



JOBS FOR THE FUTURE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Accelerating Opportunity Initiative Helps the Nation Get Back to Work

\$18.5 Million Strategic Funding Collaboration Supports States' Efforts to Provide Adults with the Credentials They Need

Boston, MA (September 19, 2012) – The American economy is facing a growing skills gap, with many adults lacking the training or education necessary for jobs that pay a middle-class wage. Helping adults earn the credentials and training they need to get and succeed in family-sustaining jobs is key to fueling the economy and boosting employment.

To that end, at today's [Opportunity Nation Summit](#) in Washington, DC, [Jobs for the Future](#) (JFF) announced that five states—[Illinois](#), [Kansas](#), [Kentucky](#), [Louisiana](#) and [North Carolina](#)—will each receive a \$1.6 million grant to help more workers earn valuable credentials needed for today's good jobs through innovative adult education programs. The grants are part of [Accelerating Opportunity: A Breaking Through Initiative](#), an \$18.5 million strategic collaboration of diverse philanthropies including the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Joyce Foundation, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the Kresge Foundation, the Open Society Foundations, and the University of Phoenix Foundation.

JFF, which manages the initiative, has engaged the National Council on Workforce Education, the National College Transition Network at World Education, and the Washington State Board for Community & Technical Colleges as partners.

Accelerating Opportunity targets workers who are underprepared for today's demanding job market. Over 26 million adults lack a high school diploma. While just over 2.5 million of these individuals are enrolled in adult basic education programs, many of them leave after only a semester or two, not earning any form of postsecondary credential. **Accelerating Opportunity** will substantially increase the number of adults who can earn a GED and a credential and enter the workplace with competitive skills by creating effective pathways to credentials and careers.

"Many employers are currently unable to fill well-paying jobs because applicants lack the skills," says JFF President and CEO Marlene B. Seltzer. "Today's good jobs require education beyond high school and training that prepares workers with practical skills that employers need. **Accelerating Opportunity** focuses on educational programs that lead to the credentials workers need to secure a

family-sustaining job and long-lasting career opportunities. We are off to a great start with over 1,000 credentials already issued by our grantee states.”

The goals of Accelerating Opportunity, which will run through 2014, are:

- At least forty colleges across five states will be implementing *Accelerating Opportunity* pathways in multiple professional/technical areas.
- At least 40,000 students will be progressing through pathways to marketable, stackable, credit-bearing credentials.
- At least 18,000 students will have in hand at least one marketable, stackable credit-bearing credential and at least one term’s worth of credit; they will also be ready to enter additional college-level programs without enrolling in developmental education.
- States policies and financing models will sustain effective *Accelerating Opportunity* programs and expand them to assist many more adult learners in obtaining postsecondary credentials.
- States will have engaged community colleges in a learning network to facilitate the adoption and scale-up of *Accelerating Opportunity* pathways.

Accelerating Opportunity will increase credential attainment using evidence-based instructional and organizational models, building on the successes of [Breaking Through](#), as well as Washington State’s experience implementing and scaling up Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training ([I-BEST](#)). The initiative includes a robust independent evaluation program, led by the Urban Institute, which will ensure that Accelerating Opportunity is able to document best practices and encourage growth through the addition of other state community college systems.

Each of the five states is led by a team that represents a unique collaboration between higher education agencies, the governor’s office, state workforce development agencies, state data agencies, leading community colleges, and employers or employer associations in industry sectors with strong labor demand and career advancement potential. By addressing policy-based, systemic, and programmatic barriers to student success, **Accelerating Opportunity** will enable many more adults to succeed in their quest for postsecondary credentials.

“America’s economic landscape has changed as many traditionally well-paid sectors decline and all jobs are demanding more technical skills,” says Steve Patrick, senior program officer at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. “By breaking down the barriers to educational attainment, **Accelerating Opportunity** is responding to the new economy by helping community and technical colleges produce more employable graduates.”

“**Accelerating Opportunity** is expanding the professional horizons of Americans across the country – regardless of age or background—by helping them earn credentials and learn skills that have real value to employers,” says Maria Flynn, JFF vice president, Building Economic Opportunity. “**Accelerating Opportunity** meets workers where they are regardless of skill level or language proficiency, preparing them for today’s labor market by helping to develop foundational skills that create better opportunities for employment.”

To learn how **Accelerating Opportunity** has offered promise and hope to students in Kentucky, click [HERE](#).

About Jobs for the Future

Jobs for the Future aligns education with family-sustaining careers. With its partners, JFF designs and drives adoption of education and career pathways leading from college readiness to career advancement for those struggling to succeed in today's economy.

www.jff.org

www.twitter.com/jfftweets

About the National Council on Workforce Education

The National Council for Workforce Education is committed to promoting excellence and growth in workforce education. As an affiliate council of the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), NCWE provides a national forum for administrators and faculty in workforce education and basic skills, as well as representatives of business, labor, military, and government, to affect and direct the future role of two-year and other post-secondary institutions in workforce education and economic development. NCWE provides the link between policy and workforce education and economic development by providing support, research, and critical information to members on current and future trends and policies.

<http://www.ncwe.org>

About the National College Transition Network

The National College Transition Network (NCTN) at World Education, Inc. supports adult education staff, programs, and states, and regional and municipal agencies in establishing and strengthening college transition services. NCTN accomplishes this through technical assistance, professional development, collegial sharing, advocacy, and publications that focus on the needs of the field. NCTN connects policy and research and practice to help build the capacity and expertise in adult education.

<http://www.collegetransition.org>

About the Washington State Board for Community & Technical Colleges

The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) is responsible for administering the Community and Technical College Act and providing leadership and coordination for Washington's public system of 34 community and technical colleges. The SBCTC is governed by a nine-member board appointed by the Governor. The SBCTC is headquartered in Olympia.

<http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu>

About the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

Guided by the belief that every life has equal value, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation works to help all people lead healthy, productive lives. In developing countries, it focuses on improving people's health and giving them the chance to lift themselves out of hunger and extreme poverty. In the United States, it seeks to ensure that all people—especially those with the fewest resources—have access to the opportunities they need to succeed in school and life. Based in Seattle, Washington, the foundation is led by CEO Jeff Raikes and Co-chair William H. Gates Sr., under the direction of Bill and Melinda Gates and Warren Buffett.

<http://www.gatesfoundation.org>

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.

<http://www.joycefdn.org>

About the W.K. Kellogg Foundation

Established in 1930, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation supports children, families and communities as they strengthen and create conditions that propel vulnerable children to achieve success as individuals and as contributors to the larger community and society. Grants are concentrated in the United States, southern Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean.

<http://www.wkkf.org>

About the Kresge Foundation

Based in metropolitan Detroit, The Kresge Foundation is a \$3.1 billion private foundation that seeks to influence the quality of life for future generations through its support of nonprofit organizations working in its seven program areas: Arts and Culture, Community Development, Detroit, Education, the Environment, Health, and Human Services. Fostering greater access to and success in postsecondary education for low-income, minority and first-generation college students is the focus of Kresge's Education grantmaking. In 2011, Kresge awarded more than \$22 million in grants to support higher education in the United States and South Africa, with half benefiting U.S. community colleges. For more information, please visit the Foundation website:

www.kresge.org or follow @kresgedu.

About the Open Society Foundations

The Open Society Foundations work to build vibrant and tolerant democracies whose governments are accountable to their citizens. To achieve this mission, the Foundations seek to shape public policies that assure greater fairness in political, legal, and economic systems and safeguard fundamental rights. On a local level, the Open Society Foundations implement a range of initiatives to advance justice, education, public health, and independent media. At the same time, we build alliances across borders and continents on issues such as corruption and freedom of information. The Foundations place a high priority on protecting and improving the lives of people in marginalized communities.

<http://www.soros.org>

About the University of Phoenix Foundation

Inspired by 30 years of witnessing the life changing power of education, Dr. John Sperling, Chairman of the Apollo Group, Inc. and University of Phoenix established the University of Phoenix Foundation in November 2006. The Foundation's mission is to increase access to education in critical areas, especially for underrepresented and low-income students traditionally under-served by the education continuum, in an effort to provide a pathway for economic advancement.

<http://www.apollogrp.edu/corporate-responsibility/philanthropy/university-of-phoenix-foundation>