

Defining On-Ramps to Adult Career Pathways

Introduction

Minnesota is experiencing a workforce challenge on three fronts as an aging population, changes in work skill needs, and growing diversity transform the state.ⁱ

Public systems and private employers are struggling in a new reality:

- employers need skilled workers;
- workers seek quality jobs;
- Minnesota State College and University Colleges compete not only for enrollment increases but also for student completion;
- Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act core partners at Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) and the Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) strive to create a shared accountability system that rewards serving individuals with the highest barriers to economic success;
- Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) struggles with Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) outcomes and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) program design;
- Community Based Organizations (CBOs) that operate within these structures scramble to build a comprehensive strategy from diverse funding streams.

Minnesota *is* investing and innovating. Early Minnesota FastTRAC Adult Career Pathway researchⁱⁱ showed marked improvements in supporting adults to enroll and complete credit coursework, but, perversely, investments to build collaborative program models to support postsecondary credential attainment (IBEST, Accelerating Opportunities, MN FastTRAC) have often resulted in further segregating of the low skill and the very low skill adult participant populations.

Many of the “bridge” programs built to connect participants to higher education require educational functioning levels that are inaccessible to half the adult education participants in Minnesota. And basic skill deficiency is only one barrier to self-sufficiency. Failure to design career pathways to mitigate non-academic issues fails many people who come to our programs.

In recognition of these challenges, the Minneapolis St Paul Workforce Innovation Network (MSPWin) engaged CLASP to define the services and partnerships involved in career pathway ‘on-ramps’ for adults. **An on-ramp is a career pathway program designed to serve individuals with significant barriers to educational and economic success.** Through research, interviews, and survey, CLASP set out to define a menu of on-ramp services that can be used to develop program models.

Career Pathway Focus

Career pathways are having a moment. From high school to higher education reform, people are talking about career pathways. An unprecedented unified letter from 13 federal agencies, the White House

National Economic Council and the Office of Management and Budget identifies the problem career pathways are meant to tackle: “Too often, our systems for preparing low-skilled youth and adults with marketable and in-demand skills can be complex and difficult to navigate for students, job seekers, and employers. Career pathways can offer an efficient and customer-centered approach to training and education by connecting the necessary adult basic education, occupational training, postsecondary education, career and academic advising, and supportive services for students to prepare for, obtain, and progress in a career.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Maria Cancia of US Department of Human Services, Administration for Children and Families recently made both the business case (scarce resources, incredible need) and the human case (people don’t live in ‘programs’ or ‘funding streams’) to call for career pathways to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our safety net systems which promote self-sufficiency.^{iv} The self-sufficiency bar has been raised by global economic forces, and initiatives to improve the educational, economic, and social mobility of individuals in poverty take coordinated, cross-system efforts.

Career pathway interventions require an investment in education and training. Educationally focused interventions studied in Washington State’s Tipping Point^v research clearly tie economic self-sufficiency for low-income low-skill adults to the completion of a postsecondary credential, but persistence and achievement are key considerations for adult workforce development and adult education programming.

In Minnesota, the WIOA Adult program, which enrolls a limited number of participants into educational activities, shows that in FY14 just 54% of program exiters have consistent employment eight quarters after exit.^{vi} Additionally, Minnesota’s WIOA Adult Basic Education program which focuses solely on education shows that in FY14 the average participant logged 140 contact hours with only four out of ten of those participants achieving a basic educational function level gain.^{vii} These two core WIOA programs now share the same performance accountability system which *should* incent changed service models, but they are only two programs in the many workforce development programs aimed at helping individuals prosper. To create career pathways that lead to educational advancement and economic self-sufficiency, many programs need to move from program thinking to system thinking.

Moving from a Program Model to a Service Model

The very idea of career pathways requires one to stipulate that no one entity, agency, or institution operates a career pathway alone. Career pathway models require intentional, meaningful collaboration.

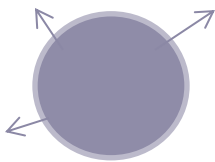
Career pathways can be described as a collaborative, place-based service model for addressing complex social problems using a collective impact partnership. As offspring of collective impact work, career pathways ask organizational partners to “actively change the way they operate in order to align their missions and develop a shared vision, with the goal of filling service gaps and eliminating redundant services.” Career pathway models compel systems change.^{viii}

Many education and employment service reform efforts have resulted in partnership, but unfortunately these have largely been what researchers call “binary partnerships” that involve organizations from two sectors coming together for a specific piece of work but not actively seeking a shared vision for ongoing partnership. A participant might benefit from a short term partnership between a community-based

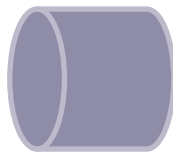
organization and a community college, but once that partnership ends, the program ends.

Career pathways provide integrated services from a range of service providers based on the recognition that individuals have a complex set of needs and are often receiving services from a variety of providers. Intentional alignment of these services through a career pathway strategy can produce better outcomes for the participant and efficiencies for the system as detailed in the Health Professional Opportunity Grants (HPOG) Year Three Annual Report^{ix}. HPOG participants engage in health care training and employment development activities while receiving support services including counseling, financial assistance, transportation, childcare, housing support, social and family support and cultural programming. At program exit, 66% of participants were employed - with a full 57% employed in healthcare, and 57% also remain engaged with training or post-training services.^x In career pathways, educational and economic mobility are both measures of success.

Career pathways, including pathway on-ramp programs, require key community organizations – employers, government agencies, community-based organizations, school systems, postsecondary institutions – in sustained partnership. Practitioners need to be supported to move from a program model, with referral processes or transactional partnerships, to a multisector partnership model in order to achieve the ultimate goal: increased educational and economic mobility for disparately impacted populations.



Single agency program which refers out for other services



Binary partnership between two agencies for specific purpose



Multi-sector partnership between key organizations within a community to provide comprehensive services

Target Populations

Much energy and investment has focused on career pathways for postsecondary level students. On-ramps are designed for individuals who may have postsecondary credentials as a goal but also have immediate needs for stabilization, upskilling, and income that need to be addressed.

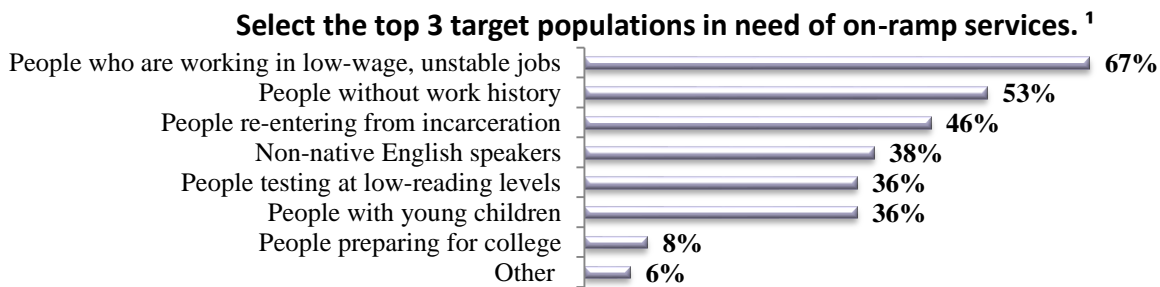
In Minnesota, a target population could be a public benefit recipient of the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP). People with low educational attainment are significantly disproportionately represented in MFIP. While in the general population, just 38.8% of Minnesotans have an educational attainment status of a high school diploma or less^{xi}, that percentage more than doubles in Minnesota’s TANF population: 86%+ of MFIP recipients have a high school diploma or less. A

study of 30,000 Colorado TANF recipients demonstrated the positive impact of career pathway credentials on quarterly earnings with increases ranging from \$416 per quarter for those with short-term certificates to an average of \$2,200 per quarter for those with an associate of applied science degree.^{xii} Recent MFIP education policy change means individuals without a high school diploma/equivalent or non-native English speakers can access adult basic education and up to four years of postsecondary education as part of their employment plan.^{xiii}

Analysis of that policy’s impact reveals that of the 21,511 MFIP recipients working with employment counselors in 2015, 17.4% are engaged in educational activities. Looking further into those 3,753 people in education, 24.6% are people without a high school degree or equivalent and 45.8% are non-native English speakers.^{xiv} There are examples of well-established targeted education and workforce development interventions for MFIP recipients, like the Anoka County Jump Start and Career Pathway Training programs^{xv} and new alignment efforts by providers like CAPI that operate MFIP, Refugee Employment Services, and career pathways programs^{xvi}. However, even after the educational policy change, the majority of MFIP recipients are left to navigate their own path through disconnected education and employment services because of the absence of career pathway system thinking and sufficient scale of on-ramps for low skill individuals with barriers to employment. And many providers – working within their unaligned performance and compliance systems – have no choice but to continue to work toward short term wins that do little to help people move beyond cycling in and out of safety net programs and contingent employment.

To build and scale effective interventions, on-ramp programs should intentionally align MFIP services with education, work experience, career navigation, and placement and retention services for those already engaged in educational activities and should also seek to boost the take up of educational activities, especially among those racial/ethnic groups with the lowest engagement: African American 11.2%, American Indian 9.8%, Hmong Immigrants 9.1%. Similarly, individuals involved with other social service providers – Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training (SNAP E&T), Housing and Urban Development Employment and Training (HUD E&T), Community Action Program (CAP), Refugee Employment Services (RES) – could benefit from aligned on-ramp services.

Minnesota stakeholders identified target populations for on-ramp programs:



”Other” responses included: People with mental health issues, people without family support system, people living in poverty, people without a high school education or GED, people with background challenges, dislocated workers, people with low educational attainment.

The on-ramp may serve individuals who are public benefit recipients, adult education learners, postsecondary education students, employees, public housing residents, workforce center customers, community based organization clients, refugees, immigrants, parents, and more. The on-ramp will seek to intentionally understand the complexity of the individual engagement with public and private systems and provide an integrated service delivery model to most optimally serve each individual. This means co-enrollment, shared accountability, and attention to details as small as how to refer to the people served collaboratively (e.g., clients, students, recipients, customers, employees, learners = our participants).

Service Delivery Model

Through interviews, surveys, and research review, these critical service components – in a variety of flexible, customizable forms – appear key to on-ramps:

- I. **Stabilization and Supportive Services** - to diminish crisis for individuals and to connect individuals to resources and opportunities
- II. **Integrated Education & Training** – to build foundational, employment, and occupational skills contextually and simultaneously
- III. **Employment, Retention, and Re-Engagement** – to gain work experience, remain connected to work, and re-engage in further education and training

On-ramps operate with all three of these components delivered with proportional balance and simultaneously, when possible. These services are not sequential or hierarchical but driven by person centered program design. It is also important to note that these services are delivered through cross-system partnership and not by one agency or set of binary partners. Many practitioners interviewed described the precarious nature of transitions as program participants exit one program and enter another. On-ramps should be designed with enough transition overlap between programs and services to lessen the chance a participant will fall away rather than move forward. This will require not only partnerships and new service models and also new strategies for funding and evaluating the work.

I. STABILIZATION & SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

Why: Universally, theorists and practitioners agree that attending both to basic needs and safety needs is necessary before addressing needs tied to independence and achievement. Beyond the lived reality of workforce development providers knowing that their program participants cannot complete their programs without an array of supports, there is also some limited research revealing supportive services are associated with improved outcomes. A Public/Private Ventures “study that examined the experiences of 1,286 individuals attending three sector focused training programs that provide both job training and supportive services—such as child care, transportation, and financial assistance—found that the treatment group study participants who received services from job training programs had greater earnings and likelihood of finding work, working consistently, and finding a job with benefits than control group participants (who did not receive services from the study sites, but could access them from external organizations).”^{xvii}

¹ See Q5 in Appendix B

What: Individualized, differentiated services to mitigate immediate crisis and provide ongoing support to participants through program participation and into employment.

Type of Services:

Mental health counseling	Childcare
Physical health services	Transportation
Food security	Re-entry services
Stable housing	Accommodation of learning disability through technology
Income supports, financial support	Work supports including federally and state funded programs that provide assistance to low-income families; e.g., the Earned Income Tax Credit, subsidized child care, food stamps, and cash assistance
Justice involvement – expungement services, re-entry services	Intensive Screening including individuals participate in culturally responsive, comprehensive assessment for the development and ongoing review of an education/employment plan
Debt reduction – payment plans, forgiveness of holds at education institutions, etc.	Housing Assistance
Family services – abuse, children’s health, etc.	Financial coaching and education
Career navigation	Domestic Violence Services
Income supports	Traditional cultural support

No one participant will need all services and no one provider could ever offer all of these services. Instead, personalized interventions will leverage co-enrollment with other programs that have expertise and resources for this work (e.g., WIOA title I adult or youth, SNAP E&T, MFIP, HUD E&T) Combining support services with promising program models and “integrating case management in helping job training participants navigate across systems to access a range of services. This approach allows individuals to work with a single case manager who helps them access all the services they need rather than multiple case managers who each try to connect them with different resources.”^{xviii}

II. INTEGRATED EDUCATION & TRAINING^{xix}

Why: Career pathway education and training models promote economic and educational mobility and thus should have value in the regional labor market and allow individuals to build upon prior education. On-ramps that include employment and training lead to greater impact. “Studies that examine program effects by training type also consistently find that job search assistance is more likely to generate positive impacts *in the short run* that then fade in magnitude with time, in contrast to the impacts of vocational training that take a longer time to mature but then turn positive and grow larger.”^{xx}

MDRC’s recently completed research on the WorkAdvance program demonstrates the impact of efforts to move “beyond the previous generation of employment programs by introducing demand-driven skills training and a focus on jobs that have career pathways” in community based workforce development programs.^{xxi} Integrated Education and Training models can span the spectrum of educational functioning levels as evidenced by International Institute of Minnesota’s course offerings ranging from English for Work, Hotel Housekeeping Training, Nursing Assistant Training, Phlebotomy, and Medical Career Advancement^{xxii}, and can happen in a variety of settings including pre-apprenticeship^{xxiii} and incumbent working training.^{xxiv}

On-ramp investments should have a goal of increasing occupational/technical skills while also building foundational skills and essential academic credentials such as a high school credential but also measureable progress toward such awards. This will require longer term engagement with individuals, flexibility from education providers, and deep engagement with employers to ensure industry value for the skills obtained.

What: Integrated education and training is “a service approach that provides adult education and literacy activities concurrently and contextually with workforce preparation activities and workforce training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster for the purpose of educational and career advancement^{xxv} (34 CFR 463.35)

Type of Services:	Examples:
Academic, Career, Employability Skills	Effective Communication, Learning Strategies, Academic Language & Skills, Numeracy, Critical Thinking, Self-Management, Development Future Pathways, Navigating Systems (TIF^{xxvi}), College and Career Readiness Standards ^{xxvii} , Contextualized English Language Learning
Workforce Preparation	Activities, programs, or services designed to help an individual acquire a combination of basic academic skills, critical thinking skills, digital literacy skills, and self- management skills, including competencies in: (a) Utilizing resources; (b) Using information; (c) Working with others; (d) Understanding systems; (e) Skills necessary for successful transition into and completion of postsecondary education or training, or employment; and (f) Other employability skills that increase an individual’s preparation for the workforce. ^{xxviii}

Resiliency Competencies	Critical Thinking, Adaptability, Self-Awareness, Reflective Learning, Collaboration ^{xxix}
Work-based Training	On the job training, customized training, incumbent worker training, registered apprenticeship, and transitional jobs. ^{xxx}
Workforce Training	<p>May include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) occupational skill training...; (ii) on-the-job training; (iii) incumbent worker training...; (iv) programs that combine workplace training with related instruction...; (v) training programs operated by the private sector; (vi) skill upgrading and retraining; (vii) entrepreneurial training; (viii) transitional jobs...; (ix) job readiness training provided in combination with services...(i) through (viii); (x) adult education and literacy activities, including activities of English language acquisition and integrated education and training programs, provided concurrently or in combination with services described in any of clauses (i) through (vii); and (xi) customized training conducted with a commitment by an employer or group of employers to employ an individual upon successful completion of the training.^{xxxii}
Recognized Postsecondary Credential	A credential consisting of an industry-recognized certificate or certification, a certificate of completion of an apprenticeship, a license recognized by the State involved or Federal Government, or an associate or baccalaureate degree. ^{xxxii}
Coaching	Motivational coaching, resiliency support, cultural training

III. EMPLOYMENT, RETENTION & RE-ENGAGEMENT

Why: The ultimate goal of workforce development programs is increased prosperity for the individual and increased economic competitiveness for the region. On-ramp participants often have an immediate need to earn income, to build a work history, to sustain employment and increase stability before taking on further education and training.

Providers recognize the importance of both building a work history and moving into career pathway employment and rapid attachment to employment to meet immediate needs. One growing initiative, The Fresno Bridge Academy which also serves as one of ten pilot programs for SNAP E&T, enrolls many participants with limited education and little to no work experience, but has a core tenet of not placing people in “dead-end jobs.” Instead, The Bridge Academy uses what their practitioners call an “A-B-C”

approach, helping heads-of-household obtain the education, training and life skills needed to get A job, then a Better job, then a Career.^{xxxiii}

What: Spectrum of paid work opportunities while continuing to receive other on-ramp services.

Type of services	Examples
Work experience	Paid or unpaid work opportunities that build skills and work history
Temporary work	Paid work within a limited time period based on the employer need
Part-time work	Work of 1 to 34 hours per week ^{xxxiv} that may or may not tie directly to skills training but that provides financial support to an individual
OJT	Training by an employer that is provided to a paid participant while engaged in productive work in a job that— (A) provides knowledge or skills essential to the full and adequate performance of the job; (B) is made available through a program that provides reimbursement to the employer of up to 50 percent of the wage rate of the participant... (C) is limited in duration as appropriate to the occupation for which the participant is being trained, taking into account the content of the training, the prior work experience of the participant, and the service strategy of the participant, as appropriate. ^{xxxv}
Transitional Jobs	(A) are time-limited work experiences that are subsidized and are in the public, private, or nonprofit sectors for individuals with barriers to employment who are chronically unemployed or have an inconsistent work history; (B) are combined with comprehensive employment and supportive services; and (C) are designed to assist the individuals described in subparagraph (A) to establish a work history, demonstrate success in the workplace, and develop the skills that lead to entry into and retention in unsubsidized employment.
Pre-Apprenticeship	Pre-apprenticeship services and programs are designed to prepare individuals to enter and succeed in Registered Apprenticeship programs. These programs have a documented partnership with at least one Registered Apprenticeship program sponsor and together, they expand the participant’s career pathway opportunities with industry-based training coupled with classroom instruction. ^{xxxvi}
Apprenticeship	Registered Apprenticeships are innovative work-based learning and post-secondary earn-and-learn models that meet national standards for registration with the U.S. Department of Labor. Characteristics of apprenticeships are: Participants who are newly hired earn wages from

	employers during training; Programs meet national standards for registration with the U.S. Department of Labor; Programs provide on-the-job learning and job-related technical instruction, On-the-job learning is conducted in the work setting under the direction of one or more of the employer’s personnel; And training results in an industry-recognized credential. ^{xxxvii}
Job development and placement services	Creating demand for jobseekers, Identifying and securing paid employment ^{xxxviii}
Post-employment retention	The Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development defines “mid-term employment” as consistent employment three quarters after exit and “long-term employment” as consistent employment eight quarters after exit. ^{xxxix}
Post-employment advancement	Participants not only gain quality jobs but there is clear career advancement potential and individuals are able to move up the career ladder.

Direct service strategies in *stabilization and supportive services, integrated education & training, and employment, retention & re-engagement* provide a menu of options for career pathway program models. However, to enhance, scale, and sustain on-ramp programs, career pathways require attention to system level components as well.

System Components

PARTNERS

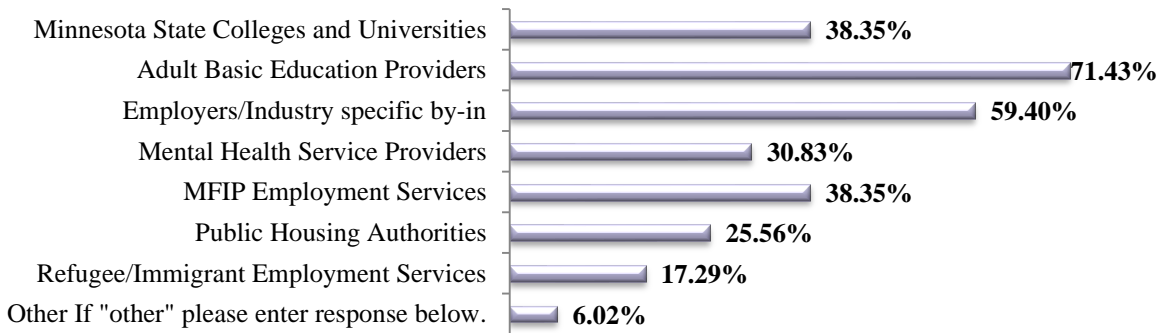
Career pathway partners bring resources and are responsible for outcomes.

At the state level, career pathway on-ramp partners should encompass human service, education, workforce development, employers, and philanthropic partners. These partners will be co-investors in the on-ramp strategy, incentivize co-enrollment between “their” programs and on-ramps, and develop shared performance accountability outcome measures. CLASP defines shared accountability as a policy tool to promote coordinated and effective service to participants who are or may be served by multiple funding streams or programs.^{xi}

At the local level, career pathway on-ramp partnerships will vary based on capacity and interest of local providers, service models for target populations, and sector expertise. On-ramp investments should encourage local providers to move beyond a binary, project limited partnership and achieve what CCRC researchers term a “multi-sector partnership between four or more sectors formed with the intention of collaborating around a shared mission as indicated by the stated goals of the partnership.”^{xii} Such partnerships will need to establish a shared accountability strategy that measures both interim progress measures, perhaps discrete to one partner, and longer term outcomes that occur post-intervention.

Stakeholders interviewed identified the following essential partners to provide effective on ramp services to participants:

Select 3 essential partners employment services should engage with to provide effective on-ramp services to participants²



Other responses included: Child care, K-12 (Includes ABE), traditional cultural/spiritual community leaders, vendors who provide credentialed training, housing resources or programs that serve individuals that are free of chemical dependency and mental health challenges, case managers, support service providers in general (housing, mental health, family services, clothing, etc.), trusted community networks who can give a trusted referral, workforce program providers, and navigator function (regardless of entity) and change MNSCU to “Post-Secondary Ed Institution.

FUNDING

Research has proven the impact of two core funding strategies: diversity of funds and continuity of funding.

University of Chicago Chapin Hall research into exemplary community based workforce development agencies reveals “diversity in funding is essential to delivering comprehensive services that create real, lasting success for individuals and the organizations.” These agencies noted the importance of having funding from a variety of sources in order to have “elasticity in program design, services offered, and clients served.”^{xlii} This finding has implications for agency administrators who must decide which funding opportunities to vie for and how to balance public and private funding for best effect in their services. The finding also has implications for funders who need to recognize the value of their own funds being leveraged against other more or less flexible dollars and to clearly articulate their interest in seeing co-enrollment of participants across funding streams in order to deliver a full complement of needed services.

Recipients of competitive funds and agencies using “formula funds” tied to one-year performance indicators are often frustrated by short funding windows and short term outcome measures. A recent random assignment/gold standard research study of the WorkAdvance initiative shows “sectoral programs can increase earnings among low-income individuals. But even when a program is well

² See Q3 in Appendix B

implemented, the benefits take time to emerge.... Even for individual enrolled at the experienced [provider], impacts did not emerge until the second year of follow up.^{xliii} To most effectively gauge the impact of on-ramps, funders need to incent programs to measure outcomes 8 quarters post participation via administrative data sources. Short term impacts are of limited value and often result in perverse incentives to serve only those who can most quickly “benefit” from service or to place participants in short term employment without a chance of economic or educational mobility.

Other research shows how sustained funding can build a system, allowing initiatives to dramatically improve their participant outcomes over time. The Arkansas Career Pathway Initiative (CPI) uses TANF funds to provide modest supports to low-income parents (up to 250 percent of the federal poverty level) enrolled in a targeted career pathway at a community college. CPI participants receive counseling and tutoring as well as financial assistance to pay for costs such as child care, gas, or textbooks. When it was first piloted in 2005, no one expected CPI participants to outperform the “traditional community college student”; however, that’s exactly what has happened.

CPI participants are now twice as likely to complete their programs as non-CPI community college students. Nationally, CPI participants outperform the achievements of all community college participants as well. National Student Clearinghouse research data on academic awards shows a 39 percent completion rate for all community college participants from 2008 to 2014. This is compared to 62 percent for CPI participants from 2008 to 2013.

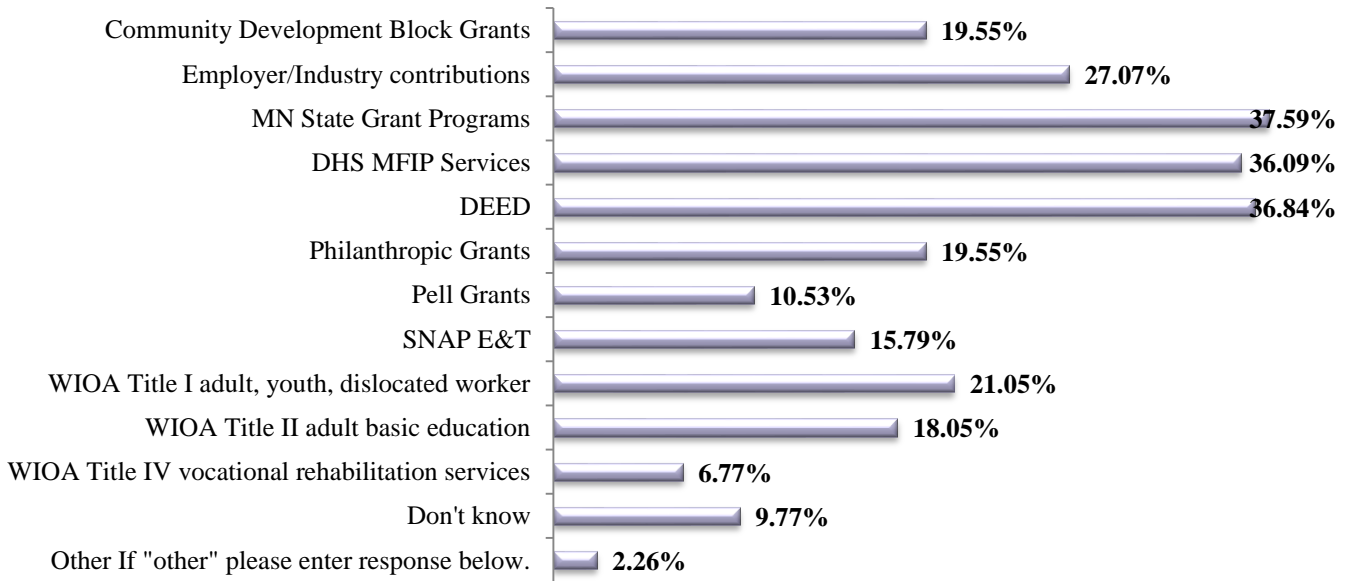
Further, when CPI participants are compared to a “matched population of their community college peers,” others who have significant education and economic disadvantages, CPI students are **six** times more likely to have completed an Associate’s degree. These results have been improving over time, telling an even more powerful story of progress. In the early days of CPI, participants achieved degrees at twice the rate of their matched peers; by 2011, they were earning AA degrees at **eight** times the rate of their community college peer group. Sustained efforts are multiplying impacts.

These educational gains are only half the story; economic gains also demonstrate CPI’s initial and growing success in creating pathways for equity. In 2006, at CPI’s outset, the total annual earnings gap between CPI participants and other Arkansas community college students was \$6,432. This wage gap narrowed to \$4,514 in 2009 and \$1,584 in 2011. In specific job sectors, the gap narrowed even further. In Education and Health Services occupations, the gap decreased from \$5,999 in 2006 to \$597 in 2011. In the Leisure and Hospitality sector, the gap is down to just \$61 a year.^{xliv}

The lesson from Arkansas’ CPI strategy is clear: despite the initial belief that many adults are not ready for training, when the right strategies and services are aligned and partnerships are sustained, these adults often fare better than traditional students, and long-term wage outcomes bear that out.

Stakeholders identified the following funding sources to providing on-ramp services to participants:

Select 3 funding sources essential to providing on-ramp services to participants³



Other responses include: VRS, governmental support, MFIP, SNAP E&T, “have pathways become a more standard program rather than year by year grant projects,” and employer dollars.

DATA

Data is needed for both continuous improvement and performance evaluation efforts. Minnesota practitioners have been building capacity to use their data through the Workforce Benchmarking Network^{xlv} and through mandated reporting via the Minnesota DEED report card^{xlvi}.

The Minnesota SLEDS team is currently evaluating the predictive value of career pathway participant interim metrics through a study with RTI. This research will test the ability to see these metrics across education and workforce development systems for adult career pathway participants and, if so, will provide information on which interim metrics correlate to further success.

WIOA shared performance indicators across adult basic education, the adult, youth, and dislocated worker programs, and vocational rehabilitation services are impacting program data collection and use as well. Unlike WIA, WIOA requires the specific linkage between state targeting policies for participants with barriers to economic success and the proposed goals for each of the common measures. The WIOA Adult program should cite the specific changes the state intends to implement in the levels of participation for individuals qualifying under the Priority of Service policy and describe how these changes are expected to impact performance results for each of the measures.

During the two-year phase in of WIOA performance accountability, DEED should take steps to document prior performance results for Priority of Service populations from each of the Title I core programs to

create a baseline against which to measure future results. Also in these next two program years, MDE will be collecting baseline data on all the shared WIOA performance measures. Having good baseline results data for targeted populations will give states an advantage in negotiating realistic goals and having the ability to direct resources to populations most in need without fear of “failing” in WIOA performance.

On-ramp practitioners, like all workforce development practitioners, need to both do better work through integrated service delivery and also understand the work they are doing better, both qualitatively (WHAT is being done) and quantitatively (what impact is it having). A program model can help practitioners think systemically about how their work can make a measurable difference in people’s lives by drawing a clear connection between the target population’s needs and the program activities and interventions. However, accountability systems must also reward providing services to those individuals most in need.

RISK-ADJUSTED MEASURES

Practitioners should not be ‘disincented’ to work with people with the highest need

As Chapin Hall University of Chicago researchers advocate, having risk adjusted measures would allow practitioners and funders to “better understand the nuances of achieving outcomes among the various populations of people served by workforce programs.” This would require having information on participant characteristics and barriers and then controlling for these factors in risk adjusted measures in order to allow programs to serve individuals with more challenging barriers and still demonstrate the value of program outcomes to funders.^{xlvii} In other words, there should be incentives to provide measurable value to participants with the most barriers.

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act includes a regression model for performance accountability. WIOA requires the Secretaries of Labor and Education to jointly develop “an objective statistical model” (more likely multiple models) based on economic conditions and participant characteristics to be used in setting state performance targets for each of the common measures. The participant characteristics include: 1) indicators of poor work history; 2) lack of work experience; 3) lack of education or occupational skills attainment; 4) dislocation from high-wage and high-benefit employment; 5) low levels of literacy; 6) low levels of English proficiency; 7) disability status; 8) homelessness; 9) ex-offender status; and 10) welfare dependency.^{xlviii}

Private and government funders of on-ramp programs should understand the risk-adjustment models used in MN WIOA programs and other potential co-enrollment programs and build upon them to advance equity and incent providers to serve participants with barriers. Additionally, on-ramp programs accountability models should include other factors—such as gender, race/ethnicity, and age—as needed to improve the models’ ability to adjust for important differences in the populations served by the state and local areas.

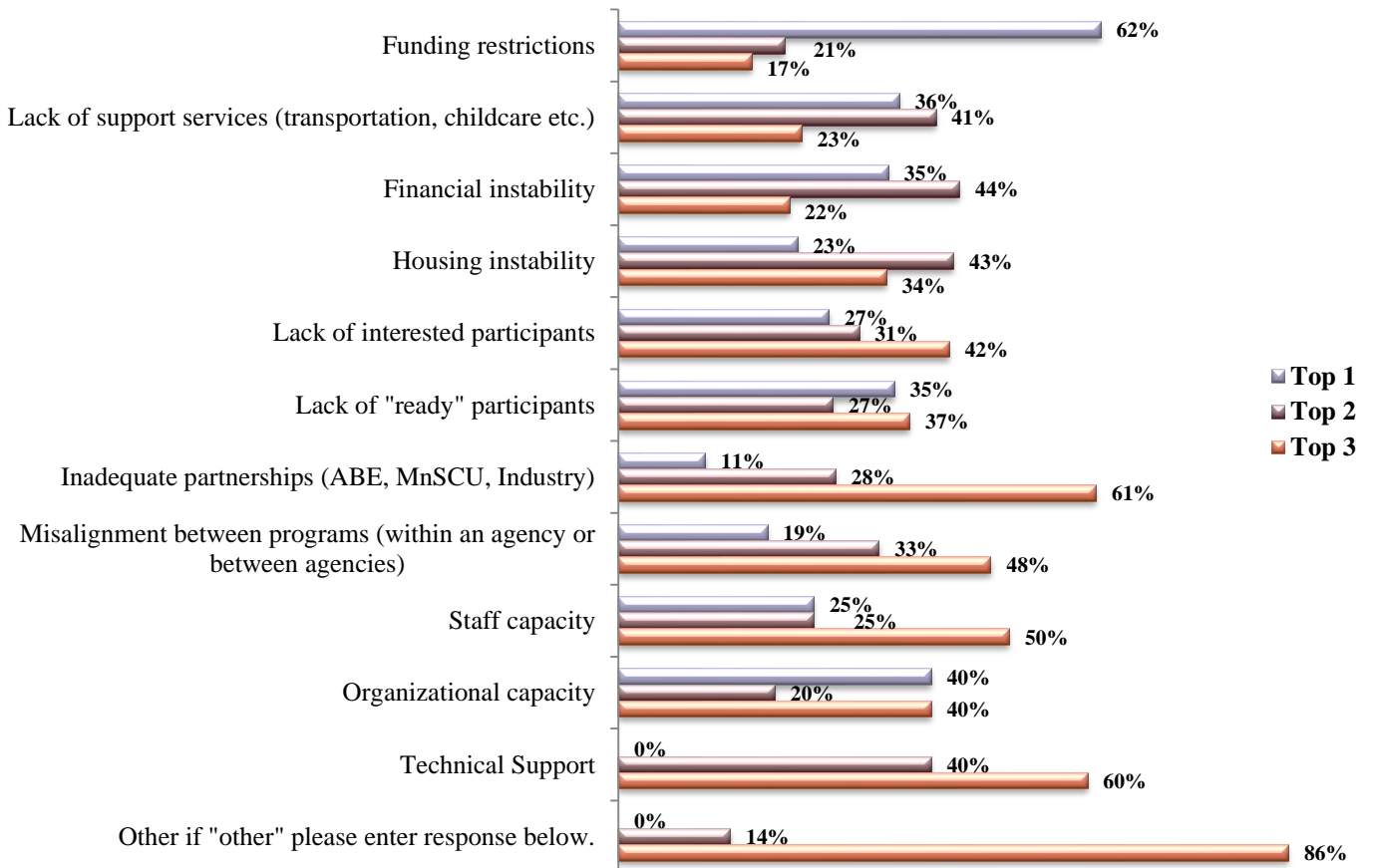
On-ramp providers will need significant support in understanding how to use risk-adjusted accountability to provide services to individuals who need them the most.

Barriers

The service model and system components described above will not surprise any Minnesota workforce development leader or practitioner and neither will the comprehensive list of barriers identified in the on-ramp survey.

Stakeholders identified both organizational barriers and structural barriers to making progress in on-ramps:

Rank the top 3 barriers to providing on-ramp services to the participants you serve⁴



“Other” responses include: No incentives for clients, space, resistance by parents/guardians, language barriers, participants who are not interested in obtaining self-sufficiency, background challenges, skills assessments, employers are not flexible enough to work with candidates, sick childcare, lacking educational background, and limited financial resources.

Barriers need to be addressed individually but also systemically. Like climate science data, the evidence of educational and economic disparities in Minnesota has been steadily building for decades. Initially it was met with denial, identified as limited to certain circumstances or maybe even unalterable realities, but recognition of the problem and solutions is growing.

³ See Q4 in Appendix B

Like climate science deniers or skeptics who believed solar was a “green job” delusion and electric cars would never be made in Detroit, some educators and workforce development professionals simply can’t conceive of systemic reform that would make career pathway systems a reality. What could possibly make “functioning” systems (*Of course, we ask Functioning for whom? And with what impact?*) decide to take on the disruptive challenge of career pathway system building? But external realities will ultimately force change on even the most calcified of structures, and Minnesota has leadership at all levels who have been steadily calling out the problem, wrestling with solutions, and looking to break down the barriers to needed change.

Exemplary Program

There are innumerable ways to operationalize the three components of a career pathway on-ramp. Below is *one* example of an on-ramp program in Minnesota that serves high barrier populations with comprehensive services, quick attachment to quality employment, and continued engagement for educational and career advancement.

IIMN Hotel Housekeeping Training and Employment Program

I. Stabilization & Supportive Services

International Institute of Minnesota has helped immigrants and refugees resettle in Minnesota for nearly 100 years. Refugee resettlement includes full family supports in community services including furnishing an apartment, enrolling children in school, connecting to health services, learning transportation systems and immigration and citizenship services.

II. Integrated Education and Training (IET)

IIMN is also a WIOA Adult Basic Education provider and an employment trainer. While well-known for their medical career pathways, this IET program was started in response to participants' needs for attaching to full-time work with benefits without high levels of academic preparation.

Hotel Housekeeping Class

Offered year-round

6-week class: Recommended for students who want to work in hotel housekeeping

This 100-hour class trains prospective hotel housekeepers in customer service, industry-specific English, housekeeping skills, and soft skills. Students receive workers' safety and speed training.

III. Employment, Retention, and Re-engagement

IIMN actively works with employers, advocating for livable wages for program completers, and both helping employers take advantage of tax incentives for hiring their participants and improve employers' abilities to work well with these new hires through courses tailored to employers.

Communication with English Second Language Learners

By Appointment

Customized for employers

45 minutes-2 hours depending on employer needs

This customizable workshop will teach immediate supervisors and hospitality managers effective communication strategies for people with beginning to intermediate English language capability.

Working with Diversity Among Refugees and Asylees in Minnesota

By Appointment

Customized for employers

45 minutes-2 hours, depending on employer needs

The hospitality industry has long been a place of linguistic and cultural diversity. This workshop is tailored for workplace training days and addresses cross-cultural communication topics specific to Minnesota's linguistically diverse population, as well as to employers of refugees and asylees.

Additionally, IIMN re-engages participants in additional career pathway IET:

Housekeeping Supervisor Training

Offered year-round

3-week class: Recommended for working housekeepers

We help experienced, working housekeepers gain the skills needed to move into a supervisory or training position. Through classes and collaborative workshops with our Hotel Housekeeping class, students will learn positive feedback and teaching techniques as well as develop supervisory skills.

Hotel Management Bridge and Support Course

Offered year-round

3-week class and ongoing support during first college semester

For clients who want to pursue a degree in hospitality management at Normandale Community College

This course is designed to prepare students currently working in the hospitality industry for college-level courses in hotel department management. Students will gain industry-specific skills such as critical thinking, college writing, and technological fluency to support them in pursuing a college degree in hospitality management.

Conclusion

On-ramps are not a body of work separate from the larger career pathway system design. An on-ramp must connect to a longer path, and simply building on-ramps without attention to the path people reach at the end will not have lasting impacts for the individual or for systemic change.

Minnesota's new reality – skilled employment needs within the context of an aging workforce being refreshed by a demographically diverse workforce that has been disproportionately impacted by educational and economic barriers – is complex. The solutions lie in partnerships and inter- and intra-agency alignment at the state and local level to build comprehensive interventions, dynamically sustain them through shared investment, and continuously improve them to meet the realities of individuals and economies.

Appendix A

On May 24-25, 2016, CLASP and Future Services Institute/Humphrey School of Public Affairs staff conducted interviews with stakeholders selected to represent current on-ramp or career pathway programs:

- Boyd Brown, Goodwill/EasterSeals
- Carol Dombek, SW MN Private Industry Council
- Leslie Dwight, TCRise
- Trixie Goldberg, LifeTrack
- Cathy Grady, MN literacy
- Jane Graupman, II MN
- Joe Hobot, American Indian OIC
- Louis King, Summit Academy OIC
- Kelly Matter, Resource
- Shelia Olson, Goodwill/EasterSeals
- Tuleah Palmer, NW Indian Community Development Corporation
- Ekta Prakash, CAPI
- Jane Samargia, HIRED
- Tina Simonson, Washington County Workforce Development
- John Thorson, Hennepin County
- Bao Vang, Hmong American Parntership
- Claudia Wasserman, CommonBond
- Mike Wynne, Emerge

Participants were given the following interview:

MSPWIN Career Pathway On-Ramp Interview

Equity in workforce education career pathways/credentials has been defined this way:

- Equity as a dimension of quality credentials helps people overcome their disadvantages and connect to opportunities. Equity provides a network of flexible access points and supports that connect people to credential attainment and the benefits of lifelong learning.
- There are on-ramps and practical supports to enable educational access for people with varying abilities, preparation, and/or prior credentials or unfinished credentials. Low-skill, low-income, first-generation, and other disadvantaged individuals can find and pursue credentialing options that meet their needs.
- The credential is an enabling mechanism for promoting education, social, and /or economic mobility.^{xlix}

Our task is to define the kinds of services that make up the “on-ramp” to secondary and/or postsecondary career pathways for individuals with barriers to employment. While your agency may

offer a wide variety of programs and resources, the focus for our conversation today is the workforce education and training or employment services programs your agency provides.

1. Minnesota workforce development and adult basic education state plans focus on a career pathways approach. The federal WFD/ABE system and federal higher education financial aid system now share the same CP definition¹ and encourage partnerships to build comprehensive career pathways; how do you see your program participants and your services in this definition?
2. How does your agency provide on-ramps to career pathways?
3. Is there a common profile (or range of profiles) of your program participants? (demographics, barriers, etc)
4. Generally, what are the primary goals of your participants? (education, employment, other)
5. What are the primary types of services provided for participants during program participation? (adult basic education/postsecondary education; training; counseling; cognitive behavioral interventions; etc - follow up questions on models within these services)
6. What performance accountability metrics are part of your work? How are they tied to specific services?
7. What types of assessment do you use with your program participants?
 - a. Academic (Placement? Diagnostic? Progress?)
 - b. Employability (workforce prep; work readiness; soft skills)
 - c. Interest/fit (career inventory)
 - d. Other (mental health, family needs)
8. How do the assessments define the goals set and services provided for participants?
9. What post-program services do you offer? (retention, reengagement)
10. How does success in your program position a person for the next step in a career pathway? How are you engaged in that next step?
11. Who are your primary service partners? Describe the partnership.
12. Are you/have you been a MN FastTRAC or Pathways to Prosperity grant recipient?
 - e. Yes. Please share your experience implementing the grant (opportunities, challenges, what's missing from current model, etc.)
 - f. No. Why not? (opportunities, challenges, what's missing from current model, etc.)
13. What suggestions do you have for on-ramp models to enhance the MN career pathway framework? (What's essential: job placement? Skill gain? Wage gain? Credential attainment? Postsecondary success? Other?)

Appendix B

In July 2016, 133 Minnesota stakeholders completed an on-ramp survey fielded by Futures Services Institute at the Humphrey School of Public Affairs. Content for the survey was developed by CLASP and Future Services Institute staff based on research and the results of stakeholder interviews (Appendix A).

From 133 respondents, the survey yielded the following results:

Q1: What is your role in the organization?

Positions	Percent	Count
Program Manager/Case Manager/Workforce Development Trainer/Manager	26%	35
Career counselor	18%	24
Director	14%	19
Financial/Eligibility Specialist/Intake Coordinator	8%	10
Administrative/Business Manager	7%	9
Policy/Research	4%	5
HR/Recruiter	3%	4
Educator	2%	3
Other	4%	5
*Total	86%	114

*This question was skipped by 19 respondents.

Q2: Select up to 6 on-ramp services essential to providing career-pathway opportunities to participants that you believe are essential.

Answer	Percent	Count
Skill development in: critical thinking, time management, conflict resolution, employment retention	75%	100
Childcare	65%	87
Transportation assistance	62%	83
Career awareness/exposure	52%	69
Contextualized foundational skills and occupational training	45%	60
High school credential/equivalency (GED)	44%	59
Digital literacy	41%	55
Goal setting	41%	54
Financial literacy: such as Household management, FAFSA, Student loans	38%	51
Mental health services	37%	49
Industry recognized credentials	34%	45
Occupational training	30%	40
Subsidized employment	29%	38
Re-engagement in education/training	26%	34
Creating professional networks	20%	26
Other	17%	23
Total	100%	133

Q3: Select 3 essential partners employment services should engage with to provide effective on-ramp services to participants.

Answer	Percent	Count
Adult Basic Education Providers	71%	95
Employers/Industry specific by-in	59%	79
MFIP Employment Services	38%	51
Minnesota State College & Universities	38%	51
Mental Health Service Providers	31%	41
Public Housing Authorities	26%	34
Refugee/Immigrant Employment Services	17%	23
Other	6%	8
Total	100%	133

Q4: Rank the top 3 barriers to providing on-ramp services to the participants you serve.

Question	Top 1		Top 2		Top 3		Total
Funding restrictions	62%	29	21%	10	17%	8	47
Lack of support services (transportation, childcare etc.)	36%	23	41%	26	23%	15	64
Financial instability	35%	19	44%	24	22%	12	55
Housing instability	23%	8	43%	15	34%	12	35
Lack of interested participants	27%	7	31%	8	42%	11	26
Lack of "ready" participants	35%	18	27%	14	37%	19	51
Inadequate partnerships (ABE, MnSCU, Industry)	11%	2	28%	5	61%	11	18
Misalignment between programs (within an agency or between agencies)	19%	4	33%	7	48%	10	21
Staff capacity	25%	4	25%	4	50%	8	16
Organizational capacity	40%	4	20%	2	40%	4	10
Technical Support	0%	0	40%	2	60%	3	5
Other	0%	0	14%	1	86%	6	7

Q5: Select the top 3 target populations in need of on-ramp services.

Answer	Percent	Count
People who are working in low-wage, unstable jobs	67%	89
People without work history	53%	71
People re-entering from incarceration	46%	61
Non-native English speakers	38%	51
People testing at low-reading levels	36%	48
People with young children	36%	48
People preparing for college	8%	11
Other	6%	8
Total	100%	133

Q6: Select 3 funding sources essential to providing on-ramp services to participants.

Answer	Percent	Count
MN State Grant Programs	38%	50
DEED	37%	49
DHS MFIP Services	36%	48
Employer/Industry contributions	27%	36
WIOA Title I adult, youth, dislocated worker	21%	28
Community Development Block Grants	20%	26
Philanthropic Grants	20%	26
WIOA Title II adult basic education	18%	24
SNAP E&T	16%	21
Pell Grants	11%	14
Don't know	10%	13
WIOA Title IV vocational rehabilitation services	7%	9
Other	2%	3
Total	100%	133

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