

One Step Forward Initiative



Employer Guide to Adult Education for Work

Transforming Adult Education to Grow a Skilled Workforce

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to Adult Education for Work

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Credits

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One Step Forward Initiative

In Fall 2007, the WDSG at the National Center on Education and the Economy received a grant from the Walmart Foundation to identify a set of quality indicators for Adult Education for Work—programs geared to helping low-skilled workers acquire the basic skills they need to succeed in the 21st-century workplace and to enhance U.S. firms' competitiveness. The purpose of identifying the elements of Adult Education for Work programs is to:

- (1) Inform the adult education field and its practitioners about the key components of effective programs;
- (2) Stimulate excellence and guide quality improvement in programming in support of Adult Education for Work; and
- (3) Steer new public and private investments into expanded and transformed programming.

This Guide on Adult Education for Work is one of the products produced by the *One Step Forward* Initiative.

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Support for the development of this document was provided by the Walmart Foundation.

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INTRODUCTION

The Problem

The United States faces an alarming challenge that seriously threatens our competitiveness in the world economy. A large and growing portion of the American workforce lacks critical basic skills and work readiness competencies, posing an acute threat to our nation's economic well-being.

This is a critical issue for employers. Millions of adults do not have the foundation skills needed to get, retain or advance in a job. The facts:

- Over 1 million young adults drop out of high school each year. More than 12 million adults without a high school credential are in the labor force today. And over 59 million adults in our country currently have nothing more than a high school diploma. These people—your current and/or future employees—need training.
- At the same time, almost twice as many jobs over the next decade will require a postsecondary credential or college degree, up from 25 percent today to about 45 percent over the next decade.¹
- Yet far too many (93 million) score at the lower levels of national assessments of functional literacy skills and are unprepared to enroll in the postsecondary education or job training programs that can prepare them for current and future jobs.²
- And U.S. employers are facing the retirement of the largest and most skilled workforce we have ever had in this country—the baby boom generation. The talent pool employers need to drive competitive advantage for their businesses is shrinking.

These dynamic forces are colliding, spurring growing consensus about the need to reform our nation's education and workforce systems to better enable low-skilled adults, including those without high school credentials, to pursue further education and ultimately family sustaining employment.

¹ Arlene Dohm and Lynn Shniper, "Occupational Employment Projections to 2016", *Monthly Labor Review*, November 2007, table 5. The Bureau of Labor Statistics characterizes a college degree to include two-year, four-year, and graduate diplomas. BLS describes a postsecondary credential as vocational programs lasting from a few weeks to more than one year, leading to a certificate or other award, but not a degree.

² Thirty million adult Americans score at "below basic" literacy level and another 63 million adults can only perform simple literacy tasks, according to the National Center on Education Statistics, *National Assessment of Adult Literacy*, (NAAL, 2003), U.S. Department of Education, 2005.

The National Commission on Adult Literacy recently concluded that America’s current Adult Education system is “ill-equipped to meet 21st Century needs” and recommended that the Adult Education and literacy system in this country be transformed into an Adult Education and workforce skills system, with the new mission of attainment of postsecondary and workforce readiness.³

What our nation, its workers, and its employers need is **Adult Education for Work**.

What is Adult Education for Work?

Adult Education for Work, in this Guide, means the education and training low-skilled adults need to become prepared for postsecondary education or training, and for family-sustaining employment and career advancement.

About Adult Education for Work

This Guide is about enabling employers to access and, where necessary, to help transform our current Adult Education system in the United States into a system that meets employer needs for more highly skilled workers—Adult Education for Work. This transformation relies on three critical principles:

- Strong partnerships with employers are critical to ensure that education and training programs are aligned to workplace needs;
- Work readiness and preparation for postsecondary education and/or training must be a core mission for all Adult Education programs; and
- A seamless system of education and training that is focused on careers (Career Pathways) is necessary—a system that provides opportunities for accelerated learning that moves adults quickly and efficiently to postsecondary education and training, and results in placement and advancement in family-sustaining employment and careers.⁴

³ National Commission on Adult Literacy, op. cit., p. vi and p. 15.

⁴ This conclusion is shared by a broad range of national organizations focused on these issues, and our work draws on their work. These groups include: Jobs for the Future’s and the National Council on Workforce Education’s *Breaking Through Initiative*; The Joyce Foundation’s *Shifting Gears Initiative*; the National Commission on Adult Literacy’s working including their report *Reach Higher, America* and the background papers on which it was based; papers written by the Workforce Strategies Center including “Building a Career Pathways System”; papers written by the Center for American Progress including “Lifelong Learning: New Strategies for the Education of Working Adult” by Brian Bosworth; the work of the Center for Law and Social Policy; and the work of The Working Poor Families Project.

The overall premise is that refocusing current Adult Education programs to meet the skill needs of American employers and of regional economies will help provide business and industry with the critical workforce they need to remain competitive in a global economy. Such a system will also provide America's workers with the skills they need to succeed economically. The decision makers and practitioners who design and operate these programs will only be successful if they engage employers as full partners, with the goal of ensuring that their programs are relevant to business and industry skill needs.

Conversely, a pipeline of work-ready employees will only become a reality if employers understand how to engage, partner, assess, transform and effectively use public education and training resources to their advantage.

About This Guide for Employers

This Guide provides employers and those who work with employers:

- A vision for new, more effective Adult Education programs including the key elements to look for in a high quality Adult Education for Work program;
- An improved understanding of the employer role in building a more efficient Adult Education delivery system, and of the benefits to employers for this engagement;
- Some tactical actions employers can take to impact change;
- Best-in-class examples of employer involvement in Adult Education for Work programming; and
- Tools employers can use to assess their training needs, access training resources, and assess the quality of existing programs. Employers can also use these tools as a guide to advocate for programs that better meet their needs.

Who Should Read this Guide?

This Guide is a “must-read” for:

- Employers, especially those who employ low-skilled workers
- Staff to employer trade associations, Chambers of Commerce, business consortium, and certification agencies
- Economic development practitioners
- Workforce Investment Boards and staff of One Stop Career Centers that work with business and industry
- Community organizers
- Policymakers, program administrators and providers who work with employers and value the power of employer partnerships in transforming current Adult Education programs to Adult Education for Work programs.

PART 1: WHY ADULT EDUCATION FOR WORK?

What Do Adult Education Programs Currently Provide?

Currently, the goal of most Adult Education programs in the United States is to teach adults with low levels of education and/or limited English proficiency the “basic skills.” The skills are “basic” in the sense that adult educators consider them to be the minimum literacy and language skills required to function effectively in American social and economic life.

Adult Education programs include:

- Adult Basic Education (ABE) instruction in reading, writing and basic math;
- Adult Secondary Education (ASE) preparation for passing the GED or other high school equivalency tests; and
- English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction in reading, writing and comprehending spoken English for non-native speakers of the language.

Adult Education programs are provided by different organizations in different communities including community colleges, K–12 school districts, community-based organizations and others. Due largely to limited funding, the current system serves less than 3 million adults each year while the projected number of adults who might benefit from services is many times that number.

For many decades, Adult Education programs have provided basic literacy, English language instruction for immigrants, and preparation for the GED and other high school equivalency examinations, while focusing on life skills and personal growth. While laudable goals, alone they do not equip adults to succeed in today’s fast-paced, knowledge-based economy or give them the foundation skills needed for living wage jobs.

PART 1: WHY ADULT EDUCATION FOR WORK?

Adult Education for Work programming would bring about the following significant shifts:

	Current Adult Education Programs	➔	Adult Education for Work
Customer	Student as primary customer	➔	Student and employer as primary customers
Goal	Goal is primarily to develop life skills and personal interests	➔	Goal is on work readiness and preparation for postsecondary education and training
Content	Content is literacy, numeracy and English language skills	➔	Content is literacy, numeracy, English language skills and work readiness skills
Proficiency	Proficiency levels driven by personal goals	➔	Proficiency levels driven by student career goals, workplace needs, and further education requirements

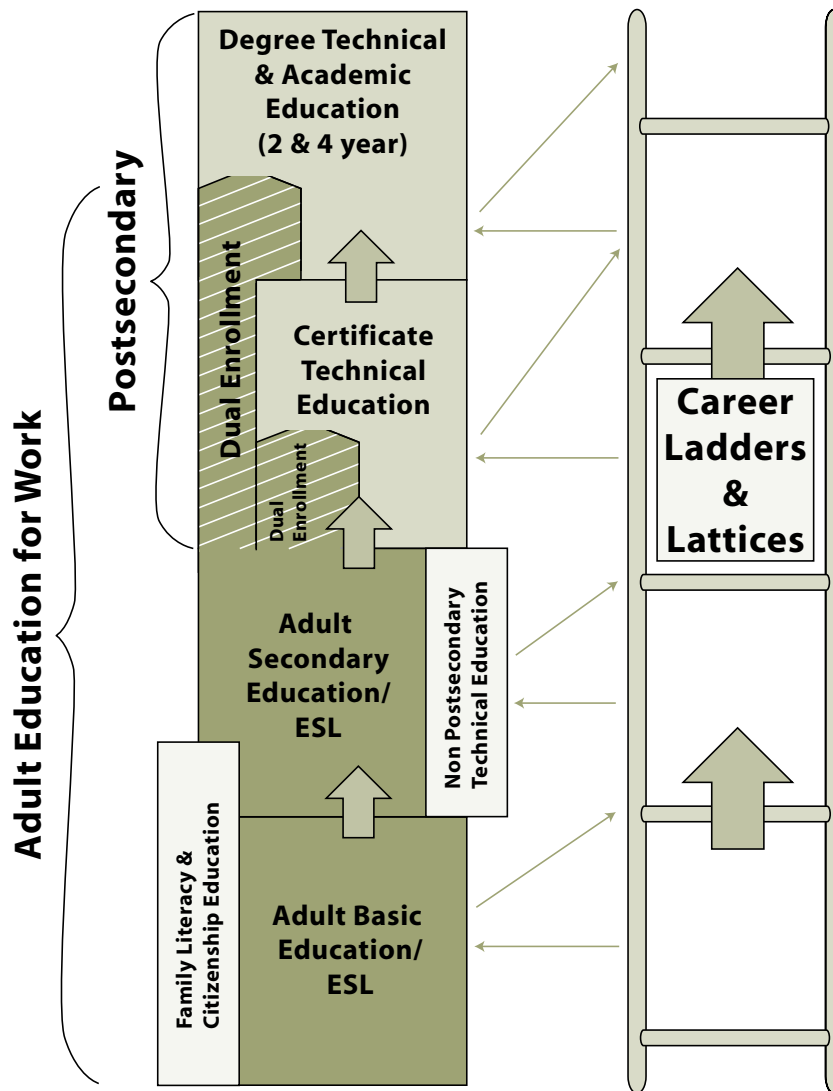
How Would Adult Education for Work Be Different?

Adult Education for Work should be the cornerstone of a broader Career Pathways education and training system designed to meet the full range of skill needs of the nation’s workforce—providing more effective and efficient services for adults. In a comprehensive Career Pathways system:

- Education and training programs at all levels would be closely aligned with careers and industries important to local and regional employers.
- Adult Education for Work programs serving adults with low skills would link directly with postsecondary education, workforce training and economic development priorities.
- Seamless **Career Pathways** would be identified and offered that make it far easier for adults—especially those with limited basic or English language skills—to advance through progressive levels of the educational system, as quickly as possible, gaining education and workforce skills certifications with recognized value at each level leading to receipt of a postsecondary credential and family-sustaining employment.⁵

⁵ “Career Pathways” is a term for a series of connected education and training programs and support services that enable individuals to secure employment within industry or occupational sectors, and to advance over time to successively higher levels of education and employment in those sectors. An early exponent, from whom this definition is drawn, is the Workforce Strategies Center; see their 2002 report [Building A Career Pathways System: Promising Practices in Community-College Centered Workforce Development](#), by Julian L. Alssid, et al. The report is available at: www.workforcestrategy.org.

Career Pathways System



Building a new Adult Education for Work program as part of a Career Pathways system will require employers to play a critical role. In addition to identification of the skill needs of high demand jobs, employers can provide other important functions including: providing input on curriculum; providing internship opportunities for students; offering training on-site or release time for employees; and participating in the delivery of training or providing teachers for technical training.

PART 1: WHY ADULT EDUCATION FOR WORK?

Employers are not the only partners in this system. Adult Education for Work programs that are part of a Career Pathways system require a community-wide effort if they are to provide the full range of services and supports all adults—but particularly low-skilled adults—need to succeed.

Following is a description of the range of partners required and the critical roles that all should play in Career Pathways systems with Adult Education for Work programs at their core.

Partner Roles and Responsibilities	
Key Partners (to ensure a comprehensive, systems approach)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult Education administering agencies • Individual Adult Education providers • Postsecondary and technical institutions (especially community colleges) • Workforce Investment Boards • One-Stop Career Centers • Social services agencies • Community-based and volunteer organizations • Others that provide or facilitate adult education and supportive services
Key Drivers (to ensure skills taught at all levels meet needs of regional employers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employers • Business and Trade Associations • Unions • Economic development agencies • Local, state or national occupational certifying agencies
Key Roles for Employers	<p>To align programs with workplace needs, employers can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influence program design and delivery • Shape curriculum and instruction • Encourage the awarding of credentials • Support high-quality teaching • Encourage access and retention • Form critical partnerships • Demand accountability measures

Partner Roles and Responsibilities	
Key Changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programs are focused on preparing workers for high growth industries and high-demand occupations • Programs are designed and implemented in partnership with regional employers • Clear pathways are identified for specific high demand occupational areas, with the education and skill requirements of progressive educational levels and programs clearly articulated • Education and training providers cooperate/coordinate at the regional level based on economic development/employer needs • Curriculum is taught in the context of job-related tasks
Key Benefits for Employers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost savings/increased productivity • Improved educational training opportunities for workers • Access to additional, needed support services for workers • Increased skill levels of workers • Increased retention of employees when given access to training • Improved job performance and career advancement opportunities for workers with additional training • Channel for recruiting qualified candidates

What Are the Key Quality Elements of Adult Education for Work Programs?

Following is a summary of the key elements of high quality Adult Education for Work programs. This description is based on a set of specific quality elements listed in the assessment tool on pages 16–18 and listed in full on page 27 that can be used by policymakers and practitioners to develop and implement high performing Adult Education for Work programs. They can also be used by employers to evaluate the effectiveness of programs in their community or state; to determine if the programs are relevant to the skill needs of their employees; to identify tactical steps they can take to strengthen their local or on-site programs; and to call for system reforms when necessary.

I. Program Design: Adult Education for Work programs provide clear pathways for participants, regardless of their skill level at the point of entry, to advance as quickly as possible to postsecondary programs, and ultimately to family-sustaining employment and progression in their careers.

PART 1: WHY ADULT EDUCATION FOR WORK?

- II. Curriculum and Instruction:** Adult Education for Work programs adopt curricula and instructional practices that support adults as they prepare for family-supporting jobs and career advancement. Among the strategies necessary to achieve this include: 1) ensuring that curricula covers the full range of basic and work readiness skills needed for entry into and success in postsecondary education and training, as well as in the workplace; and 2) using a range of resources including technology and instructional techniques that optimize both educational gains and work readiness.
- III. Assessment and Credentialing:** Adult Education for Work programs use effective diagnostic assessments of student proficiency and progress to help students enter programs at the appropriate levels and advance along Career Pathways as quickly as possible. In addition, both personal and academic barriers to progress should be identified to enable the design of individualized instructional interventions and needed support services.
- IV. High-Quality Teaching:** Adult Education for Work programs have staff with specialized educational training in adult learning and workforce preparation. Staff have the ability to apply such knowledge and skills in the provision of high-quality instruction. Teachers should have ongoing professional development opportunities and classroom supports.
- V. Support and Follow-up Services to Encourage Access and Retention:** Adult Education for Work programs provide comprehensive supports to students to reduce personal barriers to retention and progress.
- VI. Connections to the Business Community:** Adult Education for Work programs ensure that they are meeting local and regional workforce needs by working with individual employers, employer associations, economic development agencies, business and industry to identify the skill needs of regional employers and ensure alignment between those needs and these programs.
- VII. Monitoring and Accountability Systems:** Adult Education for Work programs establish strong monitoring and accountability systems to document, evaluate and improve student and program outcomes on a continuing basis.

PART 2: ACCESSING QUALITY ADULT EDUCATION FOR WORK PROGRAMS

Part 1 of this Guide identified the key elements that a high quality Adult Education for Work program should possess—helping you, the employer, to know what high quality Adult Education and Career Pathways systems within your community should look like.

Part 2 focuses on ways that employers can use this information to identify and access Adult Education and other publicly funded training programs for your own employees as appropriate. This section of the guide is designed to help you: determine the specific education and training needs of your employees; find appropriate Adult Education and Career Pathways programs to meet those needs; assess their quality; and advocate for change where your local education and workforce programs are not adequate.

Taking Stock of Your Employees' Training Needs

A growing number of employers understand that there is no greater competition in the business world than the global race for skilled workers. Your workforce makes a substantial contribution to the success of your business. ***So what does this mean for you as an individual employer?*** It means that education and training for your employees should be part of your overall business strategy. It means you need to determine your workers' education and training needs. And it means that you should help your workers access appropriate education and training, either on-site or from the broad range of education and training services that are available in your community. To do this, you need to take stock of your workers' current needs and what you are currently doing to meet those needs. Then, you must know where to look for appropriate education and training services and how to determine their quality and relevance to your needs.

If you determine that your workers are in need of education and training, you must ask yourself a few vital questions:

- Do your employees need training in basic education or English language skills as well as technical skills?
- Do your employees possess adequate work readiness skills (e.g., problem solving, critical thinking, team work, following instructions, and good work habits such as punctuality, diligence, effective communication, and appropriate dress and behavior) needed in your workplace?
- Do your employees need to improve their ability to understand, learn and apply new information to their jobs?

PART 2: ACCESSING QUALITY ADULT EDUCATION FOR WORK PROGRAMS

- Do your employees have the ability to implement new technologies and the new processes that accompany those technologies?
- Do your employees generally have the skills needed to meet your demands for continued innovation and success?
- Do the educational levels of your employees adversely impact your health and safety records? Your employee retention and promotion records? Your productivity and error rates?

There are a number of assessment tools that currently exist that are designed for employers and/or training providers to determine the exact skill needs of your workers. Some of these tools include: WorkKeys Job Skills Assessment system (www.act.org/workkeys), the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems (CASAS) (www.casas.com), the Workforce Skills Certification and Road to Readiness transcript, and the Work Readiness Credential assessments based on the Equipped For the Future (EFF) Standards (www.workreadiness.com). Education and training providers as well as your local One-Stop Career Center should be able to help you with such worker skills assessments, as well as with the identification of appropriate education and training resources and programs in your community. The following checklist includes a set of questions for you to ask yourself and a second set of questions for you to ask the education and training providers in your community.

<i>Do You...</i>	
<p>Do you use any of the following public institutions or programs to help you train employees or potential employees in work readiness skills?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community colleges • Technical/vocational schools • Universities • One-Stop Career Centers • Workforce Investment Boards • Adult basic education and/or literacy programs • Manufacturing Extension Partnerships • Community or faith-based organizations • Other 	<p>If yes, to what extent?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We use them to access training subsidies for our workers. • We use them to provide basic Adult Education or English language (ESL) training for our workers, on-site or at their facilities. • We use them to customize adult basic, ESL, and occupational skills training specifically for our workers. • Working with other employers from similar industries, we use them to design and deliver sector-based training programs for our workers. • We use their materials as training tools in our own training. • We partner with them to design their training curricula to meet our needs. • We offer their students internships and/or apprenticeships, and their teachers opportunities to become more familiar with our workplace. • We provide our staff as teachers for their technical programs. • We use them to find employees, hold job fairs at their sites, or for other employment purposes.

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<i>Do They...</i>	
<p>Collaborate with you in any of the following ways?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide classes specifically for working adults, at convenient times and locations. • Incorporate real-world, work-related problems into coursework. • Train for skills you need now and into the future, rather than “yesterday’s” skills. • Offer certificate and degree programs based on your input. • Work with you and other employers on common skill needs for your industry or region. • Keep you informed of public training subsidies and offerings. • Remove bureaucratic obstacles to partnering. 	<p>If yes, to what extent?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They provide academic, work readiness and occupational skills that are integrated or well-aligned. • They provide educational pathways and Career Pathways to skill and credential attainment. • They use curricula taught in the context of work. • They modularize curricula, making it easier for working adults to persist in training and work. • They provide on-line or technology-enhanced training. • They make classes available on-site at the workplace; and make other classes available before and after work hours, and at locations that are convenient to working adults (including through on-line offerings). • They award certifications and degrees (where applicable) that are relevant to you the employer and your workers. • They coordinate their education credits, certificates and degrees with other training providers so all coursework, achievements and skills can be recognized by employers

Using the Checklist to Make Your Current Efforts More Relevant. If you are already partnering with a community college, literacy provider, One-Stop Career Center or others, have you figured out how to evaluate that relationship? Have you calculated a return on that partnership investment? Are you happy with what they’ve been bringing to your workforce development initiatives? Do the range of services they offer compare favorably with the quality elements identified in Part 1 of the guide or with the questions asked in the checklist?

Using the Checklist to Begin a New Partnership. If you haven’t been using these publicly funded education and training resources to develop your entry-level and current workforce, the checklist is ideal for starting a discussion with providers in your area about how to establish such a relationship. Once you’ve contacted the right organizations, and set up a face-to-face meeting with the person in charge of Adult Education or training, you can get to know them, and they can get to know you. Sharing what your business does, what kinds of jobs you offer, and the skills your workers need are critical first steps for developing that partnership. The next step involves assessing the providers’ ability to

PART 2: ACCESSING QUALITY ADULT EDUCATION FOR WORK PROGRAMS

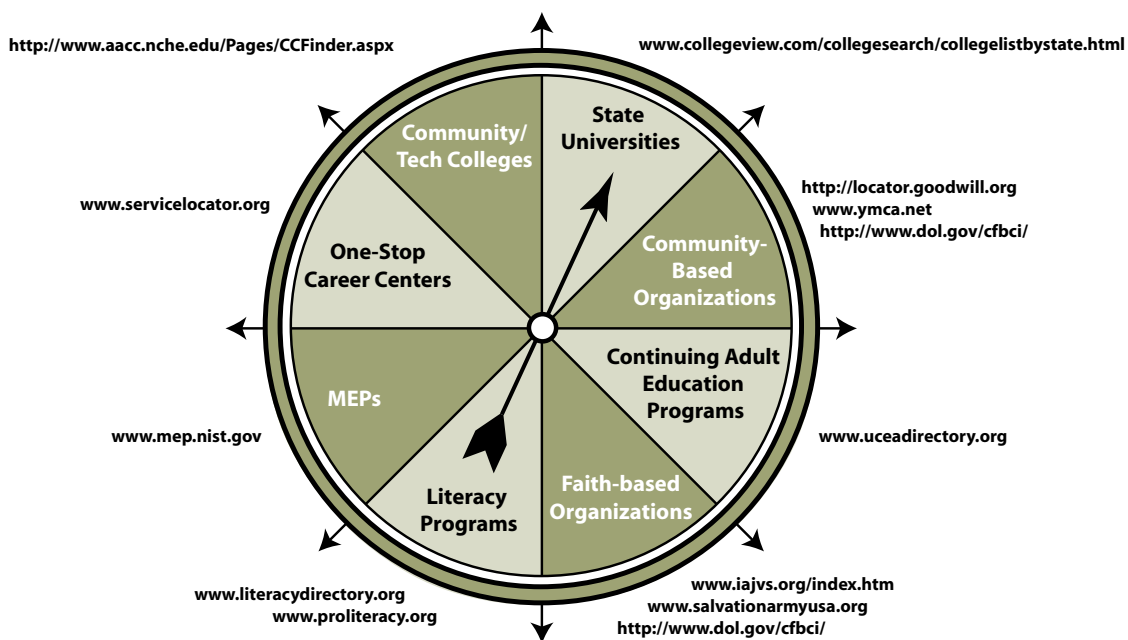
partner with your business effectively, and to meet your workforce development needs. Quality Adult Education and training providers, particularly those who incorporate many of the quality elements identified in the guide, can help you assess and identify where the gaps in your workforce skills levels are, and can help you begin to address these challenges.

Finding Education and Training Resources in Your Community

The publicly funded education and training programs that make up a Career Pathways system in your community consist of a variety of resources and delivery structures that range from Adult Education programs for individuals with limited basic or English language skills to postsecondary education programs that result in a credential or degree. These programs are provided through a variety of providers including local education agencies, community colleges, community-based and volunteer organizations, One-Stop Career Centers, career and technical education providers, and four-year colleges and universities. These providers are funded with federal, state and local resources.

If you don't know where to locate the Adult Education programs in your area or you have never even heard of the One-Stop Career Centers, here is a "compass" to help you find these resources in your community. Each "compass point" has a corresponding URL(s), so you can find out more about the resources and get in touch with these programs and providers in your region.

Compass: Public Resources for Training



PART 2: ACCESSING QUALITY ADULT EDUCATION FOR WORK PROGRAMS

The compass' URLs provide initial direction for finding public training resources in your area, but contacting those listed here is just the first step. For example, the community and faith-based organizations listed in the compass are but a few now at work in your community. There are many more. For help in finding them all, you will want to turn to your local Workforce Investment Board, One-Stop Career Center, business or trade association, chamber of commerce, or other points of reference in your local area.

Beyond the public resources, Adult Education for Work programs can also be provided at the workplace, focusing on the work readiness, basic and English language skills that workers need to gain new employment, advance in their careers, and increase productivity. In such cases, curricula are often developed by educators working with employers and employee groups to meet the reading, computation, speaking and reasoning skills required to perform job tasks effectively. As earlier described, successful efforts to institute workplace education programs require strong partnerships among educators, employers, and employees. While most workplace education programs throughout the United States have been established without direct Federal assistance, some limited resources may be available to work with your employees, and publicly funded programs should be willing to work with you to help set up individual programs. While large businesses and industries frequently establish their own programs, small businesses may want to pool resources to establish joint training efforts, particularly around the needs of similar occupational sectors.

Technology-based training and other forms of distance learning have also expanded dramatically in recent years. Sophisticated and accessible (low-cost or free) CD-ROM and internet-based options for interactive and experiential learning allow new learning technology to provide voice, image and text-based learning that has many of the features of the best classroom instruction. Appropriate use of technology can provide individual attention for particular learning styles, opportunities to work and solve programs in groups, exposure to the world of work and employers, and a progressive but not intimidating learning experience that can be offered in the workplace or on a worker's own time. When used in conjunction with face-to-face instructor/mentor support, the resulting blended learning experience can be as effective or even more effective than traditional class-based instruction.

If you are considering the establishment of work-based education programs, following is a website at the U.S. Department of Education that can help you make such decisions and develop such programs.
<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/AdultEd/workplace.html>

Assessing the Quality of Your Programs

Once you have identified education and training resources in your community, you need to determine their quality and relevance to the needs of your employees. The following assessment tool should prove useful to you in making such determinations about your local programs and in deciding how to utilize such resources. It can also help you advocate for change, where change is necessary.

- Key:**
- 1 = no aspect of quality element in place**
 - 2 = modest level of quality element in place**
 - 3 = quality element reflects benchmark**
 - NE = no experience with this aspect; need more information**

Adult Education for Work Program Quality Assessment

I. Program Design—Benchmark: *Adult Education for Work programs provide clear pathways for participants, regardless of their skill level at the point of entry, to advance as quickly as possible to postsecondary programs, and ultimately to family-sustaining employment or progression in their careers.*

Quality Elements				
Work with all partners to define the role of Adult Education for Work programs in the broader community-wide Career Pathways system.	1	2	3	NE
Provide all students an orientation to Career Pathways.	1	2	3	NE
Help each student develop a "Career Pathways Plan."	1	2	3	NE
Offer a continuum of instruction from basic skills (including English Language) to readiness for postsecondary education and training and work.	1	2	3	NE
Provide programs and supports to ensure a smooth transition from Adult Education for Work programs to postsecondary education and training.	1	2	3	NE
Provide accelerated pathways for students to move ahead as quickly as possible.	1	2	3	NE
Accommodate work and other adult responsibilities.	1	2	3	NE

II. Curriculum and Instruction—Benchmark: *Adult Education for Work programs adopt curricula and instructional practices that support adults as they prepare for family-supporting jobs and career advancement. Among the strategies necessary to achieve this include: 1) ensure that curricula covers the full range of basic and work readiness skills needed for entry into and success in postsecondary education and training, as well as in the workplace; and 2) use a range of resources and instructional techniques that optimize both educational gains and work readiness.*

Quality Elements				
Make postsecondary education and training and work readiness the goal of the curriculum.	1	2	3	NE
Make work a central context for the curriculum.	1	2	3	NE
Use instructional strategies that help students to learn by doing.	1	2	3	NE
Manage the classroom in ways that enhance readiness for postsecondary education and training, and for work.	1	2	3	NE
Make extensive and appropriate use of technology for instruction	1	2	3	NE

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III. Assessment and Credentialing—*Benchmark:* *Adult Education for Work programs use effective diagnostic assessments of student proficiency and progress for determining students’ basic and workforce readiness skills to help them enter and advance along Career Pathways as quickly as possible. In addition, both personal and academic barriers to progress should be identified to enable the design of individualized instructional interventions and needed support services.*

Quality Elements				
Use appropriate assessment tools, including assessments of postsecondary and work readiness, to place students, help them develop Career Pathways plans, and periodically assess their progress.	1	2	3	NE
Base advancement policy on assessments of skills and knowledge.	1	2	3	NE

IV. High-Quality Teaching—*Benchmark:* *Instructional staff in Adult Education for Work programs have specialized educational training in adult learning and workforce preparation and have the ability to apply such knowledge and skills in the provision of high-quality instruction. Teachers should have ongoing professional development opportunities and classroom supports.*

Quality Elements				
Require high standards and recognized teaching credentials for Adult Education teachers.	1	2	3	NE
Provide ongoing professional development opportunities and classroom supports for teachers.	1	2	3	NE

V. Support and Follow-up Services to Encourage Access and Retention—*Benchmark:* *Adult Education for Work programs should provide comprehensive supports to students to reduce personal barriers to retention and progress.*

Quality Elements				
Make high-quality counseling a priority.	1	2	3	NE
Partner with providers in the community to provide case management services to students, including counseling and social and academic supports.	1	2	3	NE

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VI. Connections to the Business Community—*Benchmark:* *Adult Education for Work programs ensure that they are meeting local and regional workforce needs by working with individual employers, employer associations, economic development agencies, business and industry to identify the skill needs of regional employers and ensure alignment between those needs and Adult Education for Work programs and services in their community.*

Quality Elements				
Focus instruction on the skill needs of industries and occupations in which there is a strong demand for workers.	1	2	3	NE
Develop partnerships with employers.	1	2	3	NE

VII. Monitoring and Accountability Systems—*Benchmark:* *Adult Education for Work programs establish strong monitoring and accountability systems to document, evaluate and improve student and program outcomes on a continuing basis.*

Quality Elements				
Develop customer-friendly performance information.	1	2	3	NE
Track longitudinal data on learning gains and employment outcomes.	1	2	3	NE
Use data to improve programs.	1	2	3	NE

Advocating for Change if Programs Do Not Meet Your Needs

What Is the Employer Role in Building a New System?

If you determine that the local education and training system in your community is not adequate or relevant to the needs of employers in your region, the following pages offer some tactical suggestions for employers about how to help state and local policy makers, program administrators and providers transform existing Adult Education programs into quality Adult Education for Work programs and Career Pathways systems as described in this Guide. The quality elements organize the information. The chart suggests actions employers can take and provides best-in-class examples of how employers across the country are already impacting change. In these examples, programs work closely with their local area employers to understand what skills employees need to be valuable employees. They then train their students to those specifications and provide a credential of skills attainment. As a result, employers involved in these programs spend less money trying to find or train employees for their businesses. They are also assured of a pipeline of workers suitable for employment in their local area businesses. And importantly, the workers in their community also benefit.

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Program Design

If you want to:	You can:
Influence program design and delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Become a member of your region's Workforce Investment Board • Invite program operators to your worksite to learn about your workplace skill requirements firsthand



In Action

Owensboro Community College

- In Owensboro Kentucky, the local Chamber of Commerce identified allied health professions as a leading growth industry.
- A partnership between the college's Adult Education program and the regional hospital center was formed to assess the workforce skills of both new hires and incumbent workers using the WorkKeys system.
- Based on these assessments, the college developed a number of basic skills training programs contextualized to the allied health field, most of which took the form of "bridge" programs—filling the gaps between basic skills employees had, relative to the skills required for particular occupations.

For more information, see: Forrest P. Chisman, [Adult Education and Literacy and Community Colleges in Kentucky](#) (Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy, 2004)

Texas LEARNS

- Texas LEARNS (the state's Adult Education Agency) has partnered with the Workforce Commission, higher education institutions, employers, and local programs to develop "...demand-driven, industry related curricula appropriate for use with Texas's English language learners" in three industry sectors: healthcare; manufacturing; and sales and service.
- They have developed industry skill standards for each cluster, conducted task analyses of occupations in particular firms, and developed staff training modules. Texas LEARNS estimates that it would take students approximately 200 hours to complete each entry-level curriculum.
- Although the curricula are primarily intended to prepare students for entry-level positions, Texas LEARNS believes that they should provide the foundation for transitions to technical or postsecondary education in the industry sectors and expects to develop systems that will facilitate such transitions by students who complete the entry-level curricula.

For more information, see: <http://www-tcall.tamu.edu/texaslearns/docs/aerespondworkfrc.html>

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Curriculum and Instruction

If you want to:

Drive curriculum and instruction

You can:

- Join a local or regional Adult Education/ workforce training Advisory Committee
- Help plan Career Pathways within a given field or occupational area



In Action

Oregon Pathways for Adult Basic Skills (OPABS) Transition to Education and Work

- The components of the OPABS model illustrate both the spirit and intent of Adult Education for Work as the cornerstone for a Career Pathways system.
- OPABS builds a pipeline for Adult Basic Skills learners to enter postsecondary education and training programs in high demand career areas in Health Services, Industrial and Engineering systems, and Business and Management.
- It initiates a basic skills SYSTEM change that is sustainable and that develops formal connections to postsecondary education and the workforce system.
- Consists of three components: (1) “Pre-Bridge” and “Bridge” courses that develop basic skills in math, reading and writing through integrated occupational information; (2) A career/college awareness course that is an integration of academic skills and occupational information to facilitate ABS learners’ transition to postsecondary courses and training programs; and (3) Advising modules that assist ABS learners in preparing for /entering postsecondary education/training.
- Once fully operational, OPABS will serve as a foundation/cornerstone for the overall Oregon Career Pathways system (www.worksourceoregon.org).

For more information, contact: David Moore, Director of Literacy and Skill Development Systems, Oregon Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development, David.P.Moore@state.or.us.

California’s Low Literacy Bridges

- San Diego Community College and Cerritos Community College have combined Vocational English as a Second Language (VESL) instruction with vocational workplace skills training so that immigrants can improve their English skills while obtaining technical skills in industries such as manufacturing, automotive, IT, healthcare, electronics and hospitality.
- Academic and vocational instructors work collaboratively to support and reinforce concepts needed for workplace situations.
- Employer engagement is considered very important to these programs, so that the students will learn the skills they need to be valued at the workplace and to move up career ladders. As a result, curricula are created with business input through employer advisory groups.

For more information, see: Community Research Partners, [Ohio Stackable Certificates: Models for Success](#). (February 2008)

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Assessment and Credentialing

If you want to:

Encourage authentic assessments and awarding of credentials

You can:

- Develop hands-on assessments that reflect actual tasks in your workplace that can be used in classes
- Grant preferential interviews to applicants with specific credentials (so students want to earn them) and provide career advancement opportunities to workers who participate in training programs and earn credentials



In Action

Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) in Washington State

- In 2004 the Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) developed the (I-BEST) program, pairing Adult Education (ABE, GED, and ESL) with professional/technical programming in its community college system. I-BEST was designed to provide expanded educational access and support for low skilled students, allowing them to progress further and faster along Career Pathways.
- In the I-BEST program, basic skills students are dually enrolled in Adult Education and postsecondary training programs where basic skills competencies are integrated with technical programs and team-taught by basic skills and technical/professional instructors. Students benefit from the support of basic skills instructors while earning one year of college credit toward a professional/technical certificate or degree.
- In addition to the accelerated time-frame, research on Washington state's community and technical college student population has found there is significant economic gain when students reach one year of college-level credit plus a credential – the "tipping point" in earnings after leaving college. ESL students who reached this point or beyond earned \$7,000 more per year than ESL students who were unable to reach the one year tipping point in their postsecondary education and training (Prince and Jenkins, 2005).
- The I-BEST model seeks to create clear "pathways" for students that will help them to earn a livable wage and become employed in high-demand jobs. The program works closely with employers to ensure that its training is relevant to employer needs.
- I-BEST began as a demonstration at 10 sites in 2004 and now there are at least 128 different I-BEST programs offered at 34 colleges across the state.

Information from the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges Research Report No. 05-2. For more information, see: www.sbctc.ctc.edu

Vocational ESL at Lake County Community College

- A vocational ESL program (VESL) certificate program in landscape management was created after several large Chicago-area landscaping firms informed the college's Horticulture Department that they faced a shortage of skilled workers and that most of the current front line employees in the industry had limited English proficiency.
- In response, the college developed a five-course program (three-credits each) leading to a certificate in Landscape Management that teaches English and landscaping courses in tandem.
- Lake County also provides integrated vocational programs in automobile technology, office administration, allied health and HVAC.

For more information, contact: Director of the CAAL project at: forrest@crosslink.net. This information is based on a working paper developed for CAAL's study of exemplary community college ESL programs.

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High-Quality Teaching

If you want to:

Support high-quality teaching

You can:

- Provide an externship to an area teacher so they can link to industry requirements
- Volunteer yourself or your staff to be a guest lecturer at a school so both students and teacher can gain cutting-edge knowledge



In Action

Kentucky Remediation Bridge to Career Pathways

- Twelve colleges collaborate with Adult Education providers to offer technical education focused on work/jobs, not just academic knowledge.
- The coursework integrates basic academics with technical skills and breaks up coursework into modules and on-line segments so working adults can find time to participate.
- This educational framework for helping adults acquire work-valued skills is considered by Kentucky to be part of their economic development process and is aligned with regional labor markets needs.
- Connections to business are an important part of this framework so students learn the skills employers need at the workplace. Employer-valued credentials are received by students upon program completion. Employers provide input about the skills and competencies as well as assist teaching faculty with the design and sequence of the curriculum. They also provide staff, as needed, to advise faculty.
- The credentials students earn can also be applied to four-year degrees if the students want to continue in their schooling.

For more information, see: http://www.communityresearchpartners.org/uploads/publications/Ohio_Stackable_Certificates_Models_for_Success.pdf

Henry Ford Community College

- Contextualized learning is part of several education and training programs at HFCC where creative faculty members work with staff at the college's Corporate Training Division to create unique programs that blend academic and vocational instruction with contextualized basic skills. Instructors are drawn from industry and often referred by employers with whom the program works.
- The Detroit Manufacturing Bridge, a three-year pilot program that ended in 2001, laid the groundwork by using an interdisciplinary team of both academic and career faculty to develop a Bridge curriculum that used a hands-on, contextualized approach to learning. The pilot emphasized applied basic skills, soft skills and technical skills in an effort to move low-income adults into career paths in technology fields.
- Employers are critical partners in all program design and delivery.

For more information, see: www.breakingthroughcc.org

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Support and Follow-up Services to Encourage Access and Retention

If you want to:	You can:
Encourage access and retention through support services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Become a mentor to your employees who have gone back to school or partner with organizations who provide mentoring for workers • Provide tuition assistance, release time, on-site training or other support services for your employees



In Action

Capital Idea

- Capital IDEA (Investing in Development and Employment of Adults), Inc. is a non-profit, community-based organization—a coalition of congregations, schools, and the business community.
- The organization acts as a bridge, connecting underemployed adults to employers in need of highly skilled workers.
- Capital IDEA refers to its programs as career-driven education and training. It collaborates closely with employers and education providers to ensure that programs completed by participants will lead to a position paying at least \$12 per hour and provide benefits as well as opportunities for further career advancement.
- Participants work with a career counselor to create a customized education plan based on assessments of their aptitudes and interests, training availability and employment opportunities. Unlike most programs that focus on postsecondary enrollment as a goal, Capital IDEA does NOT require participants to have a GED or high school diploma prior to enrollment.
- The program does not provide education and training directly, but rather works with a range of educational providers to shepherd students through their educational process, providing intensive case management, personal support services and monitoring of progress through regular meetings with counselors and peer support groups.
- Capital IDEA arranges for the payment of all costs for their participants' education, including tuition, fees and books.
- The organization fosters strong relationships with the business community which help with strategic planning, fund-raising, program design, partnerships to obtain services, and providing other resources.

For more information, see: www.capitalidea.org

Southeast Arkansas College Career Pathways Program

- This multi-faceted program used by 11 community colleges in Arkansas is designed to help adult students overcome the challenges of attending college while working.
- The program clearly describes for adult students the pathways of credit and non-credit programs tied to high-demand occupations and how they can receive certificates that make them increasingly valuable to employers.
- Bridge programs are offered to help students get remedial instruction while preparing them for college coursework. The programs include the teaching of job-specific competencies desired by local area employers.
- The Southeast Arkansas Fast Track program uses both education faculty & allied health business faculty to teach a one-semester program covering reading, writing, and math in the context of health careers' job tasks.
- The program provides intensive support services to keep students on track.
- The Career Pathways Program is a collaborative initiative among educational, faith-based and community organizations.
- Employers are engaged to inform the education system on the workforce skills needed by their employees and potential employees.

For more information, see: www.southernrgff.org/_pdf/pub_pp/pp_v27_6_06.pdf or www.breakingthroughcc.org

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Monitoring and Accountability Systems

If you want to:

Demand accountability measures

You can:

- Ask providers for performance data on their programs
- Help providers in your area to develop customer-friendly performance information



In Action

Wyoming Department of Employment

- The Wyoming Department of Employment produces an annual report on the labor market outcomes of graduates from the state's seven community colleges to measure their contribution to the state's workforce development. Wyoming has access to UI wage records using agreements with nine neighboring states to track students' social security numbers and the dispersion of the system's graduates in those states, by matching inter-state records with enrollment and graduation records.
- The state higher education system and individual colleges measure on a regular basis the employment success of their graduates, the earnings of vocational graduates by industry, the transfer rate of academic and vocational graduates, and other topics of special consideration. A recent report, for example, examined how much of Wyoming's investments in nursing programs has resulted in net additions to the healthcare workforce within the state and how many nursing graduates migrate to other states.
- Similar data could be used to determine the longer-term employment outcomes of Adult Education for Work and Career Pathways participants, informing programs, policymakers, employers, workers and students of their labor market effectiveness.

For more information, see: doe.state.wy.us/lmi/

Adult Education for Work Quality Elements

Focus Area	Quality Element
<p>1. Program Design</p>	<p>1-A. Work with all partners to define the role of Adult Education for Work programs in the broader community-wide Career Pathways system.</p> <p>1-B. Provide all students an orientation to Career Pathways.</p> <p>1-C. Help each student develop a “Career Pathways Plan.”</p> <p>1-D. Offer a continuum of instruction from basic skills (including English language) to readiness for postsecondary education and training and work.</p> <p>1-E. Provide programs and supports to ensure a smooth transition from Adult Education for Work programs to postsecondary education and training.</p> <p>1-F. Provide accelerated pathways for students to move ahead as quickly as possible.</p> <p>1-G. Accommodate work and other adult responsibilities.</p>
<p>2. Curriculum and Instruction</p>	<p>2-A. Make postsecondary education and training and work readiness the goal of the curriculum.</p> <p>2-B. Make work a central context for the curriculum.</p> <p>2-C. Use instructional strategies that help students to learn by doing.</p> <p>2-D. Manage the classroom in ways that enhance readiness for postsecondary education and training, and for work.</p> <p>2-E. Make extensive and appropriate use of instructional technology.</p>
<p>3. Assessment and Credentialing</p>	<p>3-A. Use appropriate assessment tools, including assessments of postsecondary and work readiness, to place students, help them develop Career Pathway plans, and periodically assess their progress.</p> <p>3-B. Base advancement policy on assessments of skills and knowledge.</p>
<p>4. High-Quality Teaching</p>	<p>4-A. Require high standards and recognized teaching credentials for adult education teachers.</p> <p>4-B. Provide ongoing professional development opportunities and classroom supports for teachers.</p>
<p>5. Support and Follow-up Services to Encourage Access and Retention</p>	<p>5-A. Make high-quality counseling a priority.</p> <p>5-B. Partner with providers in the community to provide case management services to students, including counseling and social and academic supports.</p>
<p>6. Connections to Business</p>	<p>6-A. Focus instruction on the skill needs of industries and occupations in which there is strong demand for workers.</p> <p>6-B. Develop partnerships with employers.</p>
<p>7. Monitoring and Accountability Systems</p>	<p>7-A. Develop customer-friendly performance information.</p> <p>7-B. Track longitudinal data on learning gains and employment outcomes.</p> <p>7-C. Use data to improve programs.</p>

FINAL NOTES

This Guide describes the economic urgency of skilling up the American workforce to meet the increasing demands of a global economy. This sense of urgency is magnified by the fact that this country faces an alarming challenge that a large and growing portion of our workforce lacks the critical basic skills and work readiness skills they need to succeed economically. To address this concern, we urge the transformation of the current Adult Education system in this country to an Adult Education for Work system that provides the education and training low-skilled adults need to become prepared for postsecondary education or training that will lead to family-sustaining employment and career advancement.

In this Guide we identify a set of quality elements for Adult Education for Work programs. These are intended to provide practitioners, policymakers and employers with the tools they need to begin this transformation of the Adult Education system that would result in:

- A new focus on work readiness and preparation for postsecondary education and training for all adults as a core mission of the program, with a clear connection to the economic development strategy of the region;
- A commitment to the creation of Career Pathways systems that accelerate learning and move adults through the continuum of education and training as quickly and efficiently as possible; and
- Partnering with other providers in the community to offer the supports adults need to persist and succeed in adult education for work programs.

Constructing such a system will require substantial changes. To be successful, Adult Education for Work and Career Pathways learning systems will require community-wide partnerships between adult education, postsecondary, workforce, and social service providers, as well as employers, unions, and economic development agencies to ensure that the skills taught at all levels meet the workforce needs of both workers and of regional employers. The development of this system will be worth the effort. It will provide greater education and economic opportunities for America's workers, and the skills that the nation's employers and regional economies require to be competitive into the future.

