

A person with dark dreadlocks is shown from the chest up, wearing a bright blue protective suit. They are holding a white surgical face mask in front of their mouth with both hands. The background is a plain, light color. A semi-transparent blue rectangular box is overlaid on the lower half of the image, containing white text.

**USING RESOURCES EFFECTIVELY:
AN OVERVIEW OF FUNDING RESOURCES
FOR WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
INITIATIVES**

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INTRODUCTION

One model for effective workforce development—long-term, comprehensive career pathways combining post-secondary education, customized training and paid work experience—is an expensive one, frequently difficult for workforce agencies or post-secondary institutions employing traditional policies and practices to implement.

But, by rethinking the use of current resources and jointly creating and supporting career pathways, workforce agencies, community colleges, social service and other agencies can sustain these programs. As a number of projects have shown, innovative combinations of Workforce Investment Act (WIA), federal and state post-secondary and other public resources can be woven to underwrite career pathways strategies.

Public partnerships are linking WIA, post-secondary and economic development resources to support sectoral career pathways including community college customized training, paid work experience and continuing upgrade training. By strategically combining these resources institutions can deliver services targeted to meet regional employer needs while providing extensive preparation and support for program participants.

“Bridge” programs, which are precursors or preliminary steps of industry-driven career pathways that prepare disadvantaged youth and adults for community college certificate, degree and training programs can also be funded weaving resources together. Partnerships in California, North Carolina, Illinois and elsewhere are linking workforce, post-secondary and social service dollars to support intensive bridge programs. These initiatives will provide applicants who do not have sufficient education or skills to get good paying jobs with college-credited skills development and workforce preparation, leading to a direct transition to college degree programs or career training in sectors such as health, bio-tech and construction.

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

WORKFORCE INVESTMENT ACT (WIA)

The Workforce Investment Act is the federal employment and training program, which has allocated \$4 billion to employment and training program services. In addition to using this funding for administrative services, local Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) often spend \$2,500 to \$4,000 per participant on training services offered by proprietary schools or community organizations. The same WIA training dollars, however, can be used as a base to develop community college career pathway and bridge programs, funding customized training, paid work experience and needed support services—all key elements of effective workforce strategies.

POST-SECONDARY RESOURCES

AVERAGE DAILY ATTENDANCE (ADA)

The nation’s 1,200 community colleges receive varying federal, state and local aid to fund instruction for enrolled students. Typically these resources are employed to subsidize the full range of traditional college courses. This funding, however, can also be used to create new customized post-secondary training programs for low-skilled individuals or new career pathway training that is customized to key industry sectors.

FEDERAL AND STATE TUITION AID GRANTS

The federal government offers cash assistance to disadvantaged students to help support tuition, books, housing, transportation, etc. Federal Pell grants, for example, provide up to \$4,000 per student per year in aid, while Chafee grants can provide an additional \$5,000 per student to transitioning foster care youth pursuing education or training. Other funding is typically available through state aid programs. Together these resources can provide a significant financial support package to assist disadvantaged youth and adults in successfully completing career pathway programs.

WORK/STUDY GRANTS

Federal grants provide colleges with funds to subsidize student employment. While these funds often support on-campus employment, the same resources can be used to subsidize paid work experience with employers in key career sectors. Employing work/study funding in this way can supplement WIA resources in developing a critical component of successful career pathway programs.

CARL D. PERKINS VOCATIONAL AND APPLIED TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION ACT (VATEA)

Most state community college systems receive federal support for curriculum and professional development tied to vocational and employment training. These resources can be used to support planning and development costs for bridge and career pathway programs.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES

Most states provide grant resources to companies to provide current workers with upgrade training. These funds are often granted separately from development of career pathways targeted to entry-level employment. Linked with WIA and post-secondary funds in a broad-based sectoral initiative, economic development dollars can help expand career pathways and greatly strengthen incentives for employer participation.

SOCIAL SERVICE RESOURCES

Many disadvantaged youth and adults enrolled in employment and training or educational programs also receive social and support services. Transitioning foster-care youth, for example, receive case management, emergency services and counseling through the Independent Living Program. Again, these services and resources, now typically delivered independently, could add to a coordinated career and college pathway targeted to disadvantaged youth.

EXAMPLE

BRIDGE PROGRAM

The Workforce Development Board of South Central Wisconsin, in partnership with Madison Area Technical College (MATC) and area employers, has developed a strategy to integrate WIA and post-secondary funding to support a broad-based career pathway. The goal of the bridge is to prepare all participants for the entry-level standards of community college degree and training programs.

The WIB will use WIA funds to create a program that will be delivered at the college and at participating community organizations. WIA participants enrolled in the program will also become MATC students and will likely be eligible for post-secondary aid. In addition, the WIB will work with employers to create a customized career pathway that will include paid work experience underwritten by both WIA and work/study resources. After a pilot year, the partners hope to institutionalize the program within the college.

The proposed program, targeted to groups of 20 participants, will cost less than current WIB individual programs cost, provide more intensive skills development and will likely leverage additional post-secondary cash grants to help support participants. A similar program, now being developed in three California counties and targeted to transitioning foster care youth, will provide \$11,250 per student in direct cash assistance from federal and state sources.

CHALLENGES

Creating and sustaining an integrated funding base presents a number of challenges for both WIBs and community colleges. These include barriers both real and perceived:

PERCEPTION

Despite flexibility in both systems, WIBs and colleges often share the belief that the other institution presents significant barriers to collaboration. Colleges frequently cite WIA performance standards and tracking requirements as impediments, as well as a fear of the dilution of their academic standards. WIBs complain about college bureaucracy and lack of interest. While these issues can certainly be a factor in creating a career pathway, concerns about the other institutions can be overwrought. When these issues are in play, numerous real-world examples show they can be overcome, especially with the support of a “champion” pushing for change at each institution.

INERTIA

As with any partnership, a WIA-post-secondary partnership requires additional planning and commitment of staff time for institutions already pressed by scarce resources and internal regulatory pressures. Also, without a history of working as partners, community colleges, WIBs, community groups and employers may need to create a structure for collaboration, including regular meetings and decision-making processes.

STANDARDS AND REGULATION

To take full advantage of post-secondary resources, programs need to be long enough and intensive enough to meet federal standards for post-secondary aid—typically at least 12 credits, or near full-time enrollment for a semester. While this course length is likely needed for bridge programs to meet their goals, it is lengthy by some WIA standards and requires rethinking of traditional program strategies, including a greater focus on academic achievement and certification. Moreover, for WIBs to meet WIA standards, participants must be placed in a job and achieve wage gain over time. This requires bridge programs to establish a clear connection to jobs.

SCALE AND SUSTAINABILITY

The workforce system is relatively small. Intensive pilot programs that are funded primarily by the WIBs play an important role in seeding change, but have relatively little impact on the larger education and training system. To achieve significant scale, the community college system needs to support and institutionalize bridge and career pathway programs, leaving the workforce and social service systems to pay for the extra support and employment readiness needed by disadvantaged participants. Under this more complete model, all agencies can contribute to more broad scale and sustainable career pathways.