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The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Workforce Programs

A Report to Vice President Joe Biden

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In his State of the Union address, President Barack Obama tapped Vice President Joe Biden to “lead an across-the-board reform of America’s training programs to make sure they have one mission: train Americans with the skills employers need and match them to good jobs that need to be filled right now.”¹

To assist with this effort, Third Way spent the last four months working to uncover the secret sauce that makes workforce programs go from good to great. We examined hundreds of programs as we searched for unique training innovations with external validation to support their efforts. We also did not limit our research to one sector or delivery mechanism, instead opting to search for the best programs among community & technical colleges, corporations, community-based service providers, unions, workforce investment boards, job search services, and more.

Based on this comprehensive research, we identified seven key traits of successful programs. As policymakers work to remake the federal workforce system, it is imperative that grant programs and other federal support incent and reward these characteristics. In this report, we outline each of these essential traits and highlight a series of case studies where innovative providers are demonstrating their effectiveness.

Seven key traits set successful workforce development programs apart from their competitors. Below, we outline each of these characteristics and numerous case studies demonstrating their effectiveness.

#1: ACTIVELY ENGAGE LOCAL BUSINESS

As Labor Department Secretary Thomas Perez puts it, we can no longer afford to simply “train and pray.”² A common criticism of ineffective training programs

is that they train people for jobs that don't exist anymore or cover concepts that are irrelevant or outdated.³ According to professor and author Edward Gordon, "The education and employment link is broken."⁴ In order to succeed, workforce development providers must work hand-in-glove with local businesses to ensure that their students gain skills that employers want.

Graduates of training programs are more likely to land jobs and earn higher wages when the training is specifically designed to meet the needs of employers.⁵ Industry-focused training also benefits companies and the economy as a whole. Employers want a steady supply of qualified workers; job seekers want to know that there will be a job for them at the end of their training program; and local governments want their economies to thrive and the tax base to grow. To accomplish this, different players in the workforce development field—including business, education and training providers, unions, trade associations, local governments, and workforce investment boards—need to come together to form training partnerships. These partnerships can constructively shape workforce development in the following ways:

- Ensuring training programs are designed to reflect the skills demanded by employers or industries;
- Identifying which industries are anticipating or currently experiencing a shortage of qualified workers;
- Spurring local or regional economic development through worker training;
- Allowing partners to pool financial resources to expand training opportunities; and
- Helping partners share ideas and best practices.

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Workforce Programs

1. *Actively engage local business*
2. *Use labor market data to drive decisions*
3. *Treat education like a job*
4. *Connect people to careers*
5. *Provide wrap-around student services*
6. *Tap innovative funding sources*
7. *Embrace evaluation*

Who's Doing It Right?

Lake Area Technical Institute

Lake Area Technical Institute (LATI), a small technical college in Watertown, SD, is known for their hands-on approach with students and the local business community. Faculty and administrators consult regularly with members of professional advisory boards composed of local employers who often struggle to

find qualified talent.⁶ This is part of LATI's commitment to a cutting-edge technical education that meets the needs of South Dakota companies. "We do a lot of coaching of businesses," said President Deb Shephard. "We're telling [employers] they can no longer be passive in this process."⁷ Employers not only help LATI develop curriculum, they also provide an educational component themselves by hosting workshops and seminars for students in their field.⁸

LATI constantly adjusts their educational programs based on employer knowledge of industry trends. They also consult with companies that employ LATI grads to find out how their students are performing. For instance, the college added a conflict resolution training to the nursing program, redesigned their agriculture curriculum, and created a whole new degree in energy technology based on discussions with industry.⁹ LATI administrators move quickly and can establish new degree programs in as little as year if the changing economy demands it.¹⁰ Degree programs across disciplines also emphasize hands-on, interactive learning to better prepare their students for employment.¹¹ This has given their students an edge: LATI's graduation rates are three times the national average and 98% of their graduates are either employed or continuing their education.¹²

Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership/BIG STEP

The Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership/BIG STEP (WRTP/BIG STEP) is a nonprofit that works with over 100 employers and unions in the Milwaukee, WI, region. WRTP/BIG STEP trains and places people in careers in the construction and manufacturing industries. WRTP/BIG STEP tries to stay ahead of the labor market by regularly consulting with its members, who include contractors, apprenticeship programs, trade associations, and unions, to ensure that their training remains current and meets employers' needs.¹³ Members sit on advisory boards and can request specific training services from WRTP/BIG STEP or provide advice about emerging trends in their field.¹⁴

In 2005, WRTP/BIG STEP established the Center of Excellence for Skilled Trades & Industry, a one stop shop that serves employers looking to recruit skilled workers and members of the community looking to receive occupational training. More recently, the organization has been working with employers to establish a mentoring program that pairs experienced journey workers with apprentices in order to increase apprenticeship completion rates.¹⁵ This close relationship with employers has paid off—an impact study by the Aspen Institute found that graduates of WRTP/BIG STEP's pre-employment training program were significantly more likely to be employed in jobs with higher wages and benefits.¹⁶ Graduates earned, on average, 27% more than those in the control group two years after participating in the training.¹⁷

Pathways in Technology Early College High School

The Pathways in Technology Early College High School (P-TECH) in Brooklyn, NY, is a collaboration among IBM, the New York City Department of Education, The City University of New York, and the New York City College of Technology. P-TECH integrates a four-year high school degree with an industry in-demand, two-year associates degree in an effort to bring together the best elements of high school, community college, and career training. Students graduate in six years or less with a high school diploma and a free associates degree in either Computer Information Systems or Electromechanical Engineering Technology. In order to develop the curriculum, IBM carefully mapped out the skills needed for entry-level positions within the company. The company then worked with high school and college faculty to map the skills to the curriculum, which would give the students the targeted tools for a career at IBM.¹⁸

In some ways, P-TECH functions just like any public high school: the program does not charge tuition, is open to all students, and meets Common Core requirements.¹⁹ The school represents the diversity of New York City; more than 96% of the students at P-TECH are black or Hispanic and over 80% are on free or reduced lunch.²⁰ Students advance at their own pace and can begin taking college classes as early as the 10th grade. They also receive one-on-one mentoring from IBM employees, participate in skills-based, paid internships, and successful graduates will be first in line for jobs at IBM.

P-TECH's early results have been quite remarkable. By fall 2013, 74% of all students had passed at least three Regents exams for graduation; 51% had passed four and 23% had passed five Regents exams before entering Year 3 at P-TECH. Typically, students across NYC may have taken up to two required Regents exams before entering the third year. By spring 2014, 160 students in Years 1 and 2 were enrolled in at least one college course at City Tech.²¹

"This model works because you have trust, trust between the public and private sector," explains Doris Gonzalez, Director of Corporate Citizenship and Corporate Affairs at IBM.²² IBM has also developed a free guide to developing P-TECH 9-14 model school for use by other partnerships. Interest in the program is high: The Chicago public school system and Chicago City Colleges have partnered with IBM, Cisco, Motorola, and Verizon to launch four high schools modeled after P-TECH. Governor Andrew Cuomo is launching 16 P-TECH schools throughout New York State in 2014, with another 10 planned for September 2014. Governor Dannel Malloy is following suit; the first Connecticut school will launch in September 2014, through a partnership with Norwalk Public Schools, Norwalk Community College and IBM.²³

#2: USE LABOR MARKET DATA TO DRIVE DECISIONS

Effective workforce development programs recognize that today's training might not be appropriate for tomorrow's jobs. Technology is rapidly changing how we live and work: being a long haul truck driver might pay a middle class wage today, but it's easy to imagine a not-too-distant future when driverless vehicles move goods across the country. While some jobs or industries will no longer exist due to technological advances, others will require fundamentally different skills. Today, surgeons are increasingly using a robotic arm instead of a scalpel to operate on patients, and factory workers monitor machines assembling widgets, rather than building the widgets themselves. Training programs that fail to keep pace with these shifts will ultimately produce graduates who are not equipped for the job market.

Exemplary workforce development providers use labor market data and job projections to tailor training to growing industries and eliminate irrelevant programs. Successful programs study trends in the job market, often in conjunction with talks with local business, to determine which fields are growing and then adjust their efforts accordingly.²⁴ This may mean expanding courses in high-demand fields like nursing; scaling back or eliminating courses in shrinking fields like traditional manufacturing; or updating curriculum to teach students new skills required on the job. Job seekers also benefit from access to labor market data when selecting a training program or career path. Many job seekers, particularly displaced workers, have little way of knowing which industries are expanding in their area.²⁵ Strong programs share this information with their students, guiding them toward a career that will give them the opportunity to grow for years to come.

Who's Doing It Right?

Walla Walla Community College

Walla Walla Community College (WWCC) in Walla Walla, WA, routinely adjusts their course offerings in response to changes in the labor market. The college president, Steven VanAusdler, served as Vice Chair of the state Economic Development Commission, so it's no surprise that he and other college officials rely on wage data and job projections to make decisions.²⁶ "We use economists to measure everything we're doing," VanAusdler says. "We lead our organization by looking through an economic lens."²⁷

The college uses labor market data to decide whether to invest in new programs or close or consolidate existing ones. When an analysis indicated that the region's hospitals needed more nurses than the college was producing, the school doubled their nursing program.²⁸ Likewise, WWCC identified a growing green energy sector

in the region and responded by establishing the state's first wind energy program.²⁹ The move has been a success, with 90% of program graduates landing jobs.³⁰

WWCC also keeps a close eye on wage data so they can ensure that a WWCC education leads to a job that pays a decent salary. For example, WWCC closed their culinary program when they saw that graduates could not find anything but low-wage jobs. When Walla Walla's tourism industry began to pick up steam, the college subsequently retooled and re-launched the program with a catering and hospitality focus.³¹ The college's emphasis on good quality jobs is paying off. As of 2011, WWCC graduates earned an average salary of \$41,548, nearly twice the wages of other new hires in the region.³² Thanks to these and other efforts, WWCC was awarded the Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence in 2013.

EMSI's Career Coach

EMSI, an economic modeling firm based in Moscow, ID, created Career Coach to bring labor market data to students' fingertips. Designed to teach students the value of their degree, Career Coach uses government data to develop occupational and wage projections specific to a college's local economy. Students can research over 800 different occupations and easily see which jobs will be in high demand in their region, how much they can expect to make over time, and what kind of degree would prepare them for that career. Career Coach also lists whether the student's school offers any relevant degrees for each occupation. The site is also searchable by degree, so students can see what graduates typically go on to do and earn. Colleges are able to access analytics on student search habits, allowing them to gauge interest in particular fields. Career Coach is currently in use by over 100 institutions.³³

Lancaster County Workforce Investment Board

Data drives the entire strategy for workforce development in the Lancaster, PA, region. The Lancaster County Workforce Investment Board relies on projections to identify the fastest growing industries in their region and uses that data to encourage the growth of "gold-collar" (skilled, high paying) jobs.³⁴ The Board has identified seven core industries in the local economy and the 100 fastest growing occupations within those industries.³⁵ Lancaster County doesn't just want people to get a job though; they focus on putting workers on the path to a career. The Board has used occupational data to pinpoint the skills, education, and experience a job seeker needs to move up the ladder in a particular field. The Board compares the skills and educational requirements of different jobs using a compatibility index.³⁶ This allows them to determine, for example, that a truck driver might already have 75% of the skills needed to work in automotive repair. The number crunching helps their career counselors steer workers into appropriate training programs and jobs in high-growth industries.

#3: TREAT EDUCATION LIKE A JOB

Successful workforce development programs understand that one of the best ways to learn is by doing. Hands-on educational opportunities help teach students the technical skills—from wiring a house for electricity to taking a patient’s blood sample—that they will need to excel on the job. The student who learns how to build an airplane by practicing on a real engine has an edge over the student who has only read about aerospace engineering in a textbook. Similarly, aspiring entrepreneurs can study business in the classroom, but their understanding is deepened by an opportunity to spend a year shadowing the CEO of a start-up.

Training programs work best when they simulate actual work conditions as closely as possible, from the topics studied to the learning environment.³⁷ Selecting business attire, showing up on time, or working on teams may be new experiences for some students. These habits are sometimes referred to as “soft skills,” but Department of Labor Secretary Thomas Perez has rightly branded them as “essential skills,” because they can mean the difference between landing and keeping a job or remaining unemployed.³⁸ Businesses want to know that their new hires have the right technical and interpersonal skills, because it increases the chances that they will be more productive from day one.³⁹

There are numerous ways to integrate realistic work experiences into training programs. Effective programs may utilize any number of these approaches:

- Classrooms or training facilities that recreate the workplace through hands-on instruction and projects that the student would typically encounter on the job;
- A dress code, schedule, or other rules that mimic the student’s future workplace;
- Internships, which give students the chance to learn on the job during a temporary period of employment;
- Apprenticeships, which typically pay students to work and train under the guidance of an experienced employee;
- Clinical rotations, which allow students to gain supervised work experience in different medical specialties; and
- Train-to-hire programs, which teach students vocational skills with the chance of being hired by the company upon graduation.

Who’s Doing it Right?

National Joint Apprenticeship and Training Committee for the Electrical Industry

The National Joint Apprenticeship and Training Committee for the Electrical Industry (NJATC) is a union-industry partnership between the National Electrical Contractors Association and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers.

The partnership sets the structure and curriculum for four different apprenticeship programs, all of which combine paid on-the-job training with classroom instruction that is eligible for college credit.⁴⁰ NJATC is committed to keeping their curriculum current and relevant to the industry. According to Executive Director Michael Callanan, if simulation-based learning (SBL) programs can be used to train pilots, NJATC certainly thinks there is a place for using SBL to train electrical workers. “We are moving to a blended learning model in September 2014 to leverage technology so we can do more hands-on training in our training centers,” says Callanan.⁴¹ The focus on SBL ensures that training closely matches what apprentices do on the job.⁴²

Local chapters administer the apprenticeships, which can last anywhere from 3 to 5 years depending on the program of study. Apprentices typically complete 2000 hours of on-the-job training each year and approximately 180 hours per year of related instruction.⁴³ Pay raises are tied to the apprentice’s progress on the job and in the classroom. Wages continue to rise until graduation, when apprentices become full journey-level workers.⁴⁴ Because the NJATC has developed national standards for their apprenticeships, graduates of local programs are able to work anywhere, and employers know that graduates will arrive on the job with substantial work experience. To date, NJATC-affiliated apprenticeships have trained over 350,000 apprentices to journey worker status.⁴⁵ Graduates of the program earn an average starting salary of \$57,000 annually.⁴⁶

Enstitute

Enstitute, a nonprofit based in New York City, provides young adults age 18-24 with one to two-year paid apprenticeships at high-profile organizations in the technology, media, and life science fields.⁴⁷ The program grew, in part, out of co-founder Shaila Ittycheria’s experiences trying to hire recent graduates. “We need to rethink how we assess entry-level talent,” Ittycheria says, by moving the emphasis to the candidate’s skills and competencies and whether these fulfill the employer’s needs.⁴⁸ A fancy name on a diploma won’t cut it anymore.

Enstitute aims to turn the current hiring model on its head by teaching young people skills on the job. Apprentices shadow executives with whom they form mentoring relationships and are expected to work on a variety of tasks or projects that expose them to different areas of the organization.⁴⁹ In addition to full-time work, students take supplemental courses online and attend community and networking events, including bi-weekly dinners with business leaders and entrepreneurs.⁵⁰ Ninety percent of the apprentices in the New York pilot program went on to accept full-time job offers or start their own companies.⁵¹ Interest in the program is high: Over 700 students and close to 1,000 companies applied to the 2013 class.⁵² Enstitute is expanding their apprenticeship program to St. Louis,

MO, and Washington, D.C., and in the fall of 2014, Enstitute will launch a new academic pilot program with George Mason University.⁵³

Per Scholas

Per Scholas, a Bronx, NY, nonprofit, provides free IT training with an emphasis on the technical and soft skills demanded by local employers. Per Scholas tells students up front that they are expected to treat the training program like a job.⁵⁴ Students attend class full time, seven hours a day, five days a week, for 8 to 18 weeks, depending on the training course selected. Participants are expected to take their training seriously: students must adhere to a strict business dress code and multiple absences or late arrivals will get them kicked out of the program.⁵⁵ An evaluation of Per Scholas found that two years after completing the program, over 75% of graduates were employed and earned, on average, 32% more than their counterparts who did not receive the training.⁵⁶ Per Scholas has expanded their courses to sites in Columbus and Cincinnati, OH, as well as the Washington, D.C., region. The organization has trained over 4,500 people to date and nearly 90% of graduates are working in the IT field.⁵⁷

#4: CONNECT PEOPLE TO CAREERS

Strong workforce development providers don't just help their students get jobs—they put them on a path to a lifetime career. Too often, it is not clear how to climb the rungs of the career ladder within a given industry. Imagine if you knew exactly what new skills you needed to master in order to get a promotion or change jobs. You would waste a lot less time trying to guess what your boss wanted, and you would not run the risk of investing in the wrong training program. Successful programs clarify the skills employers want for a series of progressively more advanced jobs in an industry. Having a clear sense of how to advance in one's field means that graduates have the tools to continue developing their skills and growing themselves professionally.

Effective programs also leverage their relationships with employers to connect clients to jobs.⁵⁸ Many job openings are not posted; often, employers rely on word-of-mouth and hire candidates through referrals. This makes finding employment especially hard for jobseekers that lack a strong professional network. Low-skill workers hoping to advance are at a particular disadvantage because their networks are usually composed of other low-wage workers.⁵⁹ The best training providers can serve as an important intermediary, helping their students build professional connections that put them on an upward career trajectory.

Workforce development providers can help bring transparency to the job market and build career tracks in the following ways:

- Mapping out how jobs within an industry can form a career path of progressively more skilled and higher paying positions;
- Clarifying the skills that employers demand for the various jobs in their industry;
- Designing a series of connected education programs that correspond to each step along a career path;⁶⁰
- Matching jobseekers to employers who seek their skills and vice versa; and
- Creating networking opportunities among jobseekers and employers.

Who's Doing It Right?

The United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipe Fitting Industry

The United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipe Fitting Industry of the United States and Canada (UA) offers one of the premier union training programs in the country. The five-year UA apprenticeship program prepares apprentices for careers as plumbers, pipefitters, HVACR service technicians, sprinkler fitters, or welders. Working closely with contractors and end-users, the UA ensures that both apprentices and journey workers are trained in the skills necessary to meet the growing demands of the piping industry.

Through their continuing education program, the UA provides numerous opportunities for journey workers to develop new skills and earn professional certifications, even after they have completed their apprenticeship. UA training also allows members to earn college credit towards an associates degree thanks to partnerships with community colleges.⁶¹ Through relationships with Washtenaw Community College and Ferris State University, UA journey workers have multiple options for earning an associates or bachelor's degree, paid for in part by the industry.⁶² The college credits are transferable, making it easy for members to build upon their previous schooling.⁶³ Many UA training centers incorporate online learning into the curriculum for the benefit and convenience of apprentices and journey workers. These degrees, along with UA certifications and apprenticeships, open up doors for UA members to move into supervisory roles, become certified trainers, or start their own businesses.⁶⁴

Baltimore Alliance for Careers in Healthcare

The Baltimore Alliance for Careers in Healthcare (BACH) was formed in 2005 to help local hospitals address shortages and high turnover among health care workers. It is a partnership between local health care providers, education providers, and nonprofits, as well as Baltimore and Maryland government agencies, the Baltimore Workforce Investment Board, and the Department of Labor. BACH

has helped its member hospitals grow their workforce from the inside out by developing a training program to advance existing hospital employees.

BACH uses a career pathway model, which means students must master a certain set of skills in order to progress through a clearly defined sequence of jobs. In one example of BACH's work, unskilled hospital workers attend three months of classroom instruction to become nursing assistants.⁶⁵ The nursing assistants then spend six months in a work-based education program, learning while working at the hospital.⁶⁶ Successful mastery of the nursing assistant position qualifies them for participation in the nurse extender training, which follows a similar classroom and experiential learning model.⁶⁷ With additional training, nurse extenders can advance into other in-demand positions, like registered nurses or surgical, radiology, lab, or pharmacy technicians.⁶⁸

BACH also runs a coaching program designed to lower turnover among hospital employees. These coaches serve a role similar to a case manager or career counselor, helping students develop a plan for their career development and getting them access to childcare and transportation assistance.⁶⁹ BACH currently works with six local hospitals, two long-term care facilities, and has helped advanced over 400 health care workers.⁷⁰

WorkHands

WorkHands, a San Francisco, CA, start-up helps skilled tradespeople climb the career ladder by connecting them to job and networking opportunities. WorkHands is a social network for skilled trades workers (plumbers, carpenters, mechanics, etc.) styled after LinkedIn. Co-founders Patrick Cushing, James Dunbar, and Paul Zaich launched the project in response to "the connection gap" between workers and employers in the trades: workers had no good way to find out about job openings, while employers couldn't find qualified people to fill their available positions.⁷¹ WorkHands seeks to bridge this gap by giving workers an identity online.⁷² The website and smartphone app are tailored for the needs of the trades industry. Instead of uploading a resume, tradespeople can upload pictures of projects they've worked on; describe the tools and machinery they know how to operate; list their certifications and licenses; and provide a work history.⁷³ Jobseekers can search for opportunities by industry or use the site as a networking tool, connecting with other workers in their field. Meanwhile, employers can post job openings or contact members who meet their qualifications. Educators, including community colleges and apprenticeship programs, are also using WorkHands to track their students' progress and career trajectories after graduation.⁷⁴

Toyota's Advanced Manufacturing Technician Program

Facing a shortage of skilled technicians, Toyota launched their Advanced Manufacturing Technician (AMT) Program, a career pathways initiative designed

to create a reliable pipeline of skilled workers to sustain and improve their U.S. operations.⁷⁵ The AMT program has three components: recruiting efforts among middle and high school students, a two-year associate's degree, and a one-to two-year internship.⁷⁶ Trainees work and study for 40 hours a week for five consecutive semesters in an environment that is designed to look and feel just like a factory.⁷⁷ Trainees attend college classes in electricity, fluid power, mechanics, and fabrication two days a week and work at a manufacturing facility the remaining three days of the week.⁷⁸ The program pays students while they learn, with the potential to earn up to \$40,000 over the two-year period.⁷⁹ Both study and work experiences are organized around a structured sequence that teaches multiple technical skills, math, reading, problem solving, and interpersonal skills. Graduates who hope to move up the ladder are eligible for further development on one of two paths, engineering or manufacturing business.⁸⁰

The program has grown steadily since its inception five years ago and now has 200 trainees in seven states where Toyota has manufacturing operations—Kentucky, West Virginia, Indiana, Mississippi, Texas, Tennessee, and Alabama. AMT not only benefits Toyota; it also provides skilled workers for other employers in the region. At each AMT program site, other companies—ranging from other global manufacturers to a foundry and a home flooring company—also participate in the program. Upon graduation, students may apply to positions at Toyota or at other advanced manufacturing firms. Last year, the National Career Pathways Network awarded AMT the 1st Place Career Pathways Partnership Excellence Award.⁸¹

Memphis Bioworks Foundation's Health and Information Technology Training

Memphis Bioworks Foundation (MBF), a Tennessee-based nonprofit organization and member of the SHRM-Memphis Chapter 134, manages a successful workforce development program that trains and employs American workers for high-tech jobs that are currently being filled by foreign workers brought to this country under H-1B visas.⁸² The initiative is partially funded by the Department of Labor's H-1B Technical Skills Training Grant program. MBF leads a team of training institutions, nonprofits, and over 75 employers in an active collaboration to design, evaluate, and hire workers in the health information technology, biotechnology, and information technology sectors.⁸³ The program focuses on people who have been unemployed for six months or longer and provides them with free training and job placement assistance.⁸⁴ Because the long-term unemployed face strong discrimination in the job market, MBF's relationships with employers and job placement services are especially important to their clients' success.

MBF helps their students lay the foundation for a career in several ways. Thanks to their close collaboration with employers, the program has outlined career pathways for nine different occupational areas so students have a clear roadmap

for advancement. The program also helps students build relationships with employers through internships and prepares them for the job market through job search skills training and job placement assistance. MBF was recently selected by the Department of Labor as a national model for best practices for their innovative placement services. MBF's health and information technology training program has enrolled approximately 250 individuals to date.⁸⁵

#5: PROVIDE WRAP-AROUND STUDENT SERVICES

Why do people drop out of workforce development programs? Programs that ask this question are more likely to help students stay enrolled. Often the reason is not because students lack vocational skills or the desire to complete the curriculum. More typically, other barriers stand in the way. "It's not just about the skills. It's also about the person," says Maureen Conway, Executive Director of the Aspen Institute's Workforce Development Strategies Initiative. "Good programs also help people support themselves—oftentimes these people have complicated lives."⁸⁶

As older workers seek out more education to advance their careers, training programs will need to provide additional support and flexibility. For instance, finding and affording childcare is among the most frequently cited hurdles by both single and two-parent families.⁸⁷ Students may also lack access to reliable transportation, have limited English language abilities, or may be recovering from drug addiction, homelessness, or returning from prison. These obstacles make it more likely for students to drop out of a training program or lose their jobs upon securing employment. As a result, even the most carefully designed occupational training can fail if providers do not address these additional barriers to employment.

Effective programs provide a host of comprehensive—or "wrap-around"—support services for job seekers.⁸⁸ Some examples of wrap-around services include:

- Individualized case management to help students sign up for financial aid and other government benefits;
- Academic advising to help select appropriate coursework and to monitor progress;
- Remedial education classes and/or tutoring for struggling students;
- Soft-skills and/or job readiness training covering topics like resume writing, job interviews, and time management;
- Career advising and/or job placement;
- Mental health or addiction counseling;
- Assistance locating or paying for childcare; and
- Subsidized transportation such as free or reduced bus or subway fare.

According to Labor Secretary Thomas Perez, “You have to take the job seeker as they are.”⁸⁹ This means knowing your students’ needs from day one. Model providers perform an intake assessment of their students to identify potential hurdles before students even set foot in a classroom or training facility.⁹⁰ Successful programs also support students after they’ve landed a job; because students may be coming off unemployment or other government assistance, they are unlikely to have a financial cushion in the event of an emergency.⁹¹ Students who receive post-employment services tend to stay in their jobs longer than graduates of programs who did not provide these services.⁹² While some workforce development providers offer these services in-house, others contract or partner with outside organizations to get students the help they need.

Who’s Doing it Right?

City University of New York’s ASAP Program

In 2007, the City University of New York (CUNY) launched the Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) in six of its seven community colleges with a goal of attaining a 50% graduation rate in three years. To put this into perspective, the typical public community college graduates just 20% of incoming freshmen within three years.⁹³

ASAP achieved their goal by offering a variety of wrap-around student services including: mandatory advisor meetings; tutoring for struggling students; a College Success Seminar which teaches good study habits, time management, and other soft-skills; career advising and job placement services; tuition waivers for students not fully covered by financial aid; and free MetroCards and textbooks.⁹⁴ ASAP makes some of these services contingent on good behavior: for instance, students must attend their advisor meetings and tutoring sessions in order to be eligible for subsidized transportation. ASAP advisors are expected to provide both academic and personal advising and are assigned a smaller caseload to help provide this support.⁹⁵

Early results show that ASAP has been remarkably effective in increasing graduation rates. Nearly 55% of ASAP’s inaugural class graduated in three years, close to triple the rate of other two-year public institutions.⁹⁶ An analysis of cost-effectiveness by Columbia University found that ASAP is so effective that the cost per graduate is less than or comparable to CUNY’s traditional education model.⁹⁷ In other words, the extra cost of providing these services was made up by student retention. And the preliminary results of a random assignment evaluation by education and social policy research organization MDRC show that ASAP has had an “unparalleled” impact on student course completion and graduation rates, the largest effect MDRC has ever seen among 15 similar studies of community colleges.⁹⁸

Multivision's Workforce Development Program

Multivision Inc., located in Fairfax, VA, provides free training in both technical and soft skills for people pursuing careers in information technology. In 2009, Multivision created a free, in-house Workforce Development Program in response to a growing skills gap among and growing demand for IT professionals. "We have to prove that being socially responsible can be a successful business model," says Ashwin Bharath Pushpanayagam, Multivision's Chief Operating Officer.⁹⁹ Multivision is doing this through their intensive classroom training program and eIntern.com online internship which are both offered at no cost to their students, a mix of unemployed workers, displaced IT professionals, and recent college graduates. Aside from teaching a hands-on technical curriculum, Multivision also devotes a significant amount of time to developing students' soft skills, including teamwork, communication, and interviewing. The classroom training program spends a week on job search skills, including resume writing and mock interviews.¹⁰⁰ Over 90% of graduates are hired by Multivision or one of its 100 partner organizations in positions paying an average of \$50,000/year.¹⁰¹ After securing employment, graduates continue to receive support for an additional 6 months through Multivision's mentoring program.

Project QUEST

Project QUEST helps low-skill San Antonio, TX, residents complete associates degrees and certifications that prepare them for careers in health care, information technology, and trades industries. While attending community college, QUEST participants receive a host of wrap-around student services. Each QUEST participant is assigned a case manager that helps the student fund their education through federal aid, referrals to local social service agencies, and/or subsidies available through QUEST. In addition to educational expenses, QUEST subsidizes transportation, childcare, and utility costs.¹⁰² QUEST also pays for any testing fees associated with professional certifications or board examinations.¹⁰³ To help ensure job retention, these subsidies are also available for the first 30 days of a graduate's employment.¹⁰⁴ Case managers also play an active role in teaching job readiness through mandatory VIP (Vision, Initiative, and Perseverance) sessions. These weekly meetings initially focus on teaching skills like time management, financial planning, and good study habits. The sessions also help participants form study groups and mentoring relationships with their peers.¹⁰⁵ Near the end of the program, sessions cover job applications and interview preparation, and participants are offered job search and placement assistance upon graduation.¹⁰⁶ QUEST has an 80% graduation rate, an 86% job placement rate, and a 90% job retention rate.¹⁰⁷ Participants make on average \$10,000 a year before entering the program and earn an average of \$40,000 after completion.¹⁰⁸ QUEST's training model has been the recipient of numerous awards and has been replicated in several other cities.¹⁰⁹

6: TAP INNOVATIVE FUNDING SOURCES

In order to deliver the highest quality training to as many students as possible, effective providers must utilize a diverse set of traditional and innovative funding sources.¹¹⁰ This is partly because federal workforce training efforts have been underfunded since their inception.¹¹¹ The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) is the largest single source of federal funding for workforce development initiatives. The program has been awaiting reauthorization since 2003. The Senate and House recently passed the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) which reauthorizes the program through 2020, but this twelve year delay has meant that funding levels—aside from a brief spike as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act—have been steadily declining for years.¹¹² Dwindling resources and a tough economy have meant that a majority of WIA funds have gone to job search assistance, not costlier investments like training.¹¹³ A 2014 analysis by the Government Accountability Office found that just 11% of participants in WIA’s adult program received training in 2011.¹¹⁴ Other funding sources are also depleted. Community colleges have been hit hard by cuts in state and local education funding. And community-based non-profits often rely on foundation money or private donations, which can be particularly hard to come by during recessions when need is the greatest.

Successful workforce development providers recognize that finances can be a significant barrier to completing educational programs. Companies do not invest in employee training equally: workers with the highest wages and educational attainment receive the most training at work, while low-skill, or low-wage workers receive the least.¹¹⁵ This makes it difficult for low and middle-wage workers to build the skills required to advance. Unemployed workers, particularly the long-term unemployed, may also be caught in a vicious circle of needing training to land a job but also needing a job to pay for training. This means that it is critical for workforce development efforts to target training to those who need it most. Often, this means providing training that is paid, free, or heavily subsidized.

As a result, effective workforce development providers have started getting creative, often tapping a diverse array of financial resources to deliver their services. Effective providers often support themselves by:

- Tapping into federal, state, and local government funds;
- Tapping into private foundation grants;
- Soliciting individual donations;
- Charging tuition and fees;
- Opening a social enterprise whose revenue funds training activities; or
- Providing specialized training to employers for a fee.

Who's Doing It Right

Maricopa Community Colleges' Corporate College

To battle dwindling state funding, Maricopa Community Colleges, a district of 10 individually accredited Arizona institutions, created Maricopa Corporate College, a school focused entirely on corporate training. While a majority of states slashed higher education funding during the Great Recession, Arizona's cuts were particularly severe. Between FY 2008 and FY 2013, state spending per student fell by over 50%.¹¹⁶ Today, just 1% of Maricopa Community Colleges' budget comes from the state, a trend Chancellor Rufus Gasper doesn't expect to change in the next several years.¹¹⁷ In response, the consortium established Maricopa Corporate College in 2013. Over time its corporate training programs will provide funding for the rest of the colleges, with big companies like Marriot hiring them to provide customized courses for their employees.¹¹⁸ The new college consolidates workplace-focused non-credit courses already offered in the consortium and also offers employee training developed especially for its client companies.

District 1199C's Training & Upgrading Fund

District 1199C, the Philadelphia chapter of the National Union of Hospital and Health Care Employees, runs workforce training programs that are funded by the local healthcare industry. District 1199C partners with employers who agree to contribute 1.5% of their gross payroll to the union's Training and Upgrading Fund.¹¹⁹ In exchange, the union provides customized job training and supplies their 54 partner organizations with trained nurses and other healthcare workers. District 1199C uses these funds to run a learning center that trains 2,000 students annually.¹²⁰ Students are split between union members and community residents. Programs include practical nursing, continuing education for current health care workers, and basic skills and college readiness courses.¹²¹ Employees at member hospitals and clinics can attend District 1199C's vocational training for free or reduced cost, while basic skills courses are free to everyone.¹²²

The Cara Program

The Cara Program, a Chicago-based nonprofit, helps homeless and at-risk adults gain employment and stable housing. They have helped fund their life skills and career training program by launching several social enterprises. A social enterprise is a business whose primary goal is the common good.¹²³ The Cara Program has launched three such businesses:

- Cleanslate, which provides neighborhood beautification services and runs a used book recycling service called Chapter Two;

- 180 Properties, a partnership between the Cara Program and Mercy Housing that maintains and rehabilitates foreclosed homes; and
- TCP Staffing, a temporary staffing agency.

These businesses provide Cara Program participants with valuable on-the-job training through internships and temporary and permanent jobs. They also provide a significant source of funding for the organization. In FY 2013, revenue from social enterprises made up nearly a quarter of the Cara Program's operating budget, with Cleanslate raising over \$2 million in gross revenue.¹²⁴ Government funds make up a small share of the budget (just over 11% in FY 2013), with the bulk coming from private sources, such as corporations, foundations, and individuals.¹²⁵ In 2013, the Cara Program placed enrollees in 576 jobs, including 270 permanent jobs.¹²⁶ Seventy percent of program participants remained in their job and nearly three quarters had permanent housing one year after graduating from the program.¹²⁷

#7: EMBRACE EVALUATION

Strong workforce development providers identify their strengths and weaknesses and constantly work to improve. While not all organizations have the resources to conduct an outside program evaluation, many have at least begun collecting and tracking their outcomes in order to compete in a climate of scarce funding.¹²⁸ However, simply tracking funders' requirements is not enough. Many training providers and think tanks have been critical of the way that governments and foundations measure success.¹²⁹ Criteria like the number of job placements, job retention after one year, and the average wages of their clients are important but fail to tell the entire story. These measures can also create perverse incentives, deterring programs from helping the people that need training the most and encouraging short-term fixes instead of long-term investments in human capital.¹³⁰ Success in workforce development means different things depending on the design of the program and who it is serving.¹³¹

Despite these challenges, top-notch providers recognize that evaluation can work to their advantage. By creating and using performance-based measures that go beyond the limits of basic criteria, workforce development providers can pinpoint areas of weakness and identify steps to improve. Some examples of how organizations can use data to evaluate and improve performance include:

- Commissioning or participating in a formal program evaluation by an outside provider who can evaluate the impact of the training program against a control group, similar to a pharmaceutical drug trial;
- Developing a set of long-term outcome measurements to track the organization's success, like two year job retention rates or client satisfaction;¹³²

- Developing a set of interim measurements, like students' progress toward earning a certification, to make sure that the organization is on track to meet long-term goals;¹³³
- Utilizing databases or other software programs to keep track of key information, like clients' demographic profiles, educational progress, and job placements;
- Monitoring and discussing progress on a regular basis to identify problem areas or highlight successful initiatives;¹³⁴
- Making changes and improvements to the program based on trends that appear in the data; and
- Tying employee promotions or raises to the performance measurements of the organization as a whole.¹³⁵

Who's Doing It Right?

West Kentucky Community and Technical College

West Kentucky Community and Technical College (WKCTC), located in Paducah, KY, has developed a number of strategies for assessing and improving student learning, a process that fuels their ability to improve. For example, WKCTC instructors have established common learning standards for their courses: Regardless of who is teaching the class, there is a uniform grading rubric for essays and/or core questions that must appear on exams to ensure that students leave the course with the same body of knowledge. Each instructor must complete a learning outcomes assessment at the end of each course, and professors use their students' test scores and grades to pinpoint weaknesses in their teaching. WKCTC also encourages faculty to attend off-site trainings and workshops on pedagogy, and new instructors attend a four-day training on teaching practices. On campus, faculty participate in learning circles, groups of 15-20 instructors who share their most successful teaching techniques with each other. New teachers also review videotapes of their lectures with a mentor, an experienced professor who can provide guidance and feedback.¹³⁶

WKCTC also recently embarked on a five-year initiative to improve student reading after a college-wide assessment indicated that just 40% of students had basic reading skills.¹³⁷ Faculty members across disciplines were trained in techniques to improve reading skills and integrated them into their classrooms.¹³⁸ WKCTC's focus on evaluating student learning and teacher effectiveness has earned them recognition from the Aspen Institute, who named them a distinguished finalist for the 2011 and 2013 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence.

Jewish Vocational Service (San Francisco)

Jewish Vocational Service (JVS) in the San Francisco Bay area has taken a data-driven approach to measuring the success of their organization. JVS, founded in 1973, offers basic and occupational skills training and job search and placement assistance for adult job seekers, youth with disabilities, and local employers. Their services are available to everyone, regardless of faith. Like many providers, JVS must track and report the results of their services to their funders. However, JVS has established their own set of performance measures that go beyond funders' requirements, tracking nearly 60 different aspects of their program, including skill attainment, job retention after 90 days, and client, employer, and staff satisfaction. Staff and board members collaborate on the development of these performance measures, and program managers meet with staff on a quarterly basis to discuss areas of success and areas of improvement.¹³⁹

JVS also trains all staff on how to use a database to track employer engagement for thousands of local employers. Staff analyze this database to determine whether they need to build stronger relationships with specific employers and industries.¹⁴⁰ The success of JVS has not gone unrecognized. They are the recipient of numerous awards, including the Shared Values Award from U.S. Bank in 2013, the Achievement in Employment Award by the Mayor's Committee for the Employment of Persons with Disabilities in 2000, and the Enterprise Foundation's Award for Excellence in Workforce Development in 2001.¹⁴¹

Air Washington

Air Washington represents a consortium of 11 community and technical colleges that provide employer-driven training for Washington State's aerospace industry. The initiative is part of the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training Program (TAACCCT), a joint initiative by the Departments of Labor and Education. Air Washington works closely with local employers like Boeing to design an advanced curriculum in aerospace maintenance and manufacturing that meets employers' current and future needs.¹⁴² The colleges have embraced evaluation in their day-to-day routine, meeting regularly to exchange ideas, share lessons learned, and discuss performance measures. As a recipient of federal TAACCCT money, Air Washington is also required to retain an independent, third-party evaluator to design and execute a rigorous evaluation of each funded project. Additionally, the Labor Department is conducting a national evaluation of the TAACCCT projects, including Air Washington, to inform workforce development policy. Air Washington has been recognized by Boeing for its quality curriculum, as well as for its ongoing assistance to Boeing's Aerospace Academic Alignment Team, a group of top Boeing managers who help academic institutions deliver more of the training Boeing needs

for less money.¹⁴³ Air Washington has served 2,500 people to date, with about half completing training programs and nearly 300 employed.¹⁴⁴

CONCLUSION

By their 46th birthday, the average baby boomer held more than 11 different jobs.¹⁴⁵ That trend is continuing today—not only are workers switching jobs frequently, they are finding that they may need to change careers entirely to keep up with the rapidly changing global economy.

And yet, these jobs of tomorrow will require a different set of skills. Technology has leapt ahead in fields ranging from medicine to manufacturing. Thirty years ago, 80% of American manufacturing jobs were unskilled; today just 12% fall under that definition.¹⁴⁶ From cloud technologies to new emerging global markets, the types of jobs we obtain—and how we can retain them—continues to rapidly evolve. As Vice President Joe Biden observed: “The opportunities that exist here relative to the rest of the world are astounding, but we have to be prepared for a 21st century world...It’s not just preparing for the jobs that exist, it’s preparing for the jobs you know are going to be coming.”¹⁴⁷

The need for a dynamic workforce has never been greater. Americans are getting older, with certain industries facing a brain drain thanks to a “silver tsunami” of retirements.¹⁴⁸ These Baby Boomers will leave behind openings for many middle-skill jobs that require some education beyond high school.¹⁴⁹ Yet companies have cut their internal training budgets while demanding more skilled performance from their employees.¹⁵⁰ Meanwhile, more people than ever are attempting college, only to drop out with few marketable skills and a mound of debt. And the long-term unemployed continue to struggle, many still unable to find work years after the Great Recession. The federal government has an opportunity to usher in a new era by learning from successful training programs and rewarding efforts that possess the seven key traits we outlined above. By doing so, we can create a climate where American workers can thrive in a globalized economy and a middle class job will once again support a middle class life.

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