

Adult Career Pathways

November 2009

What are Adult Career Pathways?

Many adults are limited in their career opportunities because they lack some postsecondary education, such as an associate degree or an industry-recognized credential, which is increasingly required in the workforce. Adult career pathways prepare unemployed, underemployed and dislocated workers for jobs by offering flexible services provided by education institutions, community-based organizations, government agencies and business and industry. Adult career pathways lead individuals to an associate degree, bachelor's degree, an industry recognized credential or certificate, and ultimately, employment within a specific occupational industry.

Adult career pathways integrate multiple levels of education, including adult literacy, adult basic education, GED instruction, English language literacy with postsecondary career technical education (CTE) certificate and associate degree programs. Education, workforce and support services are connected so that instruction and support are integrated and available as individuals progress along the pathway. Adult career pathways prepare individuals for the next level of education or employment.

Skill and knowledge acquisition along a pathway allows individuals to move not just vertically, but also horizontally, as they move from one job to the next. Career lattices, unlike career ladders, offer flexibility in moving between industries rather than just within one industry.

According to the Center for Occupational Research and Development,¹ adult career pathways programs should include:

- An intensive **prep stage** designed to prepare participants for job entry and postsecondary study
- **Industry-focused curriculum** that prepares participants for employment and career advancement
- A **multi-step career ladder** that begins with job-entry skills and concludes with advanced technical skills
- **Partnerships** with community and government agencies that can supply resources to participants to overcome personal issues that might impede study and/or employment
- Part-time employment in appropriate positions upon completion of the prep stage
- Personal and academic **support services** essential to student success

Benefits of Adult Career Pathways

Adult career pathways provide many benefits for the individuals participating, as well as the educational institutions, training providers and businesses involved in the programs:

- Gives individuals more integrated basic skills and occupational training than traditional programs
- Provides individuals with higher skills that can translate into better jobs
- Allows community colleges and other workforce training programs to have more effective engagement with industry and to more efficiently target resources
- Gives businesses a well-trained supply of workers whose skills are geared toward industry needs

Adult Career Pathways Programs Examples

- In 2002, the **Kentucky** Community and Technical College System began a statewide career pathways initiative that targets underprepared and underemployed adults with limited basic skills and education so that they may acquire skills and earn credentials needed to advance in the workforce. The career pathways initiative covers the following industries: business, information technology, manufacturing and industrial technology, healthcare, and natural resources and energy. Compared to the general Kentucky Community and Technical College student population, those enrolled in the career pathways programs have better retention rates. For example, in the 2007-2008 school year, the retention rate for the general student body was 52%, compared with a 76% retention rate for career pathways students.
- The Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) initiative in **Washington** utilizes basic skills training instructors to teach English as a Second Language (ESL) skills and adult basic education to students at the same time they are learning occupational CTE skills from other instructors. I-BEST students are more likely to acquire college credits in technical areas and to complete certificate programs applicable to the workforce than traditional ESL students.
- The **Oregon** Pathways for Adult Basic Skills Transition to Education and Work Initiative (OPABS), which began in fall 2006, is building a pipeline for adult basic skills learners to enter postsecondary education, training programs and high-demand career areas such as healthcare, engineering, and business and management. OPABS requires enrollees to take “Pre-Bridge” and “Bridge” courses that teach basic skills in math, reading, and writing through an integrated occupational context. Students also take a career/college awareness course that integrates academic components with occupational skills to ease the transition to postsecondary courses and training programs.
- The **Wisconsin** Regional Industry Skills Education (RISE) Partnership is a joint initiative between the Wisconsin Technical College System and the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development that is working to make career pathways a central part of Wisconsin's education and job training systems. The RISE Partnership targets adults age 25 to 54 who do not hold a 2- or 4-year college credential or are not proficient in English and worked in a low wage job during the previous year. The goal of RISE is to expand Wisconsin's skilled workforce by increasing the number of adults who earn postsecondary credentials in high-demand occupations through career pathways with bridge programs. Pathway areas include: manufacturing, health care, construction, and transportation and logistics.

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ⁱ Center for Occupational Research and Development, Career Pathways Advocacy, at <http://www.cord.org/adult-career-pathways>