

**Strengthening State Systems
for Adult Learners:**

An Evaluation of the First Five Years of Shifting Gears

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TheJoyceFoundation

shiftinggears

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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 is to strengthen state postsecondary, adult basic education, and skills-development 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

The Joyce Foundation supports the development of policies that both improve the quality of life for people in the Great Lakes region and serve as models for the rest of the country. The Joyce Foundation's grant making supports research into Great Lakes protection and restoration, energy efficiency, teacher quality and early reading, workforce development, gun violence prevention, diverse art for diverse audiences, and a strong, thriving democracy. The Foundation encourages innovative and collaborative approaches with a regional focus and the potential for a national reach.

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For more information about the Joyce Foundation, please visit www.joycefdn.org.

About this Publication

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Executive Summary

The Joyce Foundation launched Shifting Gears in 2007 with the goal of helping six Midwest states significantly increase the number of low-skilled adults with the education and skills they need to succeed in the 21st century economy. Between 2007 and 2011, the Foundation awarded a total of about \$8 million in grants to Illinois, Indiana, Minnesota, Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin, with the expectation that officials in these states would pursue a *systems change agenda* for making existing education and skills development systems work better for adult learners.

Shifting Gears emphasized the need for aligning policy and priorities across adult basic education, workforce development, and community and technical college systems to improve adult transitions to postsecondary education. State officials were expected to identify innovative strategies for serving low-skilled adults in new ways that, over time, would be infused into these systems and the mainstream operations of their local providers and institutions. The premise of Shifting Gears was that states would be able to bolster

postsecondary success of low-skilled adults if the old ways of delivering education and related services were replaced with more effective and aligned approaches.

The Joyce Foundation recognized that change would not come easily or quickly and was unlikely to be realized during the first five years of Shifting Gears. Accordingly, this evaluation focuses on the extent to which each of the six states “gained traction on the ground” by implementing their innovative strategies within local institutions and providers of education and skills development. This evaluation specifically focuses on the innovative strategies that connected a state’s adult basic education (ABE) system with its community and technical college system.

The overarching evaluative questions answered by this report from the first five years of Shifting Gears are:

1. To what extent have states begun to adopt and implement an innovative strategy to improve transitions from adult basic education into community and technical colleges, including serving participants in these new ways?

2. What are the factors that influenced progress in the states to adopt and implement these innovative strategies during the initiative?

STATE PROGRESS AFTER FIVE YEARS

The evaluation team found that *four of the six Shifting Gears states demonstrated traction on the ground by implementing innovative strategies to serve low-skilled adults*. By the end of 2011, Illinois, Indiana, Minnesota, and Wisconsin had enrolled a total of about 4,000 low-skilled adults in their innovative strategies—a modest number that is expected to grow considerably during the next several years as these innovative strategies are embraced by more institutions throughout the state. These states each pursued a career pathway framework, including a bridge component, to improve transition between adult basic education programs and community and technical college workforce programs.


The report also finds other benefits from the states' participation in Shifting Gears, including: a growing commitment to address the educational and skill levels of adult workers; a greater appreciation of how data could support program improvement; and an increasing willingness of adult basic education leaders to elevate the system's mission to help students aspire for higher levels of education and employment.

REASONS FOR STATE PROGRESS

The evaluation team found that *the four states achieving traction on the ground were able to do so primarily because they focused their work on a specific innovative strategy*. The value in concentrating the systems change work on an innovative strategy proved threefold: it helped state agency leaders reach consensus that low-skilled adults should and could be better served through a new approach to education and skills development; it gave direction and structure to work plans and activities undertaken by each state's cross-agency team; and it helped to garner support of key stakeholders who would be critical for achieving implementation on the ground.

Additionally, the evaluation points to four core activities that contributed to states' ability to achieve traction on the ground.

1. Strengthened alignment and collaboration across the adult education, workforce, and community and technical college systems, which helped to lay the foundation for systems change. Cross-agency teams clearly identified the changes in practices needed (i.e., their innovative strategies) and reached consensus on a policy agenda and action plan to achieve it. Staffing levels and effective project management also were instrumental in moving their efforts forward.
2. Obtained the buy-in and commitment of senior state leadership, which bolstered progress toward systems change. Most commonly, senior leaders demonstrated that Shifting Gears was one of their priorities by speaking publicly and with targeted stakeholders about the need for systems change and by allocating state resources to support their specific innovative strategy for serving low-skilled adults in new ways.
3. Enacted changes to specific state administrative policies and regulations affecting local program services and delivery, which provided an impetus for local champions to pursue the specified innovative strategy. Of particular importance, innovative strategies were codified into current regulatory and administrative rules and articulated as priorities in strategic plans issued by state agencies.
4. Engaged the field of practice intentionally and repeatedly, which helped to build local champions for systems change. The initial investments that states made in pilot projects—through funding from the Joyce Foundation, as well as state and other sources—generated important local buy-



in for systems change. Also contributing to local buy-in were the regular statewide gatherings of key stakeholder groups.

LOOKING FORWARD & CHALLENGES AHEAD

Moving beyond the initial traction on the ground will require scale and sustainability. Evaluators identified four main challenges facing states as they seek to implement their innovative strategies at scale.

The first challenge is to **define what it means to scale an innovation**. A basic step toward defining desired scale is to determine the number of low-skilled adults currently being served that could benefit from the new way of providing education and skills development services and to set numerical goals for program reach.

A second challenge is to **tackle cultural change among institutional leaders, faculty, and other frontline staff** in order to attract the support and participation of a majority of local institutions. This challenge includes identifying the right levers to build buy-in and support of the innovative strategies by particular groups. Thus, culture change may require different strategies for different stakeholders and could hinge on who is delivering the message and/or demonstrating effectiveness.

A third challenge is to **expand state capacity to more effectively use data and produce evidence** to demonstrate that the innovative strategies are successful. Moving forward, it will be important to conduct rigorous analyses that provide credible findings demonstrating that the new way of serving low-skilled adults is superior to the status quo. Moreover, these analyses need to be widely disseminated throughout the field of practice.

The fourth challenge is to **repurpose or reallocate existing financial resources** to support innovative strategies. State leaders must find a sustainable way to finance both the development and operation of their innovative strategies throughout the adult education, workforce, and community and technical college systems. In an era in which additional resources are unlikely, repurposing funds is fundamental to achieving systems change.

Looking forward, there are reasons to anticipate that Illinois, Indiana, Minnesota, and Wisconsin will continue making inroads toward systems change. By expanding and deepening their current level of traction on the ground, they will gradually institutionalize their innovative strategies and achieve scale. Building from the experiences and successes of the Shifting Gears state work, the Joyce Foundation is making ongoing investments into 2014. Meanwhile, the federal government and leading philanthropic foundations are promoting the use of career pathways to address the skill needs of America's workforce. These efforts, combined with the ongoing commitment of the states, provide a solid foundation for strengthening state systems to better serve low-skilled adults.



Introduction


The Joyce Foundation launched Shifting Gears in 2007 to help six Midwest states significantly increase the number of low-skilled adults who enter postsecondary education and obtain occupational, credit-based credentials that they need to succeed in the 21st century economy. The initiative encouraged Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin to develop innovative ideas and policies that would enable low-skilled adults to advance in education and training and move up in the labor market.¹ In undertaking this work, **Shifting Gears focused on improving transitions to postsecondary education and skills development for low-skilled adults.**

NEED FOR CHANGE

In conceiving Shifting Gears, the Joyce Foundation recognized that low-skilled adults were being left behind in the changing economy and needed education and skills development beyond high school to qualify for high-demand jobs, avoid bouts of unemployment, and earn a decent living.

Over the past decade, the gap in earnings between high school and college graduates has widened: workers with a Bachelor's degree can expect to earn on average 84 percent more than workers with only a high school diploma during their lifetime and one-third more than Associate's degree holders.² 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.³

Moreover, the weak economic recovery has been harder on workers with low levels of education. Among adults who are 25 years old and older, 14 percent without a high school diploma and nearly 10 percent with only a high school diploma were unemployed in 2011. In contrast, adults over 25 with a postsecondary degree had lower rates of joblessness than the national average of 7.6



percent, ranging from 4.6 percent for Bachelor's degree holders to 6.8 percent for Associate's degree holders.⁴

A major driver of the widening gap in wage and employment levels has been employers' rising demand for workers with postsecondary credentials. It is estimated that two-thirds of all job openings through 2018 will require at least some postsecondary education.⁵ Shifting Gears understood 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 age of 25 and 44 is expected to grow considerably over the next decade, while the share between the age of 16 and 24 will decline.⁶ Data from the American Community Survey show that in 2010 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.⁷ In comparison, the number of youth currently enrolled in high school was about 16.5 million in 2009.⁸

Recognizing these economic realities and demographic trends, Shifting Gears set out to bolster state efforts to help working-age adults who left high school with or without a diploma and who need to increase their skills to succeed in the new economy. When Shifting Gears 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 development, and community and technical colleges, operated in silos with minimal if any alignment of program offerings among them.

SHIFTING GEARS THEORY OF CHANGE

Shifting Gears set the expectation from the outset that states needed to pursue a **systems change agenda**: the Foundation believed that states could succeed in increasing the number of low-skilled adults with postsecondary credentials if it replaced old ways of delivering education and workforce services with more effective and aligned approaches geared toward the needs of low-skilled adults.

The theory undergirding this systems change agenda was that state agencies representing the three disparate systems needed to develop a common vision to improve postsecondary entry and success of low-skilled adults, and then collaborate on a policy reform plan—legislative and/or administrative—to achieve it. More pointedly, Shifting Gears was about getting state agency leaders to prioritize the goal of increasing the number of low-skilled adults with postsecondary credentials and then to retool and align their operations accordingly.

The Shifting Gears 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.

Recognizing that systems change would be complex and multifaceted, Shifting Gears provided states with a framework for how to identify, adopt, and implement innovative strategies for improving adult transitions to postsecondary education.

State Shifting Gears teams were advised to undertake a set of six core activities to achieve progress on multiple fronts:⁹

1. Collaborate and align the work of adult basic education, workforce, and community and technical college systems;
2. Expand state commitment and leadership in support of this work;
3. Adopt and implement necessary policy changes;
4. Engage the field of practice and other stakeholders;
5. Use data to inform and guide the work; and,
6. Leverage strategic communications.

Joyce Foundation leadership, funds and technical assistance were seen as important resources to support state efforts toward comprehensive and permanent system change. Between 2007 and 2011, the Foundation awarded the six states a total of about \$8 million in grants.¹⁰

The Joyce Foundation understood that at the outset some states might be better prepared than others to undertake a systems change initiative. Therefore, the Joyce Foundation provided states with planning and implementation grants and operated in two phases during the five-year period. During the initial phase, encompassing the first three years, 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 toward changing the ways that adult basic education, workforce programs, and community and technical colleges serve low-skilled adults. In the second phase, covering the last two years of the initiative, 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.

The Joyce Foundation recognized that change would not come easily or quickly and was unlikely to be realized by the end of Shifting Gears. In fact, states began implementing innovative strategies primarily in the last 18 months of the initiative, ending December 2011. Some states adopted and pursued multiple approaches to better serve low-skilled adult learners; however, all six states focused specific attention on improving transitions from adult basic education programs into community and technical colleges.


EVALUATION APPROACH

This evaluation focuses on innovative strategies that connected a state's adult basic education system with its community and technical college system. It purposely examines the extent to which the six Shifting Gears states gained "traction on the ground" by implementing these state innovative strategies into local operations.

At this point in time, evaluators consider that gaining traction on the ground among adult basic education providers and community and technical colleges signals that states may be on a positive trajectory toward systems change but *not* that systems change has been achieved.

Accordingly, this report seeks to document state progress toward systems change by addressing two overarching and interrelated questions:

1. To what extent have states begun to adopt and implement an innovative strategy to improve transitions from adult basic education into community and technical colleges, including serving adult learners in these new ways?
2. What are the factors that influenced progress in the states to adopt and implement these innovative strategies during Shifting Gears?



To answer these questions, the evaluation team drew on information collected through four years of semi-annual site visits to each state, sporadic interviews with practitioners, a survey of the field of practice (e.g., adult basic education, workforce development, and postsecondary providers), a review of state materials and program documents such as policy guidance and definitions for the system innovations, and aggregate quantitative data on program implementation provided by each of the states. (See **Appendix A** for more information about the evaluation methodology.) The evaluation report does *not* address the effectiveness of the technical assistance and coaching, including a formative evaluation, which states received through Shifting Gears.¹¹

The evaluation findings may serve as a useful resource for subsequent philanthropic and public investments that seek to increase the number of low-skilled adults who pursue and attain postsecondary credentials.

ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT

In addition to this introduction, Section 1, the report is organized as follows. Section 2 addresses the first evaluation question by documenting the extent to which states' adult basic education programs and community and technical colleges adopted and implemented innovative strategies to better provide education and skills development to low-skilled adults. Section 3 addresses the second evaluation question by examining how states' execution of the six core Shifting Gears activities affected their progress toward implementing innovative strategies.

The report concludes with Section 4 by highlighting key examples of state progress and noting the core Shifting Gears activities that had the greatest influence on local buy-in and implementation progress. The conclusion also suggests some key challenges facing states as they move into the next phase of their work to improve postsecondary education and skills development outcomes for low-skilled adults—scaling and sustaining their innovative strategies to achieve optimal, permanent change within the key systems.

State Progress After Five Years

This section of the report addresses the first evaluation question by documenting state progress toward systems change during Shifting Gears. The section identifies the outcomes that the Joyce Foundation expected states to achieve by the end of the initiative's first five-years—by making traction on the ground in the implementation of their innovative strategies. Next, it reports which states achieved these expected outcomes, which states fell short, and their reasons why. Finally, the section documents the extent of state progress and the prospects for future.

As noted earlier, this evaluation focuses specifically on state innovations that connected a state's adult basic education system with their community and technical college workforce program. This was the predominant focus of the Shifting Gears work in the six states. Two states, Illinois and Wisconsin, also developed innovative strategies for their workforce and postsecondary programs, but these efforts are not covered in this evaluation.¹²


In general, states pursued innovative strategies that reflect a career pathway framework. Career pathways encompass a series of interrelated

education and skills development programs, geared toward specific industries. These programs provide credentials at multiple points along a postsecondary education trajectory and are connected with career advancement opportunities in those industries.¹³ More specifically, for Shifting Gears states, this career pathway framework included a bridge component intended to better align adult basic education programs with community and technical college career and technical education programs.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES AFTER FIVE YEARS

The Joyce Foundation acknowledged that achieving systems change—and, the expected impact on adults' education and skills—would take seven to ten years, or even more, and would require multiple partners and actions.

One reason for this longer-term view was that for the initiative to succeed, multiple agencies and their respective local institutions and providers would need to make widespread changes to the way they served low-skilled adults, requiring these systems to be aligned in ways that differed from



how they had historically operated. Another reason was that very little empirical evidence existed on achieving systemic organizational change and the anecdotal and case study research suggested that organizational change occurs incrementally over long periods (e.g., a decade or more).¹⁴ Therefore, the Shifting Gears logic model (see **Appendix B**) articulated specific outputs and interim outcomes for states to accomplish as precursors to the intended longer-term outcomes and impact on low-skilled adults.

During the first phase of the initiative, The Joyce Foundation expected that states would: 1) increase their understanding and commitment to the needs of low-skilled adult workers; 2) identify innovative strategies to better serve them and agree to pursue implementation of these approaches; and, 3) develop and submit a policy agenda that represented team consensus on the key provisions needed to incorporate these innovative strategies into state systems and local operations.¹⁵

For the second phase of Shifting Gears, the Foundation's grants were intended to support further state progress toward adopting state policy changes and implementing effective policies and practices in local postsecondary, adult basic education, and skills development systems. The Foundation placed an important condition on the use of second phase grant resources. States could no longer use the Joyce grant to finance the development and operation of local projects or programs; states were encouraged, to use state, local and other resources for this purpose.

Therefore, as noted earlier, the key measure of Shifting Gears progress after five years is the extent to which states have moved beyond demonstration and pilot projects and begun to adopt and implement their innovative strategies throughout the adult basic education and community and technical college systems and their respective local providers and institutions.

STATUS OF STATE EFFORTS AFTER FIVE YEARS

After five years of Joyce Foundation support, four of the six Shifting Gears states demonstrated traction on the ground by implementing innovative strategies to serve low-skilled adults.

Illinois, Indiana, Minnesota, and Wisconsin have progressed to the point that policies were adopted, and local institutions have begun implementing a new way of serving low-skilled adults to improve transitions from local adult basic education programs to community and technical colleges. These efforts, although modest at this point, provide a foundation for systems change that can improve current operations and practices to better serve low-skilled adults. (See **Box A** for a description of these state strategies.)

In examining why these four states moved forward and why the two other states—Ohio and Michigan—did not, this evaluation offers the following two observations. First, successful states agreed on new ways or innovative strategies for providing education and skills development for low-skilled adults, which became the focal point of their Shifting Gears effort. Second, these states also identified and adopted policies that would enable local institutions and providers to implement these innovative strategies.

Five of the six Shifting Gears states—Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin—were able to agree on a clear vision for addressing the needs of low-skilled adults and identify a specific innovative strategy to help achieve that vision. These new ways of serving low-skilled adults became the central focus of the work of Shifting Gears teams. Agreeing on a vision and specific innovative strategy was particularly important as states developed their logic models because it helped to organize and focus their work as well as communicate their approach to achieving systems

change. Ohio, which entered Shifting Gears with a newly aligned system that brought adult basic and career technical education into the higher education system, experienced project leadership changes throughout the initiative and did not implement a specific strategy to achieve a systems change vision by the end of 2011.

Identifying a specific innovative strategy to serve low-skilled adults helped state teams focus the six core activities of Shifting Gears. For example, the policy agenda was organized around specific policies needed for local institutions and providers to implement innovative strategies to serve low-

skilled adults; data analyses were conducted to provide insights into the need to increase adult transitions to postsecondary education; and state and local stakeholders were engaged to build support and buy-in for the innovative strategies and the need for systems change. A key mantra in determining work activities became only do it if it contributes or leads to systems change or, in other words, promotes the development and adoption of the innovative strategies that were the focus of Shifting Gears. Yet, adopting a clear vision alone was an insufficient step to make progress toward systems change after five years.


BOX A: INNOVATIVE STRATEGIES SUCCESSFULLY ADOPTED & IMPLEMENTED BY SHIFTING GEARS STATES

ILLINOIS: Adult basic education bridge that integrates and connects basic academic skills with postsecondary occupational education in key industry sectors, and involves contextualized instruction, career development, and student transition services.

INDIANA: A career pathway strategy, known as WorkINdiana, which provides adult basic education students with access to targeted pre-postsecondary occupational training. It leads to certifications valued in the state's labor market and that, in many instances, crosswalk to college credit at Ivy Tech, Indiana's statewide community college. WorkINdiana is administered through a new regional consortia model comprising adult basic education, community colleges, workforce development centers, and community non-profits.

MINNESOTA: A bridge and career pathway initiative, known as Minnesota FastTRAC Adult Career Pathway, which begins with adult basic education programming at the lowest levels of literacy and extends through community college programming that integrates adult basic education and occupational credit-based course work. The explicit goal of this effort is to prepare and support adult basic skills students to attain postsecondary, credit-based credentials.

WISCONSIN: Career pathway and bridges program, known as RISE—Regional Industry Skills Education, which integrates and connects basic academic skills and technical college occupation instruction for adult basic education participants whose basic skills are insufficient for technical college credit courses.



Four states—Illinois, Indiana, Minnesota, and Wisconsin—were able to adopt key provisions of their policy agenda, enabling the development and adoption of their innovative strategies. As was noted earlier, the Joyce Foundation envisioned state policy as a primary driver for implementing new ways of serving low-skilled adults, and thereby making progress towards systems change. These four states identified an array of policy issues that needed addressing, ranging from the codification of a bridge definition into administrative rules to expanding the eligible use of resources to support their innovative strategies. The vast majority of policy issues that states pursued and achieved were administrative and regulatory in nature rather than state legislative measures. Thus, these changes were made in environments that were far removed from the world of politics and very much focused on making systems and current practices work better for students.

On the other hand, Michigan requested the legislature to enact several major policy changes, but was ultimately unsuccessful in convincing lawmakers to adopt these measures. Once the Michigan team decided to pursue available administrative options for change, state leadership changed and new priorities for education and skills development emerged.

Two important lessons were learned through the early work of Shifting Gears:

1. Reaching agreement on a specific innovative strategy for serving low-skilled adults in new ways significantly enhanced prospects for systems change.
2. Identifying and adopting policy changes tailored to a specific innovative strategy (in these four states regulatory and administrative policies) provided an impetus for further systems change activities as well as a foundation for local implementation.

THE EXTENT OF SYSTEMS CHANGE ACHIEVED BY STATES WITH TRACTION ON THE GROUND

As described in **Appendix A**, the evaluation team applied several methods to determine and document the extent of traction on the ground achieved by Illinois, Indiana, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. Evaluators examined the overall support for, and progress toward, systems change in each of the four states. Research methods included collecting state-reported data, conducting an electronic survey of local practitioners, and conducting a focus group of local stakeholders.²⁰

Table 1 reports the number of new programs that were implemented for each state's specific innovative strategy during the second phase of Shifting Gears (2010–2011). It does not include demonstration projects that were supported in the initiative's earlier years. Furthermore, the table only includes programs officially identified by the state.

At the end of 2011, about 4,000 low-skilled adults were participating in the new programs—a modest number that is expected to grow considerably during the next several years as these innovative strategies are embraced by more institutions throughout the state. For example, Illinois' bridge programs are operating in 17 of 39 adult basic education areas; Minnesota's FastTRAC Adult Career Pathway are operating in 15 of 25 community colleges statewide; Wisconsin's RISE career pathway bridges are in 14 of 16 technical colleges; and, Indiana's WorkINDiana career certificate programs are approved in all 11 economic growth regions.²¹

Evaluators caution against the calculation of completion rates because some program participants are still enrolled and timely data on participant status are not available. Although states made progress in setting up programs, they have been slower in making much-needed refinements to their state data systems that would ensure more effective tracking and measuring of student outcomes in these program innovations.

**TABLE 1: STATE INNOVATIONS & IMPLEMENTATION
PROGRESS (2010-2011)**

State	Innovative Strategy	Number of Programs Operational by Dec 2011	Number of Participants	Number of Completers	System Penetration: Proportion of System with Innovation
Illinois	Adult basic education bridges	23 ²	1,715	766	17 of 39 Adult Basic Education State Area Planning Councils
Indiana	WorkINdiana (Career Certification Program)	43	255 ³	62 (45) ⁴	11 of 11 Economic Growth Regions
Minnesota	FastTRAC Adult Career Pathway and Bridges	17 ⁵	1,074 (517) ⁶	759 (375) ⁷	15 of 25 Community and Technical Colleges
Wisconsin	RISE Career Pathway Bridges	39	956 ⁸	648	14 of 16 Technical Colleges

Source: Data Templates Completed by States

¹ To be included, programs must have served participants and been identified by the state as an official program. Thus, in some instances, the evaluation lists a lower number of programs, for example bridge programs in Illinois, than reported elsewhere.

² Twelve of these programs operate in community colleges; however, by the end of 2011, none of them were connected with Career Technical Education programs or provided college credits to participants.

³ Sixty-nine percent of Indiana participants enrolled in Certified Nursing Assistant or Entry Welding programs; 16 percent of participants were enrolled at Ivy Tech Community College.


⁴ Of 62 Indiana program completers, 45 had earned a credential.

⁵ The number of Minnesota programs includes only those with both Bridge II and Integrated Instruction; the FastTRAC Adult Career Pathway model also includes Pre-Bridge and Bridge I programs that are not reflected in this number.

⁶ Minnesota Bridge II participants exceeded 1,000, of which 517 also participated in the Integrated Instruction Program.

⁷ Of 1,074 Minnesota Bridge II participants, 759 completed that program. Meanwhile, 375 of 517 participants completed the Integrated Instruction Program

⁸ Wisconsin participant count reflects the number of Career Pathway Bridges operating during Shifting Gears; some bridge programs were already operating prior to the initiative.



The evaluation team requested and received data about the number of institutions delivering innovative programs in an effort to prompt states to reflect on the scale or reach of their systems change agenda. As a systems change initiative, scale was always a desired effect; however, the initiative did not establish specific goals for scale during the first five years of the initiative.

One method for measuring scale is the degree of penetration within the primary system for administering the innovation: community/technical colleges in Minnesota and Wisconsin, adult basic education areas in Illinois, and economic growth/workforce development regions in Indiana. As displayed in **Table 1**, the four states had a number of programs operational as of December 31, 2011. Importantly, the baseline in each state is zero because these programs represent new and specifically defined innovations, each of which was reviewed and approved by the state.²²

A crucial data element missing from all states is information on the magnitude of the need for services; that is, the number of adult learners who might benefit from the new way of providing education and skills development services. Although states such as Indiana and Wisconsin generated exemplary data on the overall education and skill needs within their state, none of the Shifting Gears states examined data to generate an estimate or target number of participants currently being served who might benefit from the new way of serving low-skilled adults. Looking at data in this manner can provide a basis for projecting the appropriate scale needed, taking into account the coverage across a system as well as the depth of service within an individual institution (e.g., number of program offerings relative to students in need of service).

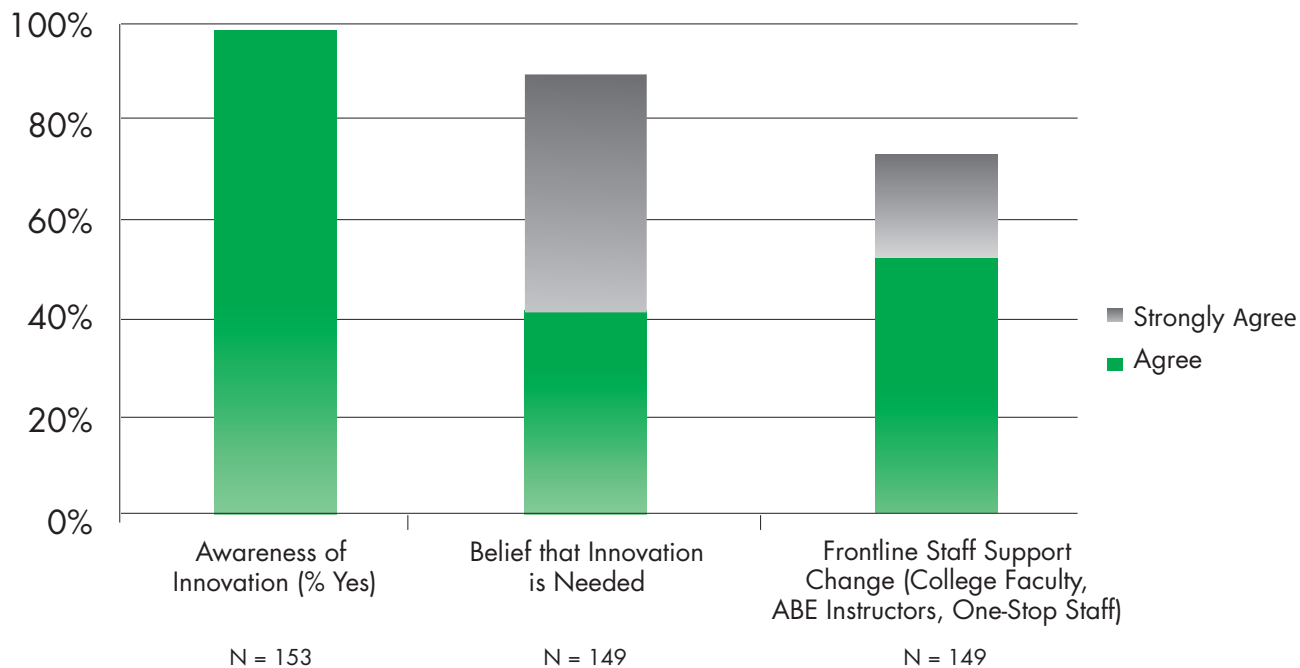
Finally, a significant distinguishing feature of the traction on the ground is that the states stopped using Joyce resources to finance local projects at the start of phase two. In their place, state teams financed local program development and implementation by leveraging state dollars, encouraging the use of traditional funding streams, and engaging other stakeholders within state government and in the community (e.g., local philanthropy, community non-profits) to support their effort. These sustainability strategies, most notably undertaken in Minnesota, have moved the Shifting Gears initiative beyond a “boutique” effort and closer to the desired goal of systems change.

SUPPORT FOR SYSTEMS CHANGE & PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

In January 2012, the evaluation team administered an electronic survey to local adult basic education, workforce, and community college leaders and practitioners to better understand the extent of their support for the new way of serving low-skilled adults as well as their buy-in to the goal of systems change. The survey was sent to representatives of all relevant system institutions or organizations; however the majority of respondents were those who had engaged in Shifting Gears pilots, demonstrations or other activities. The combined results for Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin are shown in the following charts.

Figure 1 suggests that in these three states there is widespread awareness of the specific innovative strategy for serving low-skilled adults in new ways, and a belief among local providers that change is needed in order to raise the education and skill levels of adult workers. Particularly noteworthy is that frontline staff who are responsible for putting the innovation into practice are supportive of change.

FIGURE 1: LEVEL OF AWARENESS & SUPPORT OF INNOVATIVE STRATEGY AMONG LOCAL PROVIDERS



Source: Shifting Gears Survey of Stakeholders (IL, MN, WI). Administered: January 2012.
Response rates: Illinois (59%), Minnesota (77%), and Wisconsin (51%).

The evaluation team found similar sentiments in Indiana among representatives from six of the state’s eleven growth regions. Focus group participants said they were fully aware of the WorkINdiana program and supportive of using the approach—with some suggested refinements—in order to address the needs of low-skilled adult workers. Focus group participants, however, questioned whether the leaders and staff of all Ivy Tech community colleges were aware of and supported the WorkINdiana program. At the time of the focus group, WorkINdiana had operated only for

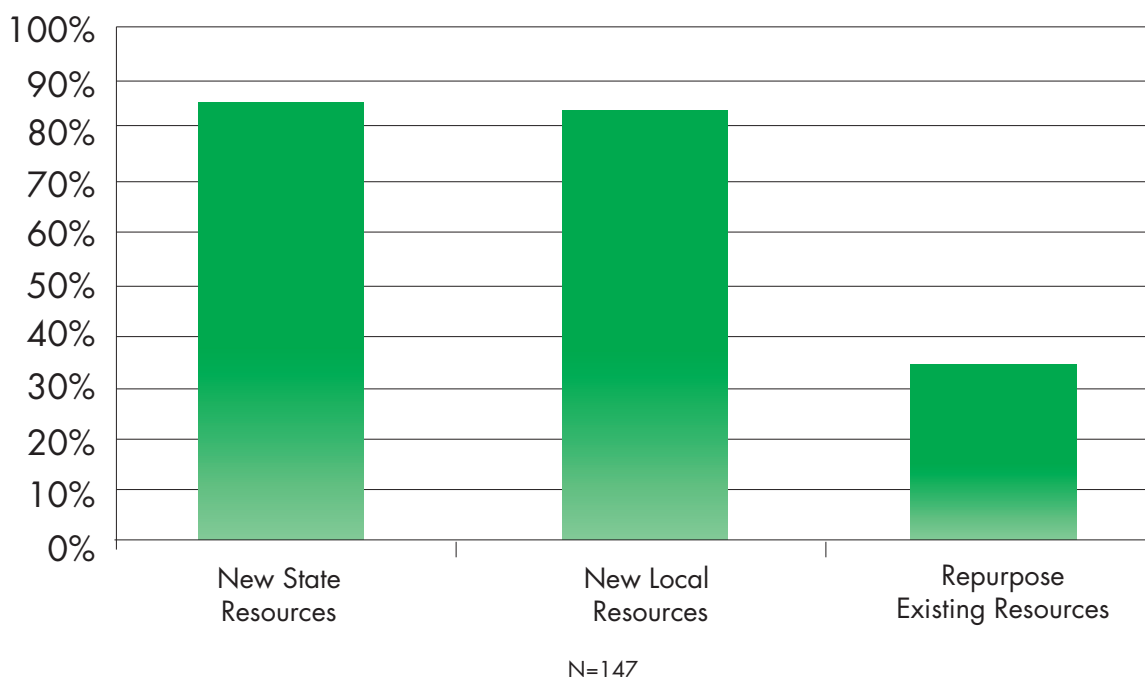
a year and primarily involved the adult basic education and workforce systems; therefore, it is not surprising that focus group participants assumed that community college stakeholders lacked awareness of the initiative.

Although widespread awareness and support for the innovative strategies is a positive outcome, it does not directly translate to implementation and sustainability throughout the adult basic education and community and technical college systems and respective local providers and institutions.

As noted earlier, the Joyce Foundation allowed states to use resources during the first phase of Shifting Gears for funding local-level demonstration or pilot projects. In the second phase, in which Joyce placed restrictions on the use of funding, the four states were effective at marshaling and leveraging their own resources to advance their work. But the likely reality is that these resources will not be available forever; therefore, the issue of what resources can be used to scale the new way of serving low-skilled adults, and sustain operations becomes significant.

Figure 2 reports the responses of survey participants when asked what was needed to sustain and expand the new way of serving low-skilled adults. Clearly, the vast share of respondents believe that new resources are needed to scale and sustain the innovation. In contrast, a modest percentage indicated that repurposing existing resources is needed to support the innovation. This sentiment was echoed by the focus groups in Indiana.

FIGURE 2: PERCENTAGE OF LOCAL PROVIDERS WHO BELIEVE THE FOLLOWING FUNDING SOLUTIONS ARE NEEDED TO SUPPORT INNOVATIVE STRATEGIES



Source: Shifting Gears Survey of Stakeholders (IL, MN, WI). Administered: January 2012.
Response rates: Illinois (59%), Minnesota (77%), and Wisconsin (51%).

At the end of 2011, after five years of Shifting Gears, states were just beginning to tackle the idea of repurposing existing resources to scale and sustain their innovative strategies. For example, Illinois recently revamped their state adult basic education RFP for 2012-2013 to prioritize adult basic education bridges and transitions to postsecondary education; Wisconsin similarly revised their adult basic education RFP to encourage bridges and career pathway programs. These changes have not directly addressed funding formulas or allocations for the adult basic education, community college, and workforce systems, but they signal to the field that these innovations are a state priority with the implication that local providers are expected to change their approach to serving adult students.

Creating an environment to implement such a policy change requires much preparation and dedication. Moreover, as was raised during the Indiana focus group discussions, it requires solid evidence that the new approach is effective. As the four Shifting Gears states continue their pursuit of systems change, they will have to address the challenge and task of demonstrating the effectiveness of their new approaches to providing education and skills development for low-skilled adults, and preparing the field to consider this major policy change of reallocating or repurposing existing resources.

OTHER OBSERVATIONS ON STATE PROGRESS

Traction on the ground is the primary benchmark of Shifting Gears progress after five years. Other positive outcomes of Shifting Gears across the six states that warrant attention:

- Although Michigan and Ohio did not achieve the outcomes recorded by the other four states, their work did produce some benefits. Based on interviews with local stakeholders, both states increased awareness among state and local policy makers of the need

to improve the education and skill levels of adult workers. This awareness has translated into local efforts to improve connections and transitions between adult basic education, and community colleges, as well as, in some cases, with the workforce systems. Stakeholders in these states believe such efforts have prompted greater collaboration among local administrators of these systems.

- All six state teams gained a greater appreciation of the role of data could play in driving and supporting program improvement. Key state policy makers now at least understand some of the challenges in collecting and analyzing data on transitions between adult basic education, workforce, and community and technical college systems.
- Compared to community college and workforce systems, the adult basic education system demonstrated the greatest willingness to pursue systems change. The idea that adult basic education should help their students aspire for higher levels of education and employment, particularly a postsecondary credential, is now firmly implanted among state staff and an increasing number of local practitioners. This represents a significant change from the outset of Shifting Gears.

Shifting Gears work in the six states has been consequential, touching a number of institutions and practitioners, especially in Illinois, Indiana, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. Although the number of low-skilled adults being served through these innovative strategies is modest, these four states appear to be building a foundation for systems change and, after five years, have demonstrated a positive trajectory toward this longer-term goal. The continued work of these states over the next several years will show how much further they can advance their systems change efforts.

Implementation & Impact of Core Activities on State Progress

Shifting Gears approached systems change from a particular point of view. As noted in the Introduction, a core assumption was that by empowering and supporting state executive branch leaders, their actions would improve key education and skills development systems to better serve low-skilled adults. Although states executed strategies and tactics in diverse ways, the expectation was that state leaders would pursue six core activities to support systems change efforts:


1. Collaborate and align the work of adult basic education, workforce, and community and technical college systems;
2. Expand state commitment and leadership in support of this work;
3. Adopt and implement necessary policy changes;
4. Engage the field of practice and other stakeholders;
5. Use data to inform and guide the work; and,
6. Leverage strategic communications.

This section of the report describes state actions taken on each of the core Shifting Gears activities. It reports the evaluators' assessment of the extent to which execution of these activities influenced progress made by the four states with traction on the ground: Illinois, Indiana, Minnesota and Wisconsin.

COLLABORATION & ALIGNMENT

One of the central challenges Shifting Gears faced was that state agencies governing and managing adult basic education, workforce development, and community and technical colleges typically had seldom worked together to better meet the needs of low-skilled adults.

During the five years of Shifting Gears, evaluators found that interagency collaboration was strong in the four states with traction on the ground. With agency stakeholders at the table, each of the states took specific steps to improve transitions of adult learners between adult basic education programs and the community and technical colleges. Most notably, state adult basic education programs expanded their mission to emphasize transitioning their basic skills participants to postsecondary



education, and as a result, states began considering adult basic education a core partner for providing on-ramps to postsecondary education.

In Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, adult basic education, workforce, and community and technical college leadership collaborated from the onset of Shifting Gears to establish a vision for the system changes needed in their states and to gain consensus around the policy and practice changes needed to achieve their vision. As noted in Section 2 (cf. footnote 15), Indiana did not achieve a consensus vision for change during the early stages of Shifting Gears and thus did not receive funding for the second phase. Even so, and perhaps in part because Indiana participated in cross-state Shifting Gears meetings, they continued to pursue a consensual process and recently began implementing a new approach to adult basic education services in collaboration with the workforce and community college systems as well as with local non-profits.


On the other hand, Michigan and Ohio lacked consensus across adult basic education, community colleges and workforce programs on a vision for change or a specific action plan to achieve it. Prior to Shifting Gears, Michigan had conceived of a vision for regional consortia; however, the approach to enact this vision was not developed collaboratively and did not gain full support of the three systems. Ohio involved representatives of the adult basic education, career technical education, and community colleges systems, but had only sporadic engagement with the state agency that governed workforce development (Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services). Without a specific vision for change, Ohio did not achieve the alignment and collaboration necessary across these systems to foster a high-priority agenda for change.

Shifting Gears states generally were unsuccessful in broadening their collaborative efforts to include stakeholders from other executive branch agencies, despite expressing their intentions to do so. A key

example was the limited participation from the human services systems, even though they could have helped to address and coordinate support services for adult learners. It is unclear why such little progress was made, but it may be in part because the state agencies managing these programs were not fully engaged as part of the state cross-agency teams early in the initiative. The one exception is Minnesota, which did effectively integrate the state human services agency into the collaborative team in year four. In doing so, Minnesota generated additional buy-in and support for its systems change goal and also yielded additional financial resources for FastTRAC.

Although reaching a consensus vision was an important first step, a more critical factor for success was whether a state's cross-agency state team took ownership and responsibility for the many Shifting Gears-related activities (i.e., policy, data, engagement, etc.). In several states, the cross-agency team took significant actions in this regard:

- In Minnesota, the cross-agency team established a timetable for accomplishing its core Shifting Gears activities and shared this with multiple levels of management in each respective agency; by involving management, team members invited a level of accountability for achieving their objectives.
- In Indiana, the workforce development agency hired new staff members to lead the systems change effort and held them accountable for launching and implementing WorkINDiana on a fast timetable.
- In Illinois, the cross-agency team met monthly at the onset in order to jointly craft the policy agenda and action plan for systems change; over time, the reform effort became the primary responsibility of the adult basic education director, who embraced the new approach to serving low-skilled adults.



States varied in whether and to what extent their respective agencies assigned staff to move the Shifting Gears agenda forward. However, the four states that made progress in the initiative each reached a threshold level of staff deployment and project management. In these states, agency and system leadership assigned staff to direct the effort and used consultants to facilitate meetings; in Illinois, consultants also provided formative evaluation services to the cross-agency team. Minnesota's approach to staffing was exemplary. The state designated two full-time staff to manage the project and coordinate activities across the adult basic education, workforce, and community college systems. Both staff members had extensive experience in the adult basic education and workforce fields, and the state agencies collaborating on the effort supported their leadership in managing Shifting Gears activities.

STATE LEADERSHIP & COMMITMENT

By virtue of their involvement in Shifting Gears, states exhibited some level of leadership and commitment to addressing the needs of low-skilled adults. The expectation was that, during Shifting Gears, states would strengthen their leadership across the adult basic education, workforce, and community and technical college systems, while increasing their commitment to transform policies and practices across and within these systems to better serve low-skilled adults.

The four states making progress met this expectation. Gubernatorial and/or senior agency leadership (e.g., chancellor or secretary-level) stayed regularly involved with the effort, especially in Minnesota and Wisconsin.

- In Wisconsin, the governor and workforce development department secretary expressed support for the RISE effort publicly through numerous speeches and presentations; similarly, the president of the Wisconsin Technical College System

made several presentations to the statewide Presidents' Council to build support locally for the RISE bridges and embedded certificate career pathway components.

- In Minnesota, FastTRAC Adult Career Pathway achieved high visibility within the Department of Employment and Economic Development. The agency created a new Division of Innovation and Strategic Alliances to house the initiative and had the division's director report directly to the agency commissioner. Additionally, after the new governor charged DEED and the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities with addressing the state's skills gap, both agencies shared publicly their support for FastTRAC Adult Career Pathway as a key part of the solution.

By contrast, gubernatorial support was not evident in either Michigan or Ohio, and executive agency leadership in these two states did not make systems change a priority. For example, in Ohio, until the most recent year of the initiative, external consultants managed the effort without the authority to set policy and practice priorities for the system.²³ In these two states, when system leadership was less engaged on a day-to-day basis, the commitment necessary for progress was not present.

Among the four states with traction on the ground, strong state leadership and commitment resulted in significant investments in Shifting Gears-related innovative strategies. Most commonly, the states leveraged the then existing state 15 percent discretionary fund of Workforce Investment Act Title I (WIA-I).²⁴ In addition, there are examples where states tapped Unemployment Insurance penalty and interest funds (Indiana) and federal WIA Title II adult basic education leadership funds (Illinois, Minnesota and Wisconsin). States also used WIA incentive dollars (Minnesota) and American

Recovery and Reinvestment Act stimulus funds (Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin) to seed efforts on the ground and elevate the importance of the Shifting Gears systems change effort.

While these resources were not exclusively used for Shifting Gears, leadership decisions to make Shifting Gears one of the funding priorities helped to elevate the efforts in these states.

Notably, in Minnesota and Wisconsin, gubernatorial transitions during the Shifting Gears grant period did not disrupt the progress of the systems change effort. The leadership teams in these states intentionally engaged political transition teams and effectively positioned Shifting Gears as a non-partisan reform agenda that governors in each party could embrace or, at least allow to continue.²⁵

POLICY CHANGE

Each of the Shifting Gears states adopted policy changes during the initiative. These policy changes cut across all three systems (adult basic education, workforce development, and community and technical colleges) and in almost all cases were administrative or regulatory in nature. Michigan was the only state that identified a legislative policy strategy; as noted earlier, that approach was unsuccessful. Ohio began the initiative after the enactment of a major legislative policy change that brought adult basic education and career technical education into the newly formed University System of Ohio.

The opportunities for state policy changes cut across a broad array of system, institutional, and programmatic activities. These included policies affecting state financing of institutions and programs; student aid and support services; program and course classifications; data collection, analysis and reporting; and overall programmatic goals and measures of success. **Table 2** provides illustrative policy changes by these states and their respective systems. Not all policy changes listed in the table contributed to implementation.

Across the four states with traction on the ground, the adult basic education system made the most significant changes to policy (and to practice on the ground). In these states, the state adult basic education leaders embraced the goal of systems change and the specific innovative strategy for better serving low-skilled adults.²⁶ This created the foundation for identifying the system-wide policy and practice changes needed to introduce their innovative strategy into the mainstream operations of local institutions and providers. In contrast, adult basic education leaders in Michigan and Ohio were involved in the Shifting Gears initiative, but did not leverage their position to advance new state policies or new systemic approaches to serve adult basic education participants.

Among the important policy changes adopted, Illinois, Indiana, Minnesota, and Wisconsin codified their innovative strategies within pertinent agencies and systems. This codification occurred in various ways:

- Minnesota State College and University system (MnSCU) adopted guidelines for program referral and curriculum alignment between adult basic education and community colleges.
- The Wisconsin State Technical and Community College system (WTCS) adopted a system-wide definition for career pathways, incorporating adult basic education bridges into the definition, and connecting the bridges to state recognized technical college programs that encompass “embedded career pathway credentials.”
- Illinois adopted a common definition for bridges across adult basic education, workforce development, and community college systems. Administrators for the adult basic education and workforce programs had the authority to approve the definition; however, formal adoption within the community college system required approval from the Illinois community college board.

TABLE 2: ILLUSTRATIVE POLICY CHANGES BY STATE & SYSTEM

	Illinois	Indiana	Minnesota	Wisconsin
Adult Basic Education	<p>Codified bridge definition into administrative rules and approval processes.</p> <p>Revised State ABE Strategic Plan to align with bridges reform effort.</p> <p>Released new RFP for 2012-13 state and federal adult basic education resources that encourages providers to implement adult basic education bridges and other programs to increase transitions to postsecondary education.</p>	<p>Passed legislation (HEA 1340) to move Adult Basic Education program from Department of Education to Department of Workforce Development.</p> <p>Adopted administrative policy for adult basic education programs in 11 economic growth regions to develop and operate WorkINdiana career certification programs in 15 career areas identified by the state.</p> <p>Adopted administrative rules to reimburse economic growth regions' adult basic education programs using performance-based funding model.</p>	<p>Hired regional transition coordinators to support FastTRAC Adult Career Pathway programs.</p> <p>Redirected EL-CIVICS grants to support FastTRAC Adult Career Pathway programs.</p> <p>Aligned State ABE Strategic Plan (NextSteps Transitions) with FastTRAC Adult Career Pathway reform.</p>	<p>Released new RFP for state general purpose revenues that allows use of basic skills and adult literacy grants for RISE Career Pathway bridges.</p> <p>Released new RFP for federal adult basic education resources that encourages RISE Career Pathway bridges.</p> <p>Adopted administrative policy requiring adult basic education programs to report new data metrics for ABE students transitioning to postsecondary education (via state QPR scorecard).</p>
Community & Technical College	<p>Codified bridge definition into administrative rules and approval processes.</p> <p>Adopted administrative rule change that reclassifies developmental education bridges as CTE courses, to increase college reimbursement for such CTE bridges.</p>	<p>Adopted administrative policy to set uniform pricing of WorkINdiana career certification programs statewide.</p> <p>Adopted administrative rule to allow Ivy tech campuses to award college credits for WorkINdiana career certification program completers upon enrollment in community college career pathway programs.</p>	<p>Adopted administrative guidelines for program referral and curriculum alignment between adult basic education and community/technical colleges.</p>	<p>Codified career pathway definition through administrative rules.</p> <p>Released new RFP for state general purpose revenues that encourages RISE career pathways for new and expanding occupations grants program.</p> <p>Revised administrative rules for program approval and modification process to allow for embedded career pathway credentials.</p> <p>Incorporated career pathways as a priority area in WTCS System Strategic Plan.</p>
Workforce Development	<p>Codified bridge definition into administrative guidelines for allowable uses of WIA-I local resources.</p> <p>Established administrative rule that 40% of local WIA resources must spent on education and training.</p>	<p>Mandated 11 economic growth regions to create regional consortia with adult basic education providers to deliver WorkINdiana career certification programs.</p> <p>(Part of an effort to align basic education, workforce training, post-secondary education, and employment services among local partners.)</p>	<p>Released <i>All Hands on Deck</i> strategic plan that prioritized FastTRAC Adult Career Pathway as a state priority for workforce and economic development.</p> <p>Revised state WIA-I guidelines to require local workforce board plans to support FastTRAC Adult Career Pathway.</p> <p>Created new office within the Department of Employment and Economic Development to manage FastTRAC Adult Career Pathway with direct reporting line to Commissioner.</p>	<p>Established administrative rule that 35% of local WIA resources must be spent on education and training, with career pathways and adult basic education bridges an eligible expenditure.</p> <p>Revised State WIA-I Plan to encourage career pathways and to require inclusion in local plans.</p> <p>Linked Industry Partnerships (sector strategies) with RISE career pathway efforts.</p>

Source: Policy documents and other materials from states.

- Indiana’s workforce development agency identified 15 WorkINDiana career certification programs, most of which connected to broader career pathways in the state’s community college system. The agency also established policy requiring that all 11 economic growth regions adopt these new pathway programs.

Another important policy accomplishment was that states made their innovative strategy a statewide priority. Most commonly, states designated priority status by incorporating their specific innovative strategy into strategic plans:

- Minnesota’s Department of Employment and Economic Development released its strategic report, *All Hands on Deck*, during Shifting Gears and identified FastTRAC Adult Career Pathway as a state priority. Additionally, the state adult basic education program office incorporated FastTRAC Adult Career Pathway into its strategic plan, building on earlier efforts to focus on transitions between adult basic education and community colleges; the adult basic education office also aligned the EL-Civics program to support FastTRAC.
- Wisconsin’s technical college system identified RISE career pathways as one of its four strategic priorities.
- Illinois focused its adult basic education strategic plan on bridges and transitions to college.
- Indiana revised its state WIA-II adult basic education plan to emphasize the new WorkINDiana program.


States pursued a number of other policy changes that contributed to their progress. For example, Minnesota reallocated adult basic education resources to hire regional coordinators to support FastTRAC Adult Career Pathway programs.

Several states issued requests for proposals to articulate new priorities for local implementation of their innovative strategies:

- Wisconsin specified that RISE career pathway bridges were an allowable activity for general purpose revenues that supported basic skills and adult literacy programs. WTCS also issued RFPs that permitted technical colleges to use new and expanding occupation grants for RISE career pathways and embedded certificate and technical diploma programs.
- Illinois established new guidelines for both state and federal adult basic education resources, emphasizing bridges and transitions to college, and required all providers to re-compete for these grants. At this point, the extent to which local adult basic education and community and technical colleges used these state resources to expand the innovative strategies for serving low-skilled adults in new ways is not fully known.

Not all policy changes succeeded in strengthening implementation on the ground. For example, Illinois and Wisconsin set expenditure thresholds for local workforce investment board education and training activities, but those funds were not spent to support their innovative strategies in any consequential way.

Minnesota and Wisconsin incorporated their innovative strategy into revised state WIA-I plans and issued new guidelines to local workforce investment boards encouraging them to support these innovative strategies locally; however, there is little evidence to suggest that local boards redirected their funds for this purpose.²⁷ Similarly, attempts in Wisconsin to link the Industry Partnership initiative with RISE career pathways had not yielded demonstrable results by the end of 2011, although efforts are continuing.



Although states had a full array of policy change opportunities to consider, they did not pursue specific policy changes related to accountability systems or the provision of support services for low-skilled adults. States also did not pursue policy changes to their state financial aid programs, aside from using discretionary or recovery resources to temporarily provide financial aid to low-skilled adults participating in their innovative strategies.

OUTREACH TO THE FIELD & OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

Evaluators found that states tended to be more effective at getting buy-in and support from the field of practice when intentionally targeting key stakeholders across systems using multiple methods, venues, and approaches. Indiana, Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin framed their outreach and discussion with the field explicitly around their vision and plans for system change—namely, the specific innovative strategy that the Shifting Gears teams wanted adult basic education, workforce development, and community and technical college stakeholders to implement.

A primary method of engagement was through the use of funding—both Joyce grant funds and state resources (including stimulus dollars)—to support pilot programs and curriculum development activities and to convene local leaders together across the adult basic education, workforce, and community and technical college systems. As noted previously, states enacted policy changes to permit use of state resources for local implementation of their innovative strategy:

- In Wisconsin, the technical college system office provided grants to local technical colleges and faculty for curriculum development; additionally, the state adult basic education office supported the development of career pathway bridges with funding from state grant programs.
- In Illinois, the state community college board leveraged their grant money at the outset of Shifting Gears to fund bridge pilots—generating interest and building champions for bridges at the local level. Although the bridge concept was already well known around the state, the board’s grants provided much-needed structure, leading to the codification of a bridge definition across adult basic education, workforce development, and the community college system. Adult basic education in Illinois also used state leadership dollars to help local providers develop and implement bridges.
- Minnesota issued a series of RFPs for the field of practice, using Shifting Gears grant dollars, state dollars, and investments from the local United Way among other resources, to seed the system reform efforts of local practitioners that agreed to abide by the requirements of the new FastTRAC Adult Career Pathway model.

Another strategy for engaging the field was through statewide and regional conferences, meetings, and workshops. Survey responses by local practitioners in Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin (**Figure 3**) suggest these types of convenings were widely attended: more than 80 percent of respondents indicated they had attended a state-sponsored meeting that discussed the conditions of low-skilled adults and the state policies and programs to address their skill needs. A similar percentage indicated they had attended a meeting or professional development workshop about their state’s innovative strategy for better serving low-skilled adults.

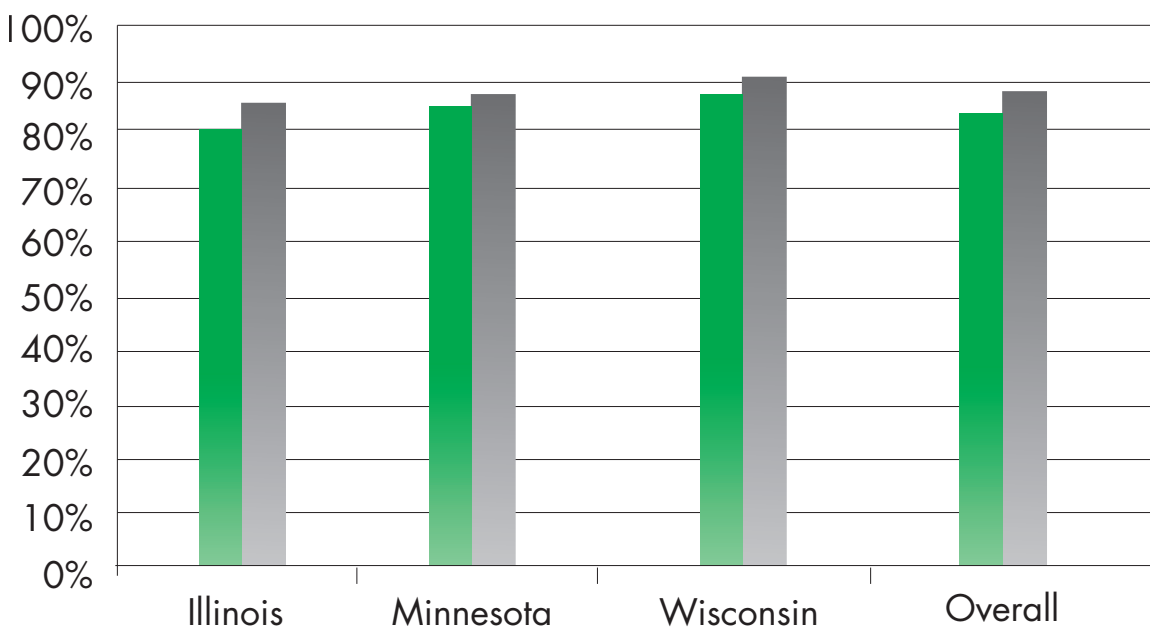
In Wisconsin, for example, WTCS convened statewide meetings of key leaders within their system, such as chief academic officers and chief student affairs officers. All Shifting Gears states used statewide gatherings of adult basic education directors and practitioners as a key venue for promoting and encouraging system innovation.

Offering professional development was another way states engaged the field of practice:

- Illinois demonstrated exemplary leadership in this activity, mandating that adult basic education directors go through general career pathway and bridge training; bridge grantees were required to participate in additional professional development activities as a condition for receiving funds to develop and implement bridge programming.
- Minnesota also took significant professional development actions. During 2011, the state team developed and implemented a hybrid

online professional development course on integrated instruction. All current grantee instructional teams participated in the six learning modules, took part in cross-system discussions, and shared best practices for developing integrated outcomes and designing lesson plans with team teaching strategies in mind. Additionally, Minnesota started to develop an online professional development program for career pathway administrators and navigators; it was to be implemented in 2012.

FIGURE 3: PARTICIPATION IN STATE-SPONSORED MEETINGS



N = 149

- Attended a state sponsored meeting (in person, conference call, or online) which discussed employment and educational conditions of low-skilled adults and the state policies and programs to address their skill needs.
- Attended a state sponsored meeting or professional development workshop (in person, conference call, or online) which discussed the state innovation.

Source: Shifting Gears Survey of Stakeholders (IL, MN, WI). Administered: January 2012.

Response rates: Illinois (59%), Minnesota (77%), and Wisconsin (51%).

- Indiana and Wisconsin took a broader approach to professional development, incorporating sessions on their innovative strategies within larger professional development activities.
- Michigan put together a series of professional development guides for career pathway and bridge programs for the adult basic education field, but the effectiveness of these guides was undermined by the failure of state policy development and leadership, as noted above.

States varied in their level of effort and effectiveness of engaging other stakeholders outside the adult basic education, workforce, and community and technical college systems. In Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, external stakeholders participated on the core state cross-agency team and played key roles in advancing the work.

Minnesota made a key business stakeholder the chair of its leadership team, ensuring a strong private-sector voice in developing and advancing the Shifting Gears agenda; the chair was instrumental in reaching out to other key employers throughout the state and building their support for FastTRAC. It turned out to be a strategic decision because this person later became the chair of the Governor's Workforce Development Council.

In Illinois, non-profit stakeholders were engaged in the initiative from the outset. One set of advocacy groups from Chicago, Women Employed and the Chicago Jobs Council, became champions of the bridge concept and worked with the City Colleges of Chicago to adopt bridges as one of several strategies to improve pathways into and through community colleges. Finally, in Wisconsin, the cross-agency team leveraged the technical capacity of the Center on Wisconsin Strategy in conducting its data work.

Except for Minnesota, state Shifting Gears teams had minimal connections with business stakeholders; consequently, employers did not contribute to achieving traction on the ground after five years of Shifting Gears.

USE OF DATA

All states used data in some way during Shifting Gears, but their activities varied considerably, even among the four states with traction on the ground.

In general, states used data most commonly to bring attention to the low-skilled adult workforce and the need for systemic changes to address their needs. In the early stages of Shifting Gears, the Indiana Chamber of Commerce released a report documenting that almost a million Hoosiers were low-skilled adults; numerous stakeholders identified this report as a catalyst for making the case for change. Minnesota and Wisconsin produced briefs that highlighted key issues, such as the "middle-skills gap," and documented how multiple agencies were serving a common group of clients. These briefs were effective in building awareness and general support for changes to the adult basic education, workforce development, and community and technical college systems.

While states were successful in using data and reports to build awareness of the low-skilled adult workforce, they shied away from analyzing programmatic data to shine the light on ineffective programs or promote the specific need for program improvement. Two states, Wisconsin and Minnesota, undertook pipeline analyses to track adult basic education students into postsecondary programs, but their data findings were not used to drive change. In Wisconsin, the state Shifting Gears team presented research findings to several stakeholder groups; however, the data results were neither disaggregated for specific colleges nor used to build support for changes in local practice.²⁸ Meanwhile, Minnesota had developed a similar pipeline analysis by the end of 2011,

but the data findings were not publicly released or shared locally to motivate changes in local practices. In general, states appeared hesitant to criticize local institutions and providers or to tell a story that was not very positive.

Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin each made important improvements in their data infrastructure during Shifting Gears. These states took steps toward tracking participant progress through their specific innovative strategy and by linking their postsecondary, K–12, and workforce development databases. Aligned infrastructure improvements should make longitudinal analyses of outcomes for adult learners more feasible in the future. Still, there is no guarantee that state will leverage improvements to data infrastructure to promote systems change. Evaluators found that states were struggling with analytic capacity, and historically have allowed local providers to use (or not use) data as they see fit. In short, Shifting Gears states failed to draw on data to promote implementation of innovative strategies. Not only did they face infrastructure challenges, but also they were limited by their analytic capacity and inexperience with constructively framing data results to a variety of audiences in ways that would garner support for reforming local policies and practices. Despite the lack of rigorous data analysis and these challenges, these four states were able to achieve traction on the ground with their innovative strategies.

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

Each of the Shifting Gear states was expected to develop a strategic communication plan to support their innovative strategies and the goal of system change; in practice, only Minnesota came close to fully executing their plan. One of Minnesota's most promising communication strategies was the branding of their Shifting Gears initiative as Minnesota FastTRAC Adult Career Pathway. The branding provided an easy to remember name for the somewhat technical and cumbersome systems change goal of implementing pre-bridge, bridge, and integrated programming throughout the adult basic education, workforce, and community

college systems. In addition, the FastTRAC Adult Career Pathway brand helped the Shifting Gears core team, senior leadership across several state agencies, and local practitioners to communicate more clearly with one another about goals and progress of the initiative. Wisconsin's cross-agency team also effectively created a brand for its work—RISE—which became widely recognized and understood across the state; however, the cross-agency team did not complete other key communication activities.


Overall, Shifting Gears states did not capitalize on the potential of their communications plans for two key reasons. First, the Shifting Gears teams did not engage state-level communications expertise or even expertise within their own agency to support systems change. Second, the cross-agency teams lacked internal capacity to execute a strategic communications plan in support of their systems change agenda.

In general, state team members appeared uncomfortable using communications to advocate and promote policy change, were hesitant to challenge how local institutions and providers operated their programs, and did not have reliable outcome data to support their new approaches to serving low-skilled adults.

SUMMARY

Based on analysis of materials, the survey of local practitioners, and several years of observational data, the evaluation team found that four of the six core activities of Shifting Gears contributed to states' ability to achieve traction on the ground.

First, **states that strengthened alignment and collaboration across the adult basic education, workforce, and community and technical college systems were able to lay the foundation for systems change.** Efforts around alignment and collaboration were especially critical for adult basic education, as it elevated the importance of this system as an on-ramp for community and technical colleges. Cross-agency teams clearly identified the changes in practices needed (i.e., their innovative strategies),



and reached consensus on a policy agenda and action plan to achieve it.²⁹ Staffing levels and effective project management also were instrumental in moving their efforts forward.

Second, **states were more likely to make progress with the expressed buy-in and commitment of senior leadership**, including the chancellor of the community and technical college system, the secretary of the workforce development agency, and, in some cases, the governor's office. Most commonly, senior leaders demonstrated that Shifting Gears was one of their priorities by speaking publicly and with targeted stakeholders about the need for systems change and by allocating state resources to support their specific innovative strategy for serving low-skilled adults in new ways.

Third, **policy change played a key role in helping states establish the foundation and impetus to pursue systems change**; that is, to implement innovative strategies that would reform current operations and practices within and across adult basic education, workforce, and community and technical college systems. Changes to specific state policies that affected local program services and delivery spurred local champions to pursue innovation. Of particular importance, innovative strategies were codified into current regulatory and administrative rules and articulated as priorities in strategic plans issued by state agencies. It is too soon to know if efforts to refocus state funding formulas or resource allocation processes for programs or systems will propel the implementation of innovative strategies forward, but this policy action seems promising.

Fourth, **engaging the field of practice intentionally and repeatedly helped to build local champions for systems change**. These champions, if effectively utilized in the future, could translate their enthusiasm to their institutional colleagues and to other local providers throughout the system. The initial investments that states made in pilot projects generated important local buy-in for systems change. Also contributing to local buy-in were the regular statewide gatherings of key stakeholder groups.

As noted in Section 2, one plausible explanation for why four of the six states were able to execute these four core activities effectively is because they clearly identified innovative strategies for implementation. This clarity gave focus to the work of cross-agency teams and helped to communicate to local education and training providers what changes were needed in order to better serve low-skilled adults. Among the four Shifting Gears states that achieved traction on the ground after five years, this intentionality translated into explicit actions around these core activities that enabled them to achieve much-needed policy changes and to begin the long process of implementation and systems change.

Concluding Observations & Looking Forward

The ultimate goal of Shifting Gears is to significantly increase the number of working-age adults across six Midwestern states who have the postsecondary skills and credentials they need to qualify for high-demand jobs and contribute to a more vibrant and competitive regional economy. Shifting Gears helped Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin pursue a systems change agenda to improve the transition to postsecondary education and skills development for low-skilled workers. To make progress toward systems change, states identified innovative strategies to better meet the needs of adult learners. The expectation was that over time these innovative strategies would become infused within postsecondary, adult basic education, and skills development systems and the mainstream operations of their local providers and institutions.

Shifting Gears recognized from the outset that achieving these educational and economic goals would not come easily or quickly. In fact, success would depend on the ability of states to make widespread changes in the ways that these systems serve low-skilled adult workers. As a result, the desired improvements, fostered by Shifting Gears, are still some years away.

Nonetheless, after three years of planning and development and two years of implementation, Shifting Gears has made positive progress toward its ambitious systems change goals in

four of the six states. As documented in this report, Illinois, Indiana, Minnesota, and Wisconsin each developed innovative strategies, introduced them into the operations of local institutions, and have continued to make strides toward wider implementation within and across their adult basic education and community and technical college systems. This level of state progress is referred to as “traction on the ground” by the Shifting Gears evaluation team.

MOVING TOWARD SYSTEM CHANGE

No benchmarks exist for objectively evaluating progress in initiatives, such as Shifting Gears, which seek to foster systems change by introducing and scaling up a new way for delivering education and skills development services.³⁰ Therefore, the evaluation team has drawn on the Shifting Gears logic model to guide its assessment of whether states have met the expectations of the initiative. Based on this analysis, evaluators report that Illinois, Indiana, Minnesota, and Wisconsin have each accomplished three significant interim outcomes.

These outcomes were critical for gaining traction on the ground and might portend sustained and increased progress toward systems change. The states have:

1. Expanded state leadership and commitment to the needs of low-skilled and low-income adult workers;

2. Adopted state policy changes to remove barriers as well as encourage efforts to foster the development of innovative strategies; and,
3. Supported actions that enabled local adult basic education providers and community and technical colleges to implement new ways of serving low-skilled adults.

In addition, the evaluation team examined data gathered for this report to substantiate the level of traction on the ground achieved by each of the four states. The data analysis demonstrates that each state has implemented its innovative strategy in local institutions and has begun to serve a modest but growing number of low-skilled adult learners. These data findings, however, represent an early stage of progress and measurement. Shifting Gears set the expectation that over time states will institutionalize their innovative strategies throughout their targeted systems, ensuring that these new ways of serving low-skilled adults are not simply add-ons to existing approaches, but become infused into mainstream operation.

A more extensive evaluation of systems change would be possible if the four states are able to substantially reform current operations and practices within and across adult basic education and community and technical college systems. Ideally, this documentation would include an examination of the breadth and depth of program penetration within systems and institutions; the quality of implementation; the magnitude or scale of the number of students served and the corresponding improvement in outcomes; and the sustainability and adoption of these innovative strategies as a new “norm” for delivering services to low-skilled adults.

There are reasons to anticipate that state innovations will move forward and make greater inroads toward systems change. The Joyce Foundation is continuing to support the Shifting

Gears work in Illinois,³¹ Minnesota, and Wisconsin into 2014. Joyce awarded additional resources to these states to expand and deepen their efforts to institutionalize the innovative strategies throughout the adult basic education and community and technical college systems. As a condition of receiving funding, these states set and are pursuing goals for achieving scale. Moreover, Illinois has joined Accelerating Opportunity, a national initiative of the Joyce, Gates, Kresge and other foundations, with the expressed purpose of expanding bridge programs and connecting them to career pathways. Furthermore, in Indiana, the current leadership has expressed commitment to using state resources to make the WorkINdiana career certifications program a standard component of its adult basic skills and workforce development programming.

These ongoing efforts come at a time of rising national attention on the need to raise the postsecondary education and skill levels of American workers. The federal government and leading philanthropic foundations have called upon the nation to reclaim its lead in having the most educated workforce.

Three federal agencies issued a policy proclamation in early 2012 to express their commitment for encouraging state and local areas “to improve coordination and collaboration across the public workforce, adult basic education, career and technical education, and human and social service systems, thereby promoting the use of career pathway approach and helping American workers advance successfully in the labor market.”³²

Shifting Gears states will likely benefit from the efforts of the federal government and the philanthropic community to create an impetus and platform for state and local action that better addresses the needs of low-skilled adult workers. As described in **Box B**, the early work of Shifting Gears played a role in informing these federal and philanthropic actions.

BOX B: SHARING THE SHIFTING GEARS EXPERIENCE

Shifting Gears envisioned that the participating Midwest states would be recognized as national leaders for their systems change work. Although ambitious, the Joyce initiative was unique in 2007 for focusing significant attention and resources on low-skilled adults and doing so with the goal of fostering policy and systems change across the adult basic education, workforce, and community and technical college systems.

Throughout the initiative, efforts were taken to share the states' experience with key national stakeholders and to educate policymakers and other experts on the policies and practices being pursued in the Shifting Gears states.

This dissemination was done in several ways:

- Issuing public reports on key aspects of the Shifting Gears initiative;
- Establishing a Shifting Gears website that chronicled the states' efforts;
- Inviting federal policymakers and other national stakeholders, such as advocacy groups and non-profit leaders, to the semi-annual cross-state meetings; and
- Conducting special forums in Washington, DC to highlight the Shifting Gears states' work and progress.

To understand whether the Shifting Gears initiative and the work of the six states contributed toward this objective, the evaluation team conducted a small number of interviews with key national leaders.⁴⁰ Based on the unambiguous statements of those interviewed as well as documentation found in notable publications, the evaluators concluded that Shifting Gears did inform work in the field beyond the six Midwest states.

For example, a recently released working paper for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' ISIS evaluation, *Career Pathways as a Framework for Program Design and Evaluation*, included references to the three public reports issued by Shifting Gears, as well as an illustration of a basic career pathway model that was adopted from the Wisconsin Shifting Gears initiative.⁴¹ Similarly, a recent Department of Labor TEGL (i.e., policy guidance statement to the field) cited the braided funding work of Minnesota's FastTRAC Adult Career Pathway initiative as an important model for leveraging financing.⁴² Although there are numerous citations of other sources in both pieces, the inclusion of Shifting Gears' work in these two publications suggests that the initiative helped inform the national discussion on career pathways and the need for systems change.

Those interviewed identified additional examples where Shifting Gears informed other national efforts, such as the Department of Labor's Career Pathways Technical Assistance Initiative and the Department of Education's Policy to Performance: Career Pathways System Initiative. In particular, the latter effort "is seeking to advance existing states' efforts in smoothing the transition between adult education and postsecondary and employment."⁴³ In addition to these federally funded efforts, the recently launched multi-state philanthropic initiative Accelerating Opportunity was also informed by the activities and lessons emerging from Shifting Gears. Specifically, Shifting Gears states' work indicated that adult basic education and community and technical college systems could work together to help improve the credential prospects for low-skilled adults. These results helped to convince the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation along with other philanthropic organizations to invest in this new initiative.

In addition, Shifting Gears' participants, ranging from members of the national management team to staff in the Midwest states, have participated in numerous national forums and meetings to share experiences and expertise fostered by the Shifting Gears work. This involvement included state leaders from Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin who participated in National Governors' Associations and Accelerating Opportunity meetings to share their expertise gained and lessons learned from Shifting Gears with other states.

Finally, according to those interviewed, Shifting Gears' experience and expertise is acknowledged for providing insights into a number of key substantive areas important to the field. These include:

- Focusing on the education and skill needs of adult learners;
- Bringing together multiple state systems—particularly adult basic education, community and technical colleges, and workforce development—to address adult learner issues;
- Concentrating on state policy and systems change rather than just local practice;
- Highlighting the important role that data can play in fostering improvement in policy and practice; and,
- Finding ways to bring multiple resources together (i.e., braided funding) to support a multi-system initiative focused on a specific goal; in this case, improving adult transitions to postsecondary education.

As the Shifting Gears' work continues in the four states, there is every reason to believe that more opportunities will emerge to share the Shifting Gears' experience.



THE IMPORTANCE OF FOCUS & IMPLEMENTATION

With an eye toward future possibilities of systems change, this evaluation report concludes by looking at what appears to have helped the four states achieve their initial progress in implementing their systems change efforts. It then identifies key challenges facing states as they move into the next phase of their work—scaling and sustaining their innovative strategies to achieve optimal, long-lasting systems change.

This evaluation finds that the four states achieving traction on the ground were able to do so because they focused their work on a specific innovative strategy.

The value in concentrating the systems change work on an innovative strategy proved threefold: 1) it helped state agencies to reach consensus that low-skilled adults should and could be better served through a new approach to education and skills development; 2) it gave direction and structure to work plans and activities undertaken by each state's cross-agency team; and 3) it helped to garner support of key stakeholders who would be essential for achieving implementation on the ground.

Consensus on a New Approach: Achieving consensus early in a systems change initiative was vital in helping participants from separate state systems to form a team and concentrate their attention on a specific idea that addresses their own agencies' interests as well as the overall interests of other agencies and local institutions and providers.

Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin each entered Shifting Gears having already identified and agreed on one or more specific innovative strategies in its Shifting Gears grant proposal.

Reaching consensus so early on enabled the cross-agency teams in these three states to embark on their initial alignment work at a more mature and focused stage than the other state teams. Rather than having to figure out what to do, they started immediately fleshing out the definitions and details of their new way of serving low-skilled adults and discussing how to implement it. On the other hand, Indiana did not reach consensus on a vision and innovative strategy during the first phase of Shifting Gears. This helps to explain why its state cross-agency team did not begin until 2011 to put its WorkINdiana career certification programs into practice.

Direction and Structure to Cross-Agency Team Activities: Focusing on a specific innovative strategy helped to establish an environment of intentionality. This ensured that all of the state Shifting Gears core activities could be directed at fostering the implementation of the innovation. This intentionality proved critical in the early years of Shifting Gears. For example, as states sought to adopt a required state policy agenda and action plan, the states that focused their policy work on an agreed-upon new approach to serving low-skilled adults moved forward with a detailed course of action. Furthermore, having a focused and specific plan led cross-agency teams to identify explicit actions that needed to be addressed to move their agenda forward; and, it compelled Shifting Gears teams to identify roles and responsibilities among members that helped further the collaborative nature of the effort.

Stakeholder Support of Implementation: Having a specific innovative strategy in mind helped the cross-agency team in each state to build the support and engagement of two important stakeholders—state agency leaders

and institutional administrators and practitioners. For both groups, state teams stressed the need to address the skills deficit of the current workforce and to preserve their state's economic competitiveness. The teams used this argument to frame the need for systems change and the importance of implementing the innovative strategy into local practice. As a result, in Illinois, state agency leaders in three systems formally adopted bridges as a preferred approach for delivering education and skills development services; in Minnesota, agency leaders made the FastTRAC Adult Career Pathway framework a centerpiece of the state's strategic plan for workforce and economic development. State teams fostered interest and support for their innovative strategies at the institutional level by awarding resources for pilot projects as well as for curriculum development and partnership engagement activities. This investment activity was particularly successful in engaging practitioners who implemented the specific innovative strategy and began to serve students in new ways. It also generated a group of local champions who supported the goal of systems change.

Although Shifting Gears teams have garnered state and local support for the innovative strategy, they still have a lot more work to do to translate this traction on the ground into systems change. They need to embark on specific ongoing actions to persuade significantly more local administrators and practitioners of the need and value of transforming and/or replacing current practices and systems with new ways of serving low-skilled adults. Doing so is nothing short of seeking a "cultural change" from the traditional and fundamental ways of delivering education and skills development services. Achieving this cultural change will not be easy, and there is not much experience or best practice to call upon for guidance.

The important challenges to acknowledge and address to effectively advance these systems change efforts are identified below.


THE GOALS & CHALLENGES OF SYSTEMS CHANGE

Four of the six Shifting Gears states have generated local take-up of innovative strategies and some initial changes in policies and practices. However, to date their efforts have touched only a modest number of low-skilled adults. Moving beyond marginal impact to significant systems change is an issue of scale and sustainability.

To achieve scale and sustainability, these new ways of serving low-skilled adults must reach a depth within an institution before the change can spread and ownership of the innovative strategies can shift beyond the initial enthusiasts.³³ During the past five years, champions throughout the adult basic education and community and technical college systems have stepped forward to embrace new program concepts, creating a foundation for system change. These states now face the challenge of moving beyond the champions to "early adopters" and then to the "early majority" of institutions.³⁴

Champions and early adopters are thought of as the revolutionaries and visionaries for systems change, while the early majorities are pragmatists who require more evidence that the innovative strategies deliver reliable results.³⁵

A recent issue of *The Evaluation Exchange* asserts the importance of taking promising policies and practices to scale and identifies a number of challenges of doing so effectively.³⁶ The successful Shifting Gears states confront four main challenges as they seek to move beyond their initial traction on the ground and implement their innovative strategies at scale. Only then can the number of low-skilled adults served in these new ways move from "more to most."³⁷



The first challenge is for states to **define what it means to scale their innovation**. As noted in Section 2, four of the states have been able to implement their innovative strategies in a number of institutions; however, relatively few adult learners have been served. A basic step toward defining desired scale is to determine the number of low-skilled adults currently being served that could benefit from the new way of providing education and skills development services and to set numerical goals for program reach. A related issue around defining scale is the need to strike the appropriate balance between ensuring the fidelity of the innovative strategies while permitting flexibility in order to adjust to local or institutional conditions.³⁸

A second challenge for states is to **tackle cultural change among institutional leaders, faculty, and other frontline staff** that is necessary to “cross the chasm” of innovation³⁹—in other words, to move beyond champions and early adopters to reach the early majority. This challenge includes identifying the right levers to build buy-in and support of the innovative strategies by particular groups. For example, early adopters may be convinced by the idea itself, especially if respected leaders and institutions deliver the message of innovation. Early majorities, on the other hand, may require evidence that the new way of providing services is better than current practice. Thus, culture change may require different strategies for different stakeholders and could hinge on is delivering the message and/or demonstrating effectiveness.

A third challenge facing states is to **make better use of data and disseminate evidence to demonstrate that the innovative strategies are successful**. Although some states conducted pipeline studies that documented the poor success rates of low-skilled adults served by the adult basic education, workforce, and community and technical college systems, these analyses were not widely shared with the field of practice to motivate program improvement efforts. Moving forward, it will be important for states to conduct rigorous analyses that provide credible findings demonstrating the new ways of serving low-skilled adults is superior to the status quo. Moreover, these analyses need to be widely disseminated throughout the field of practice. Expanding the use of data will be challenging for states with limited analytic capacity at the state level; however, reprioritizing how existing analytic capacity is deployed is needed for states to effectively gain the support and buy-in of the early majority. Alternatively, states could develop platforms for local institutions to analyze and report on program effectiveness as part of a regular continuous improvement process.

A fourth challenge facing states is to **repurpose or reallocate existing financial resources** to support their innovative strategies. Shifting Gears states have used Joyce grants, state resources, and other funding sources to support initial implementation of their innovative strategy and create a foundation for systems change among champions and some early adopters. State leaders must find a sustainable way to finance both the further development

and operation of their innovative strategies throughout the adult basic education, workforce, and community and technical college systems. As noted earlier, many local providers remain stuck in old ways of thinking about sustainability. They recommended looking for new resources to add to existing services rather than repurposing existing resources to scale-up and sustain their state's specific innovative strategy to serve low-skilled adults in new ways. In an era in which additional resources are unlikely, repurposing funds is fundamental to achieving systems change.

Overall, four Shifting Gears states have made traction on the ground during the past five-years. These states deserve recognition for raising the level of interest in addressing the skills gap of adult workers, and in working as cross-agency partners to build state and local support for improving the ways that postsecondary, adult basic education, and workforce systems serve them. Infusing their innovative strategies into the mainstream operations of local providers and institutions—achieving systems change—will be a daunting task. States that develop implementation goals and tactics to define scale, address cultural change among system leaders and providers, use data more effectively to inform the field of practice, and make tough choices about reallocating financial resources will be in the best position to achieve systems change. In short, implementation matters if scale and sustainability are to be achieved.

APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

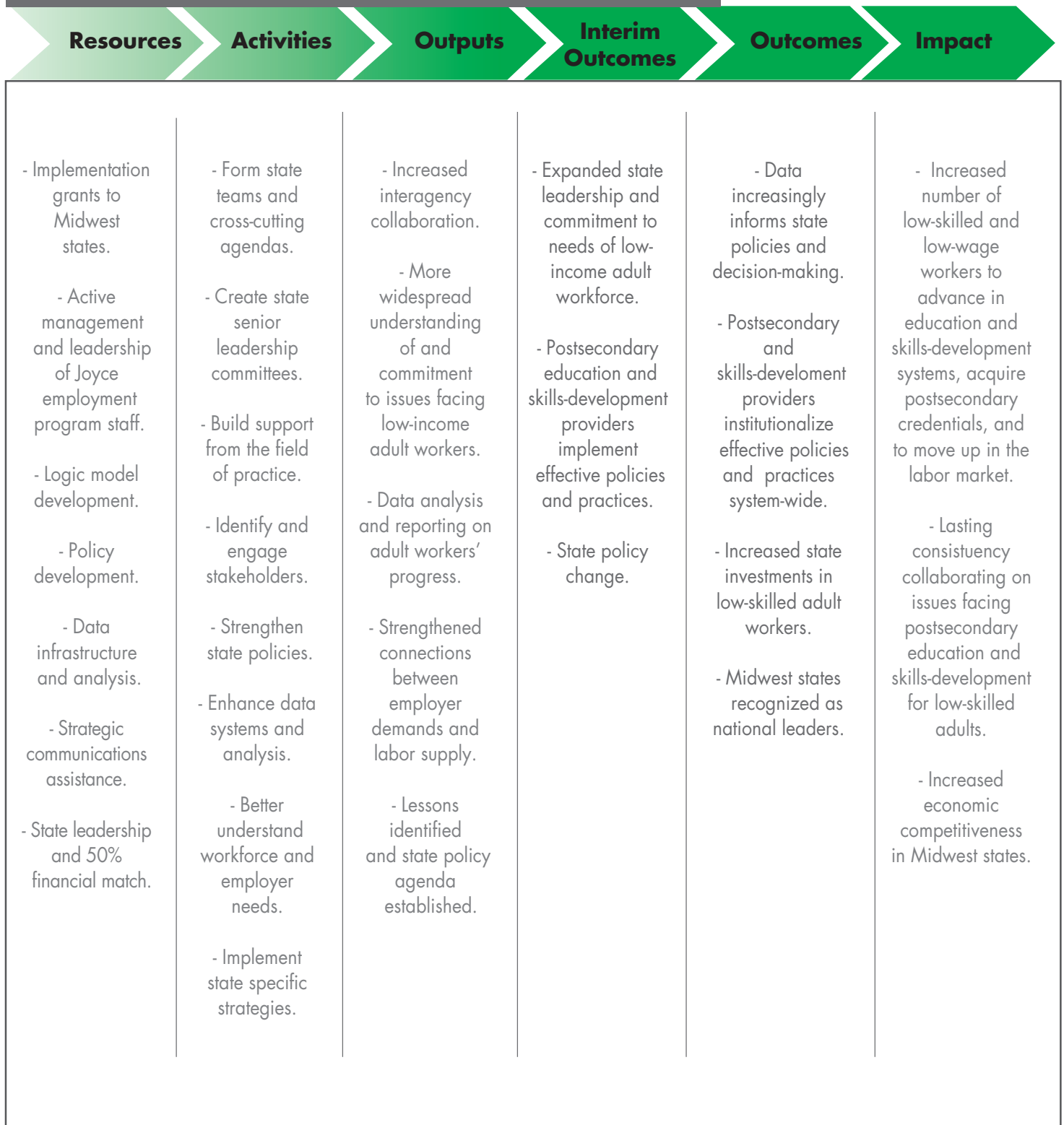
The Shifting Gears evaluation occurred over several years. At the onset, the evaluation team worked with the Joyce Foundation to create an initiative-level logic model (**Appendix B**) that provided a framework for the evaluation. The logic model organized initiative activities into core groups that the Joyce Foundation and Shifting Gears Management Team believed were needed for state policy change to affect changes in institutional practice across the adult basic education, workforce development, and community and technical college systems. State-specific logic models also were developed in collaboration with each state.

The primary data collection methods for the evaluation were qualitative and occurred between January 2008 and February 2012, during the evaluation team's twice annual site visits to each state. Evaluation site visits lasted two days and included group interviews with each state's cross-agency management or core team, as well as individual interviews with state and local stakeholders. During a typical site visit, the evaluation team spoke with the adult basic education state director; staff in the state workforce development agency; staff from the community and technical system office; members of the state core team, including representatives from local community-based organizations, advocates, and state agencies such as health and human services; project consultants; the chancellor or president of the community and technical college system; the director of the state workforce development agency; and local practitioners engaged in the work (college faculty, adult basic education instructors, and one-stop directors). A customized protocol was used that reflected the Shifting Gears logic model but was contextualized to the specific strategies and activities proposed by each state. Notes from site visits were analyzed by the evaluation team and reported to the Shifting Gears management team as formative evaluation feedback memos. In addition to the field work in each state, the evaluation team:

- Participated in and observed twice yearly cross-state meetings organized by the Shifting Gears management team;
- Participated in Shifting Gears management team meetings (both face-to-face and via telephone);
- Reviewed state materials, such as policy directives and guidance, professional development resources, and training documents shared with the field; and,
- Developed a data template for states to self-report on programs implemented during the initiative and the number of participants served.

Lastly, the evaluation team conducted a survey of local adult basic education, workforce, and community and technical college leadership in early 2012. The survey contained questions about the respondents' awareness of the Shifting Gears initiative, their support and buy-in of this work, and their commitment to sustain the effort moving forward. It was customized to reflect the specific innovation each state had identified. Four of the six Shifting Gears states were surveyed with an overall response rate of 63 percent. Indiana was not included in the survey because it did not receive a Shifting Gears grant during the prior two years, and development and implementation of system reform was just getting underway. Ohio was not included in the survey because it did not articulate a clear vision for system innovation for the field. The survey was administered via email to potential respondents identified by each state.

APPENDIX B: SHIFTING GEARS LOGIC MODEL



Endnotes

¹The Joyce Foundation. *Shifting Gears: An Employment Policy Initiative*. Request for Proposals, June 2006.

²Anthony 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.

³Anthony 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.

⁴Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey. Washington, DC. Accessed June 26, 2012 from http://www.bls.gov/emp/ep_chart_001.htm.

⁵Carnevale, Rose, and Cheah, *op. cit.*, 2011.

⁶Bureau of Labor Statistics. *Occupational Outlook Quarterly*. Washington, DC: Winter 2011-12. Accessed June 26, 2012 from <http://www.bls.gov/opus/ooq/2011/winter/art02.pdf>.

⁷Working Poor Families Project. Data from the American Community Survey 2010 and generated by Population Reference Bureau, April 2012. (See: <http://www.workingpoorfamilies.org/indicators/>.)

⁸U.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>.

⁹For a more detailed explanation of this approach and framework, see Derek Price and Brandon Roberts. *The Shifting Gears Approach to Systems Change*. Chicago: Joyce Foundation, December 2009.

¹⁰In 2007, planning grants were made to Minnesota and Ohio, and Indiana, Illinois, and Wisconsin received implementation grants. 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 SG primarily by attending the twice-yearly cross-state convenings.

¹¹This assistance, directed primarily at the state teams, focused on matters of policy and program development, data analysis, and strategic communications, and involved efforts to facilitate cross-state and peer learning through conferences and information dissemination.

¹²All states sought to identify an innovation associated with their adult basic education system; therefore that type of innovation was chosen as the focal point for this evaluation. Several states identified and worked on more than one innovation: Illinois worked on the “bridge program” concept for development education and WIA Title 1 providers, and Wisconsin incorporated aspects of a “career pathway” framework into its technical college credit-based diploma and degree programs. For more details on Wisconsin’s postsecondary career pathway work go to: http://www.risepartnership.org/pdf/rise_career_pathways_definitions_2011-03-16.pdf

¹³For more information on career pathways, see Davis Jenkins. *Aligning Public Resources to Support Individual and Regional Economic Advancement in the Knowledge Economy*. Workforce Strategy Center, August 2006.

¹⁴See the recent study by Aaron D. Anderson, *Engaging Resistance: How Ordinary People Successfully Champion Change*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011.

¹⁵Indiana did not apply for a SG 2.0 grant as the SG team had yet to reach agreement on an innovation and to develop a corresponding policy agenda. Following the move of adult basic education from the Department of Education to the Department for Workforce Development, the Indiana SG team reached consensus on an innovation and set of policy changes.

¹⁶Michigan’s innovation involved a governance and service delivery reform concept. This reform brought local adult basic education providers, community colleges, and workforce systems into a collaborative adult learning regional partnership structure. It was designed to align resources to address the basic skills needs in local communities, and to revise the delivery of educational services to better prepare participants to effectively transition into postsecondary occupational programs.

¹⁷Price and Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁹While Michigan identified an innovation, the state did not successfully adopt policies enabling implementation.

²⁰The evaluation team developed a data template that specified the type of information each state was to report. The SG team also administered an electronic survey to four SG states: Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin. The purpose was to ascertain the level of understanding, support, and commitment to change in each state. Since Michigan did not achieve traction on the ground, we have not included those results although it is interesting that the responses were not significantly different than in the other three states. Finally, Indiana was not included in the survey as their innovation had only been introduced to the field in the last year. Instead, the evaluation team conducted two focus groups with local stakeholders to determine their level of understanding, support, and commitment to change.

²¹This represents 43 program sites offering one or more of the 15 certification programs.

²²In acknowledging a baseline of zero, the evaluators understand that in several states bridge and career pathways programs existed prior to Shifting Gears. However, these efforts did not necessarily conform to the defined elements of the new innovation (e.g., include required support services) and were not verified to ensure fidelity to the innovation.

²³It is important to note that in late 2011, leadership of Shifting Gears in Ohio was assumed by a full-time senior-level staff, establishing this reform effort as a system priority. Since that time, a systems change plan has emerged that identifies policy levers needing to be changed; these developments suggest that state leadership and commitment in Ohio has improved considerably, albeit at the end of the five-year effort.

²⁴In March 2012, the U.S. Department of Labor issued a guidance letter to states that the amount available to the governor for statewide workforce investment discretionary funding was limited to 5 percent of the amount allotted of each of the WIA youth, adult and dislocated worker program year 2012 appropriations. This change is a reduction from 15 percent. Since it was made during the annual appropriation process, it is not clear what amount will be allowed for the governor in subsequent program years. See <http://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/attach/TEGL/tegl19-11.pdf>

²⁵Although Michigan and Ohio also experienced gubernatorial transition, these political changes were not responsible for their lack of progress during Shifting Gears. In Michigan, the failure of the legislative policy agenda occurred prior to the gubernatorial transition, while in Ohio neither the outgoing or incoming governor was engaged in the effort.

²⁶The evaluation did not explicitly examine why adult basic education seemed to make more progress in policy and practice changes than workforce programs or community and technical colleges. However, two hypotheses are that 1) adult basic education state directors have considerable autonomy to make decisions; and/or 2) adult basic education leaders and local providers saw the focus on low-skilled adult transitions to postsecondary education as an opportunity to raise their status and make better connections with community and technical colleges. In other words, adult basic education is structured and governed in a way that enables faster changes when opportunities present themselves.

²⁷The evaluation did not explicitly examine why there is no evidence demonstrating that local workforce boards redirected their existing resources to support these innovative strategies locally. Based on our observations we can hypothesize that despite the existence of federal performance measures, in the absence of state mechanisms to monitor, assess performance, and hold local providers accountable for following state policy guidelines, there is little motivation for local action.

²⁸As 2011 ended, Wisconsin was taking steps to disaggregate pipeline data and making plans to use it in the field to support process improvement conversations.

²⁹As a reminder, Indiana did not reach this point until later in the initiative.

³⁰Georges Vernez, Rita Karam, Louis T. Mariano, and Christine DeMartini. *Evaluating Comprehensive School Reform Models at Scale: Focus on Implementation*. RAND Corporation, 2006, pp. 3-6. Also, Cynthia Coburn, "Rethinking Scale: Moving Beyond Numbers to Deep and Lasting Change," *Educational Researcher*, Vol. 32, No. 6 (August/September, 2003): pp. 3-12.

³¹Joyce's new Shifting Gears investment in Illinois is to a non-profit group, Women Employed, that is developing a transitions network of local entities to expand bridge programs across the state and particularly in the Chicago area. Representatives of Women Employed were key members of the Illinois Shifting Gears team from the initiative's outset.

³²U.S. Department of Labor. *Training and Employment Notice 36-11*. Washington, D.C.: April 4, 2012.

³³Coburn, *op.cit.*, p. 4.

³⁴This language of innovators, early adopters, and the early majority is adapted from research on the diffusion of new technologies, i.e., "the technology (innovation) adaption lifecycle." See Everett M. Rogers. *Diffusion of Innovations. Fifth Edition*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003.

³⁵Geoffrey A. Moore. *Crossing the Chasm: Marketing and Selling Disruptive Products to Mainstream Customers*. New York: Collins Business, 2003.

³⁶Julia Coffman. "Broadening the Perspective on Scale," *The Evaluation Exchange*, Vol. XV, No. 1. Boston: Harvard Family Research Project, Harvard Graduate School of Education, Spring. 2010.

³⁷Abby Parcel. *More to Most: Scaling Up Effective Community College Practices*. Durham, NC: MDC, Inc., 2012.

³⁸Vernez, *op. cit.*, p. 3. From an evaluation perspective, if the innovation is substantially modified or only partially implemented, the expected outcome is unlikely to occur, or if it does occur, it cannot be fully attributed to the innovation.

³⁹Moore, *op. cit.*

⁴⁰The interviewees included senior staff of the U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Gates Foundation, and the National Governors' Association.

⁴¹Fein, David J. *Career Pathways as a Framework for Program Design and Evaluation: A Working Paper from the Innovative Strategies for Increasing Self-Sufficiency (ISIS) Project*. OPRE Report # 2012-30, Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2012.

⁴²U.S. Department of Labor. *Advisory: Training and Employment Guidance Letter 33-11*. June 8, 2012.

⁴³U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education. *Policy to Performance: Transitioning Adults to Opportunity*. <http://www.policy2performance.org/about-p2p>.

⁴⁴Response rates did vary by state from a low of 51 percent in Wisconsin to 58 percent in Michigan and Illinois, and a high of 77 percent in Minnesota. Data from Michigan was not included in the report because the state did not "gain traction on the ground" with its system reform effort; however, survey respondents did report views similar to other state respondents on awareness, support and buy-in, and sustainability.

Shifting Gears Management Team

The following key Joyce Foundation partners help Shifting Gears states to better develop, manage, assess, measure, and communicate this work.

- CLASP (Center for Law and Social Policy) provides ongoing policy guidance to all states and coordinates 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) provides peer learning experiences through conferences and Webinars.
- Brandon Roberts + Associates designs and implements the Shifting Gears initiative evaluation process, with assistance from Derek Price, Ph.D., of DVP-Praxis, Ltd.
- 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 advise the state grantees on using state data to inform improvements to policy and practice.
- Douglas Gould & Co. (PublicVoice) provides communications and advocacy support and technical assistance to the states.

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