

SEPTEMBER 2010

ISSUE BRIEF

CAREER LADDERS AND PATHWAYS FOR THE HARD-TO-EMPLOY

Alison Gash and Melissa Mack

SUMMARY OF BRIEF

Featuring examples from initiatives that combine the efforts of employers, educators, and workforce development experts, this brief identifies key principles for successfully implementing career ladders and pathways in programs that allow hard-to-employ job-seekers to enter and advance in the workforce.

ABOUT THIS BRIEF

This Issue Brief was written by Alison Gash and Melissa Mack of Social Policy Research. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of ETA.

This Brief was developed on behalf of the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration (ETA) under project DOLB091A20808, Technical Assistance to WIRED Grantees Serving Disadvantaged Populations project. Under this project, Social Policy Research Associates (SPR), in partnership with Mathematica Policy Research (Mathematica), provided technical assistance to assisted eight grantees of the Workforce Innovation and Regional Economic Development (WIRED) Initiative to assist them in their efforts to expanding economic opportunities for disadvantaged populations. Project Manager: Vinz Koller (SPR).

This Issue Brief is one of a series of four developed for this project.



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INTRODUCTION

The concept of the career ladder or career pathway has proven to be an effective basis for strategies aimed at developing the careers of incumbent workers. Because career ladder programs allow employers to shift resources from recruitment into employee investment, they provide employees with better access to training and contribute to improved employee retention and productivity.¹ In the last few years, an increasing number of workforce investment boards (WIBs) and workforce providers have been applying career ladder principles to a rather different task: training the unemployed and hard-to-employ. This strategy has shown considerable promise as a way of meeting the needs of this population.

Based on the successful practices employed by a range of career pathways programs for low-skill, unemployed individuals, this Issue Brief presents a set of six principles that should be the basis for the development of any program intending to use career ladder strategies as a means of bringing hard-to-employ individuals into the workforce and keeping them there.

Career ladder and career pathway programs for incumbent workers generally use interconnected educational increments, complemented by support services, to help participants ascend a career ladder in an in-demand industry or occupation.² For traditional pathway programs (those training incumbent workers) the basic goal is to make it easier for employers to advance their own employees so that they don't have to look elsewhere to fill higher-level positions.

Most career-ladder and career-pathway initiatives for incumbent workers hinge upon partnerships with three critical groups: employers experiencing a labor-supply shortage, educators who can offer customized basic and career-specific training, and workforce development experts who specialize in recruitment and skills assessment. Programs frequently make use of job placement specialists who locate employers and job openings that have advancement potential, as well as case managers who

work closely with clients to match skills and interests with promising career paths and map out support and training strategies for entering the career ladder. Typically, training is customized to meet industry requirements while expediting student completion. Trainings are often provided at the work-site, are scheduled to accommodate work schedules, and are partially or completely subsidized through employer contributions and WIA funds.

WIBs, community colleges, and community-based organizations across the country, aided in part by sector-based funding from DOL, have developed such programs in a variety of industries, including health care, manufacturing, and agriculture. In health care, for instance, career ladder programs have given food service workers and transportation specialists in hospitals the training they need to become Certified Nursing Assistants, and they have enabled CNAs to move up the career ladder and become Certified Medical Assistants or Licensed Practical Nurses.

The reasons for the success of career-ladder programs for incumbent workers are relatively clear. Most current employees already possess the foundations for advancement in their industries or companies; training can easily be integrated into the work schedule; both employees and employers can easily understand the benefits of participation. In contrast, programs designed to place unemployed, low-skilled individuals into career pathways must contend with several challenges not faced by incumbent worker programs. How will individuals be recruited into the pathways program? What steps should be taken to sustain employer engagement and investment? Finally, and most importantly, how can the pathways approach accommodate clients deficient in basic skills or possessing various barriers to employment?

Although individuals with moderate- to long-term unemployment have a wide range of barriers to employment, the typical hard-to-employ person has insufficient educational and work experience, poorly developed basic and soft skills, and limited English proficiency. In addition, many individuals considered hard-to-employ have serious training obstacles due to lack of childcare, lack of transportation, and housing instability.³ Many have severe financial constraints that put them in need of immediate employment and render them less likely than other training candidates to be able to participate in or complete traditional long-term training programs or training prerequisites. Due to these barriers, hard-to-employ individuals may have longer and more frequent spells of unemployment, which, over time, may reduce the likelihood that they will obtain stable, living wage employment.⁴

Adding to the challenge of assisting individuals facing multiple barriers to employment is the current economic crisis. The rate of job creation continues to fall; in July of 2010, the economy lost 131,000 jobs, and the unemployment rate remained at 9.5 percent.⁵ Those out of work for six months or longer now make up 40 percent of all unemployed people. In addition to compounding the difficulty of obtaining employment for those already facing barriers, the poor state of the

economy has rendered innovative career pathway programs difficult to fund. Workforce programs and training providers such as the community colleges are having to do more with less, while public and private employer partners face hiring freezes.

Despite this challenging context, many entities have prioritized the career pathway approach in their efforts to train, place, and support those with barriers to employment, precisely because of their belief in the effectiveness of this approach. To circumvent the funding problem, they have used a variety of approaches, from obtaining public grants or private foundation support to relying on employer contributions.

Several aspects of career pathway programs make them well suited to meet the needs of the hard-to-employ, even in a tight economy:

- **Because they are industry-focused, career pathway programs can achieve better placement results.** Based on industry and employer input, pathway programs are tailored to fill current or anticipated labor shortages and meet changes in skill requirements. Consequently, relative to individuals who use traditional workforce development services, industry-centered training participants tend to have higher rates of job placement and retention, and earn higher wages.⁶
- **Career pathway programs can address participants' immediate financial needs while facilitating long-term advancement.** Rather than focusing solely on placement in the first job, a career ladders approach helps an individual gain employment in an occupation with advancement potential and develop a plan to advance along a pipeline within the occupation once hired. The placement success of an industry-targeted program helps a participant meet immediate financial needs while the career pipeline approach allows him or her to fulfill longer-term goals for meaningful employment, thus effectively breaking the cycle of employment instability.
- **The team approach of career pathway programs gives participants more seamless support and a more entwined safety net.** Rather than working in isolation, or through infrequent meetings and telephone calls, case managers, training providers, and employers work together to provide a continuum of training, job placement, and support services that is more efficient and easier to navigate than many other workforce training programs.
- **Career pathway programs can be customized to meet the individual needs of participants.** They can work around scheduling difficulties, geographic limitations, and learning impediments and remain flexible to changing circumstances.

CAREER PATHWAY PRINCIPLES

Although career pathway programs for the hard-to-employ are relatively new, many of the agencies and organizations developing these programs have invested considerable time and expertise in learning how to take full advantage of these potential benefits. They have learned many lessons and implemented many successful practices. Therefore, workforce entities, training providers, and employers who want to develop career ladder/pathway programs for harder-to-employ individuals do not have to “re-invent the wheel.”

Our survey of career pathway programs that have been successful in training and placing low-skilled, hard-to-employ individuals in employment reveals that these programs share several basic attributes, regardless of the targeted industry. These attributes can be distilled into six basic principles:

1. **Partner with industries/employers** in all aspects of program design to assure that training is relevant and to increase employer investment in the program and its students.
2. **Create incremental pathways** that include employment opportunities with short-term, moderate, and long-term training requirements to expedite job placement while maintaining a focus on career advancement.
3. **Promote partnerships between training providers, WIBs, and organizations that work with the hard-to-employ** to help streamline recruitment and promote completion.
4. **Make training accessible and flexible** by varying training sites and schedules, reducing or accommodating language and learning barriers, and developing drop-out prevention services or policies.
5. **Integrate basic skills remediation with career-specific content** to maintain participant engagement and expedite program completion.
6. **Conduct frequent and relevant evaluations** to improve career ladder programs and maintain (or attract) partnerships.

1. Partner with Employers and Industry Sectors

Partnerships between industry and service providers are a critical component of any successful career advancement strategy. This is especially true when working to support career pathways for low-income workers and other hard-to-employ populations. Workforce training providers must orient training toward high-growth industries that have immediate and projected job opportunities. Employer partners and consortia can provide information about labor demand and skills requirements, which is important in developing any successful career pathway program and essential for hard-to-employ populations. Furthermore, employer-engagement strategies should be customized to the community environment. For ex-

ample, outreach in rural communities may require a one-on-one, small-business approach, while employers in urban areas may respond to higher-profile strategic efforts.

The programs highlighted in this issue brief have found that the following strategies support alignment of career pathways training with employer and industry needs:

- Form or expand existing employer consortium(s) to inform and design customized career pathways for low-income workers.
- Conduct employer surveys and/or regional labor market scans to create training that is based on real-time employer demand.
- Maintain open and on-going communication with employers and/or consortium members with the frequency that best meets their needs (monthly, quarterly, as-needed) and in the venue (on-site or off-site) that’s most convenient for them.

2. Create Incremental Pathways

Incremental training gives participants the possibility of an immediate pay-off while providing them with opportunities to improve their job prospects over the longer term. Programs that offer only short-term training may struggle to place their participants into meaningful employment. On the other hand, organizations that focus only on placing participants into jobs requiring long-term training will likely deter a significant number of potential participants who need immediate employment. A mix of short-term, moderate-term, and long-term training maximizes participation while promoting job growth.

The strategy of creating incremental pathways has several key aspects:

- Develop a tiered training scheme that offers immediate access or advancement opportunities for students who want to commit to longer-term training, even if they need substantive remediation first.
- Provide multiple trainings that result in “stackable” credentials recognized by employers.
- Where industry-specific career ladders are not possible, design short-term trainings in multiple and related occupations that offer the opportunity for lateral movement and direct advancement.

3. Promote Partnerships Between Training Providers and Organizations that Work with the Hard-To-Employ

Unlike incumbent worker initiatives, which have a captive and relatively knowledgeable audience, career pathways programs that focus on harder-to-place individuals have to overcome many obstacles in their attempts to attract and retain poten-

tial participants for specific pathways. Drawing on multiple providers to recruit and support these individuals is one critical component of many successful programs. For example, while community colleges are often instrumental as the sites for low-cost, short-term, technical-skills training, they may lack the financial and staffing wherewithal to support students with high needs and barriers to education and employment. Similarly, organizations focused on recruitment, case management, and support may be less equipped to provide students with the industry-specific knowledge necessary to help them navigate employment and training opportunities.

In order to address these capacity gaps, the “best practice” providers we surveyed have developed three important partnership strategies:

- Provide case management jointly with organizations that have relationships with career ladder participants.
- Integrate training and case management.
- Offer case managers and WIB staff an overview of industry basics.

4. Make Training Accessible to Participants

Career pathways programs serving the chronically unemployed or under-employed can face challenges when attempting to provide training to individuals with multiple barriers to participation in training. Childcare and transportation difficulties may prevent participants from attending or continuing with their training. Scheduling complications can hinder participant availability during weekday training hours. Individuals with limited English proficiency may be discouraged from participating in the training. Daily and unforeseen expenses can drastically limit the financial feasibility of program participation. In addition to determining the barriers participants face in securing employment, then, career pathway initiatives should identify the potential impediments that may prevent participants from participating in training and develop strategies for reducing or removing these obstacles.

The career pathway programs we interviewed use several common strategies for making training accessible to hard-to-employ participants:

- Offer evening and weekend classes.
- Provide flexibility around course completion when students encounter unforeseen barriers.
- Develop web-based training—offered online or out of mobile sites—for individuals in rural areas who may lack access to home computers and the Internet.
- Provide career-specific ESL courses to introduce participants to the career pathways.
- Subsidize training to permit low-income participants with pressing financial needs to participate.

5. Integrate Basic Skills Remediation with Career-Specific Content

Just as trainings for incumbent workers may be customized to accommodate the busy schedules of working students, training programs for low-skilled participants can be customized to allow participants to improve basic skills while working towards the completion of prerequisites.

Successful programs work closely with community colleges and other training providers to create numerous ways of integrating skills remediation with career-specific training:

- Align skill remediation goals with career pipeline objectives.
- Teach basic skills within the context of career training or exploration.
- Offer vocationally focused English as a Second Language courses.
- Maintain learning cohorts to enable trainees to support each other.
- Offer different combinations of credit and non-credit trainings.

6. Conduct Frequent and Relevant Evaluations

A strong data analysis system is essential for any workforce development program. For programs working with the hard-to-employ, however, program evaluation is especially critical. Employer partners may be skeptical of the benefits of working with individuals with barriers to employment. Training providers may not recognize the value of customizing or modifying training elements. A record of successful performance can counter such prejudices and promote buy-in. Success stories can be the basis of marketing that encourages program sustainability and, in some cases, expansion.

In addition to tracking training completion, hiring, wage gain, and retention, the featured career ladder programs for the hard-to-employ implement a number of additional evaluation-related measures:

- Reserve or secure funds for external or more intensive program evaluation.
- Build marketing into program elements.
- Conduct follow-up with employer participants.

STRATEGIES IN ACTION

The principles and strategies outlined above will be applied differently in different geographic regions and regional labor markets, and they need to be adapted to the local range of workforce intermediaries, training providers, and organizations with expertise serving individuals with barriers to em-

ployment. This section offers examples of the principles and strategies as they are being applied in a variety of different contexts.

Partnering with Employers and Industry Sectors

Rhodes State College in west central Ohio conducted an intensive survey of the region's manufacturing sector to determine immediate and projected hiring needs, skills requirements, and wages. Through ongoing dialogue with the state's leading manufacturing employers, the college realized that most job vacancies required skills more advanced than what the training providers had offered to teach. The survey results prompted Rhodes State and manufacturing employers to form the **West Central Ohio Manufacturing Consortium**, an association of dues-paying manufacturing employers interested in customizing career advancement opportunities to address labor supply shortages. The Consortium worked with Rhodes State to develop a multi-tiered manufacturing training program. Level 1 provides an overview of basic manufacturing terminology and processes. Students in level 2 receive an occupational certificate from either Rhodes State or a private technical college. The curriculum offered through Rhodes State is condensed into one year. Students also have the option of pursuing an Associates or Bachelor's Degree as part of the third—or advanced—level of training. Staff members maintain open lines of communication to keep consortium members informed and continually update member incentives and benefits to promote active engagement.

The **Lane Workforce Partnership** in western Oregon capitalized on an existing health care consortium to offer career ladders training in health care to individuals receiving TANF. This health-care-focused career-ladder program helped individuals receiving TANF to enter and complete training as certified nursing assistants, medical office assistants, pharmacy techs, and registered nurses. The initiative relied on existing relationships with employers and training providers established through the Community Healthcare Education Network (CHEN). CHEN employer members and Lane Community College worked together to create short-term training opportunities for individuals with immediate employment needs as well as longer-term advanced training for those with longer-term employment goals. Intensive case management and support services were provided through a partnership between TANF case managers and WIA providers.

Based on the results of "environmental scans" in energy generation and energy efficiency, the San Francisco Bay Area Consortium of Community Colleges formed the **New Energy Workforce (NEW) Initiative** to seek direction about the most pressing industry needs. The NEW Initiative convened a group of energy employers in early 2007 to explore their willingness to offer internships to students training at the community colleges for energy occupations. One direct result of the employer input was a two-year grant (2007–2009) from the Community Colleges' Chancellor's Office to provide occupational training for jobs in the energy industry. Industry

partners legitimized the proposal by confirming the need for training and provided invaluable assistance in compiling labor market data, writing portions of the grant, and committing to offering internships to future trainees.

The **Breaking Through Initiative** run by Jobs for the Future (JFF) and the National Council for Workforce Education has been very effective helping low-skilled adults access occupational and technical training. The directors of the initiative credit their success with placing hard-to-serve job candidates in high-growth career ladders, in part, to their strong connection to employers. Staff members spend time at employers' work sites to fully understand their hiring needs and what future employees need if they are to advance in the industry. Because employers are fully integrated into program development and implementation, they have a sense of ownership over the outcomes. Moreover, their participation gives them an opportunity to get to know students, increasing the likelihood that they will hire the students and promoting early investment in student progress.

Creating Incremental Pathways

The **West Central Ohio Manufacturing Consortium** created a three-tiered career pathway to allow both low-skilled and higher-skilled individuals to access employment in manufacturing. The first, or basic, tier trains participants in manufacturing terminology and processes and serves as the foundational pathway. Although the tier is primarily geared towards individuals with a GED, higher-skilled participants often participate in the program to brush up on the basics. At the end of the 40-hour training participants receive an industry-recognized certificate. Quite a few of the basic-tier graduates progress to second tier training.

Because the health care industry is an optimal field for implementing an incremental career-ladder program, there are many examples of health-care-focused career pathway programs around the country. A **Denver-based JFF** program helps participants in health care career pathways experience immediate success by providing CNA training to low-skilled participants and then helping students leverage this training in their pursuit of more advanced health care careers. Similarly, students enrolled in CNA training through **JFF's south Texas health care pathway program** can use credits earned in the training toward a more advanced degree or certificate. Typically, CNA trainings in south Texas are considered non-credit classes, but through the career pathway program, the CNA credits are held in escrow and made available when the students matriculate into a for-credit pathway. Many students enrolled in the CNA program simultaneously complete their GEDs. The **Lane Workforce Partnership's healthcare cluster** offers TANF recipients the opportunity to enter a variety of trainings, ranging from shorter-term CNA or Medical Office Assistant training to long-term Registered Nursing programs.

Based on employer feedback, the **NEW Initiative** in the San Francisco Bay Region narrowed its focus to the solar power

industry and identified five occupations in the industry that were in demand and for which community colleges in the region had the infrastructure and faculty expertise to quickly develop short-term training programs:

- Photovoltaic (solar panel) installer
- Solar-thermal (hot water heater) installer
- Sales representative
- Solar designer and engineer
- Installation manager/project foreman

These five occupations are not structured on the basis of a typical linear career ladder. Rather, due to skills shared across the positions, the short-term trainings not only prepare students for one occupation but also develop capacity for lateral movement within and between solar employers.

Promoting Partnerships between Training Providers and Organizations that Work with the Hard-To-Employ

Rather than creating parallel recruitment and case management systems to identify and support hard-to-employ participants, the **Lane Workforce Partnership** limited its recruitment to individuals receiving TANF and partnered with TANF case managers. The program's health care pathway relies on an "intensive case management" model to help keep its students engaged in training. WIA providers partner with TANF case managers to develop training plans for each of the 40 participants in the program. Coordination between TANF and Lane County staff allows participants to work with TANF case managers who are familiar with the obstacles participants may encounter throughout the training but who are also well-informed about training specifics. Additionally, the "intensive case management" approach safeguards against participants falling through the cracks in the event of a personal emergency. Staff members are quickly apprised of obstacles and work with TANF case managers to help the participants complete their training.

The Career Ladders Project (CLP) is a nonprofit organization based in Oakland, California, that was created in response to a state-level call for a comprehensive career ladders initiative. CLP operated out of a commitment to career pathways, and particularly to the strategy of pairing training providers with human service organizational expertise, in designing its **Gateway Project**, a six-county project designed to provide bridges to community college and careers for disadvantaged or disconnected youth, especially those in or aging out of foster care. In one Gateway site, **Los Medanos Community College** in Pittsburgh, California, the case manager attends class with her 25-student cohort for the duration of the 14-week Early Childhood Education training program. (This cycle occurs once per year.) Initial concern that community college faculty would resist the case manager presence turned out to be unfounded, in part because the resources (especially for

counseling) are currently so limited at the community colleges (and the teachers so over-committed) that any additional support for students was welcome. The case manager maintains close contact with the teachers in and out of the classroom, and finds that it is invaluable to be the mediator between students, teachers, and the many other parties involved in the lives of the predominantly court-involved youth.

Unlike traditional workforce development programs, which typically prioritize breadth over depth and allow case managers and WIB staff to be workforce development "generalists," career ladder programs require staff members to become well-versed in the nuts and bolts of specific industries and occupations. All staff, not just training providers and instructors, must be able to use basic industry rhetoric and understand the steps to and qualifications for advancement in order to support participants through training, placement, and advancement. To that end, **Skyline Community College** in San Bruno, California, provided its WIB staff and program participants with a green jobs overview course in order to promote a shared understanding between participants and staff about the basic elements of the relatively new and rapidly advancing "green" industry.

Making Training Accessible to Participants

To accommodate scheduling difficulties and geographic constraints, the **West Central Ohio Manufacturing Consortium** offers its basic tier training during evenings and weekends at locations throughout the region, including high schools, CBOs, and career or education centers. The Consortium is also pursuing web-based training options.

In California's San Joaquin Valley, **Proteus, Inc.**, an organization providing services to farmworkers and other rural job seekers, offers workforce services, including access to computers and the Internet and web-based training, via school buses redesigned into mobile employment centers. While not designed specifically around career ladders, Proteus's model of physically bringing services to isolated participants is particularly relevant for providers seeking to develop career pathway programs for the hard-to-employ.

JFF's **Breaking Through Initiative** is premised, in part, on the notion that current career advancement programs fail to address the specific needs and challenges of their students, thus allowing often minor obstacles, such as transportation problems or lack of childcare, to significantly reduce students' likelihood of completion. JFF has developed a range of drop-out prevention techniques. For example, a Kentucky-based JFF pathway program (Jobs for the Future) allows students to pick up where they left off if they are forced to withdraw from a class. Rather than requiring students to make up the entire course, classes are divided up into sections, allowing students who drop out to make up only the missed sections at a later date.

One reason that some hard-to-employ individuals are difficult to attract and retain is that they lack even the rudimentary tools to access the training programs designed to start them on a career pathway. In Santa Cruz County, the **Health Career LADDERS project**, a network of education providers, workforce services providers, and employers that has for the last decade focused on meeting the health care occupational needs of the region, attempted to address this problem by engaging the adult school to provide pre-CNA training for limited-English-proficient learners. The adult school developed vocational ESL classes to prepare a largely agricultural worker population for completing the first step in the transition into health care careers, that is, preparation to enter CNA training at one of the area's community colleges or other CNA training providers.

A crucial component of any recruitment and retention strategy serving the hard-to-employ involves the provision of financial supports and incentives. While all career ladders programs need to anticipate participant needs and provide supports, unemployed participants (particularly those with multiple barriers to employment) are particularly vulnerable to financial setbacks that can derail employment goals. Subsidizing training can be the difference between dropping out and completing the training, and is therefore one of the core elements of the Career Ladders Project Career Advancement Academies (CAA). CAA, a coalition of 29 colleges in three regions of California, establishes pipelines to college and high-wage careers for underemployed, underprepared youth and adults. Participants at San Jose City College, Laney College in Oakland, San Diego City College, the Central Valley Career Advancement Academies, and Hartnell College in Salinas do paid work in elementary and middle-school afterschool programs while they prepare for careers in education or human services. These placements offer trainees the opportunity to experience the real world of afterschool programming and provide much-needed income. At the same time, trainees are able to build their resumes and continue to pursue certification and credentialing in education and human services.

Integrating Basic Skills Remediation with Career-Specific Content

JFF programs recognize that program retention hinges on keeping students engaged and interested in the course material. Students may find lengthy remedial training or prerequisites especially discouraging. Integrating technical training and remediation not only decreases the amount of time spent in the classroom but also centers instruction on the more inherently interesting career-specific content. JFF's **Davidson Community College** program, which has developed career pathways for a number of different industries, merges basic skills remediation with career exploration. Through this modification, students are exposed to career-specific content that allows them to feel like they are getting started on the training and to make more informed decisions when choosing a career pathway to pursue.

A JFF program managed by **Southeast Arkansas Community College** offers students pursuing a nursing degree a condensed basic skills remediation/prerequisites sequence. Rather than requiring students to complete developmental education prior to enrolling in prerequisites, which could take up to two years, the program has compressed remediation and prerequisites into one year of training. As a result, more than 90% of enrolled students completed the fast-track prerequisite training compared to the approximately 60% of students enrolled in the traditional training sequence. Similarly, the **Spanish to English Associate Teacher Certificate Program** at Southwestern College offers a four-semester program that links ESL and childhood development coursework and leads to certification and continuing education.

By teaching both technical and basic skills while using applied, "hands-on" methods, educators have found they are able to support student understanding of academic content while at the same time developing career skills. The Career Ladders Project considers contextualized learning a critical approach to opening career pathways to individuals deficient in both basic skills and technical skills. CLP's **Utilities and Construction Prep Program** at Los Angeles Trade-Technical College integrates math, English, construction, and work readiness skills to prepare students for employment in construction/utilities and/or continued education. The **Automotive Tech program at Fresno City College** has a similar setup for automotive training. Another CLP program, **Programa en Carpintería Fina** at Laney College in Oakland, offers a bilingual cabinet-making class—the instructor teaches in English and a translator translates for the largely Spanish-speaking cohort.

Cohort-based learning is an important element of CLP's **Career Advancement Academies**. In this context, a cohort is a group of learners who take their basic (English and math) classes and their technical skill classes together. Cohort-based learning allows peer support networks to develop; students help each other apply basic skills concepts to the technical training environment, form study groups, and offer encouragement to each other to stay enrolled when coursework or external circumstances become difficult.

In California's East Bay, the community college created the **Alameda Transportation and Logistics Academic Success program** (ATLAS), a partnership between the college, the Port of Oakland, and the transportation and logistics unions. The project includes a partnership with the adult basic education system, which provides non-credit basic skills instruction for students whose levels of literacy are too low to begin community college classes. However, students are simultaneously permitted to enroll in for-credit technical skills classes, with a plan for transitioning directly into higher-level (credit-earning) basic skills classes once their math and reading levels reach the appropriate levels.

Conducting Frequent and Relevant Evaluations

In general, successful outcomes are good not only for participants, but for supporting and maintaining partnerships with workforce programs, training providers, and employers. In addition, the process of collecting and analyzing data itself can promote partner buy-in. Evaluation and technical assistance have been key aspects from the very beginning of the Career Advancement Academies (CAA)—a public-private partnership between **Career Ladders Project**, the California Community College's Chancellor's Office, and numerous foundations.

The Chancellor's Office required that each of the three regions receiving a CAA award conduct an evaluation. CLP worked with the regions to secure a common evaluator, Public/Private Ventures, for consistency of approach and presentation of results. Key aspects of the evaluation have included visits to each of the CAAs and interviews and focus groups with faculty and students. In order to have the evaluation inform the program improvement-oriented technical assistance (being provided by CLP), the evaluation and technical assistance teams have held joint "learning sessions" with each of the academy sites.

Alongside the evaluation, and emerging from its early results, CLP developed a strong marketing campaign. They created a faculty primer for community college teachers and hired a full-time videographer to make short videos in the classroom with students as the primary witnesses to the success of the Academies. The videos have been shown at faculty and other administrative meetings; they are used as a recruitment tool for students; and they can be shown by participating non-profits and workforce intermediaries to make the case to their boards and funders.

In addition to the formal evaluation of CAAs that is underway, CLP has worked with another data-gathering entity to track CAA participants with the long-term goal of program improvement. Cal-PASS is a non-profit organization that works with the California community college system and other state and local school districts on a voluntary data-sharing project.

Cal-PASS matches statewide Community College Management Information System (MIS) data with that of the K-12, California State University, and the University of California systems to create a K-16 data source for California. CLP has worked to have Cal-PASS collect data for the Career Advancement Academies as well. To this end, Cal-PASS put together a common web-based entry system for CAA staff to enter data on CAA students. CAA students are "tagged" and can be matched against the state-wide Community College MIS to access full information on any CAA participant. Cal-PASS had hoped to run the CAA students against California's Unemployment Insurance Wage data base via the state Employment Development Department (EDD) in order to track participant employment outcomes, but that effort is still being piloted and beta tested with EDD.

Rhodes State College conducted an intensive follow-up survey of manufacturing industry employers in west central Ohio. Through a grant from the KnowledgeWorks Foundation, Rhodes State staff, economic development agency employees, and members of the West Central Ohio Manufacturing Consortium interviewed representatives from 65 manufacturing companies. In addition to interviewing the companies included in the college's 2004 survey (which prompted the development of the Consortium) the 2007 survey expanded the scope of potential participants. Based on its experience with the pathway program, Rhodes State also refined the survey to include questions on skill sets that more accurately reflected the needs of manufacturing employers. In addition to providing useful outcome information on employer hiring plans from each of the three tiers, the survey also detailed current hiring challenges and anticipated hiring needs over the next three years and gauged employer interest in offering internships to program participants. Through this follow-up survey, Rhodes State and the West Central Ohio Manufacturing Consortium can continue to update their training to match ongoing changes in the manufacturing sector and expand the pool of potential employer participants.

¹ See Nanette Relave. 2003. "Incumbent Worker Training for Low-Wage Workers," *Welfare Information Network Issue Notes* 7 (13). Retrieved on August 4, 2010 from <http://76.12.61.196/publications/incumbentworkertrainingIN.htm>

² We borrow from the following two definitions: (1) "a series of connected education and training programs and student support services that enable individuals to secure a job or advance in a demand industry or occupation." (Worksource Oregon. Retrieved on June 24th, 2010 from www.worksourceoregon.org/index.php/career-pathways/128-what-are-career-pathways) and (2) a set of connected educational steps that help people gain skills and move up a career ladder" [with] "multiple entry and exit points that build to the next level." (Roseanne Perry Stephens. 2009. "Charting a Path: An Exploration of Statewide Career Pathway Efforts in Arkansas, Kentucky, Oregon, Washington, and Wisconsin." Seattle, WA: Seattle Jobs Initiative, Retrieved on June 24, 2010 from www.seattlejobsinitiative.com)

³ For a discussion of general barriers to employment among hard-to-serve individuals see Sandra K. Danziger and Kristin S. Seefeldt. 2003. "Barriers to Employment and the 'Hard to Serve': Implications for Services, Sanctions, and Time Limits," *Social Policy & Society* 2:2, 151-160.

⁴ See Harry J. Holzer and Robert J. LaLonde. 1998. "Job Change and Job Stability among Less-Skilled Young Workers," Madison, Wisconsin: Institute for Research on Poverty, Discussion Paper no. 1191-99. Retrieved July 24, 2010 from <http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/irp/>.

⁵ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2010, August 6). News Release USDL 10-1076. Retrieved from: <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/empsit.pdf>

⁶ See Sheila Maguire, Joshua Freely, Carol Clymer, and Maureen Conway. 2009. "Job Training that Works: Findings from the Sectoral Employment Impact Study," *PPV In Brief*, Issue.

⁷ The experimental study demonstrated that sector-based training participants earned, on average, 18 percent more than participants who received non-sector based employment services. Sector-based training participants were more likely to be employed during the 24-month experiment period and had longer durations of employment than control participants. (p. 6-7)