

## **WORKPLACE BALANCE STRATEGIC PLAN**

DEVELOPING A NEW POOL OF SKILLED AND MOTIVATED WORKERS FOR  
COLORADO  
FOR THE COLORADO COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM  
AND ITS PARTNERS  
INVOLVED IN CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION



JANUARY 2009

### **OVERVIEW**

The purpose of the Workforce Balance Project, launched by the Colorado Community College System in early 2009, is to help women and men choose skilled careers that are a good personal fit, meet the needs for skilled employment in Colorado, and break through traditional gender stereotypes. The outcome of the project is to develop a new pool of skilled and motivated workers that can enhance the competitiveness of Colorado's employers, and also help meet the program accountability objectives of the federal Perkins Career and Technical Education (CTE) Improvement Act. Through the activities of this effort – supporting students, celebrating success, and keeping score on progress -- community colleges, technical colleges, and even secondary schools and correctional facilities will develop effective approaches to assist men and women to learn about and to find careers that fit their interests, economic needs, aptitudes, as well as to meet current workforce demands.

## THE CHALLENGE

Key industries in Colorado are facing chronic shortages of skilled workers – specifically in the areas of information technology, health care, construction trades, and transportation technology industries. These shortages can be filled partly by enlarging the pool of potential skilled workers – those men and women who might not traditionally consider certain career fields because of gender stereotypes.

In addition to the felt need for skilled workers in Colorado, there is another pressing reason to address the issue of gender stereotypes in education. The receipt of federal funds for career and technical education by school districts, technical colleges and community colleges, hinges on whether or not programs are achieving some level of gender balance. Occupations that are determined to be “non-traditional” have less than 25 percent of one gender in that occupation. In order to continue receiving federal CTE funding, local recipients of federal funds are required to demonstrate a commitment to achieving greater gender balance in their program enrollments, as well as program retention and completion.

## CAREER OPPORTUNITIES AND GENDER STEREOTYPES

With the recent national trend urging students to earn high-end educations focused on STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) careers, there has been a lack of broadly presented quality career options. Due to the push towards careers requiring a four-year education or more, many skilled, well-paying jobs that require less extensive education are somewhat overlooked as contributing to the need for a competitive, skilled workforce.

However, a large percentage of careers in Colorado that offer solid, middle class wages fall in a range where they require more training than just a high school diploma but less than a bachelor’s degree. The training is affordable and relatively short-term in nature, making a community college or technical college an ideal solution for workers to access education and training programs.

Approximately 49% of Colorado’s jobs belong in this category, but only 42% of the state’s workers have the appropriate training for these particular jobs.<sup>1</sup> As a result of this shortage, job creation and economic growth can be slowed. With a modest investment of time, effort and resources, community and technical colleges can help workers achieve a successful career with an exponential payoff in earnings and quality of life for decades to come. In addition to offering immediate career opportunities and decent earnings, many “middle-skill” jobs also offer a valuable entry point into a career ladder that can be advanced with further experience and/or education.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.skills2compete.org/atf/cf/%7B8E9806BF-4669-4217-AF74-26F62108EA68%7D/Colorado%20S2C%20MSFS.pdf> /CO Dept. of Labor and Employment

While there are career opportunities across a spectrum of skilled employment options, the typical stereotypes of “guy jobs” and “girl jobs” are fading into the past. Women are finding enjoyable and meaningful work in information technology, automotive technology, advanced manufacturing, and various construction trades. Additionally, men are making a positive difference as health technicians and elementary and middle school teachers.

## THE WORKFORCE BALANCE PROJECT

In order to address the shortages of skilled workers, federal accountability requirements, and ongoing gender stereotypes, the Colorado Community College System (CCCS) is implementing the Workforce Balance Project. The ultimate purpose of this project is to help community colleges, technical schools, universities, secondary schools and correctional facilities learn how to further assist men and women in finding careers that fit their interests, economic needs, aptitudes, as well as meet current workforce demands. The project will work specifically to help students learn more about the exciting opportunities that await them in fields traditionally skewed toward one gender over the other.

We want potential students to know about these opportunities and why traditional gender stereotypes should not be a barrier to their participation.

The project also focuses on helping faculty members and the college admissions and counseling office provide appropriate supports for students. Finally, the Workforce Balance Project works with employers to help them identify and implement the characteristics of a workplace in which both men and women feel equally valued and welcomed and where gender stereotypes are minimized.

Successfully executing a new vision of workforce balance in Colorado will benefit all stakeholders involved in both the education and economic

### OPPORTUNITIES IN THE INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY WORKFORCE

For example, information technology is a primary tool and product of Colorado’s marketplace, as well as an enabler of multiple services and desired quality of life. Well-prepared employees who are capable of superior work in all industry sectors must acquire IT knowledge, competencies, and skills from teaching and learning processes based on currency, quality, and opportunity.

Colorado’s workforce needs a pool of skilled technology employees. As in most advanced technology fields, women are under-represented in IT.

- Because information technology is an enabling technology across all industry sectors, it is particularly important that women help fill the workforce pool.
- Women can help diversify the IT workforce, bringing much-needed breadth of perspectives in design and applications.
- Advanced technology jobs tend to be high paying. Women, as individuals and as a group, can realize significant economic benefit from these jobs.

Using the most relevant Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) codes for technology from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) data, it is clear that females earned only about 25% of all technology-related sub-baccalaureate certificates, baccalaureate degrees, and post-baccalaureate certificates in 2003 (*The Status of Colorado Girls and Women in Technology, 2005*). Computer information sciences and support services is the most populated CIP category, and less than one-third of degree and certificate holders in that category are female.

realms. While change will be required, it is our hope that the stakeholders will be able to sift through and embrace innovative ideas, welcome new workforce-balanced instruction and collaboration, and adopt different approaches to recruiting and retaining future students that will fill the workforce pipeline.

## OUR BELIEF

We believe that all levels of American society and business will benefit by having a better balance of men and women in the U.S. workplace. With the entrance of women into the workplace over the last forty years, many workplaces have already become fully integrated and women and men operate on a peer-to-peer basis. And while some occupations have been slower to become more integrated, it has been proven that progress is possible. The beginning of this process is to create a positive message about balance in the workplace, and to encourage and support Coloradans who enter education and training programs that still need to achieve balance in the workplace.

## STRATEGIC GOAL

The goal of this project is to directly impact practices and expectations within career and technical education (CTE) programs operated in the Colorado community colleges, technical colleges, and correctional facilities and to indirectly influence the perceptions and expectations of potential students and employers.

Working together, all CCCS student support services will work to impartially educate and encourage men and women on all career choices. These individuals will be encouraged to make a well-informed career and educational choice, and to strongly consider skilled employment in occupations that might be considered a non-traditional choice for their gender.

## MEASURABLE OUTCOMES

Between 2009 and 2014, Colorado community colleges, technical colleges and correctional facilities will see a shift in the participants' composition of non-traditional training programs. Currently, postsecondary CTE "non-traditional" participation is showing a decreasing trend. Through the efforts of this project, we hope to see an impact on non-traditional participation including a reversal of this trend as well as a continuous increase of non-traditional participation. Also, we hope to see non-traditional participants completing non-traditional CTE programs at the same rate as all participants completing all CTE programs. The goals of this project have been set to add 190 non-traditional participants each year or, on average, approximately a net gain of ten non-traditional participants per year per postsecondary institution receiving federal Perkins funds. Using the Benchmark completion rate (42%) as a consistent completion rate, that does align with overall completion rates, the goals of this project have been set to increase the number of Non-Traditional Participants Who Complete Non-Traditional Programs by an average of 80 completers per year or, on average, a net gain of approximately five non-traditional completers per year per postsecondary institution receiving federal Perkins funds.

Program Year	Number of Postsecondary Non-Traditional Participants in Non-Traditional Programs	Number of Postsecondary Non-Traditional Participants Who Complete Non-Traditional Programs
2007-2008		
Benchmark level	2,654	1,122
2008-09		
*Goal	2,844	1,282
2009-2010		
*Goal	3,034	1,362
2010-2011		
*Goal	3,224	1,442
2011-2012		
*Goal	3,414	1,522
2012-2013		
*Goal	3,604	1,602
2013-2014		
*Goal	3,794	1,682

\* These goals serve as a guide. Obviously many variables that are beyond our control could impact goals (i.e., economic conditions, emerging careers, changing workforce needs, etc.)

## THEORY OF CHANGE

In order to influence change, we must define our common assumptions about how a set of coordinated and implemented actions will contribute to the desired outcomes.

Given the western heritage of Colorado, we suggest the metaphor of “reaching new frontiers” throughout this strategic plan.

## ASSUMPTIONS

**Assumption 1. Individuals make choices about occupations based on a complex set of factors.** The individual makes an analysis, albeit often one that might be unstructured and largely intuitive, of the occupational options. In this analysis, he or she might consider opportunities for earnings and advancement, and how the occupational role resonates or conflicts with his personal interests and preferred work style. The individual also conducts some sort of cost-benefit analysis that compares the investment of time, effort and resources she will be required to make in comparison to the expected short-term and long-term pay-off of the occupation. He also takes a hard look at prospects for job stability and working conditions.

At some level in this analysis, the individual considers if there is a predominance of one gender over another in the occupation. However, we do not know much about how gender issues are processed. We do not know whether innate factors related to physical strength or temperament make some occupations more attractive to men or women, whether such factors are all culturally-biased, or whether there is a mix of innate and external factors at play.

**Assumption 2.** In any profession where race and gender barriers have been broken, we know there has been a generation of early “New Frontier students” that first entered the field at great personal effort and risk. These New Frontier students entered the field, and through perseverance and excellent performance, were able to demonstrate competence, and “prove” they could do the job.

**Assumption 3.** The positive example of the New Frontier students ultimately inspires others of their race or gender to believe that they too can succeed in that field of study. Over time, as the numbers of individuals in the field grows, it reaches a “tipping point” where the participation of that gender or race is seen as completely normal.

**Assumption 4.** Because decisions about work are very complex, we cannot influence a person to make a decision regarding job choice that they feel is not in their own personal interest. Thus, the Workforce Balance project CANNOT overcome real concerns about low wages, low job stability, and poor working conditions.

**Assumption 5.** However, if general wages, stability and working conditions are adequate, the Workforce Balance project CAN influence the choices of individuals, and ultimately affect gender balance in CTE programs and the workplace.

The influence can happen through three types of activities:

- 1) **Supporting Students** in education to help the New Frontier students succeed in their chosen field of study and feel more connected to and supported by one another; and
- 2) **Celebrating Success** of balanced CTE programs and their successful graduates to

- other potential students so they can envision themselves in non-traditional career roles; and
- employers so they will see themselves as “new homestead sites” – places offering open opportunities – workplaces that will be more welcoming and supportive of non-traditional workers in their workplaces.

**3) Keeping Score on Progress** so there are consistent indicators used by providers across the state, both leading indicators that predict positive movement and lagging indicators that document program enrollment, completion and employment outcomes.

**The following strategic objectives are based on this Theory of Change – Supporting Students and Celebrating Success.**

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1

### CREATE A COMPELLING MESSAGE AND IMPLEMENT A COMMUNICATION PLAN

The first priority of the strategic plan is to coordinate a compelling message to promote gender balance in education programs and the workplace with the newly developed CTE marketing message: “Colorado Career and Technical Education – for real!” This message is not only necessary, but vital to the success of this strategic plan. If the message is done properly, the plan can come to life. Likewise, if it is done poorly, even the best plans can fail.

CCCS, through the communications contractor, will work closely with key stakeholders – teachers and faculty, enrollment counselors, students and parents, and employers – to document key concerns, strengths and concepts that will introduce Coloradans to new career frontiers and opportunities.

In this message development, it will also be valuable to link the gender balance message plan to the overall CTE plan by Colorado Succeeds/CCCS.

#### SUB-OBJECTIVES:

- 1.1 Determine target stakeholder groups and select individuals from each stakeholder group for in-depth interview research.
- 1.2 Conduct in-depth interview research to identify the most compelling value statements and the key objections that must be addressed in a message and communications materials.
- 1.3 Create Proposed Message for Workplace Balance project, drawing from direct research and also from research on other industries that have achieved greater racial and/or gender parity.

1.4 Create media showing the need for more gender balance – specifically in areas with a workforce shortage. Based on information from the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, some suggested industries include:

- Health care
- Information technology
- Construction, including Installation, repair and maintenance
- Electrical contractors

Each of these suggested industries on average earn more than the median income for a worker in the state of Colorado (\$32,906).

**TIME FRAME FOR OBJECTIVE 1:** January – August 2009

**KEY ACTION STEPS:**

- Retain communications firm for research, message development and media development
- Conduct stakeholder research
- Identify key messages
- Create media materials that are career specific

## **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2**

### **CREATE BUY-IN AND COMMITMENT FROM COLLEGE LEADERSHIP, STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES STAFF AND FACULTY, AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS**

As institutions offering education and training programs, community and technical colleges are the most accessible organizations that can reach youth and adults regarding career changes with information about non-traditional career opportunities.

Colleges must be on the look-out for new frontiers and do all they can to support all students' success. They also will be the first point of contact for the potential student who needs career guidance and enrollment advice.

The college needs a consistent message from its leadership, student support services staff, and instructors.

Instead of focusing on a “compliance” mentality in which campus deficiencies for non-traditional performance are noted, CCCS will create a “celebration of excellence” approach. This involves seeding new activities around gender balance, identifying and publicizing innovative efforts and celebrating documented success as program enrollments move in a positive direction.

## **SUB-OBJECTIVES**

- 2.1 CCCS Leadership will meet with presidents, vice presidents, student support services staff, CTE faculty, and other governmental stakeholders (like Colorado Department of Education and the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment) and professional organizations that support workplace gender balance. CCCS will utilize regularly scheduled meetings and conferences where possible, and schedule other special gatherings when necessary, to explain the Workplace Balance Strategic plan, objectives and action steps.
- 2.2 CCCS will provide mini-grants to colleges creating a workplace balance program with a focus on
  - Social networking and support among students (see 3.1);
  - Enhanced career counseling;
  - Outreach and public awareness; and
  - Professional development for instructors.
- 2.3 CCCS will identify one or two campuses to serve as a “Communities of Innovation” for trying new approaches to gender balance. In order to determine which community to choose, the focus will be on the following questions -
  - How is their approach different?
  - How are they collecting data?
  - What are their goals?
  - Which industries are they targeting? Why?
  - How are they communicating their message?
- 2.4 CCCS will identify one or two groups to serve as a “Communities of Excellence” when their gender balance programs have proven, increased student balanced enrollment for two or more years.

**TIME FRAME FOR OBJECTIVE 2:** January 2009– 2014

### **KEY ACTION STEPS:**

- Schedule meetings with key college stakeholders;
- Create an internal tracking document of current non-traditional program enrollments;
- Create mini-grants RFP to be awarded in summer 2009;
- In 2009 and 2010, identify and create profiles of Centers of Innovation;
- In 2011 and beyond, identify and create profiles of Centers of Excellence; and
- Create opportunities for public recognition of and presentations by the Centers of Innovation and Excellence.

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3

### CREATE SUPPORTS TO HELP “NEW FRONTIER” STUDENTS SUCCEED

Students entering and studying in non-traditional CTE programs will face a constant sense of isolation. For some students who are strongly self-directed, this will not be a problem. But to reach a tipping point, the non-traditional education program must be seen as a safe place for the Next Generation Frontier students. CCCS will coordinate with faculty and staff of local campuses so they can work with students to create supports that increase a student’s sense of connections and reduce isolation.

#### SUB-OBJECTIVES:

- 3.1 Recruit faculty members from campuses and from various industry sectors to sponsor students groups, either campus-based or cross-state groups.
- 3.2 Identify New Frontier Students across multiple program areas, document their positive experiences and lessons learned, and use these leaders as ambassadors for creating greater gender balance.
- 3.3 Work with industry partnerships such as “Colorado Succeeds” to identify “Pioneer Professionals” who are already working in the designated career field. Document their positive experiences and lessons learned, and use them as ambassadors to the education programs to mentor and encourage aspiring students and share their lessons learned.
- 3.4 Work with the identified New Frontier Students, encourage and support them to create one or more student support groups, either on an industry-specific basis, campus-specific basis or other basis.
- 3.5 Identify appropriate publications and new media through which information about student supports can be publicized.

**TIME FRAME FOR OBJECTIVE 3:** Summer 2009 – 2012

#### KEY ACTION STEPS:

- Identify two “New Frontier Students” for each program area and write up profiles of these individuals.
- Identify two “Pioneer Professionals” for each program area that are already in the workforce, and conduct interviews, and write articles.
- Place articles about student support groups.
- Attach New Frontier Students to campus mentors and provide mentor training.

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4

### ENGAGE EMPLOYERS, EMPLOYER GROUPS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS TO CHANGE THE WORKPLACE CULTURE

Employers cannot be an afterthought in launching the Workplace Balance Project. Ultimately, if a student leaves an education program and then has a very negative workplace experience, that word may filter back to prospective students in the pipeline. Employers should be contacted and recruited as “New Opportunity Homestead Sites”—workplaces that will make a special effort to create a welcoming workplace AND be recognized for that effort.

#### SUB-OBJECTIVES:

- 4.1 Identify employers, employer groups, employee organizations and other stakeholders to serve as “New Opportunity Homestead Sites” for the Workplace Balance Initiative. Possible groups include:
  - Colorado Succeeds
  - Professional organizations representing men and women in non-traditional careers
  - Employee unions and organizations
  - Chambers of commerce
  - Economic development officials at the state and local levels
  - Colorado Department of Education, Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, and Colorado Commission on Higher Education
- 4.2 Create a Workplace Balance Task Force of business leaders and employee organizations who will commit to changing the workplace culture of their businesses and will partner with local college programs. Among other things, this Task Force could provide:
  - Shadow/mentoring/internship opportunities,
  - Information/data on particular industries;
  - Guest lecturers;
  - Information distribution; and
  - Job fairs.
- 4.3 Create an Annual Workplace Balance Award recognizing one business that is making a concerted effort to build a balanced workforce and can demonstrate two-years of increased workplace balance.

**TIMEFRAME FOR OBJECTIVE 4:** Begin Fall 2009

#### KEY ACTION STEPS:

- Recruit employers and employer groups for New Opportunity Homestead Sites
- Provide guidance to New Opportunity Homestead Sites
- Create recognition events for New Opportunity Homestead Sites

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 5

### KEEPING SCORE TO MEASURE PROGRESS

To be successful, the initiative needs to emphasize the use of data for continuous improvement. “Leading” indicators that might predict positive movement could include a focus on career counseling contacts with non-traditional students, community outreach efforts to students, parents, and employers, and broad public relations efforts, as well as program enrollments. “Lagging” indicators such as program retention, program completion, and employment in the sector should also be gathered. These indicators should be organized so there is shared responsibility among all stakeholders within the college system.

- 5.1 CCCS should create a Scorecard Document for internal use by each college and among key stakeholders within the CCCS system. A group of stakeholders should identify the leading and lagging indicators that will be included, and specify the data gathering protocols to ensure consistency of data.
- 5.2 Convene stakeholders periodically to reflect on local and statewide data, and discuss progress and challenges in affecting student choices for enrollment, retention, and completion.

**TIMEFRAME FOR OBJECTIVE 5:** April 2009 - December 2013

### KEY ACTION STEPS:

- Convene stakeholders to identify indicators
- Create Scorecard template and first benchmark report

## CONCLUSION

Based on our Theory of Change – Supporting Students and Celebrating Success -- these strategic objectives, sub-objectives, and key action steps will make a difference in the lives of individual students and prospective workers. They will help break down gender stereotypes that prevent interested men and women from entering skilled occupations that would be a good fit for them and provide a good living.

Ultimately, this initiative will increase the access of Colorado’s employers to a new pool of skilled and motivated workers. It will enhance the lives of these workers, their families, and their communities. In short, when stereotypes fall by the wayside, we all benefit.

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If you would like to volunteer for the design of future planning related to this initiative or to serve on related task forces, please contact the CCCS Perkins Director, 303-620-4000 or visit the staff directory at <http://www.coloradostateplan.com/CTEcontacts.htm>