

# *ICCB Press Release*

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **ICCB Adult Education program receives Accelerating Opportunity Initiative design grant**

*Award will support community college efforts to transform adult education*

Springfield—The Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) Adult Education program has been awarded a \$200,000 grant as a part of Accelerating Opportunity, a Breaking Through Initiative. Illinois is one of 11 states to receive the grant.

Accelerating Opportunity seeks to change the way adult basic education is delivered by getting adult students on track to earn a postsecondary credential. A collaboration of philanthropies is funding the initiative including the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Joyce Foundation, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the Kresge Foundation, and the Open Society Foundations. For program and implementation expertise, Jobs for the Future (JFF) has engaged the National Council on Workforce Education, National College Transition Network, and the Washington State Board of Community & Technical Colleges as partners.

In Illinois alone, there are more than 1.8 million adults who lack skills beyond a high school diploma. According to the grantors, by 2018, about 70 percent of all jobs will require workers with some form of postsecondary credentials. This exacerbates the current difficulty employers across the state report in finding qualified workers who can fill skilled positions.

“The fastest growing occupations in Illinois will require post secondary education and training; yet 42 percent of adults in Illinois have not completed any college-level coursework,” said Geoffrey Obrzut, the president and chief executive officer of the ICCB. “To help reduce the unemployment rate, we need to increase the job skills and educational credentials of our workforce.”

Design grants were awarded to support efforts to redesign adult basic education and postsecondary programs to integrate basic skills with practical occupational training. After the design stage, the states will be eligible to compete for implementation grants, of which five states will receive \$1.6 million each over three years to implement their plans.

The initiative will engage nearly 40 community colleges nationally and impact more than 18,000 adult learners. Educational pathways to higher skills, credentials, and employment will be rigorously tested and independently evaluated. Philanthropy, labor, employers, adult education planners, and other stakeholders in Illinois and nationally will receive this evidence to ensure that adult education programs lead to postsecondary credentials and good jobs.

“Accelerating Opportunity will help community colleges in Illinois develop successful strategies to train and educate the population most at-risk for unemployment,” said Scott Lensink, president of Lake Land College in Mattoon. “These strategies will increase student success, improve completion rates, and accelerate students’ entry into the job market where they can earn self-sustaining wages.”

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