# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Role of Policy in <em>Accelerating Opportunity</em></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roles and Responsibilities</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. POLICY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS MODEL</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Policy</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translation</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation and Local Policy</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. POLICY PRINCIPLES</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systems and Culture Change</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scale and Sustainability</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback Loops and Information Dissemination</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrating Hard and Soft Policy</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. STATE POLICY TEAM</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assembling the State Policy Team</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. YEAR ONE: KEY TASKS</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Outreach and Information Gathering</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Policy Work Plan</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. ACCOUNTABILITY AND MEASURING PROGRESS</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX: POLICY RESOURCES FOR <em>ACCELERATING OPPORTUNITY</em></td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DRAFT
INTRODUCTION

This guide is a reference point for state policy teams and their colleges as they move through Year One of the implementation stage of *Accelerating Opportunity*. The structural principles in it provide a framework for state policy work. JFF encourages state policy teams to refer to it often, especially early on, as they implement work plans and long-term goals. Implementation coaches and policy coaches can help answer questions about the guide.

The guide builds off of earlier *Accelerating Opportunity* policy resources distributed during the design phase. Principal among these is the State Policy Framework, a tool JFF developed to organize the state- and system-level policies impacting the ability of institutions to support their ABE students from enrollment to graduation. The framework consists of five broad categories: Data and Analysis, Program Redesign, Aligned Expectations, Assessment and Referral, and Finance (see box on page 2). Additionally, this guide expands on previous discussions conducted with each state team about how policy efforts will support *Accelerating Opportunity*, and the roles and expectations of the state policy team members and JFF policy coaches.

The *Accelerating Opportunity* implementation states all have similar governance models in which Adult Basic Education is part of the postsecondary system. This guide may not apply to states with different governance structures.
Accelerating Opportunity State Policy Categories

**DATA AND ANALYSIS**

States and systems need to set specific goals and benchmarks for ABE students around persistence, progression, and credential attainment linked to labor market demand. To succeed in this endeavor, states must support postsecondary data collection, disaggregation, analysis, reporting, and use. This data system should be integrated with other critical state databases and be reported in a publically accessible format. Policies must be in place to ensure that college staff receive appropriate training related to data.

**PROGRAM REDESIGN**

States must encourage institutions to implement new practices and designs aimed at improving the success rates for adult education students. Without clear incentives or support, many colleges may consider it too risky to pursue new programmatic approaches and student support strategies. States must also provide guidance around the types of redesign model that work and how best to implement them.

**ALIGNMENT**

To reduce system misalignments that begin at the state level and filter down to college-level programs, states need to align strategic priorities across education and workforce agencies and develop shared goals and initiatives. Policy efforts focused on bridging entry, exit, and content standards for adult education, remedial education, and workforce development and occupational programs are critical for improving the progression of ABE students. Additionally, the policy work should take into account the curricular connections between precollege and college-level courses to ensure that graduates from one area can move seamlessly into the next.

**ASSESSMENT, REFERRAL, AND PLACEMENT**

Poorly defined or poorly assessed diagnostic criteria can significantly hinder student success at multiple points in the ABE-to-credential student pipeline. Policy efforts aimed at standardizing assessments, cut scores, and placement criteria can go a long way toward ensuring that students take appropriate courses and remain enrolled. Additionally, it is the interventions associated with the cut scores that are most critical. Targeted assessments aligned with college readiness can lead to significantly accelerated pathways for low-skilled adult students.

**FINANCE**

Targeted financial aid and institutional funding policies at both the college and individual levels can significantly affect student success. For low-skilled adult students, financial aid must be flexible and support acceleration strategies. For the college, state funding formulas need to incentivize student progression and completion but not by encouraging the production of lower-quality credentials.
THE ROLE OF POLICY IN ACCELERATING OPPORTUNITY

State, system and institutional policy play a critical role in supporting the attainment of credentials and degrees for adult basic education students. States can create policy conditions that encourage the identification, dissemination, and implementation of strategies that improve credential attainment and jobs for our nation’s most underprepared adult learners. A strong understanding of the policy environment that exists within your state and at the institutional level, and your state’s capacity for policy change, are critical pre-conditions for identifying and developing effective, high-leverage impact strategies.

Accelerating Opportunity focuses on both the development and implementation of high-impact state policies. This effort goes beyond many other state policy initiatives in that it emphasizes the translation and implementation of state or system policy at the college level, as well as college-to-system feedback loops to ensure that policy change efforts are reactive and real-time. JFF believes that a comprehensive view of policy is critical to ensuring the success of the initiative.

Policy change in support of the Accelerating Opportunity goals goes beyond the initiative’s formal policy components. Policy is embedded in and supportive of other key strategies as well, including those focused on scale and sustainability, professional development, and funding and finance. Policy is the connective tissue that pulls these efforts together. The policy component of Accelerating Opportunity will help ensure that the efforts of implementation states over the next three years meet or exceed expectations.

This guide:

> Outlines the theory behind policy development and implementation in Accelerating Opportunity;

> Establishes the Accelerating Opportunity policy principles;

> Describes the composition of a state policy team, the roles of its members, and the role of technical assistance from JFF;

> Summarizes the major policy activities in Year One, including the basic ways policy efforts will be evaluated and monitored during the initiative; and

> Recommends ways in which states can interface with their demonstration colleges to ensure successful attainment of policy goals.
ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Jobs for the Future is committed to helping implementation states achieve their policy goals. Each year, JFF will offer each implementation state:

> A dedicated policy coach to provide on-demand technical assistance;
> Quarterly check-in calls to discuss policy efforts;
> One policy site visit (the first is tentatively scheduled for late summer/early fall 2012), following by a memo (our formative feedback process) outlining major observations and recommendations;
> Assistance with developing and updating policy work plans (based on the policy levers identified by the state during the design phase of Accelerating Opportunity);
> Policy sessions in connection with Accelerating Opportunity national meetings (in May and October of each year);
> Periodic policy webinars; and
> Access to federal policy efforts toward better aligning federal Department of Labor and Department of Education policies to support integrated pathways.

JFF also will work closely with states to find policy solutions and alternative funding strategies to alleviate the negative effect of recent changes to federal student financial aid that eliminated eligibility for students without a high school diploma or GED (Ability to Benefit).

Each implementation state will:

> Establish an active state policy team focused on implementing the policy levers identified during the design phase of Accelerating Opportunity;
> Include college representatives and individuals outside the postsecondary system office on the policy team;
> As needed, update the original policy levers to reflect progress, emerging barriers and unanticipated changes in state or system policy environments;
> Participate in check-in calls each quarter and host one site visit from a JFF policy coach each year; and
> Submit two policy progress reports per year using a template provided by JFF;
I. POLICY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS MODEL

Accelerating Opportunity emphasizes the entirety of the policy development process, from state-level policy creation to college translation and application. Since colleges do the critical work of educating students, Accelerating Opportunity emphasizes that policy is both supportive of college efforts, and implemented as intended at the local level. JFF created the Accelerating Opportunity Policy Development Process Model with this primary goal in mind. We hope that it will serve as a guiding framework as the state teams go about the difficult task of creating effective policy to support integrated pathways within their state colleges. The following section illustrates the model and provides a description of each of the key components.

Accelerating Opportunity Policy Development Process Model

STATE POLICY

The community college system office, in partnership with other state agencies and the legislative branch of state government, enacts policy changes to promote the implementation, scale up, and impact of integrated pathways models. Types of policy at this level include legislation, regulatory changes (e.g., by a board of education, system office, or workforce development agency), enforcement of practices, clarification memos or other information sharing on existing policies, large-scale professional development, collaborative efforts (e.g., data sharing agreements; braided funding), and efforts to respond to new strategic goals.
TRANSLATION

When state-level policy changes are implemented at the institutional level, a translation process takes place in which broad policies are adapted to fit local environments. Effective translation – ensuring that institutional practitioners accurately understand a policy and are able to implement it as intended – is critical to maintaining the integrity of each state’s Accelerating Opportunity policy effort. Mistranslation can occur for many reasons, including: obscure or purposely vague language; informal networks; local autonomy; lack of enforcement; policy conflicts; excessive regulation; and underfunding (see box on page 7).

IMPLEMENTATION AND LOCAL POLICY

Implementation refers to how and to what degree the college puts state policy into practice. Effective policy must be part of an information feedback loop: states craft policy based on feedback from local institutions, then monitor local implementation to identify further changes. This cyclical relationship is critical to the success of Accelerating Opportunity.

However, it is not enough to change state policy and monitor its enactment at the local level. Most likely, institutions also will need to change their own local policies to support integrated pathways and help ensure that the college’s cultural norms adjust to better support adult education students. Implementation and institution-level policy changes go hand in hand and often require cross-department collaboration. These changes are often entirely local, but state guidance in terms of best practice or professional development can be beneficial.

EXAMPLES OF INSTITUTION-LEVEL POLICY CHANGE TO SUPPORT ACCELERATING OPPORTUNITY

> Success Coaches: The college hires full-time case managers, each of whom provides a single point of contact for all integrated pathways students.

> Student Success Steering Committee: The college establishes a cross-departmental steering committee focused on finding better ways to move students from noncredit to credit and into the workforce.

> Partnership Development: The college reaches out to WIBs, CBOs, and local foundations to develop better on ramps for students, establish cost-sharing agreements, and designate resources to support students along career pathways.

> Access to Benefits: The college develops a comprehensive system for identifying public benefits and steering students to them.
### Policy Translation Challenges and Solutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Translation Problems</th>
<th>Examples of Solutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Obscure language</strong></td>
<td>Intentionally or unintentionally, colleges can incorrectly interpret the wording in state policies. Without clarification from lead agencies, this translation may weaken, or even contradict, the intent of the initial policy change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Informal networks</strong></td>
<td>Local practitioners may turn to colleagues to clarify ambiguities. This can spread misinformation and create more entrenched misinterpretation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Local autonomy</strong></td>
<td>In states where postsecondary system offices have little governing authority, policy changes are often non-binding at the local level. Unsupported or misunderstood policy risks being ignored or less-than-fully implemented or applied.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lack of enforcement</strong></td>
<td>It is not always clear which state agency or entity is charged with enforcing a particular policy, leading to situations where accountability may be weak or nonexistent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Policy conflicts</strong></td>
<td>When multiple state agencies and multiple funding streams are involved, there is a risk of actual or perceived contradictions among policies. This may create paralysis at the local level, with institutional staff unsure which policy takes precedence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Excessive Regulation</strong></td>
<td>With overly regulated policy areas, practitioners may have trouble keeping track of all the rules involved or opt to not participate in an initiative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Underfunding</strong></td>
<td>Asking colleges to undertake programs that add a financial burden can significantly reduce support for an initiative. This is particularly important for new policies that run the risk of being seen as an “unfunded mandate.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
II. POLICY PRINCIPLES

Policy is a means to achieve the ambitious goals set out by Accelerating Opportunity and by each implementation state. To facilitate the policy change process, JFF has identified four guiding policy principles that we encourage each state to consider as it implements its policy work plan:

> Systems and culture change;
> Scale and sustainability;
> Feedback loops and information dissemination;
> Integrating hard and soft policy.

JFF will return to these principles repeatedly as part of our technical assistance over the next three years. We will also work to provide detailed examples of how other states have achieved them through similar policy initiatives.

SYSTEMS AND CULTURE CHANGE

A primary goal of Accelerating Opportunity is deep and lasting culture change around the value of integrated pathways for low-skilled adult learners. This effort focuses on changing attitudes among college staff and students, policymakers, and other stakeholders so that they see ABE students as valued members of the community college population, capable of earning college-level credentials and deserving of an equitable share of state and federal educational resources.

PRINCIPLES CHECKLIST: SYSTEM AND CULTURE CHANGE

> Think actively about system change. Set system and culture change targets for every policy goal, and align each to action steps.
> For each policy effort, develop action items or interim points that focus explicitly on strategies for engaging key stakeholders.
> Measure culture and system change over time. Comparing standardized information gathering systems from year to year (surveys, interviews, listening tours) is a good way to do this.
Policy plays two roles in facilitating culture change:

As an *active promoter*, policy encourages practitioners to embrace the *Accelerating Opportunity* model through policy strategies centered on engagement and consensus building. This approach might include creating cross-agency or cross-institution working groups for stakeholders to engage one another and centering professional development on bringing together national experts and individuals new to integrated pathways. State teams cannot expect culture shift to happen “organically” within three years. An active, guided effort is necessary to accelerate the process.

The second role is *troubleshooting*. The state must avoid or remove policies that constrain the ability of practitioners to be innovative around acceleration strategies. Poorly designed policy—unfunded, contradictory, unclear, top heavy, overregulated, or excessively punitive—has the potential to break down trust and could undermine implementation. If institutional staff and faculty feel that state policy efforts are inadequately designed or implemented, they are less likely to support the initiative, even if they support integrated pathways in general.

**SCALE AND SUSTAINABILITY**

*Accelerating Opportunity* has ambitious goals for both scale and sustainability. Moreover, it asks states to consider scale and sustainability as a core component of policy from the very first day. Consider the following, excerpted from the *Accelerating Opportunity* Coaches Guide:

- Scaling and sustainability strategies are not just about numbers and enrollments, states and colleges must also work on breaking down silos for expansion within the college, while also building out integrated pathways across the state.
- Sustainability requires not just a long-term plan for funding and to manage assets and resources as a result of braided funding, but also includes the capacity to mobilize those resource well after the grant is over. Sustainability includes a high priority being placed on “shift in reform ownership” in which the key stakeholders exercise responsibility and authority. Planning to increase funding and staff capacity to match the targeted growth in the I-BEST models is essential.

---

**PRINCIPLES CHECKLIST: SCALE AND SUSTAINABILITY**

> Include scale and sustainability as an agenda item at each state policy team meeting, and emphasize both from the first day of the implementation phase.

> Regularly identify and engage potential scale-up/sustainability partners, including, but not limited to, employers, foundations, state agencies, legislators, and community-based organizations. Keep in mind that scale and sustainability partners do more than provide funding.

> Set scale and sustainability targets as part of each policy goal.
This approach requires deliberate engagement—it is not enough to assume that long-term plans for the state or any work groups include these goals. Nor should state teams wait until Year Three to think actively about scale and sustainability. Instead, consider scale and sustainability as measures for all policy change, at every step in the implementation process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale and Sustainability Through Policy: A Braided Funding Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Good</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The state forms a work group consisting of college, system office, and workforce development staff focused on braiding funds to support integrated pathways at Accelerating Opportunity colleges. The group conducts a funding audit and identifies funding streams with overlapping outcomes measures (i.e. target population). With the help of Accelerating Opportunity colleges, the group develops a Braided Funding Guide to help other colleges use the identified funding streams. In addition, the team secures in-kind and cash funding commitments for Accelerating Opportunity pathways from state agencies and local foundations. The resources available to Accelerating Opportunity colleges increase significantly each year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Better</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The work group identifies possible funding streams, with an emphasis on sustainability (i.e. not one-time investments) and availability to all colleges in the state. The group identifies and begins recruiting possible funding partners. The roll out of the Braided Funding Guide is accompanied by professional development and communication plans to encourage their use. The group evaluates the impact of better funding integration, both fiscally and in terms of impact on student success. MOUs signed with funding partners extend past the Accelerating Opportunity grant period. State legislators and/or the governor’s office express interest in further expansion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Best</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The work group is designated as a standing state-level committee charged with integrating workforce and education funding streams. The group emphasizes scale, sustainability, and diversity in its initial funding audit. There is a heavy emphasis on engaging employers and public-private partnerships. The group defines its mission and sets funding and college-impact goals for three, five, and ten years. Braided funds include performance-based funds or other incentives to encourage colleges to participate and programs to innovate. Braided funds support sustainability (e.g., permanent student success coach positions, professional development, team-teaching FTE reimbursements) at the college level. Targeted state appropriation is secured.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FEEDBACK LOOPS AND INFORMATION DISSEMINATION

Lack of clear communication is a major impediment to policy reform efforts. Without knowing the experiences of local practitioners, state agencies cannot craft effective policies. The same is true for federal agencies as they shape national strategies, or JFF as we work to effect policy reform among Accelerating Opportunity states.

All of the partners engaged in the policy aspects of Accelerating Opportunity must work to ensure that information flows effectively both upward and downward. State teams must engage a range of staff from the colleges on a regular basis around policy changes (both those made and those under consideration). Ways to do this include listening tours (see Section IV, page 17), conducting interviews and surveys, or by including college staff on the state policy team.

INTEGRATING HARD AND SOFT POLICY

The Accelerating Opportunity definition of state policy is necessarily flexible. In some instances, “policy change” applies to the more traditional definition that policymakers are familiar with, including rule changes (e.g., legislation, regulations, and guidelines), formal agreements tied to outcomes (e.g., MOUs, contracts, state grants), and definitional clarifications that have broad impacts across entire systems. These types of policy are often mandatory, requiring college staff to change behavior, and they are critical to ensuring that ambitious initiatives like Accelerating Opportunity succeed.

Accelerating Opportunity also embraces a wider ranging definition of policy. In this sense, the term “policy change” is more about shifting educational practice through professional development and culture change. This type of policy hinges on building buy-in among key constituents. It also requires that system and institutional staff collaborate to ensure that recommended changes are enacted.

PRINCIPLES CHECKLIST: FEEDBACK LOOPS AND INFORMATION DISSEMINATION

- Establish a system for identifying inefficiencies in policy translation and implementation from the state level to the local level.
- Incorporate communications strategies to improve efficiency.
- Measure improvement in state-to-local implementation.

PRINCIPLES CHECKLIST: INTEGRATING HARD AND SOFT POLICY

- Reevaluate the policy levers from the perspective of integrated hard and soft policy strategies.
- Create an evaluation system that looks at the institutional impact of policy on Accelerating Opportunity. Ensure that this process takes into account both hard and soft policy and barriers to success.
- Effectively implement the state’s three or four levers initially identified, and go beyond hard or “traditional” policy efforts (e.g., engage in the development of state professional development efforts, communication plans, and scale/sustainability plans).
The contrast between these two types of policy is captured in the terms “hard” policy (rules, regulations, and formal agreements) and “soft” policy (consensus building; standardization of practice). Focusing primarily on hard policies limits effectiveness for several reasons:

> **Governance**: Every community college system operates to varying degrees on a shared governance model that requires consensus, not top-down fiat, to ensure success.

> **Implementation processes**: State regulations are often unavoidably or intentionally ambiguous and require local translation. All hard policies are vulnerable to this distortion effect.

> **Buy-in**: Institutional staff who are not engaged throughout the policy design and implementation process will feel disconnected from an initiative and less likely to provide the critical mass necessary to ensure maximum impact and culture shift.

JFF strongly encourages state policy teams to consider both hard and soft policies as they think about policy levers and other policy efforts aimed at improving the adoption, expansion, and sustainability of integrated pathways models.
III. STATE POLICY TEAM

The state policy team is the primary engine for state- and system-level policy change guided by the policy levers outlined in each state’s *Accelerating Opportunity* implementation plan. This task goes further than simply following the steps outlined in the policy levers of that plan. On the one hand, the policy team should take a broad perspective, ensuring that the state policy environment is or will become supportive of cross-agency collaboration in scaling up and sustaining integrated pathways. On the other hand, the policy team should go deeper as well, ensuring that state-level policy efforts are impactful as intended at the institutional level.

The state policy team will need to include the right mix of individuals to ensure that policy efforts are both broad and deep. The team should include state agency, community college system, and institutional staff. It is likewise critical to include college-level representatives who can speak to local conditions, as well as other individuals below the state agency level. The group must include participants who are enthusiastic about the goals of *Accelerating Opportunity*, will actively engage around policy efforts, and (where applicable) are empowered to enact change in their own organization.

A high-functioning state policy team can pay major dividends. Beyond ensuring that the state reaches its policy goals, the team also serves as a vehicle for communication among individuals who come from distinct departments and agencies but share common workforce development, education, and employment goals. This kind of ongoing relationship promotes collaboration; it also reduces the barriers created when various policy efforts take place in separate silos. It can also serve as an on ramp for connecting with traditionally less engaged, but no less critical, constituencies like employers and statewide community-based organizations. Additionally, the state policy team can bring a collective political weight to bear on challenging policy issues. This includes efforts to increase funding or engage the governor’s office or state legislators.
ASSEMBLING THE STATE POLICY TEAM

There is no “best” group of policy team members. The following list is meant only as a reference for the state teams as they consider whom to include on their policy team, and it should not be considered proscriptive:

- *Accelerating Opportunity* state policy lead (if this is not the state lead, that person needs to be on the team as well)
- *Accelerating Opportunity* state coordinator
- Community college system/postsecondary agency staff, including: the state adult education director, an institutional research department representative, the professional/technical or workforce education director, a student support services director, and/or a representative from Academic Affairs
- Staff from leading community colleges, including a college president or designee, the financial aid/registrar, the CTE dean, the ABE dean or director, a student support services representative, and/or ABE and CTE instructors
- Governor’s education policy advisor
- State workforce development agency staff
- Staff from the state health and human services departments
- Business leaders in industry sectors with strong labor demand and career advancement potential
- Members of local Workforce Investment Boards
- College or State Board of Trustees members
- State legislators
- Representatives of regional foundations or large community-based organizations

Consider the policy team as a sub set of your implementation team with a few additional members, not a parallel or competitive structure. The policy team does not need to be large, nor does it need to meet as a full group more than quarterly. Subgroups focused on specific policy goals or themes (i.e., sustainability; communication feedback; improving implementation efficiency) can handle matters that come up more frequently. Also, the team can add new members as needed, especially to address policy barriers from a new direction or build statewide support for *Accelerating Opportunity*.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE STATE POLICY TEAM

- Set the state policy agenda, incorporating the *Accelerating Opportunity* Policy Principles (see Section 2).
- Actively work to implement state policy goals and achieve scale and sustainability.
- Update the policy work plan as needed.
- Submit progress reports twice a year to JFF.
- Engage other *Accelerating Opportunity* workgroups in the state.
- Work with the *Accelerating Opportunity* evaluation team to measure the impact of policy change in the state.
- Advise and engage key stakeholders.
IV. YEAR ONE: KEY TASKS

The first year of implementing *Accelerating Opportunity* will set the tone and deeply affect the outcomes in subsequent years. This is as true for policy as it is for any other key strategy identified by a state implementation team. To maximize success early in the initiative’s lifespan, the following key tasks should take place during Year One:

> Form or refine the State Policy Team ([see Section III](#)).

> Conduct outreach to the colleges to illuminate the local policy environments and heighten attention to improving the efficiency of state-to-college policy implementation. A *policy listening tour* or summit would be a recommended, but not required, way to do this.

> Work with your policy coach to accomplish the interim points outlined in your policy work plan and submit bi-annual progress reports (due in June and December – a template will be provided by JFF)

COLLEGE OUTREACH AND INFORMATION GATHERING

There is no better way to understand the policy environment as it is experienced by college and ABE staff than by asking them directly. JFF recommends that each *Accelerating Opportunity* state gather key information on the institutional policy environment (the translation, implementation and local policy components of the model) related to integrated pathways. We recommend doing this by conducting a listening tour that goes to each implementation college. If that is not feasible, the state team can convene key individuals from all the implementation colleges for a one-time policy “information-gathering” meeting focused on integrated pathways, or reach out via phone interviews or online surveys to gather information. Target college staff might include community college presidents, deans, faculty, and financial aid and student services staff.

Information gathering is central to the process of identifying myths and misinformation ([see Section II](#)). Often, it can be more valuable to clarify a policy than to craft a new one or revise an existing one. However, the state policy team can only identify these inefficiencies by directly engaging local faculty and staff. The state team can also identify the sources of information (e.g., websites, colleagues, documents) utilized by institutional staff when they
need clarification on a policy. JFF recommends that state teams engage their colleges not only around state policies but also around federal policy issues, in both cases with an eye for barriers and misinformation.

JFF recommends that state teams utilize the Accelerating Opportunity Policy Development Model and five policy “buckets” (Data and Analysis; Program Redesign; Aligned Expectations; Assessment, Referral, and Placement; and Finance) to ensure that their information gathering efforts are comprehensive. Examples of topics to cover during an information gathering campaign include the following:

**Barriers**

- Major policy concerns (current and anticipated)
- Non-standardized practices or a lack of coherent policy
- State/federal policy mistranslation or misinformation
- State/federal policy in conflict with local policy
- State/federal policy is ignored
- State/federal policy is unclear
- Unnecessary or burdensome policies
- Unenforced state policy

**Needs**

- Funding sources for Accelerating Opportunity pathways, especially tuition and wraparound services.
- Integration of the Accelerating Opportunity model with the broader college structure (e.g., steering committee, coordinator role and authority, and “parent” department housing Accelerating Opportunity)
- High-need professional development
- Requests for assistance, new policies, and removal of current policies
- Ways to incorporate scale and sustainability

**Opportunities**

- Local practice/policy that compliments or improves state/federal policy
- Good use of data to inform decision making
- Sources of information that individuals use to clarify policy confusion
Effective ways to secure buy-in around integrated pathways

External partnerships, especially with WIBs, CBOs, and employers

The state policy team should release key findings from the information gathering effort as part of a public campaign to raise support for integrated pathways. This report can provide a baseline assessment for measuring policy progress, especially if compared against similar information gathering efforts in Year Three of the initiative. In addition, it can help establish a platform for scaling the initiative by proactively capturing local policy barriers which can make attracting colleges an easier process.

STATE POLICY WORK PLAN

Each Accelerating Opportunity state has prepared an initial three-year policy work plan. Your policy coach will work with you to implement the key interim points outlined in your work plan for Year One, and JFF asks that each state submit a written update of their progress against the plan twice per year. JFF expects each state to make at least 80 percent progress against their initial policy work plan by the end of the three-year implementation phase.

A LISTENING TOUR

If the state decides to pursue a listening tour, here are the key elements to consider:

A policy listening tour, conducted by system-level staff, is built around a series of in-person interviews with institutional staff (and local partners, where applicable) focused on illuminating each college’s policy environment with respect to Accelerating Opportunity. They require significant resources to conduct and are therefore an optional part of Accelerating Opportunity. However, JFF recommends that state teams consider them as they offer an excellent opportunity to understand how state policy is translated at the institutional level.

Click here to read the report of a listening tour conducted in North Carolina for the Achieving the Dream initiative.
V. ACCOUNTABILITY AND MEASURING PROGRESS

JFF will manage a national third-party evaluation to provide policymakers and the field with a comprehensive body of evidence that integrates all components of the initiative and its impact. The evaluation will generate evidence for state and federal policymakers, college administrators, funders, and other stakeholders about: the process of implementing integrated college and career pathway designs and taking these designs to scale; their impact for Adult Basic Education students in college and in the labor market; and their cost effectiveness and financial sustainability.

Policy change will receive close scrutiny in this evaluation. JFF will work with states to develop customized, mutually acceptable evaluation plans to help each policy team reach its goals.

JFF and the evaluation team will most often focus on process in terms of policy change—progress toward each state’s self-defined goals—and such qualitative measures as culture shift rather than on direct quantitative impacts.

This is a reflection of the difficulty inherent in policy evaluation. For one, it is a challenge to measure the impact of broad efforts driven by state-level policy (e.g., improved student services; database integration to specific student outcomes). The many variables in these circumstances make it too difficult to determine causality. Also, policy moves slowly, so the impact of changes may not manifest themselves clearly and fully until years later.

Evaluation will combine three key components: progress against the state policy work plan; policy updates; and a formal evaluation.
Each year, JFF will provide each state policy team with a customized reporting template focused on a policy update over the prior year. The template will seek to capture the policy team’s challenges and successes, including efforts focused on scale and sustainability, culture change, and policy implementation. These reports, along with information collected by the state and policy coaches, will provide evaluation data and serve as a primary resource for developing targeted technical assistance.

The third-party evaluation will examine policy change at both the state and institutional levels. The evaluation teams will address policy-related questions in their qualitative interviews and will collect data related to policy. The evaluation teams will be in touch with specifics at a later date.
APPENDIX.
POLICY RESOURCES
FOR ACCELERATING OPPORTUNITY

Data and Analysis


This paper describes how *Shifting Gears* states use data to foster improvements in policy and practices. It highlights the “lessons learned” from the work to date.


This policy brief explores how states can balance the interests of accountability and privacy. It describes how five *Achieving the Dream* states and several other states have addressed the collection and use of student record data within the limits and constraints set by federal privacy laws, with particular reference to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).


[http://workingpoorfamilies.org/pdfs/WPFPPolicybrief-fall09.pdf](http://workingpoorfamilies.org/pdfs/WPFPPolicybrief-fall09.pdf)

This policy brief examines the issues associated with creating, improving and connecting state postsecondary, adult education and skills development data systems. It also identifies barriers states may encounter and overcome, profiles model state systems, and makes policy recommendations to help state advocates build or improve their state data systems.
This paper discusses the importance of systems that contain an individual electronic record for each student. It outlines 15 essential elements that a postsecondary data set should have to inform a complete analysis of educational pipeline issues and outcomes.

Prepared for Achieving the Dream, this report identifies essential features of a system to measure the performance of state community colleges. It also describes the essential features of state data systems to support performance measurement.

This study examines how the 34 community and technical colleges in Washington State are implementing the I-BEST model and how I-BEST programs operate.

This study examines the design and implementation of an initiative to enable students to “stack” various types of education and training into a certificate or degree. The report includes: the context for Ohio Stackable Certificates, including legislation and stakeholder perceptions; barriers that adults must overcome to succeed in postsecondary education; national and Ohio best practices for engaging adults in postsecondary education; a framework for Ohio Stackable Certificates; and case studies.
This report provides step-by-step instructions for building career pathways on the regional level and discusses how state-level officials can support regional efforts.

Alignment


http://www.jff.org/publications/workforce/better-together-realigning-pre-college-s/176

This publication offers examples of states that have aligned their adult and developmental education systems.


This paper discusses sophisticated “spidering” and artificial intelligence technologies that can aggregate and analyze online job ads and provide a more comprehensive, “real-time” source of information about the hiring and skill needs of local employers. Analyses of online job ads could complement traditional ways that community colleges determine labor market demand for program and course offerings.

Assessment, Referral & Placement


This Achieving the Dream brief describes the experiences of Virginia, Connecticut, and North Carolina as they revised their placement assessment policies. It also explores current policies in all states and makes recommendations for states that seek to evaluate and revise their policies.

This brief examines the role of developmental assessment, the validity of the most common assessments, and emerging directions in assessment policy and practice.


This policy brief, created for Achieving the Dream, describes some of the options and tradeoffs states encounter as they make state-level developmental education placement policy.

Finance


This toolkit is designed to help interagency state teams identify and use federal resources to support career pathway models. Using the Funding Options Worksheet and the ten Federal Program Summaries, state teams can identify and facilitate “braiding” of federal resources to design and develop career pathways and bridges into them for adults and out-of-school youth. An accompanying Webinar: Dollars and Sense—Using Federal Resources to Fund Career Pathways and Bridges http://www.clasp.org/postsecondary/publication?id=0840&list=publications shows how the toolkit can help interagency state teams braid together federal funds to create a customized career pathways funding strategy.
http://www.clasp.org/postsecondary/publication?id=0853&list=publications

The Annie E. Casey Foundation’s Center for Working Families approach revolves around offering clients a set of focused bundled services in three overlapping areas: employment and career advancement; income enhancements and work supports; and financial and asset building services. A key aspect of the model is that programs bundle and sequence services. This toolkit describe federal funding programs, with a focus on the components of the integrated strategy that might be publicly supported, the eligible populations and use of funds, and possible issues that might arise.

http://www.jff.org/publications/education/pushing-envelope-state-policy-innovation/177

This publication profiles 12 states that have amended or created student aid programs to better serve adult students.

http://www.clasp.org/admin/site/publications/files/Ability-to-Benefit-Final.pdf

This brief describes a policy allowing students without a high school diploma or GED to qualify for federal student aid if they successfully complete six credits in lieu of passing an Ability-to-Benefit test. Basic skills bridge programs could be designed to help students earn the critical six credits.


Commissioned by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, this cross-case analysis of performance-based funding summarizes findings from case study site visits conducted in Indiana, Kansas, and Missouri. It is intended to assist state policymakers and adult education administrators in making more informed decisions when designing state allocation formulas using performance funding.
Policy Frameworks/Guides


http://www.jff.org/publications/education/good-data-strong-commitment-better-polic/1046

This report documents the state policy work taking place in the context of Achieving the Dream’s student success policy framework, which emphasizes: a clear public policy commitment to student success; a strong performance measurement and data-driven accountability system; assessment and placement policies that accelerate the progress of underprepared students; incentives to promote student persistence and completion; and aligned expectations and transitions across educational sectors.


http://www.fordfoundation.org/pdfs/library/Bridges_to_Opportunity_for_Underprepared_Adults.pdf

The guide is designed as a resource for state policymakers, college presidents, trustees, and other education leaders who are seeking ways to enhance workers’ skills and increase the competitiveness of state’s workforce.


This report describes how Shifting Gears is supporting and guiding state policy systems change through the use of proactive coaching, evaluative feedback, and tools such as a structured policy agenda and action plan, and logic model.