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The Virtuous Cycle of Work, Learn, Earn



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Bringing together industry, workforce organizations, postsecondary institutions and working adults can solidify pathways to sustainable employment and regional economic growth.

You can probably think of several good reasons to champion working adult learners. With a big-picture view of that undertaking, the benefits get bigger too. Expanding awareness of—and access to—potential career pathways happens when people connect with the education and training that prepare them for in-demand roles. When the disparate parts that keep a community’s economy in motion synchronize, that process becomes more effective and expansive. Resources working seamlessly together empower students and job seekers to make the right decisions and unlock rewarding careers. As working adult learners flow from declining industries into growing ones, they power economic growth across entire communities.

With that perspective, CAEL fosters engagement at the major intersections that mark lifelong educational journeys. There are three regional partnerships that exemplify this model. [PetrochemWorks.com](#) and [BankingOnMyCareer.com](#) both launched in 2017 while [TN.WorkLearnEarn.org](#) launched last year. A new opportunity has emerged due to the success of these partnerships. Over the past three years, we’ve used these experiences to forge a new framework grounded in best practices, what we call Work Learn Earn.

Work Learn Earn partnerships will cover a range of scopes. The model is designed for configuration and

scalability to meet the needs of communities throughout the country. But its mission remains the same. Wherever it’s deployed, it focuses on driving educational attainment and career pathways that enable economic growth.

That was exactly the case for the three partnerships that charted the Work Learn Earn blueprint. They began with the East Harris County Manufacturers Association (EHCMA). EHCMA encompasses more than 130 manufacturing companies in the Greater Houston Area. It focuses on job development, environmental standards, and the overall quality of life in its communities.



EHCMA worked with JP Morgan Chase & Co and CAEL to develop PetrochemWorks, which supports the petrochemical industry in the Gulf Coast region. Like all Work Learn Earn Partnerships, its centerpiece is a custom-branded website that acts as a collaboration hub. [PetrochemWorks.com](https://www.petrochemworks.com) launched in April 2017 and brings together the expertise and resources of diverse specialties. This include teachers, advisors, counselors, and case managers. Each has a role serving workers and students interested in the industry. They can use the tool in the classroom or office to help students and job seekers as they explore careers.

Collective approaches create force multiplier effects — it's no different with Work Learn Earn. Stakeholders are seeing their aligned efforts amplified throughout education and workforce systems. Together, they can tell the industry story in an accurate, complete, and relatable way. To help the discovery process, Work Learn Earn sites include interactive matching features that help prospective workers identify jobs aligned with their goals and preferences. Often, this includes people who may never have considered an industry a part of their future career. As a result, new workers funnel into targeted sectors.

Dave King is Workforce Development Manager for INEOS, a global manufacturer of petrochemicals, specialty chemicals, and oil products. King credits PetrochemWorks as a primary employment referral resource. To help promote the field as a vibrant career option, he refers job seekers, owners, contractors, industry partners, students, and educators alike to the site.

Three months after PetrochemWorks launched, a similar initiative went online farther east. The New York City Employment & Training Coalition, the City University of New York, and JPMorgan Chase & Co partnered with CAEL to launch [BankingOnMyCareer.com](https://www.bankingonmycareer.com). In all, more than 175 industry experts and project partners collaborated. Like PetrochemWorks, BankingOnMyCareer serves as a branding and recruiting tool for an industry that powers economies from the local and regional level and beyond. In this case, the solution helps close the gap in middle-wage jobs in banking, insurance and wealth management.

As we saw with PetrochemWorks, training and education partners have integrated the site into classrooms. There, they use it to help inform students as they make major choices

in the “learning to earning journey.” At the same time, PetrochemWorks is a critical touchpoint for employer partners. This ensures a holistic experience for a diverse flow of site visitors.

Engaging candidates who may not have considered a financial services career is important. Lisa Tomanelli is the director of employment services for Henry Street Settlement, a nonprofit that delivers social services and other programs to more than 50,000 New Yorkers each year. In sharing her perspective about BankingOnMyCareer, she stressed job matching as a critical function of the solution. Her staff sometimes serve clients with potential that has gone unrecognized— even by the individuals themselves. This is always unfortunate and often tragic. But it's when the guided, interactive career-match function of Work Learn Earn sites can have incredible impact. As it connects formerly sidelined people to industry talent pipelines, Work Learn Earn awakens them to their own potential, launches rewarding careers and increases social mobility.

Our most recent Work Learn Earn partnership has culminated in [TN.WorkLearnEarn.org](https://www.tn.worklearnearn.org). The website—created in partnership with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Complete Tennessee, the Tennessee Higher Education Commission, and the Tennessee Department of Economic & Community Development—launched last year with a broader scope than its predecessors. In fact, the statewide initiative covers eight industries. Although applied on a larger scale, the mission is the same. TN.WorkLearnEarn engages stakeholders to align higher education with labor market demands. At the same time, it offers empowering resources to job seekers. It presents clear, current and accurate career information, including geo-mapped data within interactive career and education-matching resources.

Nancy Eisenbrandt, the chief operating officer of the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce, has seen the Work Learn Earn solution create an array of new opportunities. She recognizes that the ability to inform people where jobs are, what businesses need, and where to find the education to succeed is critical to the state's long-term prosperity.

Of course, the real winners are working adults who use lifelong learning to adapt with evolving workplaces. But that also benefits entire regions. When workers upskill, they feed talent pipelines that are the lifeblood of thriving economies.

We've seen that in the Gulf Coast area, the New York City region and across Tennessee.

Recent estimates show that a shortage of qualified employees could place more than \$1.7 trillion in yearly revenue at risk in the U.S. by 2030. That's about 6 percent of our economy. This is one reason the opportunity to scale up the Work Learn Earn resource is so exciting. The Work Learn Earn model harnesses both technology and the power of collaboration. In developing and implementing digital resources, hundreds of partners in education, workforce development, and private industry have engaged with CAEL. That makes a great case study for a holistic approach to workforce and education challenges. At the same time, it creates a wealth of fresh information and experiences. It's a way to complement long-standing principles with refined, "battle tested" best practices.

So, what is next with Work Learn Earn? CAEL is engaging with communities around the country about what a partnership could deliver for them. It starts with meeting representatives from local industries, workforce organizations and schools. We follow this by parsing through extensive regional labor market data, using this research to develop and market a customized web site and marketing plan. But Work Learn Earn will always run behind the scenes. Its purpose is to help make local businesses and schools the heroes. After all, job seekers and students look to them for guidance to rewarding career paths.

I hope you have the chance to see such a partnership add impetus to the work, learn, earn continuum in your area. In the meantime, I invite you to visit our Work Learn Earn microsite. We will continue to share updates about how it is helping towns, cities and regions serve the adult working learners in their communities.



As Senior Vice President for Partnerships, Dawn Lang oversees partnership development driving enhanced value for CAEL's clients and stakeholder community in higher education, workforce development and corporate environments. She leads a dedicated team of professionals who deliver on CAEL's promise and value proposition, passionately supporting adult learners as they pursue education and career goals.

Learn more at cael.org



Recognizing that adult learners are the backbone of the U.S. economy, CAEL helps forge a clear, viable connection between education and career success, providing solutions that promote sustainable and equitable economic growth. CAEL opens doors to opportunity in collaboration with workforce and economic developers, postsecondary educators, and employers, industry groups, foundations, and other mission-aligned organizations. By engaging with these stakeholders, we foster a culture of innovative, lifelong learning that helps individuals and their communities thrive. Established in 1974, CAEL, a Strada Education Network affiliate, is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) membership organization.