



Pathway 2 Tomorrow Impact Plan: Addressing Barriers for Adult Students

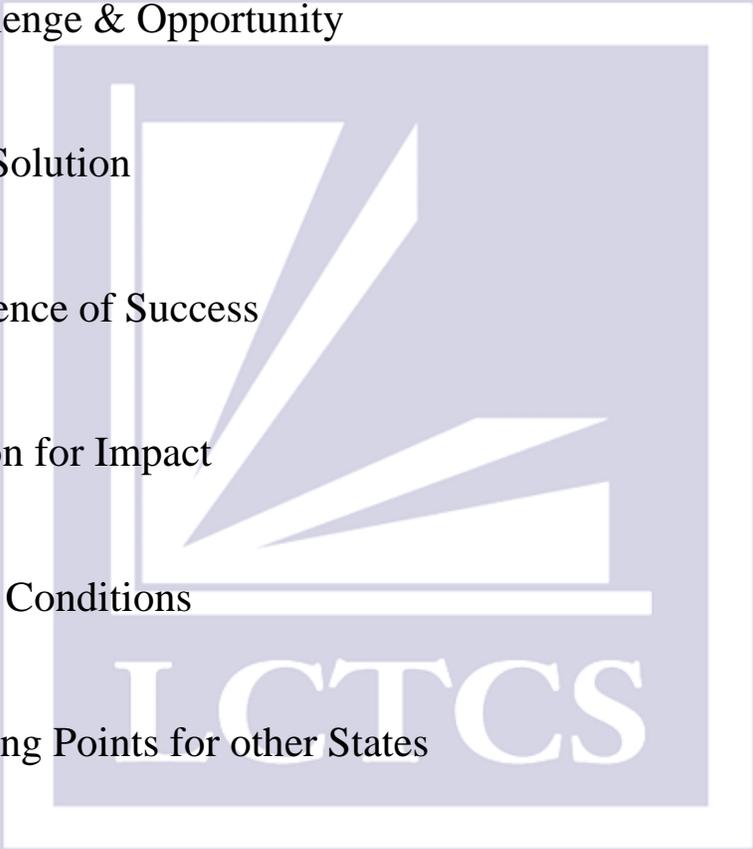
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A COMPREHENSIVE POLICY & PRACTICE APPROACH TO SERVING ADULT LEARNERS & MEETING WORKFORCE DEMANDS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2013 Louisiana was ranked 50th nationally in terms of college degree attainment. By 2017, Louisiana's overall degree attainment rate was 45.9%, ranking 26th nationally. In fact, in 2016 Lumina Foundation ranked Louisiana number one in the nation for adults with a high quality postsecondary certificate. Getting to this point required focusing upon the needs of adult learners through both policy and practice transformation.

The first step in this transformation was to recognize that there were challenges in Louisiana. Twenty-three percent (23%) of the State's working-age population had no high school diploma, leaving them without access to postsecondary education and federal financial aid. These challenges prompted the development of an aggressive strategic plan and re-positioned these challenges as opportunities for growth. The Louisiana Community and Technical College System (LCTCS) aptly identified the critical need for a paradigm shift in higher education – a true, comprehensive focus upon the adult learner without a high school diploma.

The solution was multilateral. We re-envisioned the system of adult education to expand contextualized learning and workforce training that aligned to high-wage, high-demand jobs in Louisiana. We re-committed to an open access mission, put initiatives in place to remove financial barriers for our adult student population, rethought the route to a high school equivalency, and embarked upon a multi-year strategic and statewide marketing campaign. This required support and buy-in from a multitude of stakeholders.

The transformation of the delivery of adult education, shifting from working solely to pass a high school equivalency exam to simultaneously working towards a postsecondary credential needed for good paying occupations, provided the opportunity to elevate an untapped workforce. While every state has a significant population of adults without a high school diploma or industry credential, states have historically sought to address their skills gap through a focus on K-12 education and a traditional progression of high school equivalency to college instruction. However, while such efforts have realized various levels of small successes, they are incapable of matching the needs of the economy for three primary reasons: 1) Most states have an insufficient number of traditional high school graduates annually to fill workforce needs; 2) The historically slow sequential progression of high school equivalency to college instruction results in a significant rate of attrition due to the inability of this demographic to make the significant time commitment; and 3) the financial commitment required to tap into this demographic at an impactful level, without properly leveraging the Ability-to-Benefit provisions of the Federal Pell Grant Program, becomes largely cost prohibitive.

Our vision for impact was to increase the number of adult learners in the state of Louisiana with a postsecondary credential. Our impact will only be maximized if we continue to enhance our programs, review our policies and procedures, bring people together, expand opportunities, and promote rewards. We will have to continue to dispel myths and outdated perceptions, focus on adult learners as a unique population with a unique set of needs, invest in people, communicate our vision effectively and broadly, and reflect on our accomplishments and setbacks.

LCTCS recognized the need to *disrupt the traditional education pathway by redesigning the intersection between education and workforce preparation cohesively to be agile and responsive to communities and prepare students to succeed in a time of changing economic demands.* This theme drives our comprehensive policy and practice approach to serving adult learners and meeting workforce demands.

CHALLENGE AND OPPORTUNITY

Who We Are

In 1999 Governor Mike Foster led the Legislature to establish the Louisiana Community and Technical College System (LCTCS). At that time, Louisiana had fallen behind other states in developing this sector of postsecondary education and training. Today, the LCTCS is a mission-driven primary contributor to the State's overall educational attainment. We are a system of twelve public community and technical colleges, touching every corner of the State. The colleges are governed by a single Board of Supervisors, function under one set of policies, have the same admissions application, and a single student information system. This degree of coordination provides the LCTCS with an ability to scale on a state-wide level, affording a unique opportunity to address and ameliorate socioeconomic, gender, and racial disparities through access to postsecondary education.

Still a relatively young system, we continue to look ahead toward our future. In October of 2014 the LCTCS Board of Supervisors approved an aggressive six-year strategic plan. This plan, known as *Our Louisiana 2020: Building the Workforce of Tomorrow*, was ambitious and bold. We set out to double the number of graduates to 40,000 annually, double the earnings of the annual graduating class to \$1.5 billion, quadruple student transfers to four-year universities to 10,000 annually, and double the number of students served to 325,000 annually. These goals are contingent on and inextricably linked to meeting the needs of adult learners in Louisiana.

Getting to 2020 via Paradigm Shift

System leaders realized that it was essential to create fertile conditions under which the LCTCS could become poised to meet the goals set in *Our Louisiana 2020*. To do so required a greater emphasis on serving Louisiana's adults, many of whom lack a high school diploma. Nationally, there are approximately 31 million working-age adults with no high school diploma (American Community Survey, 2017). In Louisiana alone, 561,000 people fall into this category (23% of the State's working-age population). For this segment of Louisianans, there are several barriers that have historically kept them from emerging from what is often cyclical poverty. First, because this population is often relegated to minimum wage jobs and have competing responsibilities, they are generally unable to sacrifice time to follow the traditional educational progression of first earning a high school equivalency followed by a college credential. Second, even if the barrier of time is overcome, the cost of college is a barrier.

It was clear that Louisiana needed to find a way to address the barriers of adult learners without a high school diploma. We needed to expand access points for obtaining postsecondary credentials. We needed to shift our focus to the adult learners' needs—their unique financial, academic, logistical, practical, every-day needs. We needed to re-envision the systems in place and be willing to abandon traditional practices. We needed to be creative in how we exercised recruitment efforts. We also recognized that we could not make the impact we needed to alone; it would require state, community, and stakeholder commitment to best serve the adult population of Louisiana.

THE SOLUTION

Addressing educational and economic disparities statewide is a complex undertaking. Thus, the solution has been multi-faceted. It has encompassed a host of initiatives as well as policy and practice transformation over several years, all discussed below.

WorkReady U: A Re-Envisioned System of Adult Education

In an effort to increase the proportion of Louisianans with a high school credential and to ensure seamless access to postsecondary education, in 2010 the Louisiana Legislature transferred responsibility for adult basic education programs from the statewide K-12 Board to the Board of Supervisors of the Louisiana Community and Technical College System (LCTCS). As a result, WorkReady U (WRU), a re-envisioned system of adult education, was established. This resulted in a shift in focus from 16-18 year olds to the adult learner age 19 and older. The switch from pedagogy to andragogy meant more of a focus upon contextualized learning and workforce training/preparation. In academic year 2017-2018, WorkReady U served 42,081 individuals statewide, a 34.8% increase over academic year 2015-2016. The presence of WorkReady U on community college campuses throughout Louisiana allows for the seamless transition between adult basic education and postsecondary education. LCTCS colleges therefore have the unique ability to not only assist adult students with obtaining a high school credential but to also prepare them for the workforce.

Committing to a Truly Open Access Mission

Establishing WorkReady U on college campuses throughout the State was the first task. However, ensuring that adult education students could simultaneously pursue a high school equivalency and postsecondary credential remained a challenge due to LCTCS college admission

policies, as many LCTCS colleges required a high school credential for admission. In June 2016 the LCTCS Board of Supervisors removed the high school credential from the requirements for admission for all twelve LCTCS colleges. Resistance to this was palpable as some college personnel felt that standards were being eroded. It took time and consistent messaging about the need for the change to truly implement the open access vision.

Data Sharing to Drive Program Alignment with Workforce Needs

Ensuring a seamlessness between adult basic education and postsecondary education was a win, but all of our efforts would have been for naught had we not provided postsecondary programs that lead to high-wage, high-demand careers. To that end, LCTCS partnered with the Louisiana Workforce Commission (LWC) to develop a data sharing agreement and system in which salary data from the LWC is matched to LCTCS graduates. These data inform program offerings, as LCTCS colleges align their program offerings with high-wage, high-demand occupations in the State. As a result, our graduates earn an average annual income of \$47,500 (124% above the Louisiana median income for individuals without a high school diploma).

Capitalizing upon the Return of Ability-to-Benefit

The next step was removing the financial barriers to college for individuals without a high school credential. According to Title IV regulations, individuals without a high school diploma/equivalency are ineligible for federal financial aid, but the return of federal Ability-to-Benefit (ATB) provisions in 2015 provided an opportunity. ATB provisions allow students without a high school credential to gain access to Title IV funding if they pass an approved ATB test or complete at least six credit hours of college-level coursework.

Unfortunately, many students in this population are not gifted test takers and do not have the financial resources to pay for six credit hours of college coursework. Therefore the LCTCS set policy that required all twelve colleges to allocate five percent of revenues generated from tuition increases in academic year 2015-2016 to financially assist students enrolled in adult education programs with the cost of six credit hours. This “set aside” generated approximately \$600,000 statewide. Thus, the *5 for 6 Scholarship* program was born— 5% of college revenues to cover the cost of six credit hours. These funds represent a bridge to federal financial aid eligibility and the opportunity to obtain a postsecondary credential that leads to a high-wage, high-demand career.

Implementation of *5 for 6* began in earnest in fall 2016, with WorkReady U instructors serving as the identifier of potential *5 for 6 Scholarship* recipients and college staff working with the students to get them enrolled in suitable college courses. Eligibility requirements for the scholarship were not set by the LCTCS Board. Instead, individual colleges and WorkReady U instructors were allowed to experiment. Some colleges set minimum TABE test score requirements; others did not. A few made the writing of a persuasive essay on how the scholarship would benefit the student an assignment in the WorkReady U class and part of the scholarship application. LCTCS staff felt it beneficial to allow colleges the leeway to structure the program in a way that best served local needs. This variability in program implementation would also provide LCTCS staff with robust data for quantitative analysis into best practices once the number of program participants reached a statistically significant threshold.

Strategic, Statewide Marketing

With policy in place, a \$200,000 statewide marketing campaign that included television commercials, radio advertisements, and transportation ads was launched. The theme of the campaign, *Yes U Can*, was purposefully designed to motivate and capture the attention of potential students with a variety of ads. Ads featured students from a variety of backgrounds and age ranges, some posing with family and others on a college campus. Tags from the ads included *Yes U Can make a better life for your family*; *Yes U Can attend college*; *Yes U Can earn your high school diploma*; and *Yes U Can become work ready*.

A toll-free number and dedicated website were listed on the ads directly connecting students to our enrollment specialists via phone or chat features. We were also able to leverage a partnership with our high school equivalency test provider, ETS/HiSET, to provide additional targeted marketing via social media and Pandora ads. Local WorkReady U programs became involved in social media advertising by customizing the *Yes U Can* ads with local information. Student success stories were shared on social media, garnering attention for local programs. Both organic and paid ads were used to target the adult learner population. In addition, posters and postcards were shared throughout the state at job fairs and with statewide partners.

To capture the impact of the marketing campaign, a prospect database was created to capture leads. Each WorkReady U program receives notification when a student in their geographic region is interested in enrollment, providing staff with the prospect's contact information for follow-up. To date, approximately 1,100 prospects have been added to the prospect database, with approximately 24% of them eventually enrolling in a WorkReady U program. Of the 1,100

prospects, the majority (64%) inquired after viewing the WorkReady U website, a TV commercial, or a social media ad.

In addition, having well-produced commercials with student success stories was beneficial during legislative sessions. WorkReady U programs throughout the State were able to share information on exactly what benefits the programs have for adult learners with local leaders and policy makers. Hashtags for an adult education advocacy campaign included #YesUCan, #IamAdultEd, and #aCutToHigherEdIsaCutToAdultEd.

Marketing Budget Proposal

<u>Communication Medium</u>	<u>Cost</u>
Television, Next Star Media Group & Raycom Media (SEC College Football, one local Super Bowl spot, Judge Mathis, Judge Judy, 12 Sunday Saints Games & other NFL Double Headers, PAC 12 & BIG10 College football Saturday, EMPIRE, Nightly News	\$72,000
Radio, Intercom New Orleans Magic 101.9 (25-44 year-old women influencers), B97 Top 40 (18-44 year-old men & women), Bayou 95.7 Classic Rock (white male influencers), HOT 103.7 90's & Today's RB (African American Women, 25-55)	\$15,000
Social Media (statewide geo-targeting Facebook ads, featuring same WRU ads as television)	\$10,000
Newspaper, Louisiana Press Association	\$15,000
Printing of brochures, flyers, etc.	\$13,000
TOTAL	\$125,000

Establishing Multiple Routes to the High School Equivalency

As stated above, in 2010 the Louisiana Legislature designated the LCTCS Board of Supervisors as the sole grantor of the high school equivalency diploma in Louisiana, mandating the Board to adopt such rules and regulations as necessary to establish, operate, and maintain a statewide program of adult education. Following significant input from various state and federal agencies, in 2017 the LCTCS Board of Supervisors revised its policy on high school equivalency attainment to allow adult students the opportunity to earn a Louisiana High School Equivalency through multiple routes, including educational attainment methods, in addition to the typical high school equivalency exam. Establishing multiple routes to the high school equivalency will provide greater access to the high school equivalency.

EVIDENCE OF SUCCESS

LCTCS set out to meet the needs of a significant portion of Louisiana’s adult population— those without a high school diploma. Creating a seamlessness between adult basic education and postsecondary education was the primary goal. Today, one in five LCTCS college students began in a WorkReady U program, signaling that a strong student pipeline between WorkReady U and postsecondary enrollment has been developed.

Removing financial barriers for these students was also necessary, and the *5 for 6 Scholarship* addressed this issue. Across the twelve LCTCS colleges, 584 students have enrolled in college courses using their *5 for 6 Scholarship* to pay for tuition and fees since the spring 2016 semester. After their initial *5 for 6 Scholarship* term, 181 of these students registered for subsequent

college courses, with 123 of them receiving federal Pell Grant awards through the Ability-to-Benefit (ATB) provision, as illustrated in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Initial Term	5 for 6 Students	Subsequently Enrolled	Subsequently Enrolled	Continued & Received Pell	% Continued & Received Pell
Spring 2016	54	25	46%	21	84%
Summer 2016	20	11	55%	6	24%
Fall 2016	73	36	49%	19	76%
Spring 2017	93	26	28%	19	76%
Summer 2017	33	15	45%	13	52%
Fall 2017	92	33	36%	22	88%
Spring 2018	131	23	18%	14	56%
Summer 2018	30	12	40%	9	36%
Fall 2018	58	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	584	181	34%	123	68%

As a state in the south experiencing some of the nation’s most significant racial, socioeconomic, and gender-related disparities, it was also paramount that underserved populations were reached. The *5 for 6 Scholarship* population is diverse. Sixty-six percent (387) are minority students and over half (56%) are female. The average age of *5 for 6 Scholarship* students is 28.

Table 2

Initial Term	5 for 6 Students	Minority	% Minority	Female	% Female
Spring 2016	54	39	72%	32	59%
Summer 2016	20	11	55%	10	50%
Fall 2016	73	43	59%	43	59%
Spring 2017	93	60	65%	53	57%
Summer 2017	33	25	76%	22	67%
Fall 2017	92	51	55%	42	46%
Spring 2018	131	90	69%	67	51%
Summer 2018	30	24	80%	19	63%
Fall 2018	58	44	76%	37	64%
	584	387	66%	325	56%

Over 60% of *5 for 6* students maintained a 2.0 GPA or higher. In fact, 209 college credentials have been earned alongside the high school equivalency. Only 18 months after receiving a *5 for*

6 Scholarship, one student was able graduate with a Technical Diploma in Marine Diesel Engine Technology, another with a Technical Diploma in Commercial Electrical Wiring, and an additional four others with a Technical Diploma in Welding. Other students completed short-term college credentials in healthcare, computing, and other technical fields as well as general education (leading to transferability to four-year institutions).

Table 3

Instructional Programs	College Credentials Earned
Welding Technology	93
Nursing Assistant/Aide	48
Licensed Practical/Vocational Nurse	12
Automotive Mechanics Technician	11
Health Aide	8
Diesel Mechanics Technician	5
Industrial Production Technician	4
Electrician	4
Machine Tool Technology	4
Emergency Medical Technician	4
Instrumentation Technology Technician	3
Health-Related Knowledge and Skills	3
Culinary Arts/Chef Training	2
Accounting	2
Computer Systems Networking and Telecommunications	1
Child Care Provider/Assistant	1
General Studies	1
Criminal Justice/Safety Studies	1
Electrocardiograph Technician	1
Administrative Assistant	1
Total	209

Personal Stories

While such aggregate statistics are compelling, the real story of *5 for 6* is the personal narratives of individual students. Below are a few portraits of *5 for 6 Scholarship* recipients.

- A 37-year-old African American male who dropped out of high school in 10th grade was able to study welding at Delgado Community College while simultaneously preparing to earn his high school equivalency.
- A Hispanic woman, age 50, who attended four semesters part-time to complete her Emergency Medical Responder credential at Nunez Community College while also earning her high school equivalency.
- A 32-year-old Caucasian mother who struggled with reading comprehension and dropped out of high school in 11th grade was able to take college coursework at Fletcher Technical Community College while working on her high school equivalency.
- A 31-year-old African American woman studied three semesters part-time to complete her Nurse Assistant credential from Northwest Louisiana Technical College while also earning her high school equivalency.
- A 35-year-old African American male who completed both his high school equivalency and Electrical Technical Diploma and is now gainfully employed and providing for his family.

VISION FOR IMPACT, FUTURE PLANS, AND NEXT STEPS

Our vision for impact is continuing to increase the number of adult learners in the State of Louisiana with a postsecondary credential that leads to a high-wage, high-demand career. Our impact will only be maximized if we continue to enhance and expand our programs and bring people together around this common vision. Following are our future plans and next steps.

Expand and Enhance 5 for 6

LCTCS hopes to expand the *5 for 6 Scholarship* program drastically, to approximately 13,000 statewide, annually. LCTCS colleges remain committed to the setting aside of 5% of additional revenues that continue to accrue following tuition increases previously established, while also maintaining a commitment to not increase tuition and fees beyond the current rate. The current annual revenue generation realized from the 5% set aside is approximately \$600,000. This amount will support approximately 600 students on an annual basis. To account for the remaining 12,400 students, an additional \$12.4 million will be necessary annually. To address this additional need, the LCTCS Foundation and individual college foundations will continue to pursue contributions from existing and new partnerships. In addition, additional state appropriations may be possible as we continue to collaborate with our legislature on policy changes designed to support adult learners and move them into the economy. Also, allowing colleges the ability to experiment with various aspects of the program (eligibility requirements, for example) has afforded enough variability in the implementation of the program statewide to provide for robust analysis in the future. As the program scales, quantitative analysis of best practices will be conducted to better inform the structure of the program in the future.

Imbed Industry-Based Credentials into Basic Skills Instruction

LCTCS also plans to create a first-of-its-kind skill training/high school equivalency preparation curriculum. In other words, transforming the delivery of basic skills instruction through the embedding of workforce skills and subsequent credentialing of those attained skills in a stackable manner. Such an approach will allow students to simultaneously earn workforce-recognized credentials, whether gained through college instruction or adult education instruction.

This model will allow some workforce training to take place within the adult basic education classroom, funded with federal adult basic education funds. Students could then transition into college coursework/postsecondary credential programs with the use of *5 for 6 Scholarship* funding having already begun in their career pathway.

Uncover Any Additional Barriers

As we embarked upon our mission to increase the number of working-age adults in Louisiana with a postsecondary credential, we knew that students' financial barriers to college had to be overcome. The *5 for 6 Scholarship* was our solution. But, we know that many more barriers exist, from child care issues to inconvenient class times to a need for more prior learning experience credit evaluation. Our next step will be to learn about and address such additional barriers. To do so, we hope to partner with the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) to implement the CAEL "Adult Learner 360" self-assessment for all twelve LCTCS colleges. This effort will aid us in understanding each college's strengths and weaknesses in terms of serving adult learners, and assist us with formalizing an individualized plan for each LCTCS college for restructuring to better serve the non-traditional learner.

Continue to Bring People Together

In order to increase lines of communication and foster strategic initiatives, LCTCS has established several working groups composed of individuals that heretofore had rarely collaborated. For the first time, faculty peer groups are comprised of college and WorkReady U staff. Discipline-based faculty peer groups (comprised of college faculty and WorkReady U instructors), led by LCTCS staff, have been formed to collaborate and maximize faculty

expertise and explore best practices in teaching and curriculum design in order to expand the reach of our instructional capability and offerings for all adult learners. Regular meetings and collaboration with these groups will continue.

IDEAL CONDITIONS

In order to replicate what LCTCS has accomplished, five key factors should ideally be in place. These include authority for adult basic education, a single/shared student information system, a focus on workforce outcomes, meeting adult learners where they are, and the will to change false perceptions. A description of these ideal conditions follows below.

Authority for Adult Basic Education

Responsibility for adult basic education varies from state to state. In some states, the state's K-12 agency is responsible, in others it is the state's workforce/labor agency. As stated above, in Louisiana, it is the community and technical college system. We believe the community and technical college system is ideal because it provides the opportunity to build a more seamless (and in our case, simultaneous) transition between adult basic education and postsecondary education. LCTCS has been able to move the needle with the adult population without a high school diploma significantly because of its statutory authority over adult basic education in the State of Louisiana.

A Single, Shared Student Information System

A single student information system across all twelve colleges and WorkReady U programs has provided the LCTCS with an ability to scale initiatives on a state-wide level and assess outcomes

statewide in real time, providing rich data analysis capability for the uncovering of best practices. This has also allowed us to broker data sharing agreements with other entities, such as the Louisiana Workforce Commission.

A Focus on Workforce Outcomes

LCTCS colleges unabashedly consider themselves as workforce development entities. Graduate earnings are tracked through data sharing agreements, business and industry input is routinely sought at the local level for curriculum development, and programs are evaluated every three years with employment outcomes comprising a significant portion of the review. Starting with the end in mind (the students' career) provides a framework for colleges to make decisions about program offerings and sends a strong signal to the student population that the college is a place to come to better their personal economic outlook.

Meeting Adult Learners Where They Are

Typically, colleges devote significant time and resources to recruiting high school students. A college representative visits the local high school or invites groups of high school students to tour the college. Recruiting adult students is much more challenging. Adults are busy, they are not located in a single location forty hours per week, and messaging must convey the value proposition of going back to school. A shift in thinking about who to recruit and how recruiting is done is necessary. Creative and strategic marketing that was broad in nature (television, radio, social media) and sends a "you can" message was paramount to our success.

The Will to Challenge False Perceptions

Lastly, perhaps the most important factor that must be in place is the willingness to challenge the belief that individuals without a high school diploma are not capable of preparing for or doing college-level work. As shown, data from our *5 for 6 Scholarship* program prove that education does not have to be a linear process and that second chances are very real.

TALKING POINTS FOR OTHER STATES

To get the conversation started, leaders must begin asking the following questions:

- How many working-age adults in your state do not have a high school diploma?
- What are the needs of this population (financial, social, basic skills, employment)?
- What entities and statewide initiatives are currently addressing the needs of this population? What gaps exist?
- What kind of economic impact is possible if this segment of the population is brought back into the educational pipeline and credentialed with employer-recognized and employer-needed skills?
- What financial resources would be needed to implement comprehensive outreach and programming for this segment of the working-age population? What financial resources currently exist and what funding gaps exist?
- Who are the stakeholders that could be brought together to address gaps in programming and resources (policy makers, business and industry, workforce agencies, K-12, postsecondary, non-profit organizations)? Of these, which entity is best positioned to take the lead?