



Illinois
Community
College
Board

Workforce Education Strategic Plan

July 2, 2017



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The Illinois Community College System is the third largest community college system in the nation and covers the entire state with 48 colleges and two multi-community college centers in 39 community college districts. Community colleges serve nearly one million Illinois residents each year in credit and noncredit courses and many more through their public service programs.

As the largest provider of public workforce training in Illinois, the system of 48 community colleges ensures that all Illinois residents have educational and training opportunities leading to high wage and high growth employment. Understanding and responding to the needs of the community is a core mission of the Illinois Community College System.



The Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) engaged in a strategic planning process designed to ensure the community college system remains a leader in the complementary fields of workforce training and education, and becomes ever more responsive to changing employer and student needs throughout the state. This plan will expand and enhance Illinois' ability to attract, retain, and grow businesses and develop educational opportunities to support students' success in the workforce. It will also enhance the community college system's ability to accommodate the economic and workforce shifts occurring over the past two decades and into the future.

Specifically, the strategic plan for workforce education will:

- Ensure education and economic competitiveness for the system at the local and state levels;
- Strengthen business and Industry relationships;
- Maximize employer engagement in the development of relevant programs that will lead to jobs and careers that offer family-sustaining wages;

VISION

Utilize the overall strategic planning and related processes to achieve alignment of the community college system and the state's workforce development system with economic development directions and workforce needs, thereby creating a talent pipeline that fuels economic growth and creates career pathways for all citizens of Illinois.

- Enhance education and training at all levels of the community college system including adult education, business and industry, CTE, and continuing education; and
- Provide integrated options for students to move quickly into career pathway programs/Programs of Study (POS).

The Illinois Community College Board (ICCB), in partnership with the Department of Commerce, , began the development - a Workforce Education Strategic Plan (WESP) in the Spring of 2015 with eleven regional meetings that were held in the state's ten Economic Development Regions (EDRs). These meetings included participation from community colleges, adult education and career technical education (CTE) providers, state agencies, employers, workforce entities, philanthropic and community organizations, community members, and others. Each regional meeting included an employer panel and dialogue with participants to discuss education and training needs as well as challenges identified by employers. Partner discussions and planning activities were focused around the following three focus areas:

- ❖ **Employer Engagement:** What can be done by the community college system, the workforce development system, and other partners in education and training to better meet the needs of employers, particularly those in high-priority regional industry sectors and clusters?
- ❖ **Talent Development System Alignment:** How can all stakeholders in talent development and workforce education and training better align and leverage their efforts to meet regional industry, employer, and occupational needs?
- ❖ **Education System Alignment:** How can ICCB, working with partners, best support individual community colleges/college systems in addressing the workforce preparation and education needs of regional employers in targeted industry sectors?

A written report of each regional meeting was published and described by region synthesized in an overall report provided to ICCB in August of 2015. Observations and recommendations from all of the regional meetings were provided in a comprehensive report delivered to ICCB in November of 2015. These reports are available on the ICCB website at <https://www.iccb.org/workforce/>. The regional forums discussions identified the following four priority Strategic Direction areas for inclusion in the workforce education strategic plan for the community college system. These Strategic Direction priority areas include:

- **Strategic Direction ①:** Increase Early Career-Related Education and Exposure

Students need to be exposed to careers, on-the-job learning, and work much earlier. There was a clear consensus in the meetings that career exposure, exploration, and work experience needs to start earlier, in the K-12 system, and

optimally at the elementary school level. The goal is not to “lock” students into formal career training tracks earlier or to force them to make “final” decisions about careers at an early age, but rather to expand their opportunities to explore a variety of careers and related programs of study, and to enhance core learning by teaching basic skills in the context of careers or jobs in which students might be interested. Community colleges, adult education, CTE, and K-12 partners have a significant opportunity to expand collaboration and strategic efforts and to ensure that clear and consistent career pathways are adopted statewide and intentionally pursued on a continuum from the K-12 to community college level (and beyond).

- **Strategic Direction ②:** Address Essential and Occupational Skill Gaps

Employers want workforce and education systems to expand the pool of qualified applicants. They uniformly noted significant deficits in workers’ (particularly young workers’) “soft” or essential skills and also want the workforce partners to specifically address the sector and occupational needs of their industries.

- **Strategic Direction ③:** Align Education and Training Programs to Employers’ Needs

Employers continuously emphasized their perception of a disconnect between what they need and the training and other services being provided by the education and workforce systems. Employers want education and training to be better aligned to their needs, standards and expectations and expressed that they would be enthusiastic participants in effective collaborations focused on achieving that. Employers noted the following specific issues to help define the challenge: (1) The need to specifically address the sector and occupational needs of industry, including career pathways and work-based learning; (2) The need for public systems to move at the speed of business; and (3) Disconnects in credentialing.

- **Strategic Direction ④:** Strengthen Connections among Public Partners and Engagement and Alignment with Business

There is a clear need to develop strategies that will strengthen each region’s connections between and among community colleges, adult education, CTE, K-12 systems, and the workforce and economic development systems. As important, partnering with education and training providers and with economic and workforce development needs to be easier and more seamless for employers and must provide more value.

In January 2017, a taskforce was convened to develop content for the WESP in the four Strategic Direction areas discussed above. Taskforce members included ICCB leaders and staff, community colleges, adult education and CTE providers, state workforce and education partners, local workforce and education



partners, community-based organizations, and others. Between January and April 2017, each taskforce member participated as part of a subcommittee to develop recommendations under each of the strategic directions listed above. In April 2017, the taskforce presented the recommendations for the ICCB Workforce Education Strategic Plan (WESP).

Strategic Direction ①: Increase Early Career-Related Education and Exposure

Goal 1: Build partnerships among K-12, Adult Education, CTE, and other partners to facilitate earlier engagement in career exploration and work-based learning opportunities for all student populations.

- 1.1 Expand partnerships among the community college system, including adult education and CTE, and K-12 to provide elementary and secondary students with career exploration opportunities and experiences that develop an understanding of career and educational experiences related to workforce.
 - Research and identify the most effective models and strategies for early career exposure and exploration and align and leverage funds across systems (e.g., K-12 and the workforce system) to co-invest in the most successful approaches.
 - Adopt a tiered approach to ensure increasingly robust career exposure as students' progress from elementary to middle school to high school to community college, including integration of career exposure and Adult Education and CTE partners. (See 1.2)
 - Identify and prioritize opportunities for students to engage with workers from industries with hands-on interactive elements.
 - Provide a wide-range of enriching career-oriented camps for students (e.g., Science Technology Engineering and Math [STEM] camps).
- 1.2 Endorse the PACE (Postsecondary and Career Expectations) Framework for grades 8-12. Expand the framework to include holistic, consistent engagement for grades under 8.

The framework includes the following specific steps:

1. Grade school: outreach → Middle School: develop student knowledge of career pathways/ career exploration → High School: career exploration/integrate certifications and credentials into coursework.
2. Encourage local government support of early career education and market successes.
3. Offer career exploration workshops strategically throughout education.

4. Incorporate work-based learning into the curriculum.
 - a) Align career interests and abilities at an early age to develop career pathways;
 - b) Relate skills and aptitudes to certain careers. "I like to do ____, which is related to ____ career";
 - c) Summer classes related to CTE;
 - d) CTE honors groups and service learning projects in HS;
 - e) Make career transitional student organizations mandatory for K-12; and
 - f) Increase Opportunities for apprenticeships (youth and pre-apprenticeships) and internships.
5. Involve K-12 administrators in workforce investment boards to create partnerships.
6. Support students in their personal development as part of their process in determining their career pathway.
7. Educate parents about CTE.
8. Encourage innovative program design.
- 1.3 Work with secondary education and business partners to establish mentoring programs for providing business mentorship to students younger than high school.
- 1.4 Partner with community-based and other providers that are not part of the K-12 system but are education settings, like Boys' and Girls' Clubs, to engage a broader and more diverse range of individuals in earlier career exposure and exploration activities.

Goal 2: Influence policy shifts to allow more time for students in K-12 to have more hands-on training, internship, and co-op education.

- 2.1 Provide for-credit classes for career exploration that allows secondary students to experience a variety of career pathways, including through internships with local businesses.
 - Create viable experiential opportunities for students in K-12 including youth pre-apprenticeship experiences, internships/co-ops, work/workplace exploration, visiting companies/employers, etc. Adult Education and CTE partners can play key roles in expanding these opportunities.
- 2.2 Identify and utilize existing regional partnerships/networks to build and champion educational policy and synergy of great minds, ideas, and practices.

- 2.3 Increase support for expanded dual credit, early college models and Integrated Education and Training (IET) models such as Integrated Career and Academic Preparation System (ICAPS).
 - Provide opportunities for students to exit college with Associate of Applied Sciences degree (AAS) or Career Certificate.
 - Identify opportunities to expand ICAPS and related programming.
- 2.4 Streamline and align CTE advisory groups by including secondary education into post-secondary CTE groups and other business and industry partner groups.
 - Make CTE advisory groups more strategic and meaningful.
 - Engage secondary and post-secondary partners in joint employer advisory efforts, including CTE advisory groups.
 - Engage and share information with other existing business/industry advisory groups, e.g. those that advise human services organizations.
- 2.5 Foster collaborative dialogue between educators and policy-makers around opportunities to expand career exploration and experience activities for K-12 students.
- 2.6 Analyze current policies to identify potential barriers and address as appropriate.

Goal 3: Expose K-12, Adult Education, and CTE students and other populations, such as young people with High School Equivalency Certificates (HSEs) who are stuck in low-wage, low-skill jobs, to in-demand career opportunities in employer-defined career pathways, and facilitate earlier “on-ramps” to pathways for these students.

- 3.1 Identify in-demand career pathways, validated by industry partners, and define partner roles in scaling adoption and implementation of a common statewide framework and approach, customized to unique local and regional needs.
 - Identify career pathway sectors based on labor market data.
- 3.2 Support and publicize the College and Career Pathway Endorsement system as defined in the Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness Act (PWR).
 - Ensure the community college system accepts and recognizes the value of each endorsement.
- 3.3 Identify specific credentials in critical career pathways that are realistic and attainable for the K-12 population. Connect secondary-level credentialing work in career pathways to credential attainment and pathway progressions across the full post-secondary continuum, including Adult Education and CTE.
 - Identify funding that may be available to support students in obtaining credentials, as there may be potential ineligibility for financial aid.

- Integrate the Illinois State Board of Education's College and Career Readiness Indicator as part of career pathways and credentialing efforts.
- 3.4 Leverage technology to enhance career exposure and exploration efforts for all populations, e.g. connecting students to mentors virtually, using the Career Cruising Inspire platform, IDES's Career Information System, etc.



Goal 4: Build awareness of and support for the value of earlier career exposure and CTE among key audience/stakeholder groups (including students, parents, teachers and counselors, etc.) through a variety of career messaging, education, exposure, and exploration strategies.

- 4.1 Develop a marketing campaign to promote and clearly describe CTE in Illinois.
- Conduct an assessment of the understanding and perspectives of current students and parents to uncover knowledge gaps, stereotypes, or misconceptions of CTE.
 - Create cooperative marketing efforts where community college and business/industry craft a message aimed at students and parents.
 - Develop and implement comprehensive, cohesive well thought-out marketing strategies to promote CTE in K-12.
 - Broaden the high school counselor's experience and knowledge about CTE.
 - Promote models that integrate Adult Education and CTE for adult learners.
 - Engage local workforce Board to provide career counselors, teachers, and others with wage data and related labor market information.
 - Showcase best practices throughout the system including high school and community college partnerships (9-14). Examples include:

- Oakton Community College where Career Exploration classes are offered in three industries (Health, Business, Nanotechnology) incorporating hands-on activities. Parents are actively involved;
 - Danville's Campus – Tech Camps for underprivileged students; and
 - Rock Valley College is working with Rockford Public Schools to create pathways called "Highways" in five high demand areas, so students will take college level courses in their junior and senior years, leading to certificates.
- 4.2 Provide professional development on increasing early career-related education and exposure to career pathways for K-12, CTE, Adult Education, and other communities.

Strategic Direction ②: Address Essential and Occupational Skill Gaps

Goal 1: Embed essential employability framework (sometimes called "soft skills") across the curriculum, specifically in "hard"/technical programs and courses, ideally through work-based components that complement classroom-based academic work.

- 1.1 Endorse and support the work of the Illinois Essential Employability Skills Task Force by assisting in the dissemination of the Essential Employability Skills Framework and supporting its system-wide implementation.
- In developing the Essential Employability Skills Framework, the taskforce collaborated with business and industry, representatives from the chambers of commerce, WIOA partner agencies, and education stakeholders. This committee is recommending the Taskforce:
 - Identify the skills deemed essential to employment;
 - Highlight effective practices;
 - Provide input on how to implement the framework into training courses, education classes;
 - Create a rubric to measure performance outcomes;
 - Assess performance by using data driven measurements; and
 - Engage students/employees in assessing their level of effective employability skills.

Moreover, the effective practices should highlight:

- Work based learning opportunities;
- Internships with local employers; and

- Work-based cooperative experiences (engagement between education/training programs and business and industry is essential).
 - Collaborate on the development of system-wide dissemination plan.
- 1.2 Provide guidance to revamp appropriate system-wide professional development to incorporate the framework and developed tools for CTE and Adult Education faculty, counselors and administrators.
- Professional development should include how to implement these effective practices and be aimed at multiple levels of college faculty and staff leaders. It should also include guidance on how to create partnerships between business/industry, CTE programs, and Adult Education classes.
 - Establish an advisory council including representatives from business and education to provide guidance on where and how professional development should get rolled out.

Goal 2: To address employers' concerns that workers' attainment of post-secondary credentials does not always guarantee required on-the-job competencies, increase the use of employer-driven applied/work-based learning in both credit and non-credit programming.

- 2.1 Examine effective work-based learning models.
- Conduct a scan of work-based learning opportunities across the state; determine best practices that can be shared.
 - Complete a review of the apprenticeship plus model to determine opportunities that support the goal of increasing work-based learning in credit and noncredit programming.
 - Create a central repository of best practices on work-based learning (consider current portals that are available).
- 2.2 Develop expectations for high quality and structured work-based learning opportunities.
- Crosswalk the strategies in the Office and Employment and Training's Secure Integrated Business Services Report to determine points of intersect that lead to the increase of work-based learning in credit and noncredit programming.
 - Review the WIOA Unified Plan to gather strategies for work-based learning and ensure strategies for the ICCB strategic plan align.
 - Work with the IWIB Apprenticeship Committee to discuss the ICCB strategic plan implementation goals and ensure alignment.
 - Issue recommendations for the integration of work-based learning in credit and noncredit programming. Should include a suggested process, roles &

responsibilities, etc. for colleges to take regionally that is in alignment with the new integrated business services model.

2.3 Support institutions as they engage employers and utilize current labor market information to understand skill needs and skills gaps and to ensure the development of demand-driven work-based learning opportunities.

- Identify, through industry-led groups/conversations, how work-based learning models may differ among industries (e.g., health care, manufacturing); adjust system expectations/recommendations accordingly.
- Position ICCB as a broker to facilitate partnerships among institutions and key state industry and trade associations in support of regional/local work-based learning implementation.
- Provide enhanced tools and/or training to college business outreach leaders (credit and non-credit) to help them more effectively diagnose, and address—through work-based learning—workforce challenges. Could include a sample set of issues to explore with businesses (e.g., aging workforce, degreed/non-degreed considerations, and competitive strategies) especially as part of college advisory boards.
- Support institutions in accessing and effectively analyzing labor market information in order to understand sector and occupational skill needs and potential skill gaps.

2.4 Explore enhanced state policies that may affect work-based learning expansion.

- Review the WIOA regulations to explore opportunities to leverage policy to create flexible models.
- Connect with the IWIB Policy Group to provide input into the policy development of work-based learning and career pathway framework.
- Research other state policies and national organizations (NGA, U.S. Chamber, etc.) including on OJT policies that support enhanced WBL activities.
- Explore, and support where appropriate, efforts to enhance flexibility in the academic cycle and course approval process to better align business needs with the academic calendar.

2.5 Build awareness of work-based learning as a critical workforce strategy and the capacity of colleges to implement quality models.

- Survey stakeholders to assess professional development needs related to work-based learning.
- Expand professional development across stakeholders (e.g., program designers, faculty, business service reps). Professional development should include:
 - ICCB guidelines/recommendations (see above);

- Examples of model programs;
- Braided funding opportunities/strategies;
- Student engagement; and
- Business outreach.
- Build/enhance the exchange of resources and learning in order to share good practices and facilitate peer-mentoring opportunities.
- Expand marketing of work-based learning as a key workforce strategy. Includes:
 - Common messaging among core state partner agencies/organizations;
 - Common and enhanced set of educational materials aimed at colleges, secondary schools, students and companies; and
 - Material showcasing the ROI for businesses.

Goal 3: Provide best practice resources, professional development opportunities and policy support to address significant skill and work readiness gaps; to enhance students' advancement along educational goals, credential attainment, and career pathways; and adopt embedded and/or co-requisite developmental education models and strategies.

- 3.1 Build a directory of research-based instructional models (e.g., ICAPS, co-requisite remediation, Preparatory Math for General Education (PMGE), and transitional math pathways) and student support and success models that are based on proven practice.
 - Through surveys and other pro-active methods, research effective models for accelerating students' progress successfully through developmental education.
 - Build a directory of these models.
 - Ask colleges to identify a representative who can speak to the approaches identified; officially recognize these individuals as developmental education "leaders" and assign as a statewide advisory committee to oversee this set of objectives. Identify a cadre of experts to serve as technical experts (see 3.2).
 - Identify best practice student success initiatives (financial, etc.) which are proven to enhance students' advancement along educational goals, credential attainment, and career pathways.
- 3.2 Provide guidance and professional development to ensure consistent quality implementation.
 - Issue appropriate system-wide guidance on these models.
 - Give colleges access to these proven practices through professional development opportunities that take the following forms:

- Virtual Trainings (a series of trainings held virtually or face-to-face in different regions across the state as an introduction for local program faculty and academic administrators to get an overview of the project; specific content may vary according to local industry demands of the region).
 - Academies (statewide trainings for college teams leading the implementation efforts at their local institutions to be available at established conferences [e.g., Illinois Mathematics Association for Community College; Forum for Excellence; Illinois Council of Community College Administrators; Adult Education conferences/trainings; Illinois Community College Chief Academic Officers; Illinois Community College Faculty Associations]).
 - Local Professional Development Trainings (Training tools developed to assist local implementation teams with delivering trainings at their institutions. All local program administrators and faculty within each pathway can be trained).
- All of these venues should work together to allow training content to be re-visited and delved deeply into in a systematic fashion over time.
 - Identify a cadre of technical experts in these innovative practices who can be resources to coach faculty and instructional administrators, building capacity across the state and accelerating the scaling up process.
 - Evaluate the state’s professional development program to identify the methods that work the most effectively and efficiently to scale up prove practices.
 - Consider that professional development be aimed at three levels of personnel who will be instrumental in implementing approaches to address the skill and work readiness gaps: local program faculty, local academic administrators, and a cadre of state technical experts.
 - Include secondary faculty in professional development activities, as appropriate.
- 3.3 Support the Post-secondary Work Readiness (PWR) Act and its implementation.
- Continue to support the PWR act implementation efforts and ensure it aligns with this plan.
 - Ensure institutions understand how the PWR Act intersects with the work readiness and career pathway efforts outlined in this plan.

Goal 4: Prioritize statewide adoption of Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) as a demonstrated model for assessing students’ and workers’ attained skills and advancing them more rapidly toward competency and credential attainment. Ensure that PLA and resulting skills certification are mapped to employers’ defined skill needs.



- 4.1 Support the “ICCB Alternative Credentialing Methods Taskforce” and its efforts to create a competency-based education alternative high school equivalency (HSE) credential, establishing criteria and requirements that may include PLA.
 - Maintain (or extend) the existing taskforce with a mission of creating a broader PLA system-wide framework; include additional state groups that reflect the new target populations.
 - Work with the taskforce to develop an action plan for statewide dissemination of policy and guidance for competency based education (CBE) and PLA.
 - Expand connections between and articulation of non-credit and credit programming as part of alternative credentialing and PLA strategies.
- 4.2 Develop a system-wide PLA framework that maintains academic rigor and awards and recognizes credits through the assessment of prior learning that can be used for populations with barriers to employment, including Adult Education students, veterans, the incarcerated and dislocated workers.
 - Conduct an in-depth scan of best practice system-wide CBE and PLA efforts, including those focused on serving Adult Education students. Focus on work CAEL is doing both nationally and with IL colleges (e.g., Waubonsee).
 - Develop a framework that includes, at a minimum:
 - Draft PLA state policy;
 - Assessment processes and methods;
 - Possible fee structures;
 - Guidelines to support institutions’ transfer of PLA credits;
 - Guidelines to support consistent transcription and credit recognition and program requirements; and

- Specific recommendations for how the PLA framework/strategies connect to workforce system efforts (that are focused on career pathway systems and integrated work-based learning opportunities) and align with employer-identified credentials.
- 4.3 Develop the capacity of institutions to enhance current PLA practices.
- Develop assessment tools (and use existing tools, such as CAEL's, as appropriate).
 - Develop appropriate cross-walk tools for credit transfer and a suggested process for how institutions should use it consistently.
 - Conduct system-wide professional development using the framework and tools.
- 4.4 Raise awareness of PLA with institutions and students.
- Develop common PLA-related messaging and a communications and social media plan. Consider materials for colleges to use for their own promotion.
 - Work with the workforce system to target materials and opportunities to appropriate target populations.

Strategic Direction ③: Align Education and Training Programs to Employers' Needs

Goal 1: Better engage and leverage input from employers to understand and address how industry trends will impact training and other workforce needs.

- 1.1 Formalize and regularize efforts to gather employers' input on current and future workforce training needs and use that feedback to drive program design, adjustment, and delivery.
- Industry roundtables, surveys, needs assessments, skill gap analyses, and other approaches may be part of this ongoing outreach and analysis. Identifying ways to help employers best analyze and communicate about their workforce needs is a component of this work.
 - Ensure that the process and results of gathering employer input by state-level partners are shared with regional/local counterparts, particularly business services teams, for replication.
 - Ensure that state partners seek regular input from regional/local counterparts, employers, and employer collaboratives on best practices and lessons learned in business engagement.
 - State partners should encourage and support the use of peer-learning networks to serve as a community of practice for sharing and discussing sustainable

business engagement best-practice models among interested partners. Explore use of an available online platform (e.g., a LinkedIn group).

- 1.2 Work with employers in targeted sectors to identify high-value, industry-validated training models from their perspectives (e.g., Registered Apprenticeship and other work-based training models).
 - Catalogue and disseminate employer-validated models for replication (leverage existing efforts, e.g., IWIB apprenticeship committee work).
 - Employ talent flow analysis, or back-mapping, a supply chain management approach to talent, to determine which programs and models are producing talent with the right skills and attributes needed by employers.

Goal 2: Expand and accelerate the development, approval, and implementation of employer-driven training models, including non-traditional models.

- 2.1 Catalogue and share documented best-practice examples of employer-driven training models, including impact data as available and guidance for replication (leverage existing efforts, e.g., IWIB apprenticeship committee work).
 - Employ talent flow analysis, or back-mapping, a supply chain management approach to talent, to determine which programs and models are producing talent with the right skills and attributes needed by employers.
 - Explore use of an available online platform (e.g., a LinkedIn group) to serve as a community of practice for sharing and discussing best-practice models among interested partners.
- 2.2 Increase implementation of specific models that are supported by industry/employer stakeholders.
 - Expand early career exploration and development models like Career Academies, youth internships, pre-apprenticeship, integrated foundational skills training, dual credit for high school students, integrated education and bridge models (e.g., ICAPS), etc.
 - Expand work-based training opportunities like Registered Apprenticeship and non-registered apprenticeship, on-the-job training, incumbent worker training, etc.
- 2.3 Expand community college and partner capacity to design/replicate employer-driven training models by tying sharing of models to professional development and continuing education requirements and activities.
 - Incorporate knowledge- and competency-building around designing and implementing employer-driven training models into professional development and continuing education curriculum and activities for appropriate community college and partner staff, including WIOA partner programs.

- 2.4 Fast-track expansion of employer-driven training models by encouraging local approval of programs that have already been approved elsewhere; starting new programs as non-credit and migrating to credit over time; and encouraging and supporting the expansion of existing curriculum-sharing and adaptation efforts where feasible.
- Explore hosting a platform to facilitate curriculum-sharing if desired by colleges.
 - Encourage curriculum-sharing among colleges to foster expedited local approval and responsiveness to changing business needs.
 - Other key state workforce partners should also encourage training and curriculum-sharing among their regional/local counterparts, and provide needed support to expand sharing.
 - Catalogue and share employer-driven training models that were successfully started as non-credit and later migrated to credit.
- 2.5 Explore opportunities to modularize existing training programs into component parts as a potential strategy for accelerating adoption and expansion and increasing training providers' ability to respond to employers' training needs more quickly.
- Catalogue and share existing examples of modularized training programs, as well as process guidance to assist colleges and their partners in modularizing training programs where desired.
- 2.6 As replicating implementation and scaling of employer-embraced training models is time- and resource-intensive, identify and devote additional resources to supporting it.
- Identify specific resource streams, across state partners (including adult education, CTE, business and industry, etc.) who can be tapped to support expansion of employer-driven training models statewide and in the context of specific regional/local needs.

Goal 3: Reduce duplication among training providers by incentivizing collaboration among community colleges, adult education providers, CTE, and other providers in the development of industry/employer partnerships and the design and delivery of apprenticeship, internship, and other training programs.

- 3.1 Enable community colleges, adult education and CTE providers, and workforce system providers, as applicable, to work together to meet regional workforce needs of employers.
- Identify training programs in regions and across the state that are recognized by industry partners as providing the highest quality and value.

- As appropriate, develop “expert” colleges at the regional level to serve as training leaders in various critical career pathways.
- Identify opportunities to align training investments and activities across community college district and economic development region boundaries, which in many cases are disparate.
- Align corporate training efforts to meet employer needs.

Goal 4: Align training programs to employer-defined career pathways and industry-validated, third-party credentials.

- 4.1 Work with employer partners to validate and map key pathways in target industries.
 - Conduct a scan of current career pathway models and practices around the state, including high schools and community colleges, adult education, and CTE.
 - Leverage existing career clusters/pathways and programs of study work that’s been done in Illinois as a starting point for validation with employers, rather than starting from scratch in this area. See the Illinois Career Clusters, Pathways, and Programs of Study Guide (<http://occrl.illinois.edu/docs/librariesprovider4/prc/career-cluster-guide.pdf?sfvrsn=6>) and additional resources available through the Office of Community College Research (OCCRL) at the University of Illinois (<http://occrl.illinois.edu/index>).
- 4.2 Work with employer partners to identify nationally-portable, industry-recognized credentials along pathways in key sectors within a region or community college district, as appropriate.
 - As a starting point, catalogue what is already known about existing industry-endorsed or adopted examples to support conversations with employers about the credentials they most value.
 - Focus work in particular with smaller businesses, which may be less familiar than larger ones with the potential value credentials can offer.
 - Because individual credentials cannot encompass all of the skills employers need, offer “credential plus” training that results in desired credentials and also incorporates additional “wrap-around” skill sets needed by companies.
 - Work with employer partners to map the progression of “stackable” credentials to improve students’/workers’ ability to move up career pathways and accumulate additional competencies over time.
 - Expand efforts to provide employer-driven continuing education activities for workers, such as credential renewal, continuing education credits, etc.
- 4.3 Connect non-credit training and adult education (K-adult) to post-secondary credit training in more clearly-articulated pathways.

- Enhance awareness and replication of dual credit CTE-to-post-secondary pathways and programming.
- While it is often easier to start programs as non-credit, non-credit-to-credit-bearing pathways are often not well-articulated or clear to students. Identify competencies from community college non-credit certifications and map them to those in credit programs to accelerate advancement up pathways. Use PLA, including granting credit for prior military experience, to further accelerate entry into credit-bearing programs.
- ICCB should continue its work at the state level and nationally to expand and improve data exchange between industry certification organizations and state longitudinal data systems. Industry certifications and licensure are critical to understanding career pathways and the expected outcomes of training programs.
- Employers get frustrated that different institutions have different policies regarding what they will accept from non-credit certifications and count toward credit. Facilitate a conversation among institutions to come to an agreement about common standards and practices in this area that college can adopt statewide.

4.4 Standardize stackable credentials across community colleges statewide.

- Aligning curriculum and standardizing stackable credentials across districts and industry areas is a significant lift and long-term undertaking that will require cooperative work among the institutional administration, faculty, regional employer advisory groups, and ICCB. A critical action step to support this strategy is outlining the process that will need to be pursued to align curriculum and credentials, defining roles of all involved, and identifying key challenges that will need to be addressed as part of the process.
- Engage employers at the outset of discussions about standardizing credentials to ensure alignment with industry training and competency needs. Keep employers engaged in ongoing review of credentials to ensure workplace relevancy and update/adjust credential requirement accordingly.
- As appropriate and available, integrate nationally-portable industry certifications into standardized stackable credentials across colleges.

Goal 5: Accelerate students'/workers' progression through employer-driven training and career pathways.

- #### 5.1 Adopt advancement acceleration strategies and modify programs as necessary to move individuals more quickly through training and to attainment of competencies and credentials.
- Incorporate acceleration strategies at the program level, e.g.:

- Expand integration of co-requisite “basic”/developmental education in technical skills training (e.g., ICAPS model);
 - Clearly map non-credit to credit pathways and share these with students;
 - Expand existing models for high school students’ participation in college and career academies/CTE on community college campuses (Lakeland and Parkland noted as two examples; many other examples throughout the state);
 - Modularize semester-based curriculum and embed interim stackable credentials;
 - Expand open entry and exit;
 - Expand competency-based assessment and advancement;
 - Expand PLA and awarding of credit for prior learning, experience, and skills (see Goal Area 2 for more detailed discussion related to PLA);
 - Expand secondary/post-secondary dual-credit programming; and
 - Eliminate courses and credits from credit certificate programs that employers/industry feel are unnecessary and/or not aligned with their skill needs. This will save time and resources and accelerate students’ completion of certificate programs.
- 5.2 Identify the particular needs of various populations and implement skill development and career advancement strategies, customized to each population’s common needs and challenges.
- Document and share successful/best-practice strategies for connecting all key talent pools to career pathways and advancement opportunities (i.e. models that are most effective with each talent pool population).
- 5.3 Align customer assessment efforts and tools to employers’ needs to ensure a better “fit” and improve career advancement prospects for customers.
- Conduct comprehensive assessment of customers prior to matching them with employers; proactively address skill gaps that emerge in assessment; and establish feedback loops with employers to ensure ongoing suitability and support continuous improvement.
- 5.4 Identify and expand the provision of coordinated wrap-around/supportive services that can assist individuals with continued advancement through pathways, particularly at transition points that may be especially challenging in terms of maintaining momentum.
- Expand best practice models (which would require dedication of resources) to support individuals enrolled in a variety of training programming.

- 5.5 Connect all talent pools to career pathway and credential opportunities in target industries (e.g., elementary and secondary students, disconnected youth, returning military members, Adult Education participants, and other populations).
- Leverage system partners and their strengths and areas of expertise to comprehensively address the needs of various populations as they move through pathways.

Goal 6: Develop client-driven, system-wide training-related performance metrics (beyond program/funding stream-specific measures) and track and report progress against those measures.

- 6.1 Establish performance measures that reflect employer partner training goals and expectations and are adopted, as appropriate, among all partners.
- Set specific outcome goals for employer-defined measures, e.g.:
 - Quality of referred candidates relative to job requirements;
 - Reduced time to hire;
 - Time to full productivity;
 - Percentage of hires meeting performance expectations;
 - Increased retention/reduced turnover;
 - Reduced replacement costs;
 - Other bottom-line financial impacts; and
 - Customer service/service experience.
- 6.2 Work with individual student, job seeker, and worker clients to establish performance measures that reflect their training goals and expectations and are adopted, as appropriate, among all partners.
- Set specific outcome goals for individual student/client-defined measures, e.g.:
 - Access to “good jobs,” in terms of wages, individual and family sustainability, benefits, work culture, scheduling, etc.;
 - Employment;
 - Job retention;
 - Career advancement; and
 - Customer service/service experience.

Strategic Direction ④: Strengthen Connections among Public Partners and Engagement and Alignment with Business

Goal 1: Build sustainable, deeper partnerships among K-12, Adult Education, CTE, workforce development including corporate training, economic development, and social service agencies.

- 1.1 Better understand and identify the roles and resources of K-12, Adult Education, CTE, workforce development, economic development, and social service partners as a way to build stronger relationships.
 - Complete cross-training with partners so that each partner understands each other's role, services, and constraints.
 - Identify the (financial) resources that each partner brings to the table to allow better braiding of resources among partners. Outline opportunities for braiding funding that are allowable within the context of program and funding stream mandates and limitations.
 - Create innovative opportunities for braided funding to address joint workforce and education goals.
 - Support the establishment of relationships in places where they do not currently exist, including connecting adult education providers with local representatives of WIOA required/core partners.
 - Establish common needs and priorities across partners.
 - Develop and offer training for community college and high school counselors to participate in together, thereby building relationships and providing consistent content messaging.
 - Engage existing Advisory Boards through specific, concise, attainable goals.
 - Share data and establish a data-sharing framework and tools.
 - Develop a communications strategy to ensure ongoing, continual communications among partners.
- 1.2 Participate in integrated planning with local/regional economic development strategic plans, workforce planning activities, and collective impact initiatives.
 - Participate, through strategic assignment of high-level staff, in existing local and regional planning efforts already underway. Leverage existing efforts/infrastructure to the greatest extent possible.
 - Engage local elected officials in planning work.
 - Utilized the expertise and knowledge of all partners in building partnerships.

- Identify and adopt joint goals and core measures that can be shared across organizations, thereby incentivizing partner collaboration, improving accountability and credibility, and supporting continuous improvement.
 - Clearly identify who is responsible and how efforts will be sustained.
 - Braid funding with partners to implement joint initiatives. Focus specifically on promoting ways to incentivize multi-year budgets, including pursuing policy shifts that may be required to do so.
 - Identify and share the resources the community college system and individual community colleges can bring to the table to support local and regional planning efforts, including subject matter expertise, data analysis, and enrollment data.
 - Sign MOUs to engage in specific, collaborative activities with partners.
- 1.3 Educate faculty and staff about state and regional talent development goals and initiatives.
- Provide annual (community college district-specific) training for faculty and staff on state-level initiatives and regional target industries, demand occupations, and talent pipeline initiatives.
- 1.4 Develop a systematic method to address barriers as partners work to better align and integrate.
- Map the existing (as-is) state/process.
 - Determine the ideal state/process.
 - Identify barriers and problem-solve.
 - Develop and implement communication plan.

Goal 2: Enhance sector-based employer engagement and relationship development efforts to identify and respond to employers' workforce challenges and training needs.

- 2.1 Encourage each community college to develop an internal, unified employer outreach plan and include at a minimum CTE, adult education and corporate and continuing education
- Enhance coordination between divisions within each community college that engage in employer outreach, including determining when multiple community college districts should be involved in the same employer visit.
- 2.2 Develop a comprehensive assessment of business engagement efforts and share results with the system and individual community colleges.

- Survey community college staff and employers to understand existing practices, successes, and challenges of engaging employers:
 - What does successful engagement look like from the perspective of faculty and employers?
 - How is engagement being measured?
 - Why are employers coming back/staying engaged (and why are NOT coming back)?
 - Publish results in white paper/report.
 - Develop a toolkit or guide to successful engagement of businesses which can be adapted and adopted by individual community colleges.
- 2.3 At the regional level, work across partner lines to implement a coordinated, unified approach to integrated business engagement, business needs assessment, and business service/solutions delivery. Leverage existing work being done around the formation of WIOA business services teams.
- Collaborate with partners to map existing (as-is) business engagement processes and asset-map current resources Include at a minimum CTE, adult education and corporate and continuing education, local workforce system and other partners.
 - Collaborate with partners to create a local/regional vision and process for providing unified services that aligns and streamlines processes and resources.
 - Develop joint marketing materials with partners that highlight ongoing regional and state efforts:
 - Focus not just on services available, but also how employers can engage in the community college system;
 - Demonstrate the value of businesses engaging with the community college and partners; and
 - Articulate what partners are going to be doing differently.
 - Help partners reach their business engagement goals through the unified employer outreach plan.
 - Jointly maintain an inventory of all employers in the region through a content management system.
 - Develop a shared, consistent framework/approach for business engagement and service delivery that is adopted among partners. Because significant IT changes/upgrades (e.g., adoption of a customer relationship management system accessible to all partners) are not likely in the near future, identify a few pilot sites that could test a creative data-sharing approach that uses existing resources. Ensure that the framework developed includes a mechanism for sharing information learned from employers with all partners.

- Focus on quality of business engagement, not just quantity of contacts, and on the sustainability and depth of business relationships. Define cross-agency goals for follow-through and results.
- Partners should organize as regional business services teams that bring together the strengths, expertise, and resources of all the individual partners; align around a shared approach for business engagement and service delivery; and position themselves to be able to offer a wide range of solutions depending upon employers' needs.
- Before approaching businesses, regional partners should "do their homework" in terms of identifying industry trends, examining relevant labor market information, and understanding the company to be approached.
- Adopt an employer needs-driven, vs. program-driven, approach to the design and delivery of business services/solutions. Employer engagement and service design begins with understanding employers' needs, with appropriate programs and program resources being leveraged "in the back office" to address employers' stated challenges.

2.4 Provide/participate in business engagement training.

- Cross-train business engagement staff across all partners to promote a unified approach of contacting employers. . Cross-training for all team members can help partners understand one another's unique expertise and solutions, and enable all team members to act as brokers for/connectors to solutions outside of their direct areas of expertise.
- Cross-train on how to engage businesses in a meaningful way, so all partners operate from the same framework. Example strategies with employers include:
 - Businesses drive/create the agenda and
 - Emphasize successful existing programs (We Train)

2.5 Identify and share best practices for engaging employers.

- Publish best practices and resources on the ICCB website.
- Identify promising practices and tools used by all partners.
- Including sample Advisory Council employer membership policies and rules.

2.6 Establish or enhance industry-led sector-based partnerships (convened either by community colleges or other intermediaries trusted by industry such as industry associations, economic development organizations, Chambers, etc.).

- Identify existing best-practice industry partnerships and their critical success factors.
- Where industry partnerships do not currently exist, identify business and community partner champions to form and grow them.

- Engage with employers regularly through these sector partnerships to understand and develop training solutions to workforce needs as they evolve over time.
 - Identify neutral intermediaries to facilitate partnerships.
- 2.7 Articulate the opportunities for employers to engage with community colleges and the needs that community colleges have that employers may be equipped to fill.
- Expand specific employer investment and partnership efforts, e.g.:
 - Improving employers' communication about their workforce needs;
 - Providing information about training and other strategies that will help employers be more competitive and profitable;
 - Hosting training sites;
 - Donating/providing training equipment;
 - Providing financial support for training;
 - Offering internship and other work-based learning slots;
 - Hosting job shadowing and other career exploration/education opportunities;
 - Offering staff to serve as trainers;
 - Offering flexible scheduling for workers that are in training; and
 - Committing to keeping students in training until they complete their training programs, rather than hiring them before they complete and receive their credentials.
 - Utilizing the expertise of all partners working with employers including CTE, adult education, corporate training, and local and regional workforce partners.

Goal 3: Be more responsive and adaptive to the needs of employers (i.e. move at the speed of business).

- 3.1 Seek out sustainable funding streams for employer-driven training.
- Identify sources of funding that aren't dependent on the state budget.
 - Advocate for/lobby for funding from state government.
 - Inventory funding streams and ways they can be knit together.
 - Identify other funding models that can be considered.

- 3.2 Understand and mitigate, to the extent possible, the regulations that hinder the system's ability to move at the speed of business.
 - Standardize the approval process for PLA (please see Goal Area 2 for further discussion of PLA).
- 3.3 Explore nontraditional solutions that meet the needs of employers.
 - Use technology as a tool for learning/training inside and outside of the classroom.
 - Be more flexible in the way we deliver training.
 - Leverage apprenticeship and "apprenticeship plus" models.
 - Provide training for community college, adult education, and CTE staff on innovative approaches and best practices.
- 3.4 Seek to understand what business needs and wants.
 - Reverse roles: Have college faculty and adult education and CTE instructors learn/observe in the business environment.
 - Visit employers regularly.
 - Cultivate business ownership of collaboration process.
 - Use employer surveys to supplement labor market information.
- 3.5 Develop a process to address employer training needs even when the number of students needing the training is small.
 - Collaborate between community colleges to create larger pools of students.
 - Leverage WeTrain to enhance collaboration.

Goal 4: Better engage employers in the design and delivery of training and education programs.

- 4.1 Expand the role of employers, to the extent possible, in development and ongoing review and refinement of training and curriculum.
 - Evaluate the number of employers who current serve on business advisory committees and expand when feasible.
 - Empower employers hold leadership roles on advisory councils, helping them to be "stockholders," not just "stakeholders."
 - Collaborate with other existing partnerships of employers to solicit guidance and input on how best to involve and sustain the involvement of employers in this work.

- 4.2 Ensure engagement of employers in training design reflects the composition of the industries in the community college district and region.
 - Understand the target industries in each community college district to ensure that employers in all leading and growing sectors are being engaged.
- 4.3 Utilize industry subject matter experts.
 - Engage subject matter experts to serve as champions or to work as part-time faculty, as appropriate.
- 4.4 Enhance CTE Advisory Committees to ensure their ability to meet the needs of employers in development of curriculum and instruction.