



Re-Engaging Adult Learners with Some College but No Credential in Pennsylvania

A Playbook

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ITHAKA S+R

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Executive summary

This playbook is designed to help institutions think about the key strategies and concrete next steps to engage and support adult learners from pre-enrollment through credential completion. It is organized around four areas of impact in the adult learner re-enrollment journey, which guided the year-long Pennsylvania Adult Learner Re-Engagement Community of Practice. Over 50 institutions were represented in the community of practice, including public and private four-year colleges, community colleges, occupational training providers, and more. From those institutions, nearly 100 vice presidents, directors, deans, and other professionals joined, representing functional areas from admissions and enrollment to adult learner services, advising, and financial aid. Participants set goals to improve adult learner enrollment and support at their own institutions. The key strategies outlined below draw from the progress participants made towards their goals, as well as the promising practices and challenges that they shared throughout the community of practice.

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Key strategies to support adult learner re-enrollment

1. **Assess and identify:** Identify and remove barriers to enrollment, particularly administrative holds.
2. **Connect and engage:** Develop effective messaging and use the appropriate tools to reach adult learners.
3. **Finance and sustain:** Reduce the financial burden of college through basic needs resources, debt relief options, and more.
4. **Support and graduate:** Decrease re-enrolled students' time to credential and meet their flexibility and career needs.

Introduction

About the community of practice

Higher education institutions across Pennsylvania are increasingly prioritizing support for adult learners with some college but no credential to enroll and graduate. While many individual institutions are engaged in this work, few opportunities exist to come together, discuss successes and challenges, and share resources. The Pennsylvania Adult Learner Re-Engagement Community of Practice was a year-long program that brought together higher education leaders across the Commonwealth to improve adult learner enrollment and support. Over 100 individuals across 50 institutions participated in the community of practice, meeting four times over the year to share their success, troubleshoot challenges, and learn from research and programs in the field. Participants set a goal related to improving adult learner enrollment and support at their own institutions, completing regular check-ins between meetings to reflect on their progress and outline next steps. The community of practice structure enabled institutions to achieve ambitious goals that positively impact adult learners across the state.

With support from the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE), Ithaka S+R facilitated the community of practice. Ithaka S+R is a nonprofit that is dedicated to increasing access to higher education and improving student outcomes through research and strategic advising. Ithaka S+R is a leader in adult learner enrollment research and programs, providing national research studies,¹ state-wide implementations,² and technical assistance.³ The Pennsylvania Department of Education oversees public schools and education serving over 1.7 million students across 500 districts.⁴ Pennsylvania is home to 15 community colleges, 10 state owned universities, four state-related universities, and nearly 100 independent non-profit colleges and universities, collectively serving nearly 450,000 postsecondary students. State financial aid administration is led by the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA) with whom PDE partners on strategy and communications to ensure Pennsylvania students and families receive assistance needed to access state, federal, and institutional aid. Through generous funding

from Lumina Foundation, institutions participated in the community of practice at no cost.

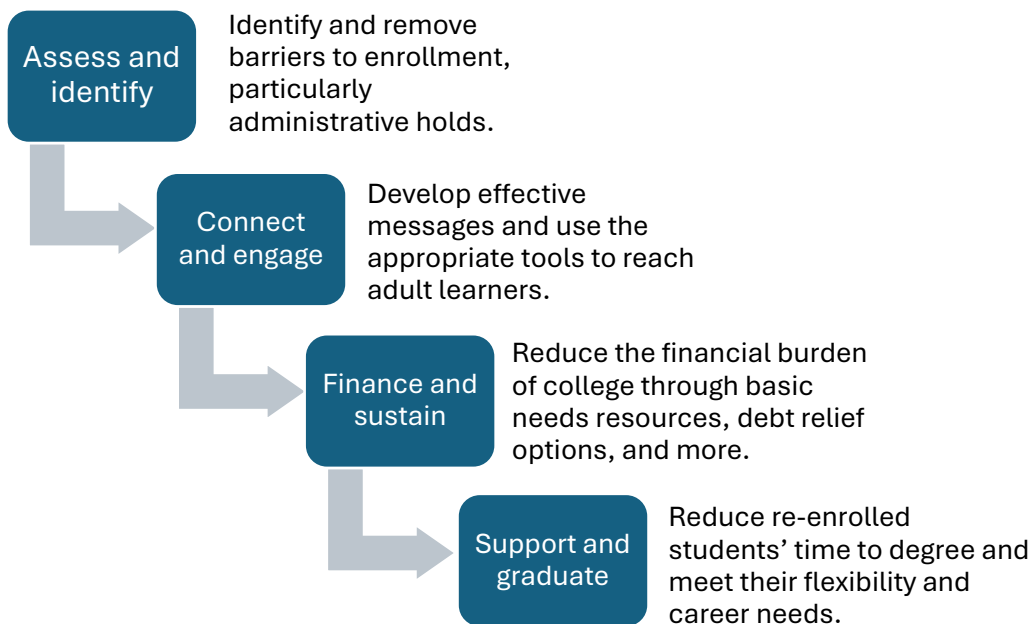
About this playbook

This playbook grew out of the promising practices shared throughout the year-long engagement in presentations, small group discussions, and goal progress surveys. Our intention is to make the key strategies and opportunities in the playbook applicable to practitioners and leaders nationally. This playbook is divided into four sections that reflect stages of the adult learner re-enrollment path, represented in figure 1.

Each of the sections include:

- **Key strategies** - overarching goals that institutions can focus on to support adult learners.
- **Actionable next-steps** - action items institutions can implement to achieve the overarching goals.
- **Institutional examples** - success story highlights from the community of practice and Ithaka S+R's related research.
- **Tools and resources** - links and citations to further reading and examples related to the section.

Figure 1. The adult learner re-enrollment path





1. **Assess and identify** outlines how to identify and remove barriers to enrollment, specifically administrative holds. The strategies in this section will help institutions make administrative holds easier for students and staff to resolve, setting a foundation for successful re-enrollment.



2. **Connect and engage** includes messaging and communication strategies to reach adults who have stopped out. Drawing from national research and institutional success stories, the strategies in this section will help institutions craft effective messaging and outreach plans for prospective adult learners.



3. **Finance and sustain** outlines several opportunities to reduce the financial burden of attending college. Strategies include managing past due balances, communicating clearly about aid eligibility and processes, creating student-centered financial aid appeal processes, and providing targeted resources to help students stay enrolled.



4. **Support and graduate** focuses on ways to align programs with students' scheduling needs and help students reduce time to completion. The strategies in this section include reviewing course offerings for alternative formats and improving credit mobility processes.

The importance of focusing on adult learners

There are 37.6 million adults under age 65 in the United States who have earned some college credit but no credential (SCNC), including more than one million in Pennsylvania.⁵ These individuals have invested significant time, money, and effort in higher education, yet they do not experience the same lifetime earnings and opportunities as those who complete a credential. Understanding the enrollment patterns and backgrounds of adults with SCNC can help institutions and policy makers design better re-enrollment and support programs. Nationally, 69 percent of adults with SCNC previously attended public two-year or primarily associate degree granting institutions, 16 percent previously attended public four-year institutions, and 7 percent attended private nonprofit four-year institutions.⁶ The demographics of adults with SCNC also reflect longstanding inequities in college completion. Students who are first-generation or from low-income backgrounds have historically been more likely to stop out of college. Both nationally and in Pennsylvania, Black individuals are overrepresented in the SCNC population compared to the overall undergraduate population.⁷ Additionally, many of these learners have earned credits at multiple institutions, are working full- or part-time, and are parents or caregivers. Altogether, they face similar barriers to re-enrollment, including administrative holds, limited financial resources, and competing priorities. With effective strategies in place, however, adults can return to college to finish what they started and earn valuable credentials.

When the right solutions are put into place, adults are able to re-enroll and thrive, earning meaningful credentials and degrees.

As institutions face declining enrollment for first-time students, reaching prospective adult learners is crucial to meeting enrollment and completion goals. Moreover, under the US Department of Education's regulation limiting an institution's ability to withhold transcripts for past due balances, many students may now be able to access their transcripts and have the option to transfer to a new institution—but still be unable to enroll at their former institution due to a registration hold.⁸ With more potential options for adult learners to apply their transfer credits and experiences towards a credential, institutions have an opportunity to

position themselves as the top option for returning students, particularly for former students who stopped out.

Regional workforces and state economies also benefit when adults are able to complete the credentials they need to keep pace with a changing economy. Across the US, the number of jobs that will require a degree is predicted to exceed the number of credentialed workers in the near future, and increasing the number of adults with a credential is a vital step to meeting these workforce demands. In Pennsylvania alone, there is projected to be a shortage of 218,000 workers with postsecondary credentials by 2032, concentrated in the managerial, healthcare, education, STEM, community services, and trade occupations.⁹ Increasing adult learner attainment is one important strategy for closing this credential gap within Pennsylvania.¹⁰



1. Assess and identify

Before re-engaging students who have stopped out, institutions should first identify and understand the records of the students they aim to reach. In addition to basic contact information, this includes reviewing academic standing, administrative holds, and outstanding balances. Collecting this information helps target outreach efforts and ensures processes are in place to reduce barriers to enrollment.

Without these systems, returning students with unresolved holds may face confusion, delays, or be unable to enroll. Removing administrative barriers and streamlining hold resolution are essential to supporting enrollment. The strategies in this section require open communication and collaboration across departments to ensure that both staff and prospective students have access to accurate information about students and their accounts.

Gather information on stopped out students

Identifying stopped out students with holds will require coordination across offices to ensure that institutions are engaging students who may be more inclined to return.

Next step: Work across departments to identify available information

- Determine the subset of former students you are most interested in learning more about. This process may be partially guided by technological capability—for example, how far back institutional records go at your institution.
- Connect with the appropriate offices, often institutional research (IR) but also the registrar and bursar offices, to gather the academic and financial information on students who have stopped out of your institution. Many key data points can help you determine how to best engage and support these students: their

contact information, credits earned, GPA, and any administrative holds and past due balances.

Designing a re-enrollment plan at Carlow University. Carlow University's Office of Student Retention (OSR) was charged by the administration with developing an outreach plan to re-engage students who had stopped out. After consulting with other offices, they narrowed in on students who had not registered for four consecutive terms but had never completed a withdrawal, had been gone fewer than five years, were in good academic standing, owed less than \$5,000, and were within two to three semesters of degree completion. They worked with IT and other departments to identify students, removing students who had graduated elsewhere, were no longer eligible for their degree programs, had run out of financial aid eligibility, or were unlikely to return. They began outreach in July 2025, with OSR staff helping to tailor individualized outreach messages via mail and directing students to Admissions. Currently, they are gathering feedback from faculty program coordinators regarding the specific path to completion for students, sharing that with the admissions counselors who will work with students choosing to re-enroll. The OSR will assess and expand outreach to more students based on the results from this initial group.

Simplify administrative holds

Institutions will also need the right infrastructure in place to simplify the process for addressing administrative holds that can prevent enrollment. While simplifying holds can require substantial staff time, knowledge and coordination upfront, the changes can reduce the capacity needed to navigate the hold process later on.

Next step: Ensure holds are consistent, appropriate, and coordinated

- Conduct a hold audit across appropriate offices to review the full spectrum of holds applied to student accounts.
- Determine which holds are outdated, unnecessary, or could be adjusted to better align with departmental needs, and make the necessary revisions.

- Establish coordination between offices that place holds and student-facing offices that interact with returning students so that there is open communication to resolve holds.
- Include departmental contact information and next steps under the hold indicator so students know how to resolve the hold.

Identifying opportunities for student re-enrollment and retention at Elizabethtown College. Elizabethtown College created the Student Retention Task Force, with representatives from admissions, operations, programs and curriculum, advising, and institutional research, to conduct a value stream mapping of the student experience from the initial point of contact to matriculation to graduation. The task force surveyed currently enrolled students, those who stepped out for a semester and are still considered active, and those who exited, to understand population details and factors that contribute to students stopping out. The task force will next look across these components to identify what's working well, any gaps, and duplicate work as they work to increase re-enrollment and boost student retention.

Provide returning students with access to their information

A common challenge for returning students is the inability to access their online portal to view information that can impact their decision to enroll. They may want to review earned credits, check their transcript, or identify and resolve holds, but without access, this becomes difficult. Even when they can view the information, students are often unsure whom to contact for assistance. Once your institution understands how access to this information can impact prospective students, it's important to ensure that staff have access to student records and that students are clearly directed to the appropriate point of contact for support.

Next step: Implement student-centered communication strategies

- Create a dedicated contact or team for prospective returning students who can see students' holds and can provide guidance on how to resolve them. This contact could be a staff member or a larger office, depending on your institution's resources.
- Provide flexible communication options (e.g., Zoom drop-in hours after 5pm) to give students who work during regular hours an opportunity to discuss their hold resolutions.

Streamlining enrollment process for returning adult learners at Cedar Crest College. Cedar Crest College was initially interested in simply identifying stopped out students. After conversations with the admissions, registrar and academic services offices to understand existing policies and procedures for re-enrolling stopped out students, they developed a single process for re-enrollment that is aligned with established processes. To support this process, they created an online form for stopped out students to initiate the re-enrollment process. Additionally, the form and its accompanying communication provides clarification about the process for stopped out students interested in returning. They worked with the marketing and communications team to add the form to the college website in June 2025.

Key stakeholders and roles

While the office that is leading adult learner re-engagement efforts can vary by institution, coordination with other departments is crucial to assess former students for outreach and make determinations about administrative holds.

- **Bursar or Student Accounts:** The office will have information about students' past due balances.
- **Enrollment Management:** This office may also have data on the students most at risk for withdrawing or stopping out, as well as the students most likely to return.
- **Information Technology:** The office can also be helpful in reviewing and consolidating administrative holds on the back end.

- Institutional Research: This office will likely have the most comprehensive data regarding students who have stopped out. This information could be combined with student-specific data in other offices to develop a robust list of potential students to reach out to.
- Registrar: This office usually oversees student records and should have information on grades, the number of accumulated credits, and remaining academic requirements for stopped out students.

Tools and resources

- [Ithaka S+R's Supporting Adult Learner Re-Engagement in Kentucky](#).¹¹ This brief outlines key insights on the salient challenges faced by students and institutions (administrative holds, past due balances and the changing landscape of some credit no credential enrollment) and offers potential solutions for other states interested in supporting returning students.
- [InsideTrack's Institutional Readiness Checklist](#).¹² This checklist (on page 21 of the report) includes questions to help institution leaders assess whether an institution has the infrastructure and resources to re-engage and re-enroll adult learners.
- [AACRAO and WICHE, Technical Guide for Assessing Administrative Holds with Data](#).¹³ As part of Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) *No Holding Back project*,¹⁴ this technical guide and Excel workbook are tools that can be used to assess administrative holds. It also provides guidance for performing analyses.
- [AACRAO + NACUBO, Joint Statement on Administrative Holds](#).¹⁵ The American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers and National Association of College and University Business Officers shared a joint statement that includes general guidance on student-success and administrative-process holds and the use of holds tied to past due balances.



2. Connect and engage

Finding an effective approach to messaging and outreach can help your institution connect with prospective adult students who are interested in returning to college. This section presents three key strategies to help your institution engage students with some college but no credential. Underlying all of these strategies is the common need to recognize the unique positions of adult learners and meet them where they are. Small changes to websites, marketing materials, and staff training can increase feelings of belonging for adult learners.

Focus messaging on adult learners' needs and motivations

Your institution may need to adapt your marketing materials and messaging strategies to reach adult learners. Consider ways to frame the benefits of re-enrolling to align with adult students' interests, including personal motivation and career advancement. Make sure that relevant resources are available to prospective returning students—including financial aid, admissions instructions, and degree programs. Finally, design outreach strategies that give prospective returning students multiple opportunities to consider enrollment.

Next step: Create or revise a landing page for adult learners

- If a prospective adult learner visits your college or university's website, what will they see? Working with your marketing team to design a dedicated landing page for adult and returning learners signals that they are welcomed, valued, and supported at your institution. This page should affirm the unique skills and experiences adult learners bring by featuring credit articulation, credit for prior learning, and common motivations for returning, such as finishing what they started and advancing in their careers.
- The page should also clearly outline next steps for enrollment, helping reduce confusion and lower barriers. Adult learners may have many questions as they view your landing page: Is the

application process different for re-enrolling students? How can learners transfer credit from other institutions? What sort of programs are available for individuals with prior work or military experience? What financial aid options exist for adults? Your landing page can welcome students to your institution, simplify next steps for enrollment, and connect them to the many resources and offices available on campus.

Next step: Design an outreach strategy that reaches students through multiple channels

Outreach strategies that include emails, text messages, and social media can help you connect with prospective students. Emails and text messages can take a more personalized approach by targeting students based on their major or accumulated credit amount, providing tailored next steps and contact information for re-enrollment. Using personal email addresses is important because college email addresses may be inactive. If your institution does not collect personal email addresses from students, third-party services can be used to identify them. Social media posts can reach more prospective students by advertising specific in-demand programs or financial aid opportunities.

Creating and revising adult student-oriented webpages

Northampton Community College. Northampton Community College worked with the Adult Student Enrollment Committee to inform the changes to student-facing webpages. They used survey data collected from returning students to determine the key resources to feature on that page. Their research found that many resources that adult and traditional-aged students rely on are the same, but the messaging to make these resources relatable to adult students needed to be changed. Next, the college's marketing department began making updates to the adult student webpage based on the collaborative conversations. The marketing department also worked with an external company specializing in search engine optimization to make content more visible to students using search engines. The Adult Student Enrollment Committee has been especially helpful in providing consistent support to adult students. Following the website redesign, the committee plans to focus on expanding the hours for student services into evenings and virtual appointments.

Muhlenberg College. At Muhlenberg College, what began as a landing page update for re-enrolling adult students has evolved into a full website redesign. Limitations with the existing content management system prompted a larger effort to build a new, fully integrated site that features an enhanced program finder and AI-optimized search functionality. Incremental updates, including optimized content templates, laid the groundwork for a platform that now spans all academic departments, enabling greater functionality and cross-department integration. Future improvements will include a new CMS for easier updates and additionally will include social media integration, contact forms, analytics tracking, and third-party tool connections, with completion anticipated between Winter 2025 and Spring 2026.

Delaware Valley University: Delaware Valley University has undertaken a comprehensive project to enhance the accessibility, clarity, and effectiveness of its enrollment pathways for adult learners and part-time undergraduate students. As part of the coordinated efforts to reduce barriers, improve student support, and create a more seamless and student-centered experience from inquiry to graduation, the institution conducted a systematic review of all webpages targeted to adult and part-time learners to evaluate their clarity, navigational structure, and capacity to address the decision-making needs of prospective students. This review informed a revision process aimed at ensuring that web-based content is compelling, accessible, and effectively guides adult learners through the admissions and enrollment process. The revision process is currently underway.

Provide students with a main point of contact

After making initial contact with prospective returning students, provide a clear and consistent point of contact to ensure they receive the direct support, guidance and accurate information they need. The contact can also help build the student's trust in the institution and help them make the decision to re-enroll.

Next step: Establish an adult learner contact or team, or train staff to work with adult learners across the re-enrollment path

- Trained advisors that understand adult students' needs and experiences, and the available resources and programs at your institution, can help prospective returning students re-enroll and reach their goals. These relationships can be especially important as students navigate the complexities of financial aid, student support, credit mobility, and academics. Therefore, the advisors who students work with at the time of admission should also be connected to academic, support, and financial aid offices on campus, so they can best refer students to relevant services.
- Adult student-centered advising can be approached at multiple scales. Existing staff in the office that is receiving returning students can be trained on returning students' needs and available resources, or new positions can be created so these prospective students have a dedicated advisor. Coaching and advising can also be adopted at a system- or state-level, to help returning students determine which institution will be the best fit for them.

Next step: Train advisors on the resources to best serve adult learners, including knowledge of credit transfer and career advising

- Advisors play an important role in the college experience for many students, and this is especially true for adult learners. Coaching-style models can help prospective and re-enrolled students feel an increased sense of belonging at your institution, while also helping students make informed decisions about their schedule. Advisors can be valuable connectors to other support services and departments on campus, and can integrate career development discussions throughout their conversations with students. Training

advisors to meet adult learners' needs, including being knowledgeable about career services, credit for prior learning, and available student support, requires investing in professional development for advisors and ensuring information is readily accessible across your institution.

Next step: Enhance advising with tools like degree maps

- In a study of adults who returned to college and completed a degree or credential after previously stopping out, 72 percent of survey respondents reported that having a clear map of how to complete their degree was very helpful.¹⁶ Complete College America recommends degree maps be designed with input from across the institution, so that they go beyond visually laying out degree requirements to include information on pre-requisites, helpful electives, and career connections.¹⁷ With these tools, students and advisors can work together to identify opportunities for course flexibility, credit for prior learning, and transfer credits.

Developing multi-channel engagement at Holy Family University. Holy Family University sought to develop a multi-channel re-engagement plan for the Fall 2026 recruitment cycle based on the reasons that students stopped out, with the intention to recruit 15 to 30 students. By mid-winter, they identified the completion programs to format and market and started gathering campus champions. In the spring, they worked to further develop the programs.

Conduct targeted outreach

Focused outreach to students who have stopped out can help increase the likelihood of those students re-enrolling and conserve your institution's resources. You can use available student data to focus your institution's efforts on students who may be more inclined to re-enroll (like students who left with more completed credits). Developing relationships with local community-based organizations can also widen the pool of adults who may be interested in completing their credential or degree.

Next step: Identify prospective students

- In the section “Assess and identify,” we highlighted the importance of retaining a wide amount of information on students who enrolled and left your institution without completing a degree or credential, including credits accumulated, major, the amount and source of an unpaid balance, and any financial or administrative holds. You can also cross-reference this list with the National Student Clearinghouse to determine if any former students have enrolled in or completed a credential at another institution. With that information, you can start to design an outreach strategy that takes students’ backgrounds into consideration.
- For example, the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center has identified that students who are closer to finishing their degree and who have stopped out more recently are the students who are most likely to re-enroll.¹⁸ If your institution is reaching out to former students for the first time, these individuals may be a good group for you to focus your initial efforts.
- Prospective adult learners benefit from time and coaching when considering whether to re-enroll. Focusing outreach on an intentionally selected group of students can help ensure your institution can support students over multiple interactions as they make the decision to re-enroll.

Next step: Collaborate with other organizations to help identify and reach the right students

- Partnerships with community-based organizations can help your institution identify and conduct more outreach to individuals who are interested in completing their credential or degree. Working with these organizations can also help you to understand the student perspective on the re-enrollment journey and barriers they face.
- The Pittsburgh Scholar House’s Wayfinders Program uses a cohort-based model to connect single parents who are seeking a college degree with colleges in the Pittsburgh area, in addition to providing customized support services to help reduce barriers to re-enrollment.¹⁹
- Graduate Philadelphia works with thousands of degree- and skills-seeking adult learners to identify resources and services to support students as they navigate their options for credential or degree

attainment. They partner with colleges in the Philadelphia area to help adult learners who use their pre-enrollment and enrollment services to find the programs that suit their needs.²⁰

Identifying students at Pennsylvania Highlands Community College.

At Pennsylvania Highlands Community College, the regional center director, director of recruiting and admissions, and dean of enrollment services and registrar work together to increase adult learner enrollment and success. A variety of strategies were put into place, including strategically reaching out to formerly enrolled students, working with a vendor to identify individuals who might be interested in enrolling at Pennsylvania Highlands for the first time, and partnering with regional initiatives to better reach prospective students through college fairs.

Key stakeholders and roles

Successful messaging and outreach to adult learners will require coordination across a number of offices, including:

- **Admissions, Registrar, or Information Technology:** These offices may be able to access students' personal emails in the student information system.
- **Marketing:** This department might be involved in developing a tailored communication campaign to adult learners. They might also be integral to redesigning previous or creating new webpages to be more oriented to adult learners.
- **Student Services and Advising:** Depending on the institution, this may be the first office that interested adult learners interact with. Either way, this office will be an important part in helping to orient adult learners towards programs and institutional resources that can better serve them.

Tools and resources

- [ReUp Education, 3 Strategies to Welcome Adult Learners Back](#).²¹ This resource offers three high-level strategies for welcoming adult learners back to college and provides examples of their implementation at colleges and universities in New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, and Michigan.
- [InsideTrack: The Outreach Checklist: How to Identify the Most Viable Students to Re-Enroll](#).²² The checklist on page 26 of the report is designed to help community colleges identify which stopped out students are most likely to go back based on different characteristics (e.g., the student having a non .edu email address, having more credits, etc). Four-year colleges can use these characteristics to create their lists as well.
- [NC State University and Belk Center for Community College Leadership and Research, Adult Learner Guidebook](#).²³ This Adult Learner Guidebook, which synthesizes lessons from the NC Reconnect “Better Skills, Better Jobs” campaign that launched in 2021 to re-engage adult learners with some college credit but no degree or credential, includes 12 promising communications practices.
- [American Institutes for Research \(AIR\), Beyond the Basics: How Institution Websites Can Encourage Enrollment for Adult Learners](#).²⁴ This blog post offers several promising practices based on AIR’s review of 350 institutions’ websites.



3. Finance and sustain

Finances are one of the biggest barriers that lead to students stopping out and being unable to re-enroll. Specifically for individuals with some college but no credential, these financial obstacles often include past due balances from before students stopped out, difficulty applying for financial aid for the upcoming term, and recurring or sudden life expenses. This section provides solutions your institution can implement to support adult learners as they navigate the financial components of returning to college.

Create paths to re-enrollment for students with balances

Past due balances are a substantial barrier to re-enrollment for many prospective students. Ithaka S+R estimates there are over six million students who have stopped out with unpaid debt, with an average balance of \$2,300 per student.²⁵ For Pennsylvanians, the average balance for students who have stopped out of public four-year institutions is about \$4,000 and \$1,500 for those who have stopped out of public two-year institutions.²⁶ The data your institution gathered in section one can help you understand the scale of this challenge, including the average amount owed per student and the average amount collected once a student stops out. You can then review this information alongside your institution's policies on past due balances to implement strategies such as adjusting thresholds for registration holds and offering debt resolution solutions.

Next step: Adjust transcript and registration hold policies to help students re-enroll

- Transcript holds and registration holds can prevent students from continuing their education and furthering their careers. If former students can access their official transcripts and transfer but not re-enroll at your institution due to a registration hold, your

institution loses out on the potential tuition revenue and completion credit from that re-enrollment. Raising the threshold for registration holds can prevent students from stopping out and help students return, benefiting students and your institution.

Next step: Offer relief for unpaid balances

- Payment plans are one tool your institution can implement to help students stay enrolled or re-enroll after taking time away from school. Students can manage their outstanding debt over time through a payment plan without having to take additional time out of school due to a registration hold. Payment plans are also a strategy to keep debts from being transferred to external collection agencies, which can make debt resolution and re-enrollment more challenging.
- Balance resolution programs for relatively small amounts can have a large impact on students' ability to return and institutions' ability to collect new revenue. Research has shown that when programs are put in place to resolve institutional debt, students with unpaid balances are just as likely to return to college as their peers without this hurdle.²⁷ Moreover, the new tuition revenue generated by returning students is likely to far exceed any collection revenue that institutions might miss out on when debt is resolved, due to the low collection rate for institutional debt.

Fostering partnerships with a two-generation approach at Pittsburgh Scholar House.

Pittsburgh Scholar House uses the two-generation approach to ensure that single parents and their children have the resources they need to do well. They provide holistic support and enrichment opportunities to parents who are interested in returning to school through partnerships with institutions such as Community College of Allegheny County, Carlow University, Point Park University, and others.*

*Pittsburgh Scholar House, <https://pghscholarhouse.org/>.

Provide clear instructions for state and federal aid processes

Adult students will need clear information on their federal and state financial aid status and other aid options. They will also benefit from clear directions for having their financial aid eligibility restored if needed, as application and appeals processes likely have changed since the student last attended school. Providing this information early in the enrollment process can help students know how and if they can afford the classes they need for their credential.

Next step: Provide information on applications and eligibility

- For many returning adult learners, instructions for completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) have changed since they were last enrolled. There may also be new funding available, such as the Grow PA Scholarship Grant²⁸ or other field-specific funding opportunities.²⁹ Adult learner points of contact should be aware of the federal and state aid resources so they can provide guidance to students and connect them to offices that can support their specific needs.
- Returning adult students may also find that their federal aid eligibility has changed. For example, a student who was ineligible for need-based federal student aid at 18 may now be eligible as an older student. Alternatively, prospective returning students may be ineligible for additional federal aid if their loans are in default or if they have not met satisfactory academic progress (SAP) requirements. In either case, it is important for adult learner contacts to encourage students to check or verify their status so that learners can make informed decisions.

Next step: Ensure satisfactory academic progress requirements and appeals processes are clear and proactively communicated

- Satisfactory academic progress (SAP) is one of the biggest barriers to securing federal financial aid for adult learners. While federal law sets the minimum standards for SAP that individuals must meet to be eligible for financial aid, institutions are able to establish criteria beyond the minimum standards. If your institution sets criteria for SAP beyond what is federally required, adjusting

these criteria to align with the minimum federal standards may make education more affordable for returning students.

- When a student is unable to demonstrate SAP, they are no longer eligible for federal financial aid. However, they are able to appeal their status to their institution. Your institution can help make this process work for students in two ways. First, make the processes for alerting students that they are at risk of not meeting SAP requirements clear and accessible. Second, make sure your SAP appeals process is student-centered, with a review panel that is able to holistically understand the student's position and has efficient response times. The resource "Satisfactory Academic Progress: Making Financial Aid Work For Today's Students" provided below lists examples of how to do this, including alerting students of the SAP status every semester and having a fully online appeals process.

Providing basic needs at Bucks County Community College. Students have access to a range of supports at Bucks County Community College in Pennsylvania. Bucks County Community College has provided emergency aid grants to students facing unexpected hardships that could impact their ability to stay enrolled and succeed. Among other supports, students can request emergency funds to cover things like overdue bills, meet with economic self sufficiency coaches who will advise on acute and long-term financial planning, update their preferred name in college systems, and learn about childcare resources in the community.*

* "Basic Needs & Community Resources - Bucks County Community College," 2025, <https://www.bucks.edu/resources/basicneeds>.

Establish targeted financial support and basic needs resources

As financial barriers are the largest reason adults stop out, financial support after enrollment is crucial for persistence and completion. Targeted support through retention and emergency grants can help students remain enrolled when unexpected or recurring expenses come up. Additionally, institutions can connect students to on and off-campus resources that can help cover unmet basic needs.

Next step: Dedicate funding for retention and student emergencies

- Retention grants are dedicated funds designed to help students cover unmet tuition and fees. These funds can make a real difference in students' abilities to stay enrolled and eventually complete their credential. Ithaka S+R's evaluation of Georgia State University's Panther Retention Grant program found that the relatively small awards—up to \$2,500 per student—reduced students' time to degree as well as the cumulative debt taken on by students.³⁰
- Emergency grants offer targeted financial assistance to learners for expenses beyond tuition and fees as they arise in students' lives. These grants help students afford urgent life expenses while staying enrolled. An evaluation of the State University of New York's Student Emergency Fund (SUNY SEF) found that 94 percent of students receiving aid completed their program or re-enrolled in the following semester.³¹

Offering emergency grants at Peirce College. Peirce College, in Philadelphia, offers emergency aid grants for students who experience eligible financial expenses, such as utility bills, rent, food, healthcare, and childcare. Information for applying for the emergency grants is provided on the institution's financial aid website.*

*"Emergency Aid Grants for Students," Pierce at Lackawanna College, <https://www.peirce.edu/tuition-financial-aid/emergency-aid-options-at-peirce-college/emergency-aid-grants/>.

Next step: Connect students to on and off campus resources for unmet basic needs

- Your institution may already have a number of support services for students, but connecting students to those resources can be a challenge. In fact, not knowing about available support and struggling to navigate offices and departments on campus can be a substantial barrier for students to access the services they need.³² Ensure that your basic needs resources are provided with

student access in mind, including promoting and providing resources in accessible physical and digital spaces, minimizing barriers to applications where applicable, providing clear contact information and guidance for next steps, and enabling virtual and evening appointments.

- PA EmpowerU³³ is a statewide PDE initiative to support Pennsylvania postsecondary learners, meet their needs, and help them thrive in college, credential pathways, and their careers. Driven by a network of student and practitioner experts, PA EmpowerU organizes events, media campaigns and a clearinghouse of resources for student success across PA campuses. Additionally, PDE administers targeted grants designed to address essential needs such as (It's On Us PA³⁴) to protect students from sexual violence, (Hunger-Free Campus Initiative³⁵) to mitigate food insecurity, and (PA Parent Pathways Initiative³⁶) to support student parents across the Commonwealth.

Supporting students at Pennsylvania Highlands Community College. The college provides a number of services to students to help ensure their success, including flexible payment options to eligible students with past due balances through the Black Bear Begin Again program,^{*} a full-time social worker that students can meet with, essential hygiene products, and a food pantry. Many students are also enrolled in the state-wide Keystone Education Yields Success (KEYS) program,^{**} which provides students facing financial challenges with resources for the costs of college outside of tuition, including transportation, technology, and course materials.

^{*}“Black Bear Begin Again Program,” Pennsylvania Highlands Community College, <https://www.pennhighlands.edu/admissions/registration/black-bear-begin-again/>.

^{**}“KEYS,” Pennsylvania Highlands Community College, <https://www.pennhighlands.edu/student-life/keys/>.

Key stakeholders and roles

Implementing these strategies and next steps will require institutional buy-in and coordination at multiple levels. Developing awareness among office staff of the circumstances of adult learners may increase their openness to helping these students re-enroll. The office or point of contact in charge

of engaging with adult learners will want to have regular communication and build connections with the staff in the offices described below:

- **Bursar or Student Accounts:** The bursar or student accounts offices may be able to remove balance-related holds after payment is received and develop payment plans for students with balances. This office may also eventually send debt to collections after a set period of time.
- **Financial Aid:** Financial aid may be authorized to use certain awards towards the outstanding balance and should have most of the information on potential grants for adult learners, federal aid and state aid options, SAP appeal, and emergency grants. They may also handle holds related to financial aid or scholarship disbursement.
- **Registrar:** Registrar offices may be involved in setting new policies and practices for holds, including lifting registration holds or changing the thresholds for holds.
- **Student Support Services:** This office may also have information on emergency aid that an adult learner point of contact or office can direct students towards.

Tools and resources

- [Ithaka S+R Outcomes for Ohio College Comeback Compact](#).³⁷ This blog discusses the positive student outcomes for stopped out students who returned to college through the Ohio College Comeback Compact and the return on investment for institutions who resolved the debt of Compact-eligible students.
- [ReUp Education, Overcoming FAFSA Hurdles for Adult Learners](#).³⁸ This resource provides institution-focused strategies to encourage adult learners to complete the FAFSA form and build their confidence as they navigate the process.
- [Higher Learning Advocates, Satisfactory Academic Progress: Making Financial Aid Work for Today's Students](#).³⁹ This brief provides an overview of the impact of losing SAP eligibility on students who want to return, the special circumstances that warrant an appeal, and some innovative solutions to SAP challenges implemented by an Ohio community college and the state of Indiana.

- [The Kresge Foundation, Nashville Flex: Redesigning Policies to Better Serve the Part-Time College Student](#).⁴⁰ This blog post describes the Nashville Flex program, which provides students enrolled part-time with wraparound support, including financial resources and personalized guidance to help them succeed.
- [University of California Basic Needs Initiative](#).⁴¹ The UC system offers comprehensive basic needs services to their students on all campuses through on-site centers offering food, emergency housing and a variety of other support services including nutrition counseling, tenants' rights workshops, financial and mental wellness resources.
- [PA EmpowerU, Resources for Pennsylvania College Students Basic Needs](#).⁴² This student-facing resource provides information on a variety of topics including health services, social services, financial aid. It also includes specific resources organized by institution and PA EmpowerU basic needs framework categories.
- [Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, Pennsylvania Parent Pathways Learning Network Policy Report](#).⁴³ This report provides detailed recommendations at the level of postsecondary institutions and at the state policy level for bolstering services addressing food, housing, childcare, and financial aid for parenting students.



4. Support and graduate

Returning students may have questions about the duration of degree programs, course modality and timing, and, in some cases, the career-specific pathways of the program. Providing opportunities for adult learners to streamline their path to completion, enroll in courses that are formatted to fit into their lives, and connect to career opportunities can help them make the decision to re-enroll and remain enrolled once they start their classes. Students may also benefit from support services that will help them navigate their various responsibilities and needs as they return and work towards completion (e.g., advising, tutoring, counseling). This section outlines strategies and next steps for structuring pre- and post-enrollment supports to assist adult learners towards completion.

Revise course policies to increase flexibility

Where possible, policies on credit attainment and course offerings for adult students should be oriented towards streamlining time to credential completion. Offering courses in formats that facilitate their attendance can also help students reduce the amount of time they spend in the program. Programs that can create clear, tangible benefits after their completion can also provide students with added motivation to complete.

Next step: Offer flexibility to adult learners through online and hybrid courses, evening and weekend classes, and accelerated semesters

- Results from surveyed adult learners often indicate that their preferred format is either hybrid or remote, likely because many adult learners who are working toward a credential also may be working or taking care of their children and/or parents.⁴⁴ The 14-16 week class schedules are not always ideal for learners who already have full schedules and cannot devote multiple days a week to class time. Consider which existing programs could be provided in more flexible formats or on different schedules, such

as night courses at coordinated times or half-term accelerated courses that can help learners focus on one course at a time without slowing down their time to credential completion. Identifying these programs and expanding format offerings will require close conversations with faculty to create necessary buy-in to develop and staff the courses.

Next step: Review and design policies to offer credit for prior learning and credit mobility

- Adult learners often have a wealth of experiences through work, military service or previous academic institutions that could be applied towards a degree, provided they are aware of their options and the process for using them is clear. Using the holistic credit mobility framework, institutions can implement and promote policies that mitigate credit loss by focusing on what students learned and not where they learned it.⁴⁵ Here, the student advisor plays an important role in helping students identify their options for assessing prior learning and experiences toward the desired credential.
- Because learners often accumulate credits from multiple sources, institutions, especially those in the same geographic area, may benefit from collaborating in new ways if students are likely to transfer between them. Look into whether your state or system has a credit mobility initiative you can participate in. Pennsylvania utilizes the Transfer and Articulation Oversight Committee (TAOC) to coordinate transfer opportunities between participating institutions. If your institution is based in Pennsylvania and is not already a member, consider joining to partner in the standardization of transfer of credit and exam and shared credit equivalency resources available to all students and advisors. Additionally, national technical assistance programs, like Ithaka S+R's National Holistic Credit Mobility Acceleration Cohort,⁴⁶ provide technical assistance and implementation support for collaborative improvements to credit mobility. As part of the National Holistic Credit Mobility Acceleration Cohort, the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) is collaborating with representatives from state community colleges to share best practices and ultimately implement strategies that support flexible and equitable credit mobility pathways for postsecondary students in the Commonwealth.

Establishing structural changes, integrated services and collaboration at Muhlenberg College. To better support returning adult learners, Muhlenberg College formed a cross-departmental committee to improve transfer credit evaluation and prior learning assessment processes, while also coordinating communication between financial aid, the registrar, and academic affairs to ensure cohesive adult student support. The graduate and continuing education unit is now re-integrating key services like student accounting, IT, and marketing into their originating departments to reduce duplication and enhance quality. Cultural change is a core part of the effort, as the unit continues to provide centralized programmatic oversight while departments take on more direct service responsibilities. Through structural realignment, improved coordination and performance measurement shifts, this initiative aims to create a streamlined, inclusive, and results-driven approach to serving adult students.

Create alignment with students' career goals

Many factors motivate adult learners to return to school to finish a credential, including furthering their careers. Additionally, colleges and universities across the US are positioned to help address workforce needs by training students in high-demand fields. Your institution can help returning students apply their education to their careers through partnerships with employers and intentional career advising.

Next step: Develop partnerships with employers, local organizations, and regional and state initiatives.

- Through partnerships with employers, regional development alliances, and community development organizations, your institution can connect students with job opportunities and build relationships with individuals who may be prospective students. The Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry offers a number of services to support these partnerships, such as the PAsmart Industry Partnership Grants.⁴⁷ Local organizations, like Graduate Philadelphia,⁴⁸ can also help students thrive academically and in the workforce through coaching and support. Partnerships like one between Pennsylvania Highlands Community College and Johnstown Area Regional Industries (JARI),⁴⁹ can also

help institutions reach individuals who are interested in learning new skills for their career development.

Building partnerships with employers at Delaware County Community College.

Delaware County Community College has partnered with Delaware County to address the shortage of social workers by providing tuition assistance. This initiative is aimed at readmitting adult learners who left college due to financial constraints after completing their general education requirements. The goal of this partnership is to help these students complete their education and secure employment in social work. Upon program completion, these students are guaranteed a first-right-of-refusal job interview, ensuring they are given priority for employment opportunities. This initiative not only supports the students but also helps the county obtain qualified social work employees. Nearly 60 students are currently in the enrollment process, ready to begin in Fall 2025.

Next step: Provide intentional career advising to help students connect their academics to career goals and opportunities.

- Intentional career advising can help adult learners stay motivated towards degree completion and find success post-graduation. In addition to providing institution-specific information in order to help learners choose degree paths and schedules that align with their goals, career advising should provide job titles, salary expectations, and hiring rates when available to help students make informed decisions about career options. Advisors can also connect students to resources that can help them with their degree goals, such as the Grow PA Grant Program,⁵⁰ which provides grants of up to \$5,000 per year to students enrolled in eligible programs and live and work in Pennsylvania following graduation.

Evaluating degree programs for adult learners at Holy Family University.

Holy Family University wanted to assess existing programs to understand which would be most beneficial to adult learners and provide them with workforce-ready degrees. Part of this goal involved evaluating how to support adult learners with corporate partnership opportunities. During the summer, they started to develop a timeline for curriculum development.

Ensure students are aware of support services

Adult learners' ability to achieve academic success often requires them to balance many competing responsibilities and demands on their time. Students returning to school lead robust lives and supporting them in different facets of their life can lead to increased chances of academic success. Returning students may not be aware of the variety of supports their institutions already offer. You can improve your adult learners' odds of achieving academic success by offering an array of support services and by ensuring they're visible and accessible.

Next step: Identify and advertise support services at your institution that can benefit returning students.

- Counseling and psychological services are common on many campuses today and can support students' overall well-being through individual appointments, group counseling, skill-building, and wellness workshops.
- On-campus childcare services can be a huge support for parenting students. Women's resource centers may exist on your campus and may offer support for parenting students if a standalone childcare program doesn't exist.
- Campus writing centers can offer support throughout the stages of the writing process. Tutoring support may be found as a standalone center on campus and specific departments may have additional tutoring options (e.g. math-specific tutors coordinated by the math department).
- Academic advising can be an important resource for students as they navigate course selection, registration, and program

requirements. Students may have access to program-specific advising in addition to a more general office of academic advising. The program-specific advisors may be increasingly helpful as students approach graduation.

Realigning administrative processes and advising models at Delaware Valley

University: In Fall 2025, Delaware Valley University restructured its administrative processes to better serve adult and part-time learners. Admissions for part-time undergraduate degree-seeking and undergraduate certificate programs were transitioned from a separate Continuing & Professional Studies unit to University Undergraduate Admissions, enabling stronger systems, personalized communications and expanded resources for recruitment and enrollment. The advising model shifted from a single generalist coordinator to faculty advisors who serve full-time undergraduate students, ensuring students receive consistent guidance that reflects current course offerings, disciplinary expectations, and career outcomes. Through these structural and process improvements, the institution has sought to create a more coherent, equitable, and supportive pathway for adult learners with some college but no credential to return, persist, and successfully complete their undergraduate education.

Key stakeholders and roles

Synchronizing academic offerings with adult learners' needs and priorities may require high-level institutional commitment from departments and offices focused on credit evaluation and program development. In addition to coordination between institutions that students frequently transfer between, coordination among the institutional offices described below will be necessary for more seamless credit evaluation and clear workforce outcomes to be a reality for adult learners.

- **Academic departments:** Faculty often evaluate portfolios, challenge exams, and other forms of assessment for credit evaluation. Creating articulation agreements between institutions can also involve faculty from the institutions meeting to better understand each others' curricula. Deans and professors can also be consulted about the more feasible ways of developing courses preferred formats and timelines.

- **Advising:** Whether devoted advisors or faculty with student advising duties, these individuals should be well-versed in the needs of adult learners and help them to navigate systems differently from traditional students. Ensuring advisors are well-versed in the institutional support services means they can share complete and up to date information on available resources with students.
- **Career Development or Workforce Development and Training:** These offices likely have information and connections to local employers who want their workforces to earn credentials and are looking for program partnerships to do that. These offices may also be the place to begin developing partnerships with employers that adult learners can leverage.
- **Prior Learning Assessment:** Other offices may evaluate forms of learning that are not transfer credits from other institutions (military experience, work experience, etc.)
- **Registrar and Admissions:** These offices can be responsible for evaluating transfer credits from other institutions.

Tools and resources

- [PA College Transfer \(currently PA TRAC⁵¹\)](#). This site provides search tools for students and advisors to easily see how prior academic credits and exams will transfer to participating Pennsylvania institutions. Users can search each course individually or register to enter a full transcript, compare transfer schools, and share a personalized transfer credit mapping.
- [Ithaka S+R, Holistic Credit Mobility Strategies in Action: A Case Study Report on State, System, and Institutional Efforts to Smooth the Path to a College Degree for Mobile Students.](#)⁵² This report provides insights from interviews with stakeholders from state systems and institutions on the policies, practices, and technologies they have implemented to improve credit mobility.
- [American Council on Education \(ACE\), Effective Practices that Support Adult Learners.](#)⁵³ The database includes a growing list of institutional programs and services that support adult learners and highlights the specific program focus and components that are best suited for them.
- [Baker Tilly, Postsecondary Credential Workforce Gap Analysis Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.](#)⁵⁴ The report analyzes workforce credential gaps by credential type and by different regions of

Pennsylvania. It also provides 2032 projections of the shortage in workers with postsecondary skills and credentials, and the number of jobs that will require these skills.

- [Jobs for the Future \(JFF\), Meet Adult Learners, and All Students, Where They Are.](#)⁵⁵ This report shares five key recommendations on how to support adult learner success through advising, drawing on focus groups and surveys with adult learners and advisers across three states.

Strategies to overcome anticipated challenges

The community of practice revealed insights into the challenges that come up as individuals and teams work to improve adult learner experiences at their institution, as well as solutions that can be implemented to overcome these challenges. Below, we highlight three challenges that participants faced and the strategies they employed to move forward.

Assess all possible stakeholders. Map processes from outreach to credential completion to understand the many stakeholders involved in the adult learner experience.

There is no one office who can be responsible for all of the many parts of a returning student's journey. In addition to small scale process improvements, take a holistic approach to understand which individuals and departments are involved and when. This process will not only help you better understand and support the student experience, it will also help you better collaborate across departments.

“We have needed to work with more offices than we initially thought to make sure our process would align with already established processes.”

Build institutional buy-in early. Gain buy-in across your institution by connecting the importance of supporting adult learners to your institution's goals.

Improving engagement and support for adult learners with some college but no credential has benefits across the institution, including student success, enrollment, credential completion, revenue, community impact, and more. The need to prioritize adult learners, however, is not always clear to leadership and other stakeholders balancing multiple priorities. You can build buy-in across your institution by engaging in ongoing conversation and connecting data on the impacts of adult learner engagement to your institution's goals. This process will take time, but even small changes can facilitate greater collaboration.

“This is a cultural change on campus and we will continue to face barriers as people adjust to the new way. We have the support of our Registrar's Office who will help funnel students to the [new process], and plan to work on marketing the new plan over the school year to faculty.”

Build in accountability and touchpoints. Give your projects enough time and establish regular check-ins and clear responsibilities.

Working across departments on new projects can take time and require coordination. Participants shared with us that they were making slower progress towards their goals than they would like, and that while collaborators were enthusiastic about the work, other priorities sometimes won out over new projects. We heard from participants that the year-long structure of the community of practice helped them maintain momentum to revisit their work over time. Participants also leveraged the SMART goal framework to create smaller milestones throughout the year, and created regular check-ins with their collaborators.

“We set up scheduled meetings to check in and make sure we have a deliverable presentation for internal and external stakeholders.”

Conclusion

The four sections of this playbook—assess and identify, connect and engage, finance and retain, and support and graduate—outline key stages in the adult re-enrollment journey, from returning to college to completing a meaningful credential. While these steps may appear sequential, the process is rarely linear. Many of the promising practices here intersect and can be implemented simultaneously by different functional areas across institutions.

We also recognize that this resource does not include every aspect of adult learner access and success. Our hope is to offer a starting point into broader conversations across the network of institutions, states, systems, and organizations that help individuals reach their postsecondary goals.

A key takeaway from the community of practice was the power of collaboration. Communities of practice are unique in their ability to bring together diverse stakeholders to share ideas, troubleshoot challenges, and reflect on successes. Over the past year, participants supported one another through small group discussions, and campus teams saw success by engaging cross-departmental representatives, from financial aid and registrars to admissions and student success. Building and sustaining these internal partnerships can lead to more innovative programs, streamlined processes, and better experiences for students.

We also saw the value of monitoring progress and collecting feedback. Regular check-in forms helped participants stay accountable to the goal they set at the beginning of the year. Additionally, this feedback allowed the project team to assess the usefulness of sessions and identify areas for improvement. As institutions work to increase access and success for adult learners, they may also consider how they can measure success and collect feedback.

Our team is grateful to have learned from dedicated practitioners across Pennsylvania, and we are inspired by the work being done to re-engage and support adult learners. We also thank the many guest presenters who generously shared their expertise. We hope this playbook can contribute to the continuation of this great work, in Pennsylvania and beyond.

Tools and resources

Section 1: Assess and identify

Creator	Resource
Ithaka S+R	Supporting Adult Learner Re-Engagement in Kentucky, https://sr.ithaka.org/publications/supporting-adult-learner-engagement-in-kentucky/
InsideTrack	Community College Re-Enrollment Institutional Readiness Assessment Tool (see p. 21), https://www.insidetrack.org/reports/reconnect-reenroll-rise
AACRAO and WICHE	Technical Guide for Assessing Administrative Holds with Data, https://www.wiche.edu/resources/technical-guide-for-assessing-administrative-holds-with-data/
AACRAO and NACUBO	Joint Statement on Administrative Holds, https://www.nacubo.org/Press-Releases/2022/2022-Joint-Statement-from-AACRAO-and-NACUBO-on-the-Use-of-Holds

Section 2: Connect and engage

Creator	Resource
ReUp Education	3 Strategies to Welcome Adult Learners Back, https://reupeducation.com/resources/3-strategies-to-welcome-adult-learners-back/
InsideTrack	The Outreach Checklist: How to Identify the Most Viable Students to Re-Enroll (see p. 26), https://www.insidetrack.org/reports/reconnect-reenroll-rise
NC State University and Belk Center for Community College Leadership and Research	Adult Learner Guidebook, https://belk-center.ced.ncsu.edu/adult-learner-guidebook/
American Institutes for Research (AIR)	Beyond the Basics: How Institution Websites Can Encourage Enrollment for Adult Learners, https://www.air.org/resource/blog-post/beyond-basics-how-institution-websites-can-encourage-enrollment-adult-learners

Section 3: Finance and sustain

Creator	Resource
Ithaka S+R	Outcomes for the Ohio College Comeback Compact, https://sr.ithaka.org/blog/turning-debt-into-credentials/
ReUp Education	Overcoming FAFSA Hurdles for Adult Learners, https://reupeducation.com/resources/overcoming-fafsa-hurdles-for-adult-learners/
Higher Learning Advocates	Satisfactory Academic Progress: Making Financial Aid Work for Today's Students, https://todaysstudents.org/wp-content/uploads/satisfactory-academic-progress-making-financial-aid-work-for-todays-students.pdf
The Kresge Foundation	Nashville Flex: Redesigning Policies to Better Serve the Part-Time College Student, https://kresge.org/news-views/nashville-flex-redesigning-policies-to-better-serve-the-part-time-college-student/
University of California	Basic Needs Initiative, https://basicneeds.ucop.edu/
PA EmpowerU	Resources for Pennsylvania College Student Basic Needs, https://www.pa.gov/agencies/education/resources/student/empoweru
Pennsylvania Department of Human Services	Pennsylvania Parent Pathways Learning Network Policy Report, https://www.pa.gov/content/dam/copapwp-pagov/en/dhs/documents/about/documents/Parent-Pathways-Policy-Report.pdf

Section 4: Support and graduate

Creator	Resource
PA College Transfer (currently PA TRAC)	Pennsylvania Transfer and Articulation Center, https://www.patrac.org/
Ithaka S+R	Holistic Credit Mobility Strategies in Action: A Case Study Report on State, System, and Institutional Efforts to Smooth the Path to a College Degree for Mobile Students, https://sr.ithaka.org/publications/holistic-credit-mobility-strategies-in-action/
American Council on Education (ACE)	Effective Practices that Support Adult Learners, https://www.acenet.edu/Research-Insights/Pages/Student-Support/Effective-Practices-Adult-Learners.aspx
Baker Tilly	Postsecondary Credential Workforce Gap Analysis Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, https://www.pa.gov/content/dam/copapwp-pagov/en/sbhe/documents/pdeworkforcepostsecondarycredentialgapreport.pdf
Jobs for the Future (JFF)	Meet Adult Learners, and All Students, Where They Are, https://www.jff.org/blog/meet-adult-learners-and-all-students-where-they-are/

Participating institutions and organizations

Albright College Alvernia University Arcadia University Automotive Training Center Bucks County Community College Carlow University Cedar Crest College Chatham University Commonwealth University of PA Community College of Allegheny County Community College of Philadelphia Delaware County Community College Delaware Valley University Duquesne University Eastern University Elizabethtown College Gannon University Gratz College HACC: Central Pennsylvania's Community College Harrisburg University of Science and Technology Holy Family University Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP) International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP) Johnson College Lackawanna College Lehigh Carbon Community College Luzerne County Community College	Manor College Misericordia University Montgomery County Community College Moravian University Muhlenberg College Northampton Community College Orleans Technical College Peirce College Penn State Behrend Penn State University Penn State University - World Campus Penn State New Kensington Pennsylvania College of Technology Pennsylvania Department of Education Pennsylvania Highlands Community College Pennsylvania Western University Pittsburgh Council on Higher Education Pittsburgh Scholar House Point Park University Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology The Pittsburgh School of Massage Therapy Ursinus College Valley Forge Military College Villanova University Westmoreland County Community College Widener University York College of Pennsylvania
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- ¹ Julia Karon, James Dean Ward, Catharine Bond Hill, Martin Kurzweil, “Solving Stranded Credits: Assessing the Scope and Effects of Transcript Withholding on Students, States, and Institutions,” *Ithaka S+R*, October 5, 2020, <https://sr.ithaka.org/publications/solving-stranded-credits/>.
- ² Brittany Pearce and Joanna Dressel, “Turning Debt into Credentials: The Ohio College Comeback Compact Continues to Benefit Adult Learners, Institutions, and Northeast Ohio,” *Ithaka S+R*, October 28, 2024, <https://sr.ithaka.org/blog/turning-debt-into-credentials/>.
- ³ Joanna Dressel, Christy McDaniel, Jonathan Barefield, and Elizabeth Looker, “Supporting Adult Learner Engagement in Kentucky: Addressing Administrative Holds, Past Due Balances, and Targeted Supports,” *Ithaka S+R*, April 17, 2025, <https://sr.ithaka.org/publications/supporting-adult-learner-engagement-in-kentucky/>.
- ⁴ Pennsylvania Department of Education, Commonwealth of Education, <https://www.pa.gov/agencies/education>.
- ⁵ “Some College, No Credential Student Outcomes: 2025 Report for the Nation and the States,” *National Student Clearinghouse Research Center*, June 6, 2025, <https://nscresearchcenter.org/some-college-no-credential>.
- ⁶ “National Demographics and State Appendix, 2025 Report for the Nation and the States,” *National Student Clearinghouse Research Center*, June 6, 2025, <https://nscresearchcenter.org/some-college-no-credential>.
- ⁷ “Some College, No Credential Student Outcomes, 2025 Report for the Nation and the States,” *National Student Clearinghouse Research Center*, June 6, 2025, <https://nscresearchcenter.org/some-college-no-credential-dashboard>.
- ⁸ “Financial Responsibility, Administrative Capability, Certification Procedures, Ability To Benefit (ATB),” *Federal Register*, October 31, 2023, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2023/10/31/2023-22785/financial-responsibility-administrative-capability-certification-procedures-ability-to-benefit-atb>.
- Brittany Pearce, “No Longer Stranded? How New Department of Education Rule Creates Opportunities for Students and Institutions,” *Ithaka S+R*, February 13, 2024, <https://sr.ithaka.org/blog/no-longer-stranded>.
- ⁹ “Postsecondary Credential Workforce Gap Analysis: Commonwealth of Pennsylvania,” *Baker Tilly*, March 2024, <https://www.pa.gov/content/dam/copapwp-pagov/en/sbhe/documents/pdeworkforcepostsecondarycredentialgapreport.pdf>.
- ¹⁰ “Adult Learner,” College Planning, *Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*, accessed May 5, 2025. <https://www.pa.gov/agencies/education/programs-and-services/instruction/postsecondary-and-adult-education/college-planning/adult-learner.html>.
- ¹¹ Joanna Dressel, Christy McDaniel, Jonathan Barefield, Elizabeth Looker, “Supporting Adult Learner Engagement in Kentucky: Addressing Administrative Holds, Past Due Balances, and Targeted Supports,” *Ithaka S+R*, April 17, 2025, <https://sr.ithaka.org/publications/supporting-adult-learner-engagement-in-kentucky/>.
- ¹² “Reconnect, Re-enroll, & Rise: Five Imperatives to Help Community Colleges Re-enroll Stopped out Students,” *InsideTrack*, <https://www.insidettrack.org/reports/reconnect-reenroll-rise>.
- ¹³ “Technical Guide for Assessing Administrative Holds with Data,” Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, October 2023, <https://www.wiche.edu/resources/technical-guide-for-assessing-administrative-holds-with-data/>.

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