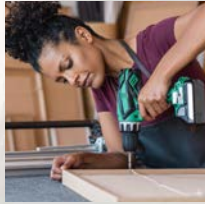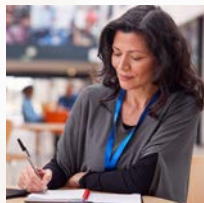# RUTGERS

School of Management
and Labor Relations

**EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT
RESEARCH CENTER**

Lumina Foundation All Learning Counts Initiative

Facilitating entry into postsecodary education for adult equity populations

March 2023

RUTGERS
School of Management
and Labor Relations
**EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT
RESEARCH CENTER**

ABOUT THE EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT RESEARCH CENTER

Rutgers' Education and Employment Research Center (EERC) is housed within the School of Management and Labor Relations. EERC conducts research and evaluation on programs and policies at the intersection of education and employment. Our work strives to improve policy and practice so that institutions may provide educational programs and pathways that ensure individuals obtain the education needed for success in the workplace, and employers have a skilled workforce to meet their human resource needs. For more information on our mission and current research, visit **smlr.rutgers.edu/eerc**.

ABOUT RUTGERS' SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT AND LABOR RELATIONS

Rutgers' School of Management and Labor Relations (SMLR) is the leading source of expertise on the world of work, building effective and sustainable organizations, and the changing employment relationship. The school is comprised of two departments—one focused on all aspects of strategic human resource management and the other dedicated to the social science specialties related to labor studies and employment relations. In addition, SMLR provides many continuing education and certificate programs taught by world-class researchers and expert practitioners.

SMLR was originally established by an act of the New Jersey legislature in 1947 as the Institute of Management and Labor Relations. Like its counterparts created in other large industrial states at the same time, the Institute was chartered to promote new forms of labor-management cooperation following the industrial unrest that occurred at the end of World War II. It officially became a school at the flagship campus of the State University of New Jersey in New Brunswick/Piscataway in 1994. For more information, visit **smlr.rutgers.edu**.

Contents:

INTRODUCTION

The All Learning Counts (ALC) initiative, funded by Lumina Foundation, was centered on valuing the external learnings and skills of adult equity populations in order to assist their entry into and progression within post-secondary education programs (PSE) and their achievement of attendant credentials and degrees. The initiative focused on "recognizing learning outside of the class-room"[1] as well as the translation of noncredit institutional learning toward credit-bearing credentials by supporting efforts to incorporate learning by adults,[2] particularly adult equity populations,[3] into transparent credential pathways. Nine projects were funded to expand and broaden existing credit for prior learning (CPL) practices and policies to encompass external learnings and nontraditional CPL assessment and validation practices and policies.

This brief, produced by the evaluation team from the Education and Employment Research Center at Rutgers University and Brandon Roberts + Associates, examines the types of CPL strategies and policies addressed across the nine projects. The brief specifically addresses the progress in implementing these strategies relative to engaging and assisting adult equity populations such that they benefit from these new opportunities. This brief is meant to be informative to practitioners, PSE institutions, and nonprofit community organizations considering creating and expanding CPL efforts or pursuing other strategies to serve adult equity populations.

> The initiative focused on "recognizing learning outside of the class-room" as well as the translation of noncredit institutional learning toward credit-bearing credentials by supporting efforts to incorporate learning by adults, particularly adult equity populations, into transparent credential pathways.

1 https://www.luminafoundation.org/news-and-views/recognizing-learning-outside-the-classroom-lumina-foundation-awards-3-5-million-in-grants-for-all-learning-counts-initiative/

2 Adults are defined as individuals aged 25 or older.

3 Lumina described equity populations as including Hispanics, African Americans, Native Americans, and other underrepresented groups.

BACKGROUND ON ALC INITIATIVE

This brief considers one key element of the ALC initiative—the focus on adult equity populations—to examine what each project proposed relative to this focus as well as the outcomes of those proposed strategies. It thus serves as a longitudinal analysis of the nine projects' strategies relative to their creation and expansion of CPL opportunities for adult equity populations and offers a summative assessment of their work to move these populations into PSE.

The nine funded projects were led by a variety of organizations:

- Four college/university systems—University of Maine System (UMS); Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (Minnesota), University of Wisconsin System (UWS); Virginia Community College System (VCCS)

- Two single-college institutions—Nicolet College (Nicolet); State University of New York, Empire State College (ESC)

- One community-based organization—Mi Casa Resource Center (Mi Casa)

- One union-management partnership—District 1199C Training and Upgrading Fund (1199C)

- One national organization —The National Restaurant Association Education Foundation (NRAEF)

Activities that advanced CPL opportunities for adult equity populations were fundamental to the ALC initiative. Projects took different approaches to their CPL model development work, but the key components were the same *(Figure 1)*:

(1) *Identifying or creating knowledge and skills in an adult equity population.* Several projects designed their ALC work around developing a CPL model for a predetermined adult equity population with an existing set of knowledge and skills (1199C, NRAEF, VCCS, ESC). Other projects' ALC activities included developing a training program during the grant period that would create learning, such as through pilot projects.

Figure 1 • ALC CPL model components

Identify or create knowledge and skills in adult equity population.	*Create linkage to PSE and mechanisms to assess and award credit for specific knowledge and skills.*	*Facilitate enrollment in PSE of adults whose knowledge and skills have been assessed and validated for credit.*
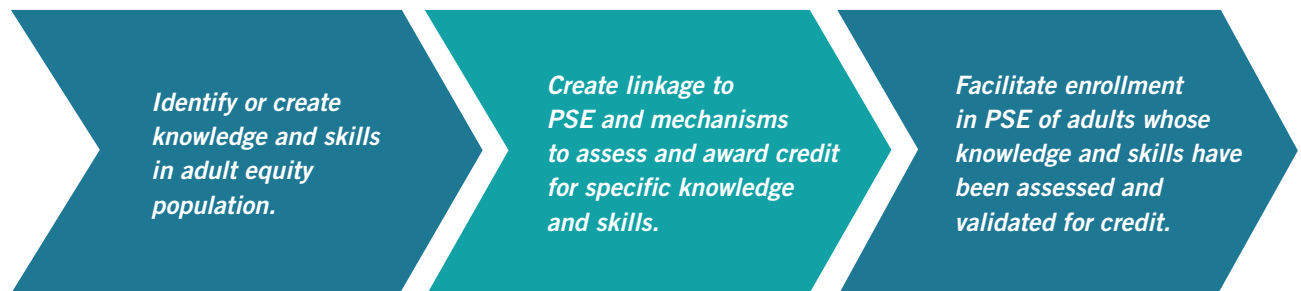
(2) *Creating linkages between the identified learning and education pathways and developing mechanisms to assess and award credit for the learning.* Projects used a variety of mechanisms to assess learning and award credit, including prior learning assessments (PLA) and articulation agreements.

(3) *Facilitating enrollment and supporting credential earning.* Project activities included helping adults whose knowledge and skills were assessed and validated to enroll in PSE programs with eligible program credits and to persist in those programs to the point of attaining a credential.

Practice and policy change efforts overlay the three components of the ALC CPL model *(Figure 1)*. The nine projects differed in their scope and focus on institutional- or system-level practice and policy changes. Five projects were led by individual entities – postsecondary institutions and other organizations – and focused on implementing CPL practice changes at their institutions. Four projects were led by postsecondary systems and focused on implementing state-level CPL policy changes. Table 1 in Appendix A offer more detail about the projects' characteristics including the strategies they proposed to develop their CPL models, and the types of partners they engaged to further their project goals.

The projects also differed in their prior experience valuing the external learnings and skills of adult equity populations and assisting their entry into and progression within postsecondary education programs, something we

found made a difference during implementation. Many of the projects had experience administering traditional forms of CPL such as portfolio reviews, CLEP exams, and ACE evaluated military experience. However, projects began their ALC work with varying levels of experience with nontraditional CPL assessments and validation, a focus of the ALC initiative. Similarly, many projects – especially those led by non-postsecondary organizations – had moderate experience serving adults and adult equity populations, but not as much experience engaging these populations in PSE. The figure below summarizes the nine projects' prior experience in four areas related to the ALC initiative: **1)** *assessing and validating nontraditional CPL,* **2)** *serving adults,* **3)** *serving adult equity populations,* and **4)** *engaging adult equity populations in postsecondary education (Figure 2).*

CONDITIONS AND FACTORS SURROUNDING PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

The ALC initiative was designed as a 30-month project. As noted above, the goal was to provide adult equity learners with CPL services for the purpose of awarding PSE program credits that could enhance PSE enrollments and accelerate the attainment of program credentials. Project funding and start dates were delayed to late fall 2019, essentially resulting in a 24-month grant period to achieve project implementation and student outcomes.[4] Implementation was challenging for all projects. During the first year of project implementation, the evaluation team realized that it was highly unlikely that any project would progress to a point of enrolling students in PSE during the two-year grant period.

---

4 Several of the nine projects did receive special no-cost extensions for two to five months into 2022.

Figure 2 • Projects' prior experience serving adult equity populations

9 Projects	Assessing & validating non-traditional CPL			Serving adults (25+)			Serving adult (25+) equity populations			Engaging adult equity populations into PSE		
	Limited	Moderate	Significant	Limited	Moderate	Significant	Limited	Moderate	Significant	Limited	Moderate	Significant
District 1199C Training & Upgrading Fund	▬					▬▬▬			▬▬▬	▬▬		
Mi Casa Resource Center	▬					▬▬▬			▬▬▬	▬		
Minnesota State Colleges & Universities	▬				▬▬		▬			▬		
National Restaurant Association Education Foundation	▬				▬▬			▬▬		▬		
Nicolet College	▬					▬▬			▬▬		▬▬	
State University of New York, Empire State College			▬▬▬		▬▬			▬▬			▬▬	
Virginia Community College System			▬▬▬		▬▬			▬▬				▬▬▬
University of Maine System	▬				▬▬		▬			▬		
University of Wisconsin System	▬				▬▬		▬			▬		

In addition, the first six months of project implementation was marked by the start of the pandemic and the country's racial reckoning. Both issues affected project implementation efforts. The pandemic led to some impressive pivots in some projects, such as taking a training program and CPL assessment process from in-person to online delivery; in other projects it resulted in the retirement and loss of key staff and the refocusing of priorities within the organization/institution. The racial reckoning was expected by some to enhance attention to the ALC goal of serving equity populations, but that did not happen because CPL was not considered a priority relative to other issues such as financial aid and student supports. Undoubtedly, the pandemic and initial economic decline diminished the interest in PSE among many adult equity learners, especially those remaining employed; notably, there were minimal efforts to explore strategies and options to overcome this barrier.

The following findings and recommendations from the ALC initiative should be viewed as a product of a multitude of issues affecting project progress that included but were not limited to the pandemic. These sections explain the progress and outcomes of this initiative by examining work performed across all nine projects and presenting findings on efforts to serve adult equity learners.

Additionally, this report offers recommendations that can be useful in informing and shaping future grant-funded initiatives, especially in the context of serving and benefiting adult equity populations.

KEY FINDINGS

The following section discusses key findings, specifically focused on equity populations, from the nine projects, breaking them into three primary categories: project design, program practices, and strengthening policies/enhancing systems. Each subsection considers elements of the proposal stage, implementation practices, and outcomes of the projects, creating a longitudinal exploration of findings.

Project Design

■ *Several projects that proposed to focus their work on specific adult equity populations were able to more effectively develop CPL structures and practices to serve those populations.* Nicolet and Mi Casa designed their work from the outset to focus on adult equity populations. Both offered proposals that included clearly articulated strategies for serving adult equity populations with specific populations in mind—adult Native American learners

(Nicolet) and adult Hispanic low-income populations (Mi Casa). Both proposals discussed structures or services meant to directly address or serve these populations. Nicolet proposed a detailed plan to work with tribal members to structure learning and assessments for this population. Mi Casa proposed working with a large Hispanic population already engaged in financial services (banking) training, where support structures were already in place.

On the other hand, the commitment to serve adult equity populations was low across the other projects. This was apparent in the general lack of articulation of strategies for accessing and serving equity groups and of the numbers of equity students projected to be served during the grant period. Some projects failed to clearly articulate an equity population of focus in the formulation of their proposals. For example, several applicants discussed adult learners as the focus for their project but failed to delineate adult equity populations. To be successful, projects meant to serve equity populations should clearly articulate this in initial project design and align project goals with the intended equity population.

■ *Most project proposals were determined to have insufficient work plans that likely contributed to implementation challenges, especially regarding recruitment, signifying the importance of detailed work plans from the outset.*
The level of operational detail articulated for implementing strategies and engaging in partnerships varied significantly across applications. On one hand, VCCS's application outlined three clear strategies for CPL systems change with a uniform process for assessing and validating knowledge and skills for credits. The system proposed a clear leader of the work and discussed prior work on assessing military skills and learning, indicating substantial experience in implementing similar strategies. NRAEF likewise presented a well-articulated concept and focus of work, including the identification of a specific equity population of focus, but details on the activities and timelines for serving these populations needed more clarification.

On the other hand, all projects failed to address

participant recruitment in their design, and even projects that built successful strategies were unprepared to effectively recruit target populations to take advantage of PSE opportunities. As mentioned above, several projects identified and noted specific adult equity populations, but their proposals did not specify exactly how the population would be targeted for outreach or made aware of the newly created opportunities. For example, one project made a direct case for bringing CPL to successful completers of college-based noncredit training programs that served a significant number of adult equity learners. Despite significant progress in building their CPL structure and making it available, at grant end they had not yet developed a marketing strategy to specifically reach noncredit program completers. As discussed below, such omissions from project work plans should raise concerns about both the intention and capacity to fully carry out the initiative goal of serving and benefiting adult equity populations.

Building Program Practices For Equity Populations

ALC CPL Model Approach

■ *Many projects sought to build new structures rather than to expand existing ones, resulting in less implementation progress and a lack of significant attention to adult equity populations.* Minnesota worked to build an online CPL portal similar to VCCS's Credits2Careers portal that would allow students to select and compare various CPL opportunities across the system. Because there was no pre-existing portal in place like there was in VCCS's project, Minnesota's portal took considerably more time to design, contract out, and develop than anticipated. As such, the portal was not fully developed by the end of the grant period and served no students. UMS worked to build a Computer Support Specialist training program targeted to serve equity populations that would generate CPL at select UMS and Maine Community College System institutions. The training program consisted of three training "levels," each associated with a badge; learners would earn a micro-

credential upon earning all three badges. The challenge of developing the training curriculum and securing training providers proved more complex and time-consuming than anticipated. The full training was not complete at the end of the grant and thus few members of the targeted equity populations completed training that would generate CPL.

■ *Projects targeted exclusively at adult equity populations made more progress building models/strategies to serve adult equity populations than did projects targeted at adult populations more generally.* The projects that focused explicitly on equity populations in their application and work plan progressed further than others in creating and expanding models and strategies designed to serve these populations. Mi Casa and 1199C structured their work to exclusively serve equity groups, and this focus yielded clear progress. 1199C, for example, proposed serving equity groups in the healthcare industry by partnering with Montgomery County Community College (MCCC) to develop a CPL opportunity for certified nurse's aids (CNAs) in the Philadelphia metropolitan area. Similarly, Mi Casa worked with both two- and four-year PSE institutions to create and finalize a program pathway meant to benefit graduates of their financial training program, which was designed to serve low-income Hispanic adults.

■ *The project that engaged their equity population in the development and implementation of their project yielded structures and approaches that were the most tailored to this equity population.* Nicolet involved Native American tribal leaders and educators from the outset of its work to develop its "Indigenous Ways of Knowing" certificate and the associated PLA. Engaging tribal members helped Nicolet embed cultural recognition into its curriculum development and CPL structure. The college also chose a nontraditional approach to PLA, although a formalized process was not fully established by the end of the grant period. The institution planned an assessment strategy involving tribal members that embodied tribal members' "indigenous ways of knowing" framework. The assessment team, including faculty and tribal members, would assess learners on an individual basis by holistically discussing

the learner's knowledge relative to the course material, allowing them to organically tell the assessors the story of their knowledge and learning. By involving the equity population in the development, implementation, and assessment of its CPL structure, Nicolet created a rich and equitable approach to CPL as well as developed a closer working relationship between faculty and tribal educational experts and leaders. Notably, Nicolet was the only project that engaged the targeted community in their structural development work.

Recruitment

■ *Projects encountered significant challenges engaging adult equity populations to seize opportunities for PSE.* As previously noted, none of the projects successfully recruited equity populations—beyond just a few students—to take advantage of the opportunity to enroll in PSE. There was a combination of reasons for this, but notable was the lack of clearly articulated recruitment strategies at the application stage. Without a clear plan for recruitment specifically tailored to adult equity populations, institutions and organizations relied on standard recruitment practices geared toward the populations they routinely served. For example, staff from 1199C noted that their use of "standard" recruitment language around "getting a degree" may have contributed to the low number of potential students showing interest in its CPL opportunity as equity populations may be more responsive to messaging about "making more money" or "getting a better job." This suggests that strategies to recruit adult equity populations requires different messaging than institutions and organizations typically use; these might include how a PSE degree can help with upward mobility and job prospects. Unfortunately, 1199C did not pursue another recruitment effort during the grant period to test this hypothesis. Overall, it seems clear that more expertise, experience, and assistance is needed to craft and deliver PSE recruitment strategies tailored to adult equity populations than were evident during the ALC initiative.

Projects did not fully commit to addressing adult equity participant recruitment, instead shifting their attention to replicating CPL models/opportunities. During implementation, all nine ALC projects encountered issues with recruitment. Several cited "pipeline issues" due to COVID-19, low student interest, low overall community college enrollments, and other factors. A couple of organizations mentioned the need to shift recruitment methods and try different approaches. However, none of the projects did so within the grant period. ESC, for example, acknowledged the need to reconsider its recruitment efforts but indicated that this was an institutional reorganization matter that would be addressed in the future outside of the ALC project. Instead of trying different recruitment approaches, and perhaps in an attempt to increase numbers for reporting purposes, some projects shifted their focus to replicating their CPL model and expanding the opportunity to other populations. Some projects shifted away from their plans to exclusively target adult equity populations to instead serve adult learners in general, and several began pursuing high school students before the grant period ended.

> Whether the project was led by a post-secondary institution or a nonprofit organization seemed to be inconsequential; partnerships that included a partner with a history of serving the population of interest seemed to be more productive in building structural opportunities for adult equity populations than those that did not.

Partnerships

■ *Projects with partnerships between adult equity-serving nonprofit organizations and PSE institutions effectively built CPL opportunities to serve adult equity populations and also created pathways to help them move into PSE.* The 1199C–MCCC partnership developed two CPL opportunities in healthcare and human services for union and community members. This presented a promising model for how labor organizations and PSE can partner to help adult learners use CPL to access PSE. Mi Casa also developed a structured CPL pathway in financial services in partnership with two- and four-year PSE institutions (Community College of Aurora and Metropolitan State). These partnerships created a CPL opportunity for adult equity students completing a nonprofit six-week training program that reduced college rates for such credits, saving adult equity learners time and money. The partners also planned to support and facilitate students' ongoing post-secondary access and college progress, though those services were not yet in place at the end of the grant. NRAEF developed a CPL pathway at Valencia Community College in restaurant and hospitality management that offered significant CPL program credits (especially for graduates of an NRAEF apprenticeship program). It also provided online programming to candidates across the country that was tailored to serve adult equity populations. Nicolet worked with the Wisconsin Indian Education Association and tribal elders to develop a four-course, 13-credit local certificate providing elective credits toward a general associate degree at the college.

Whether the project was led by a postsecondary institution or a nonprofit organization seemed to be inconsequential; partnerships that included a partner with a history of serving the population of interest seemed to be more productive than those that did not in building structural opportunities for adult equity populations.

Pilots

■ *Projects using pilots to identify opportunities and barriers for adult equity populations lacked the time and intentionality needed to complete all pilot work and to identify lessons that could be translated into practice and policy changes.* Three projects—UMS, Minnesota, and UWS—chose to utilize pilots in serving adult equity populations to identify challenges and promising practices that might later translate to changes in institutional practice or to institutional or state policy. At grant end, one pilot had several adult learners enrolled in PSE with CPL credits for training completed during the grant period. Although successful in many ways, it was small and lacked a well-defined mechanism to track student

progress, and thus had limited use in fostering a case for overall policy and systems change. Another project funded a handful of pilots targeted to specific adult equity populations; none of these pilots were fully implemented during the grant period, and intentional efforts were not taken to capture lessons and shape a policy agenda to promote state-level changes. If pilots are to benefit projects, they must be intentionally developed and supported to capture relevant lessons and have follow-up strategies and capacities for engaging in policy and systems change activities.

Strengthening Policies And Enhancing Systems For Adult Equity Populations

■ *Projects undertaking systems change work lacked adequate time, actions, and resources to foster adoption at the campus level.* Significant systems change takes time. Even when policy change takes place at the state-system level in a relatively short period of time, as happened at UWS with its revised state-level CPL policy, it takes time and intentional efforts for adoption at the campus level. In addition, without direction and resources to assist campuses, consistent adoption at the campus level seems unlikely. This is unfortunate given the positive changes UWS achieved in the system policy; its work opened CPL to adult learners by focusing on transcription/transfer issues and valuing industry certifications and college noncredit training across the system. Another project, VCCS, created guidelines and standards for evaluating certificates and training for academic credit; however, individual institutions were able to decide if an articulation agreement would be developed or if students would be assessed individually, leaving unclear the level of work to be conducted at the college level and how much of this content would be included in the state CPL portal. ESC also made an impressive institutional policy change as part of their ALC project by creating and adopting an institutional microcredential policy. However, this policy was not put into practice to serve adult equity populations in any substantial way by the end of the grant period.

■ *Projects focused on systemwide change lacked a clear and dedicated goal as well as an entity to guide the work and garner interest/support from system institutions.* A common mistake among projects focused on systems and policy change was attempting too many activities in a short period of time. By taking on a multitude of simultaneous activities, the goals and focus of the systems projects were diluted, and the projects struggled to complete individual tasks within the timeframe of the grant. Additionally, system projects without a clear, influential entity directing this work struggled to garner interest and support from system institutions to implement proposed ALC activities. One ALC project did not fall into this trap: VCCS maintained one primary goal throughout the project and had one clear system-level entity guiding the work. As a result, the VCCS project successfully engaged faculty from institutions across the system in developing crosswalks and, although it did not fully complete its portal prior to the end of the grant, the project made significant progress toward its completion.

■ *Professional development activities were generally not effective in helping projects raise awareness of the needs of adult equity learners or create strategies for adopting policy change; they were also limited in their ability to affect significant change.* Several projects developed professional development modules to guide and support local implementation and policy change actions and help raise awareness of the need to serve adult equity populations; however, more attention is needed to identify and support specific actions to serve adult equity populations. Nicolet, for example, organized a professional development speaker series to raise cultural awareness within the college on the history and knowledge of local tribes. This effort created an awareness and openness for faculty to work more closely with tribal education experts and leaders in their ALC project and to be open to acknowledging the importance of new ways of learning. It also led college leaders to recognize the opportunity to move beyond cultural awareness by undertaking work in the future to address related barriers and opportunities with college policies and practices. The UWS created profes-

sional development modules associated with the CPL policy reforms developed as part of its ALC project. In doing this work, the system recognized the importance of several key new areas of opportunity, including valuing industry certifications and working with external populations such as incarcerated individuals and tribal groups within the state. The ALC project ended before plans could be developed in these areas, but system leaders had been made aware of the need and opportunities.

◼ *Projects attempting to identify/make policy changes and enhance systems lacked a clear focus on equity populations.* All four projects focused on systems or policy changes failed to explicitly address adult equity populations. At the application stage, all these projects referred to equity populations in their proposals, but none of them articulated clear strategies for serving these populations. During implementation, activities were centered on adult learners, but they lacked a focus on equity populations. At grant end, some of these projects had made some progress at the system and state level to identify CPL as a strategy and to begin standardization of CPL across systems. While these changes benefited adult learners in general—including members of equity populations—they did not benefit equity populations specifically and were not explicitly designed to do so.

> This report offers recommendations that can be useful in informing and shaping future grant-funded initiatives, especially in the context of serving and benefiting adult equity populations.

For example, VCCS's draft strategic plan and policy changes included the establishment of a system-level CPL coordinating committee, standard methods for PLA across the system, and a statewide review process to ensure all colleges offering crosswalked courses award equivalent credits. These changes lay the foundation for systemwide practice reforms that will support the use of the C2C portal. However, by grant end, the proposed policy/systems changes did not have explicit marketing actions relative to adult equity populations, nor did they include specific actions designed to reach the completers of VCCS's Fast Forward noncredit training programs.

Notably, two projects were able to develop important policy—one on program pathways (Mi Casa), the other on CPL (Minnesota)—and present it as a legislative agenda item in their respective states. However, in both cases, policy phrasing and terminology did not include equity language, and neither policy specified the need for strategies aimed at serving adult equity populations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The ALC initiative was an admirable and ambitious effort to address a key societal need and goal: to assist adult equity populations by establishing effective ways to value their skills and knowledge to facilitate entry into and progress within PSE and to attain high-quality institutional credentials. The findings detailed in this brief make it clear that such opportunities are available and can be activated, but at the same time, more commitment, intentionality, expertise, and time are needed to ensure that adult equity populations are served and benefit from them. The following ten key recommendations for enhancing the possibility that such outcomes can be achieved build off these findings:

◼ *Projects must commit dedicated resources and capacity toward serving adult equity populations and make serving these populations their primary mission.* Projects seeking to serve adult equity populations must make a solid commitment to focus resources and capacity toward directly supporting proposed activities and strategies designed to serve adult equity populations. This includes making it the number one goal of the project or, preferably, the sole goal. Additionally, project proposals must clearly articulate the resource allocations (budgets) for strategies intentionally designed to serve and benefit such populations and should not receive project approval or funding before doing so.[5]

---

5 Understandably, requiring finalized work plans prior to project approval and funding is not always possible, but in the instance of the ALC initiative— which provided a five-month, $10,000 planning grant to final initiative candidates—this seems like a reasonable and necessary requirement.

■ *Projects should include organizations and institutions with proven experience serving adult equity populations.* New efforts to serve equity populations may best be undertaken by institutions and organizations with exposure to and experience working with such populations. This includes many two-year colleges and nonprofit community organizations. Asking four-year colleges to expand their historical focus on traditional populations, to serve adult equity populations, can result in limited actions to serve equity populations as they first focus on serving adults, without explicit attention to adult equity groups, no matter the initial plans or intent.

■ *Projects must establish work plans comprised of specific strategies designed to serve adult equity populations, including strategies to recruit for PSE enrollment.* Along with detailed budgets, proposed projects must present comprehensive and thorough work plans that articulate strategies for serving adult equity populations. Proposed strategies must encompass the scope of the initiative. In the context of the ALC initiative, such strategies must address the three components of the ALC CPL model: **(1)** identifying or creating knowledge and skills in an adult equity population, **(2)** creating a linkage to PSE and mechanisms to assess and award credit for specific knowledge/skills, and **(3)** facilitating enrollment and persistence in PSE of learners whose knowledge and skills are successfully assessed and validated. Proposed projects also need to articulate the intentional approach, steps, and capacities for enacting and achieving expected outcomes as well as the benchmarks and timelines depicting progress. They must also be reviewed and assessed for their potential to realistically achieve such outcomes in the established timeframe with the resources allotted and the capacity/ staff proposed. As indicated in the findings above, a key area for attention is the recruitment and enrollment of adult equity populations in PSE.

> The ability and willingness to ensure that projects maintain their intentions to serve adult equity populations is paramount to a meaningful and successful initiative.

■ *Project staff should use approved work plans to monitor and assess project implementation progress including preparation for carrying out the full range of proposed and necessary project activities.* The progress made by projects in building an array of innovative "models" to create CPL opportunities for adult learners is notable. In many instances, however, implementation efforts did not evolve into activities focused on helping adult equity populations take advantage of these opportunities. Such activities cannot occur without sufficient attention, resources, and staffing, so efforts should be made to ensure proposals are properly resourced and staffed to support them from the outset of the initiative. This point seems particularly important in ensuring that dedicated efforts are taken to effectively manage and support the roles and responsibilities expected of partnership activities. The ability and willingness to ensure that projects maintain their intentions to serve adult equity populations is paramount to a meaningful and successful initiative.

■ *Projects should support efforts targeting adult equity learners in specific nontraditional settings.* More attention must be given to considering the variety of opportunities for reaching adult equity populations. This may include opportunities with existing two-year college programs (e.g., noncredit training programs) as well as training programs administered by external organizations (e.g., nonprofit community training providers, tribal communities, literacy providers, employers, and correctional institutions). Such efforts require projects to intentionally commit to looking for such opportunities as well as for staff and capacities to effectively engage and serve adult equity populations.

■ *Ensure projects' external equity-serving organizations/ partners have the commitment and capacity to promote access to PSE.* Efforts to reach adult equity populations through external organizations must look beyond their existing focus on serving such populations to consider the mission and focus of the ALC initiative. For example, groups that provide training services might do so only with a goal of employment and therefore may lack the necessary experience or capacity to encourage and recruit

participants' access to PSE. It is important for groups with these deficits to be willing to invest in the expertise and capacity required to accomplish that work.

■ *Support pilot projects only when time and effort are sufficient to deliver desired services to participants and there is a commitment to assess and articulate lessons learned.* Deploying resources to support pilot projects to serve adult equity populations can produce positive results. But such efforts require time to be developed and implemented and are often limited to small numbers of participants. Importantly, the benefits of such efforts are found in lessons learned for improving practices and policies as well as perhaps for developing interest in investing in and sustaining such efforts. Time, resources, and actions to do this need to be clearly articulated and realistic.

■ *Projects should direct resources, technical assistance, and guidance to recruit, serve, and enroll adult equity populations in PSE.* Engaging and recruiting adult equity populations into PSE remains a long-standing challenge across the country. More attention, resources, and expertise are needed to address the issue. One way to do this is to engage equity populations more intentionally in project development and operational activities. It is more likely, however, that projects require outside substantive expert guidance and assistance more akin to professional marketing and advertising expertise to fully address this problem. This is a significant challenge for any type of project trying to assist adult equity populations' entry into PSE. It is not a problem to take lightly; it is worth serious attention at a broader and even national level.[6]

───────────────

6 As noted earlier, no project had a plan or strategy for recruiting adult equity populations to enroll in PSE, even those learners who could have taken advantage of newly developed CPL opportunities. No project nor the Foundation sought assistance to address that need during the grant period.

7 Although not a concept explored within the framework of the ALC initiative, institutional transformation—the process in which a system's culture is modified to make it more equitable through change in its behaviors and processes—is likely an effect at play here. For more information about institutional transformation, see http://www.dvp-praxis.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/joyceFnd_ShiftingGears3.0-FINAL-REPORT.pdf; Association of Public & Land Grant Universities. (n.d.). Achieving university transformation & systemic changes. https://www.aplu.org/our-work/1-driving-equitable-student-success/achieving-university-transformation-and-systemic-changes/; European Institute for Gender Equality. (2022). Institutional Transformation. https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/toolkits/gender-institutional-transformation/what-institutional-transformation.

■ *Professional development can be an important resource and tool for projects to support practice or policy/systems changes, but these efforts need to be focused and intentional.* Professional development is often targeted toward PSE faculty and staff. As demonstrated, such efforts can expand cultural awareness and increase participants' willingness to consider changes to methods or practices, especially when those changes benefit adult equity populations. Further, professional development efforts create a foundation for further actions that can be explicitly articulated and acted upon. If real systemwide changes in policy and practice are expected, training designed to affect such changes in ways that serve adult equity learners needs to be specifically supported rather than simply made available for possible use.

■ *Projects seeking policy and systems change are quite different from projects that seek to enhance and expand practices to serve adult equity populations; thus, the two project types have different implementation timelines and capacities.* Seeking policy change at the institutional or system level often takes more time and requires different approaches and staff than practice change requires. Although practice-change activities can help identify barriers or opportunities to strengthen policies and systems, combining both in one project is a substantial challenge and requires significant time and resources. Such efforts are doubly difficult when serving adult equity populations. Simply stated, efforts seeking to change both practice and policy and to institutionalize those changes across a system must be looking to commit to an approximately eight- to ten-year timeframe and to invest considerable resources.[7]

CONCLUSION

The nine Lumina-funded ALC projects discussed in this brief identified a variety of innovative CPL practices and policies designed to value and award the learning and skills of adult equity populations and in many instances made progress in developing such strategies. In a few instances, projects took actions to assess and value participant knowledge and skills. However, overall, the projects were not able to successfully engage participants

in taking the next step: to pursue PSE and a possible credential by applying the eligible CPL credits they had earned toward enrollment in PSE programs. In short, the ALC initiative suggests that various types of community-based external training groups and higher education organizations can build practices and strategies to use CPL to serve adult equity learners, but this leaves open the question of whether these efforts can bring such populations into PSE programs so that they may progress toward achieving postsecondary credentials.

Appendix A:

Table 1 • Project Characteristics

Project	Leading institution(s)	Key strategies	Population(s) served
District 1199C Training & Upgrading Fund (1199C)	**Individual Entity** Led by 1199C in partnership with Montgomery County Community College in PA	Partner with a local community college to facilitate CPL reviews and postsecondary enrollment for 1199C members	Adults, primarily Black and Latinx
Mi Casa Resource Center (Mi Casa)	**Individual Entity** Led by Mi Casa in partnership with Community College of Aurora, and Metropolitan State University Denver	Implement a CPL pathway model in financial services from Mi Casa training or work experience to PSE programs at partner institutions	Low-income Latinx adults
National Restaurant Association Education Foundation (NRAEF)	**Individual Entity** Led by NRAEF and American Hotel & Lodging Association Foundation (AHLAF)	Create CPL pathways from a restaurant manager apprenticeship training program to higher education through the creation of articulation agreements with colleges and universities	Adult equity workers in the restaurant and hospitality industries enrolled in specific apprenticeship programs
Nicolet College (Nicolet)	**Individual Entity** Led by Nicolet College in partnership with the Wisconsin Indian Education Association (WIEA) and local tribes	Create CPL opportunities for tribal learning and knowledge for Native students and match those students with pathways to PSE	Native communities in the North Wisconsin region
State University of New York, Empire State College (ESC)	**Individual Entity** Led by an individual college (ESC) within New York's state university system; involves multiple employer partners	Conduct reviews of employer training programs, activities, and competencies for ESC credit awards and establish pathways from those employer trainings to ESC programs	Adult learners working at partner companies like CVS
Minnesota State Colleges & Universities (Minnesota)	**System Focused** Led by Minnesota State higher education system and its Credit for Prior Learning Assessment Network (C-PLAN)	Develop a systemwide web platform for CPL, populated with CPL program cross-walks, to promote and support CPL practices within the system and implement 11 pilot projects to test CPL strategies and learn how to apply them to equity populations	Prospective and current system students; some pilot projects focused on serving equity constituencies, e.g., International Institute of Minnesota serves immigrant and refugee populations
University of Maine System (UMS)	**System Focused** Led by UMS; involves several partners in the state including Adult Basic Education, corrections, and PSE institutions	Develop and deliver microcredentials to targeted equity populations and create CPL pathways for microcredential into two- and four-year colleges; identify policy barriers affecting such efforts across the Maine PSE and workforce eco-system	Low-income adults, New Mainers (i.e., immigrants), incarcerated adults, and Native populations
University of Wisconsin System (UWS)	**System Focused** Coordinated at the system level with direct involvement from five UWS universities	Strengthen systemwide policies as well as select college policies and practices to broaden the application of CPL beyond the support of traditional students	Adult learners
Virginia Community College System (VCCS)	**System Focused** Led by system-level group; involved faculty and administrators from across the 23 system colleges	Expand the state's Credit2Careers CPL web portal and conduct crosswalks of industry training and credentials to include in the portal with a focus on Fast Forward noncredit occupational training programs	Prospective and current system students, especially adult equity completers of Fast Forward noncredit occupational training programs

RUTGERS

School of Management
and Labor Relations
EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT
RESEARCH CENTER

Education and Employment Research Center
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

94 Rockafeller Road, Room 234 • Piscataway, NJ 08854
smlr.rutgers.edu/eerc