

*DOING BUSINESS
TOGETHER*

*Adult Education
and Business
Partnering to Build
A Qualified Workforce*

by James T. Parker

February 8, 2011



Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy

**1221 Avenue of the Americas - 44th Floor
New York, N.Y. 10020
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FOREWORD & SUMMARY

Doing Business Together: Adult Education and Business Partnering to Build a Qualified Workforce is the result of a CAAL project based on two surveys and an invitational Roundtable. As the title indicates, CAAL aims to foster more and effective business involvement in planning for and providing basic and workforce skills to current and potential workers. This 21-page report is by James T. Parker, CAAL Senior Policy/Research Associate. In addition to the Roundtable, it draws on the experience of 20 states with extensive experience in workforce and workplace education programming. A key element is their successful collaborations with local and state businesses and chambers of commerce.

As the report shows, many superb models already exist to help guide future action in adult education and business partnering. There is a solid accumulated track record on which to build. Partnerships that produce desired outcomes will be of direct and immediate practical benefit to both learners and the business community.

Part I of ***Doing Business Together*** discusses the five essential elements of successful partnerships: (1) a common destiny, mutual value, and ROI; (2) partnership not as a goal in itself but as a way to address well-articulated programs and outcomes; (3) business champions to convey the message; (4) a simple, straightforward *process* for working together; and (5) development and maintenance of good data. Part II discusses exemplary service models through collaboration in 16 states. Part III considers how federal and state policy can support the development of partnerships, while Part IV considers federal, state, and other factors that stand as barriers or challenges. Part V (pages 17-21) presents the project's principal findings and recommendations.

CAAL extends heartfelt thanks to project director Jim Parker for his expert leadership. He enjoys good will across the states and brought extraordinary professional experience, sensitivity, dedication, and insight to this effort. Appreciation is also due to the many adult education and business leaders who participated in the Roundtable and who took time out of busy schedules to be part of one or both surveys. They are the real heroes of this venture. And, not least, CAAL is grateful to the Dollar General Corporation, the Joyce Foundation, The McGraw-Hill Companies, and many individual donors for making this work possible.

Gail Spangenberg
President, CAAL

DOING BUSINESS TOGETHER

Adult Education and Business Partnering to Build a Qualified Workforce

Introduction

On July 12, 2010, CAAL convened a Roundtable of selected state and national leaders (see Appendix A), in which participants shared experience, discussed key issues in practice and policy, and considered recommendations for future action. The goal was to bring about more effective and wider business involvement in efforts to upgrade workforce skills, so as to put adults on pathways to jobs that pay a sustaining wage.

The Roundtable was built around the findings of two papers, one produced for the National Commission on Adult Literacy in 2007, the other the result of a 2010 CAAL follow-up study. The earlier paper, *Workplace Education: Twenty State Perspectives*,¹ describes various elements of workplace education programs in 20 states.² It asks this central question: What are the connections, partnerships, and/or strategic plans implemented by your workforce education programs as part of economic and workforce development in your state? The report looks at such variables as funding, level of effort, nature of partnerships and strategic plans, means of measuring outcomes and the nature of those outcomes, and key elements of success. It also presents several policy options based on the collective experience.

In preparation for the July Roundtable, 16 of the 20 states surveyed in 2007 were questioned again to determine the nature of their current activities.³

Roundtable participants came largely from the states surveyed. They and the national invitees brought long experience and a variety of perspectives to the table. [Note: Project findings are presented on pp. 17-18, recommendations on pp. 19-21.]

Part I: Essential Elements For Successful Partnerships

A main part of the Roundtable was devoted to a discussion of the principles and elements that characterize successful partnerships between business and adult education service

¹ The report, published as a Commission Policy Brief, is available from the CAAL website at <http://www.caalusa.org/content/parkerpolicybrief.pdf>.

² AK, CA, CT, FL, GA, IN, KY, LA, MA, MN, MS, NY, N C, OH, PA, SC, TX, VA, WV, and WI.

³ The findings appear in this paper on pages 5 to 13. The states are AK, CA, CT, FL, GA, KY, MA, MN, MS, NY, NC, OH, PA, TX, VA, WV.

providers and planners.⁴ Certain ingredients critical to success quickly became evident, reinforcing guidance provided in the two surveys.

- Establishing a common destiny, mutual value, and a return-on-investment (ROI) are important.
- While partnerships are needed, this should not be a goal in itself.
- Champions in business and adult education play a key role in conveying the message.
- The partnership *process* is highly important.
- Good data is critical for developing successful programs and partnerships.

The following sections discuss each of these ingredients.

A. Common Destiny, Mutual Value, and Return on Investment

Establishing program value and return-on-investment (ROI) will attract and sustain involvement from all partners.

The group talked about the importance of recognizing and documenting the value that a partnership brings to workforce development. “What’s in it for me?” is the first question that must be addressed to ensure employer involvement. Employers want to know, in concrete terms, how adult program results can benefit their businesses, their employees, and the economy. For example, adult programs must be specific about what they do that will lead to filling jobs now and in the future. Adult programs should not attempt to sell pre-existing programs, but should be sensitive to employers’ needs.

One participant offered this set of actions to help develop the business case:

- Be succinct.
- Be quick to the punch line.
- Know your audience.
- Draw connections between problems that employers face and how adult education can provide solutions.
- Identify the talent pool you bring to the employer.
- Look at longitudinal data to start proving your success points.

Increasingly, employers see the value of educating their workforces. They are learning that a literate workforce enhances worker safety and efficiency, and reduces worker turnover and customer service costs. They are beginning to realize that existing systems are stronger when they fully cooperate and offer integrated programming. One participant put it this way: “Imagine that adult education could be the trainer. Employers

⁴ It should be noted that in this report, the term adult education is used to include connected services given by both traditional adult education and workforce skills providers.

would identify what they want; adult education would find that person and provide the training to support successful employment.”

Programs often connect to partners via Workforce Investment Boards and/or One-Stop Centers. These groups bring to the table expertise and feedback about local needs and the appropriate structure for education and training.

Instructional programs that lead to recognized credentialing are also valuable, especially for large national and international businesses. For example, according to one Roundtable participant, Solo Cups, which has facilities in five states, insists that curriculum leading to attainment of nationally-based credentials be part of the partnership package.

While mutual value is often recognized, ROI is not easily documented. In our surveys, the few ROI responses received were more indicators of the challenge to measure ROI than they were quantitative calculations. Involvement in regional ARRA⁵ funding, an 11 percent increase in GED graduations, hires for corrections jobs, and results like credential achievements and transition to college and jobs were included in attempts to measure ROI. Massachusetts is developing a Business Impact Measurement Plan and Mississippi sends an annual report to the State Legislature covering the impact of adult education on wage increases. Connecticut Adult Education does this as part of an extensive Legislative Report Card that includes numerous organizations/funding streams such as WIA Title I Adults and Youth Programs, and the Connecticut Community College System. ROI is an area ripe for the development of criteria and specifications. In addition, ROI needs to be calculated for skills instruction outcomes.

As one Southern State adult education director put it: “If your workforce education services are not business and industry driven, it’s just another adult education program.”

B. Partnership Is Not a Goal In Itself

The Roundtable group stressed that partnership is not a goal in itself. Adult educators should not encourage partnerships that require very little involvement, the kind that emphasize “We want your organization to be involved with us but you don’t really have to do anything.” Such affiliation partnerships may have some importance, but it is generally limited.

There are critical distinctions between cooperation, collaboration, and partnership. All have their place, but while real partnerships are the most difficult, they provide the biggest payoff. Most of the time, partners must make accommodations in the present to achieve a benefit in the future.

C. The Critical Role of Business Champions

Clearly, finding a successful and knowledgeable business partner who can speak to business and workforce agency peers is extremely valuable for programs seeking increased support.

⁵ American Recovery and Reinvestment Act

Roundtable participants agree that “If an industry says adult education is important, you have to have a champion out there willing to share those stories.” Telling business or partnership success stories within the region helps inform peers about practices that they were not hearing from each other.

Partners can also help crystallize the adult education message. They can best answer peer questions about what they do in their companies and what integration looks like. Adult education is not understood in many instances; some employers fear adult education because the term “*literacy*” conveys something negative to them. They may say “I don't have people in my company who can't read or write.” Involving the strongest partner can add credibility to a discussion of an employer's real needs and help potential partners visualize the impact of successful collaborations.

The Small Business Administration⁶ estimates that 80 percent of new jobs will come from small businesses. It is important for employers to discover the ROI that can determine whether a business will survive and grow. Employers need to identify the kinds of employees they require and assess their skill qualifications. A cadre of small business people can speak about return on investment through workforce collaboration.

Roundtable participants suggest viewing partnership opportunities with two groups:

They estimate that about 10 percent of employers are *already engaged* in strong partnering arrangements and understand the concepts and values under discussion. What these companies need most, they say, is a plan to educate their business peers in their role as champions.

Another 80 percent of potential partners *can benefit from* partnerships and would likely be open to considering one. Adult educators should aim to help this group understand the critical importance of increasing workforce skills. For example, experienced partners could develop a tool kit that would allow potential partners to take action. This tool kit might include specifics about initial involvement and perceived value, and offer a quick-start strategy to move an employer into action.

In both cases, it is critical that employers and adult educators engage in regular conversations with their peers and with each other, sharing the point of view that the industry solution in their region is more important than internal competition.

D. The Role of Process

Participants discussed ways in which we can structure the conversation so that positive change actually occurs. A simple, straightforward process can provide the solution. Partners must be able to determine what programs and services will change in the future. Part of the challenge is to design a process to evaluate ideas and choose those that are powerful and compelling.

⁶ SBA news release PR 10-07, April 2010.

Business partners will not have time or interest to talk at length about process, so adult educators should know exactly how to structure the conversation so that purposes and procedures are straightforward, transparent, and relatively easy to implement.

Employers involved with solutions take actions on three levels:

- They invest in their own workforce, supporting programs like tuition advancement and reimbursement. They clearly signal value for credentials.
- They work with their industries. Collaboration often involves sector-based solutions, which employers may fear if they perceive it as process-oriented.
- A few brave employers assist in system-level change.

Finally, businesses often complain about being pressured for funding. It is critical to have some funds to initiate the process and to draw in additional partners if needed. Programs should not expect to anchor a partnership on obtaining enough funding in the future to cover all costs. Funding should be discussed candidly in the exploratory phase of the conversation.

E. The Role of Data and Data Development

The partnership message must be persuasive and grounded in data. Good data shows respect for the process and intent to make the program successful.

Employers will pay attention when adult education programs or other lead partners focus on compelling data. According to the Roundtable participant from Georgia, the adult educators tell employers there that a certain percentage of jobs in that state require a specific skill level, and they provide data on their current service accomplishments and progress. The state provides this information by county, and updates it each month. It is critical for adult educators to become experts in the region where services are needed and provided. This boosts interest from other companies and agencies. In short, programs and lead partners should never attempt to sell services and build support without the data to guide and validate their proposals.

Adult education service providers must give priority to meeting the increasing needs for skills and credentials beyond the old boundaries of ABE/GED services. Otherwise adult education risks becoming irrelevant to employers and other policymakers. According to recent research,⁷ nine out of ten workers with a high school education or less are limited to occupational clusters that pay low wages or are in decline. As the economy gets back on track over the next five years, according to Anthony Carnevale, 60 million Americans are at risk of being locked out of the middle class, toiling in these low-wage jobs. And by 2018, 90 percent of the fastest growing jobs, 60 percent of new jobs, and 40 percent of manufacturing jobs will require some postsecondary education.⁸

⁷ A. Carnevale, in *Help Wanted*, Center on Education and the Workforce, Washington, D.C. 2010 (see Resource 9, Appendix B).

⁸ Charles Murray, *Real Education: Four Simple Truths for Bringing America's Schools Back to Reality*, Random House, Inc., 2008.

Clearly, the workforce is going to need greater education in the near future to hold a job that pays enough to support a family. Adult education needs to include higher level and technical skills in a way that makes sense for the individual learner as well as the employer.

Part II: Successful Statewide Workforce Education Partnerships

A. Model Programs in Five States

CAAL's surveys on partnership practices and priorities identified several states that spent considerable time, effort, and funding on developing statewide partnership programs. The activities and projects supported by five states (Connecticut, Georgia, Massachusetts, Minnesota, and Texas) illustrate how important it is to anchor partnerships in long-term investment and program development. All programs involve high-level government officials who, along with business partners, provide leadership to meet priority goals. These projects all require some level of risk and "thinking outside the box." These leaders recognize that adult basic education and workforce education programs must evolve hand-in-hand, that in today's economic and political scene "business as usual" is no longer an option.

These five projects have the following common characteristics:

- A core group of active state and local partners
- A high level of collaboration throughout the process
- Multiple funding sources
- High service expectations
- Public and private investments of time and funding in planning, implementing, and evaluating programs
- A foundation to guide development of future partnerships

Connecticut

In Connecticut, partnerships were developed through the Department of Education, connecting with the Workforce Development System. Practitioners throughout the state are involved in workforce development. The original goal was to create a user-friendly workforce education system for employers, but in working with Workforce Investment Boards, it became obvious that some 75 percent of the people who enroll in workforce centers are not proficient in basic skills. As a result, the project has become two-pronged, and the customer who does not have the skills to get a job is also a focus.

The Connecticut workforce education model implements workplace education programs and services for its partners and clients throughout the state. Services are at the workplace, research-based, customized, and flexible. It is a team effort to meet the immediate and future needs of small and large businesses.

Connecticut includes the following as part of its instructor training:

- How to conduct an audit
- How to conduct a needs assessment
- How to develop curriculum and customize it for the employer
- How to deliver instruction, because teaching in a workplace differs from teaching in a classroom
- How to evaluate and report progress

Partners include Connecticut's Departments of Economic and Community Development, Education, and Labor, the Office for Workforce Competitiveness, the community college system, the Connecticut Business Industry Association (chamber of commerce), the Career and Technical High School System, all five Workforce Investment Boards, the Department of Social Services/TANF, and adult education practitioners.

Georgia

The statewide Georgia Work Ready Program begins with identifying and assessing participants' skills gaps and moving them to Work Ready certification. The individual is connected to Work Ready communities, and there are Work Ready certified businesses and Work Ready regions. A 501(c)3 agency for Work Ready industry network partnerships has just been formed.

The Georgia State Chamber of Commerce is a key partner, which is highly important to the statewide effort. Another key partner is the State Technical College System. The Work Ready program has already certified over 100,000 individuals. The program measures its accomplishments and results, and includes projections for the future.

The Office of Adult Education and all its programs collaborate with the Governor's Office of Workforce Development. Adult education programs are a major provider of gap training for those seeking the Work Ready credential. The Office of Adult Education used an incentive grant in collaboration with the Governor's Office of Workforce Development, local Workforce Investment Act (WIA) organizations, chamber of commerce, business, industry, county officials, and local colleges to develop the first Accelerated Adult Learning Program. This program is a model for other fast track adult education programs throughout the state.

The Technical College System of Georgia and the Office of Adult Education created the JumpStart Transition Initiative that encourages students to enroll in adult secondary education programs while they work toward a certificate at a technical college and before they complete the GED diploma. The program has recommended benchmarks for students in reading and mathematics to assure success in academic coursework. Special admission codes were created in the student management system to track students enrolled in both adult education and technical college courses.

Massachusetts

The Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development allocated \$1.6 million in workforce training and American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds to support its Learn at Work program. Launched in November 2009, the

program is supplemented by \$400,000 from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. The 11 new grants go to local organizations to promote public-private partnerships across industries throughout the Commonwealth. Partners provide courses at the workplace in basic skills, basic computer skills, and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) for adult workers. Project activities include contextualized basic skills instruction (literacy, numeracy, and ESOL), the development of curriculum to support instruction, support services to promote participant persistence and completion of classes, program planning, and ongoing evaluation and team management.

Programs provide current workers with the basic skills required to pursue careers in high wage/high demand occupations, and provide businesses with workers who can better contribute to their productivity, performance, and competitiveness.

Partnerships include businesses and adult education and workforce skills providers. In the case of unionized workplaces, relevant labor organizations must be represented in the partnership. A match of not less than 50 percent of the total grant is required for these grants.

Minnesota

Since 2007, the Minnesota Department of Education Adult Basic Education (ABE office) has incentivized workplace education through special funds to encourage postsecondary transition programming. This ABE programming is carried out in partnership with community-based organizations, community and technical colleges, workforce centers, and employers.

The key groups focused on this work are the Minnesota FastTRAC (Training, Resources, and Credentialing) teams. The executive team consists of the ABE office, the Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, the Governor's Workforce Development Council, and employers, as well as teams with essential representation by CBOs, K-12 educators, and others.

The FastTRAC program is directed by the ABE state director and the Office of the Chancellor of the Minnesota State College and Universities. The staff is made up of program administrators from DEED. At this state level, DEED has been an important source of funding and guidance for integrated programming. At the local level, workforce center staff, community based organizations that do workforce development, and chambers of commerce have contributed to growing and maintaining workforce education programs with adult basic education providers.

ServSafe is one of many initiatives in Minnesota to help people achieve a professional food manager certification. In St. Paul, the local chamber of commerce supports this effort by providing contacts with employers willing to do tours, presentations, and hiring interviews. The workforce center and vocational rehabilitation services provide student support services to the learners during class, and job placement services after class. The adult education instructor and the college skills instructor worked together to create a curriculum that addresses the needs of low-skill adults while covering the necessary course content. At the end of the first course, all the learners passed the national exam

and received certification. Some went immediately into employment in the industry, while others chose to continue on a culinary career path with the college.

This is one example of the many cross-system partnerships that help adults fully access all the benefits of adult education, training, and workforce development support. Minnesota FastTRAC hopes to achieve offerings of this kind on every community college campus across the state.

Texas

Strategic action plans for adult education have been established through the Texas Workforce Investment Council via the Office of The Governor. The Texas Education Agency and the Texas Workforce Commission are responsible for designing and implementing integrated ABE and workforce skills training programs by 2013. These programs seek to enhance employment outcomes for English language learners who constitute a growing population and require additional skills for workforce-related success.

The action plan also prescribes the development of ABE programs to improve employment outcomes for populations requiring workplace literacy skills. Targeted literacy programs will be created to help students gain or maintain employment. Further, the action plans require the agencies to identify and assess initiatives related to workplace literacy program delivery that are currently underway. In addition, agencies must determine how many local workforce boards have established robust ABE relationships.

Texas Industry Specific ESL (TISESL) is a demand-driven workplace literacy and basic skills curriculum for adult learners. The curriculum focuses on the sales and customer service, healthcare, and manufacturing industry sectors. It offers intensive instruction of at least 200 student contact hours.

B. Additional Statewide Models

Programs in other states have also developed partnerships with chambers of commerce, business organizations, and workforce agencies to develop and test promising practices.

The Roundtable emphasized discovering partnership techniques that would be practical and doable. As with the five statewide models above, these eleven states' best practices emphasize involvement of state and local partners, high levels of collaboration, a variety of funding sources, high expectations, and public/private involvement in planning, implementing, and evaluating the innovations. In most of these enterprises, partnerships with chambers of commerce are the critical element for success. Employers are involved in many ways, from assessing skill needs to sponsoring and funding programs.

However, these efforts are somewhat different in that:

- Planning tends to be less centralized at the state level.
- They are generally discretionary, rather than mandated.
- They are more focused on local implementation.

Arkansas

The Arkansas WAGE program is a statewide effort dating back to the Clinton era. Its many successful local programs include:

- The Russellville WAGE program, a local chamber of commerce member, uses the local chamber facility for meetings, and is included in their directory. WAGE brochures are located in the chamber, and the chamber educates new industries about the program.
- In Magnolia, the Chamber of Commerce and the Economic Development Commission are housed at the same office and both are WAGE partners. They sponsor meetings and serve at graduation exercises. The Chamber hosts a Human Resource conference where the WAGE coordinator informs the human resource directors about WAGE and adult education benefits.
- Conway WAGE is also a local chamber member, and serves on a number of chamber committees. The chamber keeps WAGE informed about industries moving into the area to identify the kind of skilled workforce new employers seek. The WAGE program is on the chamber website as a resource, and sets up a display at the chamber office.

California

In the past year, California has been implementing the Workforce Skills Certification System. Workforce Readiness and the Workforce Skills Certification are high on the priority list because of the demand level. Their state assessment system is CASAS-based.⁹ (CASAS also has a well-developed Certification Program).

Workforce Skill Certification targets the banking, healthcare, and construction industries, and was at first too specific for many adult schools to use. Most of the schools focused on academics, but did not understand the soft skills component. At the CASAS Summer Institute, Washington State presented a Certification Process project, including a soft skills component. It has online video soft skills where the student views a scenario and decides the correct outcome. California and Washington collaborated on a pilot design. In January 2010, they conducted teacher training.

A student who reaches a high level of math and reading approaching high school level can go on to this Workforce Skills Certification Program. The program includes a video soft skill assessment on personal qualities and customer care. Students who score in the high range have a high probability of success. After resume writing and interview practice, students are referred for job placements. A student who does not have a high probability of success can continue in the program to improve skills.

The program aims to connect the local chamber of commerce to local employers' websites, to develop a process to identify required skills, and to match students' skills to job skills. Employers can then be certain that a referral will meet the required job skills.

⁹ Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems (go to www.casas.org).

Florida

The Chancellor of the Division of Career and Adult Education is a member of the board of Workforce Florida Inc. She participates in meetings of its councils and committees to facilitate communication and collaboration, and aids in the integration of workforce-related programs and services. Education is represented on local boards through membership of district superintendents and community college presidents with input from local adult education and career and technical deans and directors. Workforce Florida, at the state level, and regional workforce boards at the local level, are where business and education influence workforce policy to drive employment, training, and economic development.

Indiana

Effective partnerships in Indiana have involved foundation support, including the Lilly Endowment. Lilly helped fund *Ready Indiana*, a program currently continuing at the Indiana State Chamber of Commerce. *Ready Indiana* is an employer-led program to engage, educate, and elevate Indiana's workforce. The network of adult education providers that need to connect with employers can be confusing to businesses, especially smaller companies that do not have time to navigate the labyrinth of programs most likely to help them. Thus, the Indiana State Chamber has a full-time staff person to help make sense of these programs for employers. In addition, the *Ready Indiana* Program Committee advises the Chamber on program improvements. The *January 2009 Chamber Report* is the Indiana version of [*Reach Higher, America*](#). Many of these same goals are also established there. In order to improve the connection between employers and adult education programs, Indiana recently moved the adult education program to the State Workforce Cabinet.

Kentucky

Kentucky recently received \$500,000 from the state Workforce Investment Board to fund a career pathways model initiative. That work will begin by developing a curriculum in three different occupational areas.

The University of Kentucky has developed curriculum that integrates obtaining an employability certificate, a GED, 21st century skills, and some Microsoft certifications to develop stackable certificates.

Kentucky is taking the opportunity to partner with the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) by leveraging NAM's National Career Readiness Certificate with their endorsement. NAM plans to work with business and industry to create demand for this certification, and by promoting it in Kentucky. Through a special effort of the adult education program, the state Chamber of Commerce president has agreed to be a signatory on the new certificate, along with the governor.

Mississippi

In this state, community colleges administer adult education programs. The economic development agencies receive WIA Title I funding. Many adult education classes are located in One-Stop centers throughout the state. Groups such as the Mississippi

Manufacturing Association serve on committees with the community colleges, and some serve on the Workforce Investment Boards.

New York

In August 2007, New York established the Economic Security Cabinet, comprised of high-level staff from the Departments of Labor, Education, Economic Development, Social Services, Vocational Rehabilitation, and others. In the first year, the Cabinet established two initial priorities for its work: increasing access to and improving coordination of benefits that help struggling families make ends meet, and strengthening the state's workforce development system to support skills enhancement and career growth.

In addition, the New York State Board of Regents and the State Education Department developed the *Literacy Zones* initiative. *Literacy Zones* was designed to close the achievement gap in urban and rural communities having high concentrations of poverty and limited literacy or English language proficiency. Every Literacy Zone must have a guiding coalition of stakeholders, including government, education, and community leaders with a clear commitment to develop the Literacy Zone over three years. Applicants must also coordinate with other types of organizations in the Literacy Zone, such as: education (early childhood through adult), business and labor, workforce development and local economic development and financial institutions, including Voluntary Income Tax Assistance (VITA) centers.

North Carolina

In North Carolina, workplace education committees or groups exist at the local levels. Many local committees consist of subgroups of One-Stop JobLink career centers, local chambers of commerce, or workforce development boards. Community college system staff in adult education and workforce development programs will establish a statewide workplace committee in 2011.

Ohio

In 2007, Ohio's Workplace Education Committee became a part of the Transitions Task Force. The definition of transitions was expanded to include transitions to postsecondary education and training, and/or transitions to work. Members of the Transitions Task Force include mostly adult education directors, adult workforce directors, college administrators, and state officials.

Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania's local workforce investment boards (WIBs) consist of representatives from businesses, unions, education, and social services who oversee regional job training and placement programs. The partners work closely with the WIBs to develop an understanding of regional high priority occupations and regional industry partnerships. They then work to build and maintain relationships with the regional industry partnerships to exchange information about basic skills instruction and the skills needed for workers to obtain and advance in careers within the partnerships.

Philadelphia is a good-practice example. Only 25 percent of Philadelphians have any postsecondary education. Low academic level and employable skilled people enter a pipeline to work in the healthcare industry. Learners initially start working on fundamental skills, then decide on a specific healthcare job.

West Virginia

The West Virginia Workplace Education Program, working with a community college in the state, has provided training for two chambers of commerce. This has resulted in contacts with specific businesses and the opportunities to provide training for them. This program continues to work with the state Development Office, primarily with the Governor's Guaranteed Workforce Program and is currently working with four county economic development authorities to provide pre-hire training for potential employees for a new federal correctional facility.

C. What the Models Tell Us

These 16 state models have developed dynamic partnerships with businesses, chambers, and workforce agencies. This is a big reason they succeed in, or have great potential for, impacting and improving adult education services throughout the state. Most have also generated substantial new program funding through partnerships and collaboration.

Part III: Federal and State Policy Support for Partnerships

Most analysts thought that Congress would reauthorize the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) in 2010. While that was not the case, a reformed and reauthorized WIA is still part of conversations about the future of adult education and training. Business and adult education partnerships cannot thrive without government support and mandates at all levels. Some survey responses and Roundtable discussion dealt with legislative context and recommendations:

When House and the Senate staff convened meetings with adult educators in 2009, an official said: "There isn't anything you are coming here today to tell us that isn't already possible in the current WIA authorization." But, clearly WIA has not worked in all respects as its framers expected, and nobody understands completely why that is so. Roundtable participants emphasized that policymakers and workforce educators need to find answers to that question. We should have a far better sense of what the shortcomings of the current WIA bill are and what the disincentives are to implementing its provisions. The new WIA, in addition to new reforms, should adjust existing provisions that have not worked well for the past 12 years.

CAAL reports have identified legislative changes that could help improve partnerships. National collaboration among agencies is needed to provide leadership, but at this time is minimal. To promote collaboration at all levels, legislation covering higher education and health and human services should contain companion programs to support workplace training. The National Commission on Adult Literacy suggested a tax credit for employer partners. This recommendation is now a title in the Adult Education and

Economic Growth Act of 2009 (which will be reintroduced in 2011). If enacted, this title would provide a strong incentive for adult education and training programs to work as partners with each other and with employers.

In terms of reauthorization, adult education should be mandated to partner with state Workforce Investment Boards because comprehensive statewide planning is absolutely critical. The helter-skelter, silo-based writing of state plans is no longer acceptable. For the past year and a half, CAAL has stressed the need for more directives, particularly on elements of state plans.

Meanwhile, since 1999, WIA Title II has offered national and state leadership funds for partnership programs. Some states have been using state leadership funds for this purpose, but Roundtable participants and CAAL state survey respondents believe the Departments of Education and Labor should provide additional national funds to plan and support partnerships.

Roundtable participants discussed the state and policy role in terms of messaging and using partnerships. Their advice was relatively simple: Do not ask local programs to take on messaging themselves because it will create too many different and conflicting messages. As one participant put it, *“we are educators at the local level, not marketers, and we are not particularly good at the local level talking to employers and making the case.”* Business and workforce partners need to develop that policy message and then take the lead.

The Georgia Work Ready program provides an example in state legislation. It put in statute what the governor had established earlier by executive order. A 501(c)3 group, whose main purpose is sustainability, is being developed with the Georgia Work Ready industry partnership network.

Nationally, NAM helped Congress introduce legislation called *America Works*. This legislation would provide workforce education and training funds to obtain skills credentials that offer value in the workplace for both workers and employers. NAM has long advocated this approach to education and training and will continue to work with lawmakers in both chambers to ensure the bill’s passage this year.

Part IV: Barriers and Challenges to Effective Partnerships

The surveys and Roundtable identified obstacles and some solutions to partnerships. While many challenges surfaced, there was considerable confidence that, with increased focus and imagination, the barriers can be overcome. If they were, adult education and partnerships would emerge stronger and be better able to address the need for a more literate and skilled workforce.

A. Categories for Change

State survey responses for overcoming barriers clustered into five categories:

- **National and state funding changes** should include specific funds for workforce education, tax credits for employer partners, higher funding rates for bridge and blended programs, and national and state leadership funding for partnership projects.
- **National legislation and policy** should include in WIA reauthorization changes that boost collaboration, stipulate adult education as a mandatory partner in state WIAs, require statewide comprehensive planning and co-enrollment in WIA I & II programs, and foster integrated basic skills postsecondary work readiness programs.
- **Reporting changes** should include making the National Reporting System (NRS) more open to documenting workforce outcomes, improving policies and techniques for data matching, allowing real time performance measurement (vs. waiting until the end of a program year), and requiring WIA Titles I & II programs to recognize workforce credentials as significant outcomes.
- **Economic development aspects** should include developing ROI models for partnerships and collaboration, launching a national campaign to promote workforce partnerships, increasing services to small business, involving national business organizations, promoting awareness from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and improving connections with state Chamber of Commerce education committees.
- **Best practices support** should include establishing a national clearinghouse, developing distance learning systems, and designing contextualized curriculum.

B. National Challenges Identified

The Roundtable discussed problems in advancing workforce education and training partnerships that are national in origin. These relate to WIA, lack of an information clearinghouse, alignment to GED, and the NRS, as indicated below.

It is important to focus not only on what has not happened with WIA, as mentioned above, but to ask why that is so. *Reach Higher, America* put this in the context of state and national outcomes, looking at the national need and then defining the contributions of all partners to meet the desired goals. WIA was originally designed for structure and process rather than to achieve over-arching goals tied directly to the national need for economic growth and full employment. The Commission report brought critical attention to the lack of accountability and evaluation that should be embedded in federal funding for adult education. Programs should meet specific goals and objectives, and they should be set in the context of the need for economic growth in national (and state) conversations.

One Roundtable suggestion called for a clearinghouse to identify good local and state workforce service ideas. However, a clearinghouse in a YouTube world may look much

different than it has in the past. What is needed are more effective ways to share what states and localities are doing. For example, social networking could provide fresh dissemination opportunities.

The American Council on Education is working on a revision of the GED that will be more aligned to the workplace and to postsecondary standards. Programs also have to focus on certifications and diplomas, licensure, and degrees.

Many participants worry that programs have been badly served by the NRS. Teachers are so concerned that they will not take referrals from companies because incumbent workers do not fit into the “NRS box.” Employees have specific needs, and programs are afraid that accepting certain participants will negatively impact their NRS statistics. Consequently, trying to get these teachers involved with workforce development is often a struggle. In addition, many think that federal grant programs are focused on literacy gains, not on employment or transition to postsecondary education.

C. Additional Challenges Involving State and Local Programs

Partnerships that connect local, state, and federal organizations are essential for some purposes. Local organizations can come together and increase their impact, but if they are not in sync with state and federal policies, their local partnerships will make only limited progress.

As one participant said, “I have been frustrated for many years about the disconnect between adult education and economic development and workforce development. How can we break down those silos that exist now in our state, and, I am sure, exist in other states?”

The current challenge, the group indicated, is to recognize that ABE is in danger of becoming irrelevant because programs see it as including GED preparation *or* workforce development skills instead of GED *and* workforce development skills.

Adult education and workforce skills need to be advanced as a connected system and understood at all levels. Moreover, it is easier to serve people at middle skills proficiency level, than at lower levels, and we must factor in low-skilled adults who need to be in the workforce as well. The expertise for providing instructional services to them is in the adult education community. There has to be a balance of priorities between the two levels.

When there is a lack of resources in a time of greater need and collaboration becomes even more important, all partners to the service enterprise have to be much more clever about how they use their limited funds. It is especially important for service providers and businesses to identify mutual needs and goals, for both potential and current workers.

When employers meet to consider basic and occupational skill needs, it is often difficult for them to focus on the different needs of their incumbent workforce and the adult population in general. They tend to blame the K-12 system and to focus on high school reform. The important challenge is to alter the discussion and help business adopt a strategy of “grow-your-own workers.”

PART V: Findings and Recommendations

A. Key Project Findings

The Roundtable and supporting survey reports reveal a wide range of needs, ideas, critical issues, assumptions, and areas for further attention. This section summarizes the main findings.

Some findings relate to lessons learned from the experience of business organizations, adult educators, and the research community. Others identify opportunities for improving partnerships. Roundtable participants also offer guidance on how adult education programs, business organizations, employers, and public agencies can work together to improve practice in workforce education and training.

1. Clearly, the current WIA could have supported and promoted many of the ideas addressed in the Roundtable. Most states have only minimally implemented opportunities encouraged by WIA. That is because the language of the law does not reflect changes in need and practice over time, and because OVAE gave little direction or priority to workforce education and partnerships. Exceptions are states represented at the Roundtable and another dozen states that have actively pursued business partnerships.
2. The National Reporting System has not served programs as well as it should. Teachers often find it difficult to take referrals from companies because incumbent workers do not fit NRS parameters. Employees have specific needs, and by accepting their current workers into programs, they fear their achievements will fall short of NRS performance data and not be fully recognized.
3. In many instances, employers do not understand the potential of adult education to help them meet their own needs. Overuse of the term “literacy” seems to partly explain that. Many employers are reluctant to acknowledge that they may have hired people who lack such fundamental basic skills as solid reading and writing.
4. Real partnerships are difficult. More can be achieved by working together than alone, but each party has to compromise in the present for a future benefit.
5. The *process* of partnering needs to be simple and straightforward. Partners must be able to identify specific changes that will take place within a specific period of time and have a way to assess progress. Procedures for doing that need to be built into the partnership working arrangement.
6. Partnership messages need to be compelling and grounded in data. Businesses will respond to good clear data.

7. In a time of limited funds and resources, goal-based partnerships are essential to get results.
8. All participants must understand how results from partnership programs can benefit businesses, individuals, and the economy.
9. Industry needs should drive the identification of worker competencies and implementation of competency-based education and training.
10. There are critical distinctions between cooperation, collaboration, and partnerships. All have their place, but while partnership is the most difficult, solid partnerships provide the biggest payoff.
11. Business peer-to-peer communication is of high importance.
12. Developing the business case is critical to success. Roundtable participants identified several required elements. For example, adult education provider groups should be succinct. They should know their audience, draw connections between problems employers face and solutions that can be offered by adult education, analyze and identify the worker talent pool, and develop and use longitudinal data to support success points.
13. Programs often connect to partners via Workforce Investment Boards and/or One-Stops. These boards bring expertise to the table and provide feedback on local needs and structuring education and training.
14. Businesses often complain about being pressured for funding help. Having funds in advance or a firm commitment is critical to initiate the process and draw additional partners in if needed. However, programs should not expect to anchor a partnership on partner funding beyond the start-up period.
15. Jobs increasingly require some education beyond high school or the GED, so partners must make sure that adults are on pathways to education beyond the adult education and workforce skills programs offered by the service system. Otherwise, adult education services will be irrelevant to employers and policymakers.

B. Recommendations for Adult Education and Business

The survey reports and Roundtable participants generated a set of recommendations that encourage all players and partners to take responsibility for improving the products and outcomes of adult education and workforce skills upgrading. They cover a wide range of needs—from legislative changes to partnership processes, from day-to-day collaboration to telling and selling the partnership story, and from local/state/national

policy decisions to the funding of major new efforts for improving workforce education and employability. They also establish that the development of viable partnerships is critical to success. It will take time to implement most of these recommendations.

1. Improved accountability, and performance and outcome measures could help adult education improve its impact and relevance in the new American economy.
2. In their planning, local, state, and federal governments should think about how their collaboration will benefit the entire country. Joint research, development, and dissemination efforts can produce better programs and reduce “reinventing the wheel.”
3. National collaboration among federal agencies is needed to provide effective leadership. To further promote collaboration at all levels, legislation covering higher education, health and human services, justice, labor, and others should contain companion programs to support workplace training.
4. National programs need to help states identify, replicate, and implement best-practice models.
5. The 10 percent of employers who already understand and value partnerships should work with their education partners to develop a plan to help educate their peers, the other 80 percent of employers who would benefit from and likely be open to improving the skills of their workforce.
6. Statewide initiatives are critical to program success. Funding and leadership support is needed at all program levels for planning integrated systems.
7. Adult basic skills and workforce skills must be advanced by providers connected in a single system, with the needs of both middle-skilled and lower-skilled adults factored in. It should be recognized that traditional adult education has the main expertise for providing instructional services to low-skilled adults, and that such programs, which are traditionally underfunded, need adequate funding.
8. ROI is an area ripe for attention. A study should be undertaken on the ROI of workforce/workplace education programs for individual students and employers. Federal and state policy agendas should include the development of ROI models for partnerships and collaboration. ROI needs to be calculated for instructional program outcomes.
9. It is estimated that 80 percent of new jobs will come from small business. Small employers need to discover the ROI that can determine whether their business will survive and grow. They also need help to identify the employee skill

qualifications they require. A cadre of small business people can speak from their experience with return on investment through workforce collaboration.

10. When WIA is reauthorized, and in state actions, new provisions should boost collaboration, adult education as a mandatory and equal partner in state Workforce Investment Boards, statewide comprehensive planning, co-enrollment in and connection between WIA Title I & II programs, and integrated basic skills and postsecondary work readiness programs. Helter-skelter, silo-based state plans are no longer feasible.
11. WIA reauthorization should include specific funds for workforce education, tax credits for employer partners, higher funding rates for bridge and blended programs, and national and state leadership funding for partnership projects.
12. New accountability and performance measures should include an NRS that is open to workforce outcomes documentation, improved policies and techniques for data matching, real time performance measurement, and requiring WIA Titles I & II programs to recognize workforce credentials as significant outcomes.
13. National organizations should promote workforce partnerships, increased services to small business, and national business organization involvement, including promoting awareness from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and improving connections with Chamber of Commerce education committees.

C. Short-Term Action Recommendations

The Roundtable recommended that the following actions be taken immediately by partnerships and organizations to begin improving workforce education and training processes and programs.

- Adult educators should work with involved partner companies to develop a tool kit to motivate and help non-partners take action. The tool kit might include specifics about initial involvement and perceived value, and offer a quick-start strategy to move that employer into action.
- Since 1999, WIA Title II national and state leadership funds have been available for development of partnership programs. The Departments of Education and Labor should encourage the use of federal funds for this as a top priority.
- Good things are happening at the state level, especially in the 16 states profiled in this paper, but all states need to reset priorities and budgets so that workforce skill efforts can shift into high gear.
- Workforce education opportunities encouraged (sometimes even required) by existing WIA legislation have been only minimally implemented by most states.

Policy organizations need to gain a much better understanding about why WIA has not worked as intended.

- National and state professional organizations should give priority to promoting adult education/business partnerships.

Part VI: Conclusion

The surveys conducted for the Commission and CAAL and the July 2010 Roundtable identified and documented many promising practices and resources. The recommendations developed in this project will hopefully advance the national thought and action needed and help take workforce education and training to a new level of quality, service, and success. There is no question that dynamic program partnerships, for which many superb models already exist, will be invaluable in reaching this next level.

Appendix A

Roundtable Participants

Robin Asbury, Deputy Director, West Virginia Workplace Education Program

Ralph Edds, State WAGE Coordinator, Arkansas Department of Career Education

Maria Flynn, Vice President, Building Economic Opportunities Group, Jobs for the Future

Mary Gershwin, President, Business Champions

Domenic Giandomenico, Director, Education and Workforce Programs, Institute for a Competitive Workforce, U.S. Chamber of Commerce

Marshall Goldberg, Consultant, Labor Management Programs Partnership

Larry Good, Chairman, Corporation for a Skilled Workforce

Amy Kaslow, Senior Fellow, Council on Competitiveness

Neil Kelly, Education Program Consultant, Adult Education Office, California Department of Education

Cheryl King, President, Kentucky Wesleyan College (former study director, National Commission on Adult Literacy)

Mark Lawrance, Sr. Vice President, Indiana Chamber of Commerce

Jennifer McNelly, Vice President, Education and the Workforce, National Association of Manufacturers

Mark Musick, Quillen Chair of Excellence in Teacher and Learning (former Chair, Southern Regional Education Board; Member, National Commission on Adult Literacy)

James Parker, CAAL Senior Policy/Research Associate; Principal, Parker Consulting (Moderator)

Gail Spangenberg, President, Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy (Chair)

Reecie Stagnolia, Vice President, Kentucky Adult Education, Council on Postsecondary Education

Maureen Wagner, Adult Education Consultant, Connecticut State Department of Education

Michael Westover, State Director, Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education, Pennsylvania Department of Education

Appendix B

Web-Based Resources

The CAAL Adult Education and Business Partnership Project identified many resources that business, workforce, and adult education groups can use to improve, plan, and implement partnerships.

1. The first release of the NAM-Endorsed *Manufacturing Skills Certification System* focuses on core or basic personal effectiveness skills, academic competencies, general workplace skills, and industry-wide technical skills required by employers in all sectors of manufacturing. www.nam.org/institute
2. The *America Works Act* modifies the Workforce Investment Act so that adults and youths at One-Stop career centers will be encouraged to consider programs offering portable, national, industry-recognized credentials, as deemed appropriate by the local workforce board. <http://hagan.senate.gov/files/TheAMERICAWorksAct.pdf>
3. *Working Together* describes the many forms that business-adult education partnerships can take, discusses the bottom line to partnering, and offers practical steps for getting involved. www.c-pal.net
4. The Joyce Foundation launched the *Shifting Gears* initiative in 2006 to help five Midwest states re-engineer adult education, workforce development, and postsecondary education policies to support economic growth and expand job opportunities for low-skilled workers. www.shifting-gears.org
5. *Return on Investment Analyses of a Selected Set of Workforce System Programs in Indiana* uses Indiana Workforce Intelligence System data to conduct a formal ROI study of its workforce programs. www.indianachamber.com/media/pdf/ROIanalysisWorkforceDevelopment2009.pdf
6. *Connecting Literacy and Work* compiles a set of tool kits and other resources. It consists of a self-assessment, so that community literacy providers can see how well they are connecting with the workforce system. <http://www.jff.org/projects/current/workforce/connecting-literacy-and-work/918>
7. The *Springboard Project* has developed new ideas to help workers get the information, retraining, and ongoing education they need. http://s73976.gridserver.com/initiatives/education/springboard_project
8. The *Kentucky web portal* has employer, economic development, and education information, free to job seekers or employers who want to post their jobs. <https://e3.ky.gov>

9. *Help Wanted* presents a new approach that answers some critical questions about the emerging economy. <http://cew.georgetown.edu/jobs2018/>
10. The *CASAS Workforce Skills Certification System* provides the foundation to prepare a skilled and able entry-level workforce. It offers a complete system of assessments to measure work readiness. <https://www.casas.org/home/index.cfm?fuseaction=home.showContent&MapID=2057>
11. *Recommended Policies and Practices for Advancing Indiana's System of Adult Education and Workforce Training* provides a policy framework and specific recommendations for improving the system of adult education and workforce training in Indiana. <http://www.indianachamber.com/media/pdf/nchemsreportfinal.pdf>
12. *Strengthening the Skills of Our Current Workforce* contains recommendations for increasing credential attainment for adults in Minnesota. http://www.gwdc.org/adult_learners/GWDC_Strengthening_the_Skills_of_Our_Current_Workforce.pdf
13. *Tuning In to Local Labor Markets* presents findings from the Sectoral Employment Impact Study. http://www.ppv.org/ppv/publications/assets/327_publication.pdf
14. *Transforming Michigan's Adult Learning Infrastructure* recommends to the state's Council for Labor and Economic Growth a set of policy reforms that will reduce by 50 percent the 1.7 million adults lacking the basic skills they need to succeed in postsecondary education and obtain good jobs. http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mdcd/CLEG_Report_FINAL_249176_7.pdf
15. Business Champions and 30 education, business, and philanthropic leaders (in October 2010) submitted a community college action plan to the White House. *How to Create High-Impact Partnerships for Jobs & Economic Vitality in the U.S.* outlines specific steps that employers, corporate philanthropists, and community college trustees can take to form partnerships that will produce good jobs, more degrees, and increased economic opportunities for Americans. The plan is the result of seven meetings with members of the White House Economic Recovery Board. <http://businesschampions.org/node/104>
16. *Partnering with Employers to Promote Job Advancement for Low-Skill Individuals* includes examples of successful incumbent worker training efforts, pre-employment and bridge programs, "sectoral" training designed to provide industry-specific expertise, career pathways, and industry-based certification programs. Its review of policy considerations for creating and sustaining employer partnerships that provide skill development opportunities is also helpful. <http://lincs.ed.gov/pd/partnering>