

WISCONSIN CAREER PATHWAYS

POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION FOR LOW-INCOME, LOW-SKILL ADULTS

INTRODUCTION

The national economic recovery is gaining speed and Wisconsin workers and firms are increasingly feeling the relief. Skills are now solidly at the center of Wisconsin's economic agenda. And whether you care about competitiveness or opportunity or (most likely) both, that's good news. The state's ability to build industry-needed skills of the workforce is becoming an increasingly critical shared priority. Workers have jobs but need stronger skills. Firms need a skilled workforce that can adapt as opportunity evolves. Fortunately, training, education, and workforce development systems across the state are in the position to respond to these needs. Across Wisconsin, an impressive infrastructure to support the development of workers skills has taken shape over the last decade. Critical here is the strong but perhaps too little known work of the state's technical colleges in paving the pathways from basic skills to meaningful credentials. Also essential have been myriad efforts to build stronger connections to employers through training funds like Fast Forward, through the development of industry partnerships within regions, and through the increasing connection of career pathways at tech colleges to unmet and emerging industry needs.

For Wisconsin workers and employers to thrive in the 21st Century, this critical progress in skills and talent infrastructure must be supported, connected, amplified and extended. Wisconsin is a national leader – in career pathways, in tech college training for displaced and other workers (federal money supports this work, most recently through the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCT) program), and in industry/employer driven training (Wisconsin's general purpose revenue (GPR) investments in the "Fast Forward" grant program for demand-driven training). This infrastructure can help connect the unemployed to work, the underemployed to the skills they need to move toward self-sufficiency, and the state's employers to relevant strategies for developing their own workers' skills as well. This infrastructure is critical for advancing Wisconsin's competitive position and for providing low-wage workers a stronger pathway to self-sustaining jobs.

ABOUT COWS

COWS (Center on Wisconsin Strategy) is a nonprofit think-and-do tank, based at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, that promotes "high road" solutions to social problems. These treat shared growth and opportunity, environmental sustainability, and resilient democratic institutions as necessary and achievable complements in human development. Through our various projects, we work with cities around the country to promote innovation and the implementation of high road policy. COWS is nonpartisan but values-based. We seek a world of equal opportunity and security for all.

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This paper provides an overview of these programs and initiatives, the need for them, and opportunities to strengthen them. We provide data on the continuing needs of workers, take stock of the strong work that has been done, and begin to draw attention to gaps and connections that need to be made. To understand the scale of need, we review data on the status of Wisconsin's low-wage workers and low-income working families. We then turn to describe the career pathway and bridge programming done across the state through the RISE initiative. Impressive progress has been made on campuses across the state and data increasingly shows the success of this new approach to education and training. We then turn to other practice in the state that have produced results for low-wage workers (including the TAACCCT project and FSET initiatives). We close with recommendations for policy and practice that can help build a stronger system by integrating and connecting the skills infrastructure that has been developed in the state. Our focus is building on Wisconsin's strengths so that opportunity and career pathways can yield improved outcomes for low-skilled workers while simultaneously meeting the skill needs of employers in the state.

WORKING HARD, FALLING SHORT: LOW-INCOME WORKING FAMILIES IN WISCONSIN

Despite strong commitment to work in Wisconsin, too many families struggle to make ends meet. (See Table 1.) In the state, according to data from the national Working Poor Families Project, 30 percent of working families—**nearly three of every ten working families**—have income below two times the poverty line, a level defined as “low income” in this report (see text box) and a level below which researchers have consistently documented serious material struggles in family life. Related, perhaps not surprising, and still tragic, **one-third of Wisconsin children in working families are low income**. All too often, Wisconsin's children and families must get by on limited income and face the stress and deprivation that low-income implies. While striking, these data are actually slightly better than national averages. But turning to working families with at least one minority parent, the picture becomes substantially worse. **More than half of working families with at least one minority parent is low-income**. This percentage exceeds the national share, putting Wisconsin near the back of the nation (44th) when it comes to minority working families' economic well being.

Commitment to work is not the problem for these families. Indeed, in Wisconsin, families are working more than the national average. Three in four low-income families in the state are in the labor force, a rate slightly exceeding the national average (74 percent in WI vs. 73 percent nationally). And among those

Working Poor Families and Racial Inequality in Wisconsin

For more on racial disparity nationally see *Low Income Working Families: The Racial and Ethnic Divide*: http://www.workingpoorfamilies.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/WPFP-2015-Report_Racial-Ethnic-Divide.pdf.

Also, for a Wisconsin summary of that paper, see *Minority Working Families in Wisconsin Falling Behind*, link: <http://www.cows.org/minority-working-families-in-wisconsin-falling-behind>.

And for broader measures of the black/white inequality gap in the state see *Wisconsin's Extreme Racial Disparity*: <http://www.cows.org/wisconsins-extreme-racial-disparity>.

employed, Wisconsinites were slightly more likely to hold multiple jobs, with 7 percent of working people holding more than one job, compared to 5 percent, nationally. Table 2 makes clear that labor force participation for women is especially high, at 64 percent, Wisconsin women post the ninth highest labor force participation rate in the nation (compared to 57 percent, nationally).

Low-income working families in the state face stresses in addition to limited financial means. The high cost of housing is a direct and significant drain on the family budget: more than half of Wisconsin's low-income working families spend more than one-third of their income on housing. (This is a level of housing costs considered to be so financially stressful that it is "unaffordable.") These families must also deal with shifting and sometimes inaccessible health insurance. And while Wisconsin clearly does better than many other states in securing health insurance for low-income families, still more than one in ten low-income working families still has a parent that is not covered by health insurance. Finally, financial insecurity is an ongoing concern for many.

Retirement plans and pensions are uncommon common in the low-wage labor market and just under half of adults in low-income working families have access to a retirement plans through their work. For these workers, Social Security, under constant policy threat at the national level, is the only resource available to support their retirement.

THE STRUGGLES ARE GREATER FOR YOUNGER WORKERS AND FAMILIES

The income struggle weighs heavily on younger workers as is clear in Table 3. Two of every three workers ages 18 to 24 year hold low-wage jobs (compared to 20 percent for all workers). Further, 12 percent of young workers are unemployed – more than twice the state's unemployment rate overall. And one-in-ten of the workers in this age group who has a job holds multiple jobs – a commitment to juggling jobs that exceeds the national average for young workers (6 percent).

When families are economically stressed, the results for children can be devastating. Parents don't have the time or energy to look at homework. Parents don't have the flexibility to attend parent/teacher conferences. Parents don't have the money to invest in quality childcare. Parents must choose between food for their children and rent or utility payments. Children may arrive at school with serious learning and language deficits from the very start. Low-income families need support, so that they can make ends meet, to move up into better jobs, and so that their children have a chance to thrive.

Low-Income Working Families: A Definition

Low-income families are defined as those earning less than 200 percent of the federal poverty threshold. According to 2013 federal guidelines, a family of four was living in poverty if its annual income was less than \$23,550. Using the 200 percent gauge, that family is considered low-income if its earnings were less than \$47,100. A family is defined as either a married couple or a single-parent family with at least one child under 18 years of age.

For the purposes of these analyses, a family is considered to be a "working" if, in the last 12 months, family members aged 15 and older show combined work effort of at least 39 weeks – or combined work effort of at least 26 weeks, plus one currently unemployed parent actively looking for work in the past four weeks. Those who are consistently unemployed or only sporadically working do not meet this relatively stringent definition of "working."

Table 1

LOW-INCOME WORKING FAMILIES IN WISCONSIN AND THE UNITED STATES, 2012-2013

	Wisconsin	Rank	United States
Percent of workers over 18 in low-wage jobs (adjusted for state cost of living)	20%	2nd	28%
Percent workers over 18 who hold more than one job	7%	39th	5%
Percent working families that are low income	30%	19th	33%
Percent of workers over 18 who are unemployed or underemployed	10%	15th	12%
<i>Unemployed only</i>	5%	18th	6%
Percent of low-income families engaged in work	74%	17th	73%
Percent working families with a minority parent that are low income	55%	44th	45%
Percent of children in working families that are low income	34%	18th	38%
Percent low-income working families with at least one parent without health insurance	19%	5th	38%
Percent workers over 18 without health insurance	12%	6th	19%
Percent low-income families spending over one-third of their household income on housing	54%	27th	58%
Percent workers over 18 without employer-provided pensions	53%	4th	59%

Source: Working Poor Families Project, data analyzed by Population Reference Bureau.

Table 2

LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATE (LFPR) IN WISCONSIN AND THE UNITED STATES, 2012-2013

	Wisconsin	Rank	United States
Labor Force Participation Rate*			
Overall	68%	9th	63%
Women	64%	9th	57%
African-American	62%	26th	61%
Hispanic	68%	36th	66%

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

Table 3

YOUNG WORKERS (AGES 18-24) IN WISCONSIN AND THE UNITED STATES, 2012-2013

	Wisconsin	Rank	United States
Percent of workers ages 18 to 24 in low-wage jobs (adjusted for state cost of living)	59%	13th	66%
Percent of workers ages 18 to 24 who are unemployed or underemployed	22%	21st	24%
Unemployed only	12%	22nd	12%
Percent workers ages 18 to 24 who hold more than one job	10%	48th	6%

Source: Working Poor Families Project, data analyzed by Population Reference Bureau.

BUILDING SKILLS THROUGH EDUCATION: WHO COULD BENEFIT?

Education and training increase economic opportunity and are, for many, the only way to family sustaining wages. A study conducted by the Washington State Board of Community and Technical College supports this, finding a year of postsecondary education culminating in credentials represented the tipping point for sustained higher income earnings, resulting in not only higher income for low-wage workers but also preparation for further postsecondary education.¹

The need for credentials and education for working adults in Wisconsin is clear. In Wisconsin, 36 percent (or 898,051) of the workforce could benefit from skilled education and training. This number adds together three groups of Wisconsinites: 1) those workers who have worked in the past year but earned poverty level wages (365,781); 2) those earning above poverty-level wages but below the state median wage of \$16 (470,845); and 3) those seeking work but not working (61,425).²

To get to better paying jobs and to build the talent pool of the state, training and education that works for these adults is essential. But all too often, educational opportunities are tailored not to working adults but to “traditional” (meaning young and full-time) students. Educational innovation – in delivery of skills and training, in

¹ *Building Pathways to Success for Low-Skill Adult Students: Lessons for Community College Policy and Practice from a Statewide Longitudinal Tracking Study.* David Prince and Davis Jenkins. Community College Research Center. 2005. Available at: ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/Publication.asp?uid=204

² CLASP and COWS, “Building the Middle Class with Better Skills and Wages: Who Would be Helped by Stronger Pathways,” August 2013, http://www.clasp.org/documents/BSW_WI.pdf

connection to employers, in integration of work-based and experiential approaches – is essential to making training work for the state’s workers and employers. Fortunately, Wisconsin is at the forefront of just these innovations.

BUILDING BLOCKS OF A NEW SKILLS SYSTEM: CAREER PATHWAYS, BRIDGES, AND INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIPS

Career pathways, bridges and industry partnerships are systemic solutions for advancing Wisconsin’s working families. For more than a decade, leaders across Wisconsin have placed these strategies at the top of the agenda, developing partnerships between businesses, technical colleges and workforce development groups to train workers at all skill levels for high demand fields and provide them with portable, employer-recognized credentials. Wisconsin’s progress on career pathways and career pathway bridges has been especially noteworthy in recent years.

Career pathways help build a stronger connection from work to training and back into higher skilled work, with the attainment of industry-recognized credentials and credits toward technical and college degrees. Career pathways are the route to skills employers need in the workforce. Career pathways require “organizing college-level occupational training into a sequence of credentials that leads adult learners through attainable steps toward better jobs and a degree or technical diploma.”³ These are not stand-alone education programs, but rather a *framework of integrating* education, training and college programs and connecting directly to employer needs. The design of career pathways allows for more fluid movement between work and learning, and more successful access to higher levels of skill. Core components of career pathways programs include: multiple entry points, English Language Learner (ELL) access, basic skills and occupational training, and employer-recognized credentials that have real traction for getting jobs.⁴

Similarly, **career pathway bridge programs** focus on the entry point of the career pathway. Technically, the “bridge” refers to bridging from adult basic education (education at the HS level or lower) and post-secondary level skills. Bridge programs tailor and contextualize basic academic and English language content with post-secondary occupational courses to aid low-skilled, low-income workers to earn employer-recognized credentials. Features of career pathways bridges include: innovative program content and delivery, support services, and sequenced training resulting in credentials for labor market needs.⁵

The strength of career pathway programs lies in their ability to create specific, achievable options for workers, regardless of prior educational attainment, while connecting that training and education directly to employer needs. Education becomes navigable if it is broken into smaller chunks that connect directly to current skill needs and move workers both through training and job skills via employer-recognized credentials and in-demand degrees. Essentially, the pathways create an incremental, “stackable” approach to credential attainment that, by providing success in small increments, is relevant, realistic and responsive to the needs of workers and employers.⁶

³ http://www.cows.org/_data/documents/1461.pdf

⁴ CLASP (2010) *Funding Career Pathways and Career Pathway Bridges: A Federal Policy Toolkit for States*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ COWS, *Workforce Central Evaluation*, January 2012.

Industry Partnerships are formed at the regional level to ensure that employers in key industry sectors can connect to employees with the skills they need to grow. Industry partnerships target both job seekers and workers already at the firm for training to secure and/or retain family supporting jobs. They can play an important role connecting incumbent workers to meaningful training, ensuring that workers receive skills that are in-demand, relevant, and responsive to industry needs. Through these partnerships, industry leadership – from firms, unions, and trade associations – comes together to identify problems and build shared solutions with workforce development organizations, educational institutions, training providers, economic development groups, community-based organizations, local government agencies, and philanthropic foundations. The resulting network supports stronger skills for workers that are developed in ways employers find relevant. At their best, Industry Partnerships identify and help build career pathways for incumbent and future workers at the regional level. These two approaches then are not distinct, but mutually reinforcing.

For more on Industry Partnerships

Read *Employers Take the Lead: A Report on Wisconsin's Industry Partnership Project*: http://www.cows.org/_data/documents/1489.pdf



THE STATE OF CAREER PATHWAYS AND BRIDGES IN WISCONSIN

The opportunity is now clear. We can create a system that can respond to employers' skill needs while making meaningful training and credentials attainable for working adults. Led by the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) and the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (DWD), the joint project responding to this opportunity was called RISE (Regional Industry Skills Education)



Source: Wisconsin Regional Industry Skills Education Initiative (RISE)

and is now known more generically as Wisconsin Career Pathways. The common strategy, which is being pursued throughout the system and at within the states technical colleges, is Career Pathways. With patient and persistent support of system leaders and the Joyce Foundation, the state has moved to the national forefront of practice and policy supporting career pathways and career pathway bridges. These strategies provide working adults a way into and up through training making it possible for them to return to school and advance in their careers. But this works only if skills and credentials are connected back to work, to opportunities, and to employers' needs. (The figure above shows the model of how career pathways work).

This work has created an impressive statewide infrastructure for and interest and investment in career pathways. Career pathway programs can now be identified in every technical college district and cover all major sectors and occupations. All sixteen of the state's technical colleges have designed and supported career pathway programs. The number is growing, but the WTCS has approved at least 167 Embedded Technical Diplomas, and 26 Career Pathway Certificates in 15 career clusters. All of these credentials are in post-secondary programs, granting academic credit for industry-validated skills. All approved programs qualify the completer for a job or connect to further opportunities in a postsecondary occupational or academic program.

“Postsecondary education or training has become the threshold requirement for access to middle-class status and earnings in good times and in bad. It is no longer the preferred pathway to middle-class jobs—it is, increasingly, the only pathway”.

-Help Wanted: Projections of Jobs and Education Requirements Through 2018, Carnevale, A., Smith, N., & Strohl, J.

This career pathway infrastructure is supported not only by the technical colleges, but by partners from economic and workforce development as well. These connections are important, as the career pathway programs can be a real resource for employers who need to develop or recruit skilled workers. Further, workers who most need the opportunity to advance can be identified, recruited, and supported through these pathways, when more traditional recruitment and outreach strategies would have been used.

Over recent years, there has been sufficient scale in **career pathway bridges** to evaluate the results of this approach. The preliminary evaluation is quite promising. Across 2012-14, there were 50 active RISE career pathway bridge programs. These programs touched a total of 1370 students across 12 Wisconsin technical colleges, accounting for between 4 and 5 percent of the state's total adult basic education population. Of those 1,370 students, 1,015 (74 percent) completed all the credits associated with their career pathway bridge program. One bridge program at Moraine Park Technical College reported a 91 percent completion rate and an 89 percent employment rate.⁷

RISE Career Pathways Bridges Evaluation Results

- Career Pathway Bridge participants were more likely than matched controls to enroll in at least postsecondary occupational credit after the Career Pathway Bridge term and after the first adult basic education course.
- Career Pathway Bridge participants enrolled in and completed a greater number of postsecondary credits than controls after the first adult basic education class.
- Career Pathway Bridge participants report more graduations than controls.

Source: Rise 3 Final Report, p. 7

⁷ http://www.witc.edu/witccontent/pdfadvocacy2013/adult_career_pathways.pdf

Milwaukee Extends Career Pathways to Transform the College

Technical colleges are innovating with program design, and developing new partnerships, to build locally meaningful career pathway bridges across the state. Milwaukee Area Technical College (MATC) has taken this innovation to another level, using career pathway concepts to transform learning, access, and programming. The MATC transformation began five years ago when Vicki Martin (then the provost, now the president) embraced the idea and formed a committee to extend career pathways throughout the campus.

At a panel in the summer of 2014, MATC deans, department heads, HR managers, financial aid and admissions directors reflected on what the change really meant to the college. One central observation noted is how broad and inclusive and systematic the approach has to be: “Admissions, financial aid, all facets of student support services, faculty, college leadership, high school relations all have to be part of the conversation,” said Jonathan Feld, director of articulation and transfer for MATC. “Career pathways can’t be driven from one angle.”

Further, the MATC Career Pathways team found themselves balancing policy and practice. Rather than starting with either making the rules or with creating a pathway, they did both concurrently. MATC built a culinary arts career pathway while establishing general rules for building other pathways. Employers were essential to campus conversations on how to “slice and dice” academic programs to meet workforce needs.

Determining where a student should begin their training required taking assessment seriously, but also using information from assessment to meet the basic skills needs of students while they worked on occupational skills. “We had to identify courses these students would take and be successful at,” Sarah Adams, MATC registrar said. “Pre-college administrators worked with the School of Business and Health to allow students to take basic skills and college level courses at the same time.”

Financial aid counselors presented students with information about stackable credentials that lead to higher education credentials. With this more complete information, students are able to aspire to achieve a higher level diploma or degree and to qualify for funding. Camille Nicolai, director of financial aid, was skeptical at first, but now embraces the change. “MATC engaged all systems and revised all practices necessary to accommodate career pathways students,” she concluded.

The college now has several career pathways and is working to develop more. “The development of the career pathways initiative involved a wide scope of MATC personnel, including faculty, curriculum management, institutional research, financial aid, admissions, student support services, recruitment and professional development,” said President Martin. “This comprehensive approach helped ensure that we created a model that benefits students at various stages. Faculty and staff are now able to clearly illustrate career pathways so current and prospective students alike understand the important connection of education to their career advancement.”

Source: RISE 3 Final Report.

The results of the evaluation (summarized on page 8) suggest that career pathway bridge programs are working. Students are more likely to succeed in this model than in more traditionally delivered adult basic education. Perhaps especially notable, it appears that these positive results may be especially pronounced among English language learners (ELL). While this result remains tentative and requires further analysis (especially as the population of ELL in career pathway bridge programs grows), it suggests that the promise of this approach may be even greater as the population diversifies and immigrants come to the state.

Career pathway bridges have achieved significant progress in the state. Still, there is room for expansion to reach more working adults/students. As already noted, even with the expanding reach, just 4-5 percent of ABE students and around 10 percent of ELL were enrolled in or connected to career pathway bridge programs. If the programs and student success rates continue to stand up to scrutiny, the scale and reach of this approach should expand to reach students and workers who could succeed in such programs.

Further, as these programs continue to grow, it will become increasingly important to identify and overcome barriers keeping working adults/students out of career pathway bridge programs. Increasing the dialogue with program participants and exploring ways to adapt structures to work for working students could help identify new innovations and improvements to career pathway bridges. Program graduates could eventually serve as mentors and ambassadors – reaching into workplaces and securing further participation of workers and employers in these innovative programs.

The state has now established a strong infrastructure supporting career pathways. However, there remain significant opportunities to integrate career pathways with ongoing infrastructure and workforce initiatives and investments in the state. A few key areas for connection include FSET, TAACCCT, Wisconsin Fast Forward (WFF), and the newly reauthorized Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act (WIOA). We discuss each of these briefly below.

SOUTHERN WOOD COUNTY FSET INNOVATION

The south Wood County economy has long been driven by the paper industry. Globalization of the industry and restructuring of local paper mills resulted in the loss of 39 percent of existing jobs in south Wood County from 2000-08. Exacerbated by the recession, high unemployment and poverty rates resulted in a 99 percent increase for food assistance over past ten years.

Seeing this need, Wood County Human Services created a partnership with Mid-State Technical College (Mid-State), and Incentive Community Foundation to develop the Pathways program, providing disadvantaged job seekers and recipients of FSET services, occupational training combined with wraparound support services. Mid-State tailored its existing adult basic education program for the FSET population, offering five tracks of training: 1) Accelerated GED, 2) Pre-College Prep, 3) CNA-Gerontology/Memory, 4) Industrial Manufacturing, and 5) Customer Service/Office Technology (Office Tech).

From 2011-13, the pathways program trained 219 individuals. Of these participants, 9 out of 10 had no post-secondary training and 88 percent were unemployed. After the program, students within the occupational track reported a median training wage of \$10.00 and 66 percent reported working in a training-related occupation. One out of three Pathway graduates pursued a 2nd Pathways program.

Source: COWS, Workforce Central Evaluation, January 2012; COWS Workforce Central Evaluation: Progress, Challenges and Opportunities, November 2014.

FOODSHARE EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING (FSET)

The FoodShare Employment and Training (FSET) program is an employment assistance and job-training program offering FoodShare recipients assistance to gain the skills needed for gainful employment. There are opportunities to connect FSET with career pathways, but at least for most of the state, these connections have not yet been pursued.

The FSET program provides resources that can be used to enhance case management services, remediate skills, and support career assessment and computer literacy. FoodShare recipients are provided with transportation and childcare assistance while they search for employment or receive skills training. The program can additionally cover the cost of education and training programs, basic skills instruction, books, GED testing fees, and services not available to participants through other programs.⁸

Beginning April 1st, 2015,⁹ FSET programming underwent specific changes. These changes will allow FoodShare recipients to engage in career pathways programs. A regional delivery method for FSET will also be implemented, in which a single vendor is selected to administer training over a defined region. The new policy will require all able-bodied adults without dependents to participate in 20 hours of work activity. This provides opportunities for FSET recipients to enroll in career pathways training programs leading to family sustaining wages and self-sufficiency benefits.¹⁰

TRADE ADJUSTMENT ASSISTANCE COMMUNITY COLLEGE AND CAREER TRAINING PROGRAM

The federal Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) provides community colleges and eligible higher education institutions with funds to expand and improve their ability to deliver education and career training programs that can be completed in two years or less. The source of funds here is federal Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) which was created to invest in training of workers displaced by economic restructuring that results from U.S. trade agreements. TAACCCT has become a means of preparing adults for high-wage, high skill employment, meeting the needs of employers and providing resources needed for re-employment. TAACCCT programs include a career pathways option of embedded credentials.¹¹

Wisconsin successfully competed for Rounds 2, 3, and 4 of TAACCCT funding, and the state approach focused on supporting the development and implementation of career pathways in all the state's technical colleges focused on manufacturing, IT, and health care. The state's approach focused on pathways and bridges which connected students in need of adult basic education into the pathways. Wisconsin's successful Round 4 funding invests in the delivery of career pathways programs with a special focus both on health care pathways. The 4th round of funding also supported career pathways coordinators who could promote and help make connections on which successful pathways and bridges rely.

One of the TAACCCT funded programs has been Wisconsin's 'Making the Future' project to develop and expand advance manufacturing career pathway programs within the state. This three year grant program

⁸ <http://www.co.wood.wi.us/Departments/HumanServices/FSET.aspx>

⁹ Requirement rules for adults 18-49 in Kenosha, Racine or Walworth County started on July 1st 2014

¹⁰ COWS (2014) Workforce Central Evaluation: Progress, Challenges and Opportunities-Draft

¹¹ <https://www.cfda.gov/index?s=program&mode=form&tab=core&id=ee32d89381f05fc06161a29ec12fa6c3>

focuses on developing career pathway programs in industrial mechanics, welding, and fabrication to provide opportunities for TAA workers, veterans, unemployed, low-skilled workers. All 16 of Wisconsin's technical colleges received funding based on district need, and resulted in high levels of collaboration between the state's technical colleges, workforce development providers, and businesses.¹²

In 2013, WTCS received over \$23 million in additional TAACCCT funds to support the development and improvement of Intentional Networks Transforming Effective and Rigorous Facilitation of Assessment, Collaboration, and Education (INTERFACE). INTERFACE focuses on addressing basic information technology (IT) skills needs and providing informational technology pathways to high wage occupations. This allocation of funding towards strengthening computer skills and expanding IT programs to TAA-eligible, veteran, and other adult learners provides greater opportunities of linking low-wage workers into a growing demand field while filling employer needs.¹³

The state's TAACCCT and INTERFACE projects are important innovations, and in round 4 of TAACCCT, the state secured an investment that will help integrate the career pathway work on various campuses. There is great potential here, but it will be important to continue seeking to integrate career pathways and bridges developed through TAACCCT with other career pathway and bridge work going on throughout the system.

Fox Valley Technical College (FVTC) Advanced Manufacturing Pathways Plus (AMP+)

Fox Valley Technical College received a separate \$2.9 million TAACCCT investment to develop Advanced Manufacturing Pathways Plus (AMP +) equipping job seekers for employment opportunities through flexible learning options in the three pathway programs- Automation/Electronics, Machine Tool, and Metal Fabrication/Welding.

The following innovations and techniques were adopted by FVTC to create greater flexibility, and program success:

- Created shorter/stackable credentials
- Offered summer and evening courses, creating greater flexibility
- Developed and implemented technology enabled learning across three pathway programs
- Assessed veteran's military experience and created online training modules to share expertise
- Hired part-time veterans' specialist to support student veterans
- Evaluated students mechanical aptitude to aid them in choosing most appropriate career pathway

Outcomes:

- Both FVTC Certificates and Machine Tool certificates program have a 100 percent graduate placement rate.
- Automation Certificate has a 95 percent graduate placement rate.
- Welding program has a 90 + percent employment rate.

¹² <http://advancewisconsin.files.wordpress.com/2013/11/project-narrative.pdf>

¹³ <http://advancewisconsin.files.wordpress.com/2013/11/project-narrative.pdf>

Integrating with other programs, and ensuring focus on reaching dislocated and disadvantaged workers could build the state's career pathways and bridges in promising directions.

WISCONSIN FAST FORWARD (WFF)

WFF is an unprecedented investment in Wisconsin and skills. The program marks the first time the state has committed its own money (“general purpose revenue”) to a designated workforce training program.¹⁴ It is an exciting step forward to build the skills that both workers and employers need in this state. Direct employer engagement in all stages of the process secures a program that invests in skills relevant to industry.

Wisconsin's Act 9 established the WFF worker training grants program, which appropriates \$15 million in general purpose revenue (GPR) for Fiscal Years 2013-2015.¹⁵ The program's goal is to deliver short- and medium-term customized workforce-training programs to local unemployed or underemployed job seekers and incumbent workers.¹⁶ Qualifying grant proposals must demonstrate an unmet need for training and use current and projected labor market information to support the proposed training.¹⁷

WFF is an important initiative in its own right. But connecting these employer driven investments to the state's other workforce initiatives, as has been mentioned before, could help build a true system for skills out of a series of initiatives. Prioritizing WFF proposals that connect to career pathway programs or industry-recognized credentials could help ensure that training is paying off for workers.

For More Ideas on Fast Forward

Read *Wisconsin Fast Forward: How Skills Training is Working and Extending the Opportunity to Low-wage Workers* at www.cows.org.



CHANGES IN WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Finally, recent changes in federal workforce development policy provide room for expanding Wisconsin's workforce investment and providing greater alignment to the needs of low-wage workers and employers. The adoption of the Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act (WIOA),¹⁸ promotes the use of industry partnerships, rigorous data, and pathway models focusing on low-income workers. WIOA stresses increased engagement with employers, and mandates greater coordination with public support programs such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). WIOA also integrates programs such as Unemployment Insurance (UI) and utilizes American Job Centers as a cornerstone in growing the country's economy. It is evident that improving Wisconsin's adult labor force requires advancing low income workers to higher wages and WIOA's framework provides opportunities to advance opportunities for workers in Wisconsin by

¹⁴ The state DWD has up until now overseen investment of federal workforce development initiatives, but not devoted GPR to workforce training.

¹⁵ DWD, "Wisconsin Workforce Investment Act Annual Report," July 1, 2013-June 30, 2014, 8, http://dwd.wisconsin.gov/dwdwia/PDF/annual_report2013.pdf

¹⁶ DWD, Office of Skills Development (OSD), "Fast Track for a Successful Future," WFF Brochure, http://wisconsinfastforward.com/pdf/fast_forward_brochure.pdf

¹⁷ DWD, "Wisconsin Workforce Investment Act Annual Report," July 1, 2013-June 30, 2014, 8, http://dwd.wisconsin.gov/dwdwia/PDF/annual_report2013.pdf.

¹⁸ The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) is the successor to the Workforce Investment Act, reauthorized by Congress in July 2014. WIOA will be in effect from 2015 to 2020.

focusing on industry best practice in sector partnerships, cross program collaboration, and training resulting in credentials.¹⁹

WIOA provides Wisconsin with an opportunity to weave together the state's outstanding but distinct programs supporting skills, employers, and low-wage workers. Much remains unclear about the WIOA measures and timelines, but certain things are already obvious and useful. First, WIOA emphasizes career pathways and industry partnership strategies. Both the state and local workforce development boards should seize the planning process required by WIOA to consider the best ways to connect with career pathway and bridge work already going on throughout Wisconsin's technical college system. Further, boards should consider the best and most effective investment of training funds and consider the potential for targeting some resources toward low-income worker adults in order to help them make their way up through career pathways.

RECOMMENDATIONS: BUILDING WISCONSIN'S SKILLS INFRASTRUCTURE

Recommendation 1: Forge Stronger Links Between Career Pathways throughout WTCS and the Wisconsin Workforce Development System

The new plans that the state's workforce development boards will write in response to WIOA is a key opportunity to encourage planning and integration of career pathways and bridges into the state's workforce development system. Stronger links from campuses to boards and various programs can pay off for workers and disadvantaged adults, but only if campuses and boards are aware of opportunities, and clearly coordinated in order to seize them. The planning process will also touch on other programs. By facilitating greater program collaboration between programs such as TANF, FSET, UI and technical colleges, the state can use the WIOA planning process to better communicate career pathways opportunities to low-wage workers. Program directors with greater understanding of the state's career pathway programs and the ways in which they function can better collaborate with technical colleges and employers to guide low-income and unemployed workers along the process. Though partnerships and collaborations look different across regions, the collaboration between Wood County Human Services and Mid-State Technical College demonstrates the impact that such partnership can have in providing access to training leading to family sustaining wages.

Recommendation 2: Maintain and Support Bridge Programs

With the expansion and development of new career pathway programs, it is vital that they incorporate bridge programs into their design to enable ABE and ELL participants to continue to have access and acquire basic education and industry skills. The development of new career pathway programs should include requirements of bridge components to ensure that all adult learners are able to partake in training programs. The bridges are critical infrastructure making pathways accessible to the state's working adults with basic skills deficits. Extending economic opportunity requires making sure that our training infrastructure connects these workers into a skill system, rather than testing them out of it.

Both recommendations 1 and 2 require multiple stakeholders to learn about, understand, and eventually embrace career pathways and bridges and how these may work for workers. Understanding of these system

¹⁹ National Skills Coalition (2014) Side by Side Comparison of Occupational Training Provisions in House and Senate WIA Reauthorization Bills and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). <http://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resources/publications/file/WIOA-Side-by-Side.pdf>

within colleges and among workforce development leaders outside of colleges will be critical. Common understanding and definitions of bridges and their strong connections both to worker and employer needs will be a foundation for integration.

Recommendation 3: Maintain Supportive Services, Support Lifelong Learning

Student success in career pathway programs is supported by incorporating career counseling for adult learners. This is a definitional element of Wisconsin's career pathway and bridge work, but it can sometimes be overlooked. If it is overlooked, however, too many workers may be left out. Low-wage workers are often not equipped with career planning skills, with data indicating that a majority of ABE & ELL learners need information and counseling to navigate further steps, and assess the benefits of varying occupational decisions.

Continuing attention to and investment in support services to aid adult learners in integrating back to the classroom environment and cope with the non-academic challenges will be critical to the state's ongoing work in pathways and bridges. This is an area where integration with WIOA planning, and state encouragement for integration and funding support, could help secure supportive services for low-wage working adults and other disadvantaged workers.

Recommendation 4: Improve Data Collection and Transparency

The need to gather rigorous program data is important in monitoring and making programming decisions about pathway structures and development. Coordinated data collection of students' economic situation prior to entering a career pathway would allow for greater understanding of the impacts that the pathway provides. Again, connecting data from bridges and pathways at the colleges and into the state's WIOA data plan will be one lever on integration.

Recommendation 5: Support State Investment in Skills

In the last budget, the state of Wisconsin invested money directly in skill development through the Fast Forward program. This is an important step towards building a stronger infrastructure for training for incumbent workers. Especially in the context of declining federal resources for workforce, increasing state investment – in technical colleges, special funds for training, resources to support regions and their employers – could all substantially improve outcomes for workers while delivering skills employers need.