

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES

An Agenda for Connecting Adult Learners with Economic Success

SELECTED ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS

ACTION PRIORITY #1: Raise adult Ohioans' aspirations for continued learning and improve their awareness and understanding of the state's adult workforce education and training opportunities – and make those opportunities more transparent and easier to navigate.

1. Work collaboratively with the Business Alliance for Higher Education and the Economy (BAHEE) and other partners, including labor organizations, to develop and execute a thoughtful, comprehensive and sustainable public-private higher education marketing campaign with emphasis on adult learners. Consistent with the USO's 10-year strategic plan, it is essential that this ongoing initiative be fully aligned with the state's economic development and workforce training efforts.
2. Work collaboratively with employers and labor organizations – and with the Ohio Skills Bank at the regional level – to (a) familiarize workers with continued learning opportunities, including no or low-cost options; and to (b) increase businesses' and unions' understanding of and support for Ohio's adult learning and workforce development initiatives.
3. To ensure that all adults – particularly hard-to-serve populations – have access to high-quality learning opportunities, extend college access services to the state's adult learners by forging connections with the Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE) Program, as well as with regional providers such as College Tech Prep, the Ohio Appalachian Center for Higher Education (OACHE) and Ohio College Access Network (OCAN).

ACTION PRIORITY #2: Create new, accessible pathways that make it easier for learners – particularly those in hard-to-serve populations – to prepare themselves for career-relevant postsecondary education and training – and to help them move smoothly from adult career-technical programs to a credential or degree program at a two- or four-year campus.

1. Proceed aggressively to design and implement a competency-based stackable certificates program that offers industry-recognized certificates at both the pre-college and college levels.
2. Ensure that this transparent career pathway connects all of the state's adult education assets, including the ABLE program, adult career-technical education services, and community and technical colleges' developmental education programs.
3. Leverage partnerships among education entities with similar goals (e.g., OCAN, TechPrep, OLN, etc.) to increase participation in higher education and to ensure that adult learners have the academic supports required for success.

ACTION PRIORITY #3: Make Ohio's adult learning programs and services more affordable by creating new support mechanisms and financial models that meet the needs of adult learners and other non-traditional students.

1. Consistent with the recommendations of the USO's 10-year strategic plan, identify ways to better align Ohio's postsecondary system, lower operating costs and create low-cost learning options for working adults.
2. Inventory student aid and institutional financing "best practices" – in Ohio and across the nation – that have proven to be effective in addressing the needs of adult learners.
3. At the state level, develop more flexible financial aid policies and practices – loans, grants and scholarships – for adult learners studying less than half-time; increase the Ohio College Opportunity Grant (OCOG) availability for part-time adult students and find ways to use Pell Grants and other state and federal dollars to support adults, especially low-income adults.
4. Work to secure employer and union contributions/support to make education and training more affordable for their employees and members.

ACTION PRIORITY #4: Expand opportunities for work-based learning (e.g., internships, apprenticeships, co-ops and teacher externships) by increasing employer participation and by making programs more flexible and adult-friendly.

1. Increase employers' awareness of the benefits of work-based learning experiences for students and businesses that are involved in them – and to increase employer participation.
2. Develop uniform definitions of work-based learning that will allow for measuring outcomes and progress on a local, regional and statewide basis.
3. Work collaboratively with the Business Alliance for Higher Education and the Economy to double the number of postsecondary students engaged in college-level internships, co-op and apprenticeship initiatives; ensure that these learning opportunities are accessible to adult learners and are designed to meet their needs and interests.
4. Establish employer incentives for developing work-based learning programs (similar to the Third Frontier Internship Program), while providing start up support for participating employers.

ACTION PRIORITY #5: Establish a single access point in each region of the state to (1) assess talent development needs and (2) design both systemic and customized solutions that capitalize on the resources of Ohio's adult career-technical programs and two-year college campuses

1. Use the Ohio Skills Bank to foster regional alliances between employers and education to remedy the key occupation and skill gaps in high-wage, high-skilled occupations at the regional level. In addition, it should ensure that education, training and industry-recognized, portable credentialing systems are best aligned to meet these challenges and, in doing so, contribute toward achieving Ohio's workforce development goals.
2. Develop a transparent and consistent training grant process for business and industry, one that is used by all relevant agencies to ensure that limited funds are used strategically.

ACTION PRIORITY #6: Build the adult workforce education system's capacity to facilitate the transferability of credits and students among all service providers – and actively promote such transfers to encourage adults to continue learning.

1. Build the capacity of all institutions to send and receive electronically a common transcript that is processed through the Articulation & Transfer Clearinghouse.
2. Enhance program consistency and the transferability of technical credits by developing a common set of courses for each program that are equitable between adult career-technical programs and two-year colleges.
3. Develop and begin piloting modular-based, lower-level technical courses with a common expectation of foundation learning in mathematics, science and composition.
4. Facilitate dual enrollment policies that allow adult learners to pursue degrees, certificates and other credentialing options simultaneously at the state's community colleges and adult career-technical programs.
5. Develop applied technical and baccalaureate degree programs in collaboration with two-year colleges in areas where there are initial associate degrees.

ACTION PRIORITY #7: Develop an integrated data system – built around a focused set of results-oriented metrics – that fosters coordinated decision making by all adult education providers and assists in identifying and meeting employer needs.

1. Conduct a “data audit” to identify the state's adult workforce data needs and connections.
2. Resolve persistent issues about student identification numbers to ensure that learners' educational attainment and skill development can be tracked throughout their P-12 and higher education experience.
3. Develop and implement a comprehensive plan for bridging adult workforce education and training data systems.

ACTION PRIORITY #8: Develop a governance system for adult workforce programs and services, with appropriate funding mechanisms, that (1) provides comprehensive oversight, (2) create incentives for quality practices and services; (3) distributes resources equitably based on results-oriented metrics, and (4) is consistent with the USO strategic plan.

1. Develop a governance system for adult workforce programs and services – at both the state and regional levels.
2. Make decisions about future allocations and funding formulas for adult workforce programs and services based on clearly defined and widely known principles, ensuring that funding changes are consistent with the USO strategic plan.