



Roadmap for Creating a Strategic Talent Pipeline in New Mexico

Recommendations for Next Steps in Career Pathways Systems-Building

December 2020

Acknowledgements

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About JFF

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Methodology

The recommendations and related action items in this roadmap were developed after conducting a statewide quantitative and qualitative landscape analysis designed to account for the current context in New Mexico and cross-sector perspectives. The key components of this analysis included: desk-based research and analysis; real-time and traditional labor market information (LMI) analysis; structured interviews; review of national best practices; and a review of extant and forthcoming federal policy/stimulus opportunities.

Introduction

The primary goal of this strategic roadmap is to provide recommendations for New Mexico to develop state and regional capacity to build a stronger and more inclusive statewide talent pipeline in in-demand industry sectors, leading to increased employability of lower-skilled adults and helping to fulfill employers’ need for a qualified workforce.

The current COVID-19-related economic realities in New Mexico—and our nation and world—have led to businesses shuttering and industries shrinking. Thus, New Mexico is in the midst of pivoting in response to the pandemic in order to support and sustain its economy. This pivot also has deep implications on how the state could and should build career pathways that create a talent pipeline for today’s economic crisis and the state’s future economic growth and vibrancy.

Major agencies will eventually shift out of emergency mode, but they cannot go back to business as usual. With rapidly changing demand for skills and credentials in today’s job market, there is a growing imperative for educators—including those in adult education and corrections education—to align their programs and credentials with industry needs and to work closely with economic development and workforce agencies. The pandemic created a more fiercely competitive job market with heightened demand for skilled workers; increasingly, workforce boards need to help jobseekers quickly access in-demand postsecondary credentials and help their employer customers access a skilled workforce. While the advantages of partnerships between adult education providers, community colleges, and workforce boards are clear, success in any solid relationship takes deliberate structures and hard work.

As New Mexico considers how to build a strategic talent pipeline, the state must grapple with the complexity of designing a system for many different types of potential learners, while also taking into account the barriers that many New Mexicans face. While there need to be multiple approaches to meeting the diverse needs of New Mexicans, the core recommendations outlined below will be foundational to all in reimagining and designing pathways to prosperity into the future.

TYPES OF POTENTIAL LEARNERS

- **Lower-skilled adults**
- **Dislocated workers**
- **Unemployment insurance claimants**
- **Opportunity youth**

POTENTIAL BARRIERS

- Lack of career information/guidance
- Low-literacy, low-numeracy
- No cell phone, no computer, no email
- No broadband/limited internet access

- **Low-income adults**
- **English-language learners**
- **Incarcerated and other justice-involved individuals**
- **Older (50+) and younger (<30) workers**
- **Long-term unemployed**
- **Rural residents**
- **Tribal citizens**
- **Veterans**
- **College graduates**
- Limited digital literacy
- Limited formal work experience
- Limited soft and technical skills
- Limited social capital
- Mismatched or no credentials
- Limited or no financial resources
- No car, no license
- Limited or no public transportation
- Limited employment opportunities
- Limited English language skills

To fully realize the recommendations outlined in this roadmap, stakeholders in New Mexico will need to create and embrace a vision for:

- 1. Economic development that focuses on the specific needs of a regional geography, labor market, and educational opportunities, and connects to career pathways;**
- 2. Cross-sector leadership and infrastructure for implementation and the requisite support systems of leadership, governance, and intermediaries to ensure implementation, evaluation, and scale; and**
- 3. Targeted support for diverse and high-need populations, holding equity at the center of design and implementation.**

STRATEGIC ROADMAP RECOMMENDATIONS

1: Career Pathways Systems

Plan and create career pathways systems that lead to careers in both the governor's priority sectors *and* those that provide family-supporting wages and benefits.

In the report *Build New Mexico*, Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham outlined a plan to stimulate and strengthen the economy by focusing on key priority sectors (eight in the original proposal, expanded to 11 according to data provided by the Department of Workforce Solutions). In the aggregate, these sectors were originally envisioned as those most likely to provide high-growth, in-demand, and high-wage jobs that lead to careers. However, as the JFF labor market data analysis reveals, many of the individual industries and occupations in those priority sectors do not consistently pay a living wage for one adult supporting one child (per MIT's Living Wage Calculator),¹ and the economic impact of COVID-19 has changed much of the state's context.

No industry is being spared the economic impacts of the pandemic; data-informed predictions are that the priority sectors will grow less quickly than expected and, in most cases, will pay less than what JFF benchmarks as a living wage for New Mexico. In addition, access to jobs varies widely across the state; even before the pandemic, rural New Mexicans were hard-pressed to find low-wage or contingent positions for which they had the right credentials and that were close enough to home to manage transportation. Further limitations occur because occupations that are state and federally funded often require security clearance, rendering ineligible individuals with criminal records. Given these challenges, if New Mexico is going to implement a pathways strategy, it must also work to attract new employers and industries to provide more equitable economic opportunity across the state.

In general, JFF recommends a sector-based strategy for education and training based on analysis of labor market information. In this strategy, pathways move lower-skilled adults from adult education programs to community college degree or certification programs in growing sectors of the economy. In the context of COVID-19 recovery, states must consider and adopt both short- and long-term strategies for career pathways—and in the short term, this includes helping learners and workers prepare and adapt to the current context and opportunities, while also readying them for occupations which will likely be more plentiful in five to ten years.

Key Considerations

- Governor Lujan Grisham’s priority sectors were originally envisioned as those that would provide high-growth, in-demand, high-wage jobs, attract businesses to the state, and stop brain drain.
- The priority sectors are no longer predicted to be high-growth, at least in the near future, and will not provide jobs in sufficient enough numbers to accommodate those who are now unemployed.
- Career pathways that lead to industries and occupations that pay a living wage and have growth and advancement potential should be prioritized.
- To create an equitable talent pipeline and workforce development system, career pathways should take into consideration the needs of lower-skilled adults and those with criminal records, moving them from adult and corrections education programs to community college degree or certification programs in growing sectors of the economy.

| Recommendation | Action Items | Near - Term | Mid-Term | Long - Term |
|---|---|-------------|----------|-------------|
| <p>Plan and create career pathways systems that lead to careers in the governor’s priority sectors and provide family-supporting wages and benefits.</p> | <p>Drawing on lessons learned in other states around similar efforts, make attending to career pathway access and infrastructure development an overt priority in the state, supported by the governor and her cabinet.</p> | | | |
| | <p>Prioritize pathways that lead to industries and occupations that pay a living wage and have growth and advancement potential, using real-time and traditional labor market information to design programs of study that offer stackable, portable credentials.</p> <p>For returning citizens (formerly incarcerated individuals), ensure that pathways lead to jobs without criminal history restrictions.</p> | | | |
| | <p>In a coordinated effort between state agencies, institutions of higher education, and service providers, assess existing pathways and programs to ascertain their quality and alignment with regional labor market needs, taking into account a living wage threshold and opportunities for career advancement.</p> | | | |
| | <p>Provide incentives for employers to engage in pathways design and review, reverse engineering pathways from the skills and knowledge employers demand into community college, adult education, and high school programs.</p> | | | |

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| | At the state level across agencies (the Departments of Public Education, Higher Education, Workforce Solutions, Economic Development, and Corrections), as well as in collaboration with institutions of higher education, strengthen existing career pathways and co-design others that will serve multiple populations, with clear on- and off-ramps, that can be adapted to both rural and urban economic needs. | | | |
| | Engage a range of community-based organizations to provide support services and market new education and skill-building opportunities, including in and with tribal communities and dispersed rural populations. | | | |

2. Cross-Agency and Cross-Sector Partnerships

Formalize a partnership between the Departments of Public Education, Higher Education, Workforce Solutions, Economic Development, and Corrections at the state level, and strengthen relationships across education, workforce development, economic development, and community corrections at the regional and local levels.

The COVID-19 crisis has created the opportunity for the New Mexico Departments of Public Education, Higher Education, Workforce Solutions, and Economic Development to come together and create connection and coherence among diverse stakeholders working toward a shared vision, distributing responsibilities, establishing memoranda of understanding (MOUs) among participating entities, assuring follow-through, and holding implementers to collaboratively agreed-upon benchmarks and goals. JFF also notes that because of COVID-19, this environment is particularly ripe for the New Mexico Higher Education Department (NMHED) and its Adult Education Division to assume leadership roles in cross-agency efforts to upskill and connect to work the unprecedented number of lower-skilled adults in New Mexico who now find themselves unemployed and who will play a critical role in the state’s economic recovery. Partnering allows colleges to widen the base for recruitment and expand their enrollments to include a larger complement of adults seeking retraining or employers seeking to build employee skills, which is important in an era of declining enrollment.

Strengthening relationships *now* between regional workforce boards, adult education providers, and higher education will ensure that workforce development is ready and available to individuals who must upskill or reskill in order to access jobs that either currently remain or will eventually emerge in the wake of the pandemic. A very real concern is the need for workers to stay competitive in a rapidly shifting economy. Interviews with multiple stakeholders revealed that nearly all industries have been affected in some way, including those in high-skill sectors. **This suggests that the potential for a highly qualified workforce surplus exists, allowing employers to choose from among individuals with the credentials and experience necessary to be immediately employed, limiting job opportunities for those currently less qualified as positions are filled.**

Regional workforce boards, local Workforce Connection Centers (“One-Stops”), adult education providers, and institutions of higher education can work together—strategically and intentionally—to solve for a variety of challenges in more coordinated and efficient ways. For example, unemployed individuals frequently enlist the services of local One-Stops when filing for benefits and seeking services. This necessitates a level of personal interaction that could be leveraged to promote education and training opportunities, especially in rural areas and for those most affected by the digital divide. Adult education can help support wide-scale assessment (e.g., through administration of the Test of Adult Basic Education, or TABE) and fill a critical need in determining fit between an individual and relevant education and training programs. Adult education can also deliver on high school equivalency preparation and testing, often a gatekeeper in terms of access to further education and jobs. Regional workforce boards, sitting at the intersection of industry, education, and community, can help broker the conversations that lead to identifying local labor market need, mapping career pathways, and devoting federal and state funds to workforce development, including adult education programs.

Key Considerations

- The COVID-19 crisis has surfaced the need for greater alignment and collaboration among state-level agencies to share responsibilities for identifying, preparing, and supporting the state’s workforce in order to also support the state’s businesses and economy.
- The pandemic has created the possibility of a workforce surplus, with employers able to choose immediately from among already-qualified individuals for limited open positions, putting lower-skilled adults at a disadvantage.
- This is an opportune time for the New Mexico Higher Education Department (NMHED) and its Adult Education Division to assume leadership roles in cross-agency efforts to upskill and connect to work the unprecedented number of lower-skilled adults in New Mexico who now find themselves unemployed.
- In communities across the state, regional workforce boards, local One-Stops, adult education providers, and institutions of higher education can work together—strategically and

intentionally—to solve for a variety of challenges in more coordinated and efficient ways, especially in rural areas.

| Recommendation | Action Items | Near - Term | Mid-Term | Long - Term |
|--|---|-------------|----------|-------------|
| <p>Formalize a partnership between the Departments of Public Education, Higher Education, Workforce Solutions, Economic Development, and Corrections at the state level, and strengthen relationships across education, workforce development, and economic development at the regional and local levels.</p> | <p>Formalize a cross-agency leadership group (with a partnership agreement or MOU) that is responsible for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Co-creating a vision for a career pathways system that supports New Mexicans to earn the skills and credentials needed in the state’s priority sector careers, ensuring all engaged agencies have a clear value proposition for engagement in and commitment to this work, and all have articulated goals and responsibilities for implementing the work. b. Providing governance, leadership, oversight, and support to regions implementing career pathways. c. Overseeing appropriate analyses, including current and forward-looking labor supply-demand gap analyses, as preparation for conducting other functions. d. With support of top regional leadership, recruiting and enlisting representatives of key business, labor, and nonprofit employment sectors to engage in career pathways design and in providing work-based learning opportunities. e. Shaping agreements between regional partners. f. Establishing metrics for success in consultation with employers and reporting publicly on progress. | | | |
| | <p>Commit to executing an MOU that that specifies the roles and responsibilities of each organization in the partnership to ensure clarity and mutual responsiveness.</p> | | | |
| | <p>Build cross-organizational leader-to-leader and staff-to-staff relationships and establish who the key stakeholders and decision-makers are at each organization and, in particular, the points of contact to ensure efficient communication and feedback loops.</p> | | | |
| | <p>Establish common metrics, outcome goals, and data collection methods that will be used to track progress and continuous improvement.</p> | | | |

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| | Develop a strategy for impact based on a common understanding of the local labor market data, including a system for regularly collecting and analyzing the data and identifying who will be responsible for developing a regular report of labor market data, and establish regular meetings for partners to assess the data together to modify the strategy. | | | |
| | Jointly and strategically engage employer partners to analyze the gaps in programs and services that are needed to meet the local workforce challenges, determine together how those gaps will be filled, and establish responsibility and accountability for who will work to fill the gaps. | | | |
| | Align the goals and programs of regional community colleges, workforce boards and One-Stops, and economic development to ensure collaboration with other regional initiatives that will achieve greater impact at scale. This alignment will also facilitate the development of enduring partnerships through all parties maintaining a common focus on a unified strategy rather than having their time and attention divided across initiatives and priorities. | | | |
| | Co-develop strategies for recruitment of target populations to broaden the reach of marketing efforts and to maximize resources. | | | |

3. A Place-Based Approach

Coordinate across sectors to increase opportunity for economic advancement in communities and regions to produce sustainable economic growth for all and deploy educational strategies with a focus on equity and inclusion.

Solely taking a statewide approach could result in a mismatch between workforce talent and industry need at the regional level. A focus on local, place-based collaboration between government, industry, community, and education partners will better inform and shape the educational and training programs that can develop the skills and knowledge for the jobs that pay. Interviews with stakeholders from across state, regional, and local levels suggest that regional workforce boards and local One-Stops are well-positioned to build the relationships

necessary for effective collaboration—especially in rural areas—to lead the creation of career pathways that will build a talent pipeline, and to connect people to adult education and training opportunities.

Adult and corrections education programs are well positioned to be leveraged to advance this place-based approach. Although there are examples of innovative and effective adult and corrections education programs across the state, they are often disconnected from each other and their larger systems. As a result, their work, efforts, and innovations remain relatively unknown in other regions and represent a missed opportunity. Many of these programs—and their successes—rely upon passionate individuals with vision and power for their existence and are susceptible to that individual’s continued involvement. Workforce board subcommittees focused on coordinating with adult and corrections education could champion each program, surface and promote effective models and best-practices, and facilitate broader reach, quality, and impact. Working in a coordinated way, regional subcommittees could help to determine areas of greatest need and elevate recommendations to the state-level subcommittee for review, consideration, and communication to the larger State Workforce Development Board to increase and accelerate impact. To be clear, the goal is not the promotion of *programs*, in and of themselves. The goal is to ensure that the best practices of adult and corrections education are the strongest they can be, and are *systematized*, well-resourced, and well-promoted as a whole, so that as many New Mexicans as possible have *access to and are matched with* the high-quality, effective program that best meets their learning and training needs, while also meeting the needs of employers.

A critical consideration in developing a place-based approach is the role of workforce boards. New Mexico’s state and regional workforce boards provide a critical forum for industry, education, and community needs to be heard and addressed. Although the boards and their local offices span the entire state, to reach every New Mexican, a pathways strategy must take into account the unique needs each region, and especially the rural character of so much of the state. Nearly 1.4 million of New Mexico’s 2.1 million residents live in just seven counties, with the balance living in the state’s 26 other counties. New Mexico is very much a rural state, with some areas being described as “frontier.” Also important to take into account is local labor market need—the economic identities of the various workforce development and metropolitan statistical areas differ and require tailored attention if efforts are to be successful.

Key Considerations

- New Mexico is a predominantly rural state, with two-thirds of its population concentrated in just seven counties. Taking a statewide approach could result in a mismatch between workforce talent and industry need at the regional level.

| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A focus on local, place-based collaboration between government, industry, community, and education partners will better inform and shape the educational and training programs that can develop the skills and knowledge for the jobs that pay. • Adult and corrections education programs are well positioned to be leveraged to advance a place-based approach. • A critical consideration in developing a place-based approach is the role of workforce boards. Regional workforce board subcommittees focused on coordinating with local adult and corrections education could champion each, surface and promote effective models and best-practices, and facilitate broader reach, quality, and impact. | | | | |
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| Recommendation | Action Items | Near-Term | Mid-Term | Long-Term |
| Coordinate across sectors to increase opportunity for economic advancement in communities and regions to produce sustainable economic growth for all and deploy educational strategies with a focus on equity and inclusion. | Utilize real-time labor market data to identify specific local employer and workforce needs and to inform the alignment of programs and career pathways strategies. | | | |
| | Establish subcommittees at each of the state and regional workforce boards focused on and dedicated to strengthening adult and corrections education in order to best meet the needs of all New Mexicans. | | | |
| | Establish formal partnerships with community-based organizations to augment the social and academic supports available to students that are critical to their persistence and success (e.g., career counseling, assessment testing, wrap-around services, tutoring, and financial aid). | | | |
| | Develop and implement place-based economic and workforce development strategies in the communities under greatest stress, with a focus on rural and tribal communities. | | | |
| | Collaborate with local stakeholders, including state and local agencies, workforce development boards, community-based organizations, education providers, and economic developers. | | | |
| | Co-design and co-provide specialized technical assistance for communities, designed to meet their specific workforce recovery needs. | | | |
| | Facilitate a learning ecosystem that brings diverse communities from across the state together to share lessons learned and best practices. | | | |

4. Work-Based Learning

Create and scale equitable work-based learning opportunities that are integrated within career pathways and that deliver clear benefits for both participants and employers.

Work-based learning solves a problem that many jobseekers face: It's hard to get a job without previous work experience, and it's hard to get work experience without a job.

Support from a cross-sector team of state leaders is essential for providing equitable access to the benefits of work-based learning for all New Mexicans. Work-based learning, an approach to training in which workers or students complete meaningful job tasks in a workplace, provides an opportunity for adults and youth alike to gain the workplace experience and skills sought by employers while simultaneously earning in-demand credentials. Paid work-based learning models, such as internships and apprenticeships, also provide participants with a source of income as they skill up and prepare for careers. Embedding these paid experiences within pathways is a critical strategy for equitable pathways development.

Work-based learning also has significant benefits for employers, helping them gain access to job candidates who have the hands-on experience they seek. Traditional classroom-based education and many third-party job training programs do not usually offer instruction tailored to the specific needs of individual employers. But when employers work with colleges, schools, training providers, or other partners to design work-based learning programs, they can ensure that curricula and on-the-job activities cover the skills that workers need to succeed in crucial roles in their organizations.

The COVID-19 pandemic threatens work-based learning opportunities across the state. Employers that have been hit hard by the economic recession will struggle to prioritize work-based learning, especially as jobseekers outnumber available jobs, and social distancing may continue to limit access to workplaces. Colleges and training providers in the midst of creating new hybrid models of education will be unlikely to view work-based learning experiences as a first-focus area. And even before the pandemic, providing equitable access to the benefits of work-based learning was a significant challenge, particularly in rural areas of the state that lack a substantial employer base.

Strategies that support high-quality work-based learning are therefore necessary to respond to the current moment *and* as part of a long-term effort to scale and ensure equitable access to

such learning. As state leaders plan for economic recovery, they should undertake major system integration and redesign to address both immediate challenges and the longer-standing inequities in existing systems.

| Key Considerations |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work-based learning, an approach to training in which workers or students complete meaningful job tasks in a workplace, provides an opportunity for adults and youth alike to gain the workplace experience and skills sought by employers while simultaneously earning in-demand credentials. • Work-based learning has significant benefits for employers, helping them gain access to job candidates who have the hands-on experience they seek. • When employers work with colleges, schools, training providers, or other partners to design work-based learning programs, they can ensure that curricula and on-the-job activities cover the skills that workers need to succeed in crucial roles in their organizations. |

| Recommendation | Action Items | Near - Term | Mid-Term | Long - Term |
|--|--|-------------|----------|-------------|
| <p>Create and scale equitable work-based learning opportunities that are integrated within career pathways and that deliver clear benefits for both participants and employers.</p> | Establish a statewide initiative, guided by a cross-sector advisory committee, to support work-based learning and drive scale through the adoption of a statewide work-based learning framework that includes a broad range of work-based learning experiences—including both remote and in-person models—and associated goals and metrics. | | | |
| | Develop and build the capacity of regional intermediary organizations to drive scale by brokering and aggregating work-based learning experiences, bridging education and industry, and providing equitable access to these opportunities for all New Mexicans. | | | |
| | <p>Cultivate partnerships with community-based organizations to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Provide wrap-around services, such as transportation and childcare, to support work-based learning participation. b. Prepare and support lower-skilled adults and others to effectively engage in remote work-based learning. | | | |
| | Coordinate and communicate remote work-based learning opportunities to rural and tribal communities, increasing equitable access. | | | |

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| | Incentivize and support employer engagement in work-based learning while ensuring that work-based learning delivers clear benefits for employers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Organize employers by region and sector to identify their talent needs and map those needs to work-based learning possibilities. b. Create a detailed work-based learning “menu” for employers that includes remote and virtual options and clearly defines the employer partner’s role and anticipated time commitment for each. | | | |
| | Establish a statewide initiative, guided by a cross-sector advisory committee, to support work-based learning and drive scale through the adoption of a statewide work-based learning framework that includes a broad range of work-based learning experiences—including both remote and in-person models—and associated goals and metrics. | | | |

5. Policy and Funding

Ensure that policy and funding are appropriate and aligned with statewide goals, and that systems are in place to collect, manage, and leverage data.

Policy plays a critical role in the development of integrated pathways systems. Supportive pathways policies drive scale and sustainability, ensure the availability of needed funding, enable the creation of data systems to monitor outcomes and drive continuous improvement, remove barriers to implementation, and create needed culture changes.

Scale and sustainability are core components of policy and should be considered as measures for all policy change, at every step in the implementation process. **Scaling and sustainability strategies are not just about numbers and enrollments; leaders in New Mexico must also work on breaking down silos within systems and institutions—including colleges and community-based adult education providers—while also building out integrated pathways across the state.** Sustainability requires not just a long-term plan for funding and for managing assets and resources as a result of braided funding but also includes a realistic plan starting with the highest priority actions in the current budget-constrained environment and planning for incremental increases as the recovery goes forward. **In this case, New Mexico might focus first on ensuring that ownership of reforms belongs**

to regional and local cross-sector stakeholder groups. 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. By encouraging regional and local ownership, state leaders support scaling and long-term sustainability.

JFF identified various sources of federal and state funding that could be used and leveraged for realizing the work of creating career pathways (listed in brief below and in depth in the associated report). Often tied to legislation and policy, these public funds, individually, can be restricted to a particular purpose. However, when taken together (braided), and augmented by private donations and philanthropic dollars, federal and state funding can serve as the basis for a larger and long-term career pathways strategy.

Key Considerations

- Supportive pathways policies drive scale and sustainability, ensure the availability of needed funding, enable the creation of data systems to monitor outcomes and drive continuous improvement, remove barriers to implementation, and create needed culture changes.
- Leveraging policy and appropriating funds should be part of a larger strategy that keeps scale and sustainability in mind. As a first step in realizing that strategy, New Mexico might focus on ensuring that ownership of reforms belongs to regional and local cross-sector stakeholder groups.
- Federal sources of funding that should be considered include the following (beyond emergency aid related to the pandemic):
 - Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)
 - Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V)
 - Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training (SNAP E & T)
 - Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
 - National Dislocated Worker Grant
 - Ability to Benefit
 - USDA ReConnect Program
 - Medicaid Appendix K Amendment
 - Incentives for employing returning citizens (Work Opportunity Tax Credits and fidelity bonds)
- State sources of funding that should be considered include:
 - Job Training Incentive Program (JTIP)
 - Local Economic Development Act (LEDA)
 - Local Economic Assistance & Development Support Program (LEADS)
 - New Mexico Opportunity Scholarship

- Priority-sector-related investments found in the governor’s budget

| Recommendation | Action Items | Near - Term | Mid-Term | Long - Term |
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| <p>Ensure that policy and funding are appropriate and aligned with statewide goals, and that systems are in place to collect, manage, and leverage data.</p> | <p>Work across agencies and systems to identify and eliminate barriers, gaps, and inconsistencies in existing policies and establish new policies at the state level in order to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Help people to engage or re-engage in a career pathway that leads to economic advancement through skill-building and work supports, universal career navigation services, innovative financing options, and access to strong safety nets and wrap-around services; b. Revitalize inclusive regional economies through job-generating investments, sector strategies, enhanced job quality for workers, and incentives for small businesses, entrepreneurs, and emerging industries to participate; and c. Redesign education and workforce development through focusing on skills-based education and employment infrastructure, accelerated and efficient pathways from education to work, and the integration of work and learning, including earn and learn models. | | | |
| | <p>Leverage supportive federal policies and funding streams and the structures that support their implementation in New Mexico in order to ensure alignment of efforts and accelerate policy change.</p> | | | |
| | <p>Develop—with leaders from agencies and organizations—a braided funding strategy to prioritize and align funding to support the attainment of long-term strategic priorities, improve efficiency, and provide complementary services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Commit to engaging in cross-agency and cross-institutional proposal writing to tap into the interest among both public and private funders for proposals that involve strong partnerships and articulate a bold vision for impact at scale. b. To support near- and mid-term work, leverage recent and current federal stimulus resources, including: CARES Act funding, the Small Business Administration Paycheck Protection Program, National Emergency Dislocated Worker grant funding, and the Education | | | |

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| | <p>Stabilization Fund/Reimagining Workforce Preparation grant. The latter can directly support efforts to 1) build sector-based and industry-responsive strategies, 2) implement rapid reskilling and credentialing strategies, and 3) expand equitable work-based learning.</p> <p>c. Engage private foundations committed to supporting innovation in the fields of workforce development, employment, and education. JFF recommends that leadership in all agencies and organizations at all levels work to identify and reach out to foundations that support education and workforce programs.</p> | | | |
| | <p>Provide fee waivers to increase program and postsecondary participation and as an enrollment strategy to generate increased tuition revenue over time.</p> | | | |
| | <p>Encourage employer support to fund pathways in targeted ways, including tuition reimbursements for incumbent workers, direct financial contributions to programs, and in-kind use of facilities and equipment.</p> | | | |

6. Information Systems

Create comprehensive information systems that allow stakeholders to efficiently and effectively collect, share, and analyze data.

Robust and consistent state information systems support policy change, increase efficiency, reduce costs, and document impact. Collecting data on programs and the people they serve allows for assessment of those programs and their longitudinal effects, leading to improvement for greatest impact. Sharing data across departments and with service providers allows for coordinated efforts to best meet the needs of the consumer, be it an individual or business. Collection is only as good as the data that is input, and sharing is only as good as the strength and implementation of the sharing agreement.

An information system for collection and sharing data relies on the human capacity to maintain and support it, which requires adequate funding. The state’s WIOA plan notes that efforts to build an integrated data system are underway in New Mexico, with the Department of Workforce Solutions and the Human Services Department partnering to establish an integrated workforce system designed to provide real-time information. However, lack of funding remains

a significant obstacle to the creation of a statewide longitudinal information system. Lack of a cohesive information system could negatively impact any workforce development system, let alone an economic recovery plan founded on getting people back to work

Interviews with New Mexico stakeholders revealed that there are at least four information systems in use for adult education and workforce development programs: LACES (Adult Education Division); Workforce Connection Online System (Department of Workforce Solutions); the Workforce Connection of Central New Mexico intranet (which seems to show promise as a model for a statewide system); and local proprietary systems (e.g., Google Drive). More than one stakeholder shared that they rely on written “sticky notes.” This variability in information systems and the lack of a unified approach complicates communication between current partners, frustrates efforts to match adult learners with appropriate programs, and makes it difficult to monitor progress and program completion.

| Key Considerations | |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collecting data on programs and the people they serve allows for assessment of those programs and their longitudinal impact, leading to improvement for greatest impact. Lack of funding remains a significant obstacle to the creation of a statewide longitudinal information system. The variability in existing information systems and the lack of a unified approach complicates communication between current partners, frustrates efforts to match adult learners with appropriate programs, and makes it difficult to monitor progress and program completion. | |

| Recommendation | Action Items | Near - Term | Mid-Term | Long - Term |
|--|--|-------------|----------|-------------|
| Create comprehensive information systems that allow stakeholders to efficiently and effectively collect, share, and analyze data. | Commit to a single information system for each of adult education, corrections education, and workforce development, mitigating variability and encouraging standardization in their respective data collection, sharing, analysis, and reporting. | | | |
| | Commit funds to building or improving information systems and hiring the necessary staff to maintain those systems. Consider braiding federal, state, private, and philanthropic dollars for maximum effect, including funds allowable for administrative and leadership purposes. | | | |
| | Either through sharing agreements and MOUs, or integration of systems, make data available to key stakeholders, including third-party service providers. At times, making data available to others | | | |

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| | is as simple as granting access, albeit with safeguards in place. | | | |
| | Establish goals for programs and pathways and create metrics for measuring progress on and success in meeting those goals. Data should be used to refine and improve programs and pathways such that they lead to jobs with value in local labor markets and provide a living wage. | | | |
| | Hire dedicated data managers/analysts to track and monitor data and identify deficiencies and gaps in what is being collected. | | | |
| | Create virtual portfolios for learners that are regularly updated and easily shared. JFF heard that programs individuals enrolled in and completed were not easily or regularly tracked, complicating efforts to monitor progress and sometimes leading to those individuals unnecessarily repeating courses. | | | |
| | Regularly analyze data, comparing them to established goals and metrics to monitor progress and, when necessary, make adjustments and improvements in education and training programs and systems. | | | |

7. The Digital Divide

Address the digital divide and provide resources to address differential access experienced by lower-skilled and low-income New Mexicans.

The “digital divide” is characterized by differential access to technology—hardware, software, and internet connectivity—and has a real impact on individuals’ ability to access and participate in online and virtual experiences. Not surprisingly, this digital divide corresponds in many cases to the geographic, economic, and language differences that exist in a state that is predominantly rural, where nearly 20% of the population lives below the poverty line, 11.3% are unemployed as of April 2020, and where a language other than English is spoken in 35% of households. **The divide that existed prior to the pandemic has only widened.**

As stakeholders noted during interviews, inequitable access to broadband—which was already an issue in rural areas due to limited availability—has become more pronounced due to the

pandemic, especially as people look to cut what appear to be unnecessary costs. This has impacted the ability to exchange information, deliver services, and participate in distance learning at a time when most, if not all, interactions have gone virtual. The result is that a lack of digital access and digital literacy, an in-demand skill that cannot be fully developed without access to the internet, now limits the capacity of many to engage in online learning.

Various organizations have provided learners with computers (including desktops, laptops, and Chromebooks) and deployed mobile hotspots, but this is limited to programs in some places, to some people, and not done at scale systemically. Stakeholders interviewed noted that if these kinds of efforts could be sustained post-pandemic, they would expand the talent pool by allowing those previously affected by the digital divide to engage in learning and work remotely. This moment presents New Mexico with a unique opportunity.

Similarly, some education providers in New Mexico are making resources more available on cell phones and mobile devices, which, anecdotally, have been the preferred platforms for accessing information, including education and training, since before the pandemic. This reflects trends in the national data that indicate that smartphones are the only way for many low-income people to connect to the internet, making mobile platforms are all the more essential for consideration as a platform for scale.

Key Considerations

- The digital divide is characterized by differential access to technology—hardware, software, and internet connectivity—and has a real impact on individuals’ ability to access and participate in online and virtual experiences.
- Inequitable access to broadband—which was already an issue in rural areas due to limited availability—has become more pronounced due to the COVID-19 pandemic, especially as people look to cut what appear to be unnecessary costs.
- A lack of digital access and digital literacy, an in-demand skill that cannot be fully developed without access to the internet, limits the capacity of many to engage in online learning, especially during the pandemic.

| Recommendation | Action Items | Near - Term | Mid- Term | Long - Term |
|---|---|-------------|-----------|-------------|
| Address the digital divide and provide resources to address differential access experienced by | Prioritize addressing the state’s issue of limited broadband by extending operational incentives to information and communication technology providers and leveraging federal stimulus funds to expand services into rural, tribal, and other underserved areas. Consider how to best work with | | | |

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| lower-skilled and low-income New Mexicans. | the recipients of USDA’s ReConnect Program grants. | | | |
| | Put policy and decision-making in the hands of local governments. Local governments are most likely to understand and care about the specific nature of the local digital divides in both rural and metropolitan areas. They know where the “holes” are and will be accountable to local concerns. Further, local governments can deploy a number of appropriate incentives for companies to build more broadly. | | | |
| | Develop regional/local outreach and marketing materials that highlight how digital skills are relevant to regional economies and cultures—people more readily learn skills that are contextualized and connected to their lives. | | | |
| | Increase digital literacy—the ability to locate, assess, synthesize, create, and communicate information in various forms that is critical to lifelong learning and career success—for all New Mexicans through developing and providing widespread access to courses that teach such skills. | | | |

8. Raising Collective Awareness

Develop and deploy an awareness campaign that informs New Mexicans about, and connects them to, education and training opportunities.

On balance, people do not have access to up-to-date and high-quality information about what opportunities they have to gain skills and credentials, or about how to engage those opportunities. One of the consequences of the digital divide (see Recommendation 7, above) is that people who would benefit the most from educational and training programs often have the least access to information that would connect them to those programs. Some forms of communication, like radio and television commercials, are designed to reach targeted audiences, but at unpredictable times of day. Other forms of communication, such as regular mail or printed ads, enjoy limited popularity compared to electronic media and require frequent updating. All of these examples lack the two-way communication and customizable searches for information that being online offers. Often those with the most limited access to the internet are also those who need it the most.

An awareness campaign about opportunities for education and training that lead to economic advancement would not only address *how* people receive information, but *what* information they receive, leading to a better understanding of what services are available and from whom. Certain New Mexico state departments’ services are so ubiquitous that the two have become synonymous. For instance, so many people have earned high school equivalency through adult education programs that the perception is often that adult education is limited to high school equivalency. This perception can overshadow other important services provided by adult education that can support individuals obtaining the education and training they need to enter the workforce. Similarly, because of the claims being filed due to the pandemic, Department of Workforce Solutions is often equated with its role in unemployment insurance, leading many to overlook the department’s other critical functions. Disentangling departments from widely held perceptions and improving infrastructure so that there is greater access to information will increase an understanding of who provides what services and how people can best connect to and benefit from those services.

| Key Considerations |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often, people who would benefit the most from educational and training programs have the least access to information that would connect them to those programs. • An awareness campaign about opportunities for education and training that lead to economic advancement would lead to a better understanding of what services are available and from whom. • Disentangling departments from misperceptions of what they do and improving infrastructure so that there is greater access to information will increase an understanding of who provides what services and how people can best connect to and benefit from those services. |

| Recommendation | Action Items | Near - Term | Mid-Term | Long - Term |
|--|---|-------------|----------|-------------|
| Develop and deploy an awareness campaign that informs New Mexicans about, and connects them to, education and training opportunities. | Develop a branding, communications, and messaging plan to expand visibility and build public will in New Mexico at local, regional, and state levels about the individual and economic advantages and benefits of educational and training opportunities. This messaging must be delivered via multiple channels, including online, through radio and television commercials, and through the mail. | | | |
| | Establish protocols to coordinate messaging across organizations and agencies to ensure that communications about programs and opportunities are aligned and strategic. | | | |

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| | Integrate messaging and materials developed through the awareness campaign into education and career advising efforts and structures across educational institutions, One-Stops, and community-based organizations. When possible, co-locate services, allowing for in-person sharing of information. | | | |
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9. Recommendations Specific to Corrections Education

Address the sources of variability in corrections education to build a reliable system that offers pathways to gainful employment for returning citizens.

It should be noted that the lives of court-involved individuals are complex, with human variability that goes beyond what might be considered “normal.” These individuals often have criminogenic needs, which the U.S. Department of Education describes as “dynamic criminal risk factors [that] must be addressed in the design and delivery of treatment.”² Anti-social attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, drug and alcohol addiction, high-conflict relationships, and low levels of achievement in work and school are all expressions of criminogenic need. Being incarcerated is life-altering—rights and privileges are forfeited, work is halted, relationships and families are disrupted, and education opportunities are limited, if not altogether stopped. Being released from incarceration means having a criminal record, which can impact employability due to employer misconceptions of formerly incarcerated individuals (stigmatization) or restricted access (because of having to register as a sex offender or not being able to obtain security clearance, for instance). It would stand to reason that all of this personal complexity and human variability would only be compounded by systemic variability.

Incarcerated individuals eligible for release should have access to corrections education that is as consistent as possible given their circumstances, maximizing the education and training they receive for greatest effect upon reentry. Increasing consistency means addressing the sources of variability in the current system. **The following recommendations— informed by the components of the federal Reentry Education Framework, national examples of reentry efforts, and JFF’s assessment of the state—are meant to guide New Mexican stakeholders committed to corrections education to intentionally and effectively achieve the desired consistency.**

Form strategic, cross-sector partnerships dedicated to corrections education.

Strategic, cross-sector partnerships should be made in order to guide and deliver on the building of a corrections education system that leads to successful reentry and long-term success. Members of these partnerships represent various stakeholder groups and have the influence, authority, perspective, and power to make the necessary changes to the current system. Overall, clear communication and planning will lead to effective execution of efforts to decrease variability in corrections education and improve student performance.

| Action Items | Near-Term | Mid-Term | Long-Term |
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| Establish cross-sector subcommittees, reinforced by memoranda of understanding/letters of agreement, among the state and regional education, workforce development, economic development, service-provider, and community-based organizations and agencies, as well as employers, working in or with corrections education and who are critical to its effectiveness in general and reentry in particular. Accordingly: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Determine distinct yet complementary roles and responsibilities for each subcommittee member, avoiding duplication of both services and spending. b. Plan for regular subcommittee meetings that all members commit to attending and where they will provide perspective in an ongoing effort to increase consistency and effectiveness in corrections education. c. Members should have the power and authority to make key decisions on behalf of their respective organizations. | | | |
| Create a shared vision for a corrections education system that leads to reentry and that all stakeholders understand, agree to, support, and promote. | | | |
| Work with employers who already hire returning citizens to serve as spokespersons (“employer champions”) for the value of corrections education and to share practical considerations when hiring those with criminal records. | | | |
| Establish a corrections presence on regional workforce development boards and postsecondary education advisory councils. Per interviews, JFF found that corrections (not just corrections education) lacks representation on these boards and councils, which serve as natural intersections of education, workforce development, and economic development. | | | |
| Use data to inform further planning and extend partnerships in an effort to create a true, statewide corrections education system. Focus should be on those areas in the system where variability still exists and student and program outcomes are poor. | | | |
| Engage in an awareness campaign that highlights the successes of corrections education and reentry and establishes both as viable and valuable features of career pathways and workforce development. This campaign would help motivate continued good work within facilities and encourage employers to consider a talent pipeline that includes New Mexico’s returning citizens. | | | |

Strengthen infrastructure for greater consistency.

A solid, reliable infrastructure needs to be in place in order for a corrections education system to work effectively. Such an infrastructure decreases variability and increases the success and impact of educational and training programs. Identifying existing and new funding sources, establishing a centralized information system, and providing adequate classroom time and physical space are some of the ways corrections education infrastructure can be improved to better deliver programs, support incarcerated individuals’ learning, and increase consistency in reentry into home communities and integration into the workforce.

| Action Items | Near-Term | Mid-Term | Long-Term |
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| Develop metrics for measuring non-academic sources of variability and their impact on time on task (consider such things as transfers, lockdowns, discipline, access to technology, changes in schedules, intra- and inter-facility availability of programs, etc.). | | | |
| Identify the physical space and scheduling restrictions per facility that contribute to variable student learning and instructor professional development environments. Protect space for learning and professional development. Modify or extend schedules to allow enough time for program delivery and learning. | | | |
| Identify sources of funding across cross-sector partner organizations that are committed to corrections education and training. Ensure that funding is reliable, protected, and not going toward redundant efforts. Where gaps in funding exist, solicit private donations and explore ways to share costs, minimizing or closing those gaps. | | | |
| Apply funding to expand current infrastructure and design new programming tailored to the needs of incarcerated individuals, preparing them for reentry and to integrate into the workforce upon reentry. | | | |
| Information System- and Data-Related Recommendations | | | |
| Hire a data manager/analyst to track and monitor data and identify deficiencies and gaps in what is being collected. | | | |
| Map the data needs and existing information system capacities of public and private prisons, education and training providers, and state and local organizations and agencies. Establish the degree to which each is able to collect and share student-, program-, and facility-specific data completely and reliably. | | | |
| Centralize data from all facilities, either through a common information system or through data-specific sharing agreements. Establish sharing agreements and memoranda of understanding to determine what data each organization or agency will provide. | | | |
| Analyze data for trends in student performance (such as earning of credentials and increase in academic abilities), program effectiveness (including enrollment and completion figures), and non-academic sources of variability | | | |

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| (such as programs offered, lockdowns, access to and time spent using technology, and class/instruction schedules). | | | |
| Consistently collect an individual’s education and training accomplishments while incarcerated. This information would be compiled into a personal profile to be shared upon transfer and reentry. | | | |

Develop education services with career pathways in mind.

High-quality, consistent, and coordinated services across postsecondary, adult, and corrections education allow for seamless experiences, from the facility and into the home community upon reentry. Paying close attention to existing and needed programming, taking labor market information for the home community into consideration, and incorporating the input of key partners when developing and delivering education services will ensure that incarcerated individuals are on career pathways that lead to valued jobs that pay a living wage.

| Action Items | Near-Term | Mid-Term | Long-Term |
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| Use labor market information to create career pathways that lead to employment opportunities that offer living wages and are free of hiring restrictions for individuals with criminal records. Ideally these opportunities would be available in returning citizens’ home communities. This process should be revisited frequently to ensure that programming is still relevant and consistent. | | | |
| Offer programs and provide education and training that align to the employment opportunities identified above, creating pathways that lead from corrections education to jobs with labor market value, pay at least a living wage, and free from hiring restrictions for individuals with criminal records. | | | |
| Recruit those incarcerated individuals who are most likely to benefit from corrections education and have the potential to finish programs. | | | |
| Ensure that incarcerated individuals are able to complete programs they start by consistently offering courses. Completion can be impacted by not offering necessary courses either across time in the same facility or in both the sending and receiving facilities in the case of transfers. | | | |
| When possible, increase access to technology that supports learning and allows students to complete programs even upon transfer. | | | |
| Hire enough instructors to be able to consistently offer programs. Ensure that instructors have the right credentials so that programs they teach are able to confer credentials. | | | |
| Identify those postsecondary institutions interested in partnering with NMCD for educational program delivery and develop programs that start in facilities and continue upon reentry. Strengthen relationships with these institutions through articulation agreements. | | | |

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| Develop and provide contextualized instruction, combining academic and technical education with employability skills training. | | | |
| Survey incarcerated individuals and instructors to better understand corrections education for their perspectives. Use responses to better understand what is needed experientially and programmatically for incarcerated individuals' learning and from professional development for instructors. | | | |
| Consistently implement corrections education policies that provide for pre-literacy and literacy, career and technical education, postsecondary education, and returning citizen programming at all facilities. | | | |
| When possible, leverage talent in the facility to support learning. This could include expanding the role of the transitional coordinator to provide support earlier (as opposed to six months prior to reentry) and enlisting incarcerated individuals as tutors, mentors, and instructors. | | | |
| Track and consistently communicate incarcerated individuals' progress throughout programming, including pre- and post-test scores, enrollment and completion rates, number and type of credentials earned, and placement and persistence in employment upon reentry. Use the data to improve programming and instruction. | | | |

Improve transitions into and out of the corrections education system.

Corrections education systems must address the transitional needs of individuals preparing for release or even preparing for a facility transfer. Evidence-based needs assessments, education and career plans, and coordinating efforts with community partners are essential in ensuring transitional success for individuals entering and exiting the prison system, reentering their home communities, and integrating into the workforce.

| Action Items | Near-Term | Mid-Term | Long-Term |
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| Develop an assessment process that, at intake, measures not only academic proficiency but also professional and technical skills. | | | |
| As part of the intake process, create educational and career plans that incarcerated individuals, instructors, transitional coordinators, and parole officers consistently revisit and revise, from the beginning of facility-based education through reentry. | | | |
| Work with transitional coordinators and parole officers to better understand the reentry process from their perspectives. Use what they share to identify areas of variability and ineffectiveness and enlist them in improving the reentry process. | | | |
| Work with postsecondary institutions, community-based organizations, and employers to create reentry processes and structures that are implemented consistently at all facilities. | | | |

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| Develop programs and structures that span corrections and postsecondary education, creating a bridge for reentry as opposed to a handoff. | | | |
| Create a program coordinator position that sits between corrections and postsecondary institutions and whose salary is split between the two. | | | |
| Work with community-based services to better understand their role in reentry and possible areas of improvement in that process. | | | |
| Upon reentry, share the returning citizen’s personal profile of education and training accomplishments between the facility and the receiving entity (such as an employer, postsecondary education provider, or community-based organization), providing an appropriate starting place for continued education and training or for employment. | | | |

Endnotes

¹ Massachusetts Institute of Technology. 2020. “Living Wage Calculator.” Available at:

<https://livingwage.mit.edu/states/35/locations>

² U.S. Department of Education, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education. 2016. “Reentry Education Framework: Guidelines for Providing High-Quality Education for Adults Involved in the Criminal Justice System.” Available at: https://learner.lincs.ed.gov/reentryed/files/tools_pdf/Reentry-Ed-Framework-Report.pdf