The First Year of Accelerating Opportunity: Implementation Findings from the States and Colleges

THERESA ANDERSON, LAUREN EYSTER, ROBERT I. LERMAN—THE URBAN INSTITUTE
CAROL CLYMER, MAUREEN CONWAY, MARCELA MONTES—THE ASPEN INSTITUTE
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This report is part of the Urban Institute's evaluation of the Accelerating Opportunity initiative, a program to help adult with low basic skills obtain career and technical education toward marketable career credentials.

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The First Year of Accelerating Opportunity

Executive Summary

Launched in 2011, the Accelerating Opportunity (AO) initiative aims to increase the ability of students with low basic skills to earn valued occupational credentials, obtain well-paying jobs, and sustain rewarding careers. AO encourages states to change the delivery of adult education for students interested in learning career skills by enrolling them in for-credit career and technical education courses at local community colleges as they improve their basic education and English language abilities. The initiative promotes and supports the development of career and college pathways that incorporate contextualized and integrated instruction, team teaching between adult education and college instructors, and enhanced support services at community colleges. AO is also designed to change how states and colleges coordinate with government, business, and community partners and reform policy and practice to fundamentally change how students with low basic skills access and succeed in postsecondary education and the workforce.

Four states—Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, and North Carolina—received grants to begin implementing the AO model in the 2012 spring semester and oversaw the development of career pathways in 33 community and technical colleges. A fifth state—Louisiana—began implementation in the 2012 fall semester at nine additional colleges. In the first year of implementation, these 42 colleges enrolled nearly 2,600 students and built capacity to provide team teaching with college and adult education instructors, offer comprehensive support services, and develop and strengthen partnerships to support the sustainability and scaling of AO.

As a part of a rigorous evaluation of the AO initiative, this first report assesses the implementation of the initiative during its first year, which consists of the spring, summer, and fall semesters of 2012 in the original four states and the fall 2012, spring 2013, and summer 2013 semesters in Louisiana. The data presented in this report come from a survey of all AO colleges, site visits to the five states, grant documents, and quarterly calls with AO states and colleges. This report provides key findings from the early implementation that have helped the AO initiative develop strategies for its continuation and offers lessons for other states and colleges considering the AO model.

Summary of Findings

During the first year, the five states and 42 colleges began intensive efforts to implement the key features of the AO model; as of the end of the year, they were still in various stages of development. The states and colleges began by prioritizing the creation of career pathway programs designed for students with low basic skills and then the recruitment of students for these pathways. Through this process, they found that it was challenging to align pathways with local labor market needs and student interests. Initial pathways were implemented quickly, and the fields in which they were constructed had to conform to the college's existing capacity to offer high-quality programs that could meet AO requirements and effectively serve the low-skilled target population. In addition, the colleges valued the availability of student supports, but struggled to put these supports into place concurrently with the initial pathway structures.

Colleges that were able to integrate support services early on did so by leveraging partnerships with their local workforce agencies and community-based organizations and by implementing braided funding strategies that could tie AO to supports being established for other related initiatives. In addition, shifting the culture within community colleges and perceptions about low-skill students proved difficult; shifts began when career and technical education (CTE) faculty members became familiar and comfortable with teaching adult education students and collaborating with adult education instructors. Finally, states actively supported AO implementation at the colleges by initiating policy changes, providing professional development for colleges, developing state-level partnerships, and creating financing strategies. As colleges continue to engage in this work, states will need to prioritize policy alignment and financial sustainability efforts—particularly around team teaching and support services—to be able to successfully scale and institutionalize the model.

Key Findings

States and Colleges Primarily Focused on Building AO Pathways during the First Year

States and colleges primarily focused on developing their pathway programs during the first year, especially in the first semester, rather than on recruitment. By the third semester, however, they began to increase their enrollment numbers and fill more available slots for AO. All but two colleges in the initiative developed at least two integrated career pathways by the end of the first year of implementation. Several pathways were offered to more than one cohort of students. Eighteen ambitious colleges developed three or more pathways. Although the pathways varied in length—number of hours and weeks of instruction—they were designed with the ability to earn stackable credentials in mind. During the first year, colleges across all states reported awarding 2,641 credentials and 13,382.5 credits to AO students. Now that colleges and states have established pathways and have more experience with the model, the numbers for the second year should be considerably higher.[1]

Many AO Students Expressed Satisfaction with Their Pathway Program

AO students who participated in focus groups during the first year site visits described their experiences in the program as mostly positive. This level of satisfaction can also be inferred from the perceived success of word-of-mouth recruitment. Moreover, many students who participated in the focus groups were planning to continue their postsecondary education after completing a pathway, and several students had jobs related to their field of study or were pursuing job opportunities. Still, AO students can be engaged more effectively, since many students and staff interviewed reported a lack of awareness about the array of support services available.

Institutional Factors Played an Important Role in the Selection of AO Pathways

Thirty percent of the 112 pathways developed during the first year of implementation were in manufacturing; 28 percent were in health care. Other industry areas include maintenance, information technology, culinary arts, construction, agriculture, and public safety. Many colleges weighed institutional factors in addition to labor market information when selecting which pathways to offer. For example, several colleges selected pathways in CTE departments that were willing to work on the AO initiative and with adult education students. Some colleges did not offer certain pathways because the CTE programs had eligibility requirements (test scores or course prerequisites) that most AO recruits were unlikely to meet. Some college coordinators were also concerned about having high-enough student demand for particular pathways. Finally, several colleges used existing resources and structures, developing pathways that were already in place through other grant programs and adding AO elements. As colleges

continue to scale AO and build or expand pathways, it will be important to understand how colleges choose pathways in specific industries and occupations.

Attitudes toward and Opportunities for Adult Education Students Were Beginning to Change

A key part of the AO model is to shift attitudes about adult education students and their ability to successfully complete college programs. State and college staff reported that they made progress changing attitudes toward adult education students on campuses. Faculty, staff, and students responses generally reflected willingness to open doors for adult education students. Some students also reported that they had begun to identify themselves as college students, rather than GED or ESL students. Still, some additional work is required to increase support for AO among CTE staff and faculty, especially as states and colleges expand the AO model within colleges and to new colleges.

AO Instructors Used a Mix of Team-Teaching Approaches

Team teaching is an important aspect of the AO model. The model encourages an approach to teaching where both instructors are viewed as equally important contributors in the classroom, even as their roles may differ within a single lesson or throughout a course. However, this equity was not always achieved in AO classrooms in the first year. According to survey results, the most common strategy practiced was the "complementary-supportive" method of team teaching, with 89 percent of colleges implementing this approach. When using this method, adult education instructors attend CTE classes, help students in a teacher's aide role when needed, and often provide a supplemental basic skills class that contextualizes the CTE content for students. About three-quarters (76 percent) of colleges used the "monitoring" teacher model of team teaching, in which one teacher is responsible for instructing the entire class and the other teacher circulates through the room, watching and monitoring student understanding and behavior, an approach that does not support more equitable roles for the instructors. Fewer than two-thirds (59 percent) of the colleges reported using "traditional" team teaching where the instructors actively share the instruction of the content and skills in the same classroom at the same time with the same group of students and each teacher performs a different but equally important instructional task. Both state and local AO program staff noted that increasing buy-in for AO and team teaching among CTE faculty and staff is a major priority, especially in order to promote more collaborative work between adult education and CTE faculty and scale the AO model in the colleges.

Creating a Consistent and Comprehensive Network of Support Services Is Still a Work-in-Progress

A key part of the AO model is to provide "comprehensive academic and social student supports (e.g., tutoring, child care, transportation, access to public benefits, subsidized jobs)" to ensure that AO students are successful in the pathway programs.[2] Based on the survey and site visits, AO students had access to an array of academic support services at the college that included tutoring, advising, and help with financial aid forms. In most colleges, students had access to AO college coordinators, coaches, and navigators, which helped students find needed academic, career, and personal supports. From these support staff, AO students received more individualized case management and tutoring services than was typically available to adult education or college students. Some colleges also reached out to partners to provide services such as child care or transportation that were not available in house. In addition, some college staff and students reported not being aware of the range of services available to students. Thus, as of the end of the first year, there was more work to be done to get colleges to develop and provide access to support services for AO students consistently. Strengthening support services was and continues to be an important policy lever for all states.

The Loss of Pell's Ability to Benefit Shifted Most Colleges' Recruitment Strategies

The biggest recruitment challenge colleges faced was the loss of Pell Ability to Benefit (AtB). This change prevented students without a secondary school credential from receiving federal financial aid. AO was designed to use AtB as a key funding strategy for students; AO grants were not intended to pay for tuition or other college costs. The AtB policy change reshaped the initiative in some states and colleges with few financial aid options, shifting recruitment more toward students that had basic skill needs but who already had high school diplomas or GEDs. The change in recruitment strategy toward those with existing secondary school credentials also stems from the ambitious goal that each state award 3,600 credentials to AO students within the three-year grant period. As a result, 60 percent of AO students had a high school credential at enrollment, according to survey data, and nearly as many students came from existing CTE programs in the college as from internal adult education programs. A key concern is that this shift toward serving students that already have high school credentials lessens the focus on adult education students that typically have difficulty ever accessing college. To serve multiple target populations and achieve the goals of the initiative, states and colleges committed at the end of the first year to redouble their efforts to recruit adult education students and find alternative funding sources for AO students, especially those who do not qualify for Pell grants.

Almost All Colleges Had Connections with Workforce Agencies, but Many Were Still Trying to Develop Greater Employer Engagement

By the end of the first year of implementation, colleges had made progress in developing and expanding partnerships. Colleges engaged workforce agencies and local CBOs to help recruit and refer students, provide instruction and support services (including tuition and wraparound services), and connect students to job opportunities. Most colleges also formed internal partnerships—between adult education and CTE, for example—that facilitated the implementation of AO and helped gain buy-in for the model across departments. Some states helped create state-level partnerships with the workforce system that define how the colleges worked with their local workforce system. Partnerships with employers were still being formed and strengthened at the end of the first year.

Though First-Year Resources Used for AO Varied across States and Colleges, Most Resources Went to Staffing

The cost of implementing AO is of great interest for states and colleges participating in the initiative, as well as for other states and colleges seeking effective models for underprepared students and understanding of the resources needed. Resources used for the first year of AO mainly went toward the college staff and administrators needed to get the pathways up and running and for adult education and CTE instructors to create and operate AO courses. The additional (incremental) cost of the resources used for the AO courses, besides the instructors, was reduced if colleges embedded AO in current CTE courses or replaced CTE courses entirely with AO. The average value of resources invested in AO across the colleges was $228,410 and ranged from about $179,000 to about $267,000. Overall, these amounts are not outside reasonable expectations for first-year investments into this type of initiative. And the economic costs, or real resources used, do not necessarily represent money directly expended. That is, most colleges did not "write a check" for the entire amount of the resources used. Some of the resources captured in this evaluation were redirected from other potential uses. The value of resources invested by the colleges rose with the number of pathways offered and students served. Colleges funded AO through a mix of grant funds and the reallocation of existing resources, as well as in-kind contributions from within and outside their institutions.

Most state and college staff interviewed described the first year as resource and time intensive. Of particular concern across all states were the resources used for team teaching and additional

student supports. However, as of the end of the first year, states and college staff expected to realize economies of scale as implementation of AO moves from start-up to a "steady state" and colleges serve more students per pathway. It remains to be seen how the benefits of AO compare with the additional costs of implementing the model, especially when considering the benefits to students who become employed because of AO. A full cost-benefit analysis answering this question will be available in late 2016 as part of the final evaluation report. Many state and college staff interviewed indicated that they were waiting to see the impact of AO relative to the cost in order to decide how the AO model should be sustained after the grant ends.

States Supported AO Implementation by Building on Existing Infrastructure and Relationships

All states recognize AO's ambitious goals of transforming how adult and workforce education is framed and delivered. The primary way that the states supported colleges as they implemented AO was by building on existing programs and infrastructure. For example, states were able to integrate AO's focus on adult education reform and college access within their own statewide goals to increase postsecondary degree completion. In addition, all states had experience with initiatives that supported the development of career pathways. Illinois used knowledge from developing bridge programs in Shifting Gears to support AO, while North Carolina aligned its Basic Skills Plus program with AO. Kansas was able to strengthen a relationship between the Kansas Board of Regents and the state workforce agency that had started during a previous career pathway initiative. Kentucky used the momentum from its work with Breaking Through to bring together three state agencies to lead AO.[3] Finally, Louisiana was working to make tenets of AO central to its new WorkReadyU workforce education initiative.

States Changed and Aligned Policy but Were Still Working to Address Challenges, Especially around Financing AO

The AO state teams strived to help colleges succeed in implementing AO according to the model, especially through technical assistance, professional development, and general oversight. Part of the state leadership efforts included ensuring the sustainability and scalability of AO by working to align current policies or pursue new policies to support the initiative. Specifically, state offices undertook state curricular alignment, the development of new state funding models, data systems improvements, and active support for reinstating AtB. Federal and state budgetary cuts constrained early policy victories, such as Kansas and Illinois's efforts to include funding formulas for AO. Program implementation was also challenged by budget constraints, as many state leaders and college administrators struggled to help colleges address the costs of tuition and integrated instruction and try to develop strong financing strategies to support AO over the long run. Even with these challenges, the states seemed to leverage this new model to engage state leaders and college partners in a policy review process in order to improve opportunities for adults with low basic skills.

Progress toward Meeting the Goals of Accelerating Opportunity

As the key findings demonstrate, the states and colleges made important progress in implementing AO during the first year. Each state's progress was measured against the AO Theory of Change, which is provided in the appendix of this report. It is important to recognize that the goals of AO span four years, and the states and colleges had only taken the first steps toward them in the period covered by this report. This early progress was apparent in most states, especially since nearly all colleges implemented two pathways, enrolled nearly 2,600 students, and began to see attitudes changes toward adult education students; several states also got some early policy wins. However, state and college staff alike indicated places where more progress was needed to scale AO, including better funding strategies, more comprehensive

access to support services, better employer partnerships, improved team teaching, and better use of data for management and promoting the AO model. Based on continuing discussions with the states and colleges since this initial data collection, they are addressing these issues and working hard to achieve these goals.

Looking Forward

AO is changing and growing. Around the end of the first year, North Carolina left the initiative, but Louisiana, Georgia, and Mississippi were added to the implementation phase. Louisiana also became an evaluation state and is included in this and future reports.

As an important part of the implementation evaluation, this report offers initial documentation of the AO model and focuses on the first year of implementation by the states and colleges. It also is designed to provide early findings to assist states and colleges as they continue developing and improving their AO programs. Future reports will examine implementation of AO during the remainder the grant period and will continue to track the progress of AO states and colleges in achieving the goals of the initiative. The evaluation will also report on the impact that AO had on students' educational and employment outcomes and on the benefits and costs of the AO model in the AO states. Complete findings from the implementation, impact, and cost studies will be released in separate reports in 2016.

Glossary of Acronyms

ABE	adult basic education
AO	Accelerating Opportunity
AtB	Ability to Benefit, a now-defunct provision of the federal Pell Grant
BSP	Basic Skills Plus, a North Carolina pathways program
CBO	community-based organization
CTE	career and technical education
ESL	English as a second language
GED	General Educational Development tests
I-BEST	Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training Program, a Washington State basic skills and workforce education initiative
JFF	Jobs for the Future
NCTN	National College Transition Network
NCWE	National Council for Workforce Education
NRS	National Reporting System
PD	professional development
TA	technical assistance
SBCTC	State Board for Community and Technical Colleges in Washington State

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We also thank the leadership teams in Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, and North Carolina and all of the participating colleges for giving their time and energy to host site visits, complete surveys, provide student data, and answer our myriad questions about all aspects of Accelerating Opportunity. They have made this evaluation possible.

Introduction

In today's economy, postsecondary education has become crucial for economic advancement. Nearly two-thirds of jobs in the next decade will require at least some postsecondary education.[4] Nationwide, 30 million adults fall below basic literacy levels; another 60 million adults cannot perform at moderately challenging literacy levels.[5] Existing adult education programs alone do not have the capacity to prepare low-skilled adults to qualify for the postsecondary credentials necessary for these well-paying jobs. Thus, obtaining a postsecondary credential and finding a well-paying job can be an insurmountable challenge to individuals with low basic skills.

Adult education programs—operated by community and technical colleges, school districts, and nonprofit organizations—are often oriented toward helping adults obtain a secondary school credential, such as a general educational development (GED) credential or adult high school diploma, or improving English language literacy. These programs are not typically designed to encourage or transition students into college. According to data from the US Department of Education, only 2.4 percent of the over 2 million adult education students enroll in, much less complete, any postsecondary education annually that would help them earn a credential to allow them to find a well-paying job.[6] Given this context, substantial resources and attention have been directed in recent years to improving both academic and labor-market outcomes for adult education students.

Launched in 2011, the Accelerating Opportunity (AO) initiative aims to transform how states and community and technical colleges train and educate students with low basic skills. The goal of the initiative is to increase the ability of students with low basic skills to earn valued occupational credentials, obtain a well-paying job, and sustain a rewarding career. Key components of the model include integrated basic skills instruction, team teaching with adult education and occupational skills instructors collaborating, and enhanced support services. Beginning with a design phase in fall 2011, 11 states developed plans describing how they would implement the AO model in their own community and technical college systems. From the design phase, four states—Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, and North Carolina—were selected to receive grants to begin implementing their plans on January 1, 2012. Implementation grants will run until fall 2014. Louisiana, Georgia, and Mississippi were added to the implementation phase in fall 2012, and North Carolina transitioned out of the initiative at the end of the first year. This report examines the early implementation of AO in the five states that are part of the evaluation: Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, North Carolina, and Louisiana.

AO is managed by Jobs for the Future (JFF) in partnership with the National College Transition Network (NCTN), the National Council for Workforce Education (NCWE), and the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) in Washington State. JFF contracted with the Urban Institute and its partners—the Aspen Institute and the George Washington University—to independently evaluate the initiative. The following report presents findings from the first year of implementation evaluation activities and summarizes the early accomplishments of and challenges faced by the implementing states and colleges during the first year.

The Accelerating Opportunity Model: A Closer Look

The AO model draws on promising practices from earlier initiatives, particularly JFF's Breaking Through and Washington State's Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST). AO funds states, which administer grants to community and technical colleges to develop college and career pathways for in-demand occupations accessible to people who otherwise would first have to complete an adult education program and earn a GED. The states participating in the implementation of AO were selected from a group of 11 that took part in a rigorous design process. The 11 original states were chosen through consideration of the policy environment and openness for systems reform, as well as the structure of the community college system. Only states in which the postsecondary system administers adult education were considered for this initiative. This decision was based on the assumption that this governance structure would be more amenable to the initiative's system goals of connecting low-basic-skills students to postsecondary education through engaged leadership, policy change, better-connected data systems, and realigned financial resources.

The key programmatic components of AO include I-BEST's integrated and contextualized instruction and career pathways and Breaking Through's focus on comprehensive student support services, accelerated learning, and labor-market payoffs. Although AO incorporates the key elements of previous initiatives, it does have a distinct design, with enhanced elements such as policy change, partnerships, and culture shift to institutionalize the model in these states. The box to the right summarizes the key "nonnegotiable" design elements of the AO model. A more detailed summary of the specific elements of the model is provided in the appendix.

The AO model requires that each of eight colleges per state offer two integrated career pathways. Each pathway uses integrated instruction, which combines basic skills and technical training that is contextualized for the occupation targeted. This approach not only makes career and technical education (CTE) courses accessible for students with low basic skills but is intended to enhance the quality of instruction by having an adult education instructor "team-teach" with the CTE instructor. The AO pathway represents the first step on a career pathway that allows students to earn approximately 12 credits (or more) as part of an integrated career pathway and a set of stackable, industry-recognized credentials for an occupation (see the "Career Pathways as a Postsecondary Strategy for Disadvantaged Adults" box for more detail). After completing this initial step on a career pathway, AO students are prepared to either continue their education and earn

Key Accelerating Opportunity Design Elements: "Nonnegotiable" aspects of the AO model

- **Two or more integrated career pathways in at least eight colleges**
- **Acceleration strategies**
- **Academic and social student supports (e.g., tutoring, child care, transportation)**
- **Dual enrollment strategies (e.g., paired courses, I-BEST or I-BEST-like approaches)**
- **Marketable, stackable, credit-bearing certificates and degrees**
- **Award of some college-level professional-technical credits**
- **Partnerships with workforce investment boards and employers**
- **Evidence of strong local demand for selected pathways**

additional credentials or a degree, or find employment in their field of study. The expectation of attainment of the first 12 credits is strongly supported by evidence-based research done on Washington State's I-BEST work and is considered an important "tipping point" in getting individuals to earn at least one marketable credential and persist in postsecondary education.[7]

To ensure that the pathways address employers' demand for skills, states and colleges must partner with workforce investment boards (WIBs) and employers to shape and support the pathways. Ensuring that comprehensive support services are available to AO students, who are often disadvantaged and may balance work and family, is also part of the AO model for which partnerships within and outside the college are needed.

The overall goal for the initiative is that each participating state will produce at least 3,600 credentials within the grant period. Participating colleges must target recruitment efforts toward students who are within National Reporting System (NRS) levels 4–6 (6th- to 12th-grade level) on math, reading, or writing or NRS levels 5–6 in English language skills. Finally, eligible students may or may not have a high school diploma or GED.

The five states reviewed in this report—Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, North Carolina, and Louisiana—agreed to adhere to the AO model and the required program elements. AO's theory of change—which was developed in collaboration with the states, colleges, funders, and various other AO partners—shows how the initiative will achieve impact through its three primary components: college and career pathways, culture shift, and scale and sustainability. Crosscutting activities within the AO theory of change include comprehensive student supports, stakeholder engagement, professional development, state technical assistance to colleges, policy, and leadership and staff commitment. The theory of change specifies two- and four-year outcomes as well as long-term goals for the system and students, respectively. Figure 1 (see page 5) provides an abbreviated version of the theory of change and illustrates the relationship between the model's elements and the main expected outcomes. A complete description of the model and the entire theory of change are presented in the appendix.

Four of the five states (all except Louisiana) began formal implementation of the AO model in the spring semester of 2012 and oversaw the development of career pathways in 33 community and technical colleges over the course of the year. Louisiana joined with an additional nine colleges in fall 2012. Across the five states, the colleges enrolled nearly 2,600 AO students during the first year and built capacity to provide team teaching, offered comprehensive support services, and developed and strengthened partnerships to support the sustainability and scaling of AO.

The Accelerating Opportunity Evaluation

The AO evaluation, led by the Urban Institute and its partners, the Aspen Institute and George Washington University, is a comprehensive assessment of the initiative that aims to produce valuable evidence for the field and inform public policy on new approaches to serving the education and workforce needs of adults with low basic skills. The evaluation consists of three major components:

- **Implementation study:** A qualitative study of the process through which AO integrated pathways are undertaken by the states and colleges, scaled, and potentially sustained and an analysis of how well the states and colleges implemented the AO model.
- **Impact study:** A quasi-experimental analysis designed to measure the effectiveness of the AO model based on its impact on participants' educational and labor market outcomes by comparing them with similar students who did not participate in AO.

- **Cost-benefit analysis:** A comparison of the costs and benefits for states, colleges, and students engaged in the AO initiative.

This first evaluation report is based on findings from the implementation study. It documents and assesses the first year of the AO initiative in four states. The overall evaluation effort will culminate in a series of final reports covering each of the three evaluation components, to be released consecutively in late 2015 through late 2016 after the conclusion of the initiative.

Methodology

For the implementation study, the evaluation team is collecting data from state and local participants in the initiative through site visits to each state, a college survey, and quarterly calls with state and college teams. The team is also reviewing documents related to the initiative such as state policy plans, college pathway templates, progress reports, and outreach materials.

The first site visits took place in fall 2012 for the original four states and in summer 2013 for Louisiana. During the visits, the evaluation team spent one day with state staff responsible for the initiative and their partners and one day each at two AO colleges. Site visitors interviewed state and college staff and partners to document how AO was being implemented, the context in which they operated, and plans for the remainder of the grant. The site visits also included observations of AO classes and focus groups of AO students at each college.

An in-depth, web-based survey was fielded to colleges in the original four states in February 2013 and to the Louisiana colleges in October 2013 to capture data systematically on the implementation of AO across the 42 participating institutions. The survey collected data on the goals of the colleges, the pathways implemented, student characteristics, the nature of the instruction and support services, the costs and resources needed to operate AO, partnerships, and sustainability plans. All data from this survey were self-reported by the colleges. More detailed, individual-level data on participants from each state will be analyzed later in the evaluation.

Data from the implementation study were analyzed to develop this report. A second set of site visits and surveys will be conducted in 2014 to document the remainder of AO's implementation and support the findings of the impact and cost analyses to be conducted in the future.

Career Pathways as a Postsecondary Strategy for Disadvantaged Adults

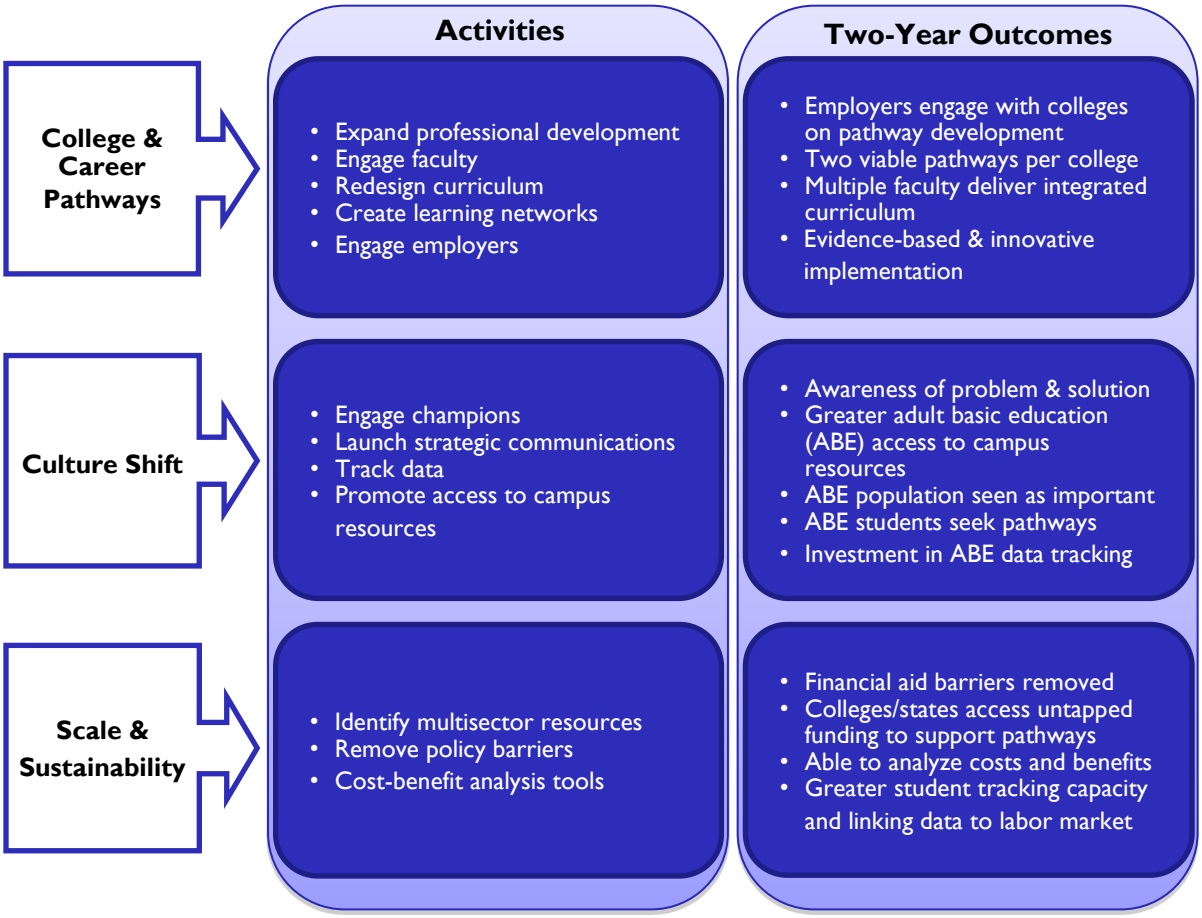
Career pathways are a popular postsecondary education strategy. Career pathways are sequenced education and training programs for fields of study that are in demand by employers. They are designed to make participation manageable for low-skill, low-income individuals with family and work commitments. The programs are designed to move students from entry-level to higher academic and vocational skills. Generally, the first program or "step" on the pathway is short—typically less than a year—and earns a student a certificate or set of certificates that employers value. Subsequent steps on the pathway allow students to earn additional certificates and degrees that will help them find mid- to high-skill jobs that pay good wages.

See Mary Clagett and Ray Uhalde, *The Promise of Career Pathways Systems Change* (Boston: JFF, 2012), http://www.jff.org/sites/default/files/publications/CareerPathways_JFF_Paper_060112.pdf; David Fein, *Career Pathways as a Framework for Program Design and Evaluation* (Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, US Department of Health and Human Services 2012), http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/inno_strategies.pdf; and *A Framework for Measure Career Pathways Innovation* (Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy, 2013), http://www.clasp.org/admin/site/publications/files/CLASP-AQCP-Metrics-Feb-2013.pdf.

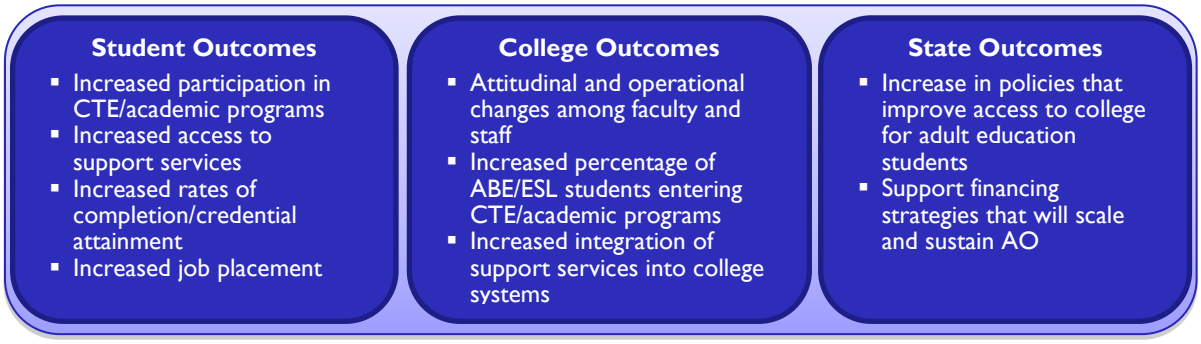
Structure of the First Implementation Report

The remainder of this report examines the start-up and implementation activities of the colleges to get their pathways, support services, and partnerships up and running. It also discusses the resources used in implementing AO during the first year. The report then describes how the states supported AO's implementation through their leadership structure, technical assistance to the colleges, and policy work. It concludes with a summary of findings from the first year of the initiative and uses the theory of change to analyze the states' and colleges' progress so far.

FIGURE 1. ABBREVIATED ACCELERATING OPPORTUNITY THEORY OF CHANGE



Primary Long-Term Outcomes



How Did Colleges Implement AO?

Building and implementing integrated pathways was one of the first activities that states and colleges undertook. The colleges also began to coordinate support services for AO students. With this quick start-up of AO activities, AO students earned over 2,600 credentials and over 13,300 credits during the first year of implementation.

The pathways considered in this report were self-defined by the colleges in the college survey, though many colleges received formal approval of AO pathways from state AO offices. The state offices in Kansas, Kentucky, and North Carolina implemented formal pathway approval processes in 2012, through which they ensure that pathways comply with the elements of the AO model—described in the appendix—as well as state accreditation requirements. Nonetheless, not every pathway from the first year fully implements all the nonnegotiable elements of the grant, as is detailed throughout this section. Variation from the model seems to have resulted from colleges targeting areas where they could achieve the highest buy-in from CTE staff, accommodating eligibility requirements within certain CTE programs, developing pathways in areas with the highest level of student interest, and incorporating AO pathways into existing structures.

Pathway Implementation

The states and colleges implemented many pathways across the semesters during the first year (table 1). In Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, and North Carolina, implementation began in spring 2012; in Louisiana it began in fall 2012. The 42 AO colleges implemented 112 unique AO pathways: 19 in Illinois, 27 in Kansas, 22 in Kentucky, 21 in Louisiana, and 23 in North Carolina.[8] The number of active pathways grew from 55 in the first semester of implementation to 101 in the third semester. This increase reflects the continuing development of pathways during the first year of implementation by the states and colleges. Since not all colleges offer summer semester classes, the number of pathways in the second semester for the original four states (summer 2012) and the third semester for Louisiana (summer 2013) is expectedly lower.

TABLE 1. PATHWAYS ACTIVE IN EACH SEMESTER OF THE FIRST YEAR OF IMPLEMENTATION, BY STATE

	Semester 1	Semester 2	Semester 3	Unique pathways
All states	**55**	**52**	**101**	**112**
Illinois	11	7	19	19
Kansas	19	11	27	27
Kentucky	13	10	18	22
Louisiana	9	19	14	21
North Carolina	3	5	23	23

Source: AO college survey.
Note: For Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, and North Carolina, semester 1 was spring 2012; for Louisiana, semester 1 was fall 2012.

An important part of the AO model during the first year was the creation of two AO pathways in each participating college. All AO colleges in Kansas, Kentucky, and Louisiana had at least two active concurrent pathways at some point in the first year of implementation, according to the survey data.[9] The largest number of pathways offered by any college in a given semester was five.

The pathways were diverse across states and colleges in industry, entrance requirements, time to completion, credits earned, and types of credentials earned. The remainder of this section explores the various pathway designs implemented by the colleges.

Manufacturing and Health Were the Most Common Pathway Industries

A key requirement of the AO model is that pathways train students for occupations with labor-market demand. Figure 2 shows the number of pathways in each of the top five industry areas as reported in the college survey. The most common industry areas were manufacturing—at 34 pathways (30 percent of all pathways)—and health—at 31 pathways (28 percent of all pathways). "Other" industry areas include maintenance, information technology, culinary arts, construction, agriculture, and public safety. These statistics include pathways that were active in any semester of the first year of implementation.

Figure 3 breaks out the industry areas by state. Manufacturing was more common in Kansas than in the other states, while health was most common in Louisiana. North Carolina had the most diversity in industry areas, while Illinois had the fewest industries represented across pathways. The Illinois AO state office made recommendations based on state labor-market data to the AO colleges about which industry areas to offer. It is unclear if this is the reason there is less diversity in industries offered in the state.

The site visit interviews revealed that many colleges weighed factors in addition to labor-market information when selecting which pathways to offer. For example, several colleges selected pathways in CTE departments that were willing to work on the AO initiative and with adult education students. In other words, buy-in and cooperation were important criteria for pathway selection.

A number of colleges did not offer certain pathways that could lead to the most high-demand, high-wage employment because the CTE

FIGURE 2. PATHWAYS ACTIVE IN FIRST YEAR OF IMPLEMENTATION, BY INDUSTRY AREA

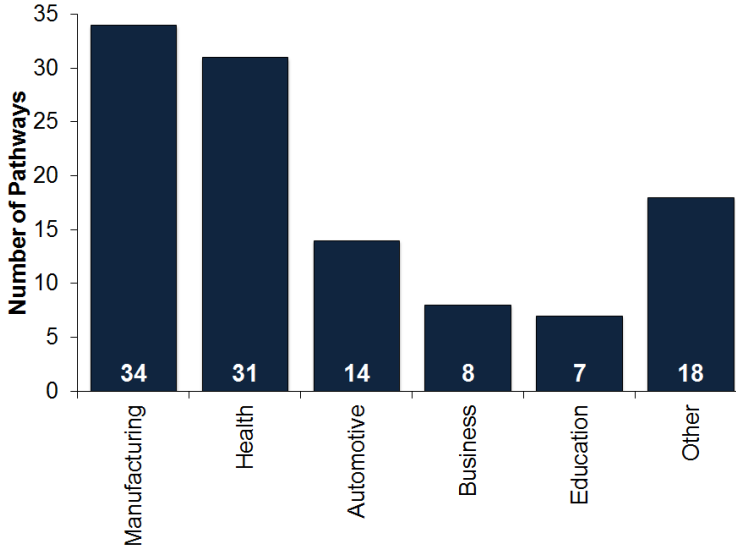
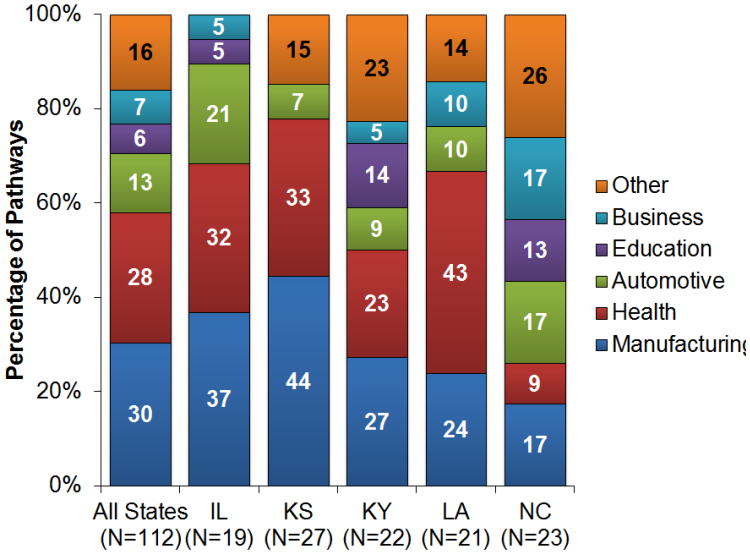


FIGURE 3. DISTRIBUTION OF AO PATHWAY INDUSTRY AREAS, BY STATE, FIRST YEAR OF IMPLEMENTATION



Source for both graphs: AO college survey.

programs had eligibility requirements (test scores or course prerequisites) that most AO recruits were unlikely to meet. For instance, a college in Kentucky tried to create a manufacturing pathway, but the staff leading the AO initiative could not convince that department's faculty and staff that AO students could perform at the academic level the department expected in its courses. In the end, the college developed a construction pathway since that department was more amenable to working with AO students.

Some colleges were also concerned about recruiting students to particular pathways. One college polled students during its adult education orientation to learn about their interests and decide what to offer. Staff at another college indicated that they were concerned about offering the same pathway every semester because there might not be enough students interested in particular pathways to fill the classes each semester.

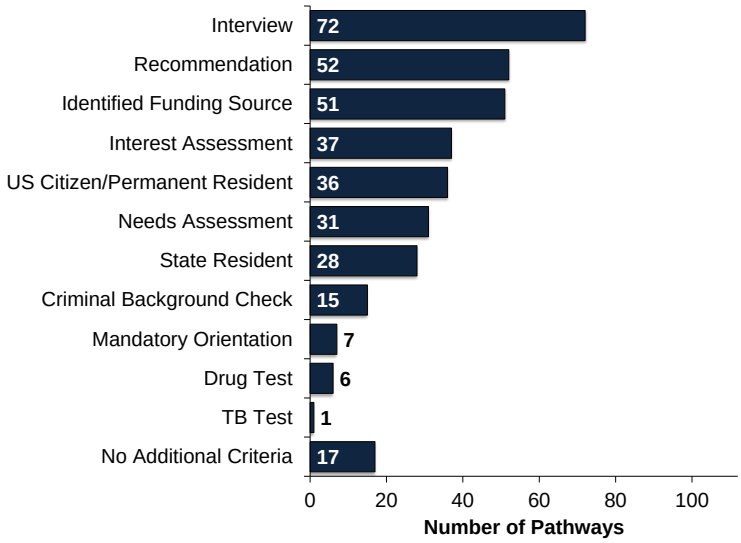
Several colleges opted to leverage existing resources and structures by developing pathways that were already in place through other grant programs and adding AO elements. These grant programs included federal initiatives such as the Health Profession Opportunity Grants and the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College Career Training (TAACCCT) grants. The most common AO enhancements to current programs were integrated/team-teaching instruction and more intensive support services.

Many Pathways Had Eligibility Requirements beyond Test Scores

All pathways used student scores on basic skills assessments—such as the Test of Adult Basic Education, Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems, or the General Assessment of Instructional Needs—to determine AO eligibility. In addition to using at least one basic skills assessment, several institutions used a college entrance exam—such as the Computer-Adapted Placement Assessment and Support Services—for eligibility determination.

In addition to test scores, all but 17 pathways (85 percent) screened students at entry, as shown in figure 4. Seventy-two of 112 pathways (64 percent) required an interview. College staff during the site visits indicated that they looked for qualities in potential AO students such as motivation, resilience, and commitment. Some pathways also required students to pass criminal background checks and/or drug tests. Other common requirements, according to the survey, were that students have a letter of recommendation or that they have an identified funding source at entry. Many pathways required an interest or needs assessment.

FIGURE 4. ADMISSION CRITERIA FOR PATHWAYS BESIDE TEST SCORES, FIRST YEAR OF IMPLEMENTATION



Source: AO college survey.

North Carolina Offered the Most Bridge Programs

Colleges offer bridge programs as an opportunity to bring potential AO students up to the eligibility levels needed for entry into a pathway. This can help students for whom this type of intervention would be otherwise out of reach enter AO. The bridge programs for the AO pathways

generally served students at the 6th- through 9th-grade levels. In the site visits, college staff explained that bridge programs often consisted of preparation courses with reading, writing, and math instruction related to the pathways students were pursuing.

About one in five pathways—22 percent—had affiliated bridge programs. These were most common in North Carolina, which accounted for 18 of the 25 bridge programs across the initiative. Louisiana had four bridge programs, Illinois reported two, Kansas had one, and Kentucky reported none.

In North Carolina, an advantage of linking bridge programs to AO is that the programs can be used to bring students up to the 9th-grade level so they qualify for the state's Basic Skills Plus (BSP) program. BSP waives tuition for students with low basic skills who enroll in college courses. Though students in the North Carolina bridge programs are not technically AO students, the programs serve as an entry point for AO pathways.

Illinois had established bridge programs across the community college system as part of an earlier initiative, Shifting Gears. As shown in the survey data, Illinois colleges did not use bridge programs as often to help prepare students for AO as in North Carolina. However, some Illinois staff interviewed during site visits were thinking about how to use existing bridge programs to develop AO pathways.

While Pathways Offered a Range of Credits and Credentials, They Looked Similar across States

The AO college survey collected information about the characteristics of pathways offered and preliminary information on credentials and credits earned. The pathways varied widely in the number of courses offered, the number of credits, the percentage of hours team taught, and the percentage of classes that were blended with AO and non-AO students.[10] On average, each credential earned in the first year consisted of about five credits, and students could frequently obtain more than one credential in the AO pathway to meet the 12-credit threshold. Some colleges also completely separated AO students from mainstream CTE students, while others offered all classes blended with CTE students.

Some pathways had no team teaching, while others had 100 percent overlap. This is one way in which the pathways that colleges considered part of AO were still adapting to the model, since AO pathways are expected to have at least 25 percent instructor overlap by design. Of the 91 pathways with data on team teaching overlap, 65 (71 percent) had at least 25 percent overlap.

A nonnegotiable element of the AO model is for colleges to implement dual-enrollment strategies for students in their pathways. Dual enrollment refers to concurrent enrollment between adult education and CTE. Often the adult education instruction is contextualized to the occupational training. Many pathways adhered to this design in the first year, though there was often a distinction between requirements before a student obtained a high school credential and after. Most commonly, students were required to be dual enrolled before obtaining a high school credential; after the credential was obtained, they were given the option. The supplemental adult education instruction was usually delivered in the form of extra tutoring or an additional class. According to survey results, 87 percent of AO pathways required separate adult education instruction of students before obtaining a high-school-equivalent-credential, and 34 percent required additional adult education instruction after obtaining a high-school-equivalent credential. An additional 11 percent of pathways made adult education instruction optional before obtaining a high school equivalent and 60 percent made it optional after obtaining a high school equivalent. Additional information is needed to determine what opportunities were

available to students in the three pathways that did not offer adult education to AO students, all of which were in the same college.

The Intensity of the Team-Teaching Approach Varied across Pathways and States

A core component of the AO model is team teaching, which, for purposes of the AO model, refers to having both a CTE instructor and an adult education instructor in the classroom at the same time, with both responsible for delivering instruction. This overlap of instructors is designed to draw on their respective teaching expertise and strengths to enhance the learning experience of students in need of foundational skill development. The model thus encourages an approach to teaching where both instructors are viewed as equally important contributors to the class, even as their roles may change within a single lesson or throughout a course. The team-teaching model also encourages collaboration to be as active as possible between teachers, including aligning learning objectives. The approach requires planning time and coordination of instruction to plan the overlap, as well as the contextualized adult basic education (ABE) instruction that is part of integrated pathways. AO colleges were required to establish team teaching in their pathways for at least 25 percent of instructional hours over the course of a term. Most colleges achieved this benchmark.

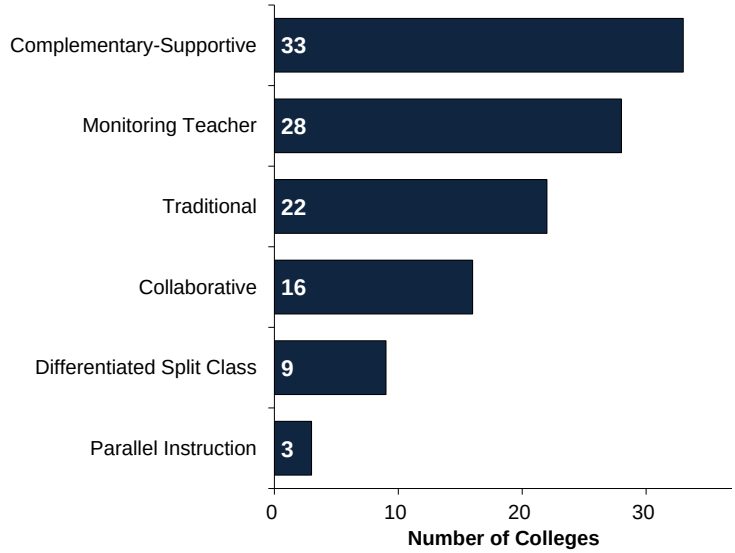
The professional development regarding team teaching provided to AO colleges covers a range of six different approaches defined by the SBCTC (figure 5). While all approaches may be used and combined at different points of time, colleges have been encouraged to apply approaches that provide for active instructional roles for both teachers and to limit the use of the differentiated split class and the monitoring teacher. Five colleges did not use team teaching in the first year of implementation according to the survey, four in North Carolina and one in Louisiana.

Figure 5 shows the number of colleges that reported using each type of team teaching, based on the college survey; team-teaching types are described below the figure.[11] Of the 37 AO colleges that provided team teaching, 33 (89 percent) reported practicing the complementary-supportive method. Monitoring teacher was another common method, reported by 28 colleges (76 percent). Twenty-two colleges (59 percent) reported practicing traditional team teaching. The least common method reported was parallel instruction.

The two most common methods of team teaching are the least egalitarian; one instructor is the lead—in this case, generally the CTE instructor—and the other instructor is in a supportive position. These survey data support the observations from the site visits that in early implementation, the CTE instructors were in a superior position within the classroom. As the model develops and teaching teams become more comfortable with each other, the relationship may become more egalitarian.

Team teaching took on diverse forms across classrooms. Based on the site visits, a common team teaching approach involved the adult education instructor attending the CTE class and taking notes, then organizing the basic skills session to support students' learning the CTE material, as well as building the reading, writing, and math skills related to the content. Though this can be effective for contextualizing basic skills instruction, there is little opportunity in this arrangement for students to benefit from the adult education teacher's expertise while they are learning new material. Adult education instructors sometimes taught specific lessons during the AO CTE course on the pathway material when they were able to explain something better than the CTE instructor, such as a math concept. Adult education instructors often served as "student" role models during their team-teaching time in the CTE class, demonstrating how to ask clarifying questions and take notes. Developing study guides for students was also common. Some adult education instructors circulated within the CTE class helping students who might be

FIGURE 5. APPROACHES OF THE 37 COLLEGES THAT IMPLEMENTED TEAM TEACHING, FIRST YEAR OF IMPLEMENTATION



Source: AO college survey.

Complementary-supportive teaching: One teacher is responsible for teaching the content to the students. The other teacher takes charge of providing follow-up activities on related topics or on study skills.

Monitoring teacher: One teacher is responsible for instructing the entire class. The other teacher circulates around the room, watching and monitoring student understanding and behavior.

Traditional team teaching: Two or more teachers actively share the instruction of the content and skills in the same classroom at the same time with the same group of students. Each teacher performs a different but equally important instructional task.

Collaborative teaching: Team teachers work together to teach the material not by the usual monologue, but by exchanging and discussing ideas and theories in front of the learners. The course uses group-learning techniques, such as small-group work, student-led discussion, and joint test-taking.

Differentiated split class: A class with more than one teacher is divided into smaller groups according to learning needs. Instructors provide their respective group with the instruction required to meet their learning needs.

Parallel instruction: The class is divided into two groups and each teacher is responsible for teaching the same material to her or his smaller group. This model is usually used in conjunction with other forms of team teaching.

confused with content, especially during in-class exercises and demonstrations. In some cases, CTE instructors saw adult education instructors more as teacher's aides, often reporting that they were not sure how to integrate them into the classroom. Students also sometimes referred to the adult education instructor as an "aide" in the classroom.

Several CTE instructors in the colleges visited reported that they were initially skeptical of the team-teaching approach. However, for the most part, the CTE instructors reported that they overcame these doubts and welcomed the extra help and support once they had their first classes with the adult education instructor present. Many CTE and adult education instructors who participated in team teaching in the first year thought that they would be able to improve their team-teaching techniques once they had some experience with the model and had built a certain level of comfort and trust with their instructional partners.

Support Services

Another important component of the AO model is the provision of support services—academic, career, and personal—to AO students. Survey results indicate that all colleges provided support services to AO students during the first year of implementation. However, the model does not specify the nature of the services that colleges are expected to deliver, and the type and intensity of services varied across and even within colleges. Data from the first year site visits and ongoing interviews with the colleges indicate that the variations were most likely influenced by availability of services on local

campuses, AO staffing structure, and the ability of colleges to leverage services from partner organizations.

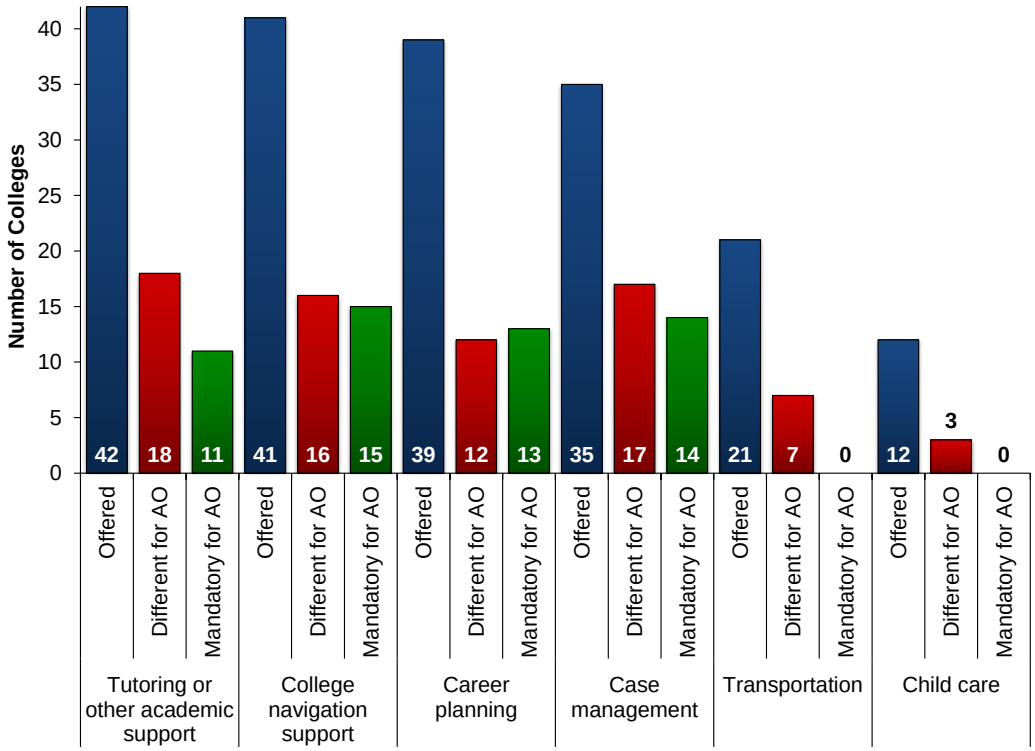
Many Support Services Were Not Highly Differentiated for AO Students

Figure 6 shows a selection of support services offered to AO students across the 42 colleges from the college survey. It indicates services offered to AO students, whether they differed for AO students versus traditionally taught adult education students, and if the services were required of AO students but not of other students. The survey does not distinguish between services offered by the college itself and services provided through community partners.

All AO students were offered tutoring or other academic support, and almost all were offered college navigation support, career planning, and case management. The majority of colleges visited during the first year reported that case management and navigation were important parts of their AO programs. Moreover, during site visits, many referred to the benefits of the more individualized support that AO students often receive from their AO "coaches" or "navigators." Navigators can undertake various activities, but their general purpose is to orient students to resources within and outside the college that will lead them to success in higher education. Child care and transportation were least common among AO colleges during the first year, and site visit interviews revealed a possible unmet need in these areas. Some students in focus groups expressed that lack of child care made it difficult for themselves or their classmates to attend class and commit to the program. Administrators at various colleges discussed the challenges of transportation, particularly at colleges in more rural settings. To address transportation problems, staff and students reported that AO students often formed carpools with others in their AO cohorts; at times, navigators also were able to provide students with gas cards or bus vouchers. However, these solutions were not always permanent or reliable.

The difference between the support services available to AO students and the services available to all adult education students varied. Survey respondents indicated that the support services that most often differed for AO students were provided more intensively than services for other adult education students. Tutoring or academic support services were the most commonly different for AO students, with 43 percent of colleges reporting a difference. Case management was different for AO students in 40 percent of colleges, and college navigation services were different in 38 percent of colleges. College staff interviewed indicated that support services may have been distinctive for AO students because of exclusivity to AO, intensity, quality, cost, provider, or location.

FIGURE 6. SUPPORT SERVICES OFFERED TO AO STUDENTS, IF SERVICES DIFFERED FOR AO STUDENTS RELATIVE TO OTHER ADULT EDUCATION STUDENTS, AND IF SERVICES WERE MANDATORY FOR AO STUDENTS ONLY



Source: AO college survey.

College staff also reported that case management and college navigation were usually provided by a dedicated AO coordinator, while tutoring was provided by an adult education instructor. Colleges may have described these services as more intensive because of AO students' unique access to such individualized supports. Moreover, students, staff, and instructors at the site visit colleges often characterized integrated instruction as an extra academic support service that non-AO students do not receive, though it is not formally conceptualized as such within the AO model.

Provision of Support Services Is an Area of Continual Development

The provision of and access to support services for AO students is a high priority for all states and colleges in the initiative, but this area is still a work in progress for most. Across the colleges visited, the communication and delivery of services was inconsistent, meaning that not all students were aware of or received all the services for which they qualified and from which they might have benefited. Moreover, some AO instructional staff members did not seem entirely aware of the range of services and supports available to students at the college and from community-based organizations (CBOs) or government agencies in the community. Staff members that were interviewed also expressed interest in providing more services but struggled to figure out how to do so, especially in light of limited funding. With guidance from state AO leadership, colleges were working to establish a more integrated and seamless approach to delivering support services. More information on how each state is providing direction in this area is provided later in this report.

Credentials and Credits Awarded

According to survey data, by the end of the first year of implementation in each state, the five states had awarded 2,641 credentials and 13,382.5 credits to AO students.[12]

Table 2 presents individual state results. Based on the colleges' self-reports, Kansas awarded the most credentials and credits in the first year, while North Carolina awarded the fewest. Kansas achieved exactly one-third of the 3,600 per-state credential goal, while Illinois achieved 16 percent, Kentucky achieved 12 percent, Louisiana achieved 10 percent, and North Carolina achieved 1 percent. As this report emphasizes, however, much of the first year was dedicated to start-up activities. In addition, the states and the colleges experienced several challenges during the first year. The results from the second year are expected to look substantially different, with more pathways producing more credentials and students earning more credits as states and colleges scale the initiative.

TABLE 2. CREDENTIALS AND CREDITS AWARDED IN THE FIRST YEAR OF AO, BY STATE

	Credentials	Credits
All states	**2,641**	**13,382.5**
Illinois	581	4,221
Kansas	1,190	4,802.5
Kentucky	449	2,063
Louisiana	369	1,629
North Carolina	52	667

Source: AO college survey.

Summary

During the first year of the initiative, colleges put a large effort into pathway design and development. Most colleges strived to follow the AO model by taking into account such factors as the 12-credit pathway requirement and proof of labor-market demand. Colleges also made sure that the pathways that were developed made sense for their local context and met their students' needs. Site visits and survey results indicate that when developing integrated pathways, colleges faced the most difficulties with team teaching and building the appropriate support service structures for AO students. Those interviewed during site visits emphasized that both areas require a significant amount of planning time, personnel, and resources. College and state leadership teams across the initiative indicated that they were eager to see the program's potential impact so they could determine future resource allocation and whether scaling the model has payoffs for their community's education and economic development goals.

What Types of Students Did AO Serve?

The states were tasked with ensuring this model could be scaled by recruiting students rapidly to enroll in the AO pathway programs. As mentioned earlier, the focus of the AO program is to target underprepared adult learners who fall within the 6th- to 12th-grade equivalency levels in math, reading, or writing (NRS 4–6) and English language learners at high intermediate or advanced English as a Second Language (ESL) level (NRS 5–6) who can benefit from a pathway program.

The 42 colleges in the five AO states enrolled 2,588 students in the first year (table 3). Kansas had the highest enrollment, with 1,001 AO students. Illinois, Kentucky, and Louisiana enrolled similar numbers: 419, 499, and 451, respectively. North Carolina enrolled 218 students. This section details AO recruitment activities, then describes the students who enrolled in the initiative in the first year.

TABLE 3. STUDENT ENROLLED IN THE FIRST YEAR OF AO, BY STATE

	Students
All states	**2,588**
Illinois	419
Kansas	1,001
Kentucky	499
Louisiana	451
North Carolina	218

Source: AO college survey.

Recruitment Sources and Strategies

During the design phase of the initiative, AO state teams developed recruitment plans to help colleges market the career pathway programs. Strengthening those recruitment plans was a priority during the first year. When planning for recruitment, states and colleges often looked at AO to improve access to college and success in higher education for low-skilled students who would not be able otherwise. Many states planned to target the current adult education population first and then expand recruitment to other potentially eligible populations. As the model intended, the majority of colleges developed communication plans to promote the program to existing adult education students, both within their institutions and with partner organizations such as CBOs and local one-stop career centers. In their plans, the states expected mainly to target AO students who did not have secondary school credentials. However, colleges' recruitment strategies shifted when the Pell grant's Ability to Benefit (AtB) rule changed in July 2012 and adult education students lost a major financial support for AO participation. Thus, many colleges had to more heavily recruit students who had basic skills needs but were already enrolled in college or already had a secondary school credential.

AO States and Colleges Adapted Recruitment Plans to Changes in Pell Grant Rules

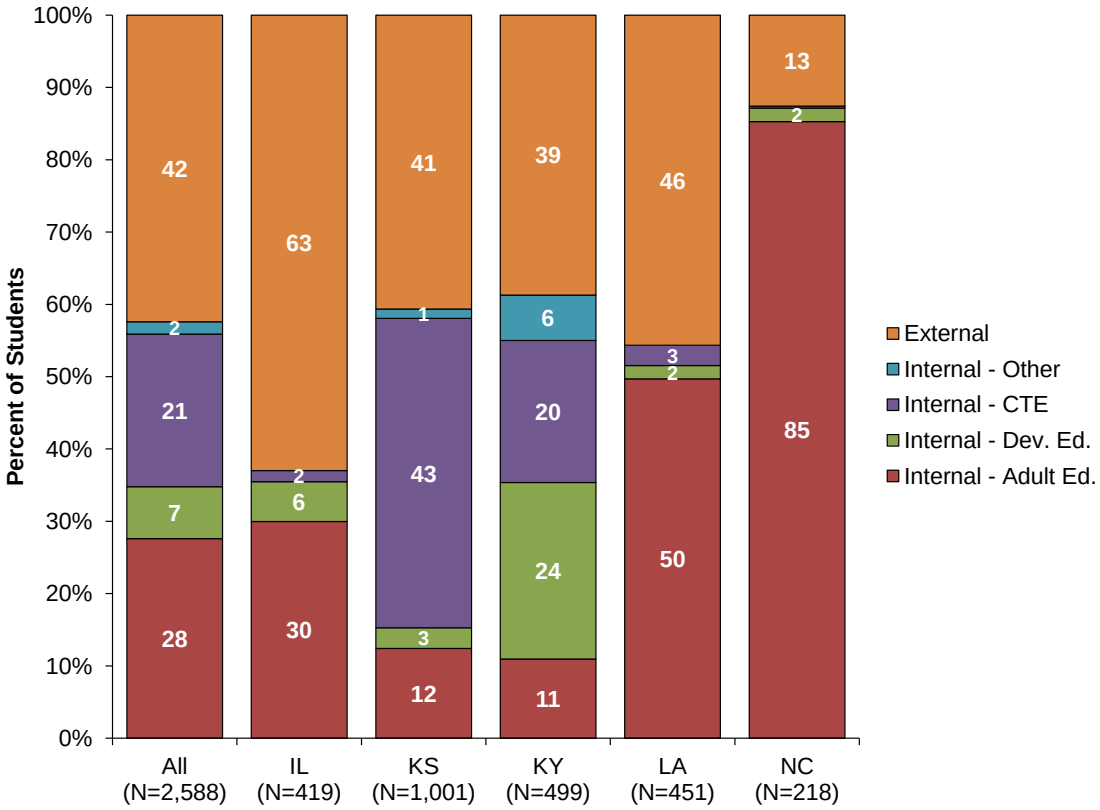
A change in federal financial aid policy—the loss of the Pell grant's AtB provision—reshaped the AO initiative in most states and colleges. This change prevented students without secondary school credentials from receiving federal financial aid. The initiative's leadership team, headed by JFF, expected Pell grants to provide 60 to 70 percent of the student financing for the initiative, which primarily targeted students without high school diplomas or GEDs.

This law change had a major effect on the landscape of AO. In response to the loss of AtB, a number of colleges broadened their recruitment efforts to include high school graduates that still tested within the 6th- to 12th-grade level, because this population could be eligible for federal financial aid and benefit from the AO model. Some colleges also targeted students enrolled in their adult education programs who had recently attained or were close to finishing their GED. Other colleges recruited students already enrolled or about to enroll in developmental education programs, which serve low-skilled students who already have secondary school credentials. In Kansas, which has smaller ABE programs than the other states in the initiative, some colleges tested students in regular CTE programs, found that nearly all

were eligible for AO because they had basic skills scores below a college level, and recruited them for AO pathways. In the first year, of AO students in all states for whom high school credential attainment was known, about three-quarters (74 percent) had a high school credential at enrollment, according to survey data.

Moreover, nearly as many students came from existing CTE programs in the college as from adult education programs. There was large variation among states (figure 7). In the first year, 21 percent of AO students came from internal CTE programs, 28 percent came from internal adult education programs, and 7 percent came from internal developmental education programs. Externally recruited students might have come from adult education programs at local CBOs or from other places within the community. In Kansas and Kentucky, relatively large proportions of students came from internal CTE and developmental education programs. In Illinois, most students came from sources external to the college. In Louisiana and North Carolina, most students came from internal adult education programs. The sources of student recruitment will become clearer once states provide student-level records for analysis.

FIGURE 7. RECRUITMENT SOURCES BY STATE, FIRST YEAR OF IMPLEMENTATION



Source: AO college survey.

North Carolina was able to continue to recruit from the adult education population because eight of the nine North Carolina colleges were not as affected by the changes in AtB. They participated in the existing state-funded BSP program. This program provides tuition waivers for students without a secondary school credential who score between the 9th- and 12th-grade level on basic skills assessments. North Carolina placed AO under the umbrella of BSP, so AO students were concurrent participants in both programs, eligible for funding from both streams. However, because of the restrictions on BSP tuition waivers, some colleges did not enroll

students who scored between the 6th- and 8th-grade level in AO, instead enrolling them in noncredit bridge programs to bring them up to the 9th-grade level.

Louisiana was affected by AtB, but the state office emphasized to the colleges the focus on adult education students. The state office interpreted an existing tuition waiver policy broadly to allow colleges to grant waivers to AO students. Louisiana might have benefited from the delay in start-up, since the state had time to sort out this policy and was able to learn from the financing struggles that other states encountered.

The various ways that colleges adapted to the change in Pell rules are summarized in table 4. In Illinois and Kentucky, where the colleges began to focus on students with secondary school credentials after the rule change, the state offices intervened to ensure that some students without secondary school credentials were being admitted to AO. Nonetheless, as the data on student characteristics show, the vast majority of AO students across the five states had a secondary school credential at intake.

TABLE 4. EFFECT OF THE CHANGE IN PELL RULES ON AO TARGET POPULATIONS, FIRST YEAR OF IMPLEMENTATION

	Ability to Benefit change effect on target population
Illinois	Colleges started targeting students with GED or equivalent; the state intervened and colleges are now also serving those without GED or equivalent.
Kansas	Some colleges recruited heavily from existing postsecondary CTE programs.
Kentucky	Some colleges started targeting students with secondary school credentials; the state encouraged colleges to ensure that least 25 percent of AO students do not have a secondary school credential.
Louisiana	The state office had more time to plan for the change in Pell rules than the other states. It continued to emphasize recruitment from the adult education population but interpreted rules broadly to allow colleges to grant tuition waivers to AO students without high school credentials.
North Carolina	There was no change in recruitment strategy for students at 9th- to 12th-grade levels at eight of the nine AO colleges; some colleges used noncredit bridge programs to help students below the 9th-grade level, who were not eligible for BSP.

Sources: Site visits and AO college survey

These changes in recruitment strategy meant that AO was less oriented toward promoting access for students from adult education programs in some states during the first year of the initiative and was focused on serving low-skill students who had a secondary credential and had already enrolled in a college course. This change represents a shift from the model's original target population and has implications for how the evaluation measures the impact of AO on students. That is, the diversity of recruitment sources makes it more challenging for the evaluation team to identify an appropriate comparison group for the impact analysis, and the team has found that individual-level data on non-AO CTE students may be unavailable in some states. Evaluation plans are being adjusted to accommodate these changes as best as possible.

Recruitment Strategies Were Similar across Colleges, but Success Was Not Universal

As learned from the survey and during the site visits, many colleges in the initiative recruited some students from local adult education programs, whether they were on campus or administered by local providers. When recruiting from adult education programs, it was common for navigators or AO coordinators to visit classes or orientation sessions to promote

AO. Many coordinators also organized information sessions and open houses for interested students. Often the AO teams worked with other departments, such as admissions and advising, to organize such events. Many colleges in Illinois, Kansas, and Kentucky also turned to their local workforce agencies for referrals. Various colleges had relationships with local CBOs and were able to recruit students from those organizations. Some colleges turned to advertising in local newspapers or on the radio. Many site visit colleges visited were already recruiting their second or third AO cohort, so they also cited word of mouth as an emerging recruitment method.

While some colleges were able to generate interest in AO and recruit students to fill classes in the first year, other colleges experienced challenges in recruiting sufficient numbers of students. Site visit colleges that had difficulty with recruitment indicated lack of time and resources as reasons for their lower enrollment numbers. Also, some college staff mentioned that some AO pathways offered did not match student career interests. In a number of colleges, AO program managers had competing priorities and responsibilities—including building pathways and supporting students already enrolled—leading them to focus less intensively on recruitment.

Student Enrollment

Reviewing the types of students who enrolled in AO is important to understand the shape of the initiative. The student characteristics shed light on the results of AO recruitment efforts, and they have implications for student outcomes. This section portrays the demographic and social characteristics of AO participants.

AO Participants Were Diverse, but Most Often Female and White

Table 5 reports demographic characteristics of AO participants in the first year based on the college survey results. Averaging across all states and pathways, AO students were mostly female (about 60 percent of the 2,588 students served). In addition, just under half of students were white, one-quarter were African American, and over one-eighth were Hispanic. This distinguishes the AO student population from the national adult education population, which is mostly black/African American and Hispanic/Latino.[13] Louisiana had a particularly large proportion of African American students, while Illinois had a large proportion of Hispanic students.

The age distribution of students in the program was similar across categories and similar to the overall adult education population.[14] Students age 20–22, 27–35, and 36–54 each made up approximately 20 percent of the program population across all states. AO students were somewhat older in Kentucky, with the median student falling in the 27–35 age range (as opposed to the 23–26 age range), though data on age were missing for about a third of Kentucky AO students.

The site visits provided the opportunity to get perspectives from a wide cross-section of students through focus groups. Students who participated in focus groups represented a wide range of ages and life stages. Some students—especially the older ones—reported enrolling in AO after losing their jobs or exhausting their unemployment insurance benefits. Younger students were drawn to the program because of the accelerated pace and the promise of extra academic and job search supports.

TABLE 5. BASIC AO STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS, BY STATE, FIRST YEAR OF IMPLEMENTATION (%)

	All states	Illinois	Kansas	Kentucky	Louisiana	North Carolina
			GENDER			
Male	**40**	35	40	42	39	47
Female	**60**	65	60	58	61	50
Unknown	**0**	0	0	0	0	3
Total	**100**	100	100	100	100	100
			RACE/ETHNICITY			
White	**47**	37	56	56	24	53
Black/African American	**25**	31	15	10	55	29
Hispanic/Latino	**14**	29	19	2	4	6
Asian/Native Hawaiian	**1**	1	2	1	0	1
Two or more races	**2**	1	5	0	0	0
Other	**1**	0	0	1	1	0
Unknown	**8**	1	2	32	15	10
Total	**100**	100	100	100	100	100
			AGE			
Under 17	**0**	0	0	0	1	0
17–19	**14**	11	19	6	13	17
20–22	**21**	23	24	13	22	16
23–26	**16**	21	16	13	19	8
27–35	**19**	27	18	17	17	16
36–54	**18**	17	20	18	11	17
Over 54	**2**	1	3	1	1	6
Unknown	**11**	0	0	31	17	20
Total	**100**	100	100	100	100	100

Source: AO college survey.
Note: Columns might not total 100 because of rounding.

A Large Percentage of AO Students Had Secondary School Credentials at Entry

Table 6 presents selected characteristics of AO students, as reported on the college survey. Colleges indicated that 60 percent of AO students had some sort of high school credential at intake. Despite this, only 26 percent were recorded as receiving a Pell grant in the first year of implementation. This is an important finding because even after the change in the Pell rules, most students with a secondary school credential should be able to qualify for Pell. Many colleges expressed that it was difficult to finance student tuition after the change in the Pell rules, so it is notable that a substantial portion of potentially eligible students did not receive a Pell grant. More exploration is necessary to understand why so many students who appear Pell-eligible are not receiving federal aid.

Over half of AO students were part-time college students, and nearly a quarter of AO students were known to be employed at intake. AO students in Kansas were most likely to be enrolled full time and also most likely to be employed, though many colleges did not have data on these indicators, particularly employment status. Student-level records will reveal more about student social characteristics, which will be documented in later reports.

TABLE 6. SELECTED AO STUDENT SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS, BY STATE, FIRST YEAR OF IMPLEMENTATION, (%)

	All states	Illinois	Kansas	Kentucky	Louisiana	North Carolina
HIGH SCHOOL CREDENTIAL						
Diploma	**45**	19	64	69	8	24
GED	**13**	10	15	16	7	9
Other	**2**	1	2	0	0	8
None	**21**	16	8	4	59	45
Unknown	**20**	53	10	12	26	14
Total	**100**	100	100	100	100	100
PELL GRANT RECEIPT						
Pell grant	**26**	11	41	32	3	17
No Pell grant	**51**	36	56	15	81	83
Unknown	**23**	53	4	53	16	0
Total	**100**	100	100	100	100	100
FULL-TIME STUDENT STATUS						
Full time	**29**	9	42	22	29	29
Not full time	**53**	60	37	56	71	70
Unknown	**18**	32	21	21	0	1
Total	**100**	100	100	100	100	100
EMPLOYMENT STATUS AT INTAKE						
Employed	**23**	16	31	24	14	17
Not employed	**43**	37	50	23	40	78
Unknown	**34**	48	19	53	46	6
Total	**100**	100	100	100	100	100

Source: AO college survey.
Note: Columns might not total 100 because of rounding.

Students Were Generally Satisfied with AO

The success of word-of-mouth recruitment may indicate general satisfaction with the AO initiative among enrolled students. Moreover, students in focus groups said AO had been a positive experience for them. Many were planning to continue their postsecondary education after completing the initial pathway, and a number of students had found employment in their field of study or were pursuing job opportunities.

Summary

Despite the major policy challenge presented by the change in Pell rules, colleges enrolled nearly 2,600 students into AO pathways during the first year. Students were recruited from the community and from within the AO colleges. Within colleges, most students came from adult education programs, but a large number also originated from CTE and developmental education programs. The students from these latter two programs tend to have high school credentials, while adult education students generally do not. Across states, 60 percent of enrollees were known to have a high school credential at entry. The change in Pell rules influenced colleges to seek out more enrollees with secondary school credentials than they might have otherwise. JFF issued guidance on how to target AO recruitment, and during the second year of the initiative, states and colleges have reported that they plan to find additional sources of financial aid to support enrollment of more adult education students and students without secondary school credentials.

AO students were diverse. Across all the states, most students were white and female, but many nonwhite students also enrolled in the program; in two states, over half of enrollees were not white. Students were a range of ages; the modal student was in the 23–26 age range.

Students enrolled in the program expressed satisfaction, especially with the extra support from adult education instructors, navigators, and their AO cohort. Those who came from ABE programs expressed appreciation that they could take CTE courses while they were pursuing GEDs.

How Did the Colleges Develop Partnerships to Support AO?

The ability of AO to improve educational and employment outcomes for students with low education levels relies on colleges' ability to leverage resources through partnerships both internal and external to the institution. The AO model emphasizes the importance of partnerships, particularly with workforce agencies—such as WIBs—and employers. AO colleges are also expected to build partnerships with local social service organizations, especially to recruit students to AO and to ensure that students have personal supports they need to successfully complete an AO pathway. Local partnerships are particularly crucial in places where much of the adult education instruction is provided by CBOs or other organizations external to the college, since the adult education providers team with the college to successfully implement integrated instruction. The colleges also needed to collaborate with internal partners, such as student services, financial aid, and CTE departments. These partnerships promote AO, increase the resources available to AO students to persist in the pathway program, and facilitate students' transition to employment.

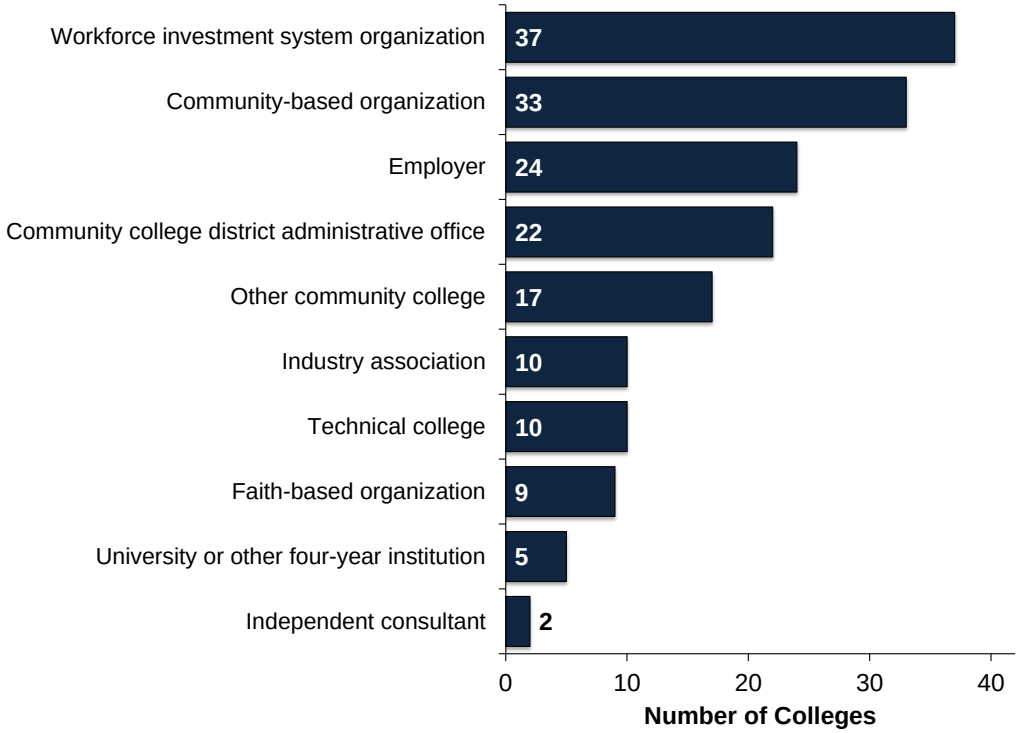
By the end of the first year, colleges had made progress developing and expanding their partnerships. Colleges engaged workforce agencies and local CBOs to help recruit and refer students, provide instruction and support services (including tuition and wraparound services), and connect students to job opportunities. Partnerships with employers were still being formed and strengthened at the end of the first year. Most colleges also formed internal partnerships—between adult education and CTE, for example—that facilitated the implementation of AO and helped gain buy-in for the model across departments.

External Partnerships

During the first year of AO, all colleges had external partnerships related to AO. Figure 8 shows the number of colleges that formed partnerships with various external organizations, based on the college survey. The most common external partnerships were with workforce investment system organizations; 88 percent of colleges (37 of 42) reported a workforce system partnership. Across all states, over half of colleges had a partnership with a CBO, an employer, or a community college district administrative office. Partnerships with another college or university, an industry association, or a faith-based organization were less common.

Data from the first year site visits shed some light on the depth and quality of partnerships between the AO colleges and workforce organizations, employers, and CBOs. Although most of those interviewed during site visits indicated that partnership-building could be strengthened, local partners were already integral for recruitment, student financial aid, support services, and career planning during the first year. Interviews with college staff and existing partners revealed that partnership development is a work in progress at most colleges, particularly with employers. The colleges that started to implement AO with existing partnerships generally had an easier time working with partners and leveraging resources during the first year of the project.

FIGURE 8. EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIPS REPORTED BY AO COLLEGES, FIRST YEAR OF IMPLEMENTATION



Source: AO college survey.

Partnerships with Workforce Agencies Were Common and Important

A key part of the AO model is to engage workforce organizations to support the implementation of the initiative. In the original four states, all but one college had a partnership with a workforce organization. In Louisiana, these partnerships were less common; only five of the nine colleges reported workforce system partnerships. While the number of colleges who had an active partnership with their local workforce agency is high, college staff and partners interviewed during site visits noted that the level of collaboration was mixed. In Kentucky, with support from the state workforce agency, local one-stop career centers assigned career coaches to recruit AO students and coordinate employment services such as job search assistance, career counseling, and job placement. The Illinois colleges visited had strong preexisting relationships with workforce agencies that helped with AO. For instance, the colleges actively used Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funds to cover student tuition. Some Kansas colleges had particularly strong relationships with the regional WIBs, particularly in southwest Kansas. The Workforce Investment Board of Southwest Kansas assigned a liaison to interface specifically with AO programs and help connect students and graduates with resources and jobs. However, the strong regional structure of the Kansas WIBs resulted in inconsistent engagement with workforce agencies across the state. The Louisiana colleges visited and the state office reported that the strength of the local workforce system partnerships varied greatly by region, with strong partnerships in the northern part of the state but a more strained relationship in the New Orleans area. The Louisiana Community and Technical College System has a strong and long-standing partnership with the Louisiana Workforce Commission. The North Carolina Community College System, the state AO office, had not engaged with the state-level workforce entities as of the end of 2012. Overall, how well colleges were able to leverage existing partnerships with workforce entities was mixed.

Partnerships with Employers Need Further Development

Based on survey results, every college in the original four states and five of nine colleges in Louisiana reached out to employers to partner with or support AO. However, the first year site visits and interviews indicated that it was difficult for colleges to fully engage employers as partners as they were establishing the pathways. Most colleges interviewed during the first year thought that employer engagement could be improved during the second year. The colleges visited that had greater success engaging employers typically built on existing relationships. Examples of successful engagement include presenting to employers at advisory board meetings, developing work-based learning components of their pathways with employers, and developing job leads for participants. According to survey data, 62 percent of the colleges in the initiative were able to engage employers in pathway development. However, it is difficult to determine the intensity and exact nature of employer engagement across all colleges. Further, staff interviewed indicated that more work was needed to engage employers around job placement for AO students.

Partnerships with Community-Based Organizations Were Often Central to AO Success

The AO model encourages, but does not require, partnerships with CBOs. Colleges often found that partnering with organizations that offer adult education and services to support students was critical to help students persist and complete pathway programs. Many colleges engaged CBOs during the first year of the project, according to survey results and interview data. In particular, CBO partnerships were important in Kansas and Louisiana's AO programs because community-based entities often provide adult education instruction in these states. Therefore, some Kansas and Louisiana colleges developed strong working partnerships with the local adult education providers. A couple of colleges even arranged for adult education instructors from CBOs to travel to the colleges to provide team teaching. The adult education providers also sometimes screened applicants for AO in coordination with the college-based AO team.

Staff at colleges visited expressed concern about the lack of in-house resources for providing more intensive support to students. In response, some built new or stronger partnerships with CBOs. As was the case with the workforce agencies, the level of collaboration varied. Services provided by CBOs to AO students might include recruitment and referrals, case management, or tuition and transportation support. However, because the first year of the grant focused on implementing the AO pathways, college staff reported that they needed to more fully develop the partnerships to be able to provide more comprehensive student supports.

Internal Partnerships

Establishing partnerships within their respective colleges was also an important priority for AO colleges during the first year. AO staff used various outreach methods, including campus publications and campus-wide events and presentations, to connect with other internal college stakeholders regarding AO.

During the site visits, college staff reported that they reached out to other departments within their colleges to develop pathways and be able to connect AO students with the college's support services. Staff recognized that they needed to address perceptions of adult education students within the college as they built the AO programs. Internal partnership-building was primarily concentrated in developing stronger ties between CTE and adult education departments and overcoming the negative perceptions of the capabilities of adult education students. The department sponsoring the AO initiative varied by college, and the department leading the initiative was responsible for reaching out to the other college entities necessary to ensure

successful implementation. In all colleges visited in Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, and North Carolina, the adult education program led the AO initiative and had to gain buy-in from the CTE leadership and staff. In the Kansas site visit colleges, the CTE departments oversaw the initiative and reached out to the adult education partners, both within and outside the college. Colleges that were not visited by the research team may have had different arrangements.

Generally, the college's administrative structure determined the ease of collaboration between departments. In places where CTE was leading the initiative or where adult education and CTE were under the same division, communication and collaboration were much easier to navigate. Where CTE and adult education were separate and the latter was taking the lead on AO, intra-college collaboration was more challenging. College staff indicated that they had generally experienced little historical interaction with the CTE side and therefore had to build relationships from the ground up. Staff from colleges that had existing pathway programs or that had other adult education initiatives struggled less with these partnerships because they had already established connections between the two sides of the college. CTE instructors frequently expressed that they were initially uncertain about team teaching and collaborating with adult education instructors. Many of the site visit colleges where adult education departments were leading the initiative chose to address this issue by introducing AO pathways in CTE departments that were viewed as easier to work with and more open to giving adult education students a chance. Although the culture was starting to change across all states, those interviewed agreed that they still needed to achieve stronger working relationships between adult education and CTE departments.

Summary

Partnerships and stakeholder engagement are integral to the institutionalization and sustainability of AO at colleges, as shown in the AO theory of change. Although colleges have made some progress in developing external and internal partners to support their AO start-up efforts, they need to do more work to strengthen these relationships. Many program managers interviewed mentioned that building stronger support for AO across the college will be key to sustaining the initiative. For many colleges, increasing buy-in from CTE departments was a priority, especially when trying to scale the initiative by developing new pathways or expanding current AO pathways. In addition, being able to engage college leadership in AO efforts was important when thinking about future funding and sustainability of the program. Finally, external partnerships, particularly those with employers, seem to be a top priority for colleges since those relationships will help move graduates into jobs, thus showing that AO is effective in meeting education and employment goals for adult education students. From the site visits, it appeared that AO programs sought to enrich their relationships with employers. Progress made in the second year of the initiative will be telling.

What Resources Did Colleges Use to Implement AO?

Innovations in higher education and workforce development often require an initial investment for development, assessment of effectiveness, and capacity-building. Once the innovation is tested and yields positive results, states and colleges are likely to adopt the new approach as a regular part of college programming. Funding will then come from existing resources as a way of increasing the effectiveness of their education and training.

Colleges participating in AO were asked to accomplish a great deal with a relatively small amount of seed money, ranging from $26,000 to $115,000 in the first year, with the average at about $78,000. Moreover, AO colleges have used their own resources in addition to the state grants to implement AO. Efforts similar to AO, especially federal grant programs, have offered significantly more funds to community colleges for developing new education and training programs.[15]

As a first step to understanding the investments and resources needed to support the first year implementation of AO, this report explores the economic value of the resources used by the colleges to start and operate AO. The ultimate goal of the evaluation is to compare all of AO's economic costs with AO's economic benefits from the perspective of society as a whole. If AO's economic benefits exceed AO's economic costs, then AO will represent a good investment. The cost-benefit analysis that will be presented in the final evaluation report (due in late 2016) will look separately at the distribution of these costs and benefits among students (and parents), schools, and state and federal taxpayers. While this report provides an early snapshot of initial resources used by the colleges, it does not analyze the benefits that AO could yield (especially to students), as the full cost-benefit analysis will ultimately do.

Framework for Capturing Resources Used by Colleges for AO

The economic costs, or real resources used, do not necessarily represent money directly expended. That is, most colleges did not write a check for the entire amount of the resources used. Some portion of the resources captured in this analysis was redirected from other potential uses. This report accounts for redirected resources because they were "used up" by AO when they could have gone toward other activities that are of value to the college. For example, a dean who would have been employed by the college anyway may have spent 20 percent of her time on AO activities. While this does not necessarily cost the college more money, the value of that 20 percent of the dean's time was invested into AO when it could have gone toward other activities, such as departmental oversight. Therefore, that dean's time is a resource used on AO.

The real resources used include the time allocated to AO by administrators, instructors, counselors, and other personnel as well as advertising and supports, less any savings in resources due to AO (classes not given, for example). The economic value of staff time is assumed to be the per-hour salary plus benefits of each worker times the hours devoted to AO.

Added resources used for AO are those required and used to run the AO model over the alternative approach. In general, the alternative to AO will be adult education programming, although in some colleges it may be CTE programs. This section presents data derived from college self-reports of resources directed to AO that would not have been expended in the absence of AO or would have been expended on other things valuable to the college. The estimates only account for the resources used by the colleges and thus do not include costs to the students (such as forgone earnings or tuition) and to the state and federal government, which will be incorporated into the cost-benefit analysis. The evaluation will not be able to account for

the costs and benefits to other organizations, such as CBOs that may have been involved in the implementation of AO, because of data limitations.

During the period covered by this report, colleges were only beginning operation of their pathways and serving initial cohorts of students. Start-up of AO included activities such as professional development, planning time, development of recruitment processes, and curriculum development. Ongoing costs in the first year and going forward include recruitment, operating pathways, and student counseling and supports. In reporting on the resources directed to AO in the first year, colleges did not distinguish between start-up costs and ongoing costs of operation as they did not track the resources they used in this manner. As a result, this initial look at the economic resources directed to AO combines resources used for both start-up and ongoing operation. As more college data on resources from the second and third year of AO are collected, the evaluation will be able to better assess start-up versus ongoing costs.

In general, colleges found it challenging to parse out the resources used for AO relative to their regular programming in the survey. Most AO resources were used for personnel, but the figures are only estimates because most colleges did not specifically track the time all college staff spent on AO. This staff time includes adult education and CTE instructors, coordinators, student coaches or navigators, and deans and other administrators across the college. In some cases, the resources used for AO displaced regular expenditures on adult education and CTE, while other resources used were in addition to regular expenditures; this was also difficult for colleges to track, although some made an effort to capture these "savings." Finally, some colleges financed AO by leveraging resources from other grant initiatives such as the Health Profession Opportunity Grants and the TAACCCT grants, which are not fully captured here. Future evaluation efforts will examine if and how colleges used regular adult education, CTE, and other resources to operate AO and how that changed over the initiative to institutionalize the model.

Resource Components

Table 7 describes the break-down of the types of resources used for AO by colleges. The most resource-intensive aspect of AO was personnel, which accounted for over 90 percent of the total resources used across states. Personnel resources cover not only those who administer AO, but also the extra instructor's time in team teaching. Specifically, personnel resources used included the time spent on AO by deans and administrators; regular (nonadjunct) CTE faculty members and instructors; adjunct CTE faculty members and instructors; adult education instructors; counselors, coaches, navigators, and advisors; marketing, outreach, and recruiting staff; administrative support staff (e.g., clerical); data staff; physical plant and maintenance staff; and other staff. All states used a relatively similar proportion of total resources for personnel, ranging from 84 percent in North Carolina to 96 percent in Kentucky.

Colleges also used resources for support services, advertising, consultants, and course costs, which include supplies, space, learning tools and technology, and other course-related expenditures. These together average about 9 percent of all the resources used for AO by the colleges.

Because personnel make up such a large share of total resources used for AO, table 8 breaks down the components of personnel investments. Interestingly, the distribution across states is similar. Across all states, about one-quarter of personnel resources were used on deans and administrators. Nearly another quarter of resources were used on adult education instructors. A third quarter of personnel resources were used for CTE instructors, both adjunct and nonadjunct.

TABLE 7. COMPONENTS OF AO RESOURCES USED, FIRST YEAR OF IMPLEMENTATION (%)

	Personnel[a]	Courses[b]	Support services[c]	Advertising	Consultants	Other
All states	91.4	6.7	0.4	0.9	0.1	0.6
Illinois	85.5	11.0	1.5	1.3	0.0	0.6
Kansas	94.8	3.8	0.0	0.9	0.2	0.3
Kentucky	96.3	3.3	0.0	0.4	0.0	0.0
Louisiana	95.6	3.7	0.0	0.7	0.0	0.0
North Carolina	84.4	11.9	0.1	0.9	0.0	2.7

Source: AO college survey.
a. In measuring personnel resources used, the survey asked about the proportion of staff members' time dedicated to AO in the first year and the total value of their time for the whole year. The total proportion of time for each category of staff member was multiplied by the total value of the time for that category.
b. To measure resources directed to courses, the evaluators considered three types of classes: entirely new classes added for AO, existing classes that had AO added to them, and classes that were not offered because of AO but would have been offered otherwise. Those classes that were not offered represent a savings. For the classes that were entirely new and classes that were enhanced by AO, the calculation excludes the instructional resources to avoid double-counting personnel resources.
c. Support service resources here do not include the salary of the coach or navigator, which is part of personnel resources. Support services include transportation vouchers, emergency financial assistance, and child care assistance. They do not include tuition waivers or scholarships.

Across all colleges, CTE and adult education instructors put in a similar amount of time in the first year. Deans and administrators put in about 40 percent of the time of members of the two instructor categories. However, because the resources used reflect time spent on AO multiplied by the value of that time (measured as salary plus benefits) and deans and administrators receive higher compensation, resource investment was similar for each of these groups. The site visits and other contact with the colleges revealed that deans and administrators often played an important role in getting AO off the ground, either acting directly as the college coordinator or lead or providing other support to the program such as helping align curriculum, bringing together different parts of the college, or negotiating with the college trustees or state office.

TABLE 8. DISTRIBUTION OF PERSONNEL RESOURCES, FIRST YEAR OF IMPLEMENTATION (%)

	Deans/ Adminis-trators	Nonadjunct CTE faculty members/ instructors	Adjunct CTE faculty members/ instructors	Adult ed. instructors	Counselors/ Coaches/ Navigators/ Advisors	Other staff[a]
All states	**25.1**	**18.1**	**6.4**	**23.1**	**18.4**	**9.0**
Illinois	26.4	23.4	4.2	27.7	16.0	2.2
Kansas	19.5	19.9	7.8	25.0	16.1	11.8
Kentucky	24.6	17.2	6.8	22.6	15.7	13.1
Louisiana	28.6	15.2	9.2	17.6	22.2	7.1
North Carolina	28.4	11.7	3.1	20.2	24.7	11.8

Source: AO college survey.
a. "Other staff" includes marketing, outreach, recruiting staff; administrative support staff (such as clerical staff); data staff; physical plant/maintenance staff; and others.

In interviews, college staff and administrators focused on the extra resources required for team teaching as the key challenge to sustaining the AO model. Often, the adult education side of the college had to absorb the extra cost of the adult education instructor's team-teaching time, some of which was offset in the first year by the AO grant. Colleges were not always able to recoup all the costs from existing adult education and other programs. No states had worked out a higher reimbursement mechanism for team-taught courses as of the end of the first year, though the Kansas Board of Regents—the state agency administering AO—began developing a tier for AO in its new funding model. The AO state teams were working to address how best to fund the additional costs of AO to sustain the initiative past the end of the grant.

Total Resources Used by Colleges

Based on survey data from 39 colleges (three were missing data), the total first-year AO resources used were valued at an average of $228,410 per college. The average value of resources used per college ranged from about $179,000 in Louisiana to $267,000 in Illinois. The value of Louisiana's resources is lower because personnel were relatively inexpensive and course costs were low. North Carolina likely used fewer resources than other states because some colleges did not fully implement team teaching in their pathways and had fewer pathways during the first year because of a delayed start. Illinois is a fairly expensive state in terms of personnel costs, particularly in the metropolitan Chicago area. Kansas likely used a higher amount of resources because all its colleges implemented team teaching, it had more pathways operating statewide during the first year, and it served the most students. The median value of resources is also presented in table 9 to show that some states had colleges that used a relatively high or low value of the resources used.

TABLE 9. SNAPSHOT OF VALUE OF RESOURCES USED FOR AO, FIRST YEAR OF IMPLEMENTATION

	N	Missing	Total	Average (mean) per college	Median per college
All states	**39**	**3**	**$8,907,975**	**$228,410**	**$216,400**
Illinois	8	0	$2,136,576	$267,072	$271,782
Kansas	8	1	$2,123,718	$265,465	$245,421
Kentucky	7	1	$1,649,390	$235,627	$242,054
Louisiana	9	0	$1,611,316	$179,035	$135,000
North Carolina	7	1	$1,386,975	$198,139	$199,180

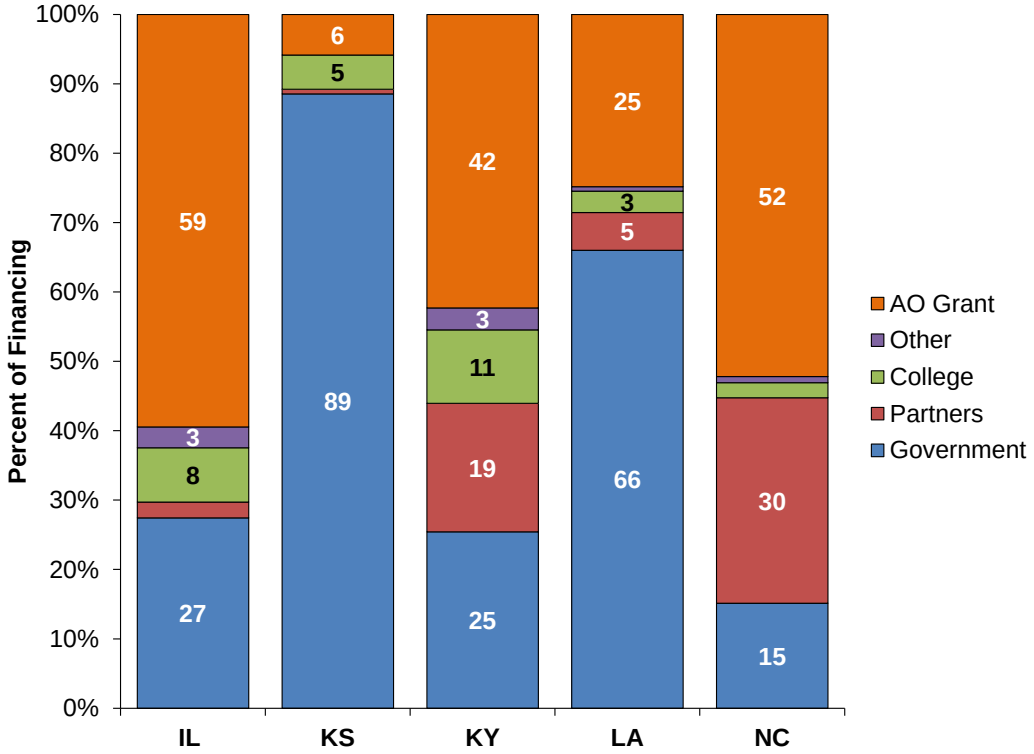
Source: AO college survey.

Financing

Financing refers to the various sources of money that the colleges brought in or provided to help support the AO program. Figure 9 depicts the various sources of financing by state in the first year. These sources do not correspond precisely to the resources expended in the first year, as some sources could be spread across multiple years of AO and tracking every dollar is beyond the scope of the evaluation. Rather, this figure sheds light on the various sources of money that may be supporting elements of the initiative over time.

The government—both federal and state—provided a large proportion of financing in Kansas and Louisiana. In Kansas, the high level of government support is mostly attributable to a large TAACCCT grant. In Louisiana, the large proportion of government expenditures primarily comes from the state rapid response funds invested into AO. The AO grant was the largest source of financing in the first year in Illinois, Kansas, and North Carolina. The colleges themselves provided a relatively small proportion of the financing in the first year.

FIGURE 9. FINANCING IN THE FIRST YEAR OF THE AO INITIATIVE



Source: AO college survey.

Summary

Colleges primarily used AO resources in the first year of operations to pay for college staff and administrators to get the pathways up and running and for adult education and CTE instructors to create and operate AO courses. The total resources used per college were higher in states with more colleges, more pathways offered, and more students served. Financing came from the AO grant, from the state and federal government, from partner organizations, and, to a lesser degree from the colleges themselves.

Sustaining the funding of AO is a primary concern for both states and colleges participating in the initiative. Most state and college staff interviewed described the first year as costly and time intensive. Of particular concern across all states was the level of resources required for team teaching and additional support to students provided through navigators and coaches. However, as implementation of AO moves from start-up to a "steady state" and colleges serve more students per pathway, colleges are expected to achieve economies of scale, reducing the per unit (student, credit, or credential) costs of AO.

This report provides an initial view of the resources devoted to AO in the first year. A more complete understanding of the resources required for AO over a longer period of time will be developed in future reports, along with an analysis of costs and benefits, especially the benefits to students who become employed because of AO. Many of the college leaders interviewed indicated that they were waiting to see the impact of AO relative to the resources it requires before deciding which aspects of the model should be sustained after the grant ends.

How Did the States Support AO Implementation?

Several state characteristics and important AO components have influenced how colleges implemented the initiative. The nature of the state leadership has been an important factor. The original request for proposals for AO sought leaders who could "build support for the initiative within the higher education agency, among external stakeholders, and with colleges."[16] The structure and engagement of state and college leadership affected the amount of political and resource investment that was put toward the AO initiative and efforts to change the state and local systems to support it. Moreover, the availability of professional development (PD) and technical assistance (TA) from the state office had important effects on the capacity of colleges to deliver the model. These factors are relevant to the ability of states to advance policy change and to the sustainability of the AO effort throughout the grant period and beyond.

Leadership Engagement and Stakeholder Support

When implementing the initiative, all state teams made efforts to prioritize AO across their agencies and establish early buy-in from important partners and stakeholders. Table 10 identifies each state's managing agency and describes the main strategy that the agency used to build state support for AO during the first year of the initiative.

TABLE 10. STATE STRATEGIES TO INCREASE AO BUY-IN

	Managing agency	Strategy to increase buy-in
Illinois	Illinois Community College Board	Brought allies in the governor's office on board early. Used the regional professional development structure to infuse AO into all trainings in the state. Offered a planning grant to participating colleges early in the design phase to build goodwill among colleges and jump-start the implementation process.
Kansas	Kansas Board of Regents	Leveraged its existing joint position with the Kansas Department of Commerce to build statewide support of AO and make connections between workforce and education priorities.
Kentucky	Kentucky Community and Technical College System	Formed a leadership team composed of the Kentucky Adult Education Agency and the Kentucky Employment and Workforce Development Cabinet.
Louisiana	Louisiana Community and Technical College System	Incorporated AO into the state's WorkReadyU structure. Offered seed grants to participating colleges in the design phase and allocated the state WIA incentive award to support the AO initiative. Encouraged colleges to leverage the overlap between AO and similar grants such as TAACCCT to build strong, integrated implementation teams. Mirrored this cross-initiative collaboration on the state level.
North Carolina	North Carolina Community College System	Incorporated AO under the umbrella of the existing Basic Skills Plus Program, which is a mostly noncredit career pathway program that integrates basic skills and CTE for adults who test at the 9th- through 12th-grade level.

Source: Site visits.

As the table shows, states brought together multiple stakeholders and institutionalized those relationships to galvanize support for AO and maintain it as a state priority. Some states helped create state-level workforce system partnerships that defined how the colleges worked with their local workforce system.

In Kentucky, AO helped strengthen the relationship between the Kentucky Community and Technical College System, the Kentucky Adult Education Agency, and Kentucky Employment and Workforce Development Cabinet. The three agency leads were part of an executive committee that managed the initiative. This executive committee tried to cement its commitment at the college level by creating local executive committees to mirror the state-level structure.

In Kansas, the partnership between the Kansas Board of Regents and the Kansas Department of Commerce was equally strong, if not more, because of the shared position that focused on connecting postsecondary education to workforce priorities. Although this vision took hold before AO, its existence helped institutionalize the importance of collaboration between workforce and higher education actors.

In Louisiana, which rolled out several other pathway initiatives around the same time as AO, the state AO leadership combined forces with TAACCCT grant team and encouraged colleges to do the same. The state office also worked closely with the Louisiana Workforce Commission to pool resources to support AO. As of the end of the first year of implementation, the state team was still trying to help colleges strengthen partnerships with their local WIBs.

The other states, particularly Illinois, recognize the importance of partnerships in order to achieve statewide buy-in and support for AO, but AO is still very much an adult education initiative. Illinois Community College Board partners such as the Illinois Department of Commerce and the Governor's Office were involved at various stages during design and (somewhat) during implementation. More work could be done to integrate these partners more fully and to further institutionalize the priority of promoting education and training for low skilled adults.

The North Carolina Community College System formed many important partnerships across divisions within the system office. The adult education side of the state office coordinated with the CTE and curriculum counterparts to articulate non-credit pathways to for-credit pathways. The state AO team had plans to coordinate with the state workforce system, but had not done so as of the end of 2012 and then left the initiative shortly after the end of the first year.

Technical Assistance and Professional Development

The AO state teams strived to help colleges succeed in implementing AO according to the model. States varied in the extent to which they offered AO-focused PD and TA. Table 11 describes some common PD and TA activities states carried out during the first year. States were particularly active in supporting colleges in pathway development, recruitment, and the provision of labor-market information. In addition, Kentucky, North Carolina, and Illinois surveyed colleges to understand TA needs.

Building pathways was an important priority for all states during the first year. In order to provide support to the colleges, states took advantage of previous experiences with career pathways and adult education transition efforts. To ensure that the pathways met the expectations of the grant as well as the requirements of state accreditation, Kansas, Kentucky, and North Carolina developed pathway approval processes. However, even with this targeted support, site visit colleges reported some start-up difficulties when building their pathways,

especially around constructing pathways of at least 12 credit hours. Louisiana colleges struggled with finding pathways that garnered enough interest from students and met the high-need and high-wage standards. The state office worked with the colleges to identify pathways that were at least high-need and that could attract enough enrollment to be worthwhile.

TABLE 11. TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROVIDED BY STATE AO OFFICES, FIRST YEAR OF IMPLEMENTATION

	Pathway development	Recruitment/ outreach strategies	Professional development	Labor-market information	Surveys on college AO needs
Illinois		✓	Regional	✓	✓
Kansas	✓	✓	Statewide	✓	
Kentucky	✓	✓	Statewide	✓	✓ (2)
Louisiana	✓		Statewide and regional	✓	
North Carolina	✓	✓	In progress		✓

Sources: Site visits and program documents.

Three states helped with recruitment and outreach strategies to encourage enrollment of the target population, though the characteristics of the target population shifted with the termination of Pell AtB. Kansas, Kentucky, and North Carolina provided outreach and marketing tools to help colleges with recruitment efforts. Kentucky was particularly advanced in this area, creating a series of compelling video testimonials to promote AO. Louisiana encouraged colleges to focus on the adult education population without secondary school credentials, but the state did not provide direct assistance on outreach and recruitment from what was observed on the site visits.

Finally, all states except North Carolina provided labor-market information to help colleges develop pathways that would target sectors with growing job opportunities. In North Carolina, colleges were tasked with gathering this information individually to show that pathways were in areas of high growth or high demand.

Another important TA component of pathway development was in support services delivery. The Illinois Community College Board outlined an extensive list of required support services for colleges to include in their proposals. In Kansas, the state team fostered state partnerships through workforce and human services agencies to help colleges provide support services locally. In North Carolina, the state team used a 2012 survey of the colleges to assess the services available for AO students. Drawing on information from the survey, the state will be able to work with the colleges to address the gaps in services, where additional resources may be needed, and where resources outside the college (such as CBOs) could fill these gaps. The Kentucky Community and Technical College System is helping colleges figure out how to use funds from federal grants to hire success coaches that provide services to AO students. The Louisiana state team stated that it still needs to address support services with the colleges in its TA efforts.

Professional development was also crucial during the first year of implementation. All states provided various PD opportunities, mostly in coordination with JFF, NCTN, and SBCTC, which provided staff that coached the states to support AO implementation and fidelity to the model. Each state sent a substantial number of AO-affiliated staff from the college and state teams to national and regional trainings with JFF and its partners. Kansas and Kentucky had several statewide professional development events, and Illinois assigned AO as a priority for one of its regional PD providers. Kentucky also contracted with an expert from the University of Kentucky

to provide guidance on team teaching and contextualized curriculum to college staff. Louisiana offered several in-person trainings for AO colleges. As of the end of the first year, the state team was developing a regional PD system called Centers of Excellence, which is divided into eight regions across the state, coordinated by the Louisiana Community and Technical College System. This is part of the implementation of the WorkReadyU model. The North Carolina state team originally relied on NCTN's online PD tools to provide PD opportunities for colleges, but late in 2012 began to expand its in-person offerings. As of the end of the first year, North Carolina was reforming its PD efforts across all community and technical colleges, which included integration of AO concepts into the overall PD activities. States are generally using PD as a strategy to institutionalize AO concepts by leveraging existing PD delivery structures.

Additional State Resource Investment

All states in the initiative provided colleges resources beyond the grant. Resources ranged from in-kind support and matched funds from partner agencies to financing strategies that used multiple funding streams and repurposed funding for AO. Common funding streams that states used in the first year of the initiative included WIA, Perkins, and federal grant funds. For example, the Illinois Community College Board used Perkins funds to provide professional development in team teaching for adult education and CTE instructors. Kansas and Kentucky leveraged funds from the TAACCCT grant to provide success coaches at AO colleges. The Louisiana Community and Technical College System negotiated with the Louisiana Workforce Commission to split the WIA incentive funds for 2013 to support AO pathway development on one side and sectoral approaches to employer engagement on the other.

However, finding stable funding to operate AO and support students' participation in AO was still a challenge at the end of the first year. At the time of the site visits, state and college AO teams were eager to receive a tool kit and onsite training on how to "braid" funding sources for AO, being developed by JFF and its partners. Although this support has been important to jump-start implementation, state teams interviewed during site visits were eager to see evidence of success so they could more effectively advocate for increased investment in AO.

Policy Work and Emerging Systems Change

Policy change to support the development and implementation of integrated career pathways is a key component of AO. States formed policy teams and developed work plans to guide efforts to implement policy change throughout the grant period. The policy changes the states were working on in the first year fell into five categories: data and analysis; program redesign; alignment between education and workforce development; assessment, referral, and placement; and finance. The policy levers developed by the states often fell into more than one of these categories.

Data collected during interviews with the state teams, state partners, and college representatives, as well as the work plans and progress reports developed by the state policy teams, provided a picture of the first year of policy work conducted by each AO state office. In creating their policy work plans, states considered their environments and how various factors affected their ability to effectively implement, scale, and sustain the AO model. The states had several common environmental factors that influenced how they designed their policy levers, including budget constraints and the positioning of adult education within the state administrative structure. State-specific environmental factors also affected implementation, such as changes in authority over policymaking in Kansas and North Carolina, where the legislatures gave more autonomy to the state higher education boards.

In Louisiana, AO started when the entire community and technical college system was being overhauled. The state had recently rolled out WorkReadyU, an umbrella under which the Louisiana community and technical colleges were combined with adult education and developmental education efforts. Until 2011, the adult education system had been under the authority of the K–12 system. As part of the rollout of WorkReadyU, many colleges and programs were being realigned; in some cases, previously distinct colleges and programs were being merged administratively. This context provided an opportunity to incorporate changes introduced by AO but also caused some chaos in the colleges and state office.

Table 12 shows where states were able to make progress toward their policy goals in the first year of implementation. In Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, and North Carolina, the state offices underwent processes of curricular alignment between adult education and CTE that strongly benefited AO. Kentucky worked on curricular alignment between adult education, the Common Core standards, and the new, more rigorous GED test being implemented. Louisiana developed a common course numbering system and made its policies friendlier to students who wanted to transfer among two-year institutions or from two-year to four-year institutions. Though AO students are more likely to leave the system to get jobs than transfer, the new policies provide more options to AO students who might want to continue to pursue higher education. North Carolina worked to integrate the AO model into its BSP program and articulate current pathways from noncredit to credit throughout 2012. At the end of the first year, the North Carolina Community College System planned to continue this work for the remainder of the grant period.

TABLE 12. STATE PROGRESS ON POLICY LEVERS, FIRST YEAR OF IMPLEMENTATION

	Curricular alignment	New funding models	Data improvement
Illinois		Performance-based funding; deadline changes	P-20 (existing)
Kansas	✓	Tiered	Merge with Department for Children & Families
Kentucky	✓		P-20 (existing)
Louisiana	✓	Tuition waivers	Movement into BANNER, expansion of P-20
North Carolina	✓		Systemic overhaul

Sources: Site visits and program documents.

During the first year, Illinois implemented performance-based funding, but budget cuts made the funding less substantial than was initially planned. Illinois was also working to change the state financial aid deadlines to be friendlier to community college students. The Kansas state office had a tiered funding model approved in the legislature and also gained increased autonomy over funding in order to integrate a new AO tier into the new model. Kansas was planning to develop a funding reimbursement structure for AO. To do this, the Kansas team was working to estimate the additional cost of AO to build into its tiered funding model. These state funding efforts could reimburse AO courses at a level that recognizes the added cost of instruction and encourages college participation. Louisiana has not yet developed new funding models for the colleges, but the state office did work with colleges to interpret the existing state tuition waiver policy broadly so AO students could qualify for waivers in the absence of Pell. In contrast to the advancements in Illinois, Kansas, and Louisiana, the North Carolina state office has been hesitant to push AO financing policies within the legislature because it might put funding for the BSP program at risk.

Though all of the states have improved their data quality and tracking, North Carolina has undertaken the largest systematic overhaul, using AO as an opportunity to improve data for all

its programs. Other states have notable data accomplishments, and the existing P-20 warehouses in Illinois, Kentucky, and Louisiana are impressive. Kansas is working to merge the college data system with the system of the Department for Children and Families, but this effort remains a work in progress. Louisiana worked to move all its colleges into a common data system—BANNER—and further developed its P-20 data warehouse. However, the development of the adult education tracking system has taken a backseat to the efforts to incorporate BANNER into the colleges.

There were other policy successes in the first year of AO as well. Kentucky, as part of its continuing effort to align its adult education curriculum to the Common Core, ensured this component was included in its AO state work plan and provided PD to adult education instructors statewide on teaching the new curriculum. Kansas mapped resources to identify opportunities to link the workforce system more tightly to the community college system, in order to ensure funding was coordinated and available to students.

Since the states focused mainly on supporting the colleges to implement pathways in the first year, time and resources put toward the policy work to date has had to compete with other AO priorities. The states, however, seemed to take advantage of this new model as leverage to engage state leaders and college partners to create policy change in order to improve opportunities for adults with low basic skills.

Summary

The AO state teams strived to help colleges succeed in implementing AO according to the model, especially through technical assistance, professional development, and overall oversight of the initiative. Recognizing that AO is intended to transform how community and technical colleges serve adult education students and taking into account widespread budgetary cuts, AO state teams also began to galvanize support for statewide policies that will help sustain AO and better address the needs of adults with low basic skills. Interviews with state team members across the initiative indicate that AO state leads plan to continue supporting colleges by coordinating resources and providing opportunities for colleges to share best practices, particularly around sustainability and braided funding as well as team teaching and general student support.

Part of the state leadership efforts included ensuring the sustainability and scalability of AO by working to align existing policies or pursue new policies. Specifically, states undertook curricular alignment, development of new state funding models, and data systems improvements. Federal and state budgetary cuts constrained early policy victories, such as Kansas and Illinois's efforts to include funding formulas for AO. Program implementation was also affected by budget constraints, as many state leaders and college administrators struggled to help colleges address the costs of tuition and integrated instruction and try to develop strong financing strategies to support AO over the long run. Even with these challenges, the states seemed to take advantage of this new model as leverage to engage state leaders and college partners to create policy change in order to improve opportunities for adults with low basic skills.

Summary of Early Implementation Findings: Progress toward Achieving AO's Goals

This section summarizes the major implementation findings from the first year of AO and reflects on participating states' progress in implementing the theory of change. The AO theory of change provides a framework for the array of activities that constitute the AO model, the stakeholders and levers that are intended to influence it, and the short-term and long-term outcomes and goals to be achieved over a four-year period. Given that this report focuses on first-year activities, progress is assessed against the proposed two-year outcomes along the theory of change.

States and colleges made important progress in implementing AO during the first year. They implemented various activities to build the systems, processes, and relationships needed to support AO implementation. Start-up activities included designing integrated career pathways that met the needs of adult education students; recruiting and enrolling the intended target population; engaging external partners, such as local workforce agencies and CBOs; getting buy-in for the model, particularly among CTE departments; coordinating support services; and identifying state policy work that would help the AO model succeed at the colleges. Given the breadth and magnitude of change needed to enable low-skill students to access and ultimately complete postsecondary education, states and colleges accomplished a great deal during the first year.

Still, there were challenges. In states where the change in Pell grant rules affected how student tuition would be funded for students without a secondary education credential, recruitment efforts shifted toward students who had a high school diploma or GED. Additional uncertainty about the sustainability of funding revolved around team teaching. Many colleges indicated that team teaching was not sustainable yet because states had not established long-term funding solutions to pay for this approach. Moreover, although most colleges indicated that the integrated instruction is valuable to students, college adult education staff members were still working to engage CTE departments with the AO model.

Summarizing Progress toward Outcomes

Table 13 provides an overview of early progress related to the two-year outcomes identified in the AO Theory of Change. Each state received a progress rating based on analysis of its survey responses, observations made during site visits, quarterly calls, and document reviews during the first year of AO's implementation. More complete data will be provided in subsequent evaluation reports, but there is some early evidence that states are progressing toward their two-year outcomes. The table indicates where there has been significant observable progress in achieving each of the two-year outcomes for each state. For outcomes that are not checked, it may be too soon to tell or progress was not observed based on the interviews and documents.

TABLE 13. OBSERVED PROGRESS TOWARD TWO-YEAR AO OUTCOMES AS OF THE END OF THE FIRST YEAR OF IMPLEMENTATION

Outcome	Illinois	Kansas	Kentucky	Louisiana	North Carolina
COLLEGE AND CAREER PATHWAYS					
Two viable I-BEST or I-BEST-like pathways per participating college	a	✓	✓	✓	
Multiple faculty members per college willing and able to deliver integrated curriculum to ABE students	✓	✓		✓	
Implementation reflects emerging evidence and innovation					
Employers actively engage with colleges on pathway development					
CULTURE SHIFT					
Growing awareness of problem and solutions by colleges, employers, and states				✓	✓
Greater ABE student access to campus resources	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
ABE students seen as important population/pipeline in institutions	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
ABE students seek college and career pathways	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
States, colleges invest in ABE data tracking	✓	✓	✓		✓
SCALE AND SUSTAINABILITY					
Some financial aid barriers removed; at least two states successfully using models for ABE students to access Pell grants		✓		✓	✓
Colleges and students gain access to untapped state, federal, and employer funding to support pathways		✓	✓	✓	✓
Capacity, tools, and data are available in states and colleges to conduct cost-benefit analysis					
Colleges and states have greater capacity to track ABE student progress/outcomes and to link data to labor market	✓	✓	✓		✓

Sources: AO college survey, site visits, and program documents.
ABE = adult basic education
a. One college in Illinois implemented only one pathway in 2012; the other colleges implemented at least two.

States and Colleges Have Developed Many Integrated Career Pathways but Could Strengthen Team-Teaching Delivery and Employer Relationships for the Pathways

As shown in the data on pathway development, by the end of the first year of implementation, all but two colleges—one in Illinois and one in North Carolina—had implemented at least two integrated career pathways. Colleges considered both labor-market information and their particular contexts—such as the needs of their community, student interest for particular pathways, and the willingness and openness of CTE departments and staff to work with adult education students—to determine which pathways to offer.

States and colleges were still trying to get faculty and staff to buy into team teaching as of the end of the first year. Across states, many CTE faculty interviewed expressed that they were initially hesitant about working with adult education programs and particularly team teaching, but most did report changing their minds about the value of the model once they experienced it and expressed interest in helping to bring other CTE faculty around to the approach. According to survey results, the most common strategy practiced was the complementary-supportive method of team teaching, with 89 percent of colleges that had implemented team teaching practicing this approach. When using this method, adult education instructors sit in on CTE classes, help students in a teacher's aide role when needed, and often provide a supplemental basic skills class that contextualizes the CTE content for students.

Although employer engagement was a large component of designing and implementing pathways, states and colleges reported that more work could be done to solidify these relationships. Survey results indicate that 57 percent of participating colleges had ongoing employer relationships. Some of these colleges' activities with employers included presenting to them at advisory board meetings, developing work-based learning components of their pathways with employers, and reaching out to them to develop job leads for participants. However, these types of activities with employers were not occurring consistently across colleges, and during site visits AO staff indicated that the depth of employer relationships could be strengthened during the remainder of the grant period.

Attitudes toward and Opportunities for Adult Education Students Are Changing

Colleges and states made progress changing the culture and attitudes toward adult education students on campuses. While several colleges visited indicated that they had to do more in this regard, the interviews with faculty, staff, and students generally reflected willingness to open doors for adult education students. Further, many AO students reported that they had begun to identify themselves as college students, rather than GED or ESL students. Based on first year findings, colleges see adult education students as an important resource in their community. States have been able to use this greater integration of adult education students into community college as leverage in order to achieve their long-term goal of enabling more low-skilled students to gain access to college and attain credentials.

Another key indicator of progress for shifting attitudes toward adult education students in participating colleges is the availability of "comprehensive academic and social student supports (e.g., tutoring, child care, transportation, and access to public benefits, subsidized jobs)" for AO students.[17] Survey and site visit data indicate that AO students had access to an array of academic support services at the college, including tutoring, advising, and help with financial aid forms. In most colleges, students interacted with AO college coordinators, coaches, and navigators, who often helped them find needed academic, career, and personal supports. From these support staff, AO students received more individualized case management and tutoring services than was typically available to adult education or college students. Many colleges also reached out to partners to provide services such as child care or transportation that were not

available in house. Yet there is still work to be done to ensure that support services are available to AO students consistently. This is a policy lever for all the states. In fact, four of the five states developed a plan to ensure that adult student support service needs are met: Kansas mapped its support service infrastructure, with the intent of offering integrated support services seamlessly. Both North Carolina and Illinois started assessing how their colleges offered support services. In Illinois and Kansas, colleges often leveraged partnerships to offer more comprehensive support services. Kentucky looked for a more unified statewide support service strategy by placing success coaches in all colleges and career coaches through the workforce system. Louisiana identified support services as its next area of improvement.

Work on Scale and Sustainability Is Under Way, but the Main Focus in the First Year Was on Start-Up Activities

All five states were developing plans to scale and sustain the initiative, but little was actually implemented in the first year, since most colleges concentrated on building pathways and recruiting students.

Sustainability work focused on exploring policy and financing changes that could help states and colleges sustain the model after the initiative ends. For instance, Kansas incorporated a tier into its funding structure that would provide the higher funding levels needed for AO, although this policy change had not been fully implemented by the end of 2012. Illinois made two attempts to expand funding for AO students. The Illinois state team successfully incorporated AO into the performance funding metric but, like Kansas, this effort did not result in increased funding for AO colleges in 2012. The team also tried unsuccessfully to obtain funding for tuition from another state resource after the Pell AtB rules changed. However, Illinois and Kansas are continuing their work to bring about these funding changes in the coming years. Louisiana developed a way to extend state tuition waivers to AO students who cannot qualify for Pell.

While states began to braid funding with other resources such as WIA, Perkins, other grants, and other state allocations, all states plan to focus more attention in the second year on gaining access to untapped resources. Some braided funding strategies focused particularly heavily on incorporating funds from other grants, such as TAACCCT, to help support AO structures. On the cost side, states may need to work more closely with colleges to understand the true program costs, particularly as AO structures become more institutionalized. Measuring costs also requires considering what the states and colleges are *not spending*. For example, if students are moving through GED and other adult education programs more quickly and becoming more self-sufficient, then costs of those programs might decrease. The sources and amounts of these costs are likely to shift as the program matures. Better identifying these costs will help states as they think through policy changes and braided funding strategies.

States and colleges also improved tracking of student academic trajectories to ensure that AO is sustained after the grant period ends. Kentucky and Illinois are far along in this respect with their longitudinal student tracking systems. Moreover, all states were either working to improve their data systems or already had robust data systems for tracking and evaluating adult education students. Louisiana's data system development was heavily focused on introducing BANNER to the Louisiana Community and Technical College System institutions, but the adult education system is the next item on the agenda.

All states visited defined scale at the end of the first year as bringing additional colleges into the AO system. Illinois, Kentucky, and Louisiana created a process to bring new colleges into the initiative. The Kentucky Community and Technical College System officially added the remaining eight colleges in its system to AO in fall 2012. The hope was that the new colleges would start creating their pathways in 2013 and would benefit from a mentoring relationship

with the original eight. Illinois brought together a cohort of four affiliate colleges by providing them with small planning grants. These Illinois colleges will launch their pathways in 2014. Louisiana gave seed grants to non-AO colleges to begin implementing AO-like structures in the first year and will likely formally incorporate some new colleges in the second year. North Carolina was considering integrating successful components of AO into BSP colleges.

Across colleges, scale was difficult to focus on during the first year, since most were concentrating on building pathways and recruiting students. Further, as stated above, states and colleges are still working through financing and cost considerations of the model.

Scale and sustainability is a work in progress. While states and colleges tried to enroll as many students as possible during the first year, recruitment was a challenge, especially with the unexpected changes in the Pell rules. Moreover, in order to justify sustaining AO, states and colleges need more evidence on its effectiveness. The impact study and the cost-benefit analysis are designed to help provide that evidence. The goal of the implementation evaluation is to understand the process of designing and implementing career pathways and to collect qualitative evidence that will help inform the impact findings. Undoubtedly, states and colleges will continue to make progress on the AO theory of change as they adjust and refine their efforts. This progress will be documented and assessed through additional data collection and analysis for the evaluation.

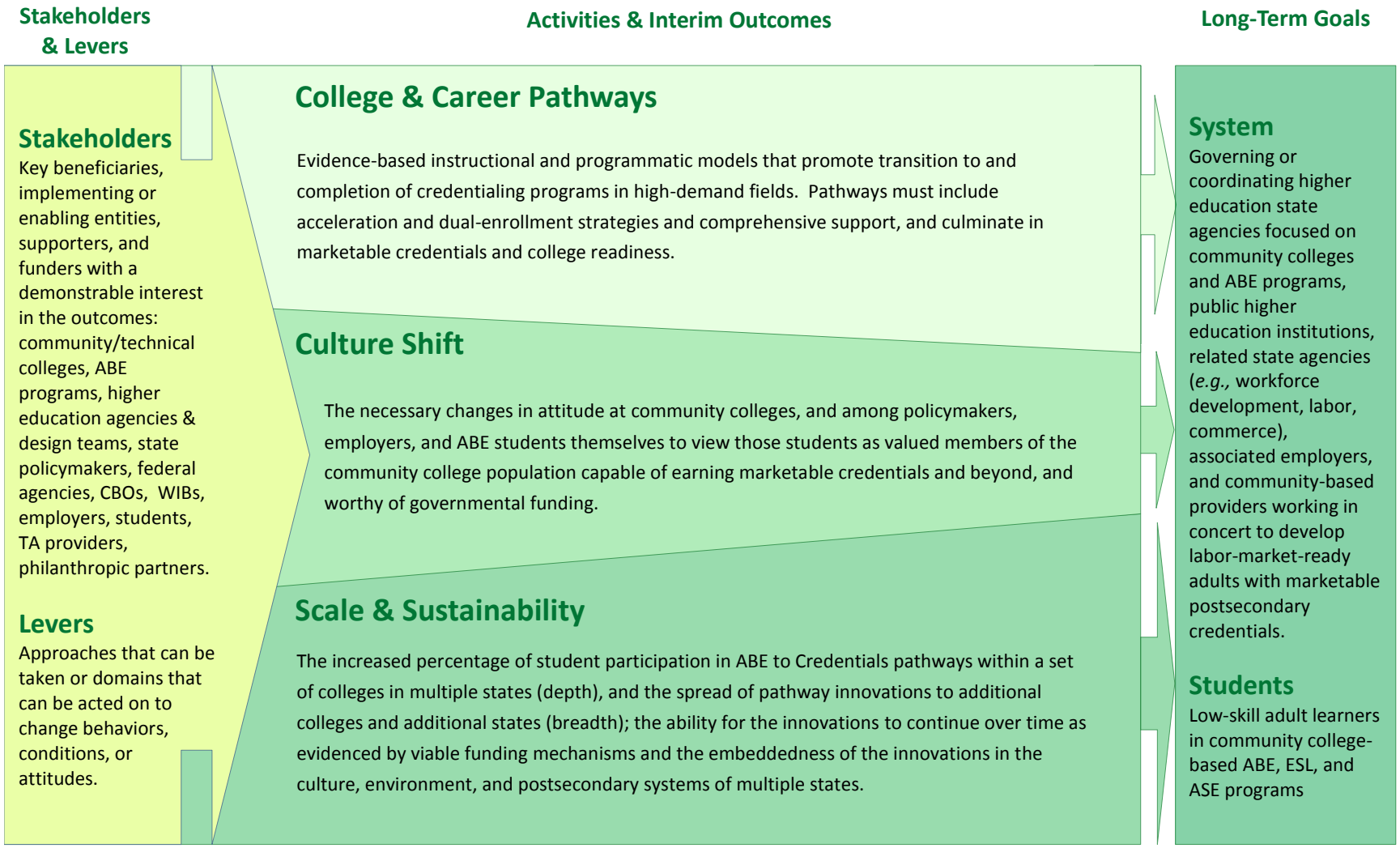
Appendix. Required Elements of AO and Theory of Change

Nonnegotiable Elements of the AO Grant

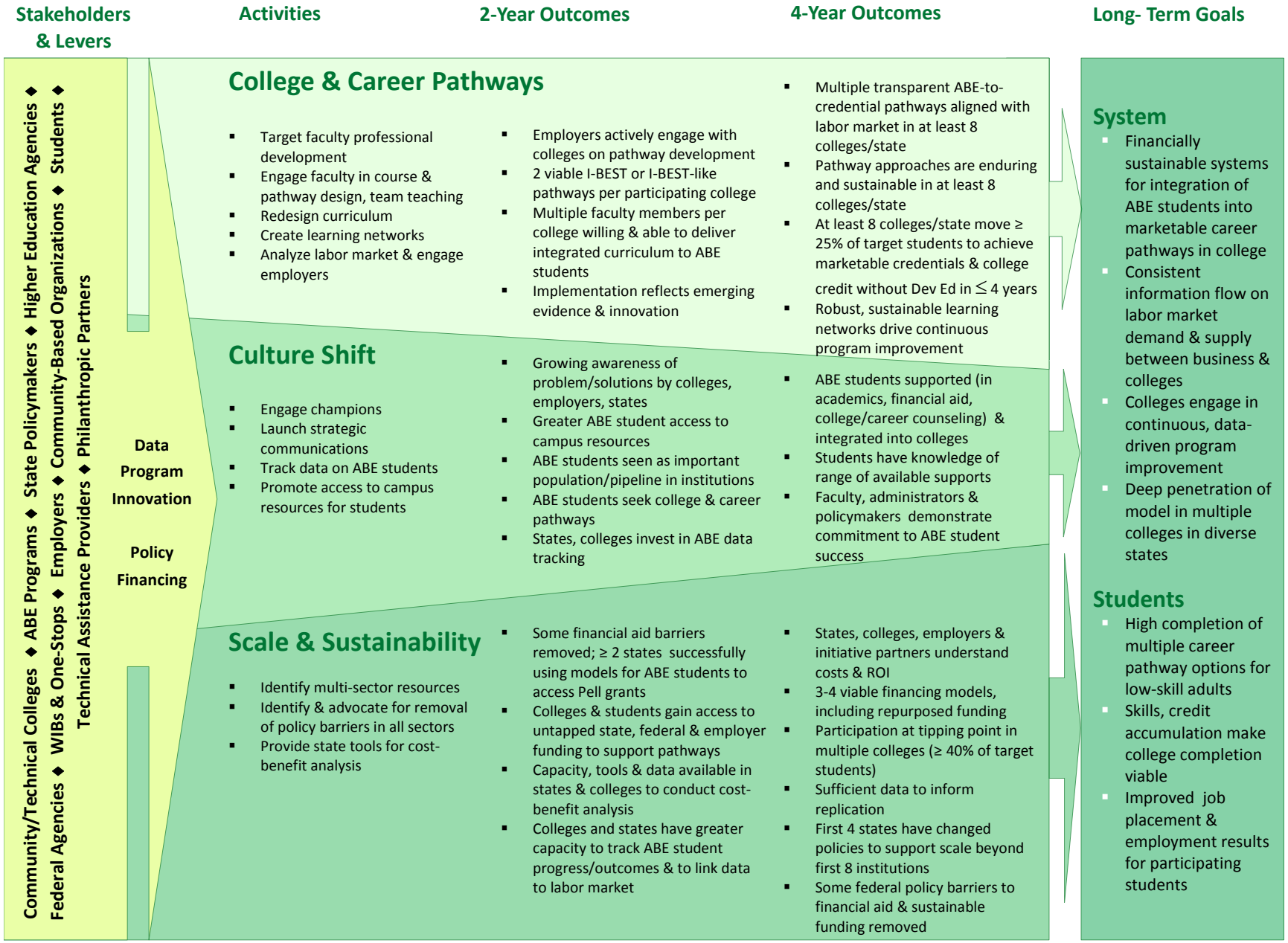
1. Explicit articulation of two or more educational pathways, linked to career pathways, that begin with adult basic education or ESL and continue to a college-level certificate and beyond;
2. Evidence of strong local demand for the selected pathways, including the presence on the workforce investment board demand list for the local area or other local data demonstrating robust demand;
3. Acceleration strategies, including contextualized learning and the use of hybrid (online and classroom-based) course designs;
4. Evidence-based dual enrollment strategies, including paired courses and I-BEST and I-BEST-like approaches;
5. Comprehensive academic and social student supports (e.g., tutoring, child care, transportation, access to public benefits, subsidized jobs);
6. Achievement of marketable, stackable, credit-bearing certificates and degrees and college readiness, with an explicit goal of bypassing developmental education;
7. Award of some college-level professional-technical credits, which must be transcripted the quarter or semester in which they are earned; and
8. Partnerships with Workforce Investment Boards and employers.

States and colleges are further expected to adhere to the nonnegotiable elements of the model except where infeasible. These elements specify that the states' programs should offer career pathways that are at least 12 credit hours long, at least two pathways should be established in each of at least eight colleges, and pathways should have at least 25 percent team teaching. Students eligible for AO must fall within National Reporting System (NRS) levels 4–6 (6th- to 12th-grade level) on math, reading, or writing or NRS levels 5–6 in English language skills. Enrolled students may have a secondary school credential as long as they fall within the eligible skill ranges. States were asked to identify policy levers and are expected to make at least 80 percent progress toward their policy goals by the end of the grant period. The goal is that within three years of operation, each participating state will produce at least 3,600 credentials statewide. Credentials should be offered in industries with sufficient labor demand so students can reasonably become employed within their areas of study.

Accelerating Opportunity Theory of Change – Definitions



Accelerating Opportunity Theory of Change – Path to Impact for System and Students



Endnotes

[1] The states updated their total to 6,257 credentials awarded through February 2014. This total is summed across more than 42 colleges, since additional colleges joined as the initiative progressed. The totals will be corroborated with college survey data and participant records in future reports.

[2] See "Designing an Integrated Pathway: Essential Elements Planning and Assessment Tool," Jobs for the Future, http://acceleratingopportunity.org/field-guide/sites/acceleratingopportunity.org.field-guide/files/ao_essentialelementassessment_110613.pdf.

[3] The Breaking Through initiative, which began in 2005, promoted improvement of adult education programs through four strategies 1) integrated institutional structures and services, 2) accelerated learning, 3) labor market payoffs, and 4) comprehensive supports. Starting with 16 colleges, over time Breaking Through became a broad initiative emphasizing the four core strategies to improve adult education at numerous other institutions across the country.

[4] See Anthony P. Carnevale, Nicole Smith, and Jeff Strohl, *Help Wanted: Projections of Jobs and Education Requirements through 2018* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, 2010), http://cew.georgetown.edu/jobs2018.

[5] See "National Assessment of Adult Literacy: Demographics, Overall," US Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, http://nces.ed.gov/naal/kf_demographics.asp.

[6] See *Adult Education and Family Literacy Act of 1998: Annual Report to Congress, Program Year 2010–11* (Washington, DC: US Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, 2013), http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/resource/aefla-report-to-congress-2010.pdf.

[7] See John Wachen, Davis Jenkins, Clive Belfield, and Michelle Van Noy, *Contextualized College Transition Strategies for Adult Basic Skills Students: Learning from Washington State's I-BEST Program Model* (New York: Columbia University, 2012).

[8] Based an updated count of pathways in JFF's pathway database in April 2014, there are 150 unique pathways that are currently or were ever in operation across the four states still in AO—Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, and Louisiana. The number of colleges participating in AO within these states also increased over this period from 34 to 49.

[9] One college in North Carolina offered no pathways in 2012, and a college in Illinois had only one operating pathway in any semester of 2012.

[10] Exact values are not reported here because the process for collecting pathway characteristic information was improved following the first year to ensure consistency across states and colleges.

While obtaining 12 credits is a key element of the AO model, JFF allowed some colleges to offer pathways with fewer than 12 credits if the college could sufficiently argue that the pathway would still lead to skills and industry-recognized credentials important for finding a job.

[11] For more information on these team-teaching approaches, see http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/college/_e-ibestteamteachingmodels.aspx. To determine the level of team teaching implemented during the first year, the survey listed SBCTC's six formal definitions of team teaching and asked respondents to classify their team-teaching method to the best of their ability. Reporting based on these categories may not fully capture variations in team teaching as instructors adapt approaches to classroom needs.

[12] The states recently updated the total to 6,257 credentials awarded through February 2014. This number will be corroborated with college survey data and participant records in future reports.

[13] See *Adult Education and Family Literacy Act of 1998: Annual Report to Congress, Program Year 2010–11,* http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/resource/aefla-report-to-congress-2010.pdf.

[14] Ibid.

[15] For example, in the Community-Based Job Training Grants, administered by the US Department of Labor from 2005 to 2012, grants awarded ranged from $500,000 to $3.6 million over a three-year period, significantly more funding than colleges received to implement AO (see Lauren Eyster, John Trutko, Teresa Derrick-Mills, Alexandra Stanczyk, and Jessica Compton, *Implementation Evaluation of the Community-Based Job Training Grant (CBJTG) Program; Final Report* [Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2013], http://www.urban.org/publications/412890.html). For the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College Career Training (TAACCCT) grants, also administered by the Department of Labor, grant awards to consortia of institutions in the second round range from $5 to $15 million for three years of program activities (see US Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, "Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training Grant Program Report for Fiscal Year 2012 to the Committee on Finance of the United States Senate and Committee on Ways and Means of the United States House of

Representatives" [Washington, DC: US Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, 2013], http://doleta.gov/taaccct/pdf/annualreport_fy2012.pdf.).

[16] See Jobs for the Future. *State Design Grants Request for Proposal: ABE to Credentials* (Boston: MA: Jobs for the Future, 2011), http://www.jff.org/sites/default/files/ABEtoCredentialsDesignRFP_120710.pdf.

[17] See Jobs for the Future, "Designing an Integrated Pathway: Essential Elements Planning and Assessment Tool," (Boston, MA: Jobs for the Future, 2013) http://acceleratingopportunity.org/field-guide/sites/acceleratingopportunity.org.field-guide/files/ao_essentialelementassessment_110613.pdf.