

Volume 29, No. 3: *Leveraging the Power of Career Pathways*

Career Pathways in the Age of Technology and WIOA

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In a country where Walmart is now the largest private employer in 22 states and unemployment is at an all-time low, employers are looking for new ways to upskill the national labor force to make job applicants “career ready” and existing employees upwardly mobile. Layered on top of this is the fact that the Internet now dominates how we conduct our lives. More than half of the world’s 7.6 billion people use the Internet daily. More than 5 billion people access the Internet on mobile devices. These factors have created a new landscape for Career Pathways development and delivery.

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) established new requirements designed to ensure that adult career pathways align with the skill needs of industry. WIOA language removes any ambiguity about the need for technology integration and distance learning in ABE. Adult career pathways must align and integrate education (including ABE and ESOL), job training, counseling, and support services so as to enable low-skilled adults and youth to obtain secondary school diplomas (or recognized equivalents) and postsecondary education credentials, leading to employment in in-demand occupations. In today’s world, meeting those requirements requires technology.

Following are examples of how technology is being used in successful career pathway models around the country.

- The California Labor Federation’s Mobile Up Project brings basic skills instruction and career education coaching services entirely by cell phone to approximately 400 underserved English language learners working in the service sector. Cell-Ed’s interactive text and audio phone lines teach English and basic skills to hundreds of low-wage janitors and long-term care and other low-wage service workers who may have little to no digital literacy or

Internet access. This “anytime, anywhere” model makes learning accessible to a demographic that cannot attend regular classes because of family responsibilities and irregular work shifts.

- TalentABQ in Albuquerque, New Mexico, works to improve Albuquerque’s workforce by helping employers find talent using skills-based hiring. TalentABQ assesses and builds job seekers’ qualifications and the skills required to access new jobs by measuring core foundational skills that are found across 95 percent of all jobs in the U.S. Online assessment of soft skills enables non-traditional job candidates to demonstrate their job readiness to employers who may otherwise have overlooked them. Employers identify new talent through a “screen-in” process, rather than missing potential candidates through the traditional, degree-oriented “screen-out” process.
- Clark County, Nevada, is taking the collective impact approach to the next level by tearing down silos that exist between agencies that provide adult education and workforce training. The Clark County School District’s adult education program (state funded), Clark County Library System (WIOA II funded), Clark County Workforce Development Board (WIOA I funded), the College of Southern Nevada (WIOA II funded), and the Correctional System (state funded) have adopted computerized skills remediation software for both ABE and HSE preparation. Agencies throughout the county can share student data, accommodate the needs of students/clients who change locations, and meet the needs of all adult learners on a single curriculum delivery platform.

To meet the needs of an ever more diverse labor pool, education and workforce professionals must support the infusion of digital strategies into adult education career pathway development and workforce initiatives. By developing a shared strategy for leveraging the power of technology, we can create truly powerful career pathway models that enable adults to reach their goals as workers, family members, and citizens.

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BEGINNING OF NEWSLETTER

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