

Career Pathways and Adult Education

September 2017 | Judy Mortrude



Adult educators play a strong role in workforce development, which creates both individual prosperity and regional economic competitiveness. Too many working Americans have low foundational skills that keep them from thriving in the workplace and attaining their educational and career goals. In fact, nearly 30 percent of adults with household incomes at or below the poverty line lack a high school credential. Meanwhile, nearly 40 percent of adults enrolled in adult education are unemployed. New strategies are needed!

Innovative practitioners across the country shaped *Career Pathways*, the service delivery model that Congress defined both in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and Higher Education Act (HEA). WIOA mandates that local workforce boards convene their education partners to develop and implement career pathways, especially for people with barriers to success. And the HEA's "Ability to Benefit" provision enables adults without a high school diploma to get Pell Grants through eligible career pathway programs.

(7) CAREER PATHWAY.—The term “career pathway” means a combination of rigorous and high-quality education, training, and other services that—

(A) aligns with the skill needs of industries in the economy of the State or regional economy involved;

(B) prepares an individual to be successful in any of a full range of secondary or postsecondary education options, including apprenticeships registered under the Act of August 16, 1937 (commonly known as the “National Apprenticeship Act”; 50 Stat. 664, chapter 663; 29 U.S.C. 50 et seq.) (referred to individually in this Act as an “apprenticeship”, except in section 171);

(C) includes counseling to support an individual in achieving the individual’s education and career goals;

(D) includes, as appropriate, education offered concurrently with and in the same context as workforce preparation activities and training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster;

(E) organizes education, training, and other services to meet the particular needs of an individual in a manner that accelerates the educational and career advancement of the individual to the extent practicable;

(F) enables an individual to attain a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, and at least 1 recognized postsecondary credential; and

(G) helps an individual enter or advance within a specific occupation or occupational cluster.

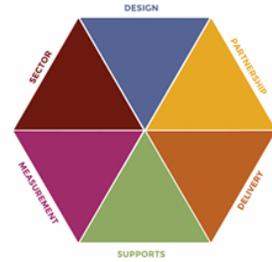
Integrated Education and Training (IET) is an optimal instructional strategy for adult education within career pathways. Elements “D” and “E” (see definition on left) align with the IET elements of concurrent activity and contextualization as acceleration strategies.

34 CFR §463.34 (WIOA) and 20 USC § 1091(d)(2) (HEA)

A career pathway program delivers the foundational and occupational skills that local employers value as well as the supports individuals need to be successful. But, these programs are not enough. Adult educators must partner to build programs that seamlessly align into pathways and are supported by **career pathway systems**.

Career Pathway System Building

While career pathways programs take multiple forms, the most effective and sustainable pathways operate within systems that address six core elements.



Core Element	Components	Guiding Questions
 Sector	Focusing on an industry with a skills shortage, engaging employers based on occupational targets, and producing skills that are portable (supporting occupational mobility).	What workforce need in the regional/state economy will the career pathway address? How will the skills created be portable and relevant over time?
 Design	Building the pathway for a defined population of participants; addressing starting skills levels, featuring course and credential sequencing, providing multiple entry and exit points as well as alignment across settings, and awarding credentials that stack (supporting educational and economic mobility).	Who is the career pathway intended to serve and how will it do so? How is the pathway designed from a participant perspective? How do the educational components connect as participants move between settings and stages?
 Partnership	Forming and maintaining collaborations based on shared goals and aligned responsibilities, with defined leadership, governance, and funding.	Who comes together to create, implement, and sustain the career pathway? What resources and responsibilities does each player bring? How do partners find common language as well as articulate and pursue shared goals, while meeting their individual accountabilities?
 Delivery	Using participant-focused, evidence-based practices that incorporate contextualized instruction, concurrent remediation, dual enrollment, competency-based education, work-based learning, integrated education, and training.	What instructional strategies will be used to produce results from the career pathway? How does the pathway make use of academic and occupational skill building and work-based learning approaches?
 Supports	Providing participants with services based on individual assessment of needs and including active advising, career navigation, case coordination, and referrals to specialized suppliers.	How does the career pathway address the holistic needs of participants to enhance their success? How is equity considered in providing differentiated supports for individual participants?
 Measurement	Tracking progress through shared use of data, selection of metrics, and commitment to formative and summative assessment to inform continuous improvement.	How is success defined for the career pathway? How is data assembled to assess success? What is the approach to continuous improvement?