



# THE ACCELERATING OPPORTUNITY THEORY OF CHANGE

## OVERVIEW

A theory of change helps illustrate how activities lead to short- and long-term goals. It identifies stakeholders and levers for promoting change. A well-developed theory of change guides the initiative, and it creates consensus about the problem and how the initiative addresses it. This diagram shows what actions the stakeholders engaged in the initiative can take in order to achieve their interim and long-term goals.

### ACCELERATING OPPORTUNITY THEORY OF CHANGE—DEFINITIONS

#### STAKEHOLDERS & LEVERS

##### Stakeholders

Community/ technical colleges, ABE programs, higher ed agencies, state policymakers, federal agencies, CBOs, WIBs, employers, students, TA providers, philanthropic partners

##### Levers

Approaches that can be taken or domains that can be acted on to change behaviors, conditions, or attitudes

#### ACTIVITIES & INTERIM OUTCOMES

##### College & Career Pathways

Evidence-based instructional and programmatic models that promote transition to and completion of credentialing programs in high-demand fields

##### Culture Shift

Changes in attitude that lead to viewing ABE students as valued members of the community college population

##### Scale & Sustainability

Growth in the proportion of students participating in integrated college and career pathways within and across colleges and states, and the capacity to sustain pathway innovations

#### LONG-TERM GOALS

##### System

Governing or coordinating higher education agencies, public higher education institutions, related state agencies (e.g., workforce development, labor, commerce), employers, and community-based providers working in concert to develop labor-market-ready adults with marketable postsecondary credentials

##### Students

Low-skill adult learners in community college-based ABE, ESL, and ASE programs

# ASSUMPTIONS

A theory of change is based on assumptions about people, environments, and program models. Surfacing these assumptions early on can help the team identify opportunities and spot potential pitfalls.

## UNDERLYING ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT THE ACCELERATING OPPORTUNITY MODEL

It is possible to acquire or improve basic skills in reading, writing, and math while simultaneously learning occupational/technical skills along an intentional career pathway. They do not have to be done in a sequence. This assumption is based on studies of I-BEST.

It is possible to hire the right faculty or to train existing faculty necessary to support this model.

Aligning ABE and college assessment statewide will make it easier to develop and pilot ABE programs that are integrated into the postsecondary credential pipeline.

## ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT STUDENTS

Many more students who restart their education in basic-skills classes are capable of gaining the skills needed to advance to college if they have access to an integrated occupational/technical skill training within a pathway that is simplified and transparent.

A higher proportion of ABE students will complete a credential if enrolled in intensive programs that reduce the time required to attain skills and credentials with labor market value, ideally to one year or less.

Providing ABE students with comprehensive supports will make it more likely they transition to credit-bearing courses and earn credentials.

Basic-skills students will pay tuition (or campuses and state policy will support innovative ways for ABE students to access Pell funds) for intensive career pathway training that delivers a credential with labor market value.

Students who participate in Accelerating Opportunity will be much more likely to bypass one or more levels of developmental education, saving time and money and improving the likelihood of attaining a credential.

## ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT COLLEGES

Colleges, through their top leadership and through individual program champions at lower levels, can drive change in instructional practice, program alignment, and other reforms that facilitate the transition of adult learners from ABE to careers and credentials.

Colleges will consider ABE students part of the postsecondary pipeline.

Colleges will be willing to make this shift, given state policy support, even in the absence of performance-based funding or direct incentives to improve for ABE student outcomes.

This model can be seen as part of a completion agenda and can benefit from momentum around completion.

## ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT THE LABOR MARKET

Employers will generate demand for these credentials and students.

The kinds of credentials these programs will produce are enough to create family-supporting wages for graduates, though it may take more than one credential to do so.

Students who gain basic reading, writing, and math skills through integrated programs can obtain a short-term credential, hold a job in their field of study, and compete in the labor market with people who had high school-level skills before obtaining the certificate.

## ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT SCALING UP THE ACCELERATING OPPORTUNITY MODEL

The essential design elements of Accelerating Opportunity can be replicated.

Success with this model in a few colleges will ignite change in others in their state and elsewhere in the country.

## ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT FINANCING

States will be able to support increased ABE by braiding funding from different sources (e.g., repurposing existing funding; tapping new or existing sources of funding).

Increasing the alignment of ABE to the other postsecondary education systems within colleges will create clearer pathways from Accelerating Opportunity and potentially make more funding available for basic-skills education.

State, institutional, and political will to repurpose or braid existing money exists or can be created.

Multiple states will be able to solve the “financial aid problem” (access to aid for those without GED or diploma, and eligibility of contextualized technical programs).

Emerging evidence and the resources from this initiative can change attitudes about this population enough to propel systems’ change and investment.

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**Jobs for the Future** works with our partners to design and drive the adoption of education and career pathways leading from college readiness to career advancement for those struggling to succeed in today's economy.



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