



# FINISH for YOUR FUTURE

**FULFILLING OHIO'S ADULT LEARNER PROMISE**

Report of the Adult Learner Working Group

September 2020



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# LETTER FROM THE CO-CHAIRS

*September 1, 2020*

When Ohio joined Lumina’s Adult Promise effort in early 2019, it was the perfect opportunity to combine multiple efforts across the state into one initiative to serve Ohio’s adult learners. By making a deliberate adjustment to become more “adult-friendly,” we can better serve the more than one million Ohioans who have some college but no degree, as well as adults who have not attended college. When adults can connect and complete, we build the capacity necessary to achieve vital strategic goals – notably, 65 percent of all adult-age Ohioans with a postsecondary certificate or degree.

Ohio’s Adult Promise effort, *Finish for Your Future*, built on successful initiatives of the past decade and has resulted in the attached report containing 24 recommendations to enhance adult learner success.

More than 150 people contributed to this report. Over 40 core team members from postsecondary institutions and supporting organizations served on our Adult Learner Working Group, which met regularly to share a common passion to better serve our adult learners. We added over 100 voices to our work to discover high-impact practices, close equity gaps, improve policy, and understand the return on our investing in adult learners. In addition, a variety of other stakeholders (students, employers, civic groups) generously donated their time to provide best-practice examples of what is already working well and where we can improve.

We thank the many people who brought their experiences, their insights, and their voices to the table so our adult learners can better access and succeed at our Ohio institutions. We hope as a learner, legislator, board member, higher education professional, or civically minded citizen, you read our work and determine how you can apply our recommendations to make a positive difference based on your own role in helping adult learners succeed.

Our passion is that thousands of adult learners discover the benefits of postsecondary education to improve their lives. We know that by working together, we will vastly improve the adult learning experience in Ohio.

Respectfully,

**Michael Thomson** (*Co-Chair*)  
Northwest State Community College

**Barbara Henry** (*Co-Chair*)  
Bowling Green State University

# INTRODUCTION

Ohio's public and private postsecondary education system was primarily designed to serve 18-to-24-year-old students who could devote their full attention to educational activities. Colleges and universities built educational offerings, organizational processes, and co-curricular activities assuming that most students have ample time for class, outside academic activities, periodic visits to student services, and attendance at co-curricular events.

Today, however, this a false assumption. Over the last generation, our educational system has not kept up with Ohio's need for a larger number of its citizens to continue their education beyond high school. Like most of the nation, Ohio has not developed a robust system that meets the needs of adult learners for accessible, affordable higher education — from certificates valued in the workplace to bachelor's degrees. Demographic, economic, technological, social, and financial forces point to the necessity of reshaping our postsecondary systems to be more accommodating to adult learners age 25 and older. If we desire to maintain our relevance to adult learners and our influential role in economic development and community prosperity, adult students require our immediate attention.

Thus, we look to scale adult-friendly programming in Ohio. That requires transparency so adults can make informed decisions. It demands equitable resources and opportunities for all adults. It means programs and practices that are inclusive of adult learners. Institutions that succeed in providing adult learners certainty and flexibility have experienced increased enrollments, high completion rates, and student loyalty.

# PROBLEM STATEMENT

Given demographers' projected decline in the number of high school graduates, as well as a record number of projected Baby Boomer retirees, **Ohio's adult education strategy has never been more critical.**

With reduced numbers of students age 18-24 available in the demographic pipeline, the focus of Ohio's education policy must turn to educating substantially more adults age 25 and older. Economists predict that Ohio will need nearly 65 percent of its working age adults to hold postsecondary credentials to keep the economy healthy. To reach that goal, Ohio must significantly increase enrollment of adults age 25 and older in higher education, from the current 27 percent to at least 40 percent. And to address systemic equity issues, Ohio must achieve a 25 percent increase in degrees and high-value certificates for white students and more than double that for African American, Hispanic, and American Indian students.

State and institutional leaders must identify and develop practices to help adult learners minimize the amount of time they spend in class and the time to degree completion while maximizing the economic payoff for their effort. Our success at helping an increasingly diverse student body accomplish their educational goals will translate to financial stability, economic mobility, and a job-ready workforce for our state.

The stakes are high. There is no time for delay. Major shifts in Ohio's employment landscape triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic further underscore the need for urgent action.

# MEETING ADULT LEARNER NEEDS

Adult learners face significant barriers to their success. The traditional “one-size-fits-all” approach for 18-to-24-year-old, full-time students misses the mark for adults who hold work, family, civic, and spiritual responsibilities as priorities in their lives. Consequently, we have more than one million Ohioans wearing the educational label “some college, no degree.” Many have a negative bias due to their previous educational experience, including outstanding debt or other barriers preventing their re-admission to college.

This report focuses on the broad adult learner population, which includes not only “some college, no degree” returning adults, but also new adult learners who have never attended college. No matter what we call this population, they often share common characteristics that help us define the group:

- They are usually 25+ years of age.
- They are typically employed, often full time.
- They support a family.
- They are seeking to advance professionally or to find a long-term position in a stable occupation that pays family-sustaining wages.

While we have a sense of who this population is, we also know some of the concerns or challenges they have that may delay them from beginning or returning to college:

- They are unsure how to manage the school, work, and family balance;
- They fear failure given their previous college experiences;
- They lack funds to begin or return to college; and
- They need to see a positive return on investment (ROI).

Research reveals that at the age of 25, there is a shift in focus toward employment and home life, and education becomes part of one's life journey, a lifelong learning endeavor. While education may seem useful, the adult learner will engage educational providers with three direct questions:

- Can I make education work with my busy life?
- What will it cost me to complete my credential or degree?
- What is my return on investment for completing my credential or degree?

When nontraditional adult learners hear clear, direct answers to these questions, they continue their interest and engagement; when they do not, they often disengage. Returning adults who have left school, then returned with some college but no degree, as well as adults who are starting college for the first time, want their educational commitment to accommodate their lifestyle. They ask for certainty in their educational experience and flexibility in the institutions serving them. To serve adult learners effectively, educational institutions must build strong partnerships that create a holistic student experience.

To maintain Ohio's economy and quality of life, a greater number of Ohioans must be able to access, afford, and acquire postsecondary credentials. The sheer demographics point to the need to serve more adult learners. Over the last 40 years, many of Ohio's educational institutions made commitments to the adult learner. These institutions have discovered that the

lifestyle, educational, and financial needs of adult learners require a different approach. Ohio's Technical Centers (OTC), community colleges, public universities, and independent colleges and universities have created programs geared to adults.

These "adult-friendly" educational programs are typically part of a separate organizational structure for part-time, evening learners. These programs provide excellent examples of best practice as well as emerging trends as we look to scale adult-friendly programming in Ohio. While we have wonderful examples of successful, adult-friendly programs, serving adults is still not mission-centric or a strategic focus of most Ohio educational providers.

**Our goal is clear: Improve, promote, and support adult learner success.**

**About 38 percent of students with outside financial, work, or family obligations leave within their first year.**

*(Lumina, 2019)*

# ADULT LEARNER WORKING GROUP

The Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE) convened an Adult Learner Working Group composed of diverse representatives of adult postsecondary education stakeholders, as well as a range of business and industry, community and nonprofit leaders, to review and prioritize – at the campus and state levels – suggestions for an adult learner engagement plan. Created as part of a Lumina-supported Adult Promise Grant, the Working Group was charged with better serving adults seeking education after high school—supporting adults who want to earn degrees, certificates, and other quality credentials beyond a high school diploma.

This has been a noble and essential challenge. Serving many more adults who have “stopped out” — individuals with some college but no degree, as well as those with little or no prior postsecondary experience — will be critical to meeting Ohio’s workforce development needs over the next 10-15 years. Since the Great Recession of 2008, the proportion of adult learners enrolling in postsecondary education and training has been in decline; in the five-year period between AY2011 and AY2016, adult enrollment has declined by nearly one-third.

Postsecondary education stakeholders are understandably concerned by this enrollment trend among adult learners. In response, the Working Group has prepared this report, Fulfilling Ohio’s Adult Learner Promise, to identify recommendations for improving adult learner outcomes.

## Working Group Guiding Principles

The report has been developed with the following guiding principles in mind:

- Solutions must be adult learner focused and address adult student needs.
- All completions, including technical certificates, associate degrees, and bachelor's degrees, are valued and need to be increased.
- Access and success must be improved.
- The report should build upon existing and previous adult learner success initiatives and campus experiences.
- Recommendations must be based on data.
- Strategies must be systemic approaches.
- The academic quality of programs must not be compromised.

Unless otherwise noted, all references in this report to "postsecondary institutions" include OTCs, community colleges, public universities, and independent colleges and universities.

## Acknowledgement of Ohio's Capacity-Building Sites

The Capacity-Building Phase of Ohio's Adult Learner Promise is a pilot program with five public postsecondary institutions. Five capacity-building grantees received a \$50,000 grant from the Lumina Foundation to increase their capacity to serve adult learners successfully:

- Cleveland State University
- Edison State Community College
- North Central State College
- Stark State College
- University of Cincinnati Online

The outcomes of their work will be posted on the ODHE website in early 2021.

# SUBGROUPS

The Adult Learner Working Group was charged with researching, analyzing, and recommending strategies to advance improvement of adult learner enrollments and completions.

The Working Group's report was shaped by four Subgroup reports, which can be accessed in their entirety via the links provided below:

- The [High-Impact Practices Subgroup](#) was charged with researching Ohio-focused, high-impact strategies for increasing adult learner enrollment and advancing improvement of adult learner outcomes. [Link to Subgroup Report](#).
- The [Return on Investment Subgroup](#) was charged with researching ROI from three vantage points: (1) return on investment for Ohio's postsecondary providers, (2) return on investment for Ohio's adult learners, and (3) return on investment for employers, based upon increased learner enrollment and success. [Link to Subgroup Report](#).

- The [Closing Equity Gaps Subgroup](#) was charged with identifying successful strategies for closing equity gaps. Ohio is committed to closing the equity gaps in enrollment and completion among populations of adults including, but not limited to, low-income students, underprepared students, and students of color. [Link to Subgroup Report](#).
- The [Policy Improvement Subgroup](#) was charged with identifying policy barriers to adult learner completion that impede robust implementation of recommendations from state initiatives such as Complete College Ohio, Strong Start to Finish, Ohio Values Veterans, and PLA with a Purpose, as well as identifying policy barriers to scaling promising practices. [Link to Subgroup Report](#).

*Note: All Subgroups considered the equity imperative with regard to their unique focus.*

# WHAT INFORMED OUR WORK

To help ensure consistency and continuity, all four Subgroups of the Working Group agreed to organize their research and discussion using the following report structure:

- **Data**
- **Research**
- **Emerging Trends**
- **Recommendations**

Each of the four Subgroups identified a framework to use as each collected data, reviewed relevant research and noted emerging trends to inform and validate their recommendations. Subsequently, each Subgroup produced its own detailed report, all four of which are posted on the [ODHE website](#). Sample findings from each Subgroup are presented throughout this report.

## **The High-Impact Practices Subgroup**

The Subgroup identified several priority practices that enhance the success of adult learners:

- **Effective Communication:** Adult learners need and expect clear, transparent, informative communications throughout their educational experience.
- **Credit for Prior Learning:** Many adult learners have acquired college-level learning outside the confines of a traditional classroom; awarding students appropriate credit for these experiences honors that learning and helps them graduate in less time.

- **Flexible Learning Modalities:** Adults benefit from the ability to choose course delivery options that fit within their busy lives. Examples include:
  - » Online programs, which allow adult learners to access course content when it is convenient for them
  - » Competency Based Education (CBE) programs, which allow adult learners to work at their own pace, with flexible beginning and end dates
  - » Programs built around consistent and predictable on-campus schedules, which allow adult learners to better coordinate their education with work and family responsibilities
  - » Cohort programs, which provide adult learners with a peer group for support, guidance, and sense of belonging
- **Enhanced Support Services:** Adult learners benefit from a full range of support services that address childcare and transportation needs, food and housing insecurity, and that provide holistic institutional student support throughout their programs.
- **Employer Apprenticeships:** Apprenticeships are a unique way to immediately engage adult learners in workplace learning opportunities, making education relevant to their career aspirations.
- **Engaged Faculty:** Professional development for full-time and adjunct faculty members is essential; adult learners are more successful when faculty members understand how adult learners differ from younger students, the unique challenges adult learners face, and how faculty members can best support their learning.

## Apprenticeship

### ApprenticeOhio Statistics ([showing growth since 2014](#)):

- 20,000 current apprentices
- 75% increase in people entering into ApprenticeOhio programs
- 37% increase in veterans enrolled
- 189% increase in women enrolled
- \$60,000 average salary upon completion

## The Return on Investment (ROI) Subgroup

This Subgroup conducted its research from three vantage points:

- Return on investment for Ohio's postsecondary providers, based on increased adult learner enrollment
- Return on investment for Ohio's adult learners
- Return on investment for employers

The ROI Subgroup also identified these critical challenges:

- What service enhancements will most improve adult learner success?
- What investments will be necessary to enhance such services?
- What is the projected cost?
- How is incremental revenue estimated?
- What are the impacts on students?

To successfully transition to utilizing an ROI approach for making institutional investments, an institution must:

- Develop a clear understanding of the resources required.
- Shift its focus to think in terms of revenue versus cost.
- Connect student success and financial sustainability.

## The Closing Equity Gaps Subgroup

This Subgroup used Completion by Design's Loss-Momentum Framework to infuse equity-mindedness into every aspect of the adult learner experience:

- Connection
- Entry
- Progress
- Completion
- Transition

Given the varied experiences adults bring with them, workforce is uniquely braided across all aspects of this framework.

## Defining Equity & Demonstrating Equity-mindedness

What is equity? What is an "equity gap"? What does it mean to demonstrate equity-mindedness? In our institutions, it means asking and answering several questions:

- How do we compare nationally regarding postsecondary attainment?
- How are we doing by demographic?
- Which demographics do we measure and compare?

## The Policy Improvement Subgroup

This Subgroup used the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning's *10 Principles for Effectively Serving Adults*, listed below, to serve as the lens through which the Subgroup conducted its research and formulated its recommendations for enhancing adult learner retention and completion:

- Adaptivity
- Assessment of Learning Outcomes
- Financing
- Life & Career Planning
- Outreach
- Technology
- Strategic Partnerships
- Student Support Systems
- Teaching-Learning Process
- Transitions

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on extensive analysis of research, data, trends, and best practices, members of the Subgroups have identified and categorized our Recommendations in the following manner:

- 1 PILLAR 1:** Recommendations that postsecondary institutions provide adult learners with flexible, customizable, student-centered, and adult-friendly programs and supports
- 2 PILLAR 2:** Recommendations that value adult learners' real-world, workplace knowledge, skills, and experience
- 3 PILLAR 3:** Recommendations that identify and close equity gaps, creating universal access to education pathways for adult learners
- 4 PILLAR 4:** Recommendations that identify and address financial barriers to maximize adult learners' use of Ohio's wide array of postsecondary institutions
- 5 PILLAR 5:** Recommendations that clarify opportunities, enable success, and document progress



**PILLAR 1:** Recommendations that postsecondary institutions provide adult learners with flexible, customizable, student-centered, and adult-friendly programs and supports

This pillar is all about postsecondary educational providers truly “connecting” with adult learners. It includes accommodating life demands via consistent course offerings; flexible start and stop options; full program package information; part-time, online, and hybrid options; support services beyond the traditional workday hours, and business partnerships for on-site offerings and workplace opportunities.

A traditional “one-size-fits-all” approach for 18-to-24-year-olds misses the mark for adults age 25 and older who consider work, family, civic, and spiritual responsibilities to be as important in their lives or as a strategic focus for their educational goals. The unfortunate fact is, serving adults is neither mission-centric nor a strategic focus of most education providers in our state.

**Recommendation 1:** Make the cost of attending and completing programs within the institution transparent and readily available, including full program costs, time to completion, job outlook, and associated wages.

It is essential that colleges and universities provide students with clear guidance as to the actual cost of attending and completing their degrees and the return on their investment.

**According to an EAB (2019) report, *Is Your College Designed for Post-Traditional Learners?*, five strategies enhance the support services that you provide to adult students:**

- **Conduct self-directed early career assessment;**
- **Encourage students to utilize tools and data to inform their career decision making process;**
- **Provide clear road maps for the future, planned with realistic expectations, toward graduation, including opportunities for credit for prior learning, the effects of part-time enrollment on time to degree and other important program requirements;**
- **Provide services that engage off-campus students; and**
- **Provide career-preparation workshops in flexible formats such as in the evening, virtually, or on demand.**

Simply listing tuition costs is not enough. It is necessary to provide students with a better estimate of the cost of completing their degree, which would list the courses remaining to be completed and an estimate of the cost of completing those courses, including mandatory fees and estimated book costs.

Transparency enables adult learners to make informed decisions and take full advantage of the variety of postsecondary opportunities offered in Ohio, increasing the likelihood of adult students engaging with an institution. Clear communication is important, especially regarding the job outlook associated with the credentials and anticipated salaries related to adult learners' investment in time and money.

Further, postsecondary institutions should coordinate communications among campus departments in order to provide adult students with clear, personalized attention to guide them from entry into the institution through completion of a degree or credential.

**Recommendation 2:** Institutions should provide adult learners who hold jobs with educational pathways that balance a commitment to education with adult learners' lifestyles and other commitments.

Employers and postsecondary institutions should collaborate to provide flexible delivery formats, innovative programming, and course scheduling practices that are adult-friendly and manageable for adult learners. There are

many ways this recommendation can be deployed, such as the following:

- » Intentionally design programs that use adult student perspectives to provide needed supports;
- » Make the location of classes or training convenient and/or travel minimal for students/employees;
- » Make the course schedule accommodating for the adult students; and
- » Implement cohorts (learning communities) to help adult students avoid feelings of isolation while juggling school, work, and personal responsibilities.

**Recommendation 3:** Postsecondary institutions should develop policies and practices to expand and support wraparound services for adult learners.

Institutions are realizing that some students are, by the nature of their life circumstance, at higher risk. Adult learners, by and large, include disproportionate numbers of these at-risk students. Therefore, programs focusing on adult learners must be ready to provide holistic student services to ensure successful student outcomes. The full range of academic support services, such as advising, tutoring, counseling, and career services must be available to adults at times that are convenient for them, often outside of traditional business hours.

To be inclusive of the adult learner, institutions must provide equitable resources and support. Institutions should build

community partnerships to address adult learners' social service needs, including access to the following:

- » Resources to address transportation and childcare needs;
- » Digital devices and broadband service; and
- » Expanded financial supports, including food banks, emergency loans/grants, and affordable housing opportunities.

Campuses should regularly assess the needs and experiences of adult students to promote a culture of care and practice of continuous improvement.

**Recommendation 4:** Postsecondary institutions should provide full-time and adjunct faculty with resources and professional development opportunities focused on the unique needs of adult learners.

Preparing faculty members to address the needs of adult learners will require institutions to provide professional development opportunities related to teaching using the modalities that fit within the lives of adult students (e.g., online, hybrid, or CBE modalities), as well as practices for creating inclusive classrooms that recognize the adult learner experience. The following are examples of topics that could be included in professional development programs for faculty interested in creating positive educational experiences for their adult students:

## Professional Development Practices

**Moving faculty professional development beyond a one-day mandatory workshop is a key emerging practice. Example: According to Pasadena Community College (PCC), New Faculty Orientation is a one-year program facilitated for all newly hired full-time faculty. The objectives are to assist faculty in (a) becoming familiar with PCC's culture and operations and developing a supportive network of colleagues and friends; (b) integrating effective practices related to course design, pedagogy, curriculum, and assessment; (c) furthering their understanding of the student populations served at PCC and ways in which one creates an equity-minded classroom; and (d) leveraging technology to connect with and engage 21st century learners, including adults.**

- » Addressing ageist language and attitudes;
- » Recognizing and using the strengths of adult learners;
- » Understanding adult-learner challenges and strategies to address those challenges;
- » Managing intergenerational classrooms;
- » Honoring life experiences via class discussion and assignments;
- » Active and collaborative learning strategies; and
- » Culturally responsive andragogy.

One takeaway from the High-Impact Practices Subgroup was the need to encourage institutions to provide faculty development opportunities in faculty learning communities focused on the unique needs of adult learners. Examples include writing syllabi with the adult learner in mind, reviewing course policies and practices from the lens of the adult learner, and incorporating technology to connect with adult learners.

**Adult learners' top priorities are job and family, followed by school.**

**Recommendation 5:** Postsecondary institutions should hire and train personnel to support adult learners in coaching roles that serve students from pre-enrollment activities through completion.

These coaches should specialize in adult learners, and they should be trained in services such as financial planning, career guidance, advising, required computer and internet access, and the availability of non-academic supports provided by the institution, e.g., food banks, childcare, and emergency loans and grants.

Adult learners need assistance from the institution to understand and access the relevant support services available. Adults may be hesitant to complete the admission's application, apply for financial aid, or seek advice related to course selection and registration. A coach, as a single point of contact, provides guidance and builds an important connection to the institution.



## PILLAR 2: Recommendations that value adult learners' real-world workplace knowledge, skills, and experience

Adult learners frequently enter or return to institutions of higher education with experiences, knowledge, and training that are valuable and applicable to a course of study. Oftentimes, this learning is not quantified in the form of credit-bearing coursework. Adult learners are more likely to enter into higher education institutions if they believe that their prior learning will be valued and considered as applicable toward their intended degree.

Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) is an increasingly important way for higher education institutions to evaluate a student's college-level, post-high school learning that was achieved outside a traditional academic environment. PLA credit can lower the cost of education and shorten the time to completion. The Education Commission of the States recommends that statewide policies governing Prior Learning Assessment address the following elements:

**Informing students.** Raising awareness of PLA policies and procedures assists adult learners who must balance their education with other responsibilities (e.g., family, work, and civic), and increases the likelihood of such students engaging with an institution. Transparency is important, and clear communication allows adult learners to plan their process for engaging with portfolios, exams, and other assessments. It is important to be clear about fees, costs, and credit limits.

**Assessing student knowledge.** Most state statutes or policies provide postsecondary institutions with significant latitude in assessing student knowledge. While Ohio does not have a PLA statute, the state does have a set of PLA standards offering a basic framework and set of minimally acceptable standards and procedures in order to ensure integrity and transferability.

**Recording academic credit.** State statutes frequently define whether credit obtained with PLA is noted as such on the student's transcript. Several states have established maximum numbers of PLA-earned credit hours that can be applied to a degree. Further, some states prohibit the transcribing of excess credits (credits not applicable to a degree or credential) earned via PLA in order to safeguard an adult learner's financial aid eligibility.

**Collecting and recording data.** Most state statutes specify reporting processes, including the type of data to be reported, the body to which data should be reported, the number of students receiving PLA credit, or the total number of credit hours awarded.

**Recommendation 6:** Postsecondary institutions should develop policies and practices to more broadly assess their students' prior learning and award credit for college-level learning that has been achieved outside the traditional classroom.

PLA is an underutilized strategy among Ohio's colleges and universities. Granting credit for learning gained through work experience, employer training programs or self-study is essential, as doing so enables adult learners to save both time and money as they work toward a credential. Granting credit for prior learning may also serve a motivational purpose; research has consistently shown that adult learners whose previous learning is recognized are more likely to persist and earn a degree. On average, adult learners actually complete more credits, and having their learning recognized by a college or university leads to feelings of validation, self-efficacy, and self-worth. Awarding credit through PLA is financially advantageous to institutions, as well, because adult learners with PLA credit are more likely to persist and earn a degree rather than dropping out.

**Recommendation 7:** The Ohio General Assembly should direct ODHE to create policies that ensure all adult learners will be assessed for prior learning and have appropriate credit awarded.

State policies and practices must operate in ways that encourage the state's postsecondary institutions to attract and retain adult learners by validating their life and work experiences. These include ensuring that all postsecondary institutions are publicizing, offering, and tracking PLA and the credits subsequently awarded for prior learning.

Ohio already has a strong PLA structure in place that many institutions use but others do not. PLA needs to be scaled in Ohio—we need to make PLA the customary practice at all of our postsecondary institutions, a practice that all students expect.

**Recommendation 8:** The Ohio General Assembly should require all public postsecondary institutions to develop and implement a comprehensive institutional policy for the assessment of prior learning, including requisite baseline components developed in collaboration with ODHE and higher education stakeholders.

To ensure that Recommendation 6 and Recommendation 7 are implemented consistently and with fidelity across the state, it is recommended that the General Assembly codify the requisite components of baseline PLA policy and ODHE oversight. The required policy should, whenever feasible, use existing resources and processes, e.g., PLA with a Purpose, Ohio Values Veterans, and Ohio Articulation and Transfer Network (OATN) Policy as models for the development of the comprehensive statewide PLA policy. The policy must address, at a minimum, the following five elements recommended through PLA with a Purpose and the Education Commission of the States:

- » Establish a minimum set of standards regarding informing students of PLA opportunities and policies;
- » Establish a uniform set of standards and procedures for provision of PLA;
- » Establish a system of accountability for quality assurance and reporting of data;
- » Establish a set of standards and procedures for providing professional development regarding PLA; and
- » Provide oversight for application, transcription, and transferability of credits earned through PLA.

A working group, convened by the Chancellor, should draft potential legislative language to be considered by the General Assembly for inclusion in the next state biennial budget.

**Recommendation 9:** Postsecondary institutions should develop policies and practices that deepen their connections with business and industry, thereby ensuring robust and relevant learning opportunities for students during their programs and graduates who have knowledge and skills valued by employers

Ohio's postsecondary institutions have traditionally used "Program Advisory Groups" to monitor the currency of their programs and enhance graduate placement. However, the function of these groups, and their relationship to faculty and students within programs, varies widely across – and even within – institutions.

Effective partnerships between institutions of higher education and business and industry provide (a) timely curricular insights for program faculty, (b) relevant work-based learning experiences for adult learners, (c) connections to jobs for program graduates, and (d) opportunities for higher education institutions to partner with employers in the development of programs targeted toward incumbent workers who need a high-value, short-term certificate or degree for advancement within the company.

Postsecondary institutions looking to deepen their connections with employers can participate in a variety of activities at the state, regional, and local levels. Examples of partnership opportunities include:

- » **Industry Sector Partnerships**, which are collaborations among businesses, education and training providers, and community leaders designed to meet a regional workforce need;
- » Ohio's **Tech Cred** program, which provides funding for short-term technology-related credentials for incumbent workers;
- » **Regionally Aligned Priorities in Delivering Skills (RAPIDS)**, which makes regionally strategic capital equipment investments that support workforce development initiatives at postsecondary institutions and the economic growth of businesses in the region;
- » **Ohio Cybersecurity Collaborative Committee (OC3)**, which is a statewide initiative to address the expanding needs of education and training pathways for the talent pipeline of a well-trained workforce; and
- » ODHE's **Short-Term Certificate** program, which provides need-based financial aid to students enrolled in certificate programs that lead to an industry-recognized credential for an in-demand job.

## Model Employer Partnership Program

"ExactTrack" is a "dual degree" partnership between Huntington Bank, Columbus State Community College (CSCC), and Franklin University. Huntington worked with CSCC and Franklin University to develop an associate degree (awarded by CSCC) to bachelor's degree (awarded by Franklin University) pathway. The program targets established, high-performing Huntington employees who lack the credentials needed to qualify for higher-skilled, higher-paying positions at Huntington. Using a pre-imburement model, it is provided tuition-free to the selected employees. Transportation and scheduling challenges are reduced by having classes at its location at the end of the workday. The adult learners report that the cohort model builds camaraderie and reduces isolation while the defined, valued job target provides additional motivation. This is an excellent example of how large companies can engage with local institutions of higher education to address companies' workforce needs while creating new opportunities for incumbent workers.

**Recommendation 10:** Ohio's Articulation and Transfer Network (OATN) should continue its work with Ohio's colleges and universities to award postsecondary credit for the training received in apprenticeships, the military, and career/technical education.

The OATN has for many years been promoting guaranteed credit for college-level training that occurs outside of the traditional college classroom. For instance, adult learners

who successfully complete specified technical programs in OTCs are guaranteed college credit through Ohio's Career Technical Assurance Guides (CTAGs) or One Year Option (1+1) program. Similarly, Military Transfer Assurance Guides (MTAGs) provide a statewide guarantee that military training, experience, and coursework that aligns with courses at colleges and universities will be awarded appropriate credit. Additionally, statewide agreements are in place to award guaranteed college credit for apprenticeship programs in the Electrical Trades, Sheet Metal, Carpentry, and Plumbers and Pipefitters, significantly shortening an adult learner's pathway to a technical associate degree.

While these efforts are not new, we are calling on ODHE, in partnership with Ohio's institutions of higher education, to substantially accelerate the work in the following ways:

- » Increase the fields in which credit is awarded through CTAGs, the One Year Option, MTAGs, and apprenticeships.
- » Enhance communication and training regarding guaranteed credit awards.
- » Improve ODHE's ability to track the use of these options and the outcomes of the students who use them.

**Recommendation 11:** Postsecondary institutions should expand workforce consortia to increase partnerships that support apprenticeships for adult students.

Apprenticeships are an attractive option for adult students and can be used to build a pipeline of new workers and upskill current employees.

It is important that apprenticeship programs include clear diversity and equity goals, and alliances between educational institutions and their workforce partners are key to advancing racial equity and workforce goals. The National Skills Coalition's Roadmap for Racial Equity (2019) proposes regional collaboratives composed of area employers along with colleges, schools, workforce, and associated agencies working together to align training and required skills for the industry. These teams can focus on diversity within the coalition membership, engage in equity and inclusion training, modify recruiting practices, and disaggregate data to understand impact across demographic groups.

Using pre-employment and apprenticeship programs as part of the educational process will help underserved populations learn the necessary skills and can offer access to employment that has traditionally occurred based on social and professional networks.

## 3

**PILLAR 3:** Recommendations that identify and close equity gaps, creating universal access to education pathways for adult learners

Addressing our population's growing diversity and related equity gaps requires these commitments:

- Postsecondary education emphasis on relevance, quality, and equity;
- Inclusive recruitment, retention, and completion strategies; and
- Disaggregated data and evidence-based decision making.

In order to address adult learners' barriers to success, it is necessary to understand age and socioeconomic status as well as race, ethnicity, first-generation status, caregiver status, and work status. Equity requires understanding and providing adult learners with what they need – when they need it – to be successful, rather than giving everyone the same treatment or tools and expecting equivalent outcomes.

Knowing who is joining the student body can help a postsecondary institution become “student ready.” Acknowledging that increasing numbers of applicants are not likely to be what is traditionally labeled “college ready” when they approach higher education, leaders are going to

have to prioritize new and innovative partnerships and programs that will ready instructors, staff, and systems for the students who most need their help. Disaggregating data is absolutely critical to understanding equity gaps. Though it may be difficult to collect data on all of the subpopulations noted here, it will not be possible to judge progress across the student spectrum until this is accomplished.

### Disaggregating data is critical to understanding equity gaps

**Comparing Ohio to national statistics on postsecondary attainment, African Americans in Ohio lag at 27 percent compared with the national rate of 36.1 percent, as do Whites with attainment rates at 40.5 percent compared with the national rate of 47.9 percent. Yet, Hispanics in Ohio are outperforming the national average at a rate of 27.4 percent compared to 24.6 percent.**

Source: <http://strongernation.luminafoundation.org/report/2020/#state/OH>

**Recommendation 12:** Postsecondary institutions should prioritize development of a definition of equity and create a statement of commitment to equity-mindedness as a component of each institution's 2022 Campus Completion Plan.

This report does not offer a single definition of "equity" or "equity-mindedness," as those definitions are a result of institutional deliberation and self-study about equity, inclusion, and quality in light of its own institutional mission and student body. The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU) clearly calls for institutions of higher education to act, stating that "colleges should gather representatives from across their institutions' students, faculty, staff, administrators, and trustees, and engage them in self-study and planning" (AACU, 2015) because of the importance of supporting adult learners from underserved communities.

Equity-minded additions to each institution's Campus Completion Plan should include definitions, a list of subpopulations, specific goals, a reporting schedule, and performance indicators including adult persistence and graduation rates, as well as a focus on addressing academic skills gaps for underprepared adult learners.

**Recommendation 13:** Postsecondary institutions must offer financial literacy support and information.

Adult learners will benefit from understanding the cost of college, job opportunity and wage potential, ROI, and various options for paying for college. Financial literacy support must be developed to help adult learners make informed decisions regarding PELL Grants, loans, and other financial opportunities.

**Recommendation 14:** ODHE should create and lead a Digital Inclusion Coalition to ensure all adult students who lack affordable home broadband access, home computing equipment, and/or computer and internet skills are treated equitably.

An unfortunate consequence of poverty is the inability of many adult learners to purchase digital technologies and afford broadband internet. One way colleges have sought to increase accessibility and enrollment is by expanding online and hybrid course offerings; however, the success of this strategy depends on students' ability to engage with digital technology. The shift of postsecondary institutions to remote learning due to the COVID pandemic has further elevated the importance of digital inclusion. During a time when postsecondary institutions are significantly increasing online programming, it is imperative that digital inclusion is addressed.

ODHE's strategy for addressing complex issues often is to bring together stakeholders who analyze data and best practices and then recommend strategies for moving forward. This model seems well-suited for addressing digital inclusion and represents a significant opportunity to resolve this adult learner challenge. Convening a coalition will be an important step for supporting postsecondary institutions in achieving digital inclusion for all adult learners.

## Digital inclusion

In 2018, according to the American Community Survey (ACS), 15.5 percent of Ohio households had no home broadband internet subscription of any type, including a mobile data plan. Further, 30.1 percent lacked a home "wireline" subscription such as cable internet, DSL, or fiber to the home. One-fourth of Ohio households, 1.2 million out of 4.7 million, owned neither a desktop nor a laptop computer.

## Steps postsecondary institutions can take to ensure digital inclusion is effectively addressed:

- **Assess adult learners early in the matriculation process using a tool such as the Northstar Digital Literacy Assessment developed by the Minnesota State Library, and include situational assessment including students' home access to broadband and technology.**
- **Create a "Computer and Internet Intro" basic skills course to address life skills and readiness for higher education and employment.**
- **Look for community partners and co-create community digital inclusion programs providing personal, individualized training at a nominal cost, if any.**
- **Seek out collaborators to support on-campus assistance, e.g., local and regional computer refurbishers and other institutions with similar needs, such as colleges, housing authorities, senior service organizations, and faith-based programs.**
- **Support local efforts to expand broadband access, especially in underserved rural areas.**

**Recommendation 15:** State and postsecondary institutions should review and amend policies and practices that perpetuate inequities in order to impact the broad community of new and returning adult learners in alignment with equity-conscious goals.

Equity-mindedness refers to how professionals look for inequity in student outcomes and how institutions take responsibility for success gaps among different populations by acknowledging social and historical context. Ultimately, an equity-minded approach is one in which institutions and their employees accept accountability for students' success and take on the challenges that come with accepting underserved adult learner populations. (*Center for Urban Education (CUE)*)

## Assessing equity-minded indicators

**CUE's "Equity-Minded Indicators" 12-question self-assessment is a tool that can help institutions and practitioners gauge their maturity in this area, as well as guide rich discussion on current practices and future goals. Lorain County Community College provides evidence of its commitment to equity via its college Equity Statement and annual progress report.**

Beyond disaggregating success and retention data, institutions must review their recruitment, admission, and participation rates and goals, looking for equity gaps there as well. Institutional reporting on admissions applications, acceptance, and yield by race and gender, as well as disaggregated reports on incomplete admissions applications, will offer important data regarding who is attracted to the institution and who is receiving enough attention and support to experience a positive connection and start or restart as an adult learner.

**Recommendation 16:** Postsecondary institutions should review their recruiting and hiring practices, and implement strategies to employ a more diverse workforce.

One approach to improving postsecondary institutions' hiring practices would be to host a statewide summit or workshop, co-sponsored by ODHE, the Inter-University Council of Ohio (IUC), and the Ohio Association of Community Colleges (OACC), to assist campuses as they conduct a comprehensive review of hiring strategies and practices.

Hiring and retaining faculty who reflect the diversity of the adult learner and community populations help support a diverse student body. Ethnically diverse learners have not typically built strong relationships with their faculty. Research indicates that faculty of color have a strong influence on the recruitment and retention of students of color, and they have a positive impact on adult learner perceptions of campus diversity climate.

## Model Search Committee Practices

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Marion Technical College (MCT) trains all search committee members on implicit bias and uses a blind application review process, which removes names and locations of applicants. MTC also uses NorQuest College's Inclusion at Work online training modules, which allow employees to reflect upon the meaning of diversity and inclusion and then follow up with in-person DEI on-campus training on a range of topics offered by local professionals.

**Recommendation 17:** Postsecondary institutions should work in partnership with business and community to ensure workplace experiences are part of the education process and provide optimal hiring opportunities for graduates.

Hiring practices are important. Specific attention should be given to equitable hiring practices and conversations around diversity, equity, and inclusion to support adult learners and graduates.

According to the National Skills Coalition (2019), working with partners to bridge employment gaps and support equitable hiring practices is necessary to advance racial equity. This is especially true since African Americans may experience a disproportionate rate of job displacement due to automation and gain a smaller share of anticipated job growth through 2030. Examples of programs with equity goals include the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), U.S. Department of Labor Registered Apprenticeship programs, and the KeyBank Foundation award to Cuyahoga Community College to expand in-demand public safety training with scholarships for minority and female recruits.

## 4

**PILLAR 4:** Recommendations that identify and address financial barriers to maximize adult learners' use of Ohio's wide array of postsecondary institutions

Many of the most significant obstacles to degree completion for adult learners and students who have stopped out of college are financial. Postsecondary institutions and the state have already made progress in limiting costs via tuition freezes and increased support to students, e.g., increases in State Share of Instruction (SSI) and the Ohio College Opportunity Grant (OCOG). This progress provides a strong beginning and continued efforts are encouraged; however, the state and institutions of higher education need to take additional steps to help students overcome financial barriers and limit the need for students to incur significant debt.

Many state agencies, community organizations, and employers provide support for adults seeking to further their education, but awareness of and use of these opportunities are far from universal. Institutions and the state should work to ensure adults are aware of the opportunities available to them and institutions should be encouraged to develop strong partnerships in their communities to ensure that these resources are leveraged.

**Recommendation 18:** The Ohio Department of Higher Education, working in collaboration with the Office of the Ohio Attorney General and, where needed, the Ohio General Assembly, should implement state policy to provide a pathway for students with unpaid institutional debt at Ohio public colleges and universities to re-enter college under a "debt forgiveness" program.

**About 60 percent of adults in the U.S. have thought about returning to college, but 70 percent do not believe they can afford it.**

*(EAB, 2019)*

Adults who left college before completing a certificate or degree, but who are now contemplating returning to finish a credential, may find that past due institutional debt is a barrier to re-entry. Adult learners with unpaid college debt may not be allowed to re-enroll at the college where the debt is owed and may be refused transcripts necessary for re-enrollment at a different college.

These institutional policies exist, in some cases, for leverage. If adult learners aren't allowed to re-enroll or receive a transcript, it incentivizes them to pay back the past due debt. This, however, is shortsighted. Using an ROI lens, an institution might realize that it is advantageous to forgive old debt that may never be paid back because the institution will receive more in tuition and SSI going forward.

In other cases, these policies exist because Ohio's public colleges and universities are unclear about or unaware of existing allowances for debt forgiveness under current state law and whether adult learner enrollments can be reported for SSI when institutional debts are past due

ODHE, working with the Ohio Attorney General's Office, OACC, and IUC, should develop guidance documents for colleges and universities that explain the availability of pathways to re-entry that are available under current law, create transparent and consistent pathways that are clear to institutions and students, and work with the Ohio General Assembly, as needed, to document the process in Ohio law. ODHE, IUC, and OACC should assist their constituents in developing educational materials and activities related to the ROI that colleges and universities can expect under the debt forgiveness guidance.

## Warrior Way Back Debt Forgiveness

Based on the success of the Warrior Way Back (WWB) program at Michigan's Wayne State University (WSU), for example, it is possible to move debt below a certain amount for adult learners close to completion back to the institution. Upon successful completion of either credit hours or a degree, the debt would be forgiven. Using performance funding measures, the debt "pays for itself" in completion funding. For example, WWB forgives up to \$1,500 over three semesters or upon graduation for qualifying students. To qualify, students must have a grade point average (GPA) of 2.0 or higher, a balance of \$1,500 or less, and not have attended class at WSU for two or more years.

**Recommendation 19:** ODHE, in coordination with postsecondary institutions and state and federal partners, should set goals and develop programming targeted toward increasing the FAFSA completion rates for adults.

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is the key to student aid at the local, state, and federal levels. Many adult learners do not know that completing the FAFSA annually is required for federal (e.g., PELL) and state (e.g. OCOG) financial aid programs.

In addition, most colleges and universities use the information from the FAFSA to determine eligibility for institutional loans, grants, scholarships, and work-study funds.

ODHE and ODE already encourage and support all school districts in the Ohio FAFSA Completion Initiative, which focuses on increasing the FAFSA completion rate among high school seniors. To date, Ohio's FAFSA campaign has targeted only high school students. An additional program targeting adults (and all students who need to complete the FAFSA annually to maintain eligibility) is needed to ensure that eligible students of all ages have access to the funds necessary to support their education.

**Recommendation 20:** The Ohio Department of Higher Education, working with the governing boards of Ohio's postsecondary institutions, should develop policies, practices, and additional scholarship opportunities specifically for adult learners.

Most institutions focus scholarships on first-time, full-time students, which means that the amount available for adults, transfers, and returning students is severely limited. In addition, scholarships typically target students who begin in the fall term, further disadvantaging students who wish to begin or resume their education at other points in the

**Institutions are offering constructive solutions to real problems when they offer emergency funds for unexpected issues, completion grants, and payment plans.**

academic year. Moreover, information about scholarships available to adults is often difficult to find on institutional websites.

To address this disparity, institutions should consider expanding scholarship opportunities for adult students who attended other institutions, who are returning to school after stopping out, or who

intend to attend part-time. Efforts should also be made to ensure that these scholarships are designed to meet the needs of students at whom they are directed. For example, many veterans have funding from the military, so they don't need tuition dollars, but may need other kinds of financial support. And, in contrast to younger students, working adults may not need campus housing support, but do need tuition assistance and funds to support their living expenses.

As an incentive to institutions and governing boards, the state should consider developing a program to award matching funds to institutions that establish new scholarship programs targeted toward working adults. The state should also audit its existing grant and scholarship programs (e.g., Choose Ohio First, Ohio College Opportunity Grant) to ensure that adults are not unintentionally disadvantaged by program requirements.



## **PILLAR 5:** Recommendations that clarify opportunities, enable success, and document progress

The common theme among the four recommendations in Pillar 5 is communication. The call is for a statewide marketing campaign that communicates our story to adult learners; an annual report that communicates our successes and our areas for improvement; a student portal that serves as a one-stop resource for communicating essential information about our postsecondary institutions; and visible leadership communicating support for efforts to fulfill Ohio's promise to adult learners.

**Recommendation 21:** The Ohio Department of Higher Education should publish an Adult Learner Annual Report to assess the success of adult learners, using data and statistics that already are tracked, collected, and reported.

Adult learner success can be measured via enrollments, progress, completion, and where available, employment. This recommendation does not contemplate creating new, burdensome reporting requirements; instead, ODHE should produce a report using available data to report on the success of adult learners. If desired, the report could be produced as part of ODHE's legislatively mandated Attainment Report that uses common measures already tracked and reported by institutions.

**Recommendation 22:** The Ohio Department of Higher Education, in coordination with other state partners, should launch a statewide marketing campaign targeting adult students.

Ohio must reach out to adults in the state who do not have the credentials (i.e., high value certificates and degrees) needed to access today's high-skill, well-paying jobs. Some of these adult learners have never attended an institution of higher education; others attended but "stopped out" before completing a credential; still others may have a degree or certificate but need to upskill because of advancements in technology. As noted elsewhere in this report, adult learners

**Adults are attracted by marketing materials that are clear about the "Return on Investment" that students likely will achieve with additional educational credentials.**

may be hesitant to enter or return to an institution of higher education because of financial barriers or because of the difficulty in balancing the responsibilities of work, family, and education.

A successful marketing campaign will need to accomplish three tasks. First, it will need to create demand among adults by communicating how increased education impacts the lives and prosperity of individuals and communities. Second, it will need to show adults that further education is possible by demonstrating that returning is affordable and can be balanced with existing work and family responsibilities. And, finally, it will need to provide information on the actions to be taken to start the educational journey.

Several best practices should be considered when marketing to potential adult learners. Adults are much more aware of the costs associated with enrolling in higher education, both personally and monetarily, so showcasing the economic return on the investment in education is critical. Also important is explaining how adult-centered programs are designed to fit into the lives of individuals with jobs and families. Finally, there is power in the message that there are affordable options for everyone.

**Tennessee Reconnect merits attention for its marketing campaign, which includes adult technical centers, two-year, and four-year options.**

**Recommendation 23:** The State of Ohio should create a self-navigating portal to provide education information, without institutional bias, for all of Ohio's potential students.

This recommendation is for a single, statewide, self-navigating portal where Ohio learners can access information about all of Ohio's postsecondary institutions (OTCs, community colleges, universities, and independent colleges and universities) using a similar look and feel and common content standards across institutions. The portal would assist prospective students in understanding the similarities and differences among the types of postsecondary institutions and help them determine a "best fit" based on their educational needs and career aspirations. The portal would also assist adult learners in forging connections to specific postsecondary institutions and would direct interested adults to educational coaches who can assist in their decision making.

**Recommendation 24:** The Chancellor should create a standing Adult Learner Advisory Group that reports to the Chancellor and holds ODHE and the institutions accountable for advancing the strategies needed to support Ohio's adult learners.

The Chancellor's appointment of an adult learner-focused advisory group would send a visible sign of Ohio's commitment to fulfill its promise to adult learners. The advisory group could meet periodically to examine data and advise the Chancellor on Ohio's progress toward meeting the specific needs of adult learners. The group could also host annual meetings in support of the recommendations in this report (e.g., board engagement; professional development on the needs of adult learners for faculty and staff; the benefits of adult-friendly programming such as PLA and CBE); and provide further suggestions for supporting the five pillars of this report. Potential areas for exploration might include required additions to each institution's legislatively mandated Completion Plan, suggested resolutions to be adopted by institutional governing boards, or targeted state investments for adult learners.

# RETURN ON INVESTMENT

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a huge impact on postsecondary institutions' budgeting and planning—requiring a deeper understanding of what is needed to attract, return, and retain adult learners.

An ROI model can be a valuable tool to help postsecondary institutions think long-term about the cost and benefits of deploying the recommendations in this report. Specifically, institutions can use ROI tools to (a) think beyond the conventional budgeting process of allocating a fixed amount of resources that are perceived to be assigned rather than generated and (b) evaluate the costs while considering potential future revenue gains of increased adult learner enrollment and support.

An institution can determine for itself how conservative it wants to be in building its estimates. The postsecondary institution can set objectives, calculate the anticipated marginal revenue that meeting the objectives will generate, and set a budget available to invest in enhanced services.

Alternatively, with an estimate of costs, the postsecondary institution can calculate the necessary improvement in retention necessary to recover those costs. An ROI model can assist the institution in following the

**The ROI Subgroup identified four models that focus on ROI to the institution by improving student attraction, retention, and completion:**

- **National Center for Inquiry & Improvement (NCII) and Jobs for the Future (JFF) – Guided Pathways model;**
- **Nudge 4 and HCM Strategists – ASA/Ohio OBF model;**
- **Rpk Group – OACC Student Success Initiative Financial Model and OACC model; and**
- **Wayne State University Model – Warrior Way Back**

classic economic rule of investing in production as long as the marginal (incremental) revenue is equal to or greater than the marginal cost.

Governing Boards of postsecondary institutions are encouraged to use ROI measures more often – so that they start to evaluate the longer-term positive payoffs of changes, e.g., adding student support staff and wraparound services, forgiving debt, and restructuring programs, rather than just looking at up-front costs as “unaffordable.” Using an ROI model is beneficial to boards that have to make decisions based on mission, competing priorities, and limited resources. An ROI model introduces a cost-benefit analysis to budget decisions that can shift priorities from continuing established programs to supporting the most effective programs.

ROI models are generally intended to analyze the impact of a specific initiative on a specific targeted population. However, the models are fairly straightforward and can easily be adapted and applied to the adult learner population. The underlying questions are the same: What is the appropriate level of service needed to serve the population and increase their success? What resources are necessary to provide those services, and what will they cost? Finally, what is the marginal increase in revenue that successfully serving this population will generate?

The ROI Subgroup notes that to successfully transition to utilizing an ROI approach for making institutional investments, an institution must:

- Develop a clear understanding of the resources required;
- Shift its focus to think in terms of unit costs rather than total costs; and
- Connect student success and financial sustainability.

## NEXT STEPS

Ohio is committed to providing affordable and equitable educational opportunities to adult learners. This report contains recommendations for how to build upon high-impact promising practices for adult learner success, how to close equity gaps, suggestions for policy improvement, and the importance of examining return on investment for educational providers, adult learners, and families.

The recommendations are a mix of strategic and tactical. Some are campus-level; others are state-level. Accountabilities range from educational postsecondary institutions, to the Governor and state legislators, to employers. So, where to begin?

Following are five suggestions:

1. Read the four individual Subgroup reports [available here](#). You'll get a richer, more detailed and nuanced view of each group's objective and work.
2. Work collaboratively to develop a definition of "equity" and create a statement of commitment to "equity-mindedness," as a component of each postsecondary institution's 2022 Campus Completion Plan.
3. Identify potential "champions" and convene interested parties who want to know more, including how to get involved in active ways.
4. Offer to help interested parties—providers, students/families and employers—in calculating return on their investment.
5. Develop an initial action plan, including objectives, messages, strategies, and timelines.

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