



**Minnesota
STATE COLLEGES
& UNIVERSITIES**

Shifting Gears-Minnesota *FastTRAC*:
*Training, Resources And Credentialing
for Pathways to Sustainable Employment*



December 10, 2008

Ms. Whitney Smith
Program Manager
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Dear Whitney,

We are pleased to inform you of our progress toward implementing a one-year, \$500,000 grant to Minnesota for the FastTRAC initiative designed to create a statewide stackable credential framework for low-skilled adults to obtain postsecondary occupational credentials required to gain family supporting wages. Per your request, the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system Office of the Chancellor (OOC), acting as the fiscal agent for the grant, is providing a description of the work so far on the FastTRAC initiative on six key benchmarks (listed below) in order for you to properly evaluate fulfillment of the terms of the grant and progress toward meeting our goals. We also are reporting on related initiatives that are influencing the FastTRAC policy agenda and work plan; these are hopeful signs of growing awareness and commitment to improved system alignment. Finally, we are informing you of valuable professional development opportunities that have helped shape our work, and relaying to you a frank assessment of the challenges ahead.

Progress toward MN FastTRAC Benchmarks

Benchmark 1: Developing a logic model to guide the creation of a work plan. Please see Attachment A. The logic model was introduced at the first meeting of the Systems Leadership Team (i.e. our steering committee) on August 28, 2008, and updated prior to and after the second meeting of the Systems Leadership Team on November 3, 2008. We have been fortunate to have the guidance of Derek Price, Brandon Roberts and Neil Ridley to assist development of our logic model.

Benchmark 2: Creating a cross-agency work plan with an agenda for state policy change. A template provided by Neil Ridley and Julie Strawn for framing policy opportunities in education and workforce development systems was reviewed by the Systems Leadership Team on November 3, 2008, and selected as a tool for organizing policy options. Staff has customized the template to highlight key decision points and focus attention on key policy opportunities in the current environment. Please see Attachment B, "Policy Change Framing Tool." Staff is using this template—based on a tool used during Wisconsin's RISE policy scan—to guide one-on-one

interviews with key policy leaders and program directors across Minnesota's education and workforce development systems. Thus far, staff has interviewed key persons in WIA Adult Services (i.e. Title 1-B Adults and Dislocated Worker), Adult Basic Education (ABE, Title II) and Perkins/Community and Technical Education systems. Other interviews are being scheduled. The idea is to collect policy ideas from key persons at the state and local levels, in each part of the system (many of whom sit on FastTRAC leadership and collaborative learning teams described in Benchmark 4), and present these ideas to leadership and collaborative learning teams to foster discussion and aid decision making around priorities and strategies.

Benchmark 3: Identifying a project coordinator. Two staff have been hired to work under the initiative, a director and a project consultant. The Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) is providing staff support, space and equipment for staff use. Mary Schmidt, the director, is responsible for carrying out decisions of the executive team, enabling the leadership and collaborative learning teams to fulfill their charges, overseeing incubator contracts, initiative budgeting and reporting, and policy development. Anne Marie Leland, the project consultant, is responsible for identifying policies to create the stackable credential framework, providing technical support to incubators, and being the key liaison between DEED and Adult Basic Education on aligning policies and programs for low-wage, low-skilled adult workers. Matching resources from Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system (Perkins federal grant funds) and DEED were used to cover salaries and expenses of staff prior to grant effectiveness.

Benchmark 4: Convening the steering committee and creating a state-level "stackable credentials" framework. The FastTRAC Systems Leadership Team is responsible for preparing findings and recommendations for building a stackable credentials framework to the governor and state workforce development and education policy makers no later than July 2009. The Systems Leadership Team includes leaders from state agencies providing public employment services, as well as leaders from public and nonprofit local organizations that provide basic education and skills training to low-skilled and low-wage adult workers, and individuals who influence policy makers in education and workforce development. The Systems Leadership Team can draw on the advice of three collaborative learning teams: The Stackable Credentials Team is advising incubators in implementing career pathway innovations and overcoming curriculum issues; the Student Support Services Team is identifying barriers and innovations to providing financial aid and student support services; and the Data and Information Team is following incubator participant progress and outcomes and identifying what will be required to create awareness and commitment toward building integrated data capability. Please see Attachment C for roster and charge of each FastTRAC team. Minutes of team meetings are available on the FastTRAC website: www.cte.mnscu.edu. Following is a summary of accomplishments and next steps of the FastTRAC teams.

- **Systems Leadership Team**—selected incubators and the policy issue that each is testing; selected policy framing tool; began review of state legislative policy agendas of team members for 2010-11 biennium. Team members representing non-state agencies, such as Affirmative Options and the MN Workforce Council Association (MWCA), have specific legislative priorities that if put into effect will be important examples of reforming agency practice and aligning funding streams. For instance, the MWCA is going to advocate for more training and support services for adult workers, and--along with the Literacy Minnesota coalition--extending the ongoing DEED-ABE initiative around short term training and certificates called "Educational Training Collaborative (ETC) grants". Next steps for this team are to consider policy opportunities collected by staff from interviews with key policy makers and program

directors, and continue to follow federal and state legislative priorities affecting FastTRAC population. (Meeting Dates: August 28, 2008; November 3, 2008; February 2, 2009; May 4, 2009; July 13, 2009.)

- Stackable Credentials Team—identified recurrent themes for further research and consideration for policy recommendations, namely lifelong learning accounts, mandating student planning tools, and student portfolios. Next steps are to discuss “decision points” specific to bridge curriculum programming based on decision points in Washington and Ohio career pathway models and lessons from ETC grant recipients. (Meeting dates: November 3, 2008; February 2, 2009; May 4, 2009; July 13, 2009.)
- Student Support Services Team—identified common innovations in wrap-around services of incubators, namely transportation, counseling, and support to employers. At the next meeting, the team will discuss policy options in financial aid and wrap-around services, including a report on student services on Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system campuses. (The report will examine intensity of services, costs, and roles/responsibilities of partners.) (Meeting dates: November 3, 2008; February 2, 2009; May 4, 2009; July 13, 2009.)
- Data and Information Team—surveyed incubator partners to gather insight on which data elements incubator partners are currently gathering, frequency of collection, and ease of sharing. The survey responses informed FastTRAC staff and the Data and Information Team in framing quantitative data collection expectations of incubators. The survey also created greater understanding of data sharing obstacles and opportunities/assets at the local level between workforce centers, Adult Basic Education providers, and Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system institutions. Next steps are to advise FastTRAC staff in collection of qualitative information from incubator partners and to aggregate participant data collected by incubators. (Meeting Dates: September 8, 2008; October 28, 2008; November 3, 2008; November 21, 2008; February 2, 2009; May 4, 2009; July 13, 2009.)

Benchmark 5: Analyzing data strategically to identify policy issues. Because of limitations in Minnesota’s capacity to match individual records across programs, state data systems lack the integration needed to routinely follow individuals from a variety of education and training entry points across multiple programs and institutions and into the labor market. Cognizant of this limitation, the Data and Information Team opted to create a template for incubators to collect common demographic, placement, employment, services, and other key data elements of incubator participants at the local level. The intention is not just to gather intake and exit data on a modest number of persons, but to identify (and attempt to resolve) disconnects that limit gathering of data from all participants and sharing of data at the local level to facilitate program management and reporting. The intention is also to document anecdotal “costs” of disconnections to create awareness and commitment to change among legislators and policy makers. While not directly financed by Joyce Foundation resources, through related efforts Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system-Office of the Chancellor is making progress using DEED’s long-term occupational projections (based on job growth and job replacement) to define high wage, high demand occupations in Minnesota. Thus far 325 occupations have been identified as high wage and high demand among 85 career pathways. When this work is completed, it will be possible to identify where the high wage, high skilled occupations are in each pathway, or to look at a specific high wage, high skilled occupation and see which career pathways it supports.

Benchmark 6: Selecting and implementing local incubators. The Systems Leadership Team selected seven education and work transition programs called *incubators*, to test or incubate innovative policy ideas in ongoing stackable credential or career pathway models. Each incubator was awarded a grant (\$30,000-45,000) to identify its stackable credential model and “incubate” innovative ideas surrounding student support services or bridge curricula. A request for proposals was issued in August 2008, from which 22 pre-applications were submitted. After careful review, ten of the most promising career pathway models were invited to present at the MN FastTRAC Policy Academy on September 23, 2008, and received feedback on their stackable credential models. Final selection of incubators was announced on October 20, 2008. A list of incubators and their policy ideas for testing are available at www.cte.mnscu.edu. To build on the interest and momentum generated by the FastTRAC incubator selection process as well as stackable credentials-related work supported by other initiatives, FastTRAC staff has launched an electronic career pathways network in Minnesota. FastTRAC staff uses this network to disseminate reports, professional development opportunities and other information to help grow the capabilities and commitment for stackable credentials and career pathways beyond the seven incubators.

Major State-level Education, Training and Employment Initiatives Affecting FastTRAC Policy Agenda

Overcoming barriers faced by low-wage and low-skilled adult workers in the education and employment arenas is the focus of ongoing agency efforts that have been catalyzed and reinforced by the Shifting Gears: Minnesota FastTRAC initiative. Following are a few examples of how FastTRAC partners have stepped up their collaborative efforts and agreed to changes in state agency practice. These efforts help build the infrastructure for and institutional commitment to a stackable credentials framework in Minnesota.

ABE Transitions (Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system-ABE initiative): This Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system-ABE initiative is in year two of a three-year effort to increase ABE program capacity for ABE clients to move seamlessly into post-secondary education and training programs. In the first year, ABE provided categorical funding and consultative expertise to each ABE consortia (52 total in the state) enabling them to establish and increase collaborations with their local post-secondary institutions. In order to learn which ABE providers have developed stronger relationships and in which areas, ABE and Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system agreed recently to survey ABE providers to gauge relational developments around two-way client referrals, testing, co-locating, and transition/bridge classes and curriculum. ABE and Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system directors also agreed to pursue pilots to learn how the content of the ABE curriculum matches up with the post-secondary Accuplacer placement test used by post-secondary institutions in Minnesota, with the intention to arrive at a set of scores that are interpretable to students and personnel of both systems. Additionally, ABE staff has met with the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system Assessment for Course Placement Committee to develop referral protocol between ABE programs and Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system campuses.

Education and Training Collaboratives (DEED/Workforce Service Agencies-ABE provider initiative): In March 2008, DEED and ABE combined resources to award 17 collaboratives a share of \$400,000 Education and Training Collaborative (ETC) grants to increase system capacity to effectively serve Minnesota’s adult population who are low-wage and/or low-skilled. The main purpose of the ETC program was to increase employability options by: (i) developing

and providing pre-certification training with direct linkages to higher education and/or a specific job certification process; (ii) offering apprenticeship or internship experiences for adults with limited skills; (iii) providing on-site basic skills training (ABE, GED, or ESL) for incumbent employees whose skills may keep them from retention, promotion or success on the job; or (iv) developing and providing or piloting certificates or credentials based on assessment and work-related competencies (e.g. National Work Readiness Credential, WorkKeys). Most of the resources have gone into the development and implementation of bridge programming in healthcare or manufacturing (two high demand industries in Minnesota). To capture lessons and opportunities for FastTRAC, FastTRAC staff along with DEED and ABE are reviewing reports from grant recipients. A compilation of lessons learned with options for translating outcomes into state policy changes will be considered by the Stackable Credentials Team in the near future. One of the most remarkable developments here is that the professional organizations for the ABE providers (Literacy Minnesota) and Workforce Service Agencies (the Minnesota Workforce Council Association) will be advocating together in 2009 at the Minnesota State Legislature for continued ETC funding. This development affirms local level commitment toward building the stackable credentials framework among frontline practitioners.

Vocational Rehabilitation (ABE-DEED initiative): Discussion between state directors for ABE and Vocational Rehab (VR) has led to agreement that ABE providers will be encouraged to strengthen MOUs with Workforce Centers to better address VR connections; ABE and VR will present at each other's state/regional meetings; and ABE will conduct a survey of ABE providers to gauge current levels and types of connections between Workforce Centers and ABE providers around VR services, as well as WIA adult and youth services.

Professional Development Opportunities for Initiative Staff and Others

FastTRAC staff and co-leads were able to attend the MN ABE Transitions Conference for ABE directors and instructors on Oct. 30 and 31, 2008. The purpose, goals and strategies of the Shifting Gears: Minnesota FastTRAC initiative were presented and attendance by ABE managers indicated considerable interest in learning about and advancing career pathway models. Attendees were also able to learn from Julie Strawn's presentation on career pathways experience in other states and Stephen Reder's longitudinal study of adult learners.

FastTRAC staff and one co-lead was able to attend the National Training Institute for adult education leaders in Seattle Nov. 12-15, 2008, with a particular focus on ABE contributions to developing career pathway systems/frameworks. Among the key resources staff acquired for MN's use with FastTRAC are: (i) Ohio's Stackable Certificate development process, particularly a description of how work groups and committees organized their work around key decision points; (ii) National Center on Education and the Economy's draft "Adult Education for Work" document to help explain relationships and sequencing of policy opportunities and inform plans for a possible year two of Shifting Gears: Minnesota FastTRAC; (iii) a curriculum alignment toolkit for use at the local provider level to engage ABE providers, workforce centers and post-secondary institutions in pursuing common curriculum goals; and (iv) the Perfect Storm 8 minute video for articulating and delivering the urgency of our message.

Challenges Ahead

Multiple policy opportunities have been identified and many more are expected by the summer, be they legislative, agency practice or data-related. Framing opportunities and providing enough research and background information to enable informed decision-making, and to do so in the tight timeframe, will remain a demanding task for staff and the executive committee. Moreover, attracting and retaining the attention of state leadership toward FastTRAC's policy agenda will be challenging given the likely concentration of decision makers on responding to the state's austere budget situation.

These challenges are manageable and we anticipate continued guidance from Neil Ridley, Julie Strawn, Derek Price and Brandon Roberts will aid our persistence and ultimate success.

We would be happy to discuss any of the points raised above or any other matters of concern for Shifting Gears: Minnesota FastTRAC. We are satisfied with our progress to date and feel rather optimistic about our prospects for arriving at a policy agenda and work plan that will produce timely payoffs for state agencies, Minnesota employers and adult workers and students. Your financial investment, time and attention to this important matter are greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

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Attachment A: Shifting Gears Logic Model - Minnesota

Resources	Activities	Outputs	Interim Outcomes	Outcomes	Impact	
POLICY/SYSTEM CHANGE						
Leadership, professional/technical and financial resources from Joyce Foundation	Develop policy agenda and action plan that reflects key elements of stackable credentials education and training framework, including bridge curricula and student support services (underway)	Systems Leadership Team recommends policy agenda and action plan to agency leaders and policy makers, including a two-year strategy to pursue policy agenda	Policy agenda and action plan enacted that addresses key areas: funding streams, data sharing, and professional development	FastTRAC policies implemented statewide that support stackable credentials education and training framework, including bridge curricula, and student support services	More low-skilled adults receive postsecondary educational credentials	
FastTRAC Systems Leadership Team	Collaborative meetings among FastTRAC teams and related state agencies (underway)	MOUs are strengthened between ABE providers and Workforce Centers to better address Vocational Rehab connections	FastTRAC regulatory and legislative priorities are included in legislative agenda of state agencies			
FastTRAC Collaborative Learning Teams Student Support Services Stackable Credentials Data and Information	Survey of ABE providers to gauge levels and types of connections between Workforce Centers and ABE providers on WIA adult and youth services and Vocational Rehab services (underway)	Alignment is agreed upon between ABE curriculum and post-secondary Accuplacer placement test	FastTRAC policy agenda included in Governor's budget			Low-skilled adult workers who take advantage of more accessible and navigable training and education systems receive higher earnings in the labor market
Other leadership MnSCU MDE ABE DEED DHS GWDC DOLI OHE	Survey of ABE providers to learn levels and types of relationships with local postsecondary institutions around two-way client referrals, testing, co-location, and transition/bridge classes (underway)	ABE curriculum is broadened so ABE can teach soft skills, work-based skills and pre-occupation-specific skills coordinated with Workforce Centers and other systems				Employers gain a reliable supply of workers with skills geared to industry needs
INCUBATORS (PILOTS)						
Local and regional stakeholders, including incubator leaders	Award grants to seven incubators to test FastTRAC policy ideas in areas of student support services and bridge curriculum (completed)	Analyses of incubator results – using common standards - shared with FastTRAC teams	Incubator pilots expanded at test sites and implemented at additional sites regionally	FastTRAC models institutionalized throughout adult education, postsecondary and workforce systems	Economic competitiveness grows for employers, regions, and the state overall	
Lessons from other state/regional initiatives ETC Perkins MJSP MIG ABE Transitions	Conduct field visits to incubator sites (one completed; others scheduled)	Model framework for stackable credentials				
	Study wrap around services for adult workers at MnSCU campuses (due Feb. 2, 2009)					
DATA AND INFORMATION						
	Develop data collection tool for incubators to collect common data of participants (completed)	Recommendation and increased commitment to improve data sharing across ABE, MnSCU, DEED systems	Interagency agreements signed on data collection and sharing across ABE, MnSCU and DEED systems	State regularly reports data on low-income adults' progress and transitions through education, training and employment systems		

Attachment B

SHIFTING GEARS: MN FastTRAC POLICY CHANGE FRAMING TOOL

Adult Education Systems

(Cross-walk of top policy opportunities in major adult education systems in Minnesota i.e. legislative and agency practice opportunities)

<u>Policy Opportunities</u>	System:
Mandate: what does the strategic plan for the agency say about the agency's overarching objective in serving low wage, low-skilled adult student/workers?	
Funding: how can these funds support career pathway initiatives?	
Tuition: how can the system be reformed through practice (e.g. agency protocol, MOU between levels of the system or with other systems) to assist low income adults with costs for education/training tuition/fees, materials, living expenses, many of whom are part time students working full time? What regulatory or legislative changes would create more opportunities for adult workers to succeed in each part of the system?	
Student Support Services: how can the system be reformed through practice to assist low income adults with transportation, childcare, counseling (peer, academic, career pathway)? What regulatory or legislative changes would create more opportunities for adult workers to succeed in each part of the system?	
Articulated Curriculum: where are the opportunities for each system to better align curriculum between various levels/courses within a system and between systems? And along a continuum of basic skills, occupational skills, work readiness/soft skills, for-credit certificates and credentials?	
Assessment and Instruction for Success: are there opportunities to improve our assessment tools? Where are there opportunities for co-enrollment across systems? Opportunities for increasing short-term, accelerated learning?	
Persistence and Completion of Credential: What opportunities are open for systems to raise persistence and completion rates of the FastTRAC population?	
Workforce Readiness/Compatibility: where are opportunities to better support adult students' employment goals?	
Connections to Business and Industry: are there opportunities to better engage employers to support training and education that fills their workforce needs?	
Opportunities for Collaboration with WF centers and MnSCU campuses:	