

**Preliminary strategy recommendations on improving college completion
among underemployed / unemployed adults**

From discussions hosted at the St. Louis Regional Chamber, June 12, 2013

DRAFT for REVIEW

- 1) Succeeding in the knowledge economy requires new thought processes, which we must promote in our region. We should emphasize the big picture view of continuous education pathways -- from education to employment, back to education, and so on.
 - We can start any of several different places on the continuum: if we increase the educational level of the middle employees up, the number of Bachelors will also increase, and vice versa.
 - Education (from K-16) needs to be retooled to be geared for a knowledge economy vs. an industrial economy.

- 2) We need to teach people how to be career-long creative problem-solvers, including how to reframe themselves and their skill sets. Old skills can be translated into new skills, but people do not know how to do it.

- 3) Financing higher education for underemployed and unemployed individuals requires creative use of underutilized resources. We should also develop alternative funding mechanisms.
 - Allow for Individual Development Accounts, which are matched savings accounts for unemployed and underemployed individuals so that they can invest their own money and receive a boost from the community as well.
 - Dedicate some paid internship positions to adults, so that people who need to earn some money while going to school can do so.
 - Encourage creation of scholarship programs that adults can qualify for – currently there are none.
 - Let people who have lost their jobs know about the federal funds that are available to help them retrain. Currently, money is available that is not being utilized.

- 4) Our region should expand use of 'cohort' college learning models in the workplace, targeting workplaces with high numbers of entry- or lower-level employees (underemployed) and providing undergraduate level courses. There are a few good local models that could be replicated. Several schools could cooperate in delivering course content.

- 5) Address the major barrier of non-transferability of college credits. Many schools in the area do not accept transfer credits from other schools, and this slows down (and sometimes inhibits) adults from finishing college. Some schools do not accept AP credits that students have earned in high school.

6) Evaluate adult educational offerings across the region to make sure that appropriate options are available and accessible to underemployed and unemployed individuals. Coordinate efforts to define the targeted groups.

- Remember that we need different strategies for different groups of unemployed people. Not all underemployed and unemployed people are alike. Define groups and create opportunities for each group.
- Identify appropriate programs and messages that fit each defined group. Connect the programs to appropriate groups through effective communication efforts.
- Scale up prior learning initiatives.
- Coordinate program efforts among labor groups to create synergy within the region.
- Provide hybrid online programs
- Offer multiple delivery options
- Give the option of short-term ed programs that offer credit, including accelerated on-line courses in an eight-week format
- Offer evening programs for working adults that offer flexibility.
- Provide work-study programs for adults. Paid internships should be continuous with education – not just offered at the end of a degree.
- Encourage USDOL Apprenticeship programs
- Skill specific continuing education
- Provide adult-specific admissions counselors and academic advisors

7) Underemployed and unemployed individuals will be more motivated to continue their college education if they have more information about business demands and how education will help them get a better job. Information should flow regularly from business / economic development to underemployed and unemployed individuals through colleges, universities, and career centers (workforce investment boards) in response to these and other questions.

- Where are the jobs?
- What do we need to get them?
- Where can I go to get the knowledge?
- How do I translate existing skills for the old job into a new relevant one?
- Can I access specific training for a specific company, designed by that employer?
- Is mentoring available?

8) Broadcast information about available resources for underemployed and unemployed individuals to the broader community. Currently, individuals who are laid off from large corporations have the benefit of rapid response and outplacement services, but those working in smaller employers may not.

- 9) Encourage adoption of competency-based programs, through which adult students can get college credit for what they have mastered in the workplace. This can greatly reduce the time and money required to finish college.

- 10) Encourage region-wide adoption of stackable credentials, which can be used to build credits toward an Associate or Bachelor's degree – nothing is wasted. Also, establish high school → community college → four-year institution articulation agreements.