Community College
Growth Engine Fund

Micro-pathways: A Gateway to Community College Transformation

Design Insights — an Education Design Lab publication series
The Education Design Lab (Lab) is a national nonprofit that co-designs, prototypes, and tests education-to-workforce models through a human-centered design process focused on understanding learners’ experiences, addressing equity gaps in higher education, and connecting learners to economic mobility. The Lab believes human-centered design allows colleges and universities to map and galvanize their existing strengths to meet the needs of the students they serve. The Lab’s process also shows higher education leaders how to consider the needs of employers, using the curriculum and program design as a gateway to make skills more visible to students and employers alike.

Design Insights is a publication series designed to share insights from initiatives led and supported by the Lab as part of the Learner Revolution, which is about changing the future of learning and work in response to the needs of learners, workers, and the evolving labor market. The future of education, training, and work lies with new majority learner-earners, who include parent learners, students of color, first-generation students, low-income students, and communities long underinvested in, around whom the Lab is orienting our work through our Learner Engagement Framework.

The Education Design Lab and Design Insights Publication Series

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Have we found the Gateway to Transform Community Colleges?

This opinion article was originally published on November 9, 2021, in the Community College Daily co-authored by Kathleen deLaski, Founder + CEO of Education Design Lab, and Dr. Lee Lambert, Chancellor of Pima Community College.

Read the original piece [here.](#)
Community colleges are certainly "having a moment." Congress, states and private philanthropy have invested billions of dollars during the Covid-19 pandemic (including $10 billion just in the American Rescue Plan earlier this year). They see community colleges as a logical key to solving both the equity and talent crises. But, as "free community college" was just removed from the next federal mega-spending bill, it is becoming clear that the investment may be a "one-time" infusion at a time when our colleges are having a major identity crisis.

So now what? In many ways, the past few weeks have further demonstrated the need for community colleges to be more than just an affordable option. Enrollment has declined dramatically over the last decade as our traditional college-age customers dwindle in numbers and prospective students vote with their feet. Some of the best community colleges report that private boot camps are beginning to set up shop near their campuses to compete for students. Boot camps, on average, cost $10,000 more than one year of the average in-district community college tuition and fees, and few of them offer scholarships because they are not tied to federal student aid.

Yet boot camps are gaining ground with students who can afford them. Why? Because they know how to market to students; offer rolling start dates to fit student schedules; and hire industry experts to quickly teach the latest skill stacks in tech, marketing, data analytics and healthcare support.

Business analysts would call our problem a failure of the sector to see "product/market fit." In plain English, they would charge that community colleges are stuck in traditional collegiate delivery methods and academic silos and are not meeting the changing needs and demographics of their 12 million customers. Even the standard "credit hour," developed in 1906 to calculate faculty workload and pensions and not student learnine, has become obsolete.
A new approach

The need for faster, flexible and visible skills training and credentialing is becoming more real than ever as the “skills-based hiring economy” takes hold. Community colleges are well positioned at a critical moment to serve the growing population of “new majority learners” and employers who are desperate to fill their employment gaps.

The Community College Growth Engine Fund was set up just before the pandemic to help community colleges lean into a future role, more as regional talent agents than as the cafeteria-style course emporium and university training wheels program imagined 70 years ago. The Fund offered a disciplined design accelerator to develop shorter-term credentials — shorter than a degree, but longer than industry certifications that have recently become popular. It also offered to design those credentials with employers to earn the coveted industry endorsement.

Six of the largest community college systems joined in the first cohort, producing 30 “micro-pathways” in the first year. These are seen as job role-specific credentials, taking less than a year to earn, that lead directly to living-wage jobs but also stack to a degree, which can be earned later or part-time while working.

The colleges co-designed the credentials with some 40 employers, and at Pima, we can already report that interest seems high. Six hundred learners reached out in the first month to consider the programs, branded as PimaFastTrack, in industries key to southern Arizona such as automated industrial technology, cybersecurity/IT, building and construction technology. We are pleased to see that the majority of applicants are from communities of color and identify as under or unemployed, most often due to job loss during the pandemic.

Different credentials

Many of us were already working with a few key industries or employers to address their talent shortages, but these initiatives were hard to scale. We were also not used to thinking like consumer “product developers,” matching curriculum paths based on regional data for high-demand roles and designing the learning experience with the set of strict criteria the Fund imposed based on learner feedback. And we had not figured out how to transfer the growing number of “non-credit” technical skill-based courses to the academic side to help students get degree credit and financial aid.

Now, one year in, we are encouraged enough to glimpse a future role for community colleges as a more proactive talent development marketplace for their regions, focused on populations who need additional support and low-cost access.

A disciplined design process, across several industries, can help us create a common currency: a new type of credential that is faster and more targeted than a degree, but stackable if desired, and that an employer can request or require in a job posting. Pima imagines building out its entire curriculum this way and collapsing the artificial distinction between credit and non-credit, which is irrelevant and confusing to learners and employers alike.

The proposed new paradigm is a series of connected universal design maps that translate learning outcomes and credits to skills that employers are, more and more, mapping into “competency frameworks.” If the frameworks are adopted by industries, state agencies and high school districts, we could create the Google Maps of opportunity with community colleges playing a central role in managing the supply and demand of talent.

We have started informally describing micro-pathways as a “gateway” or “silver bullet” into lifelong education. And this year has taught us that the construct is working not just for learners who can more easily dip a toe into higher ed, but, interestingly, for all of us: for faculty trying to adapt this model so their students can get traditional course credit, for employers who need templates and processes to better articulate the skills they need for individual roles, and for those of us lucky enough to be stewards of these institutions as a blueprint for Community College 2.0 comes into focus.
Introduction

The current COVID-19 crisis and historic inequities in our labor market have disproportionately impacted and exacerbated long-standing barriers for new majority learners to have access to what we all hope for: an opportunity to achieve our goals and find a higher standard of living for ourselves and our families. This reality is especially true for new majority learners who are Black, brown, indigenous, low-income, immigrants, based rurally, and working parents and caretakers. Add to this a surfaced racial awakening, particularly for many white Americans coming to understand the existence and effects of systemic racism, bringing conversation and long-standing calls for change by BIPOC communities (Black, indigenous, people of color) to the forefront.
Higher education institutions have been forced to adapt quickly, clarify their value proposition, and create new business models. Without swift changes to our postsecondary, employer, and workforce ecosystem — changes that are rooted in the needs and goals of learners and aligned to the demands of an ever-changing labor market — families face an impossible road forward to true intergenerational economic mobility, and gaps in wealth, access, opportunity, and outcomes will continue to widen. Dr. Rufus Glasper, former chancellor of Maricopa Community College and president of the League for Innovation in the Community College, a Fund partner, articulates the urgency for change when he said, “Community colleges have two options as a new paradigm continues to evolve: to leverage the unprecedented wave of investments to transform themselves or risk becoming irrelevant.”

That's why the Lab launched the Community College Growth Engine Fund (CCGEF or the Fund, for short) — a design accelerator to work with community colleges and systems across the country to co-create a new class of credentials: micro-pathways.

In this brief, you’ll find:
+ A glimpse of our work on the ground, including key components and criteria on how to design and deliver micro-pathways;
+ Innovative micro-pathways from each participating college currently being piloted;
+ Insights from learners, employers, and colleges;
+ Where this work is headed next.

We hope readers will find inspiration from this new class of credentials and the models designed for learners who need clearer pathways toward their goals.

Micro-pathways Explained

Co-designed with learners and employers, micro-pathways are defined as two or more stackable credentials, including a 21st century skill micro-credential, that are flexibly delivered to be achieved within less than a year and result in a job at or above the local median wage.
The Fund is a design accelerator that selected six of the most forward-leaning community colleges and systems in the country to lead a demonstration of how community colleges can leverage innovation capacity, regional partnerships, and dynamic labor market data to identify and build sub-degree micro-pathways with designated credentials that employers validate.
The First CCGEF Cohort

We saw the potential of this model through earlier work with community colleges and employers, and years of learner voice insights that pointed to clear criteria for faster, targeted credentials built for high-demand job roles.

Together, these six institutions and systems are working through the Lab’s human-centered design process — built to center learners and employers — accompanied by tools, resources, and direct support from the Lab’s team of education designers and coaches.

The first CCGEF cohort has designed more than 30 new micro-pathway models for industry groups to rally around, and is ready to share insights to enable adoption, replication, and scale by other learning providers and regions.
Stakeholders Involved in Cohort 1

Through the CCGEF design accelerator, participating colleges are uniquely positioned to design new pathways that connect learners to increased economic mobility. Just these first micro-pathways in Cohort 1 set the stage for more than 4,000 new majority learners to earn meaningful credentials in the first year of implementation. By selecting in-demand occupations and co-designing with employers and learners to identify crucial skills and needs, we expect the implementation of micro-pathways will lead to improved access to quality education and training leading to higher wages for learners.

We are measuring our impact multiple ways including through an Impact Evaluation over a two-year period conducted by Urban Institute. In addition, the Lab is building a Data Collaborative for a Skills Based Economy that includes partners like the Urban Institute, National Student Clearinghouse, BrightHive, and Credential Engine. Collectively, this approach helps us build proof points on the efficacy of the micro-pathway model focused on improving employment and wage outcomes.
Our Approach: A Design Accelerator for Micro-pathways

THE DESIGN QUESTION
At the Lab, we kick off our projects with a design question to guide the work ahead. In the field of human-centered design, we often frame questions as "How might we...?" to help imagine the world of possibilities. For the Fund, we're asking:

How might we design equitable and accessible micro-pathways toward high-growth careers endorsed by employers and visible to learners moving from post-secondary education into the workforce?

To answer that question, we developed the "design accelerator" that pre-packages a design criteria accompanied by a fast-paced change process. This allows for community colleges to co-design new pathways with employers in a 6-8 month timeframe that strengthens economic mobility opportunities for new majority learners. This rapid transformation approach was born out of a need to build more responsive pathways that unbundle the traditional degree and make learning more visible, portable, flexible, relevant, and affordable.

THE DESIGN PROCESS

Human-Centered Design — sometimes referred to as HCD — is an approach and process to addressing complex problems. At its core, human-centered design is built on empathy, and provides phases, tools, and methods for engaging those most proximate to the problem you hope to address as experts and co-creators. It is a process that encourages messiness, iteration, and questioning what we know.

The Lab's human-centered design process consists of four phases:
1. Understand
2. Ideate
3. Prototype
4. Launch and Implementation

The Fund was our first concerted effort to create a "design accelerator" for micro-pathways using the principles of human-centered design. Colleges in the inaugural cohort were provided the support and resources to pilot and implement this work on their campuses and within their systems. This includes a clear Micro-pathway Design Process to guide the college teams throughout the design process.

The micro-pathway design criteria was informed by best practices in the field and was driven by years of Lab design work with community colleges and over 8,000 interviews with new majority learners and 200-plus employers.
Design Criteria for Micro-pathways

Once we aligned on a design question to frame our work, we worked with partners and stakeholders to identify and align on a set of criteria that all micro-pathways must meet to be successful. We call these sets of goal-oriented and research-backed criteria “design criteria.”

At multiple points throughout this work, our cohort is asking, “Does this meet our design criteria?” and adjusting along the way.

By capturing and documenting the process of designing micro-pathways, the Lab is compiling insights, models, and promising practices for micro-pathway development that can be replicated and scaled by community colleges across the country.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alignment Criteria</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Align to dynamic regional labor market and median wage</td>
<td>Focuses on in-demand occupations that pay at least regional median wage according to regional labor market data and employer input.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Includes two or more credentials that are stackable, portable, and track toward a degree</td>
<td>Credentials include certificates, certifications, and/or micro-credentials that are stackable and articulate for credit toward an associate degree. Credits, courses, and credentials are portable across institutions within the state, between states, and between agencies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be employer-validated</td>
<td>The credentials and skills focus of the micro-pathway are identified by regional employers as required or preferred in the hiring process for specific occupations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be affordable</td>
<td>Program cost takes into account the life circumstances of learners and aligns to funding sources, such as scholarships, grants, and public funds whenever possible.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Completed in one year or less</td>
<td>Full or part-time learners can complete the micro-pathway in one calendar year or less.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be offered in a flexible delivery format</td>
<td>Can be offered in online, in-person, and hybrid formats so that learners who work or have caretaking demands are not shut out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrates technical + 21st century skills</td>
<td>Includes both technical and 21st century skills (the range of in-demand, higher-order human skills that cut across industries and job roles).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be digitally discoverable</td>
<td>Learners are issued digital credentials (badges) and trained on how to use them to promote their accomplishments.</td>
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Understanding Micro-pathways

The first Community College Growth Engine Fund cohort has developed 30 micro-pathways from October 2020 to December 2021. Most of the colleges in our cohort primarily focused on meeting the needs of adult learners, as nationally we witnessed the severe impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on displacing many from their jobs and sustaining incomes. Other colleges in our cohort sought to expand their dual credit options with high school partners.

Each micro-pathway provides entry and exit points to a clear career path and to securing a sustainable job with options for growth. Each of the occupations selected is based on regional demand, and depending on state and/or regional economic development conditions, some are more focused on emerging industries and occupations.

In the example on the right, the Borough of Manhattan Community College designed a micro-pathway for Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) that connects dual enrollment high school students to EMT training that can be completed senior year, includes three 21st century skills digital micro-credentials, national and state EMT certifications, CPR certification, and awards four college credits toward an associate degree in Paramedics.

CUNY Borough of Manhattan Community College's Emergency Medical Technician Basic Certificate
A Micro-Pathway to become an Emergency Medical Technician

//Diagram showing credentials earned and future growth opportunities for an EMT career pathway.//
Another example is Ivy Tech Community College’s Smart Manufacturing Digital Integration Micro-pathway that can be completed in four months full- or part-time, includes the WIN Essential Soft Skills credential, two Smart Automation Certification Alliance (SACA) certifications, an internship, and six credits toward an advanced manufacturing technical certificate or degree.

You can find a repository of all 30 micro-pathways from Cohort 1 here.
## Micro-pathway
### Sectors + Occupations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ALLIED HEALTH</th>
<th>HOSPITALITY + BUSINESS</th>
<th>INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY</th>
<th>ADVANCED MANUFACTURING + SUPPLY CHAIN</th>
<th>OTHERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+ EMT (PCC)</td>
<td>+ Hospitality Leadership (PGCC)</td>
<td>+ AWS Cloud Computing (SC)</td>
<td>+ Production Technician (ACC)</td>
<td>+ Automotive Technology (PCC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Healthcare Technician (PGCC)</td>
<td>+ Project + People Management (SC)</td>
<td>+ IT Support Specialist (PCC + PGCC)</td>
<td>+ Automated Industrial Technology (PCC)</td>
<td>+ Residential Construction (SC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Community Health Worker (CUNY: LGCC)</td>
<td></td>
<td>+ Broadband Technician (ITCC)</td>
<td>+ Heavy Trailer + Truck Driver/Logistics (ITCC)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Community Health Worker (CUNY: KBCC)</td>
<td></td>
<td>+ Cybersecurity (CUNY: LGCC)</td>
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### Community College Legend
- ACC: Austin Community College
- CUNY: City University of New York
  - BMCC: Borough of Manhattan Community College
  - KBCC: Kingsborough Community College
  - LGCC: LaGuardia Community College
  - QBCC: Queensborough Community College
- ITCC: Ivy Tech Community College
- PGCC: Prince George's Community College
- PCC: Pima Community College
- SC: Seattle Colleges

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Community College Growth Engine Fund

Design Insights 13
This section provides insight into the intensive work that happened on the ground during the Fall 2020 to Spring 2021 design sprint. This design year began and ended amidst the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and we are grateful to our partners for sticking together in this work.
Key Components of the Community College Growth Engine Fund

Designing micro-pathways to be successful (meet the design criteria named in the prior section) and sustainable requires a multi-faceted and complex process. Below we highlight the key components we brought together to make the Fund and the design of micro-pathways possible:

**DESIGN TEAMS**

Each college in our cohort designated a design team to lead the micro-pathway work for their college. Led by a champion team lead, each team included a range of college staff members including deans, leaders from workforce development/continuing education, student services, advising, marketing, and admissions and enrollment.

**DESIGN LEADS**

Design Leads typically serve in senior-level roles at the college and have a line of sight with the president or chancellor, keeping that individual informed of the progress across the college or system as well as serving as liaison with Lab staff on touchpoints, milestones, and meeting overall goals of the initiative. They are ultimately accountable for the success of the design and implementation of micro-pathways on their respective campuses.

**DESIGN SESSIONS**

Design teams participated in collaborative design sessions led by the Lab to anchor our design work and ensure alignment with our co-created design criteria. In these sessions, teams worked with human-centered design tools and learned from stakeholders and peers. Sessions included a national convening that brought all of the design teams together to launch the Fund, then several local, college-specific design sessions focused on employer engagement, skills mapping using the Lab’s T-Profile Tool, and the learner journey.
COACHING SESSIONS
Coaching sessions were held on a biweekly basis with each design team. Coaching sessions combined common topics across the cohort centered on the design criteria and the micro-pathways design process along with institutional goals. This was an essential element as the design teams moved step-by-step through the Micro-pathway Design Process.

LEARNER ENGAGEMENT
Learners are the primary stakeholders for micro-pathways and those most impacted by this new program. Throughout the design year, we engaged learners at each college through roundtables, focus groups, and surveys. We sought to understand key milestones, emotions, decisions, and experiences of each learner in how they engage with work and learning, alongside key needs and wants. As each college began to prototype and develop different micro-pathways, we asked learners to provide feedback through designated sessions.

DATA
The majority of our micro-pathways were designed to be noncredit. Though noncredit pathways are more accessible to a wider range of learners, much of the data we need to measure efficacy is not collected in noncredit pathways. In response, the Lab has partnered with Urban Institute, National Student Clearinghouse, BrightHive, and Credential Engine to create the Data Collaborative for a Skills Based Economy.

EVALUATION
To evaluate our process and both intended and unintended impact, we partnered with the Urban Institute. The Urban Institute provided process evaluation insights and is partnering with us on baseline data collection and quantitative and qualitative research throughout the pilot stage.

EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT
Designing with employers was another crucial part of this process. We engaged employer partners throughout our design arc in roundtables, skills mapping sessions, and prototype feedback sessions. The design teams engaged frequently with their local employers formally and informally as advisors, co-designers, and partners, as detailed in our Employer Engagement Guidebook.

PRESIDENT’S FORUM
Alongside our design sessions, we offered the Presidents’ Forum, a designated space to design directly with the presidents and chancellors at each college.
A community of practice was developed within the cohort of colleges to provide opportunities to work and learn alongside one another. Each college is facing both regionally unique and nationally shared challenges. Offering space to share approaches and ideas is critical to designing for collective impact. Additionally, we know a key outcome of successful design work is the development of what we call design channels, where college staff have access to sustained communication and learning.

Each participating college in Cohort 1 received a $100,000 grant to cover any costs associated with the design process. These were considered general operating funds with the only request that grants be spent in service to the goals outlined by the Fund. An additional $50,000 was also given to each system to seed scholarships in the pilot phase as well as funding regional market research to understand what messages would resonate most with learners.

Ensuring longevity and sustainability of each micro-pathway is critical to our ultimate goal of learner success. We worked together from the start to establish sustainable funding streams through grants, scholarships, and employer support.

Throughout our design year, we created tools and captured novel processes and ideas. We hope this documentation will allow for replication of our process and a repository of models to inspire future innovation in the community college field in the future.

As micro-pathway development progressed, each college started to market their micro-pathways to their learners for enrollment. To support the cohort, the Lab partnered with a marketing consultant to conduct market research on learner attitudes and perceptions of micro-pathways. Marketing assets for each college were developed and offered to each college.

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MARKETING

CAPTURING + DOCUMENTING PROCESS

RESOURCING INNOVATION

FUNDING MODELS

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE
Innovative Design
Elements of Emerging Micro-pathways

This section features emerging micro-pathway models and innovative design elements from each institution. After some brief background information, a list of the micro-pathways each college launched or will launch in 2022 links to visuals showcasing how these models came together. In addition, the design teams each selected two innovations they are most proud of.

At the Lab, we believe micro-pathways have the potential to positively change economic outcomes for new majority learners, specifically those who are BIPOC (Black, indigenous, and people of color), low-income, immigrants, based rurally, and working parents and caretakers. Although the design criteria for each remains the same, there is a great deal of variation from institution to institution that is necessary for them to respond to their regional economies.
INSTITUTIONAL OVERVIEW

Seattle Colleges (SC) is a champion of employer engagement, developing mutually beneficial partnerships with each of their five micro-pathways. What started out as conversations a year ago about “what could be” has since gained momentum to where their local employers are contributing the time, energy, and funding needed to create sustainable new programs. One of their most successful partnerships is with Seattle’s Children’s Hospital, which is providing $200,000 in scholarships for SC’s Health IT/Epic Associate micro-pathway and plans to send its employees through the program. Another example is with their Residential Construction micro-pathway where their flagship employer Blue Sound Construction has introduced them to the Master Builders Association of Washington and numerous other local construction companies.

**ANNA BALDWIN**

Design Team Lead, CCGEF and Director, Workforce Projects
Seattle Colleges

Seattle Colleges (SC) is a multi-college district that serves approximately 45,000 students in Seattle and its surrounding communities. Seattle Colleges prepares each student for success in life and work, fostering a diverse, engaged, and dynamic community.

**INNOVATIVE DESIGN**

Skillification is a term used by SC to describe the development of a shared skills-based language, adopted by formal and informal education providers and employers. For the college, this forces translating curriculum and learning outcomes into the language of skills. Each skill has a “rich skill descriptor,” which is a description of what is meant when a learner is skilled at something. **Skillification validates skills and competencies no matter where they are acquired**, acknowledging skills and skill development in informal learning environments — for example: caretaking, managing money and resources, and navigating a new country and a new language. Seattle Colleges has started their journey to skillification with their CCGEF micro-pathways.

**Deep Employer Engagement**

SC is a champion of employer engagement, developing mutually beneficial partnerships with employers for each of their five micro-pathways. **What started out as conversations a year ago about “what could be” has since gained momentum to where their local employers are contributing the time, energy, and funding needed to create sustainable new programs.** One of their most successful partnerships is with Seattle’s Children’s Hospital, which is providing $200,000 in scholarships for SC’s Health IT/Epic Associate micro-pathway and plans to send its employees through the program. Another example is with their Residential Construction micro-pathway where their flagship employer Blue Sound Construction has introduced them to the Master Builders Association of Washington and numerous other local construction companies.

“We have been really impressed by our employer partners and their energy and commitment to bringing our micro-pathways to life. Employers have realized they can spend their philanthropic dollars for uses they never thought of.”

**ANNA BALDWIN**

Design Team Lead, CCGEF and Director, Workforce Projects
Seattle Colleges

**MICRO-PATHWAY OCCUPATIONS**

- Amazon Web Services (AWS)
- Cloud Practitioner
- Junior Extended Reality (XR) Developer
- Epic Associate
- Supervisor
- Remodeler

**“Skillification”**

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INSTITUTIONAL OVERVIEW

Name: Pima Community College
Location: Tucson, Arizona

About

Pima Community College (PCC) serves the Tucson metropolitan area with annual enrollment of nearly 40,000 students. Pima is rapidly transitioning to a high-tech institution serving the needs of the region’s growing aerospace, defense, and healthcare industries.

INNOVATIVE DESIGN

The Nexus of Universal Design + Universal Access

Pima is using micro-pathways as a springboard to make the shift to universal design and universal access principles. In universal design, learners have access to the modality that best suits them to develop their competencies, whether that’s online, hybrid, or in-person. With universal access, the college has formalized a new noncredit on-ramp for learners with all of their micro-pathways. For the targeted learner segment of adult learners, this is the shortest route to immediate employment for those who want to reskill and offers the least number of potential barriers. Given these micro-pathways have for-credit equivalents, learners are earning credits so that they may, at any point they choose, enroll into a credit program to earn higher credentials in the pathway.

Website Shifts to Be More Inclusive of Adult Learners

As part of Pima’s overall shift to universal design and universal access, the college is changing the way it presents content and organizes its website. Focusing on the different needs and priorities of adult learners, Pima has launched a new set of web pages specifically for their micro-pathways, called “FastTrackPima.” This website focuses on occupations available to learners upon completion, average salaries, available supports, and flexibility. Down the road, Pima plans to merge its credit and noncredit programming into one comprehensive website that addresses all learner needs and goals and does not create a dichotomy between credit and noncredit learners.

“We have credit and noncredit learners together in the same classes. It doesn’t matter whether a learner is gaining competencies in the credit or the noncredit realm. Every learner is a learner that has value and worth, and we are here to serve them.”

DR. IAN ROARK
Vice President, Workforce Development and Strategic Partnerships
Pima Community College
INNOVATIVE DESIGN

Ivy Tech is using micro-pathways as proving grounds for a more holistic learner ecosystem. All four of its micro-pathways are instituting models for making the noncredit-to-credit articulation process seamless, in one case even mixing noncredit and credit in the same micro-pathway. The big learning for the design team thus far has been around being intentional with starting programs on the noncredit side, then supporting learners as they transition to the credit side. Once there, and hoping they have gained some confidence, they will see themselves as “students,” and can look at their overall goals and purpose. As a Guided Pathways institution, the students then receive guidance to persist, complete and meet their highest potential. They would also qualify for financial aid and potentially additional state funding to support them on their journeys.

The Next Level Jobs Workforce Ready Grant pays for tuition and mandatory fees for eligible high-value certificate programs at ITCC. The grant launched a few years ago and has been infused with COVID relief aid, which has allowed for more flexibility in what can be funded. The majority of credentials included in the college’s four new micro-pathways have been approved for these grants. This is a big win for the design team, as they have intentionally started the micro-pathways on the noncredit side wherever possible. Given the lack of financial aid for noncredit programs, this is especially significant for the Heavy Truck and Trailer Driver program, which is experiencing tremendous growth but would not be affordable to most learners.

“Being part of the CCGEF design accelerator has helped Ivy Tech push forward with changes we started to make. The Fund has enabled us to think even more broadly and creatively about innovation.”

DR. STACY TOWNSLEY
Design Team Lead, CCGEF and Vice President, Adult Strategy + Statewide Partnerships
Ivy Tech Community College
INSTITUTIONAL OVERVIEW

Name
Borough of Manhattan
Community College

Location
New York City,
New York

About
The City University of New York is the nation’s largest urban
public university, consisting of seven open-access community
colleges, 11 universities, and seven graduate and professional
schools. The colleges are distributed across the city and
serve 275,000 degree-seeking students and approximately
240,000 noncredit/continuing education students annually.

INNOVATIVE DESIGN

Borough of Manhattan Community College leaders re-designed occupationally neutral
segments of the curriculum focused on 21st century skills and updated them to create a series
of EMT-specific scenarios that reinforced the occupational foundations of the program while
elevating the ways in which EMTs would apply creative problem-solving and empathy in the
course of their future jobs in the allied health field.

DONNA MCLEAN-GRANT
Assistant Director, Workforce Development
Borough of Manhattan Community College (CUNY)

BMCC identified a respected member of the college faculty who was also the Emergency
Medical Services (EMS) Program Director at the college to lead the development work. She was
intimately familiar with the existing curriculum as well as the state accreditation requirements.
The faculty member joined BMCC two years ago and ensured an introductory course was
created to provide prospective program participants with a substantial understanding of the
nature of the profession, the rigor of the coursework, and the time commitment required to
succeed and complete the program before officially enrolling in the micro-pathway.

“We were very excited to elevate the 21st century skills that were already part of the
EMT curriculum and redesign them to align with scenarios students would encounter
on the job. The results have made the program even more powerful, and since we are
badging those competencies, we know they will stand out to future employers.”

DONNA MCLEAN-GRANT
Assistant Director, Workforce Development
Borough of Manhattan Community College (CUNY)
INSTITUTIONAL OVERVIEW

Name: Kingsborough Community College
Location: New York City, New York

About
The City University of New York is the nation’s largest urban public university, consisting of seven open-access community colleges, 11 universities, and seven graduate and professional schools. The colleges are distributed across the city and serve 275,000 degree-seeking students and approximately 240,000 noncredit/continuing education students annually.

INNOVATIVE DESIGN

Employers have always been an important part of workforce training program development at Kingsborough Community College, but one of the CCGEF tools, the T-Profile, engaged employers at the front end of the pathway creation process and continuously thereafter. Employers were asked to confirm the essential skills learners would need to get hired as well as the 21st century skills that would be most valuable on the job. By contributing to all facets of the 144-hour Design Works User Experience micro-pathway, employers owned the curriculum in a deeper way, which changed how they viewed graduates in terms of readiness for positions in their companies. There has already been a powerful spillover effect, as KBCC programs are now moving to make this co-design approach the norm across the Continuing Education and Workforce Development Division.

Program leaders at Kingsborough have activated a badging contract that will enable them to award successful learners with digital badges that will detail the skills mastered in the program in technical areas as well as the Lab’s Intercultural Fluency, a 21st century skill micro-credential highly valued by employer co-designers. These badges will signal the skills and competencies of learners to potential employers and can be displayed by successful program completers on their LinkedIn accounts and other personal and professional social media outlets.

“Using the T-Profile tool transformed our relationships with employers. By getting input from them on the front end of the program design process, we could be sure students were getting the skills required in the marketplace and that employers knew the value of the credentials — because they helped to create them.”

DR. EDWISIMONE RODRIGUEZ
Vice President, Workforce Development, Continuing Education, and Strategic Partnerships
Kingsborough Community College (CUNY)
INSTITUTIONAL OVERVIEW

Name
LaGuardia Community College

Location
New York City, New York

About
The City University of New York is the nation’s largest urban public university, consisting of seven open-access community colleges, 11 universities, and seven graduate and professional schools. The colleges are distributed across the city and serve 275,000 degree-seeking students and approximately 240,000 noncredit/continuing education students annually.

INNOVATIVE DESIGN

LaGuardia has been able to make significant progress in closing existing credit/noncredit gaps in both directions. The funding and CCGEF tools help ensure the highest quality program curriculum, which eases the adoption of some portions for credit consideration. Their programs also attract credit learners who enroll to build real-world skill portfolios that complement more theoretical programs in the same overall field. This helps ensure noncredit and credit programs complement and enhance each other within disciplines, rather than compete. The 21st century skills, for example, have broad value and applicability beyond the specific pathways and may become increasingly valued by credit programs moving forward. Learners are leading the way by taking both, making a powerful impression on leaders in both college divisions. In other cases, there are learners who have actually completed college credit degrees coming back for the noncredit courses to enhance their employability.

INNOVATIVE DESIGN

Closing the Distance Between Credit and NonCredit Instruction
#flexible

LaGuardia’s Community Health Worker micro-pathway is designed to be relevant to multiple populations of learners ranging from high school students to incumbent workers employed in the industry. Although labor-intensive to build and manage, one of the most powerful program elements is the 125-hour internship that all students experience as part of their program of study. These internships keep a group of nearly 50 regional employers continuously engaged with the program and serve as extremely effective off-ramps to jobs as learners complete their credentials. Complementing the Community Health Workers program’s robust internships is an incumbent worker program for Data Analytics learners in which local employers pay 100% of the program costs to upskill current employees to enable them to move into high-demand jobs involving data analytics within their companies — a win-win for employers and learners.

“It is really all about work-based learning for students. From incumbent workers to people acquiring skills to enter a completely new career field, early and continuous work-based learning from on-the-job projects to substantial internships is the power feature in our micro-pathways that makes all the difference when it comes to getting a job offer.”

HANNAH WEINSTOCK
Senior Director, Workforce Development
LaGuardia Community College (CUNY)
The City University of New York is the nation’s largest urban public university, consisting of seven open-access community colleges, 11 universities, and seven graduate and professional schools. The colleges are distributed across the city and serve 275,000 degree-seeking students and approximately 240,000 noncredit/continuing education students annually.

Queensborough Community College
New York City, New York

INSTITUTIONAL OVERVIEW

Name
Queensborough Community College

Location
New York City, New York

About
The City University of New York is the nation’s largest urban public university, consisting of seven open-access community colleges, 11 universities, and seven graduate and professional schools. The colleges are distributed across the city and serve 275,000 degree-seeking students and approximately 240,000 noncredit/continuing education students annually.

INNOVATIVE DESIGN

A surge in learner and employer demand led to the accelerated activation of CCGEF micro-pathways at Queensborough Community College beginning in the summer of 2021, when over 400 students enrolled in the re-designed Cloud Computing micro-credential. To maximize completion and success, all learners were enrolled in Queensborough’s initial pilot of the Persistence Plus model, which provided nudges to learners at critical junctures through an intelligent text-messaging platform that supports persistence and completion. The platform emphasized remote learning goals, time management, dispelling myths that mitigated stereotype threat, and the maintenance of a growth and success mindset. Of the 399 learners who participated, 87% remained subscribed to the platform and 93% recommended the service.

Workforce-relevant accelerated training programs were given another boost by aggressive resource leverage. This resulted in Queensborough leading a successful team of CUNY colleges in being awarded prestigious, multi-million dollar U.S. Department of Labor Strengthening Community Colleges grants, which will support 17 other community college micro-pathways that include articulated units into related college credit programs, expanded internships, and accelerated pathways through training and into the workforce.

“EDL and the Community College Growth Engine Fund connected the dots for us on micro-pathways. It was just the information we needed to accelerate the design and activation of this work. These models have driven extensive related activities at the college — all centered on equity, mastery learning for students, and exiting to median-wage jobs in high-demand fields.”

DR. HUI-YIN HSU
Dean of Continuing Education and Workforce Development
Queensborough Community College (CUNY)

+ Software Engineer
+ Entry-level Cloud Engineer

MICRO-PATHWAY OCCUPATIONS

Resource Leveraging
#affordable

COMMUNITY COLLEGE GROWTH ENGINE FUND DESIGN INSIGHTS
As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, Prince George's has received much needed funding for noncredit Continuing Education (CE) learners through the Maryland Governor's Education Emergency Education (GEER) Relief Act. They will be using some of these dollars for their new “Geer” Advisors who will serve learners enrolled in their three micro-pathways, which are all housed in the noncredit Continuing Education (CE) division. These advisors will provide holistic advising, offering learners guidance, support and connection to resources that will assist them with completing their micro-pathways. The design team has mapped the learner journey in detail from enrollment to employment to ensure they are prepared to help mitigate risks for their targeted adult learners, who are typically juggling multiple responsibilities.

INNOVATIVE DESIGN

Prince George's is moving toward a Competency-based Education (CBE) approach across the college. They are starting with three micro-pathways using a phased approach, given CBE requires extensive organizational change. CBE will provide learners who may be reluctant to attend college the flexibility they need. Not only will PGCC be instituting a flipped classroom approach, but they are thinking creatively about how to connect learners to employers and job opportunities through CBE.

“At PGCC, we believe Competency-based Education is a game changer. Even though our micro-pathways have been established to be flexible to meet learners where they are, connect them to jobs, and earn higher wages, the best way for us to do that is within a CBE model.”

JUNE EVANS
Design Team Lead, CCGEF and Director, Center for Innovation & Entrepreneurship Innovation Hub (INNOHUB)
Prince George's Community College

-about-

INSTITUTIONAL OVERVIEW

Name
Prince George's Community College

Location
Largo, Maryland

About
Prince George's Community College (PGCC) provides higher education to over 11,000 students in Prince George’s County, Maryland, in close proximity to Washington, D.C. The college prides itself in being a place where anyone can achieve their professional, educational and personal goals.

MICRO-PATHWAY

OCCUPATIONS

+ Healthcare Technician
+ Hospitality Leadership
+ IT Support Specialist

INNOVATIVE DESIGN

Holistic Advising Model for Noncredit Learners

Transition to Competency-Based Education

#flexible
#employer validated

- Healthcare Technician
- Hospitality Leadership
- IT Support Specialist
INSTITUTIONAL OVERVIEW

Austin Community College (ACC) is a nationally recognized two-year college that serves more than 70,000 students annually. The college is the primary gateway to higher education and career and technical training in Central Texas and strives to be a catalyst for social equity, economic development and personal enrichment.

About

Austin Community College (ACC) is a nationally recognized two-year college that serves more than 70,000 students annually. The college is the primary gateway to higher education and career and technical training in Central Texas and strives to be a catalyst for social equity, economic development and personal enrichment.

INNOVATIVE DESIGN

As is the case at most community colleges, there is little financial aid available to learners in noncredit programs. In Texas, there is the Texas Public Education Grant (TPEG) — this funding is limited — and only for learners who meet specific criteria. ACC has created its first-ever CE Scholarship Fund, which will provide a last-dollar funding source for learners who may not otherwise enroll in one of the college's two new Production Associate or Administrative Assistant/Business Office Technology micro-pathways. The CE Scholarship Fund was started with a $40,000 donation from a local community member and is being supplemented by a $50,000 deLaski Family Foundation gift and some of ACC's CCGEF grant funding. Learners can use the scholarships for tuition and the Microsoft Office exams for the Business Office Technology micro-pathway.

“The CE division is an on-ramp. We've been trying to make it a ‘seamless’ on-ramp, like on a freeway. We are using CE to get students up to speed for credit classes and on the same level as credit students. We started on this path about four years ago, but CCGEF is allowing us to do this quicker and better. Start here, get there is a catch phrase we have at ACC.”

DR. GRETCHEN RIEHL
Design lead, CCGEF and Associate Vice President, Workforce Education
Austin Community College

One of ACC’s most important goals for CCGEF is to make the noncredit-to-credit articulation process seamless to learners. Micro-pathway learners will start their programs on the noncredit side and can complete two certificates (foundational skills, then either technical or communication skills), which articulates to 14 or 19 credits toward a higher-level certificate and/or degree for a related occupation, per an agreement already established internally at ACC. Should learners choose to continue in the near- or long-term, upon earning at least one credit, all 14 or 19 credits will automatically transfer to their certificate and/or degree program. Learners are receiving one-on-one advising upon enrolling in the ACC micro-pathways and ongoing support and encouragement to continue as they reach their goals.

MICRO-PATHWAY OCCUPATIONS

+ Administrative Assistant
+ Production Associate

Seamless Noncredit to Credit Articulation
#flexible

Community College Growth Engine Fund

Design Insights
Design Insights from Key Stakeholders

At its core, human-centered design is built on empathy, and requires us to understand and engage those most proximate to the problem as experts. This section offers a wide range of insights gathered during the design year that are organized by key stakeholders who participated in the process, including learners, employers, and the staff and faculty of the colleges delivering them. Importantly, these insights continue to reinforce the design criteria of the micro-pathway model, which is two or more stackable credentials that can be achieved within less than a year and includes at least one 21st century skill micro-credential validated by employers and ultimately result in a job at or above the median wage.

These insights were gathered through multiple methods: formal feedback sessions the Lab and each college hosted with learners and employers; on-the-ground observations by design coaches and their conversations with the design teams; and early process evaluation findings from the Lab’s third-party evaluator, Urban Institute, based on interviews with members of the design teams, learners and employers.
#1 Learners need practical pathways with a clear return on investment (ROI).

Learners want to understand the total cost of pathways, in both time and money, as well as the value gained from the pathway. In order to understand that value, learners emphasized a need for high-level details from the outset of the program including skills, educational and career steps, job opportunities, and wage gains. Learners want to be confident that employers would hire micro-pathway completers. While cost is not a new concern, a changing landscape has put learners in greater control of their postsecondary destiny, giving them more pathway options to economic opportunities. As a result, institutions face enormous pressure to collaborate with employers to design models that are more affordable, delivered in a fast and flexible format, and yield greater economic outcomes for learner-earners.

**LEARNER VOICES**

“I wasn’t aware of the other opportunities my [credential] would lead to. I thought once I got my [credential], that was it. I would be interested in learning a lot more about that and I would bet that a lot of other drivers, after so many hours and so many miles, would be, too.”

A Learner who engaged in a College Prototype Feedback Session
#2 Learners need flexible micro-pathways that meet them where they are in their journey.

Learners appreciated the flexibility offered in the micro-pathways they reviewed. This meant flexibility in format and timing — part of the core design criteria. This also includes acknowledging and building on existing skills learners developed through previous life and work experiences. A working learner may need flexibility in their course hours to align with their work commitments and may need a pathway that can adequately account for their previous experience and skills.

#3 Learners want and need deeper and more extensive work-based learning.

Learners made an important distinction between having employers visit classes as guest speakers and being able to have actual, immersive experiences in the career field they are studying. They want to learn the industry jargon, meet people doing the work, and begin to understand the culture, all while establishing contacts to build a professional network that could help them land their first job in the field.

LEARNER VOICES

“In the COVID world with more offerings being online, making it more flexible, where you don’t have to travel to the campus...I think that would make this even more attractive.”

A Learner who engaged in a College Prototype Feedback Session

“We want to experience the workplace firsthand, see what programs they are using and how they solve client problems with the equipment and tools available.”

A Learner who engaged in a College Prototype Feedback Session

EDL TOOL HIGHLIGHT
Design Insights about Evolving Employer Needs + Mindsets

#1 Employers need learners to have work-based learning experiences.

Similar to what learners said they needed, employers look for learners who have gained hands-on or work-based experience to apply their skills. Employers seek applicants who have work-based experience whether it’s an internship, a job, volunteering, or a personal project they’ve built on their own. Applicants not only need to have this experience but also need to communicate their competencies and experiences through something like a portfolio.

Both learners and employers view work-based learning as a top priority, calling for institutions to integrate and/or deepen employer engagement as part of their program design. Instituting work-based learning requires a similar level of commitment from employers, as does engaging an employer partner as a co-designer and full-on partner. We outline how to get there in our Employer Engagement Guidebook.

EMPLOYER VOICES

“For us, it's a matter of being able to check the box... to say, 'Hey, this person has some experience kind of working in the office,' even if it's an informal capacity, even if it's an internship, even if it's volunteering. If they can talk about that, and if they have something to put in their resume, I think that just gets them to the table a lot faster.”

An Employer who participated in a T-profile Skills-mapping Session
#2 Employers see the micro-pathway co-design process as transformative to deepening their relationships with community colleges.

Employers have long provided guidance to educators preparing the future workforce, but traditionally, these exchanges have been episodic and limited. The CCGEF’s model of transforming that relationship to one of co-designer elevates what only businesses know about their technical and other skill needs and weaves it into the program development process.

Through the co-design process, we hosted a skill profiling session with each college, where employers were introduced to the Lab’s T-Profile. The T-Profile is a visual construct that represents the optimal combination of 21st century skills and technical skills for a specified job. It demonstrates mobility up and across career ladders, making explicit the range of motion of different skill sets. It is designed to help both institutions and employers identify and engage in meaningful conversations around technical and 21st century skills.

“Advising an occupational program and co-designing it are very different things. As a co-designer, we own it and can continuously bring insights from the workplace to the attention of program leaders and faculty, who constantly work with students—our future employees”

An Employer who participated in a T-profile Skills-mapping Session
#3 Employers strongly value training and credentialing for 21st century skills like communication, critical thinking and intercultural fluency.

Employer partners stated that though technical skills are essential for obtaining a job, keeping a job requires 21st century skills such as good “communication hygiene,” said one employer partner.

The Lab defines 21st century skills as the range of in-demand, higher-order human skills that cut across industries and job roles. After years of work with employers and educators, we’ve developed a competency framework for 21st century skills.

This involves understanding etiquette such as sending follow-up emails and thank-you notes. Employer partners appreciated the strong 21st century skills training and the focus on these types of skills in the

The Lab’s 21st Century Skills Micro-credentials, 21st Century Skills Competency Framework

EMPLOYER VOICES

“I think that whatever else you can do to really kind of bake into the program to teach that entry-level professionalism, so that they walk into the work world ready to go. Getting a job is only half of it, but keeping a job [is different].”

An Employer who engaged in a College Prototype Feedback Session
# Design Insights about Transforming Community Colleges

#1 The micro-pathway design process can serve as a gateway to institutional transformation.

The micro-pathway design criteria and process have provided an agile design channel to drive further institutional transformation. For example, this includes solving for the growing gulf between noncredit and credit-bearing courses. As most micro-pathways start in the noncredit division, the design teams were able to set up articulation processes that are learner friendly and supported by faculty. These "design channels" have also helped to further socialize and bring to life the value of embedding 21st century skill micro-credentials across curricula to ensure learner competencies are visible to employers.

College leaders are using micro-pathways as a testing bed to solve for:
- A mandate for more diverse and inclusive talent pipelines.
- Community college enrollment declines.
- Accelerated transition to a skills-based economy.
- Shifting learner-earner attitudes toward school and work.
- The continued impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

And more are all creating a perfect-storm effect that is pushing a new paradigm.
#2 Colleges used their micro-pathways to further collaborate with other mission-aligned regional ecosystem initiatives.

As community colleges are part of the public workforce system, they are often a core component of many system-level initiatives related to postsecondary education and workforce development, which can be difficult to map and connect. However, the design criteria of micro-pathways and the process used to develop them has been leveraged to help institutions further advance other strategic initiatives well beyond the scope of their participation in the Fund. Examples include Achieve60AZ for Pima Community College and 60X30 TX in Texas, both of which aim to enable 60% of adults to have postsecondary credentials by 2030. In New York City, CUNY colleges partnered with the New York Jobs CEO Council to focus on pathways to in-demand occupations with the city's 28 largest employers.

#3 Facilitated design processes with targeted tools and customized support are critical to accelerated design work.

Because college leaders and design teams are incredibly busy and often over-extended, there is a need for a third party intermediary partner to manage a clear and transparent design process that can help inform future planning and resource decisions. One example can be found in the use of the Lab’s "pressure tests" that created a mechanism to solicit learner and employer feedback to ensure the design is meeting both of their needs. The Lab’s T-Profile was also valuable, as it provided colleges with a tool and methodology to help employers map both the technical and 21st century skills that need to be designed into every micro-pathway. This tool helped to eliminate guesswork and accelerate alignment between colleges and employers.

We also consistently heard from participating colleges that they see the value of both human-centered design and the Lab’s Learner Engagement Framework in their work more broadly. Most plan to use similar approaches to strengthen upcoming initiatives and decisions.
#4 The colleges demonstrated the ability to innovate with limited resources.

One large, overarching theme emerged through our research: Designing micro-pathways in an accelerated interval requires critical resources including
+ A resilient internal infrastructure.
+ The ability to leverage influence to impact ecosystems.
+ The time and resources to invest in and incentivize innovation.

While additional capacity would have enabled the colleges to expand even further, they made the most of the resources despite the challenges. The Fund launched in the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, where we alongside our partners and the stakeholders involved in this work, were inspired to serve our communities and address the inequities amplified by the pandemic.

#5 Champions of this work must ensure buy-in from college leadership.

We are at a pivotal moment for forging the kind of robust changes needed to better serve new majority learners. While the need for strong leadership is not a new requirement for transformation, the micro-pathway design process involves nearly every department across the institution from marketing and communications, enrollment management, academic affairs, student support services, and more. Clear and consistent messaging from leadership to encourage active participation and buy-in to the design process is even more critical given the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Leaders in the cohort have expressed their clear intention to use the micro-pathway model and design process as a beachhead to broader institutional transformation.
A Future-Forward Letter on the Road Ahead

By Dr. Lisa Larson, Head of the Community College Growth Engine Fund
THE ROAD AHEAD

We are all continuing to find our way through the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, adjusting to new realities of living, working and thriving in our communities. The historic inequities new majority learners continue to face and the ongoing effects of systemic racism remain barriers in the way of learners being able to achieve their goals, gain skills, and earn family sustaining wages.

Higher education and employers have had to quickly adapt to ever-changing environments to meet the needs of new majority learners and workforce skill gaps. The impact of declining enrollments and low credential rates further demonstrate the need for new models and strategies.

The Community College Growth Engine Fund, in partnership with leader colleges, learners and employers, took on this challenge and used human-centered design to co-create over 30 micro-pathways across multiple high-demand workforce sectors and occupations. And this is just the first cohort.

Through this experience, our partners noted other critical outcomes that are important to their ongoing success, including stronger, more intentional employer partnerships; new or improved models of articulating learning experiences outside of the traditional classroom; the addition of key services including advising for all learners; and the recognition of the power of human-centered design in driving institutional change to better serve new majority learners.

This work is far from done. There is still much to do to remove barriers and improve economic mobility for the great majority of today’s earner-learners, who have been structurally left out. We start by prioritizing the needs of learners and employers in order to create and scale accessible, affordable, flexible, portable, relevant, and visible micro-pathways. Transforming long-standing views, cultures and institutions is required for lasting change and more equitable outcomes. A year from now, we should have substantial data from Cohort 1, both quantitative and qualitative, to confirm, in practice, that micro-pathways put new majority learners on a path to economic mobility. Micro-pathways (and the design criteria) is a “theory of change.” We are hopeful, and confident, based on the changes from the inaugural cohort, that micro-pathways can be the gateway to transformation.

Higher education, specifically community colleges, are in a unique position to improve social mobility and reduce economic disparities. As the economy continues to evolve, it is clear the future demands a system of higher education that is inclusive, responsive, dynamic and adaptable. We will soon begin our work with 13 new colleges in Cohort 2. We will continue to share proof points, tools and processes that will impact more learners and strengthen communities across the country. This is just the beginning. Let’s get going.

About
Dr. Lisa Larson

Dr. Larson, Head of the Community College Growth Engine Fund, has dedicated her career to advancing the mission of community colleges. Dr. Larson is committed to and passionate about creating partnerships that align education to workforce needs to support learners in gaining critical skills in high-demand, good-paying careers.

+ Connect with Dr. Larson
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