



WORKFORCE ECOSYSTEM

COLLABORATIVE

**The Pivot: Creating Sustainable and Diversified Adult
Education in the Workforce Ecosystem**

August 10, 2025

Participating Agencies
Convening #1 – December 4, 2025

Association for Career and Technical Education

LeAnn Curry, Executive Director
Michael Connet, Associate Deputy
Executive Director
Sophia Alston, Senior Manager of
Postsecondary CTE

Correctional Education Association, CEA

Peggy Kaiser, Executive Director

**National Association of State Directors of Adult
Education, NASDAE**

Pat Tyler, Executive Director

**Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives
Foundation, ACCEF**

Amy Shields, Executive Director ACCEF, VP
Programs ACCE

The National Association of Workforce Boards

Brad Turner-Little, President and CEO

**National Association of Workforce Development
Professionals, NAWDP**

Melissa Robins, Executive Director

Bray Strategies

Jan Bray, Chief Executive Officer

National Coalition of Certification Centers, NC3

Roger Tadajewski, Executive Director

The Coalition on Adult Basic Education, COABE

Sharon Bonney, Chief Executive Officer

The Center for Work Ethic Development/Aztec

Deanna Crosson, Strategic Director of Adult
Education
Mitch Rosin, Chief Academic Officer



Participating Agencies Convening #2 – April

Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development

Windy Swearingin, Director of Adult Education,

American Institutes for Research (AIR)

Sudie Whalen, Senior Technical Assistance
Consultant

The Coalition on Adult Basic Education, COABE

Sharon Bonney, Chief Executive Officer
Shaketta Thomas, President

Correctional Education Association, CEA

Peggy Kaiser, Executive Director

EASTCONN

Kristin Hempel, Adult & Community
Programs Director / COABE Board

National Association of State Directors of Adult Education, NASDAE

Pat Tyler, Executive Director

National Association of Workforce Development Professionals (NAWDP)

David Barch, Director of Vendor Relations and
Special Projects

New Mexico Higher Education Department

Amber Gallup, Director of Adult Education

P2C Solutions, LLC

Mitch Rosin, President/Strategist

Prism Group

Kyle Marinelli, Director, Government Affairs

The Center for Work Ethic Development/Aztec Workforce

Deanna Crosson, Vice President of Strategic
Accounts



Participating Agencies
Convening #3 – August 10, 2025

Bray Strategies

Jan Bray, Chief Executive Officer

California Department of Education

Carolyn Zachry, State Director of Adult Education

CASAS

Alex Harris, Program Consultant

The Center for Work Ethic Development/Aztec

Deanna Crosson, Vice President of Strategic Accounts

The Coalition on Adult Basic Education, COABE

Jeffrey Abramowitz, Board Member

Correctional Education Association, CEA

Peggy Kaiser, Executive Director
Andrea Buttross, President
Robert Vehock, Vice President

Truckee Meadows Community College

Alex Harris, Program Director | ABE Adult Basic Education

National Association of Workforce Development Professionals (NAWDP)

David Barch, Director of Vendor Relations and Special Projects

National Association of State Directors of Adult Education, NASDAE

Pat Tyler, Executive Director

P2C Solutions, LLC

Mitch Rosin, President/Strategist

The Petey Greene Program

Jeffrey Abramowitz, CEO

Prism Group

Kyle Marinelli, Director, Government Affairs



National Association of State Directors of Adult Education



THE
**PETEEY
GREENE**
PROGRAM



Introduction

On August 10, 2025, leaders from across the nation gathered in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, for the third convening of the Workforce Ecosystem Collaborative, held in conjunction with the Correctional Education Association (CEA) International Conference. This unique convergence of education, workforce development, reentry, and employer stakeholders created a powerful forum for exploring solutions at the intersection of adult education, workforce development, business and industry, and justice reform.

Building on the foundation of prior convenings, this session deepened the Collaborative's mission to reimagine the U.S. workforce ecosystem through cross-sector alignment, systems integration, and equity-driven innovation. The Pittsburgh gathering was particularly timely, taking place amid the suspension (and subsequent reinstatement) of WIOA Title II (AEFLA) funding, a major federal support for adult education and literacy, which added urgency to conversations about sustainability, diversified funding, employer engagement, and new models of service delivery.

The convening created five focused workgroup areas tasked with tackling some of the most pressing challenges facing the field:

1. **Awareness Campaigns** – Developing unified messaging to communicate the value of adult education to employers and policymakers.
2. **Skills-Based Hiring** – Promoting employment based on demonstrated ability, not credentials alone.

3. **Reentry and Correctional Education Pathways** – Bridging corrections education with career technical education (CTE) and employment.
4. **Enhanced Employer Engagement** – Deepening partnerships with industry, especially in support of justice-involved individuals and co-designing training.
5. **Cross-Sector Integration** – Breaking down silos for seamless service delivery across workforce, corrections, and adult education.

Each workgroup brings together experts from education, government, workforce boards, corrections, and industry to identify actionable strategies that align with local needs while responding to national workforce and equity goals. What emerged was a shared understanding that adult education must evolve into a workforce-connected, outcomes-oriented system, capable of driving economic inclusion and community transformation through the Department of Labor’s workforce system.

This white paper summarizes the insights, recommendations, and next steps generated during the Convening. It also offers a roadmap for how stakeholders across sectors can work together to build a sustainable, equitable, and demand-driven workforce ecosystem—one that not only meets the needs of today’s labor market, but also honors the potential of every learner, regardless of background or circumstance.

Creating a Sustainable and Diversified Funding Model for the Workforce and Adult Education Ecosystem

Sustainable funding is the foundation of an effective workforce ecosystem—one that can withstand economic shocks, policy changes, and social transformation while continuing to deliver value to learners, workers, employers, and communities. Yet as the workforce ecosystem faces increasing demand for services, the financial structures underpinning these systems are becoming less reliable—particularly with the temporary suspension and ongoing instability of WIOA Title II (AEFLA) funding, a vital source for adult education nationwide.

This section, grounded in insights from the August 10, 2025 Workforce Ecosystem Collaborative convening, outlines an integrated framework for building resilient funding models. It emphasizes program flexibility, funding diversification, and service delivery innovation while directly addressing the risks posed by the loss of WIOA Title II resources and the need for immediate, strategic adaptation.

Defining Sustainability in a Changing Landscape

Sustainability in the workforce ecosystem cannot be equated with permanence. Rather, it reflects a system's capacity to adapt, evolve, and endure in the face of volatility. With WIOA Title II (AEFLA) funds previously suspended at the federal level—funds that for decades supported core literacy, ESL, and high school equivalency programs—the need for adaptable, diversified funding has become urgent. For many adult education providers, WIOA Title II

(AEFLA) served as a stabilizing base. Its endangerment has exposed overreliance on single funding streams and triggered widespread disruption in services, staffing, and learner access.

Participants at the Convening emphasized the need to develop new operational assumptions. As one attendee succinctly stated: *“Nothing is 100% guaranteed anymore.”* This new reality demands that workforce and education leaders design systems that don’t merely survive policy change, but actively embrace adaptability as a core function.

That adaptability begins with a question each organization must ask: *“Do we have the capacity to do what we do and move forward—even if a core funding source disappears tomorrow?”* In a potential post-Title II environment, the answer lies in building systems that are not tethered to a single funder, but instead draw on a mix of public and private support, long-term partnerships, and agile financial planning.

Braided Funding and Diversified Sources

At the convening, the concept of braided funding emerged as a critical strategy for long-term sustainability. Braided funding refers to the strategic blending of diverse resources—federal, state, local, philanthropic, and private sector—to support programs in a way that reduces siloed operations and increases alignment across systems. As primarily public servants, the workforce ecosystem is not adapted to tapping into these alternative funding streams, but must learn to pivot so as to maintain programs, achieve missions, and continue to provide valuable resources to the communities being served.

In practice, this means integrating funding from:

- Perkins V
- WIOA Title I (Employment Services)
- State Funds (such as the California Adult Education Program (CAEP))
- State Apprenticeship and Pre-Apprenticeship Grants
- Strong Workforce Program
- Private foundations
- Corporate Giving Initiatives
- Employer Sponsorships
- Public / Private Partnerships

Participants also recommended looking beyond traditional sources and expanding fee-for-service models, especially those linked to performance-based outcomes. For example, workforce entities can:

- Partner with employers to provide customized upskilling, literacy, or language instruction;
- Offer wraparound support services to industry at cost, such as navigation, onboarding, transportation, or childcare coordination;
- Leverage tax incentive programs to offset employer investments in training.

It was also noted that market saturation and sector fatigue must be factored into diversification strategies. Chasing every available grant or over-targeting a single industry (e.g., clean energy,

allied health, or logistics) can exhaust both staff capacity and community trust. Instead, funding plans should be deliberate, demand-driven, and regionally relevant.

Innovation and Responsiveness

The instability of WIOA Title II funding is not just a financial challenge—it is a call to reimagine the workforce and adult education ecosystem. In particular, it exposes the need to design systems that can quickly respond to shifting technological, demographic, and economic conditions.

One such condition is the accelerated adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) and automation. As several participants noted, the pace of technological change far outstrips the speed at which education and workforce systems can respond—either in curriculum design, policy adoption, or funding alignment. Public systems are reactive by design, but sustainability in the future will require proactive planning, scenario modeling, and early adoption of innovation.

Sustainability also requires redefining what “workforce development” means in 2025 and beyond. It must go beyond traditional vocational pathways and embrace:

- Pre-apprenticeship and co-enrollment models
- Stackable credentials linked to career ladders that embed digital literacy
- Bridge programs connecting literacy to technical training
- Holistic learner support, including digital access, mental health, and transportation

“We can’t keep waiting for the systems to align,” said one panelist. “We have to build what’s needed now—even if we build it ourselves.” This ethos captures the urgency and agency that must underpin future funding models.

Accountability and Data-Driven Decision Making

The peril of WIOA Title II (AEFLA) has also reignited conversations about accountability and data. With fewer stable funding streams, funders and stakeholders are demanding proof of impact and ROI in real terms—employment, wage growth, job retention, and economic/social mobility.

To that end, participants recommended that all organizations across the workforce ecosystem:

- Use wage and labor market data to shape programs and justify investment;
- Track longitudinal student outcomes, not just completions;
- Adopt performance-based budgeting that allocates resources to outcomes rather than inputs;
- Design equity-centered metrics that consider the barriers learners face and the progress they make.

Sustainable funding requires that programs demonstrate value—to funders, partners, and the public—on a continuous basis. Data isn’t just compliance; it’s advocacy.

The Imperative of Cross-Sector Partnerships

Finally, it was widely agreed that sustainability cannot be achieved in isolation. As WIOA Title II (AEFLA) funding faces a possible shift to A Stronger Workforce for America (ASWA) legislation, a shift to the Department of Labor, and other destabilizing actions, partnerships become not just helpful, but essential. Employers, business and industry associations, education systems, local governments, and community-based organizations must collaborate on both programming and funding. This hold particularly true given the release on August 13, 2025, by the Departments of Labor, Education, and Commerce of *America's Talent Strategy: Building the Workforce for the Golden Age* which explicitly proposes the elimination of Adult Education citing a perceived duplication of services. (<https://rb.gy/i15a0t>)

Key strategies include:

- Building joint funding applications and consortium-level grants;
- Sharing data systems, facilities, and support services to reduce duplication;
- Co-designing curriculum and career pathways to align training with labor demand;
- Engaging in regional advocacy to protect and expand state funding for adult education and workforce services.

Intentional partnerships, especially those that go beyond transactional relationships, can help organizations weather volatility, leverage combined influence, and secure multi-year funding in ways that solo entities cannot.

Pivoting Toward a Department of Labor-Focused Adult Education Model

As the workforce ecosystem landscape continue to evolve, the role of adult education must also transform—particularly in response to shifting federal priorities that increasingly place adult education within the purview of the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) rather than the Department of Education alone. The June 30, 2025, temporary suspension of WIOA Title II (AEFLA) funding has accelerated this pivot, exposing both a gap in strategic positioning and a critical opportunity for adult education systems to align more directly with labor market outcomes, employer demand, and workforce equity priorities.

This moment demands that adult education move beyond its traditional identity as a literacy or remediation system and fully embrace its role as a foundational element of the workforce pipeline. That shift entails reimagining service delivery through a DOL-centric lens, emphasizing training readiness, credential attainment, and measurable employment outcomes (including job retention and wage growth). It also calls for stronger operational ties to workforce boards, American Job Centers, employers, labor unions, and sector partnerships.

Aligning Curriculum and Programming with Workforce Outcomes

In a labor-aligned model, adult education must embed workforce preparation into every level of instruction—from ESL to high school equivalency. This means offering contextualized learning tied to in-demand occupations, developing pre-apprenticeship and bridge programs that lead to industry-recognized credentials (IRCs), and integrating career exploration and digital skills across all career pathways.

Programs must also adopt stackable credential frameworks that allow learners to progress seamlessly from foundational skills to postsecondary and career advancement. In a DOL-aligned system, credentials are not optional—they are essential milestones that demonstrate readiness to employers and open doors to economic mobility.

Embedding Adult Education within the Workforce Ecosystem

Historically, adult education has often operated in parallel to the workforce system. A labor-focused model requires full integration. This includes:

- Co-location of education services at AJCCs and workforce hubs;
- Shared intake and case management systems between education and workforce partners;
- Participation in regional workforce planning and sector strategies;
- Co-enrollment models that allow learners to receive both academic and occupational training simultaneously.

This approach not only improves service alignment but also increases access to DOL resources—such as WIOA Title I, III, and IV, apprenticeship funding, and competitive workforce grants.

Shifting Performance Metrics and Accountability

A pivot to a labor-driven model also requires a shift in how success is defined and measured.

Traditional academic metrics—such as educational functioning level gains or seat time—must be replaced or supplemented with employment-centered outcomes, including:

- Credential attainment;
- Employment within 6–12 months after program completion;
- Wage progression;
- Job retention;
- Employer satisfaction.

Programs will need to build capacity for new data systems and reporting frameworks aligned with labor market information and federal workforce performance indicators.

Professional Development and System Readiness

To support this shift, adult education instructors, administrators, and support staff must receive professional development focused on workforce integration. This includes:

- Understanding the labor market and regional industry needs;
- Learning how to teach in IET and contextualized models;
- Navigating employer partnerships and career pathway design;
- Using data to drive employment-aligned instruction and case management.

System leaders must also engage in change management and culture-shift strategies, ensuring that staff at all levels embrace the workforce mission of adult education. Adult education needs to be recognized as an economic driver at the community and regional level.

Reframing the Narrative

Finally, adult education must reframe its public identity and policy narrative. No longer simply a system for remediation, adult education is a launchpad for economic opportunity, particularly for immigrants, the formerly incarcerated, low-income adults, and individuals with interrupted education. In a Department of Labor-focused model, adult education becomes the first step on the workforce ladder—a critical driver of regional competitiveness and equity.

To realize this vision, adult education leaders must advocate for:

- Greater inclusion in workforce development boards and planning processes;
- Equitable funding across future DOL-aligned initiatives;
- Recognition in economic development strategies and sector partnerships.

Moving the “Buds” from Concept to Action: What needs to happen in the next 3 – 6 months?

Introduction to Action Committees

As a direct outcome of the third Convening of the Workforce Ecosystem Collaborative, participants developed next steps in order to strengthen the adult education and workforce development ecosystem. This convening, which brought together voices from education, reentry, workforce boards, community-based organizations, industry, and government, was set against the backdrop of unprecedented shifts in policy and funding—most notably, the suspension of WIOA Title II (AEFLA) funding, which had historically supported foundational adult education across the country.

At the third Convening, five committees emerged from the foundational work of the first two convenings of the Workforce Ecosystem Collaborative. During Convening #1, participants collaboratively developed early-stage ideas—referred to as “buds”—that captured opportunities for system improvement and innovation. These buds were then reviewed, refined, and ranked by priority during Convening #2, forming the basis for the most urgent and actionable focus areas. The committees now carry forward this work, transforming those initial concepts into targeted strategies that will guide the Collaborative’s impact moving forward.

Amid growing demands for access to education and training, more effective career pathways, and industry-aligned job preparation, attendees acknowledged that systemic challenges such as fragmented service delivery, employer disengagement, inadequate recognition of non-

traditional credentials, and underinvestment in reentry populations could no longer be addressed through isolated or piecemeal efforts. What was needed was coordinated, sustained, and cross-sector action—an ecosystem approach that connects systems and centers the needs of learners, workers, and employers alike.

In response to this urgent call for coordinated leadership, the Collaborative formally established five targeted action committees. These committees are designed not only to continue the momentum from the Convening but to function as ongoing engines of research, strategy, and implementation. Each committee will take on a specific issue area critical to workforce transformation, bringing together cross-functional teams to identify scalable solutions, cultivate collaborative practices, and inform future policy and funding strategies.

Committee participants represent a broad range of expertise—spanning adult education, corrections, labor, technology, employer partnerships, and economic development. Their charge is not just to generate ideas, but to build practical, equity-centered models that can be tested, shared, and replicated across states, sectors, and institutions. As they carry out their work, these committees will draw from existing innovations, elevate promising practices, and develop new frameworks that respond to current realities while preparing for future demands.

The five action committees and their focus areas include:

- **Awareness Campaigns Committee** – Focused on elevating the value and visibility of adult education and workforce credentials by building a unified communications strategy. This group aims to better inform employers, policymakers, and the public

about the transformative potential of adult education, and to influence funding, policy, and partnerships through coordinated messaging.

- **Skills-Based Hiring Committee** – Committed to promoting hiring practices that recognize and reward demonstrated ability, rather than relying solely on degrees or formal credentials. By advancing skills validation, employer education, and alternative credentialing frameworks, this committee seeks to expand access to quality employment and close opportunity gaps.
- **Reentry and Correctional Education Pathways Committee** – Charged with aligning correctional education, CTE, and employment systems to ensure that justice-involved individuals are equipped with meaningful credentials, supportive services, and clear pathways to sustainable careers. This committee will address gaps in continuity, employer engagement, and post-release navigation.
- **Enhanced Employer Engagement Committee** – Focused on building deeper, more strategic relationships with industry partners, particularly those open to hiring individuals with barriers to employment. The group will prioritize co-designed training models, apprenticeships, and feedback loops that ensure training programs are responsive to labor market demand.
- **Cross-Sector Integration Committee** – Tasked with breaking down silos between agencies and institutions to create seamless, person-centered service delivery. This includes unified intake, co-enrollment strategies, data interoperability, and collaborative case management—all with the goal of creating a cohesive and navigable system for learners and workers at every stage.

Each committee will work independently while maintaining alignment with the broader goals of the Workforce Ecosystem Collaborative. Their outputs—whether in the form of pilot programs, policy briefs, strategic toolkits, or implementation frameworks—will help inform national and state efforts to modernize workforce delivery and create an ecosystem that is resilient, responsive, and rooted in measurable performance outcomes.

Together, these five committees represent a bold shift from siloed planning to collective action. They serve as both a commitment and a catalyst—ensuring that the work begun in San Antonio, Dallas, and Pittsburgh continues forward with clarity of purpose, strength in collaboration, and a shared vision for a more inclusive, integrated, and effective workforce system. Below is a summary of each committee’s tasks, the members of the committee, and their ideated goals.

Awareness Campaigns Committee: Communicating the value of adult education and credentials to employers and policymakers.

Committee Members:

Alex Harris, Program Director | ABE Adult Basic Education, Truckee Meadows

Community College / Program Specialist, CASAS

Robert Vehock, Vice President, The Correctional Education Association

Lead: Pat Tyler, Executive Director, National Association of State Directors of Adult Education

This committee has identified a unified communications strategy as a critical priority to elevate the visibility and perceived value of adult education among employers, policymakers, and stakeholders across the ecosystem.

To move this initiative forward, the committee will:

- Collaborate on the development of a shared, data-driven one-pager that highlights the economic, social, and workforce benefits of adult education and credential attainment.
- Ensure message consistency by aligning the one-pager's language with existing NASDAE fact sheets, reinforcing national data and policy relevance.
- Engage executive leaders from Chambers of Commerce and other employer-facing organizations to validate, endorse, and help disseminate the messaging.
- Secure formal sign-off from all participating organizations, affirming consensus and establishing a single voice for advocacy and outreach.
- Establish a timeline for distribution and presentation to state workforce boards, policymakers, business alliances, and educational coalitions.

By maintaining unity of message and leveraging the credibility of each organization, the committee aims to create a compelling and coordinated advocacy tool that drives increased investment and recognition for adult education nationwide.

Skills-Based Hiring Committee: Promoting employment based on demonstrated ability, not credentials alone.

Action Committee Members:

Lead: Deanna Crosson, Vice President of Strategic Accounts, Aztec Software

Emma Diaz, Executive Director, Inland Adult Education Consortium

Mitch Rosin, President/Strategist, P2C Solutions

Carolyn Zachry, State Director of Adult Education, California Department of Education

This committee has identified the need to shift hiring practices away from traditional credential-based models toward frameworks that prioritize demonstrable skills, including technical proficiency, emotional intelligence, and industry-specific competencies.

To advance this effort, the committee will:

- Map current employer practices and adoption of skills-based hiring, including engagement with national initiatives such as Walmart's employment strategies and NAWB's 2025 webinars, to assess the scale and reach of the movement.
- Collaborate with industry partners to define high-demand skills across sectors and develop shared language between employers and educators to close the communication gap that often hinders alignment.
- Promote California's Credit for Prior Learning model as a scalable approach to validating workforce-relevant skills in formal education systems.

- Explore existing frameworks like NC3’s industry certifications (used across 80 occupations) and Alabama’s AIDT model to determine best practices in third-party skills verification.
- Investigate fee-for-service or nonprofit organizational models that could provide skills validation for learners outside of traditional education channels.
- Address the role of emotional intelligence and other essential soft skills in hiring practices, and identify mechanisms to assess and validate these competencies.
- Develop a unified strategy to incorporate Integrated Education and Training (IET) programs as a practical vehicle for skills acquisition that is aligned to employer needs, particularly in regions and sectors where credentialing is a barrier to entry.

Through these actions, the committee aims to build a cross-sector roadmap for widespread adoption of skills-based hiring, ensuring that individuals are recognized and employed for what they can do—not just the degrees or credentials they hold.

Reentry and Correctional Education Pathways Committee: Bridging corrections education with CTE and employment.

Action Committee Members:

Lead: Jeffrey Abramowitz, CEO, The Petey Greene Program / COABE Board Member

Andrea Buttross, President, The Correctional Education Association

Peggy Keiser, Executive Director, The Correctional Education Association

Robert Vehock, Vice President, The Correctional Education Association

The committee has identified the urgent need to strengthen the connection between correctional education, career technical education (CTE), and employment for returning citizens. Recognizing the complexities involved in navigating reentry, the committee is focused on creating intentional, outcomes-based pathways that are aligned with labor market needs and structured to lead to real job opportunities—not dead ends.

To guide its work, the committee will:

- Map the steps to employment for formerly incarcerated individuals, including identifying high-potential sectors, determining the necessary credentials, and outlining the full transition process from training to workforce entry.
- Define target populations, priority training areas, employer partners, and desired outcomes to ensure every reentry pathway is grounded in purpose and regional opportunity.
- Conduct a labor market analysis (LMI) at the local and regional level to guide program design and avoid misalignment between training and available jobs.
- Develop tools to differentiate best practices across national, state, regional, and local levels, ensuring that strategies are adaptable and scalable based on geography, policy environment, and available resources.
- Identify and elevate models of excellence in correctional-to-career programs, with an emphasis on employer engagement, industry certifications, and cross-agency coordination.

- Establish a framework to ensure that every “bridge” created between corrections, education, and employment is clearly defined, structurally sound, and leads to a meaningful destination for participants.

By anchoring its work in workforce data and designing reentry pathways that reflect both employer demand and individual potential, the committee aims to break cycles of incarceration and create sustainable career opportunities for justice-involved individuals.

Cross-Sector Integration: Breaking Down Silos for Seamless Service Delivery.

Action Committee Members:

David Barch, Director of Vendor Relations and Special Projects, National Association of Workforce Development Professionals (NAWDP)

Jan Bray, Chief Executive Officer, Bray Strategies

Lead: Deanna Crosson, Vice President of Strategic Accounts, Aztec Software

Jacinda Lamb, Field Service Representative, Aztec Software

The Cross-Sector Integration Committee has prioritized the development of a shared vision and strategic roadmap aimed at dismantling the long-standing silos that hinder collaboration, reduce efficiency, and limit equitable access across adult education, workforce development, and reentry systems. While there is growing consensus around the importance of learner- and worker-centered service delivery, the committee recognizes that achieving true integration

requires more than agreement—it demands intentional design, shared accountability, and bold cross-sector coordination.

To initiate this work, the committee has outlined the following key activities:

- Identify existing silos and their representatives across the ecosystem at national, state, and local levels. This includes sectors such as:
 - Adult Education
 - Workforce Development Agencies
 - Correctional Education and Reentry Programs
 - Business and industry associations
 - Chambers of Commerce
 - Municipal Leadership (e.g., U.S. Conference of Mayors)
 - National Workforce and Labor Associations (e.g., NASWA, NAWDP)
- Conduct a systems mapping process to assess the current landscape of services, identify gaps and redundancies, and establish where meaningful collaboration is already occurring.
- Work backward from the ideal state of integration, identifying structural and procedural barriers (e.g., funding misalignment, incompatible data systems, eligibility inconsistencies) and developing concrete strategies to address them.
- Develop models and tools to support integration, including:
 - Shared intake and referral protocols
 - Co-enrollment frameworks

- Joint service delivery models
 - Cross-sector performance metrics
 - Interoperable data systems
- Convene a core cross-sector working group composed of leaders from corrections, workforce boards, adult education, business and industry, and civic institutions. This group will serve as both an advisory body and an implementation team to pilot integration strategies and refine them based on lived realities.

Ultimately, the committee envisions the creation of a replicable, equity-focused model for cross-sector service integration—one that aligns funding streams, eliminates duplicative efforts, and ensures that individuals, especially those facing systemic barriers, can navigate a streamlined pathway from education to employment. By grounding its work in practice, data, and partnership, the committee seeks to transform how systems operate—not just alongside one another, but together.

Enhanced Employer Engagement Committee: Focusing on justice-involved individuals and in co-designing training.

Action Committee Members:

Lead: Jeffrey Abramowitz, CEO, The Petey Greene Program / CASAS Board Member

Robert Vehock, Vice President, The Correctional Education Association

Carolyn Zachry, State Director of Adult Education, California Department of Education

The committee has prioritized the development of intentional, equity-centered strategies to engage employers more effectively, particularly in support of justice-involved individuals and in the co-design of training programs that reflect real-world workforce needs. Recognizing that employer partnerships are foundational to sustainable reentry and workforce outcomes, the committee is focused on building bridges that lead directly to opportunity, not just training.

To advance this goal, the committee will:

- Identify and categorize employers by industry, region, and willingness to hire justice-involved individuals, including those with established second-chance hiring policies.
- Conduct outreach to understand what employers want and need in terms of technical, soft, and work readiness skills—ensuring that training programs are designed to meet those expectations from the outset.
- Align employer engagement strategies with specific target populations, ensuring that supports and pathways are tailored to address both barriers and opportunities at the intersection of justice involvement and workforce entry.
- Explore proven models such as NC3 (National Coalition of Certification Centers) and Apprenticeships for America (AFA) to identify scalable approaches to credentialing and earn-and-learn programs that employers recognize and value.
- Facilitate co-design sessions where employers and educators jointly develop or adapt curricula, workplace-based learning experiences, and wraparound supports for justice-involved individuals entering high-demand sectors.

- Leverage these partnerships to increase the visibility and value of adult education and reentry training programs as credible, employer-aligned talent pipelines.

By building deeper, more reciprocal relationships with industry and embedding employer voices into program design, this committee aims to elevate employment outcomes, reduce recidivism, and close the gap between training and job placement for justice-involved individuals.

Conclusion: From Crisis to Opportunity

The potential loss of WIOA Title II (AEFLA) funding is undeniably a blow to the field of adult education and workforce development—but it also serves as a powerful wake-up call. It reveals the fragility of overreliance, the urgency of funding diversification, and the untapped potential of cross-sector alignment. If the field responds with intention, collaboration, and courage, this moment can catalyze a shift toward a more resilient, innovative, and inclusive system.

As the federal landscape shifts toward a labor-first view of adult education, programs must pivot accordingly—aligning to employer needs, regional economies, and labor market data. This is not a marginal adjustment—it is a foundational redesign of adult education’s mission, partnerships, and outcomes. Embracing a Department of Labor-focused model is not only necessary for sustainability—it is essential for maximizing impact in a workforce-driven future.

Sustainability is no longer a buzzword—it is a strategic imperative. Through braided funding, data-driven accountability, bold partnerships, and a commitment to equity, the workforce ecosystem can build a foundation not only to survive without Title II—but to thrive beyond it.

Outstanding Questions:

- How does the Collaborative define adult education?
 - Is WIOA the guiding light moving forward?
 - How does the Collaborative bring into the conversation programs and initiatives that are not funded by WIOA?
 - How does the Collaborative address the silo between K-14 education (funding and regulations) and adult education?
 - Best practice is for workforce education to begin no later than Middle School. Is the workforce system we are addressing for adults only?
-

Next Convening: TBD