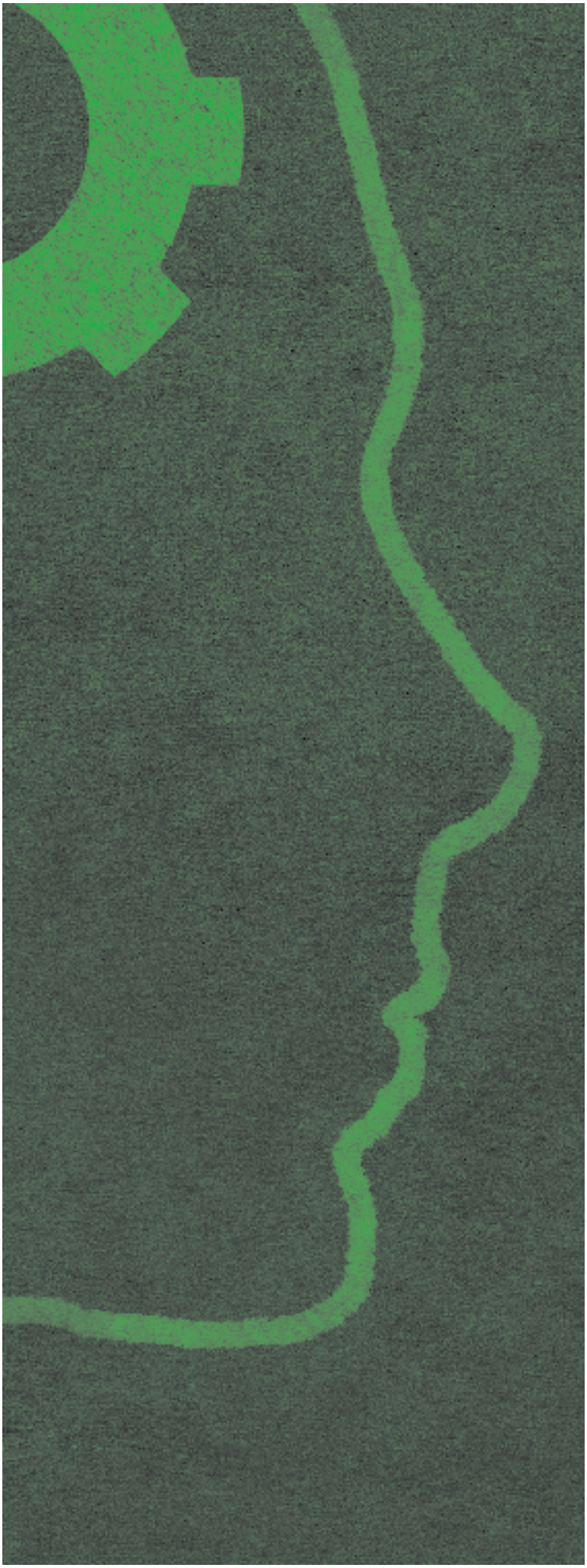
Building Career Pathways for Adult Learners:

An Evaluation of Progress in Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin After Eight Years of Shifting Gears

BRANDON ROBERTS AND DEREK PRICE



About Shifting Gears

The Joyce Foundation's Shifting Gears initiative was launched in 2007 as a state policy change effort in Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin. The goal was to strengthen adult basic education, workforce, and community and technical college systems so that more low-skilled workers gain the education, skills and credentials needed to advance and succeed in our changing economy. For more information on Shifting Gears, please visit www.joycefdn.org/shifting-gears.

About the Joyce Foundation

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About This Publication

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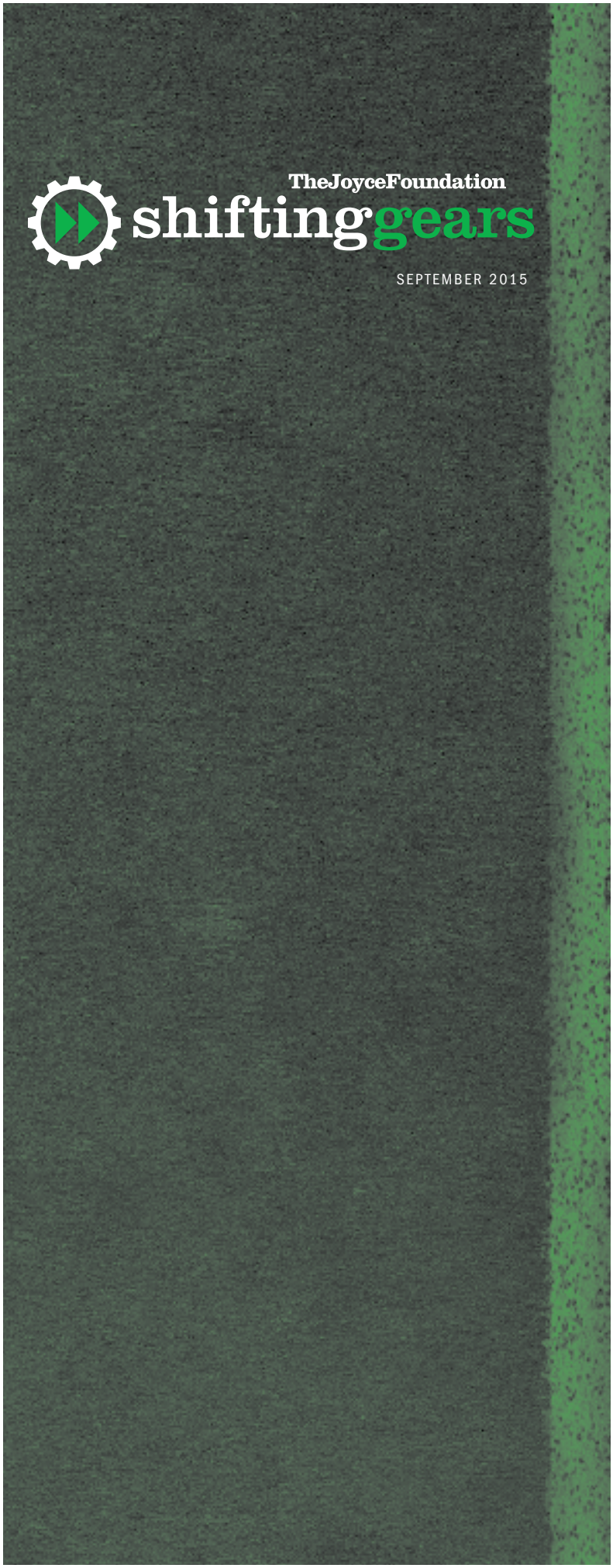


Executive Summary

The Joyce Foundation launched Shifting Gears in 2007 to assist six Midwest states to increase the number of low-skilled adults with the education and skills they need to succeed in the 21st century economy. Between 2007 and 2014, the Foundation invested $12.7 million so these states could transform their education and skills development systems to better serve adult learners.

In conceiving Shifting Gears, the Joyce Foundation recognized that low-skilled adults were being left behind in the changing economy. To qualify for high demand jobs, avoid bouts of unemployment, and earn a decent living, these adults needed education and skills beyond high school. The data were clear: workers with a bachelor's degree can expect to earn on average 84 percent more than workers with only a high school diploma.[1]

In undertaking this work, the Foundation wanted to help states to better align their adult basic education, workforce, and community and technical college systems in order to improve transitions for low-skilled adults to postsecondary education and training. Participating states were expected to identify innovative strategies that, over time, would be infused into state systems and the mainstream operations of local providers and institutions. The premise of Shifting Gears was that states could bolster postsecondary success of low-skilled adults if they replaced old ways of delivering education and related services with more effective and aligned approaches.

In December 2012, the Joyce Foundation released an interim evaluation on the first five years of the initiative. This report documented findings that aligning state systems did not come easily or quickly. "Four of the six states demonstrated traction on the ground by implementing innovative strategies to serve low-skilled adults … three of these states pursued a career pathway framework, including an adult education bridge component, to improve transitions between adult basic education programs and community and technical college programs."[2] Collectively, these states reported serving some 4,000 low-skilled adults with their innovative strategies.[3]

The Joyce Foundation extended Shifting Gears funding from 2012 – 2014 (referred to as SG 3.0) in Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. These states had committed to expanding adult education bridge programs to increase the number of students transitioning into postsecondary education. Such bridge programs are designed to link and integrate basic academic skills with postsecondary occupational credit-based learning in key industry sectors. These bridge programs typically involve contextualized curriculum and instruction, career development, and enhanced student services and supports. Often they are directly connected with additional postsecondary courses as part of a career pathway that leads to postsecondary credentials and degrees.

The Foundation also committed to evaluate the progress of these three states in order to document the expansion of adult education bridge programs and the increased number of participants served. A key aspect of this evaluation was to learn how state systems scale adult education bridges, and to identify key factors that enabled or hindered progress toward scale. This report examines the progress made in each state from 2012 – 2014, and also briefly reviews how the Shifting Gears work influenced the national discourse on increasing skills and credentials for adult learners.

The evaluation reached five primary findings:

- Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin doubled the total number of their bridge programs from 79 to 196 between SG 2.0 to SG 3.0. This growth includes expanding adult basic education bridge programs to more adult education providers and more community and technical college campuses.
- Each state effectively institutionalized its adult education bridge program as an ongoing option to address the educational and skill needs of low-skilled adult learners. Altogether, the number of participants served more than doubled, from 4,000 during SG 2.0 to 10,345 during SG 3.0.
- In two of the three states (Minnesota and Wisconsin), important policy changes expanded financial resources available for adult education bridges, and created the foundation for further advancing adult education bridges. These changes included reallocating current resources as well as new state funding dedicated to sustaining the expansion of bridge programs. Minnesota now has an $11.2 million allocated fund for career pathway and bridge programs in the biennium budget and Wisconsin has a $4 million annual fund to support these same program approaches.

- Scale was not achieved during this period in terms of serving many or most of the low-skilled adults who might benefit from bridge programs. Altogether during SG 3.0 the three states served less than five percent of the adult learners in need. States grew their programs opportunistically rather than setting intentional goals and strategies around scaling.
- The work of Shifting Gears positively influenced the national discourse on workforce development. The goal of helping adult learners increase their skills and earn credentials is now widely embraced in the workforce field and can be found as a core principle in the recently reauthorized federal workforce development legislation, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).[4]

Overall, after eight years of investment, the evaluation concludes that the Shifting Gears initiative made demonstrable progress in three Midwestern states in terms of expanding adult education bridges and serving low-skilled adults effectively. In addition, research conducted by Minnesota and Wisconsin suggests that Bridge program students transitioned to college and earned postsecondary credentials at a higher rate than students in traditional adult basic education programs. Furthermore, the focus on career pathways and aligning state adult basic education, workforce, and community and technical college systems influenced national and local thinking on workforce development across the country. In doing so, Shifting Gears contributed to a better understanding of the importance of addressing the educational and skill needs of low-skilled adults, the strategies and actions necessary to do so, and the challenges in sustaining and scaling efforts to achieve significant impact.

Introduction

Shifting Gears is a national initiative of the Joyce Foundation that was started in 2007 to encourage states to improve their educational and skills training systems to better help low-skilled adult learners gain the education and skills needed for the 21st century economy. When launched in 2007, state systems for adult basic education and workforce development were not typically designed to help low-skilled adults move into and succeed in college nor were state postsecondary institutions prepared to educate them. Simply put, helping adult learners obtain postsecondary credentials was not a priority, as these systems—adult basic education, workforce, and community and technical colleges—often operated in silos and rarely aligned program offerings among them.

Improving Adult Learner Skills

The need to improve educational outcomes for adult learners is widely known. Over the past ten years, the gap in earnings between high school and college graduates has widened: during their lifetime, workers with bachelor's degree can expect to earn on average 84 percent more than workers with only a high school diploma and one-third more than associate's degree holders.[5] Meanwhile, obtaining short-term postsecondary credentials produces a bump in earnings—good news for the more than one in ten workers who report a postsecondary certificate as their highest level of education. On average, postsecondary certificate holders earn 20 percent more than high school graduates without any postsecondary education.[6]

A major driver of the widening gap in wage and employment levels has been employers' rising demand for workers with postsecondary credentials. An estimated two-thirds of all job openings through 2018 will require at least some postsecondary education and skills development.[7] Shifting Gears is based on the understanding that satisfying employer needs for a college-educated workforce would hinge on increasing the education levels of adults already in the labor market. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the share of the labor force between the ages of 25 and 44 is expected to grow considerably over the next decade, while the share between the ages of 16 and 24 will decline.[8] Data from the American Community Survey showed almost two-thirds of all 25 – 54 year olds—about 80 million people—had some college and no degree, or had a high school diploma or less.[9] In comparison, the number of youths currently enrolled in high school was about 16.5 million.[10]

Shifting Gears Theory of Change and Approach

With these conditions in mind, the Joyce Foundation targeted the six Midwestern states of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin to participate in a multi-year (2007 – 2014), $12.7 million state-driven initiative to transform educational and skills training systems to produce better outcomes for adult learners. The theory of change undergirding Shifting Gears was that state agencies representing adult basic education, workforce and community and technical colleges needed to develop a common vision to improve postsecondary entry and success of low-skilled adults, and then collaborate on a legislative and/or administrative policy reform plan to achieve it.

This approach presumed that greater alignment of state systems would spur the introduction of innovative strategies within and across adult basic education providers, workforce programs, and community and technical colleges at the local level. Shifting Gears did not set out to create programmatic add-ons to existing approaches. Rather, over time, states were expected to scale up and infuse these innovations into mainstream operations.

Realizing that some states might be better prepared than others to undertake a systems change initiative, the Joyce Foundation provided them with planning and implementation grants,[11] and planned the work in two phases. During the initial three years (SG 1.0), state cross-agency teams were expected to work toward consensus on a policy plan and a set of coordinated actions for building support among state and local stakeholders. The plans aimed to change the ways that adult basic education, workforce, and community and technical college systems serve low-skilled adults. During the next two years (SG 2.0), states were expected to adopt the policy agenda and implement innovative strategies for delivering education and skills development to low-skilled adults at local institutions and providers.

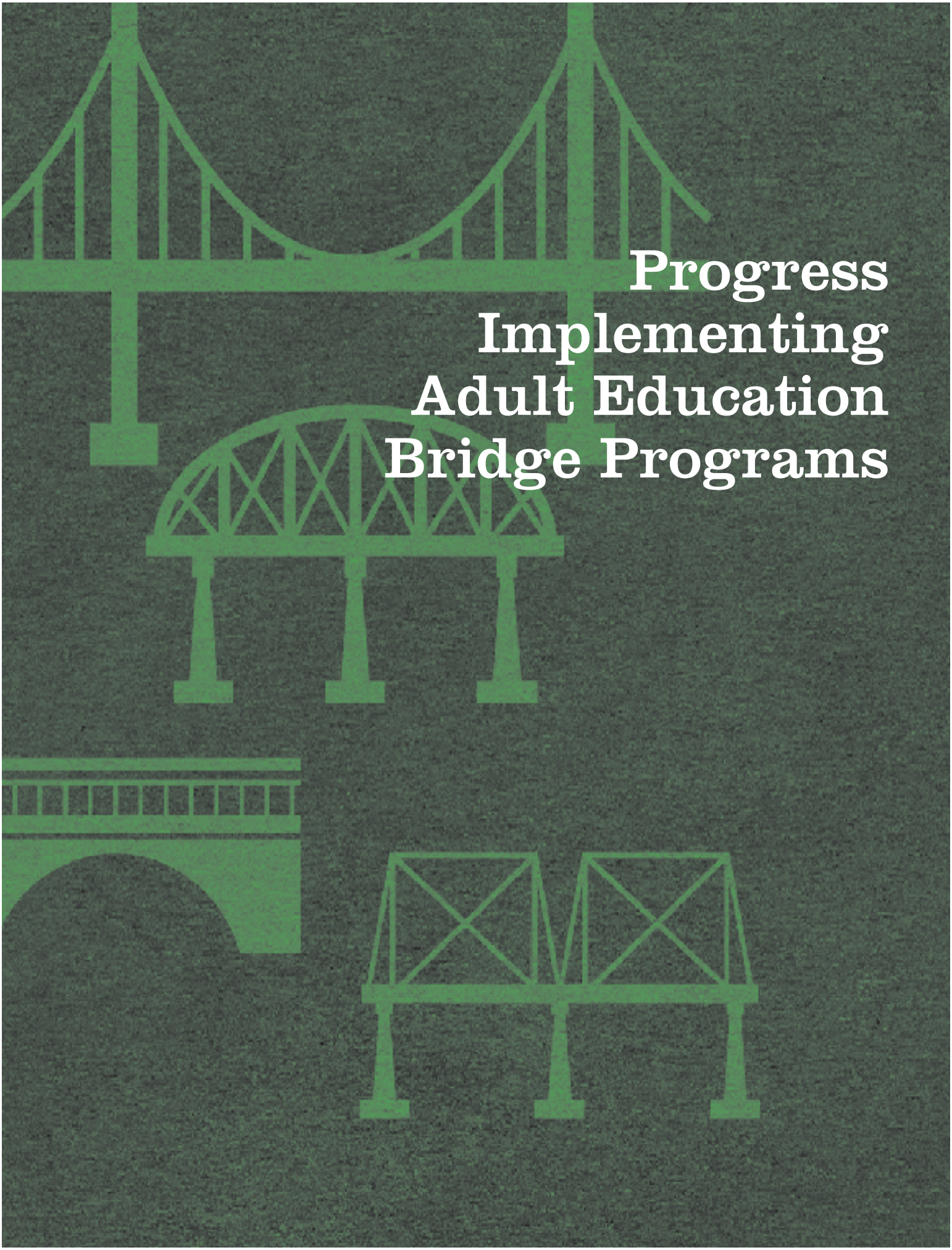
At the end of SG 2.0, the evaluation documented that three states—Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin—were taking positive actions to implement adult education bridge programs to better serve their adult learners. At that time, the Foundation recognized that these efforts touched only a modest number of adult learners, and that states needed additional time and effort to develop more adult education bridge programs if they expected to reach significant numbers of those in need. Therefore, the Joyce Foundation continued Shifting Gears in those three states from 2012 – 2014 (SG 3.0), supporting their efforts to expand and scale up the number of bridge programs and participants served.

Evaluation and Organization of This Report

This report provides details and insights on the efforts and progress made in Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin from 2012 – 2014. During this three-year period, the evaluation team conducted in-depth site visits and regular telephone interviews with key state staff and policy leaders as well as with local practitioners and stakeholders engaged in the Shifting Gears initiative. The evaluation team also worked with state data teams to help generate the data and analyses of adult basic education bridge programs and participant outcomes.

The remainder of this report is organized to address four areas of the states' Shifting Gears work. The first section documents the expansion of adult education bridge offerings and the increase in participants in each of the states. The next section summarizes the educational outcomes of bridge participants, including evidence from two of three states that conducted their own evaluation studies. This is followed by an examination of each state's effort to institutionalize, sustain, and scale adult education bridges during SG 3.0 and a summary of key factors that affected those efforts.[12] The report concludes with an assessment of the extent to which the three states have reformed their adult basic education, workforce and community and technical college systems to better meet the needs of low-skilled workers and employers, as well as a review of how the Shifting Gears work influenced the national discourse on increasing skills and credentials for adult learners.

Progress Implementing Adult Education Bridge Programs



As reported in Shifting Gears 2012 evaluation report, adult education bridges are different in each state. Each state defined its bridge programming to reflect key principles and components. Common to each state was the goal of preparing adult basic education learners to successfully transition to postsecondary education. Table 1 summarizes each state's bridge definition.

Table 1: Bridge Definitions in Each State

Illinois	Minnesota	Wisconsin
Adult education bridges integrate and connect basic academic skills with postsecondary occupational content in key industry sectors; and involve contextualized instruction, career development, and student transition services.	FastTRAC integrated bridges connect adult basic education and postsecondary courses; provide contextualized instruction that integrates industry and occupation knowledge with basic reading, math and language skills; and, offer career development and support services.	RISE career pathway bridges provide integrated instruction of adult basic education and postsecondary occupational content; include at least two postsecondary credits; and lead to a Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) approved program.

Adult education bridges integrate and connect basic academic skills with postsecondary occupational content in key industry sectors; and involve contextualized instruction, career development, and student transition services. FastTRAC integrated bridges connect adult basic education and postsecondary courses; provide contextualized instruction that integrates industry and occupation knowledge with basic reading, math and language skills; and, offer career development and support services. RISE career pathway bridges provide integrated instruction of adult basic education and postsecondary occupational content; include at least two postsecondary credits; and lead to a Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) approved program.

By 2012, Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin had gained "traction on the ground" with their adult education bridge efforts. In Illinois, 17 of 39 adult basic education area planning councils had offered a bridge, serving more than 1,700 participants; in Minnesota, 15 of 25 community and technical colleges had offered both bridges and integrated occupational programming, serving almost 1,100 participants; and, in Wisconsin, 14 of 16 technical colleges had offered adult education bridges in 2010 – 2011, serving almost 1,000 participants.[13]

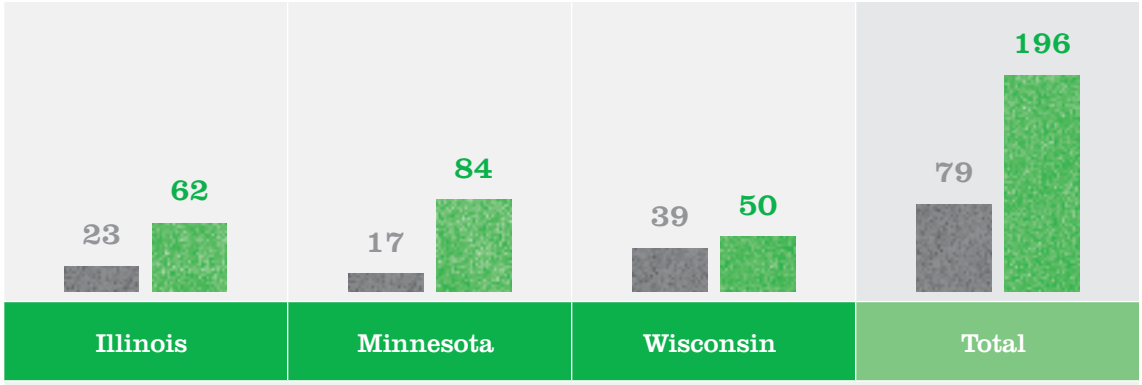
For SG 3.0, each state was expected to expand its adult education bridges to more providers or sectors, and thereby serve more low-skilled adults. The data presented in this report were generated from state administrative systems, as requested by the evaluation, and were based on system policies that determined if programming met the definition of a bridge program for each state.

Bridge Program Expansion

As Figure 1 indicates, all three states expanded bridge programs between 2011 – 2014 as the total number of bridges in the three states more than doubled from 79 after five years of Shifting Gears to 196 by the end of 2014.[14]

Both Illinois and Minnesota expanded their bridges considerably during those three years. By the end of 2014 all 39 adult education area planning councils in Illinois offered bridges, and 24 of 30 state colleges in Minnesota offered bridges or integrated occupational programming for low-skilled adults. By the end of 2011, almost all technical colleges had offered adult education bridges in Wisconsin, which partly explains its slower growth in the number of bridges between 2011 and 2014. The expansion of bridges to almost all adult education providers and community and technical colleges in these states indicates that **Shifting Gears achieved some breadth of scale by 2014 for this approach to serving low-skilled adults,** although as discussed in the next section, the programs are reaching only a small fraction of those in need.

Figure 1: Number of Adult Education Bridges, by State, 2010 – 2014



Note: Wisconsin's data reflects three academic years (2011-2012, 2012-2013 and 2013-2014) from 12 of 16 technical colleges. Illinois and Minnesota data reflect four fiscal years (2011, 2012, 2013, and 2014).

Each state expanded bridges by focusing on key industry sectors or clusters that reflected "in-demand" jobs and careers. Illinois bridges were offered in seven industry clusters, with more than half of its 62 bridges in the health sciences, and another third in manufacturing. In Minnesota, more than half of its 84 bridges and integrated programs were offered in the health care or manufacturing clusters.[15] Wisconsin's 50 adult education bridges connect with career pathway programs in almost all career clusters.

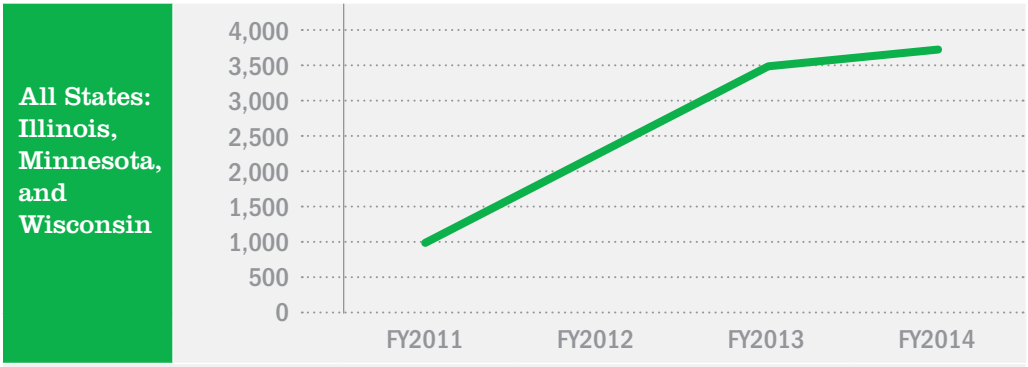
Expanding Number of Participants Served

Along with the expansion of adult education bridges statewide, the number of low-skilled adults who participated in bridges also grew considerably between 2011 and 2014. **By the end of 2014, 10,345 low-skilled adults participated in a bridge**—a considerable increase from the approximately 4,000 adults reported to have participated by the end of 2011. The growth in the number of bridge participants between 2012 and 2014—an increase of 67 percent—further indicates that bridges are increasingly serving low-skilled adults. Although this growth is notable, it represents less than five percent of adults in need.

As Figure 2 shows, the number of participants in bridges increased every year between 2011 and 2014 in the three states, with almost 3,700 low-skilled adults being served in 2014 alone. The increased number of participants reflects both the increased breadth of bridge offerings statewide (see Figure 1) as well as the ongoing and regular offering of bridges among providers of adult basic education, including community and technical colleges.

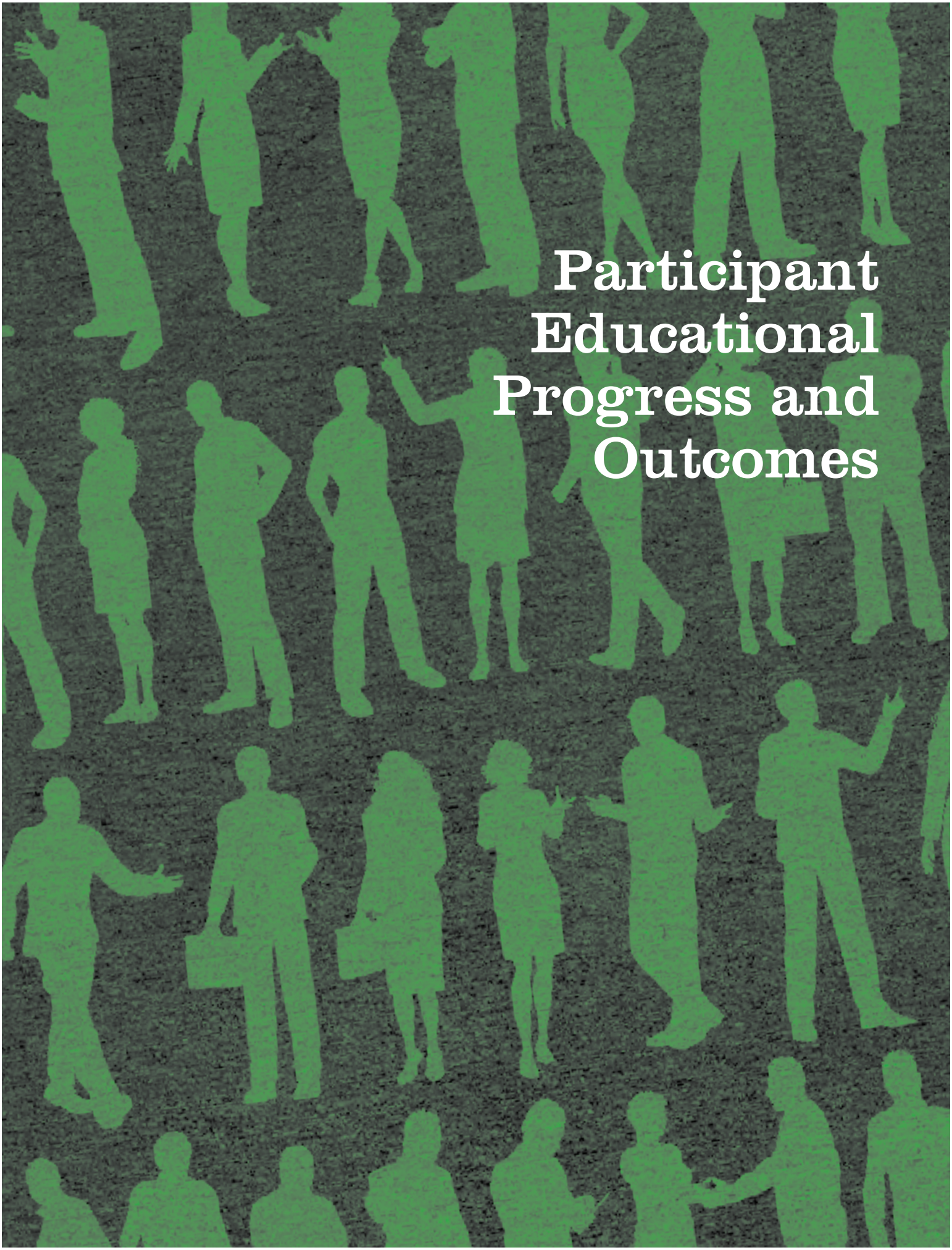
This overall trend varies somewhat among the three states. Illinois showed slow and methodical growth every year, adding about 300 additional adult basic education students annually between FY 2011 (about 400 participants) and FY 2014 (about 1,400 participants). By comparison, Minnesota more than doubled the number of bridge and integrated programming participants between FY 2011 and FY 2012, and increased the number of participants by another 46 percent between FY 2012 and FY 2013. Although the number of participants declined in FY 2014 to about 1,700, this is three times more than were served in FY 2011. Similarly, Wisconsin more than doubled the number of bridge participants statewide between 2011 – 2012 and 2012 – 2013, and this number stabilized at around 600 low-skilled adults enrolled in bridges in 2013 – 2014.

Figure 2: Number of Bridge Participants, by Year, FY2011 – FY2014



Note: Wisconsin's data reflect three academic years (2011-2012, 2012-2013 and 2013-2014) from 12 of 16 technical colleges. Illinois and Minnesota data reflect four fiscal years (2011, 2012, 2013, and 2014).

Despite these positive trends, bridge programming is reaching only a small portion of the low-skilled adult population in each state. For example, in Illinois, about three percent of 60,000 annual adult basic education participants were enrolled in a bridge program.[16] In Minnesota, about four percent of the almost 125,000 adult basic education participants were enrolled in a bridge or integrated p rogramming between FY 2011 and FY 2014.[17] Similarly, in Wisconsin, it is estimated that less than five percent of the annual adult basic education population were enrolled in career pathway bridges.[18] Thus, the modest number of bridges in these states falls considerably short of the capacity needed to serve significant numbers of low-skilled adults, as states grew their programs opportunistically rather than setting intentional goals and strategies around scaling.



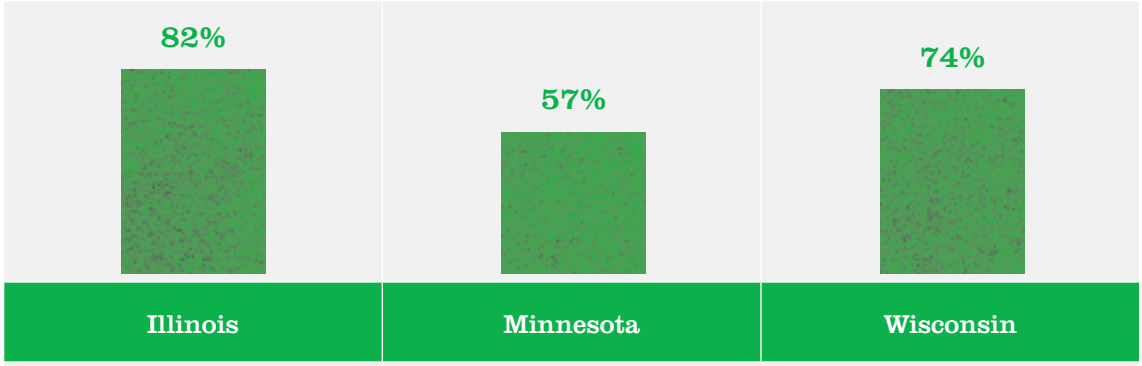
Participant Educational Progress and Outcomes

This section of the report documents the education outcomes for bridge participants in each state. The SG 3.0 evaluation relied on states to generate and provide data on bridge program participants and outcomes. All states provided data on participant outcomes through 2014 as requested by the evaluation team. In addition, Minnesota and Wisconsin conducted their own outcome analysis, comparing bridge participants to an equivalent group of adult education students. Evidence from these reports is included in this section.

Participant Progress and Outcomes

Shifting Gears expected that positive outcomes for bridge participants would include enrolling in postsecondary programs of study, earning credits and credentials, and gaining employment.[19] This expectation flowed from the way bridges in each state contextualized basic skills education with occupational content and provided enhanced support services, such as a navigator to help participants access necessary supports as well as map out their education and career pathways.

Figure 3: Percentage of Participants Who Completed a Bridge, 2011 – 2014



N= 3,303 (Illinois); 5,191 (Minnesota); and 1,370 (Wisconsin)

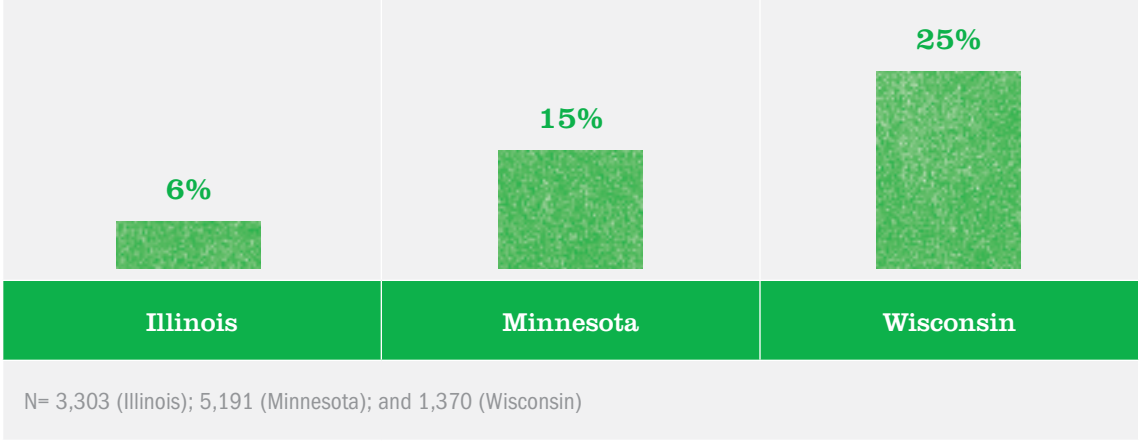
Note: The determination for completing a bridge varied considerably among the three states, and is reflected in these data: both Minnesota and Wisconsin defined bridge completers based on passing postsecondary courses and/or earning post-secondary credits, while Illinois defined bridge completers based on attendance in adult education courses.

As a first step, participants needed to complete their bridge programs and each state defined completion in a different way. To complete a bridge in Illinois, a participant had to attend the minimum required hours according to federal Adult Basic Education (ABE) reporting guidelines. A participant in Minnesota had to finish at least 75 percent of the maximum hours in a bridge or successfully pass 75 percent of the postsecondary courses that make up the integrated programming. In Wisconsin, a participant had to complete all the postsecondary credits associated with an adult education bridge.
These differences in how bridge completion was defined may help explain the differences in the completion rates among these three states, as shown in Figure 3. In all states, the majority of participants completed the bridge, ranging from 57 percent in Minnesota to 74 percent in Wisconsin and 82 percent in Illinois.

As noted in Table 1, postsecondary credentials were not a required component of a bridge in any state. However, in Wisconsin a career pathway bridge had to lead to a Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) approved program.

Figure 4 illustrates the variation among the states in the percentage of bridge participants who earned a postsecondary credential between FY 2011 and FY 2014, ranging from six percent in Illinois to 15 percent in Minnesota and 25 percent in Wisconsin. Almost 1,100 bridge participants earned a postsecondary credential during this period; the vast majority (80%) was in Minnesota and Wisconsin, because the bridge programs in those states are directly linked with postsecondary programs that offer credentials.

Figure 4: Percentage of Bridge Participants Who Earned a Postsecondary Credential, 2011 – 2014[20]

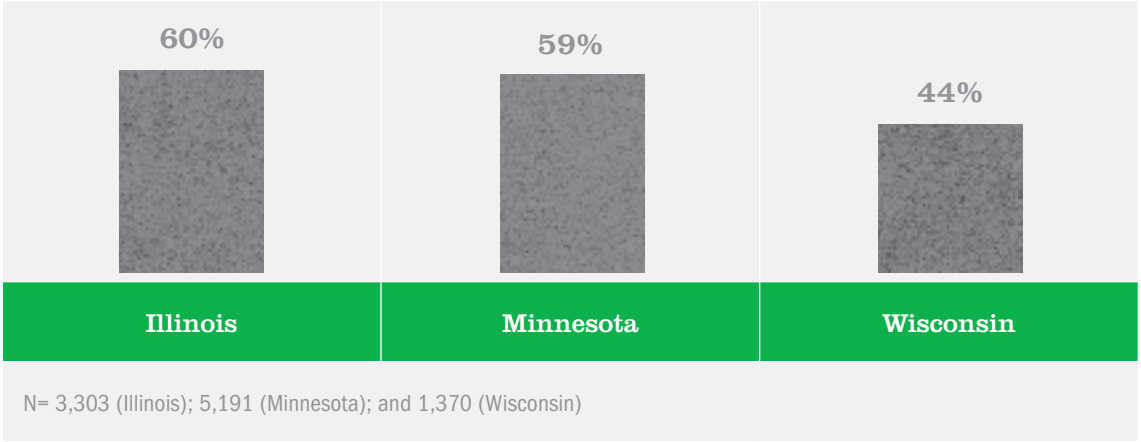


In Minnesota and Wisconsin, the data allowed a comparison of credentials awarded to bridge participants who complete the bridge as opposed to those who did not. Not surprisingly, a higher percentage of bridge participants who completed a bridge earned a postsecondary credential—19 percent in Minnesota and 32 percent in Wisconsin.

Bridges were intended to serve as a key transition for low-skilled adults into credit-based postsecondary programs of study. In Minnesota and Wisconsin, bridges were thought of as an explicit part of a career pathway that enabled low-skilled adults to transition from adult education into an occupational program. In Illinois, bridges were seen as an introduction to career clusters for adult education students, and were not necessarily connected to a postsecondary occupational program.

Figure 5 shows that 60 percent of bridge participants in Illinois and 59 percent in Minnesota enrolled in at least one postsecondary credit course. In Wisconsin, only 44 percent of bridge participants enrolled in at least one postsecondary credit course *after completing the bridge;* however, all Wisconsin bridge participants earned at least two postsecondary credits as part of the bridge programming if they completed the bridge.

Figure 5: Percentage of Bridge Participants Who Enrolled in Any Postsecondary Credit Courses, 2011 – 2014



These outcome data on adult education bridges are promising; they show that a majority of bridge participants are completing the bridge and enrolling in postsecondary credit courses or earning postsecondary credits. Moreover, of participants completing a bridge, almost one in five in Minnesota and about one-third in Wisconsin earned a postsecondary credential.

Comparative Outcome Analyses Conducted by States

As part of their Shifting Gears 3.0 activities, Wisconsin and Minnesota conducted their own outcome evaluation of bridge participants. These analyses included a comparison group of adult education students with whom to compare outcomes with bridge participants, and provided some promising evidence on the benefits of adult education bridges for low-skilled adults.

According to the RISE Career Pathway Bridge Evaluation, Wisconsin adult education bridge participants were more likely to enroll in and attempt a greater number of postsecondary credits than a comparison group; were more likely to complete 12 postsecondary credits; and were more likely to earn a postsecondary credential.[21] Some data from the report:

- 47 percent of adult education bridge participants enrolled in at least one postsecondary credit after completing the bridge, compared with 42 percent of the comparison group.
- Adult education bridge participants attempted an average of 11.91 postsecondary credits after their first adult basic education course, compared with an average of 9.69 credits for the comparison group.
- 29 percent of adult education bridge participants earned at least 12 postsecondary credits, compared with 25 percent of the comparison group.
- 27 percent of adult education participants earned a postsecondary credential, compared with 11 percent of the comparison group.

This evaluation report further suggests that these positive outcomes may be driven by the performance of English Language Learners (ELL).[22] Exploratory analysis comparing ELL bridge students with non-bridge ELL students in the comparison group suggests that:

- 48 percent of ELL bridge participants enrolled in postsecondary education, compared with 23 percent for the comparison group.
- ELL bridge participants attempted an average of 12.85 postsecondary credits after their first adult education course and completed an average of 10.32 credits, compared with 2.22 postsecondary credits attempted and 1.81 completed for the comparison group.
- 30 percent of ELL bridge participants earned at least 12 postsecondary credits, compared with 7 percent for the comparison group.
- 32 percent of ELL bridge participants earned a postsecondary credential, compared with 14 percent for the comparison group.

These data provide promising evidence that Wisconsin's career pathway bridges yield significant, positive outcomes for low-skilled adults, especially for ELL participants. Of note, ELL bridges in Wisconsin were almost exclusively team-taught between an adult education instructor and postsecondary occupational faculty.

In Minnesota, bridge participants included both students enrolled in adult education bridge courses and students enrolled in an integrated bridge that combined both adult education courses and postsecondary occupational courses. The integrated bridge is similar to the career pathway bridge in Wisconsin. According to the *Minnesota FastTRAC Evaluation Report,* integrated bridge participants were more likely to enroll in postsecondary courses and earn more credits than a comparison group; and were more likely to earn a postsecondary credential:[23]

- Integrated bridge participants enrolled in 9.5 courses, on average, compared with 8.2 courses for the comparison group.
- Integrated bridge participants earned an average of 19.1 postsecondary credits, compared with 17.7 credits for the comparison group.
- 20 percent of integrated bridge participants earned a postsecondary credential within one year of enrolling in the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system (MnSCU), compared with 12 percent for the comparison group.

This report also shows that 70 percent of integrated bridge participants were women, which is considerably higher than the 50 percent of the overall ABE population; and 39 percent of participants were students of color, which is smaller than the 65 percent of the overall ABE population.[24]

In 2013, another Minnesota report found that 60 percent of adult basic education FastTRAC students enrolled in a MnSCU college or university during or within one year after their ABE service year—a rate considerable higher than for non-FastTRAC ABE participants (13.5 percent).[25]

In sum, this evidence from Minnesota and Wisconsin suggests that **adult education bridges, combining adult basic education courses with postsecondary occupational courses, can yield positive postsecondary outcomes for low-skilled adults** in terms of earning postsecondary credits and credentials.

Efforts to Institutionalize, Sustain, and Scale Adult Education Bridge Programs in Three States

In 2012, the Shifting Gears evaluation found that Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin had made progress implementing their adult basic education bridge programs with local adult basic education providers and community and technical colleges. The report also indicated that this progress was on a positive trajectory for sustaining and expanding bridge programs statewide, and perhaps achieving some degree of systems change.

In looking to the future, the report concluded: "States that develop implementation goals and tactics to define scale, address cultural change among systems leaders and providers, use data more effectively to inform the field of practice, and make tough decisions on resources will be in the best position to achieve systems change." The report noted that further efforts to serve more low-skilled adults by infusing or institutionalizing innovative strategies into the mainstream operations of local providers and institutions would be a daunting task.[26]

Given this conclusion, the evaluation team considered five key factors as they followed the work of Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin to sustain and scale their adult education bridge programs during SG 3.0. The factors likely to influence success were:

1. Maintaining ongoing involvement and commitment of senior cross-agency leadership to the Shifting Gears work during 2012 – 2014.
2. Setting numerical goals for scale based on an assessment of the number of low-skilled students that could potentially benefit from adult education bridges, and creating a corresponding plan to expand the number of programs and providers and allocate the resources necessary to achieve some degree of scale.
3. Strengthening state policies and leverage additional resources to foster local efforts to support additional adult education basic bridge program work.
4. Committing to professional development efforts that assist local providers and institutions to develop and implement adult basic education bridge programs.
5. Measuring adult education bridge participant outcomes and using the findings to promote the further adoption and expansion of adult education bridges at the state and local level.

This section summarizes each state's progress over the past three years, and assesses how each of these factors influenced that progress.

Illinois

Illinois took important steps to develop and foster adult education bridges by articulating a state priority for increasing the transition of low-skilled adult learners to postsecondary credentials, and by modifying state ABE policy to require all providers to engage and support local bridge programs. In addition, the state leveraged additional resources via participation in a national initiative, Accelerating Opportunity (AO).[27] This initiative promoted integrated bridge programs between adult basic education and postsecondary education. All of these efforts, including a major commitment to bridge programs at City Colleges of Chicago (CCC),[28] helped generate additional adult basic education bridge programs across the state and increase the number of participants.

At the end of SG 3.0, bridge programs have become institutionalized within the Illinois adult basic education system and will likely be a fundamental part of local provider operations for the foreseeable future. However, Illinois has not secured new external resources, or made policy changes to reallocate existing state resources, that would provide the financial support local providers might need to expand the development and growth of bridge programs.

Involvement and Commitment of Cross-Agency Senior Leadership

During the first five years of Shifting Gears, Illinois effectively engaged senior leaders from the adult basic education, workforce, and community college systems, in tandem with a number of external stakeholders, to support and drive the Shifting Gears initiative. Over the following three years, the senior leaders from the ABE system and Illinois Community College Board (ICCB)[29] stayed involved and committed to furthering the development of adult education bridges within the ABE system. They complemented this effort by working to develop integrated bridge programs through their participation in the AO initiative. During this time, the involvement of senior state leaders from workforce dissipated, as did the formal participation of external stakeholders. Recently, ICCB staff indicated they are working with the state's workforce agency and other external stakeholders to plan for implementation of the new Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA), and expressed a desire to tie continued bridge expansion to the policies and practices supported by this legislation.

Importantly, senior ABE and community college leaders advanced in their positions in recent years to the highest levels within ICCB,[30] and in doing so reinforced to the field their commitment to adult basic education bridge programs. As discussed below, this commitment and prioritization involved issuing new state ABE policy that requires bridge programs at the local level and focusing professional development resources accordingly. Efforts to better align senior ABE and postsecondary staff within ICCB to more overtly support the connection of adult education and career technical education programming and resources at the local level was also achieved. This reinforced the opportunity at the local level to "braid" adult education and career technical resources to advance the AO-supported integrated bridge concept. The desire of senior leadership to expand these efforts, however, is constrained by reductions in ICCB staff resources and capacity. With external resources coming to an end, it is unclear what resources are available to support needed staff positions, especially given serious state budget issues.

The commitment of senior state leaders to bridge programs is mirrored by a similar commitment by City Colleges of Chicago as indicated by the noteworthy number of bridge programs and participants at CCC.[31] The potential benefits to serving adult low-skilled students with a "bridge strategy" is acknowledged by leadership at the highest levels and is supported by their efforts to include bridge programs as a significant part of the system's Reinvention initiative.[32] (Specific CCC actions are discussed below.)

Identifying Goals and Plans to Expand Bridge Programs and Participants

In 2012, the Illinois Shifting Gears team established a goal of offering adult education bridge programs at the local level among all of the state's 90-plus local providers. This action was intended to signify to the field that bridge programming was a significant and important strategy, for serving low-skilled adult learners, and one that could help achieve the state priority of increasing transitions from adult basic education into postsecondary credit-based programs.

This goal represented an important first step. Considerable progress has been made at the local level, as reflected in numbers presented above. Yet, this goal was not developed based on an analysis of the number of ABE students that could benefit from the state's new bridge strategy. As SG 3.0 proceeded, ICCB did not set explicit goals for scale based on strategic analysis of the number of adult education students who could benefit from bridges. Nor did it identify the number of programs or resources necessary to achieve some degree of scale. Although senior leadership expresses a desire to use the WIOA implementation to continue the expansion of bridge programs statewide, it is unclear what level of resources would be available to support this effort.

As noted earlier, City Colleges of Chicago made transitions from ABE to postsecondary a significant priority of its Reinvention initiative, and adult education bridges was one of two key strategies for adults seeking occupational skills and credentials. CCC was not asked to set bridge goals under SG 3.0, but as a part of its Reinvention initiative conducted a strategic analysis. The analysis estimated that about 6,000 students, one-third of those enrolled in adult basic education, might benefit from bridge programs. Further analysis led to an understanding of programs and resources required to address this need and resulted in policy actions to support further bridge development.

Strengthening State Policies and Leveraging Resources

Three specific state policy actions stand out as supporting the development and implementation of adult education bridge programs across Illinois:

- First, in the initial few years of Shifting Gears the state revised its five-year adult education plan to articulate the importance of ABE increasing student transitions to postsecondary education, and to endorse the overall concept of career pathways and adult bridge programs. This policy framework set the foundation for ICCB and the ABE program to adopt a formal definition for adult basic education bridge programs (see Table 1). This bridge definition has provided a solid foundation for developing and implementing bridge programs.
- Second, starting with the 2012 – 2013 fiscal year, the ABE system articulated a statewide policy that required all local providers to engage in bridge programming. This policy has been renewed and refined over the following two fiscal years to the point that local providers report they fully understand that adult education bridge programs are now an integral strategy for serving low-skilled adult learners.

- Third, participation in the AO initiative brought several million dollars in new and additional resources into the state over a three-year period to develop integrated bridge programs. This work was intentionally focused at the outset on colleges and local areas where adult education bridge programs had been developed. It appears that this initiative, which started serving participants in 2012,[33] has helped generate integrated bridge programs using the AO model, and also enhanced interest in the "bridge strategy" concept among local providers and institutions. The AO resources also were used to provide local practitioners with dedicated and well regarded professional development assistance, which included efforts to further develop adult basic education bridges.

These state policy actions and leveraged external resources were instrumental in sustaining the commitment to bridge programs in Illinois as well as incenting their growth. Notably, the growth in adult education bridge programs and participants has been achieved in recent years without state ABE resources being targeted to support bridge development at the local level. Instead, local ABE providers were offered tools to access resources from locally administered federal workforce and human service programs to support bridge development under the concept of "braided funding".

As Shifting Gears concluded at the end of 2014, ICCB had not secured additional external resources to support bridge development and expansion statewide. In addition, ICCB has not adjusted the long-standing ABE resource allocation formula to support bridge development, although some local providers expressed interest in the state doing so. Local providers reported taking steps to use institutional and other local, federally funded programmatic resources for bridge programs, noting that they have come to recognize the benefits and positive outcomes achieved by their students. Future bridge development and expansion in Illinois will largely depend on provider efforts to secure or "braid" local institutional and grant program resources, since dedicated state general fund resources do not seem likely. One possible exception might be found in WIOA implementation if a sizeable portion of the governor's 15 percent discretionary fund is allocated to support bridge development and expansions, which is allowed and even encouraged by the law.

CCC, based on its commitment and an understanding of the magnitude of need and potential value of bridge programs, took two specific policy actions to support moderate bridge expansion: (1) required each CCC college to allocate its own institutional resources to develop bridge programs in at least one sector and to finance their availability year round; and (2) allocated resources to fund transition specialists within each college to support bridge participants. Although these are positive steps for fostering bridge development and expansion, CCC senior administrators acknowledged that more effort and resources are needed to serve the estimated 6,000 students who could benefit from bridge programming.

Using Professional Development to Support Local Implementation Efforts

The interest and commitment to bridge strategies in Illinois is reflected in the efforts to inform and educate local providers and institutions on the importance of addressing the educational needs of low-skilled adults, and the operational details of establishing and operating bridge programs. ICCB and external stakeholders supported these efforts.

ICCB first used its existing ABE professional development resources and capacity through the Southern Illinois Professional Development Center[34] (SIPDC) to hold conferences and workshops with local providers to educate them in bridge development. The start of AO and its additional resources allowed SIPDC to expand its professional development efforts. Each year, SIPDC worked more directly with a group of about 15 local providers and community colleges to build integrated bridge programs and adult basic education bridges through what were called Transition Academies. This effort was intended to foster integrated bridge programs throughout the state. SIPDC also supported the development of curriculum and lesson plans for bridge courses and programs, and helped guide the development of the overall state career pathway framework for adult learners.

City Colleges of Chicago conducted its own professional development activities to help develop adult education bridges in all seven colleges. These efforts were complemented by the work of external stakeholders such as Women Employed and the Chicago Jobs Council, which were supported by the Joyce Foundation and ICCB to further bridge development in Chicago.

In addition, Women Employed and the Chicago Jobs Council created a statewide network of 467 members interested in establishing bridge programs in their local area. Network members—representing community-based organizations, local workforce development agencies, and community and technical colleges—were given access to workshops and materials to inform their interest and some were provided technical assistance. Importantly, the professional development efforts were not limited to educational and technical assistance activities. They also involved developing tools and resources to support implementation, including the contextualized curriculum and lesson plans for key occupational programs. Altogether these efforts provided easily accessible resources for local staff to design and implement adult education bridges.

Using Data to Promote the Development and Adoption of Bridge Programs

Early on, ICCB staff understood the importance of identifying bridge programs and participants in order to track and analyze their educational progress and outcomes. Despite putting in place a protocol to determine whether local bridge courses met the official state definition, efforts were not taken to generate program participant outcome data until the end of the SG 3.0; these are reflected in the data presented earlier in this report. Similarly, City Colleges of Chicago tracked bridge enrollments, and more broadly the transition of all local ABE students into postsecondary credit courses. However, student outcome data for bridge students specifically were not analyzed or reported by CCC. Thus, neither ICCB nor CCC explicitly documented the effectiveness of "bridge strategies" in better serving low-skilled adult learners. Such data could have been used to promote further development of bridge strategies with local providers and institutions as well as with other important stakeholders.

Minnesota

Minnesota ended the first five years of Shifting Gears with a highly acclaimed adult education bridge model that was being implemented throughout the state. In 2013, policy makers took a significant step to institutionalize adult education bridges, known as FastTRAC,[35] by enacting state legislation[36] to finance the FastTRAC program at $1.5 million annually for each biennial state budget. These dedicated resources, along with specific funds allocated by the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) to provide TANF recipients with FastTRAC training, contributed to the growth of local programs across the state and to the increase in participants served.

Local practitioners in adult basic education, workforce, and community colleges who have aligned their efforts to implement FastTRAC acknowledge that the program is a significant strategy to address the education and skill needs of adult workers and learners in their communities. This recognition of FastTRAC's value is reinforced by the results from the analysis of FastTRAC participant outcomes presented in above. In collaboration with the Governor's office, the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) is now fostering and supporting the program's continued development and expansion across the state. This includes recently securing a four-fold increase in state appropriations for a total of $11.2 million in the upcoming biennium. These resources, along with the continued partnership with DHS, are expected to ensure the continuation and growth of local adult education bridge programs.

Involvement and Commitment of Cross-Agency Senior Leadership

Minnesota's senior leaders from the adult basic education, workforce, and community college system worked closely during the first five years of Shifting Gears to develop and advance the FastTRAC initiative. They did so in collaboration with important external stakeholders from the private sector and community based organizations. They also maintained their focus and alignment during the significant gubernatorial change that occurred in 2010. As noted in the first five-year evaluation report, the senior leaders took actions to allocate resources to support Shifting Gears and designated two full-time staff to manage the initiative and coordinate efforts across the three systems.[37]

For a number of reasons, including the appointment of new leaders at the three system agencies, the strong alignment and collaboration among state system leaders became less formal and systematic after year five. This change was evident in the disbanding of the FastTRAC senior leadership team, which resulted in diminishing the ongoing engagement and support for FastTRAC by senior ABE and MnSCU leaders. Despite this change, local adult education and community college leaders and practitioners note that FastTRAC has become an important strategy for addressing the needs of the sizeable number of low-skilled adult students, especially among diverse and non-traditional populations.

In tandem with the governor's office, DEED's senior leadership continues to give high priority to key elements of the FastTRAC model. They have demonstrated this prioritization by increasing state resources for career pathways (see below), maintaining their partnership with DHS to serve TANF recipients, and reorganizing within DEED to enhance staff support for career pathways and FastTRAC development at the local level. Importantly, DEED also has maintained the required alignment among local adult education, workforce, community college providers, along with community-based organizations, to receive grant resources for the development and operation of local adult education bridge programs.

Identifying Goals and Plans to Expand Bridge Programs and Participants:

As Minnesota continued its Shifting Gears initiative in 2012, the SG team proposed expanding or scaling FastTRAC over the next several years to serve 1,500 bridge participants and 1,500 integrated bridge participants. As shown above, Minnesota exceeded this goal. However, this number of participants falls overwhelmingly short of the 1.2 million working learners that the state identified as needing upgraded skills and postsecondary credentials.[38]

The state workforce system continues to provide dedicated resources to support the further development of career pathways and the FastTRAC model and to strengthen state data systems to monitor and assess program outcomes. However, steps have not been taken to strategically analyze the amount of resources or program capacity necessary to address the needs of 1.2 million adult learners. Therefore, there is no empirical sense of what scaling FastTRAC might look like, how many additional programs and or providers/colleges would be needed to achieve some degree of scale, and what level of resources would be required to support such efforts.

Strengthening State Policies and Leveraging Resources

During the first five years of Shifting Gears, the state adult basic education and workforce development systems enacted a number of policies to support FastTRAC development and implementation. These included making transitions from ABE to postsecondary a priority of the ABE state plan and program, and revising state Workforce Investment Act (WIA) guidelines to require local Workforce Investment Boards to support FastTRAC.[39] In 2013, the state legislature enacted a significant policy change that provided dedicated funding for the development and operation of local FastTRAC programs. DEED is responsible for administering these resources, which established FastTRAC as a specific grant program within DEED. As a result, FastTRAC has become institutionalized as a credible model for addressing the skill needs of low-skilled adult learners across the state.

In recent years, approximately three million dollars in state grants have supported the continuation and further development of FastTRAC projects at the local level, thus helping expand the number of programs and participants statewide. DEED has administered the program, adhering to the FastTRAC principles and model established earlier, and has used the strictures of grant administration to bring more consistency to local models and implementation. In addition, DEED has used a formal RFP process to make awards and has utilized existing DEED grant reporting data systems for tracking of program activities and participant outcomes.[40] These efforts have helped solidify FastTRAC as a state program. DEED also has facilitated the ongoing financial participation of DHS, giving assurance that its resources are being awarded and managed in a focused and systematic way.

The overall state legislation that initially supported FastTRAC was adapted in the spring of 2015 to bring FastTRAC and the adult workforce competitiveness grants under a single initiative called Pathways to Prosperity. This initiative is designed to signal the state's overall commitment to career pathways, especially in terms of meeting the needs of Minnesota's low-skilled and disadvantaged adult populations. The appropriation for this initiative is $11.2 million for the upcoming biennium, an almost four-fold increase over the past biennium. These resources are expected to further the development and expansion of adult education bridges across the state.

Anticipating the enactment of Pathways to Prosperity, DEED issued an RFP in April 2015 to finance local Pathways to Prosperity projects. The RFP explicitly references using funds to support the FastTRAC target population of low-skilled adults and essentially maintains four key principles and components of the FastTRAC model: local partnership between adult basic education, workforce and postsecondary education entities; enhanced academic instruction at the postsecondary level; contextualized curriculum; and participant supports or navigation services.

However, several notable programmatic changes in the RFP differ from past FastTRAC efforts: (1) employment placement and retention is now a desired outcome along with educational advancement; (2) local providers are given flexibility to work with a variety of entities to address adult basic and enhanced academic instruction; for example local partnerships will no longer have to work with MnSCU institutions for occupational education and training, but have the option to choose other private and non-profit training providers to meet those needs; and (3) enhanced academic instruction no longer requires the delivery of credit-based courses, thus opening the door to non-credit instruction.

The possible movement away from required credit-based postsecondary training is a significant departure from a core element of Shifting Gears: low-income adults should get training that awards credits so they can continue their education in postsecondary programs of study without starting over. The expectation that participants would earn credits was an explicit attempt to align workforce training programs with postsecondary education.

While adaption of the program may be needed for scale and expansion to continue, the potential movement away from credit-based postsecondary programming could mean that FastTRAC becomes just another short-term workforce training option to achieve entry-level employment. This would be a stark contrast from a program that was intended as a catalyst to develop adult workers with higher levels of education, skills, and credentials, thus raising their economic prospects and addressing employers' desire for a more competitive workforce. The extent to which this change is acted upon in local programs should be evident as projects are funded in 2015 under the new guidelines.

Using Professional Development to Support Local Implementation Efforts

Minnesota targeted its professional development resources to FastTRAC grantees. These efforts include providing information and assistance to improve key substantive aspects of FastTRAC, such as contextualizing basic skills curriculum, designing approaches for enhanced academic instruction, and organizing career navigation services. These efforts help improve local programs and projects, but do not directly engage the broader field to further champion interest and engagement in adult education bridges.

One consequence of the lack of broader professional development throughout the educational and workforce systems is reflected in the change to expand the options for postsecondary partnership beyond institutions in the MnSCU system. This change was pursued because some community colleges were not willing to adopt the FastTRAC integrated bridge model to combine basic and occupational skills content into postsecondary courses that awarded college credit. This resistance reflects the absence of system-level policy change, resources or incentives to encourage all community colleges across the state to work similarly in using the FastTRAC model to address the needs of the state's low-skilled adult population.

Using Data to Promote the Development and Adoption of Bridge Programs

MnSCU used SG 3.0 grant resources to conduct considerable data analyses that looked at overall transition rates of adult basic education students into postsecondary education (i.e., pipeline analysis), and the educational and employment outcomes of individuals receiving training through FastTRAC programs. As noted above, the results of the FastTRAC analyses is very positive for participants in general and in comparison to similar students not receiving FastTRAC education and services.

The pipeline analysis and a preliminary look into FastTRAC participant outcomes was concluded and presented by MnSCU in a June 2013 report. Although it is available on the MnSCU website, neither the report nor the findings were widely disseminated or used to promote the further development and adoption of bridge programs. The updated examination of FastTRAC participant outcomes and the comparison analysis was made available for this report, but has not been distributed publicly as of July 1, 2015.

Moving forward it is not clear if this type of analysis of bridge participants will continue. One reason is that such analyses requires data sharing agreements that allow for records in DEED's Workforce One data system to be matched with records from other state data systems. Particularly important are the ABE data in the Department of Education system, and the postsecondary data in the MnSCU system. Such agreements were made for Shifting Gears, but these data partnerships are not expected to continue. However, discussions are underway to explore the option of using the Minnesota Statewide Longitudinal Education Data System (SLEDS) to do such analyses in the future.

Wisconsin

Wisconsin state policy makers took significant steps to institutionalize adult education bridges and postsecondary career pathways by enacting state policy changes and leveraging significant external resources. These efforts have fostered a deliberate increase in local adult education bridge programs and participants served over the past several years, and the state has established a solid foundation for future growth. A key reason for this progress is the articulation of a clear vision and priority commitment to career pathways and adult education bridges by the president and senior leaders of the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) as well as a growing number of local college presidents.[41] This commitment is echoed by senior leaders of the state's workforce development agency, an initial and primary state partner in the Shifting Gears effort.

Significant state policy actions include WTCS focusing discretionary technical college resources and institutional performance funding metrics on career pathway and adult education bridge program efforts; and, intentionally collaborating as a system of 16 technical colleges to successfully leverage over $49 million in federal competitive resources to support career pathway development in all WTCS colleges. These actions are complemented by focused professional development efforts and the internal use of data analysis documenting the need to increase the number of students successfully transitioning from adult basic education into postsecondary programs. Altogether, these efforts contribute to a growing belief in Wisconsin that adult education bridges and career pathways will be a critical strategy for addressing the education and skill needs of significant numbers of adult learners in the coming years.

Involvement and Commitment of Cross-Agency Senior Leadership

Throughout the eight years of Shifting Gears, the Wisconsin senior leadership team remained focused and committed to the goal of fostering the development and implementation of adult career pathways and bridges in the technical college and workforce development systems. Principally comprised of senior officials from WTCS and the Department of Workforce Development (DWD) and supported by dedicated staff, the team maintained a steady commitment to the effort even as institutional leadership and senior staff changed.

A new WTCS president was appointed midway through the initiative and intensified the prior president's support for career pathways. She did this by continually and publicly articulating her vision and priority commitment to career pathways as an essential strategy for better serving students and businesses across the state. This public support was significant, and when combined with policy and programmatic actions by WTCS, provided the encouragement and opportunities for technical colleges to make changes in educational programming to better serve low-skilled adult students.

The partnership between WTCS and DWD remains intact. Over the years, DWD resources were used to promote the importance of addressing the needs of low-skilled adults among local workforce providers and business. DWD resources also supported local industry and employer partnerships and in doing so raised awareness about adult education bridges and career pathways among employers and the workforce system.

Identifying Goals and Tactics to Expand Bridge Programs and Participants

In 2012, Wisconsin articulated a goal of establishing 80 – 160 career pathway adult education bridges that enrolled 3,500 new participants. This goal was based on the expectation of external funding from a national foundation that eventually did not occur. These goals were never modified, and as documented above in the section on bridge expansion and the number of participants (see pp. 10-11), the state did not achieve them during SG 3.0, despite increasing the number of low-skilled adults who participated in career pathway bridges.

A subsequent analysis by WTCS staff documented that as many as 35,000 students being served by the technical colleges in developmental and adult basic education could benefit from adult bridge programs. This analysis, as well as other WTCS internal research on the rate of transitions from developmental and adult basic education into postsecondary education, provided motivation for continuing and expanding adult education bridges. However, as in the other two states, Wisconsin has not identified explicit numerical goals for scale in terms of the intended number of participants to be served in adult education bridges, and has not taken further steps to analyze the number of programs or amount of resources necessary to achieve some degree of scale.

Recently, the WTCS president acknowledged publicly that the state had reached the point that it needed to go all the way to implement sufficient bridges and pathways to meet student needs. In doing so, she noted that more resources would be needed, but indicated that “braiding funding” from other programmatic resources was not the answer. Instead, colleges need to consider their own institutional resources and create a demand or market for bridges and pathways. Once employers and agencies (e.g., human services, vocational rehabilitation, and workforce training) are convinced of their value, they would be more likely to invest in or pay for bridge and pathways services.[42]

Strengthening State Policies and Leveraging Resources

Wisconsin took three significant state actions to support the development and implementation of adult education bridge programs statewide:

- First, WTCS gained new authority to establish categorical grant areas for the distribution of state discretionary resources to colleges. With funding of $22 million per biennium, WTCS created seven categorical areas, one of which specifically supported the development of career pathways and bridges at $4 million dollars annually. Four other categorical areas, such as support services and core industry grants, also gave specific priority for projects related to career pathways and bridges. Local colleges competing for these resources indicated that these discretionary grant programs made it very clear that projects involving career pathways and bridges were a priority for WTCS.
- Second, WTCS moved toward performance funding for the non-categorical state resources appropriated for the state's 16 technical colleges. WTCS established nine performance funding metrics, two of which focus on adult education students: (1) transitions to postsecondary occupational skills training; and (2) delivering basic skills instruction alongside postsecondary occupational skills training. These two metrics, along with the metric on number of credentials awarded, reinforced the value WTCS places on career pathway and bridges for local technical colleges.
- Third, WTCS and the 16 college presidents intentionally banded together as a consortium in 2012 to apply for the U.S. Department of Labor Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training grant program (TAACCCT). The consortium won a $12 million dollar grant in round 2 to develop career pathway and bridge programs in advanced manufacturing; its success continued in rounds three and four with grants to develop career pathways and bridges in information technology and health care at $17 million and $15 million, respectively. In round four, Wisconsin also received the only grant awarded ($5 million) under a supplemental "exceeding the cap" provision that offered federal resources to fund "building policies and practices that will support the development or expansion of state career pathway systems."[43] Wisconsin is using these resources to further scale career pathways statewide, and will bring additional systems like K – 12 into a common framework of career pathways. Altogether, Wisconsin leveraged $49 million in TAACCCT consortia grants to support the state's career pathway and bridge scaling efforts.

These state actions came to fruition over the last two years, so the creation of new career pathways and bridge programs is expected to accelerate. Moreover, these actions have fostered an expanded awareness and interest in career pathways and bridges among local colleges, especially among presidents.

As noted earlier, DWD remained a key partner in Wisconsin's Shifting Gears initiative. One notable DWD policy action involved modifying state WIA regulations to require local Workplace Investment Boards to include their approach to supporting career pathways and bridges in their local plans. This requirement helped bring greater awareness of career pathways among local workforce providers and local employers. It also should be helpful as the state and local workforce systems move to implement the career pathway and bridge provisions of WIOA. This legislation creates the opportunity for workforce and adult basic education agencies to shift resources from raising awareness of career pathways and bridges to actually financing their development and use by WIOA adult and basic education participants.

Using Professional Development to Support Local Implementation Efforts

Since inception, the Wisconsin Shifting Gears initiative supported activities to educate local practitioners and stakeholders on the importance of addressing the needs of low-skilled workers and the potential value of career pathways and adult basic education bridges. In recent years, these efforts have become more focused on technical college leaders and staff who have the authority to support the development of career pathways and bridges. For example, WTCS convenes statewide meetings of various stakeholder groups (e.g., vice-presidents of instruction and student services, and deans of occupational program and adult basic education). These meetings incorporate specific discussions on career pathways and bridges. They focus on the newly streamlined system processes for the development of technical college career pathway and bridge programs, as well as promising practices at the local level. In addition, WTCS has held cross-disciplinary conferences focused specifically on career pathways and bridges that bring together technical college deans with local workforce development staff and employers.

Two specific aspects of the WTCS professional development work stand out. First, WTCS included technical college presidents in career pathway and bridge development efforts. This helped build a level of understanding that paved the way for ideas such as developing TAACCCT grant applications and focusing state technical college discretionary resources on career pathways and bridges. Second, WTCS occupational program education directors—the primary state liaisons to technical college occupational program deans—became vested in encouraging the development of career pathways and bridges locally, and providing assistance to facilitate their development. These actions helped foster an understanding that career pathways and bridges were not a “flavor of the month,” but a long-lasting commitment of the system.

DWD also took actions over the years to build an understanding of career pathways and bridges among local workforce development stakeholders. Notably, DWD resources supported several rounds of "mini-grants" to convene local workforce boards, employers, and technical colleges around the idea of career pathways and bridges. These efforts built an awareness of the value of career pathways and bridges, which should be useful as local workforce development systems move to support career pathways and bridges as they implement WIOA.

Using Data to Promote the Development and Adoption of Bridge Programs

Wisconsin undertook a number of data analyses to support the Shifting Gears Work. These included: (1) identifying the magnitude of the low-skilled adult population in the state; (2) examining the rate of student transitions from adult basic education programs to college occupational programs (i.e., pipeline analysis); (3) measuring the progress and outcomes of adult education bridge participants; and (4) comparing the progress and outcomes of bridge participants to similar ABE non-bridge participants. The initial analysis of the low-skilled population, conducted by the Center on Wisconsin Strategies, was used publicly to raise awareness of the importance of strengthening the skills of a sizeable number of Wisconsin workers.

The other three analyses were not promoted or used publicly. The transitions or pipeline analysis was used internally to influence the state system and local technical colleges to embrace career pathways and bridges as a centerpiece of educational occupational programming. The analysis of bridge participant outcomes and the comparative analysis were completed at the end of 2014, and it is unclear whether or how they will be used further support or accelerate the development of career pathways and bridge programs.

Factors Influencing Progress in Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin

Each of the three SG 3.0 states continued to expand the development and implementation of their adult education bridge programs from 2012 – 2014 and, to differing degrees, established some foundation for sustaining the bridge commitment in the years ahead. In examining the factors that appeared to influence these efforts, five observations stand out.

1. The importance of system leaders committing to sustain and expand adult education bridge programs. The direct and public support for bridge programs by the president and senior leaders of the technical college system in Wisconsin, in consultation with the presidents of the local technical colleges, helped establish an important rationale and foundation for bridge implementation. This system-level commitment resulted in significant state policy changes and the leveraging of external resources to support the work. In Minnesota, senior leaders at DEED maintained and expanded their commitment to career pathways and adult education bridges and achieved a significant increase in state resources. Senior leaders of the Minnesota community/technical college and adult basic education systems did not demonstrate this level of commitment; only modest alignment and policy changes ensued across the state systems during SG 3.0. System leadership within the Illinois Community College Board was strong and public in the support for adult education bridges, but this commitment did not translate into state or system policy changes that yielded new financial resources.

2. Modest goal setting that neither reflected the scale needed to serve the significant number of low-skilled adults who could benefit from bridges, nor identified the number of programs and level of resources required to effectively address this need. Although all states worked to achieve the initial program and participant goals articulated in their state SG 3.0 proposal, none took the strategic and intentional next step to analyze the programs, providers, and resources needed to build the capacity of their local systems to sufficiently address the sizeable low-skilled adult population in their states. Therefore, SG 3.0 ended without any of the three states having concrete plans for achieving a level of scale that makes a meaningful contribution in addressing the needs of low-skilled adults and employers.

3. The enactment of significant and comprehensive state policy changes. Wisconsin changed state level institutional funding policies in two important areas and leveraged significant outside funding to support bridge and career pathway development. These actions provide a foundation for ongoing bridge development and provide confidence that bridges will expand at a significant level for the next several years. Minnesota's enactment of a dedicated funding stream for adult education bridges and continued partnership with the Department of Human Services also provides significant resources to support bridge development and will enable some level of expansion for the next several years. By comparison, Illinois' SG 3.0 expansion was financed with external resources that are no longer available and the modest policy change enacted to require bridge programming did not include resources dedicated to supporting additional expansion. Without further state policy changes and/or resources in Illinois, it is unclear whether local resources and efforts will be sufficient to foster continued expansion of bridges, especially if reliant on the concept of "braiding" local programmatic resources. It does appear, however, that policies put into place and the resources devoted to adult education bridges at Chicago City Colleges will lead to continued expansion for the foreseeable future, which is notable given the large number of adult students served.

4. The important role of professional development in all three states. Providing targeted and regular professional development opportunities for practitioners in all three states helped build the interest and knowledge in local systems and institutions for the further implementation of adult education bridge programs. In 2014, Wisconsin received a $5 million federal TAACCCT "exceeding the cap" grant dedicated to furthering systems development of career pathways among all local technical colleges, and seems best poised to make major advancements in expanding adult education bridge programming across all technical colleges.[44]

5. Data analysis in each state documented positive outcomes for participants in adult education bridge programs. All three states took significant steps to identify adult education bridge participants and track their educational progress and, as noted earlier, found promising results. In addition, both Minnesota and Wisconsin conducted comparative analysis suggesting that these outcomes are more significant than those achieved by similar basic skills students not participating in bridge programs. These findings suggest that adult education bridges serving low-skilled adults can yield positive and notable postsecondary outcomes. To date, none of the states have proactively used these finding to justify and promote the further development and implementation of bridge programs statewide.

Conclusion:
Shifting Gears Progress in Strengthening State Systems for Adult Learners

After eight years of Shifting Gears investments, the evaluation concludes that adult education bridges have been institutionalized in three states as a credible model to improve basic skills, provide occupational training, and enhance transitions to postsecondary education for low-skilled adults. Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin each made progress throughout SG 3.0 by expanding the number of adult education bridge programs and increasing the number of participants served.

Moreover, each state made policy changes and took actions that helped establish adult education bridges as an important new approach for accessing and delivering education services for low-skilled adults. Both Minnesota and Wisconsin made major resource allocation commitments to fund bridge development during SG 3.0 and for the coming years. Wisconsin took even further steps with specific state policy changes that support what senior state leaders of the technical college and workforce systems articulate publicly: bridges and pathways are the top priority for addressing the skills and credentials needs of workers and local employers, now and in the future.

Despite the institutionalization of bridges in each state, none of them achieved the scale necessary to impact the adult workforce, and the extent to which scale might be achieved in the future is unclear. Across the three states, several million low-skilled adults need considerably more education and training targeted to in-demand labor market opportunities. Although the 10,345 adults who participated in bridges between 2011 – 2014 will likely benefit from their postsecondary credentials and move up in the labor market, these numbers pale given the magnitude of the need.

Shifting Gears has not only made demonstrable progress in three Midwest states, but has informed national and local workforce development thinking across country (see Box A). In doing so, the initiative contributed to a better understanding of the importance of addressing the educational and skill needs of low-skilled adult workers, the strategies and actions necessary to do so, and the challenges in sustaining and scaling efforts to achieve significant impact.

Six specific points warrant note regarding the outcomes and potential impacts of Shifting Gears:

1. **Adult Learning:** The idea that adult learning and training systems should offer opportunities for low-skilled adults to obtain postsecondary credentials was at the core of Shifting Gears. Within each state, Shifting Gears generated a lasting constituency of stakeholders committed to this idea. These stakeholders include both system-level champions (state agencies and college system offices) and local leaders (adult education and workforce training providers, including community and technical colleges). Also, the focus on helping low-skilled adults earn postsecondary credits and credentials is now firmly established in the general field of workforce development. For example, this goal is a major focus of other philanthropic multi-state initiatives such as Accelerating Opportunity; it is reflected in new policy and program guidance of major federal programs such as the WIOA legislation enacted in 2014; and it is a publicly articulated priority of the U.S Department of Education.[45]

2. **System Alignment:** Aligning multiple state systems—adult basic education, workforce, and community and technical colleges—is now recognized within states and in federal legislation as fundamental to building and implementing career pathways that can address the education and training needs of low-skilled adults (see discussion of WIOA in Box A). As demonstrated by the efforts of Shifting Gears states, achieving and sustaining system alignment over time is influenced by the ongoing commitment of each system's senior leadership. Given that all systems experience periodic changes in senior leadership, which sometimes leads to changes in prior commitments, the issue of how to sustain system commitments during and after leadership transitions likely requires upfront and intentional planning.

3. **State Policy and Resources:** As important as external funding is to stimulate state action—something clearly achieved in Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin as a result of the Joyce Foundation's Shifting Gears investment—it is increasingly clear that efforts to foster transformative change in the practices of institutions and systems require significant state policy changes and investment or reallocation of state resources. Relying on new resources or the successful "braiding" of other programmatic resources may be insufficient or in some cases problematic. This is especially true in states with budget challenges, making the willingness to reallocate existing resources to support new innovative strategies of the utmost importance. Reallocating existing resources to replace long-standing practices comes with the challenges of getting the support of local practitioners, an issue that must be addressed directly and systematically.

4. **Engaging Local Stakeholders:** Although Shifting Gears worked through state leaders and systems, it was clear from the outset that real change would not be possible if led solely from the top. Local stakeholders needed to embrace change and become champions for new ways of delivering education and training. In all SG 3.0 states, the commitment to engage local practitioners was pursued throughout the initiative. This is likely a key reason that the number of bridges implemented and the number of low-skilled adults served more than doubled during the past three years. Engaging local leaders through professional development workshops and onsite training, as well as providing access to key materials such as curriculum and lesson plans, appears fundamental to building broad and deep support for systems change.

5. **The Role of Data:** Data were seen as an important lever for systems change at the outset of the Shifting Gears initiative.[46] Over the years it became clear that there are multiple dimensions to using data for systems change. The role of data involves more than just defining the problem (e.g., number of low-skilled adults in a state), which was accomplished by all Shifting Gears states. Using data to support and foster a new strategy such as adult education bridges requires adjusting state and program data systems to include participants and to assess their progress and outcomes. Making such infrastructure changes did not come quickly or easily, but ultimately they were achieved. Taking the next step—using the positive outcomes revealed by state analyses to advocate publicly for expansion and scale—did not occur in any state during the eight years of Shifting Gears. Whether states or other groups have the capacity, resources, or perhaps even institutional will to use data in public and proactive ways to promote change is not clear. The fact that data was not used in this way may have contributed to the low number of adults served relative to the need. However, the evaluation does document steady growth and expansion of bridge programs within each state.

6. **Systems Change and Scale:** Moving beyond boutique programs and transforming systems and programs to reach significant numbers of participants was a primary goal of Shifting Gears.[47] Systems change and scale is a core principle of other initiatives (e.g., Accelerating Opportunity), but the key lesson from Shifting Gears is that change of this magnitude is slow and incremental. Although the SG 3.0 states reformed systems to include and even institutionalize the new innovative strategies of adult education bridges, the scaling of bridges to serve significant participants was not achieved after eight years of Joyce Foundation investments and

assistance. Clearly, achieving scale and systems change takes time. Constraints in resources, staff capacity, and expertise to develop and execute strategic implementation plans influences both the pace of systems change and eventual outcomes.

Overall, the Shifting Gears initiative in Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin successfully enacted policies and institutionalized adult education bridges systemwide. In doing so, these states demonstrated a better way of delivering education and skills training to low-skilled adults seeking postsecondary credentials and a career pathway to advance in the labor market. Shifting Gears also resulted in the three states being recognized as national leaders in improving education and training outcomes for low-skilled adults. Although the states did not reach a significant level of scale, more than 10,000 low-skilled individuals benefited from these state efforts during the last three years of Shifting Gears. Finally, the policy and practice changes specifically enacted in Wisconsin and Minnesota, and the commitment to additional state financial resources, suggest that adult education bridges and career pathways will continue to expand and serve more participants in those states.

Box A: Influence of Shifting Gears on the National Discourse for Increasing Skills and Credentials for Adult Learners

By 2012, participating Midwest states had emerged as national leaders through their experiences in Shifting Gears. This was evidenced by the inclusion of their state innovations and activities in key federal workforce publications and the 2012 federal policy guidance on implementing career pathways at the state and local level.[48] It was also reflected in the participation of state leaders from Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin in national and state forums to share lessons learned in fostering policy change and system alignment throughout their adult basic education, workforce, and community and technical college systems.[49]

During SG 3.0, the work continued to influence the national discourse on workforce development. Based on interviews with a small number of key national leaders,[50] the initiative is seen as an essential pillar in transforming the thinking about adult learning to focus on bringing multiple systems together at the national, state, and local level to address the needs of low-skilled adults. One result is the development of a lasting constituency among multiple partners to support postsecondary education and skills development for low-skilled adults. This is manifest in a number of ways, most notably by the inclusion of key Shifting Gears ideas and strategies in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA) of 2014,[51] as well the formation and work of the Alliance for Quality Career Pathways (AQCP)[52] that got underway in 2012.

The connection of Shifting Gears and WIOA is most prominently represented by two specific requirements in the legislation that mirror the strategies and lessons from the participating Midwest states. First, WIOA promotes state systems alignment by requiring a unified state plan that includes workforce and adult education, with an option to include postsecondary career and technical education. This legislative attempt to align three systems (adult education, workforce, and community and technical colleges) reflects the core premise of the Shifting Gears initiative: aligning these systems is needed to improve postsecondary education and skills development for low-skilled adults.

Second, WIOA encourages the development and implementation of career pathways. Importantly, the commitment to career pathways pertains to both Title I (workforce) and Title II (adult basic education), and specifically calls for a system to support transitions from adult education to postsecondary education. In addition, WIOA allows for the integration of literacy and English language instruction with occupational skills training for the first time. These career pathways concepts were the foundation of the innovations developed and pursued by Shifting Gears states starting in 2007. These requirements were slated to get underway in all 50 states starting July 1, 2015.

While WIOA provides the impetus for states to move forward with systems alignment and career pathways, the work of AQCP provides the substantive details for designing and implementing a career pathway system. A number of the AQCP elements were informed by the experiences of Shifting Gears states. These include the need to articulate an overall framework and set of definitions for career pathways at the state, regional, and institutional level; and the importance of establishing a valid and useful measurement system to collect and report on career pathways activities and outcomes. Finally, a number of key staff in several Shifting Gears states—representing 3 of the 10 states initially involved in this work—were instrumental in the developing the AQCP and field testing the AQCP framework and measurement system.

The key ideas and strategies fostered by Shifting Gears can be expected to remain at the core of national workforce policy and extend to other states in the years ahead.

Endnotes

[1] Anthony P. Carnevale, Stephen J. Rose, and Ban Cheah. *The College Payoff: Education, Occupations and Lifetime Earnings.* Washington, DC: The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, 2011.

[2] Brandon Roberts and Derek Price. *Strengthening State Systems for Adult Learners: An Evaluation of the First Five Years of Shifting Gears.* Chicago, Illinois: The Joyce Foundation, December 2012, p. 3.

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] David Fischer and John Twomey. *Implementing WIOA: State Policy Choices to Assist Low-Income Working Families.* Working Poor Families Project, Summer 2015.

[5] Carnevale, Rose, and Cheah. *Op. cit.,* 2011.

[6] Anthony P. Carnevale, Stephen J. Rose, and Andrew R. Hanson. *Certificates; Gateway to Gainful Employment and College Degrees.* Washington, DC: The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, 2012.

[7] Carnevale, Rose, and Cheah. *Op. cit.,* 2011.

[8] Bureau of Labor Statistics. *Occupational Outlook Quarterly.* Washington, DC: Winter 2011-12.

[9] Working Poor Families Project. Data from the American Community Survey 2010 and generated by Population Reference Bureau, April 2012. (See: http://www.workingpoorfamilies.org/indicators/)

[10] U.S. Census. *Enrollment Status of the Population 3 Years Old and Over.* Washington, DC: October 2010. Accessed June 26, 2012 from http://www.census.gov/hhes/school/data/cps/2010/tables.html

[11] In 2007, planning grants were made to Minnesota and Ohio, and implementation grants were made to Indiana, Illinois, and Wisconsin. In 2008, Michigan received a planning grant. In 2010, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin received two-year implementation grants. Indiana did not receive a grant for this period, but continued to participate in Shifting Gears, primarily by attending the twice-yearly cross-state convenings.

[12] The factors examined are: (1) sustaining leadership and commitment to the work; (2) articulating the intent to sustain and expand the number of adult basic education bridge programs and participants served at the local provider/institutional level; (3) strengthening state policies and leveraging additional resources to support local efforts; (4) fostering cultural change among local practitioners; and (5) using data to promote change. These factors are derived from finding of the first evaluation report (Roberts and Price. *Op. cit.,* 2012).

[13] Roberts and Price. *Op. cit.,* 2012, page 13

[14] Unless otherwise stated, the data in this report cover the period 2011 – 2014, because states were able to provide information to the evaluators on adult education bridges from state administrative records for that period. In the December 2012 evaluation report, states relied on several methods for collecting and reporting data on bridges and participants. The data from administrative systems used in this report are more reliable than the previously reported data.

[15] *Minnesota FastTRAC Evaluation Report (FY2011-FY2014),* prepared for the Joyce Foundation, February 5, 2014. The higher number of overall bridges reflects a revised count of bridges in FY 2011 from what was reported in Roberts and Price, *op. cit.,* 2012.

[16] As reported to the evaluators via email from Jay Brooks, Director of Research and Policy Studies, Illinois Community College Board, June 19, 2015.

[17] *Minnesota FastTRAC Evaluation Report (FY2011 – FY2014).*

[18] Childress, L. 2014. *Wisconsin's Regional Industry Skills Education (RISE) Career Pathways Bridges: An Evaluation of Career Pathway Bridge Programming in Wisconsin, 2012 – 2014.*

[19] The evaluators requested data from each state on employment and earnings. However, the UI match on participants was too low, and in one state was not completed; thus employment outcomes are not included in this report.

[20] Minnesota did not provide data on credentials for FY 2014 participants, so only FY 2011, FY 2012 and FY 2013 participants are included in this calculation. In Illinois, 15 percent of bridge participants earned a GED, but these numbers are not included in the data because a GED is not a postsecondary credential.

[21] Childress. *Op. cit.,* 2014.

[22] *Ibid.*

[23] *Minnesota FastTRAC Evaluation Report (FY2011-FY2014).* Although 36 percent of bridge participants continued on to an integrated program, the data in this report reflect only those students who started in an integrated program. The comparison group of adult education participants was also limited to students who enrolled in credit-based courses at a MnSCU state college.

[24] *Ibid.* See Table 5.

[25] *Enrollment, Persistence, Graduation and Employment of Adult Basic Education Learners and FastTRAC Participants at Minnesota State Colleges and Universities.* Minneapolis: System Office Research, Planning and Policy, June 25, 2013.

[26] Roberts and Price. *Op. cit.,* p. 35.

[27] Accelerating Opportunity is a national initiative funded by the Joyce Foundation and other foundations. It operates in a number of states to combine adult basic education and career and technical postsecondary training into one integrated curriculum, following the overall concept of Washington State's I-Best model. For more on AO see: http://www.jff.org/initiatives/accelerating-opportunity.

[28] City Colleges of Chicago consists of seven community colleges. All seven community colleges administer the adult basic education program and the system office made transitions from adult basic education into postsecondary education as one of five top priorities for overall system improvement. Bridge programs are a high priority strategy for achieving improved student transition outcomes.

[29] The Illinois ABE program/system is administered by the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB).

[30] One senior leader became executive director of ICCB and the other became deputy director for all adult education and workforce programs.

[31] City Colleges of Chicago constitutes almost one-third of the bridge participants reported by ICCB.

[32] See: http://www.ccc.edu/menu/pages/reinvention.aspx

[33] Data provided by ICCB show that in FY 2012 and FY 2013, 552 unduplicated adult education students enrolled in integrated bridge programs developed for the Accelerating Opportunity initiative. Of this group, 85 percent enrolled in postsecondary education and 38 percent completed a post-secondary program of study, presumably earning a postsecondary credential. The Urban Institute is leading the national evaluation for Accelerating Opportunity, and a final report is expected in early 2016.

[34] http://www.siue.edu/SIPDC

[35] http://mn.gov/deed/programs-services/minnesota-fast-trac/

[36] Laws of Minnesota, 2013 Chapter 85 (H.F. 729) Article I, Section 3, Subdivision 3(f)

[37] Roberts and Price. *Op. cit.,* p. 20.

[38] Governor's Workforce Development Council, *All Hands on Deck: Fifteen Ideas for Strengthening Minnesota's Workforce,* February 2012, page 6.

[39] Roberts and Price. *Op. cit.,* pp. 21-24.

[40] Despite the robustness of DEED Workforce One data system, the ability to fully analyze FastTRAC participant outcomes requires the capacity to work with other state data systems, especially those at ABE and MnSCU. Unfortunately it is not clear that data exchanges established under Shifting Gears are continuing.

[41] The Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS), comprised of 16 local technical colleges, has statutory responsibility for providing ABE in the state.

[42] Morna Foy, President , Wisconsin Technical Colleges System. Presentation at the Center for Wisconsin Strategy Forum *"Wisconsin Workforce Development 2015: Career Pathways, Fast Forward, and New Opportunities for Policy",* June 9, 2015.

[43] http://www.doleta.gov/grants/pdf/SGA-DFA-PY-13-10.pdf, page 22.

[44] An important aspect of the $5 million grant is the plan to provide resources for each technical college to hire a career pathway coordinator who can support the further development of career pathways and bridges within all program areas of the technical college.

[45] U.S. Department of Education. *Making Skills Everyone's Business: A Call to Transform Adult Learning in the United States.* February 2015. http://www.ed.gov/edblogs/ovae/2015/02/24/making-skills-everyones-business-report-launch/.

[46] Derek Price and Brandon Roberts. *Statewide Data as a Lever of for Systems Change: Experience and Lessons form Shifting Gears.* Chicago, Illinois: The Joyce Foundation, September 2010.

[47] Derek Price and Brandon Roberts. *The Shifting Gears Approach to Systems Change.* Chicago, Illinois: The Joyce Foundation, December 2010.

[48] U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration. Training and Employment Notice No. 36-11, April 4, 2012.

[49] Roberts and Price. *Op. cit.,* p. 31.

[50] As in the 2012 evaluation report, interviews were conducted with senior leaders or staff either currently or recently involved with the U.S. Department of Education, National Governors' Association, Jobs for the Future, and the Center for Law and Social Policy, as well as the states involved in the Shifting Gears initiative.

[51] Public Law 113-128. See http://www.doleta.gov/wioa/

[52] http://www.clasp.org/issues/postsecondary/pages/aqcp-framework-version-1-0

Shifting Gears Management Team

The following key Joyce Foundation partners helped Shifting Gears states during 2007-2012 to better develop, manage, assess, measure, and communicate this work.

- CLASP (Center for Law and Social Policy) provided ongoing policy guidance to all states and coordinated communications efforts between states and partners, including maintenance of the Shifting Gears web site and distribution of a quarterly newsletter.
- The Workforce Strategy Center (WSC) provided peer learning experiences through conferences and Webinars.
- Davis Jenkins, Ph.D., Senior Research Associate, Community College Research Center, Teacher's College, Columbia University, and Tim Harmon, research coordinator with the Office of Community College Research and Leadership at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign advised the state grantees on using state data to inform improvements to policy and practice.
- Douglas Gould & Co. (PublicVoice) provided communications and advocacy support and technical assistance to the states.

The Shifting Gears Evaluation Team

- Brandon Roberts + Associates designed and implemented the Shifting Gears initiative evaluation process, with assistance from Derek Price, Ph.D., of DVP-Praxis, Ltd, from 2007-2015.