



# EMPLOYMENT & TRAINING REPORTER

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The next issue of the *Employment & Training Reporter* will be published Dec. 18, 2017.

orative in the Mississippi Delta Region, working on projects in manufacturing, logistics and health care, encouraged public sector agencies, employers, funders and other stakeholders to work together.

“With our team, we all have something to offer, and the work is something we can all take credit for,” she said.

Both Allen and Judith Bell, vice president of the San Francisco Foundation, said they thought their participation in regional funding collaboratives helped lead public sector workforce development partners to focus on opportunities for low-income workers and minorities.

The Bay Area Workforce Funders Collaborative, having raised \$16 million from 30 local funders, has invested in local community college training programs across a variety of industries. In doing so, it has also pumped funding into bridge programs to prepare low-skilled workers and others with employment and education difficulties to succeed in postsecondary training.

“We have one of the healthiest economies in the world and we have growing inequality,” Bell said, on being inclusive of low-skilled, low-wage workers in these efforts.

—Ryan Hess

## **Farmworkers**

### **EVERGREEN CAREER PATHWAY SPANS FROM FARMS TO FACTORIES**

A farmworker program, an American Job Center and a community college in southeast Washington developed and are promoting short-term industrial technology training accessible to agricultural workers and other jobseekers with few basic skills, in an effort described as exemplary career pathways design by a federal official.

The Employment and Training Administration featured the collaborative work of the Opportunities Industrialization Center of Washington, Columbia Basin College and WorkSource Columbia Basin during a Dec. 4 webinar on the agency’s Workforce GPS site. The purpose was to share steps the workforce partners took to build a career pathway, according to Sara Hastings, unit chief in ETA’s Division of Youth Services.

Hastings, one of the leads of a federal interagency working group on career pathways, said the efforts of these partners illustrate key elements of pathways design. ETA promotes these elements in its Career Pathways Toolkit, a guide most recently issued in late 2016 (ETR 1/9/17, p. 205).

These elements include cross-agency partnerships, employer engagement, the design of education and training programs, the identification of funding, program and policy alignment and systems change.

The place is Benton and Franklin counties, a single workforce development area surrounding the cities of Kennewick, Pasco and Richland, where the Columbia and Snake rivers converge.

Agriculture and manufacturing are the top two private sector industries, in terms of employment, in Franklin County, comprising 19.5 percent and 11.9 percent of all jobs in 2016, according to state labor market information. In larger-by-employment Benton County, these industries comprised 6.9 percent and 4.7 percent of total employment, respectively. Food product manufacturing is a major part of the industry there.

## **Agriculture and Manufacturing**

OIC of Washington is the statewide operator of the National Farmworker Jobs Program. The local workforce area is one of its seven service areas.

According to business services manager Leonor Rico, OIC’s local office had a preexisting referral partnership with Columbia Basin College. It sent farmworkers to the community and technical college for English language and adult education programs as well as short-term training for nursing assistant and forklift operator jobs.

Rico said that more than two years ago the local farmworker program office began exploring options for a training program based on transferable skills many farmworkers possess that are valued in the local economy.

“These farmworkers have a lot of really great skills that a lot of times are unrecognized by the workers themselves and by employers. A lot of skills that workers have working in the fields can be transferred to other aspects of industry,” she said.

Through consultation with WorkSource Columbia Basin, they learned that industrial maintenance workers were in high demand. Columbia Basin College is a well-recognized job training provider in the region and had a for-credit industrial maintenance program.

However, at the time, college placement tests scared off farmworkers, who were likely to be directed to remedial course work before they could take part in training.

Both Rico and Janese Thatcher, dean of career and technical education at Columbia Basin College, began contacting maintenance supervisors at local factories to explore the basic skills they were seeking and options for another path into jobs.

Rico credited the college’s name recognition with helping her get through.

They found that factories were seeking workers with a variety of technical skills, but often at a very basic level.

The school’s workforce program staff decided to repackage the college-level industrial maintenance program into an 11-week, noncredit Basic Industrial Maintenance certificate, based on classes in blue-

prints and drawings, basic electricity and welding and the fundamentals of maintenance.

OIC planned to contract with the college to train a single initial cohort.

By making the course noncredit, the college could enroll students without requiring a placement test.

Only a basic skills assessment — in most cases, the CASAS test and for some WorkKeys — was administered by the farmworker program office or the one-stop career center.

“We wanted to take all the fear of taking placement tests out of the way ... We were really able to make entry into the Basic Industrial Maintenance program very easy,” Thatcher said.

Columbia Basin College runs on academic quarters. The initial training cohort was scheduled for the winter session to coincide with a time of year when many agricultural workers served by OIC are on temporary layoff.

OIC and the WorkSource center worked together to recruit students.

According to Leticia Torres, the adult, dislocated worker and youth program manager at WorkSource Columbia Basin, the staff coenrolled farmworkers in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act adult and dislocated worker program in order to provide supportive services.

### First Cohort Fully Employed

An original cohort of 14 students completed the program and found jobs soon after graduation (two actually had landed jobs during their short studies, finding employers willing to schedule them to accommodate the training).

Average hourly wages went from \$16 to \$36, according to Thatcher.

“We considered it to be very, very successful,” she said.

This success was taken as proof of concept for a one-off effort.

The college has kept the Basic Industrial Maintenance program in its catalog, offering everyone the four classes that make up the program throughout the year. The one-stop and farmworker program now pay for participants to enroll on an individual basis. The college has also structured these courses as part of Washington state’s Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training initiative, which brings adult education instruction into technical classrooms and recruits students from English language classes.

According to Thatcher, the school is using the short-term maintenance program as a “stepping stone” into for-credit programs for farmworkers and other low-skilled, low-income people.

The school has since introduced a for-credit Industrial Technology Certificate that carries 13 to 19 credits, depending on the combination of classes taken. If students have completed, for example, the blueprint reading class from the noncredit mainte-

nance program, they do not need to retake it if they pursue the for-credit certificate.

“The big takeaway is that you offered a lot of flexibility and tried to meet your students where they were at, which is really critical for career pathways design,” Hastings told the workforce partners.

✓ Find ETA’s Career Pathways Toolkit at [careerpathways.workforceceps.org](http://careerpathways.workforceceps.org).

—Ryan Hess

## Higher Education Act Reauthorization

### WORK EXPERIENCE LEARNING STEERS POSTSECONDARY ED BILL

Strengthening workforce development was the first bullet point House Republicans listed on a summary of their new Higher Education Act reauthorization bill; it would authorize a new grant program for work-based education, including apprenticeships.

The legislation would also allow schools to structure more work-study jobs with private sector employers and make several significant changes to Pell grants, including allowing them to cover more short-term training programs.

The bill would also restructure HEA accountability by implementing program-level student loan repayment thresholds for financial aid eligibility in place of school-level repayment monitoring. This would cut off funds to particular programs that produce struggling students rather than schools as a whole.

The bill would end the gainful employment regulation designed by the Obama Administration to police occupational training programs, but the new provisions would leave a conceptually similar mechanism in its place.

As a whole, the 542-page HEA bill received mixed reviews from postsecondary education stakeholders and drew objections from Democrats.

Republicans framed their plan, in several ways, around connecting federal investments in postsecondary education with employment outcomes.

Committee on Education and the Workforce Chairwoman Virginia Foxx (R-NC) and Higher Education and Workforce Development Subcommittee Chairman Brett Guthrie (R-Ky) introduced the Promoting Real Opportunity, Success and Prosperity through Education Reform Act, HR 4508, on Dec. 1.

“With six million unfilled jobs and over a trillion dollars in student debt, simply reauthorizing the Higher Education Act will help no one. A hard truth that students, families and institutions must face is that the promise of a postsecondary education is broken. We need a higher education system that is designed to meet the needs of today’s students and has the flexibility to innovate for tomorrow’s workforce