



JOBS FOR THE FUTURE

The Community College and Career Training Grant Program:

Lessons Learned from the Field and Recommendations

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August 2010

The new Community College and Career Training Grant Program to be launched this fall presents an important opportunity to help more American workers find better long-term employment more efficiently, through the promotion of innovative training and education programs that incorporate the best of what works for dislocated and unemployed adult workers.

Based on our experience in the field, Jobs for the Future wants to share with the U.S. Department of Labor what we have learned about effective programming—and how this grant program can encourage community colleges to help more workers move quickly through effective programs that result in successful employment and educational outcomes.

The new grant program was created in the Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act, with appropriations of \$500 million for each of fiscal years 2011 through 2014. The Secretary of Labor is authorized to award grants to eligible institutions for the purpose of “developing, offering, and improving educational or career training” for workers eligible for training under the Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) Act.¹ Each state is to be awarded grants of not less than 0.5 percent of the total or \$2.5 million.

This note:

- Summarizes core design principles distilled from JFF’s work and our networks of innovators;
- Describes the context within which the grant program is being designed; and
- Provides examples of innovative training and education innovations that can guide the department as it structures the RFP for this program.

We welcome an opportunity to discuss these recommendations with the department.

THE OPPORTUNITY—AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR FEDERAL INVESTMENTS

The Community College and Career Training Grant Program presents an important opportunity for the U.S. Department of Labor (and its partner, the U.S. Department of Education) to help community colleges serve the large number of dislocated and unemployed workers seeking to improve their career prospects in the current economy. This infusion of funds for training and education through two-year-or-less credential programs presents an additional opportunity: it can be an important new source of incentives for community colleges to innovate in the design, structure, and delivery of skill development programs—and to advance the President’s goals of raising postsecondary attainment *and* helping more Americans achieve their career dreams.

Jobs for the Future, like others in the workforce field, sees a growing consensus on the building blocks of a strong, effective skill development system in the United States, aligned with many of the priorities of the Department of Labor. Policy investments should promote learning programs that result in:

- **Employment in high-demand industries/occupations** that often require less than a Bachelor’s degree but some postsecondary learning program;
- **Degrees and credentials** that are recognized by employers as having labor market value; and
- **Accelerated and flexible pathways for adults** that provide a greater likelihood of success through: quicker progress toward completion of credentials; integration of basic skills with technical learning; and academic, financial, and supportive services that keep adults learning and progressing to completion.

In addition, this grant program creates opportunities for long-term capacity and partnership building. It can be structured to dramatically increase learning about new, innovative strategies that are effective for different populations and different industry sectors, through research, evaluation, and shared learning across grantees. And it can promote strong regional partnerships, collaborations between colleges and workforce investment boards, and multi-college consortia that deliver better designed, more efficient programs and more labor-market-sensitive targeting of funds.

JFF has been a lead partner in several important initiatives targeting improved employment and education outcomes for community college students. From these, a number of important design principles have emerged, which map well to the opportunity presented by the grant program.

The *Breaking Through* initiative, a partnership between JFF and the National Council for Workforce Education, has built a national network of over 30 community colleges

involved in program redesign and institutional restructuring to enable many more lower-skilled adults to enter and complete occupational credential programs. The pathways programs created by these colleges have demonstrated high rates of retention and completion. They are built on a foundation of four design principles:

- **Accelerated pace of learning** through compression, contextualization, and customization of program structure and delivery;
- **Alignment across educational systems** to create career pathways that reduce barriers to completion and include effective on ramps to success;
- **Quick labor market payoffs** through targeting of high-demand industries and occupations, stackable short-term credentials that employers value and incumbent workers can manage, and close relationships with employers; and
- **Comprehensive supports** built into programs to help low-income students when difficulties threaten completion.

Achieving the Dream is an ambitious initiative with well over 100 participating community colleges in 16 states, launched by Lumina Foundation for Education and involving a number of partner organizations and funders. Achieving the Dream is committed to a data-driven approach to improving student outcomes and completion, particularly for low-income and minority students. Relevant lessons include:

- The centrality of quality longitudinal data in any institutional continuous-improvement process and the importance of evaluation in drawing lessons for scale from program innovation;
- The importance to adult student success of the student's first semester or year—from orientation and registration to assessment and placement and the quality and effectiveness of basic skill courses and instruction;
- The power of collective action by consortia of colleges to accelerate learning and diffuse what works; and
- The value of close collaboration between state authorities and colleges to overcome barriers to innovation and promote incentives for more effective program design.

RECOMMENDATIONS THAT ADVANCE TRADE ADJUSTMENT ASSISTANCE AND AMERICAN GRADUATION INITIATIVE GOALS

The Community College and Career Training Grant program can combine the best of the TAA authority and priorities with some of the innovative and high-leverage strategies of the proposed American Graduation Initiative. The purpose of the grant program as authorized initially in 2009 was to enhance the capabilities of community colleges to more effectively and efficiently serve unemployed adult learners, including mid-career,

often low-skilled, workers who have never participated in postsecondary education and training. Although TAA authorizing legislation was fairly quiet on program design, the President's American Graduation Initiative proposal placed great emphasis on design elements that reflect the best knowledge about what works to help low-income underprepared community college students succeed. Taken together, a clear set of priorities emerge as ways to encourage better and faster routes to employment and credentials valued in the labor market for dislocated or unemployed adults:

- Basic skills and college readiness preparation for adults with basic skills deficiencies;
- Commitment to creating career pathways, programs, and policies to accelerate learning and move adults through the system to credentials with labor market value as quickly and efficiently as possible;
- Partnering with other providers in the community to offer supports adults need to stay enrolled and succeed in community college credential programs;
- Training designs and partnerships with employers and workforce boards that best ensure that training programs result in employment upon completion in good jobs in high-demand occupations and industry sectors important to the regional economy;
- Data systems that make it possible to use student labor market and educational outcomes to assess innovations and support continuous improvement; and
- The encouragement of consortia among higher education institutions to develop program innovations together, test them at reasonable scale, and learn from one another as they implement.

EXAMPLES OF PROGRAMS/MODELS THAT REFLECT THESE RECOMMENDATIONS

JFF works with many programs that have characteristics that the grant program should promote—employment as the goal; credentials as the educational outcome; and accelerated progress through innovative instructional designs and structures that emphasize shorter duration, flexible schedules, modularization of longer degree programs into stackable credentials, and the integration of academic, remedial, and technical skills efficiently and effectively. Here are a few examples:

- Shorter time to credential: *Southeastern Arkansas Community College* has shortened a four-semester Allied Health degree program into a three-semester pathway geared to working adults and responsive to the needs of local health care institutions.

- New credentials with labor market value: *North Shore Community College* in Massachusetts has created a Bridge to Child Development Associate credential, which is intended for working adults who need basic skills as well as occupational training—and successful completers gain a credential and one semester of credits for an AA program.
- New curricula for high-demand jobs: *Henry Ford Community College* in Michigan developed the curriculum and instruction for a weatherization program for dislocated workers with a seventh-grade reading and math level.
- Stackable credentials and career ladders: *Portland (OR) Community College's* well-developed Career Pathways initiative, designed and implemented with its workforce board partner, “chunks” 14 different two-year occupational/technical degree programs into pathways characterized by modular, stackable credential segments, including six vocational English as a Second Language pathways.
- Integration of occupational and basic skills: *I-BEST* in Washington State is a national model of a systemic initiative that integrates occupational and basic skills instruction for lower-skill adults across the state's community colleges.
- Support services that accelerate student progress: *Northern Virginia Community College and Goodwill Industries* have combined to create an innovative, scalable training model combining remediation, wraparound supports, and contextual instruction that help accelerate adult students' entrance into career opportunities and further college education.
- Regional approaches to credentials for high-demand industries: *Mott Community College* in Michigan's Fast Track Program has specified road maps to credentials in four high-demand industries in the region: business; human services; engineering/manufacturing; and health.

ⁱ This program was originally authorized in the Trade and Globalization Adjustment Assistance Act of 2009, enacted last year as part of the American Recovery and Investment Act; but the program was not funded at the time. These Trade Act amendments, including the CCCT grant program, are slated to sunset December 31, 2010 unless reauthorized by the Congress. However, because Congress subsequently appropriated funds for the CCCT program for 4 years, it is possible that this provision was reauthorized and extended by the appropriations action.