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**Adult Career Pathways**

**Building Strong Enrollments**

Guidelines & Examples

*This document provides guidelines and examples. Use the accompanying Worksheet side-by-side with this document to complete the assignment.*

Assumptions

* To meet enrollment goals in any adult career pathway program, deliberate planning and creative action steps must be taken
* Targeted promotion/recruitment is almost always more effective than generic. When we try to attract *everyone/anyone*, we attract few. When we work to attract specific populations, it can focus our efforts with greater results.
* We *must* look beyond current ABE participants for enrollments. There are *many* adults in our communities who are unlikely to come to us for ELL or ABE basic skills classes but who *will* come for a career pathway program.
* We must go beyond *increased marketing* to consider whether there are barriers to participation in the way we design and deliver elements of the ACP program.
* We can often be judgmental, frustrated, timid or wishful in our work with partners to build ACP enrollments. Consider how you can **replace judgment with curiosity, frustration with creativity, timidity with courage, and wishful thinking with deliberate action**.
* We must establish norms and processes for accountability among ACP partner institutions. Without these, intentions/promises for promotion, recruitment and enrollment numbers often go unfulfilled.
* We must stretch beyond our white, middle-class ways of doing things and use a racial equity lens to effectively recruit and serve people of color, immigrants, refugees, low income people and other target populations.
* The planning and implementation of this enrollment work should be done collaboratively by all partners to an ACP program.
* This process can be helpful whether you are just starting out in new ACP program development or trying to boost enrollments in existing programs.

Source

Several “tools” in this document are drawn from the *Career Pathways Toolkit, Element Three, Component 3.2: Identify Target Populations, Entry Points and Recruitment Strategies* (available in your binder and in Schoology, and online at <https://careerpathways.workforcegps.org/resources/2016/10/20/10/11/Enhanced_Career_Pathways_Toolkit>).

Process

This 7-step process can guide effective enrollment strategies for you and your ACP partners. The assignment will guide you through each step.

1 – Set enrollment goals

2 – Identify target populations

3 – Design program to meet needs of target population

4 – Determine recruitment sources and strategies

5 – Articulate benefit statements

6 – Choose appropriate marketing tactics

7 – Define and develop student supports for persistence

**Step 1 – Set enrollment goals**

It is crucial to set clear recruitment, enrollment and completion goals for each step in your adult career pathway program, and then do concrete calculations and planning for meeting those goals. This includes realistic considerations of:

* How many participants you want to *complete* the pathway and enter gainful employment in the career field.
* Then how many participants you will need at each step of the pathway to meet those completion goals; i.e., use *realistic* attrition rates during and after each step.

EXAMPLE, working backwards from completion goal:

* + 10 participants enter career-field employment
  + 13 participants complete post-secondary training, earn credential (3 don’t transition to employment)
  + 18 participants enter credential training program (5 don’t finish)
  + 22 participants complete bridge class (4 don’t transition beyond bridge)
  + 30 participants enter bridge class (8 don’t complete bridge)
* Finally, plan concretely about the sources of your enrollments.

EXAMPLE, based on a goal of 30 participants in the initial step of the bridge class:

* + 10 current ABE students
  + 7 referrals from the community college admissions office
  + 4 co-enrolled Title I adult or youth participants
  + 3 co-enrolled Title IV voc rehab participants
  + 6 referrals from 3 specific community based organizations (CBO)

EXAMPLE: See *Enrollment Spreadsheets* (in Schoology) – a tool you can use as is or modify for your own context and program for calculating the numbers above.

**Step 2 – Identify target populations**

A crucial step is for all partners in the development of an ACP program to identify target populations that will benefit from the features of a career pathways program. Then narrow the list to those you plan to actively recruit, to focus and effectively tailor promotion and recruitment efforts.

Target populations may include, but are not limited to the following (this list comes from the WIOA definition of target populations):

1. Displaced homemakers
2. Low-income individuals
3. Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians, defined in WIOA Section 166
4. Individuals with disabilities (adult and youth)
5. Older individuals
6. Previously incarcerated individuals
7. Homeless individuals
8. Youth who are in or have aged out of foster care
9. Individuals who are English language learners, individuals who have low levels of literacy, and individuals facing substantial cultural barriers
10. Eligible migrant and seasonal farmworkers
11. Individuals within two years of exhausting lifetime eligibility under Part A of Title IV of the Social Security Act
12. Single parents (including single pregnant women)
13. Long-term unemployed individuals
14. Such other groups as the Governor involved determines to have barriers to employment

Recruitment efforts are most effective when target populations are more specifically defined per the career sector of your ACP. For example, target populations for an early childhood education career pathway might include:

* *Somali, Hispanic and Karen women who provide informal home-based child care, within 10 miles of class site and/or on bus/train lines*
* *current ELL advanced-level learners interested in this career field*
* *current GED prep and adult diploma learners interested in this career field*
* *Head Start parent volunteers and entry-level (non-credentialed) Head Start staff*
* *students who seek entry to the child development program at the community college but do not reach the required Accuplacer score*
* *parents in ABE family literacy classes*

For this assignment you will choose *one* specific target population to focus on.

* EXAMPLE: I choose to focus on *students who seek entry to the child development program at the community college but do not reach the required Accuplacer score.*

(You can complete these steps for *each* target population as you proceed with your ACP work; but only one is required for the cohort assignment.)

**Step 3 – Design program to meet needs of target population**

Consider the following aspects of program design to ensure you deliver something that fits and is accessible to the target populations.

Location

* Near to target population or accessible by public transportation
* In a place where target population feels welcome

Schedule

* Scheduled at days/times to avoid conflicts with work; i.e., an “earn and learn” model that allows work and study simultaneously
* Number of hours per week are viable
* Create “hybrid” class that allows some work to be done on their own time and place

Course content / instruction

* Ensure high quality content and instruction – quality attracts participants
* Take a cultural lens to course materials and instructional methods to ensure a fit with the target populations
* Train instructors on issues of race and ethnicity
* Seek instructors that reflect the target population

EXAMPLE: A child development bridge class was offered weekdays middle of the day and had low-enrollments for several sessions. The class was switched to a Saturday morning and enrollment jumped to 40!

**Step 4 - Determine recruitment sources and strategies**

1. How can you reach your specific target population? What organizations work with this population? Consider the following:
   * Adult basic education
   * American Job Centers / Career One Stops / WorkForce Centers
   * Community colleges
   * Employers in the career sector
   * Faith-based organizations
   * Human service agencies – MFIP, SNAP
   * Nonprofit / community-based organizations
   * Organizations serving individuals with a disability
   * Refugee organizations
   * Secondary education
   * Secondary education / dropouts
   * Unemployment compensation office
   * Veteran organizations
   * Youth-serving organizations
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EXAMPLE: I need to work with the *community college* to identify and recruit students who seek entry to the child development program at the community college but do not reach the required Accuplacer score.

1. What steps do you need to take to build a relationship with one or more of the above organizations?

* Sending print material or web links is not sufficient if there is no relationship.
* You must know staff, understand how the institution works, and together develop viable referral processes.
* Understand how the organization sees the adult career pathway program serving their participants and what information they need to make strong referrals.
* Recognize that there may also be *disincentives* within the organization to refer students to the ACP. Try to discover what these may be and address them.

EXAMPLE: Community college

* Meet with the director of admissions to understand their Accuplacer testing and intake processes.
* Work together on viable ways to identify and reach those who want to enter child development but get placed in DevEd classes due to low Accuplacer scores.
* Develop joint marketing materials to share with the target students.
* Establish a referral process so ABE gets their contact info for recruitment into the bridge class.

1. As you work with a group of partner organizations on an ACP program, be sure you are being honest and realistic about setting and meeting enrollment goals.
   * Consider how recruitment responsibility and accountability can be shared (to counter the common scenario of promises or good intentions of referrals/recruitment with no results).
   * It can be helpful to designate one person in the ACP collaborating group to coordinate recruitment / enrollment. Role includes keeping track of enrollment actuals to goals, where they’re coming from, follow-up with referral sources and reporting out regularly to all the ACP partners.

**Step 5 – Articulate benefit statements**

Guidelines:

* Marketing messages are most effective when tailored to each specific target population.
* Promotional material should focus on benefit statements for each population; these may vary – i.e., it is usually worthwhile creating several population-specific promotional pieces rather than one generic piece.
* Know the difference between *informational* and *promotional* material.
  + *Informational* materials include *lots* of words, details like cut scores, unfamiliar educational jargon and acronyms, in language that is often above that of the target population, in third person or passive language, usually very dense on the page. (This kind of document may be usefully internally and in communicating with other organizations, but *not* in recruiting targeted populations.)
  + *Promotional* materials use fewer words, larger font, more white space, with the bulk of content focused on benefits statements, reflects cultural sensitivity, and has appealing pictures that reflect the target population.

Benefit statements: This requires stepping *out* of your educator role / mindset and *into* the mindset of each specific target population.

* *Why* would they want to participate in the ACP program?
* *What* program features would attract them to participate?
* What *barriers* might they have (or assume) that can be addressed?

Once you have the benefit statements, they can be used in a variety of ways in print and online promotional materials.

EXAMPLE:

ENROLL TODAY IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION CAREER PATHWAY PROGRAM!

* *Free* college prep class with focus on child development
* Build up your knowledge to get the Accuplacer score you need
* Build computer skills to succeed in college
* Connect with other students that will enter the college program with you
* Get help with the financial aid and registration process
* Supports include bus passes, funds for textbooks and on-site childcare

**Step 6 – Choose appropriate marketing tactics**

With limited resources, be sure you are choosing marketing tactics that will be most effective in reaching your target population. You will likely need to do some research about how various populations get information and make decisions about participation. Possibilities include, but are not limited to:

Print materials

* Brochures
* Flyers

Digital content

* Websites
* Blogs
* Video testimonials

Social media platforms

* Facebook
* Instagram
* Twitter
* YouTube

Events

* Resource tables at community events, places where target population shows up
* Informational sessions
* ACP students/alumni from the target population representing the program at events

Other

* Local cable channels
* Billboards

EXAMPLE: To reach our specific target population (students who want to get into the college Early Childhood program but didn’t make the Accuplacer cut score), we will use these tactics:

* Flyers
* Websites – ABE and the college
* Video testimonials – current and completed participants
* Informational sessions – on college campus

**Step 7 – Define and develop student supports for persistence**

* Consider your various target populations and the potential barriers they may face to enrolling and/or persisting in your ACP program. These may include lack of reliable, affordable childcare; lack of transportation or funds for transportation; unstable housing situation; lack of family/friend support system; physical or mental health issues; lack of funds to pay tuition/fees.
* A crucial part of a fully-realized ACP is student supports and navigation. Figure out *what* services will be provided, *who / which* organization will provide them and *how* they will be funded.

EXAMPLE: Many ACP programs have participants use [Bridge to Benefits](http://www.bridgetobenefits.org/Home2) to determine possible eligibility for public support programs and tax credits.

* Evaluate your own processes across systems and streamline with the ACP participant in mind.

EXAMPLE: Instead of requiring ACP participants to complete *three* intake processes (ABE, community college, CBO), and requiring multiple testing, streamline into one intake process, form and testing.

* Ensure strong navigation support at each transition in the ACP program – from on-ramp to bridge course, from bridge course to registration and financial aid application, from there into their first post-secondary course, and from completion of a credential to full employment in the career field. Beware of assuming that ACP participants understand all of these systems and their requirements.
* Help participants connect with one another for mutual support, from intake onward.