

ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION

HOW COMMUNITY COLLEGES PREPARE THE WORKFORCE

BY THE INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL
& THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES



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INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL (IEDC)

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AACC is the primary advocacy organization for the nation's community colleges. The association represents nearly 1,200 two-year, associate degree-granting institutions and more than 13 million students. Visit www.aacc.nche.edu.

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This paper is part of a larger scope of work delivered by IEDC through the POWER Initiative. The purpose of this work is to provide capacity-building services in areas of Alabama, Kentucky and Tennessee that have been affected by changes in the coal industry.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Community colleges are, unsurprisingly, reflective of the communities they serve. The range and diversity of programs, services and interventions in which they are engaged represent each college's informed efforts to respond to local needs and opportunities.

Addressing workforce considerations – whether through credit-bearing or non-credit bearing courses, training services, or other interventions – requires strong and durable connections throughout the community to ensure that programming is sufficiently nimble to meet evolving needs. These connections include local economic development entities, industry and trade groups and employers, workforce boards, community development financial institutions, community-based organizations, local, regional and state government, and similar organizations. These connections may be constituted as anything from formalized partnership agreements to peer to peer relationships, depending on the circumstances. It is clear that in cases where we can identify a strong workforce pipeline, these relationships are present and aligned.

We also find that the level, breadth, and sophistication of college commitment to meeting local workforce needs does not correlate to college or community size, demography, geography, or other similar factors. Instead, it seems to correlate to community engagement, as reflected in the partnerships and connections previously described. Second, we have observed that campus leadership (chancellors, presidents, vice presidents, deans) plays an important role in setting a tone and creating an environment in which this commitment is cultivated, developed, and maintained. Furthermore, in many cases, these campus leaders initiate executive-level relationships, leading to partnership development at the organizational level.

We note that the Workplace Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)¹ sets an expectation that economic development and workforce development collaboration will occur. This collaboration is initiated at the state level in the development of state plans, but flows down to the local level in the plan implementation. Thus, fertile opportunity for developing and maintaining strong relations among community colleges, economic development organizations and workforce boards exists and should be sought by all.

INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

This paper is the first in a series of three papers prepared by the American Association of Community Colleges for the International Economic Development Council. These papers support and inform the work being conducted by IEDC as part of an award from the U.S. Economic Development Administration's Partnerships for Opportunity and Workforce and Economic Revitalization (POWER) Initiative. IEDC's work under this grant is designed to build capacity for economic development in communities in Alabama, Kentucky, and Tennessee, that have been affected by changes in the coal industry. The focus of these white papers is on the community college role in strengthening and diversifying local economies in collaboration with economic development organizations and other partner entities and stakeholders.

This paper focuses specifically on the role of community colleges in preparing the workforce for economic diversification. Topics explored include soft skills, workforce development, entrepreneurship,

and leadership development. Stakeholders in the POWER region identified these topics as priorities in interviews for a needs assessment in the first phase of this project.

To complete the research, AACC identified regions within and outside of Appalachia in which efforts to strengthen and diversify local economies have occurred or are occurring to identify promising practices, resources, and materials that can inform efforts in the POWER-served region. The regions are identified as those in which a significant economic downturn – with concomitant job losses – has occurred and where applicable, some portion of the economy is or was dependent on value-added natural resources. Specific regions targeted include northern New England (timber and paper products), North Carolina (textiles and furniture), the Pacific Northwest (timber), the rural upper Midwest (manufacturing), and Appalachia (coal). AACC conducted both online and relevant literature research, and conducted interviews with community college personnel in order to address key questions. Pacific Northwest (timber), the rural upper Midwest (manufacturing), and Appalachia (coal). AACC conducted both online and relevant literature research, and conducted interviews with community college personnel in order to address key questions.



FINDINGS

Soft Skills

Soft skills, sometimes also referred to as work-readiness skills, are typically offered at community colleges in one or both of two ways. The first is to deliver material in a stand-alone program, and the second is to embed soft skills within a larger curriculum – e.g., customer service within a hospitality degree, or teamwork within a number of programs.

One of many examples of the latter can be found in New Hampshire. WorkReadyNH is a tuition-free workforce development program designed for job-seekers and career-builders that provides training in the specific skills that individuals need to secure and keep a job, as well as those that employers are seeking in their current and future employees. These areas include: job interviews, general workplace expectations, workplace safety, communication skills, team-building and conflict resolution, problem-solving, meetings, on-the-job training, customer service, and performance review. Graduates earn two nationally recognized credentials to add to their resume.² The program is delivered by all seven of the colleges within the community college system of New Hampshire and, depending on the individual college, it may be delivered in multiple locations within a service area, rather than solely on campus.³

There is a growing recognition that while discipline-specific knowledge, skills, and abilities are essential, the other skills are equally important for success in the workplace. Community colleges across the United States have recognized this, and have taken steps to embed, assess, and measure the acquisition of soft skills within curricula.

For this work to be effective, program developers, faculty, and other college personnel must seek input from employers to accurately identify the soft skills

needed, as well as how and at what level they will be used by the workforce. For example, an aspiring chef in a culinary program and an accounting student hoping to begin work as a bookkeeper may both need teamwork skills, but the skills may look different in the application and frequency of use at the job site.

Competency framework tools, such as the beta Credentials Framework, developed by the Corporation for a Skilled Workforce with support from Lumina Foundation, are being tested in multiple sites.⁴ The framework allows colleges to identify and set levels for soft skill competencies in conjunction with industry input and validation. When these levels are established, together with the means for acquiring and assessing the competencies, colleges, employers and students can be confident in addressing the necessary soft skills.

A program of Louisiana's Bossier Parish Community College (BPCC), "Retraining the Gulf Coast Workforce through IT Pathways," developed an open course focused on soft skills.⁵ BPCC's Open Campus courses are free, online courses available to anyone and developed in a module form for ease of use. Driven by industry need and input, the course covers topics that address the meaning and importance of soft skills, communication in the workplace, corporate culture, attendance, confidentiality, protecting your and others' privacy, communication difficulties, and time and stress management.⁶

In some communities, soft skills are combined with other wraparound supports to ensure that students achieve successful outcomes. In the "Job Ready, Willing, and Able" initiative, funded by the Walmart Foundation, the American Association of Community Colleges worked with 17 colleges from around the United States over three years. The colleges each provided services to unemployed and underemployed individuals in an effort to move them into middle-skill jobs with family-sustaining wages. Each college developed its own set of resources and practices based on local labor market needs; many of the colleges have incorporated soft skills training and supports as part of their overall approach. Examples of these include:

- Grossmont College (Calif.): The college provided financial and mental health counseling, as well as wrap-around services that included assistance with

studying, communication, and time management skills. Some students also needed help with health and medical issues, learning issues, clothing and food needs. In addition, students were helped with resume revision, job application assistance, and interview preparation.

- Hazard Community College (Ky.): Students received support for transportation costs, resume writing, job placement and financial counseling.
- Jamestown Community College (N.Y.): All students in a machining program were provided with career counseling and resume preparation.
- Kirkwood Community College (Iowa): Kirkwood's program included drug testing, clothing for business tours and interviews, testing fees, tuition assistance, welding supplies, and case-by-case assistance (e.g., immunization, a physical examination).
- Montgomery County Community College (Pa.): The college provided job search assistance, resume writing, interviewing skills, job leads, support in the job search process and counseling services.
- Northeast State Community College (Tenn.): Assistance was provided to individuals to apply to the college, as well as to apply for financial aid and scholarships. The college also offered personal counseling and mentoring, resource referrals, assistance with supplies, career assessment and guidance, resume writing, interview tips, job leads and job search resources. Information about bus rates and student discounts, as well as resources on housing and other transportation options in the area for students in need were also provided.

We note these approaches to show that while soft skills are important in and of themselves, today's students – especially non-traditional students – may benefit from an array of supports in order to be successful. While the resources and interventions noted here were supported through the Walmart Foundation grant, colleges that are resource-challenged can explore the possibility of leveraging partner entity resources to achieve the same goals.

Drug use has become a serious workforce challenge. Drug testing is standard for entry into some community college programs, such as nursing. In addition to the Kirkwood example provided above,

Missoula College's "RevUP Montana – Empowering Montana's Workforce" program implemented a strict drug-screening policy for the commercial driver license training program.⁷ Prospective students were required to take a five-panel drug-screen test before entering the program. Students also agreed to undergo follow-up testing in certain situations, such as post-accident testing, reasonable suspicion testing, and random testing.

Most standalone soft skills programs discuss the priority that employers place on a drug-free workplace and stress the importance for those seeking employment of remaining drug-free.

Workforce Development

Workforce development is an essential component of community economic development in any economic climate, and even more so in communities where there has been industry loss and corresponding job losses. While there is no formal definition of "workforce development," generally speaking, the term has come to describe a wide range of activities, policies and programs to create, sustain and retain a workforce that can support current and future business and industry.⁸

AACC takes the position that "workforce and economic development brings together community colleges, offices of economic development, workforce boards, labor market entities, employers, and other organizations to improve the economic prosperity of business, workers, and communities."⁹ In so doing, AACC uses the term to encompass education and training for incumbent workers; the unemployed or underemployed; and those entering the workforce for the first time or reentering the workforce after a lengthy absence, as well as activities that occur in support of the education and training.

Different colleges "silo" workforce development differently, both in how it is viewed and where in the organizational chart it is housed. Some colleges take

the position that all programming that is not geared towards academic transfer to a four-year college or university is workforce development. Others take a position that only non-credit programming or business training are considered workforce development, while still others adopt a blend of these approaches. Workforce development programming may be open-enrollment, in which anyone who wishes to enroll may do so, or specific to an employer, to a targeted population, or to referrals from a specific entity, such as a workforce board.

However it is defined, structured, or placed organizationally, workforce development remains a significant part of the mission of all community colleges. Furthermore, workforce development is not an activity that community colleges can, or should, pursue alone. Instead, it should be seen as an activity that occurs in partnership or collaboration with local economic development organizations, businesses, workforce investment boards, chambers of commerce, and other willing partners. To that end, much of the work that community colleges do in support of workforce and economic development may extend beyond the specific task of the development and delivery of training.

Colleges often offer specific training in response to a local or regional need. One example is the Lineman Training Program at Hazard Community and Technical College in Kentucky, which prepares individuals for the electrical utility industry.¹⁰ Another example is Shalenet in western Pennsylvania,

which provides preparation for a career in the oil and gas industry.¹¹ Standalone soft skills training, referenced earlier, is a typical example of workforce development, as are licensure and continuing education unit (CEU) offerings in a variety of fields and professions or in support of licensure. Colleges also work to provide incumbent worker training in concert with local employers.

A program of Minnesota's Pine Technical College, titled "Rural Information Technology Alliance," focused on the rural IT workforce in response to a critical and growing need.¹² Small to medium-sized businesses in smaller communities are in need of tech talent as much as those in large cities are. For IT professionals who prefer to live in rural areas, opportunities also are available through telecommuting and virtual work.

In recent years, the state of Kentucky has put considerable effort into the development of a strong workforce system within the Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS). The centerpiece of the workforce and economic development efforts is the KCTCS-TRAINS program. KCTCS-TRAINS is part of the Kentucky Skills Network, a partnership of workforce professionals from the Cabinet for Economic Development, Kentucky Career Center (Education & Workforce Development Cabinet), Labor Cabinet, and KCTCS dedicated to solutions-based services. Through KCTCS-TRAINS, KCTCS colleges work with employers to provide the training employees need to keep companies competitive in today's global economy.

Through KCTCS-TRAINS, companies receive funding to assist with the cost of providing workforce training and assessment services to current and potential employees. KCTCS-TRAINS funds are distributed on a project basis and require a company cash match of 50 percent. The KCTCS Workforce Solutions staff helps companies develop training plans and apply for KCTCS-TRAINS funding. Companies may apply individually, or as a training network with other companies to meet common training needs from various sectors of the economy. The network approach is successful because companies that need only one or two employees trained are able to join with other companies to obtain



cost-effective and timely training. KCTCS Workforce Solutions staff assist companies in developing the training networks.¹³

Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship is a growing area of focus for many community colleges. Particularly in rural regions hit hard by job losses among large, natural resource-based and value-added employers, entrepreneurship is seen as a means to contribute to the rebuilding of communities. It can take various shapes: from fully developed business incubation as at Eastern West Virginia Community and Technical College to virtual incubation in New Hampshire, to entrepreneurship degrees and certificates, as at Westmoreland Community College in Pennsylvania.

In rural communities, where the presence of large businesses – particularly chain retailers – may be diminishing, entrepreneurship is seen as a way to sustain downtowns with the presence of new small business, as well as to diversify the economic base. We note that in rural communities, the term “entrepreneur” may be intimidating for those starting out; the term “self-employment” may be a less daunting descriptor. This may be particularly true when working with small business owners who are transitioning from being hobbyists.



AACC has worked with AARP Foundation in delivering services to the mature workforce, both unemployed and underemployed. One part of the programming is titled Work for Yourself@50+. This initiative helps low-income people who are 50 or older explore the factors involved in and first steps to take when deciding to become self-employed. This initiative includes the “Five Simple Steps to Get You Started” toolkit, an in-person workshop and interactive website.¹⁴

Some business incubators on community college campuses tailor a portion of their programming or real estate to students. The John Pappajohn Business and Entrepreneurial Center at North Iowa Area Community College does so, in addition to offering youth entrepreneurship programming.¹⁵ Likewise, the business incubator at Southeast Community College in Lincoln, Nebraska, has served multiple student tenants.¹⁶

Montgomery County Community College, on behalf of the 14 community colleges in Pennsylvania, developed an online course titled “Be the Boss – Starting Your Own Business.” The course is designed to encourage aspiring entrepreneurs to tackle studies in an online format, on their own time, at no cost, to enable them to reach their business and career goals. Flexible and self-paced, the course, funded by a U.S. Department of Labor grant, includes modules which provide the basis to develop a business plan. A course completion certificate is provided, with the potential to earn college credits through prior learning assessment.¹⁷

Beginning in 2013, The National Association for Community College Entrepreneurship (NACCE) partnered with the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) to promote the efforts of community colleges in Kentucky, Tennessee, and West Virginia to become anchors for local entrepreneurship efforts in Appalachia. NACCE serves as the project director for the college partners and is the liaison with ARC for tracking and reporting project activities and outcomes. The project intends to introduce and facilitate the use of existing NACCE initiatives to ARC-designated colleges in the three states.

In another initiative supported by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, AACC worked with colleges in 11 states, NACCE, and the U.S. Small Business

Administration to convene a Virtual Incubation Network (VIN) and design a toolkit for national dissemination to community colleges. Many colleges establish small business incubators to nurture companies through the most challenging start-up stages of development, with an ultimate aim of increasing jobs and revenue in the local community. The VIN acknowledged that those were not limited to delivery in a traditional brick-and-mortar facility. The VIN colleges developed methods and techniques to provide services either through technology-enabled means or through onsite delivery at the place of business. Colleges in coal-mining areas may find value in the portion of the toolkit that speaks specifically to virtual incubation in similar locations.¹⁹

Community college business incubators and entrepreneurship programs that are sector-specific are infrequent, compared to the bulk of programs that are more general in their approach. However, one targeted approach is that of a kitchen incubator, in which entrepreneurs have the use of a shared kitchen and kitchen equipment. Eastern Carolina Food Ventures Incubator Kitchen is run by James Sprunt Community College, with support from two counties.²⁰ Similarly, Kingsborough Community College in New York runs a Kitchen Ventures Incubator Program, and Northeast Wisconsin Technical Colleges offers the Woodland Kitchen and Business Incubator.^{21, 22}

Leadership Training



The last area we explored was leadership training. Such programs are not uncommon in small towns and rural areas; however, they are typically run by organizations other than community colleges. An exception is Leadership North Country (LNC), which is housed at White Mountains Community College in New Hampshire. Each year, LNC selects a diverse group of people who learn and work together for nine months, covering topics such as workforce and economic development, education, arts and culture, rural health and poverty, travel and tourism, and government and politics. Program participants gain information and experience through interactive presentations and panels, insider tours, and informed conversations with leaders from a range of areas. Leadership North Country was founded by a concerned group of regional advisors and modeled after successful state and regional leadership programs nationwide.

Endnotes

¹According to the Urban Institute's 2015 publication *Coordinating Workforce and Economic Development under WIOA*: "Several federal and state programs fund the public workforce system, but WIOA creates the organizational structure. WIOA provides about \$3.2 billion in annual funds for the employment and training services for the public workforce system, nearly all of which is directed by formula to states."

²<http://www.ccsnh.edu/workforce-training/workready-nh>

³See also the State of Alabama "Ready to Work" program: <http://www.aidt.edu/ready-to-work/>

⁴<http://connectingcredentials.org/framework/>

⁵The project was funded through a Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) program Round 2 grant.

⁶<https://www.skillscommons.org/handle/taaccct/4321>

⁷The project was funded through a Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) program Round 3 grant.

⁸<https://www.stlouisfed.org/Publications/Bridges/Spring-2010/What-is-Workforce-Development>

⁹<http://www.aacc.nche.edu/Resources/aaccprograms/wed/Pages/default.aspx>

¹⁰https://hazard.kctcs.edu/workforce_solutions/lineman_training_program.aspx

¹¹<https://www.shalenet.org/>

¹²The project was funded through a Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) program Round 3 grant.

¹³http://kctcs.edu/en/Degrees_Training/Workforce_Training/KCTCS_TRAINS

¹⁴www.aarpfoundation.org/workforyourself

¹⁵<http://www.niacc.edu/pappajohn/entrepreneurial-education/college-programs/>

¹⁶<https://www.southeast.edu/entrepreneurship/businessincubationandcoaching/>

¹⁷Because this project involved DOL funding, course material are available at <https://www.skillscommons.org/handle/taaccct/8149>

¹⁸Colleges included Burlington County College, Indian River State College, Lorain County Community College, Long Beach City College, Mott Community College, North Iowa Area Community College, Northeast Wisconsin Technical College, Rio Salado College, Santa Fe Community College, Southeast Community College, White Mountains Community College.

¹⁹http://www.aacc.nche.edu/Resources/aaccprograms/wed/Documents/VIN_Toolkit_Complete.pdf

²⁰<http://www.jamessprunt.edu/kitchen>

²¹<http://cewdkbcc.com/current-programs/kitchen-ventures-incubator-program/>

²²<https://www.nwtc.edu/about-nwtc/places/aurora-regional-learning-center/woodland-kitchen-and-business-incubator>



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