



TRANSFORMING U.S. WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT POLICIES FOR THE 21st CENTURY

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Capital IDEA and Austin Community College

A Case Study of a Nonprofit- Community College Partnership

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Postsecondary credentials are increasingly important for workers in today's economy. Nearly two-thirds of the 30 fastest-growing jobs through 2022 typically require a postsecondary education, according to the Bureau of Labor and Statistics (2013). A postsecondary education is also linked to higher earnings. According to research conducted by the Center on Education and the Workforce at Georgetown University, workers with at least some college earn slightly more than \$1.5 million on average over the course of their careers, which is \$250,000 more than workers with only a high school diploma. Workers with an associate's degree earn a little over \$1.7 million during their lifetimes (Carnevale, Rose, and Cheah 2011). These of course are averages, and the proportion of college graduates who find themselves employed in low-quality, noncollege jobs has increased over the past decade (Abel, Deitz, and Su 2014). Course of study matters, however, and at both the subbaccalaureate and baccalaureate levels, the quality of employment outcomes varies markedly according to type of certificate or degree (Fry and Parker 2012; Hanson, Carnevale, and Rose 2012). General recognition of the importance of postsecondary education to economic success has played a role in the increased college enrollment and college attainment we've seen over the past decade (Fry and Parker 2012). And, given the cost of postsecondary degrees, more and more students are turning to community colleges for postsecondary education.

According to the American Association of Community Colleges, nearly half of today's college students are enrolled at community colleges, many of whom represent a new type of student. They are more racially and ethnically diverse, and many of them are also working, older, low-income, and parents. The most recent data on community college enrollment showed nearly 13 million students enrolled in community college in fall 2009, including 8 million students who enrolled in for-credit courses, and approximately 5 million who enrolled in noncredit coursework. Nearly 60 percent of these students enrolled part time. The majority of community college students, 57 percent, were women, and over one-third were racial or ethnic minorities. The students' average age was 28, and 15 percent of students were over age 40. More than 40 percent of these students were first-generation college students, and most were employed full or part time while in school (American Association of Community Colleges 2012).

Many of these students face significant challenges in community college. Students unfamiliar or inexperienced with postsecondary education may struggle to navigate the college bureaucracy, such as financial aid and registration processes. Some students do not know what skills are in demand in their labor market or what occupations they should pursue. Many lack the basic skills they need to succeed in the classroom; others lack the professional networks and job search and interview skills they need to successfully transition to the labor market. Personal and family responsibilities can also be barriers. Seventy-five percent of today's community college students are juggling family responsibilities, work, and school (Complete College America 2011). These students often need a range of support services such as assistance with child care, transportation, or covering the costs of tuition and fees. As a result of these challenges, many community college students are finding success difficult to achieve.

Part-time students, as well as minority and low-income students, are much less likely than other community college students to earn a degree or certificate. Older students who attend part time also struggle to complete a degree or certificate (Complete College America 2011). The primary reason that students drop out of community college and university is the stress of combining work and school, according to a national survey of college students aged 22–30 (Public Agenda 2009).

Many community colleges are responding with new strategies to meet the needs of today's workforce. Funding challenges and institutional constraints, however, limit how much colleges can do alone. In many communities, nonprofit organizations are partnering with community colleges to help students overcome these challenges to succeed in the classroom and labor market. The Aspen Institute's Workforce Strategies Initiative (AspenWSI) identified and named these collaborations Courses to Employment (C2E) partnerships. This case study will discuss findings from AspenWSI's research into C2E partnerships and present a case study on a partnership between Capital IDEA, a nonprofit organization, and Austin Community College.

COMMUNITY COLLEGE-NONPROFIT PARTNERSHIPS: COURSES TO EMPLOYMENT STRATEGIES

Courses to Employment partnerships, as defined by AspenWSI, are collaborations between community colleges and workforce nonprofit organizations that use a range of strategies and combine the strengths of each institution to serve students more effectively than either could alone. Most of these partnerships target a specific industry or cluster of occupations, developing a deep understanding of the interrelationships between business competitiveness and the workforce needs of the targeted industry. These partnerships support students to improve their workplace skills and persist on an education pathway in pursuit of a higher-quality job. Along the way, partnerships provide motivational support and counseling, as well as access to needed social services and academic supports, including basic skills development. As workers transition to the workplace or aim to climb the career ladder, partnerships may provide labor market navigation services that help students find jobs and build the professional networks and communication skills they need to retain jobs and succeed within a local industry.

While many partnerships share similar goals, their work is often structured and organized in different ways. For example, some partnerships focus on short-term vocational skills training, and others have students pursue associate degrees. In some cases, the nonprofit provides

most of the training, and in others the college assumes all the responsibility for curriculum design and instruction. However, most of these partnerships have three common elements: 1) a high-quality education program that has a clear link to in-demand employment opportunities and provides appropriate technical skills training and basic skills development, 2) a range of student academic and nonacademic support services, and 3) an industry strategy that focuses on meeting business needs and helping students enter and succeed in the local labor market.

Partnerships leverage each other's institutional competencies and resources in different ways to serve their students. The activities and services of partnerships often differ because they serve different worker populations and businesses, use and have access to different funding streams, have different institutional strengths and weaknesses, and operate in different policy and regulatory environments. Because each partnership is unique and customized based on these factors, the field of nonprofit-community college partnerships consists of a rich and diverse set of strategies and approaches.

In 2013, the AspenWSI conducted a national survey of nonprofit-community college partnerships that generated responses representing 177 partnerships that demonstrated a lot of diversity in approach. Nonprofits engaged in partnerships with colleges represent a mix of institutions, including community-based organizations, funder collaboratives, union-affiliated nonprofits, worker centers, and Workforce Investment Boards. Table 11.1 summarizes some of the survey findings (Aspen Institute Workforce Strategies Initiative forthcoming).

In the next section of this case study, we profile a partnership between Capital IDEA and Austin Community College to provide a better understanding of what a Courses to Employment collaboration does, and how nonprofit organizations and community colleges can work together to support the success of low-income students.

CASE STUDY: CAPITAL IDEA AND AUSTIN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Partnership History

In the late 1990s, many hospitals, semiconductor companies, and businesses in Austin were finding it difficult to find skilled workers, and many families were struggling to make ends meet as the cost of living rose in the Austin area. Local policymakers had attracted semiconductor plants with tax incentives. In response, Austin Interfaith, a broad-based coalition of religious congregations, schools, unions, and other community institutions of the Industrial Areas Foundation, worked to hire disadvantaged workers and create a policy that links abatements to a fund for high-skill, long-term training (Bennett and Giloth 2008). When Samsung located a plant in Austin, it proposed to hire operators at low wages. Austin Interfaith organized the community to ensure a higher starting wage.

Around the same time, Austin Interfaith created Capital IDEA—based on Project Quest, an initiative of Austin Interfaith’s sister organization in San Antonio—to help lift Central Texas working families out of poverty by providing supports, counseling, and connection to educational services that lead to lifelong financial independence. Using funding from the new long-term job training fund established by the Samsung tax abatement deal, this program began preparing disadvantaged workers to become semiconductor technicians, as well as other high-skill occupations. Through this early work, Capital IDEA established the organization’s guiding framework for identifying living wage jobs in their labor market, and then creating education pathways to those jobs. Today, Capital IDEA works with students and employers in a variety of industries, including health care, technology, and the trades, as a sponsor of educational services for Austin’s low-income workers. A central component of the program’s strategy is to work with local community colleges and training providers to supply those educational services.

Capital IDEA’s partnership with Austin Community College (ACC) began in 1999 in part through an introduction by leaders at Austin Interfaith. Capital IDEA and ACC jointly developed the College Preparatory

Table 11.1 Courses to Employment Partnerships: Summary Findings from a National Survey

Student populations served	Partnerships are designed to serve numerous populations. The highest percentages of partnerships identified low-income individuals, adults with limited or no work history, youth between the ages of 18 and 26, and ethnic, racial minorities as among populations they most commonly serve.
Industries targeted	Nearly 80 percent of partnerships reported that they are preparing students for employment in a particular industry or set of occupations. Partnerships responding to the survey commonly cited health care, manufacturing, construction, and information technology as industries within which they are preparing students for employment.
Training provided	Partnerships provide a variety of different types of training, including basic and technical skills education. Sixty-four percent of partnerships reported offering training in credit certificate programs, 60 percent reported offering noncredit vocational skills training, and 43 percent reported supporting students in associate degree programs.
Support services and job placement assistance provided	Partnerships provide a range of support services and job placement assistance. Over 80 percent of partnerships reported providing case management services, and nearly 90 percent of partnerships provide job search assistance. Many partnerships also reported providing assistance with transportation, monetary assistance to help cover the cost of tuition and living expenses, and assistance with obtaining uniforms, tools, or other work supplies.
Industry engagement activities	Over 80 percent of partnerships said businesses inform their curriculum design or career pathways development, and almost 60 percent of partnerships said businesses provide in-kind resources such as materials, equipment, or training space. Eighty percent of partnerships said partnering businesses hire students, and 60 percent said businesses provide internships. Almost 60 percent of partnerships reported that businesses provide in-kind resources. Fewer partnerships, however, said businesses provide monetary resources to support the partnerships' work.

Partners' roles and responsibilities	In C2E partnerships, community colleges typically assume responsibility for delivering training, nonprofits usually manage support services and job placement activities, and both institutions often play a strong role in engaging industry and business partners.
Partnership funding	Nonprofits and colleges use many different funding streams to finance their partnership work. Both nonprofits and colleges commonly identified the Workforce Investment Act, philanthropic foundations, and state government dollars as among the top funding sources their organization uses to support the partnerships' work.
Outcomes of students served by partnerships	Over 80 percent of nonprofits said a student served by their partnership typically obtains employment in a training-related field, obtains any kind of employment, and/or receives a wage increase or promotion. Nearly half of community colleges said students served by their partnership are more likely to complete their educational goals than students in similar training programs at the college, and 40 percent said students served by the partnership find training-related jobs more easily than other students in similar training programs.

SOURCE: Aspen Institute Workforce Strategies Initiative (forthcoming).

Academy as an alternative to the traditional developmental education model after recognizing that many adult learners in Austin could not pass the college entrance exam and were not prepared to enter college course work. The academy serves as an important bridge into the college's vocational and technical skills training for Capital IDEA-supported students. Nearly a year after beginning the partnership, the collaborative graduated its first students from the Licensed Practical Nursing program. Today, the partnership supports hundreds of students each year in various programs and continues to develop new innovations and supports in response to the needs of its students.

Between 2003 and 2008, Capital IDEA enrolled 991 students into its health care training pathways program with ACC. Eighty-eight percent of these students were female, 44 percent were Latino, and 26 percent were African American; the median age of students was 27. Over one-third of the students were single parents (Helmer and Blair 2011). As described in the rest of this case study, Capital IDEA provides an extensive amount of support and financial assistance, which includes covering the costs of tuition and fees to their students, with funding primarily coming from local government and foundations.

Education Strategy

ACC delivers all related academic education and training to Capital IDEA-supported students, including the College Prep Academy, which prepares Capital IDEA participants to pass the Texas Higher Education Assessment, a prerequisite to enter community college in Texas. Students receive over 300 hours of instruction from ACC faculty in reading, writing, mathematics, test taking, and study skills through the training that operates six hours a day, five days a week, for 12 weeks. Students who need additional math instruction can opt for another 12 weeks of instruction (half-time).

To help participants address the financial burdens of pursuing post-secondary education, Capital IDEA fully funds all education-related costs, including tuition, fees, books, supplies, uniforms, and vaccinations. Capital IDEA allows students who qualify for Pell Grants to keep those resources to help cover essential, ongoing living expenses.

ACC provides the training and instruction to Capital IDEA-supported students for the in-demand careers they are pursuing. Prior to entering an educational program, these students undergo a thorough

assessment that includes Student Assessment of Growth and Excellence testing to assess the students' vocational interest, skills interests, learning styles, and aptitudes; a Test for Adult Basic Education testing for math and reading academic levels; an interview to evaluate the participant's motivation and commitment to the program; and assessments designed to determine what barriers students face that may prevent their success in the classroom and labor market.

Capital IDEA career navigators and the participant use the assessments to craft an agreed-upon customized education and career plan that may include attending the College Prep Academy or applying for and entering a vocational program at ACC. The plan is also developed based on availability of training slots at the college and labor market information gathered by the partnership about high-demand occupations. While Capital IDEA strives to ensure students are matched with a career opportunity that meets the students' interests, the organization is demand-driven and will only fund and support students in training that leads to employment.

Prior to acceptance by Capital IDEA, participants may be asked to do more career exploration, meet with an ACC recruiter, or attend an ACC information session, change their housing situation to reduce living expenses, or resolve outstanding financial debts. Some may be referred to other partnering organizations to improve their English language skills or earn their General Educational Development. Capital IDEA is also actively preparing participants for college advising and is in close communication with career counselors at the college about participants' needs and progress as they begin and continue their studies.

ACC provides a wide range of for-credit certificates and degrees in the allied health, technology, and trades fields, including training for dental hygienists, licensed vocational nurses, registered nurses, carpenters, and automotive technicians. Extra tutoring and study skills instruction are available to students, and Capital IDEA coordinates a comprehensive package of support services to support students in training, as described in the next section.

Support Service Strategy

Capital IDEA coordinates and manages a wide array of student support services, financial assistance, and career and college navigation. In addition to the individualized assessment, career counseling, and

academic planning described earlier, the program helps students navigate the college experience. It provides individualized assistance with college enrollment, course sequencing, and financial aid processes. It also teaches participants how to navigate financial aid and registration processes at the college, and serves as a student advocate when needed. Capital IDEA may help participants address administrative obstacles to enrollment and registration, such as appealing poor academic records from previous study or paying past due parking or library fines.

In addition to covering students' academic expenses as noted earlier, Capital IDEA also provides direct financial assistance for nonacademic needs such as child care, transportation, and emergency-related living expenses. The program's wide network of community partners also helps provide assistance in these areas when needed. Though its students are generally encouraged not to work so they can focus on their studies, Capital IDEA recognizes that this is not possible for all students and helps those who need to work find interim employment opportunities while in training to help cover their living costs.

Capital IDEA continues to provide financial support and intensive case management services until graduation and placement, often two to five years. Career navigators meet with most participants regularly, in peer group sessions and one on one, while they are in training. ACC and Capital IDEA staff and faculty collaborate in a variety of ways in order to make this support system effective. The college developed a waiver system that allows faculty and staff to share information with career navigators about individual students' progress and challenges in real-time. Staff in numerous departments communicate with career navigators to keep them informed about advising, registration, and course requirements. ACC also regularly invites navigators to attend staff information sessions where information that is relevant to students is shared. Consistent communication among Capital IDEA staff, participants, and college staff allows the partnership to quickly identify students who are struggling and provide the necessary supports in response.

To keep students motivated, Capital IDEA organizes and facilitates regular peer support sessions that are held at locations and times that are convenient to students—usually where they attend classes. Sample topics include communications with instructors, self-esteem, budgeting, dealing with professors, attitude, accountability, and personality.

Industry Strategy

The partnership between Capital IDEA and ACC aims to prepare students for high-demand careers that provide self-sufficient wages. To meet this goal, the partnership must stay attuned to what jobs are in demand, who is hiring, and what skills and education students need to obtain those jobs. To gather that information, the partners work to develop and sustain close relationships with businesses in high-demand sectors in their region, such as allied health, and they engage business partners at several levels and points of contact. Both ACC and Capital IDEA are members of the Healthcare Workforce Alliance of Central Texas, an industry-led and community-sponsored group that exists to address collectively the workforce needs of the health care industry in Austin. Members include community colleges, universities, high school tech programs, major hospitals, and many other smaller health care providers. The partnership also relies on labor market intelligence and regional economic forecasts from local area chambers and Workforce Solutions, the local Workforce Investment Board, to inform the partnership's strategy.

ACC learns about businesses' needs to inform their curricula and educational strategies through other business relationships as well. For example, businesses, such as hospitals, contract with ACC to provide them employer-specific incumbent worker training. Some hospitals with long-standing relationships with ACC help to pay for lab equipment, fund faculty salaries, provide clinical slots for health care students, and provide other in-kind support. ACC often collaborates with businesses on grant proposals, and many business leaders serve on ACC's advisory committees.

Capital IDEA, which is primarily responsible for connecting students served by the partnership to jobs, maintains a consistent, real-time dialogue with businesses to stay informed about their employment projections and workforce needs. Program staff work to create close relationships and formal agreements with local businesses, some of which have representation on Capital IDEA's board of directors. By conducting ongoing information gathering about health care and other in-demand careers from the businesses directly, Capital IDEA is able to obtain real-time labor market information, including base employment

projections and actual starting wages, which can be different from that of broader regional forecasts. Placement staff use this information to steer students toward businesses that are hiring as they approach graduation. On occasion, businesses have paid Capital IDEA a placement/retention fee after hiring a graduate supported by Capital IDEA, as described further in the next section.

Partnership Costs and Funding

Per student costs for Capital IDEA–supported students can vary greatly. Some students need more intensive support services and/or a longer time frame to complete their educational goals. Capital IDEA’s extensive use of referral organizations to provide additional support services and assistance are unaccounted costs that can also mask the full costs of supporting students. The organization also provides case management, counseling, and structured peer supports to students, which are costs that also cannot be attributed to an individual student.

To help one student obtain her certificate as a Licensed Vocational Nurse, Capital IDEA provided nearly \$16,000 in direct support over a six-year period, with the majority of the support going to tuition (47 percent) and child care (29 percent), books (9 percent), and rental assistance (5 percent). For this particular student, Capital IDEA used nine different funding streams to support these costs (Conway 2011).

Capital IDEA spends a significant amount of resources paying for students’ tuition, books, and other financial assistance, such as child care. It budgeted more than \$1.2 million for tuition, books, and educational costs out of an overall budget of \$3.4 million in 2014. Financial assistance for child care, transportation, housing, utilities, and other living expenses account for another nearly \$300,000. In total, direct payments for tuition, books, and other supports account for approximately 45 percent of the program’s budget for supporting students in training programs. Capital IDEA devoted the other 55 percent of the budget to covering staff salaries for the industry engagement, career navigation, and case management activities, as well as necessary operating expenses and administrative functions.

As noted earlier, students may spend anywhere from a few to several years with Capital IDEA pursuing their education. Some students may take breaks in their studies, and others may persist straight through

to completion. Capital IDEA may be actively supporting upward of 800 students per year in its training programs in any given year. The organization estimated total per participant costs at \$4,254 in 2014.

The partnership between Capital IDEA and ACC often draws on a mix of funding streams to support students. Capital IDEA has a very diverse funding base, including public and private sources, that allows it to provide and sustain over time a wide variety of critical nonacademic services to students. In fiscal year 2008, Capital IDEA obtained approximately \$4.2 million in funding from 21 different sources to support students in training. The organization obtained funding from 3 national philanthropic sources, 11 regional or local philanthropy sources, 3 federal government sources, 3 local government sources, and 1 state government source. Local government was the organization's largest funding source, accounting for nearly 44 percent of its revenue. Another 40 percent of funding came from national, regional, and local philanthropic sources, 4 percent from federal government, 6 percent from business or corporate contributions, and 4 percent from individual donors (Conway 2011).

Capital IDEA is unusual in the nonprofit workforce development field in that it receives substantial amounts of funding from city and county general revenues. With the support of active advocacy organized by Austin Interfaith, Capital IDEA has been able to make the case for public investment in its strategies. The positive outcomes brought about by the partnership's work have helped convince the local public sector to make these investments. The general revenue funds provided by Austin and Travis County to Capital IDEA are used to pay for support services, as well as tuition at ACC. This allows students to keep Pell Grants and use those funds for income support while in training. Donations from foundations, corporations, and individuals are another critical source of funding the program obtains to support its efforts. It receives private sector support through formal agreements with several health care employers who pay a \$5,000–\$8,000 retention fee over eight quarters after hiring a registered nursing graduate who was supported by Capital IDEA.

In addition, the partnership benefits from active and long-term collaboration with WIA-funded WorkSource Career Centers. WorkSource coenrolls eligible Capital IDEA-supported students into WIA for the final 1.5 years of training. These students qualify for Individual Training

Accounts to pay for tuition, fees, books, gas cards worth \$200/month, uniforms, required tools, crisis payments for things such as utilities or car repairs that would be a barrier to completing school, and sometimes child care.

ACC was also recently awarded a grant from the Department of Labor Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training. The grant is being used in part to support some new strategies the partnership is pursuing, as discussed in the next section.

Innovations and Future Directions

Capital IDEA and ACC founded the College Prep Academy in the early stages of their collaboration, a critical innovation that provided an alternative to developmental education and provided a framework for the partnership to use to test new educational and support strategies. Capital IDEA students serve as one of the college's testing grounds for experimenting with different types of strategies, and the feedback Capital IDEA provides to the college about its services helps ACC continuously adapt and improve based on the changing needs of students.

After the partners discovered that many students were failing their allied health prerequisite courses, ACC, with the funding from the Department of Labor, founded the Health Professions Academy to develop and deliver individualized, computer-based education to improve the prerequisite completion rate for students pursuing a health care career. Capital IDEA provided key input and advice on the structure of the academy based on their students' experience. With assistance from Capital IDEA, ACC is also redesigning prerequisite courses to be more interactive and include more hands-on training. ACC redesigned a biology prerequisite and is in the process of redesigning anatomy and physiology courses.

The process for exchanging ideas and information among the partners has also led to other important changes in service delivery. Capital IDEA has also intensified its efforts to support students through prerequisites and is colocating eight of its career navigators on a new ACC campus so they can be more readily available to students who need support. The partnership is exploring other new approaches that will facilitate accelerated learning and competency-based training.

Student Outcomes

The partnership's work led to some impressive educational and employment outcomes for students, according to a study completed by the Aspen Institute (Conway, Blair, and Helmer 2012). Over 80 percent of the 358 students enrolled in the partnerships' College Preparatory Academy between 2003 and 2009 completed the academy and passed the Texas Higher Education Assessment, qualifying them for entry into community college coursework. Of students enrolled during this same time period, 193 had received a credit certificate or associate's degree in an allied health field by the time Aspen's study ended. In the year following completion, 96 percent of these students were employed and earning a median salary of over \$44,000 per year, over three times more than their median salary of \$13,545 they had earned in the year prior to enrolling with Capital IDEA.

Capital IDEA and ACC's partnership stands out as an example of what two very different institutions can do to leverage one another's strengths and support the success of low-income students. The increased capacity and ability to improve student outcomes is a top benefit of these partnerships, according to many nonprofit organizations and community colleges that participated in AspenWSI's survey.

BENEFITS OF NONPROFIT-COMMUNITY COLLEGE PARTNERSHIPS

The outcomes demonstrated by Capital IDEA and ACC, as well as other partnerships researched by the AspenWSI during the Courses to Employment demonstration project, show that these collaborations are a promising approach to helping students get the credentials and skills they need to connect to better employment and higher wage opportunities. These types of outcomes and the ability to reach and serve students with barriers are some of the most commonly cited benefits as to why partners engage in these collaborations, according to AspenWSI's survey of nonprofit-community college partnerships.

Nonprofit organizations participating in AspenWSI's survey of partnerships reported that one of the top benefits from their partnership

is the access to quality training opportunities and college credentials with labor market value the college provides to their worker constituency. They also noted that a top benefit was the positive education and employment outcomes they saw students achieve as a result of the collaboration. Some nonprofits said the partnership improved their ability to meet industry needs and improved their relationships and networks with business partners. Many nonprofit organizations also reported that the ability to leverage different resources and expertise from the college was another top benefit.

Community colleges reported that their collaboration allowed them to better serve their communities and a wider population of students, many of whom the college may not typically reach. One respondent said, “The partnership helps the college reach a population that may not otherwise make it to the campus.” Colleges also said the ability to provide support services and the network the partnership provided to community resources is beneficial. Similar to nonprofit responses, colleges also noted that the nonprofit’s access to different types of funding is beneficial and that improved student outcomes are also an advantage of these collaborations. Despite all these benefits, creating, sustaining, and expanding partnerships can be challenging.

CHALLENGES OF NONPROFIT–COMMUNITY COLLEGE PARTNERSHIPS

Nonprofit and community colleges face numerous challenges in creating, sustaining, and expanding their partnerships. AspenWSI observed partnerships struggling to balance different institutional goals and missions, to collect and analyze data, and to find enough resources to serve students with multiple barriers. The survey of partnerships conducted by AspenWSI confirmed many of these observations.

According to AspenWSI’s survey results, over 80 percent of colleges and nonprofits said that sustaining resources to maintain or grow the partnership is a challenge, and 72 percent of both colleges and nonprofits said recent government funding cuts are a challenge (Aspen Institute Workforce Strategies Initiative forthcoming). When asked

open-ended questions about their top challenges, nonprofits and colleges again reported that funding is a big challenge.

Nonprofits also commonly reported that working across institutions with different goals, missions, and cultures can be difficult, and that working with the bureaucracy of the college system can pose challenges. According to one nonprofit respondent, “The college operates in silos, so when we want to work across departments it can be challenging.” Colleges also noted that different institutional cultures create a number of challenges. According to one college respondent, “We operate in different spheres, with different reporting requirements and ‘language.’ Sometimes people do not adequately understand the challenges faced by the other members of the partnership.”

Colleges also reported that data collection and sharing is challenging. Eighty percent of colleges and 60 percent of nonprofit organizations agreed that collecting, evaluating, and reporting employment outcomes is a challenge for their partnership. Many nonprofits and colleges also said sharing data about student outcomes between their institutions is an issue. Helping partnerships overcome these challenges so the field can learn and grow from its success and failures in helping students complete their education and find employment will be critical to this emerging field’s success.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Today, many workers seek to upgrade their skills in order to compete for better-wage jobs. Unfortunately, too many of them lack the supports, guidance, and resources they need to gain appropriate skills and connect to better opportunities. By addressing these needs, these partnerships provide opportunity to a variety of low-income workers seeking to obtain a better education and a better job. In an era of funding cuts, however, these partnerships are struggling to put together the resources they need to support these workers. Federal, state, and local policymakers all have a role to play in supporting these partnerships and ensuring adequate investments are maintained so that workers have the educational opportunities and labor market connections they need. In

an era of shrinking public resources, investing in partnerships is the best way to reduce inefficiencies. In particular, organizations that provide support services (so working adults have the time to participate meaningfully in an education opportunity) and offer industry intelligence and networking services (to help workers pursue credentials that will likely lead to better jobs and connect with employers looking for their skills) need greater support. More action needs to be taken to ensure sufficient funding is directed to these nonprofits so that workers pursuing education can succeed in school and in work.

Along with the direct support these partnerships need to provide services, they also need resources to improve their strategies and work together. This field of collaborative practice between nonprofit organizations and community colleges is still emerging. Over 50 percent of partnerships surveyed by AspenWSI are less than four years old. Investing in and incentivizing the start-up and expansion of nonprofit–community college partnerships right now is critical, as millions of workers continue to struggle and many partnerships report challenges in obtaining the resources they need to maintain or expand their work.

As illustrated throughout this case study, these collaborations are complex undertakings and can take time and resources to build. Partners must build trust and relationships with one another, identify common goals, develop industry engagement strategies, and create communication and project management processes. The field of C2E partnerships needs opportunities to learn about the practices and strategies of other partnerships. Investors should create opportunities for convening and information sharing among the field. Helping colleges and nonprofits build the organizational capacities, cross-institutional knowledge, and relationships they need to engage in these partnerships will help this field of practice develop more quickly, which can only serve to meet the needs of a greater number of workers and businesses.

Finally, the collection and use of student outcomes data are critical to how partnerships design their services and training. Quite simply, many partnerships are experimenting with a variety of instructional approaches, support services, and industry engagement strategies, and they need to know if their actions are leading to positive education and employment outcomes for their students. Collecting, managing, and analyzing this type of data, however, is not easy and it also requires resources. The data often reside within different institutions or, in the

case of employment data, within a government agency. Sometimes the partnerships have access to these data and sometimes they do not. Assuming they do have access, partnerships may still struggle to collect and merge the data from the college, nonprofit organization, and outside agencies. Policymakers and investors need to work to open up more data to these partnerships and provide them with the resources and assistance they need to make use of it. Turning this field into one that is driven by data on student outcomes will help ensure the resources are spent efficiently and effectively.

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