Funding the Development of Noncredit Workforce Training Programs

2 ways to use this report

- Identify funding sources for noncredit workforce training programs
- Organize and price programs to ensure sustainability and self-sufficiency

Community College Executive Forum

Funding the Development of Noncredit Workforce Training Programs

Resource in Brief

This report profiles noncredit workforce training programs at seven institutions. It explores how administrators fund the development and operations of new noncredit professional programs through grants and industry partnerships. It also examines pricing and marketing strategies that promote program self-sufficiency over time. The report is divided into three sections: program structure and operating needs, funding noncredit workforce training, and promoting self-sufficiency and sustainability.

Problems Addressed

- Administrators struggle to identify funding sources for noncredit workforce training programs.
- Workforce training programs lack self-sufficiency and are unsustainable for institutions.

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Funding the Development of Noncredit and Workforce Training Programs

Continuing and Online Education Forum

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1) Executive Summary

Key Observations

Three contact institutions receive governmental funds through state and local workforce investment boards that provide student aid and program development grants. Under the Workforce Investment Act (1998), state and local boards oversee the distribution of student aid for eligible noncredit training programs. Some boards also offer program development grants, often funded by the Department of Labor. Staff at two contact institutions serve on local boards and affiliated committees to build relations with industry leaders, community organizations, and other community training providers.

Workforce training units access additional grants through partnerships with other university departments and community colleges. Faculty in for-credit departments at University B often apply for research grants to develop noncredit courses in collaboration with their workforce training unit. The workforce training unit at University F sometimes partners with community colleges to develop joint workforce training programs through shared grants.

Four contact institutions primarily use revenue from existing programs to fund new programs, partly in response to limited external funding. For example, University A has shifted to this model over the last two years because state funding for workforce training ceased during the recession. Existing revenue-generating programs typically include contract trainings. Some units housed within continuing education divisions may also use revenue from for-credit continuing education programs.

Several contact institutions maintain industry advisory boards to cultivate corporate sponsorships and align training with employer needs. Administrators typically recruit board members through instructor contacts and industry associations. To emphasize the value of board membership, administrators present it as an opportunity to shape training to companies' needs and to showcase companies to students as they enter the industry.

Administrators consult industry experts and survey prospective students to evaluate price points, and they generally expect program revenue to exceed expenses within one to two years. In addition to direct course expenses (e.g., instructor pay, course materials), calculations should account for indirect operational costs (e.g., staff salaries, space maintenance, marketing costs, website support). Administrators typically cancel programs that fail to meet minimum enrollments after two years.

Most workforce training units employ independent instructors (i.e., instructors without a formal contract) and three to ten dedicated staff members; they typically share classroom space with other university programs. Many units use classrooms within continuing education divisions, but some units share general university classrooms. However, they rarely share university faculty because full-time faculty lack the workload flexibility of independent instructors. Most instructors are paid by the course, so canceled courses do not incur instructional costs.

Definition of Terms

In this report, "workforce training" refers to programs that teach industry- or occupation-specific skills in response to demand from local and regional employers and job seekers.

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2) Program Structure and Operating Needs

Reporting Structure

Most Universities House Noncredit Programs Within Continuing Education

Contact institutions house noncredit workforce training programs in one of three units:

- **Continuing education divisions:** At **University B**, **University C**, **University D**, and **University F**, continuing education divisions offer noncredit workforce training programs alongside for-credit professional programs, personal enrichment courses, and/or extension services.
- **Vocational/technical colleges:** At **University A** and **University E**, vocational/technical colleges within universities offer noncredit workforce training programs alongside for-credit certificates and degrees.
- **Statewide system offices:** In **University System G**, administrators oversee noncredit workforce training programs from the system office. The system office hosts some programs (particularly contract trainings), while a network of vocational campuses affiliated with the system's three universities hosts other programs.

Overview of Noncredit Offerings

Workforce Units Offer Course, Certificate Programs, and Contract Trainings

Most contact institutions offer open enrollment courses and noncredit certificate programs for individual students, in addition to contract trainings for groups (primarily local corporations).

- **Open enrollment courses:** Contact institutions offer up to 200 open enrollment courses. Most teach occupation-specific skills (e.g., bookkeeping, medical billing); some units also offer courses in general skills (e.g., word processing) and/or personal enrichment (e.g., golf).
- **Noncredit certificate programs:** Contact institutions offer three to 25 certificate programs. Most comprise a series of courses that develop broad bases of industry-specific expertise (e.g., nonprofit management, green construction). Some, such as the sommelier certificate at **University C**, include just one intensive course.
- **Contract trainings:** Many institutions partner with companies to offer custom employee trainings. Trainings may develop industry-specific competencies (e.g., mining safety) or general workplace competencies (e.g., leadership, project management). Each year, **University D** offers at least 15 trainings, while **University A** offers 30-40.

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Prevalence of Program Types Across Contact Institutions

	University A	University B	University C	University D	University E	University F	University System G
Open Enrollment Courses	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
Noncredit Certificates	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Contract Trainings	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Instructional and Operational Expenses

Most Units Employ Independent Instructors on a Per-Course Basis

Administrators primarily hire instructors to teach workforce training courses without formal contracts. Instead of receiving standard faculty contracts, instructors are hired to teach individual courses. Because some instructors teach multiple courses at once, units employ fewer instructors than the number of courses taught every term. For example, at University A, approximately 150 instructors teach a total of 200 courses. No more than five percent are University faculty.

Reasons to Hire Independent Instructors

- **University faculty have restrictive workloads**. Full-time faculty often lack the flexibility to fit workforce training programs into standard workloads. Workforce training units may find the cost of overload pay prohibitive.
- **Per-course instructors allow for necessary course cancellations**. When instructors are paid by the course, administrators can cancel courses with low enrollments for which expenses would exceed revenue.
- **External instructors bring industry expertise to the classroom**. Individuals who work within the industry have applied professional experience, but university faculty approach coursework from academic backgrounds.

University Faculty May Provide Program Development Grants

Unlike most workforce training units, the training unit at **University B** does not hire independent instructors. Instead, it shares tenure-track faculty with other University departments. In many cases, departments offer course releases to faculty who develop noncredit courses within their standard workload. Under this model, faculty typically produce self-paced online courses that require limited involvement from instructors.

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Workforce Training Units Employ Three to Ten Dedicate Staff

Contact institutions typically employ three to ten full-time staff in workforce training units. Units within continuing education divisions share division-wide staff to limit duplication of staff. At **University D**, workforce training requires only three dedicated staff (the director and two program assistants) because general continuing education staff perform registration, marketing, and catalog maintenance.

Dedicated Staff Roles at University A

- Director (1)
- Program Assistant (3)
- Sales Coordinator (2)
- Systems Analyst (1)
- Office Managers (1)
- Student Assistants (2)

Staff roles within other contact institutions include graphic designers, instructional designers for online courses, and sales associates for contract training.

Units Share Classrooms with Continuing Education and Other Departments

Few workforce training units maintain dedicated classroom space. Units within continuing education divisions often share space with other divisional programs. The continuing education division at **University C** owns one building with eight classrooms, two computer labs, and administrative offices, which workforce training programs share with personal enrichment, computer literacy, and senior learning programs.

At **University A** and **University E**, workforce training units housed under vocational colleges share classroom space with programs across the institution. Because central scheduling offices typically prioritize for-credit programs, this model generally limits classroom access to evenings and weekends.

Workforce training units commonly offer programs at shared satellite sites to reach markets in a wider geographic area. **University D**, for example, offers programs at six sites across the state, all of which are co-located with other colleges.

Instructors may also deliver contract trainings in corporate settings. This practice does not require classroom space, but it does generate travel expenses.

Shift Courses Online to Limit Space Needs and Expand Market Reach

Online courses require significant investment because of costs associated with instructional design and technology. Nonetheless, many administrators are shifting workforce training programs online to conserve classroom space and instruction time, and to expand their regional market.

At some institutions, programs begin in face-to-face formats so that staff can record each initial lecture and convert it into an online offering. Instructors may require compensation for each online session. For example, at **University E**, educational technology instructors receive $75 for the first face-to-face delivery of each workshop and $5 for each paid viewing of the online archive.

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Online Formats Facilitate Large-Scale Contract Trainings

The workforce training unit at **University E** traditionally offers face-to-face workshops. In recent years, staff members have recorded all workshops and archived recordings in a digital library to which students may purchase access. Because online workshops are not subject to space constraints, they allow the unit to provide large-scale contract trainings. The state Department of Education, for example, recently purchased access to instructional technology archives for 7,000 elementary and secondary school teachers for $250,000.

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3) Funding Noncredit Workforce Training

Instructional and Operational Expenses

Units May Use Existing Program Revenue to Avoid Reliance on External Funds

Contact institutions fund new programs through one of two models:

- **Grants-based model:** Programs at **University B**, **University F**, and **University System G** receive substantial external funding, especially during development and start-up phases. Funds assist with upfront expenses, including instructional design and marketing, which would otherwise require significant internal investment. Administrators expect programs that initially receive external funding to become self-sustaining over time.
- **Self-sufficient model:** At **University A**, **University C**, **University D**, and **University E**, revenue from existing programs within workforce training or continuing education covers expenses associated with new program development. Administrators in units with well-established offerings may adopt this model to avoid reliance on external funds, especially when outside sources are scarce.

Contact institutions generally do not derive substantial funding from industry sponsorships. However, some members of industry advisory boards at **University F** have contributed program development funds in exchange for the presence of their names and logos in course catalogs and on course websites.

Limited State Budgets Encourage Self-Sufficient Models

Over the last two years, **University A** has shifted from a partly grants-based model to a primarily self-sufficient model in response to state budget cuts. The state Board of Regents had provided $200,000 each year to assist with workforce training expenses, but funding ceased during the recession. Existing programs now generate approximately $2 million in annual revenue, most of which remains within the unit to cover operating expenses and contribute to new program development.

Source of External Funds

State and Local Boards Provide Funds for Student Aid and Program Support

Several contact institutions access funds for program development and operations through local workforce investment boards established by the Workforce Investment Act (1998). Some states also use state tax revenue and discretionary funds from federal allocations to provide additional support for workforce training.[1] Because state and local administrative bodies oversee the allocation of funds, the availability of funding to four-year universities varies by region.

Examples of Governmental Funding for Vocational Education

- **Student vouchers for workforce training:** State and local workforce investment boards maintain Eligible Training Provider Lists (ETPLs), and qualified students may receive vouchers to attend ETPL programs. Because **University A** and **University F** appear on local ETPLs, they receive workforce investment funds through students matched to their programs. Several states, including New

1) U.S. Government Accountability Office, Workforce *Development: Community Colleges and One-Stop Centers Collaborate to Meet 21st Century Workforce Needs* (Washington: US GAO, 2008), http://www.gao.gov/assets/280/275362.pdf.

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Jersey and Oregon, also provide grants to corporations for incumbent worker training (i.e., contract training).[2]

- **Stimulus funds for program development:** Under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (2009), the local workforce investment board in University F's region applied for Department of Labor grants to fund job training. It allocated these grants to local training providers including University F, which received $400,000 to develop healthcare training, $500,000 to develop green construction programs, and $5 million to develop biotechnology programs in conjunction with industry partners.
- **State funds for program development and maintenance**: **University System G** receives funds to provide postsecondary job training programs from the state department of education through the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act (1983). Each year, the State also invests $5.4 million of revenue from unemployment insurance taxes into the System's workforce training unit to develop new programs, maintain existing offerings, and upgrade course materials and technology.

Identify Funding Opportunities through Service on Local Boards

Under the Workforce Investment Act, local workforce investment boards (WIBs) must include educational representatives. In addition to superintendents of public school districts and presidents of community colleges, boards and affiliated committees often include university administrators. WIB participation provides administrators at **University A** and **University F** with opportunities to:

- Learn about existing workforce training programs
- Discover relevant grants for program development
- Network with other stakeholders in workforce development

Partnerships Within Universities Provide Research and Outreach Funds

Some workforce training units partner with other university divisions to offer collaborative noncredit programs. Partner divisions may contribute funds for program development from grants outside workforce investment and vocational education.

Additional Funding Sources for Program Development

- **Faculty research grants**: At **University B** and **University System G**, university faculty often teach workforce training programs. Faculty may identify and apply for research grants to develop noncredit programs related to their fields of study. Grants from faculty partners provide most program development funds within University B's workforce training unit, and the resulting noncredit programs reflect the University's research strengths (e.g., horticulture, pharmacy).
- **Funds for extension and community outreach:** At **University B**, land-grant subsidies for cooperative extension contribute to noncredit programs that serve communities across the state. For example, the workforce training unit and the extension school jointly offer an online master gardener course in which students practice professional skills through volunteer hours at community gardens, farmers' markets, and extension offices across the state.

2) U.S. Government Accountability Office.

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Partner with Other Training Providers to Expand Grant Access

The workforce training unit at **University F** has partnered with local community colleges to develop programs funded by shared grants. For example, the University is developing a joint biotechnology program in which the University provides advanced training for scientists while a partner community college provides entry-level training for technicians. This model allows partner institutions to exchange grant opportunities, develop more thorough project proposals, and share revenue from successful programs.

Use Industry Associations and Faculty Contacts to Build Advisory Boards

Several workforce training units maintain industry advisory boards to cultivate potential sponsorships and exchange expertise on training needs and program demand. A small workforce training unit may maintain one generic advisory board with experts from various industries. Units at **University System G** and **University F** also maintain industry-specific advisory boards for some programs (e.g., green construction, water management).

Members of the Casino Industry Board at University F

- Casino chief executive officers
- Casino human resources directors
- Gaming industry magazine staff
- Tribal council representatives

The typical advisory board includes seven to 12 members who represent diverse occupations and organizations within one industry. In addition to executives, human resources staff provide insight on industry training needs. Although most board members maintain employment in the industry, boards may also include select faculty members with knowledge of industry trends.

The Role of Industry Advisory Board Members

- **Fund training programs**. At University F, some board representatives have contributed funds from companies they own for training program development. However, board members primarily serve to provide industry insights.
- **Contribute insight on industry needs.** Administrators can evaluate the hiring needs of board members' companies to gauge program demand, understand desired skills and competencies, and project employment trends.
- **Hire program graduates.** Members with input on training content are more likely to hire program graduates. Positive hiring outcomes build program reputation. In some cases, grant-funded programs also need to report hiring outcomes.

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Strategies to Identify Prospective Board Members

Locate Industry Contacts Through Instructors	Because most workforce training instructors work within the fields they teach, their colleagues and business contacts tend to be industry experts. University faculty may also have industry-specific research contacts.
Network Through Industry Associations	Program officers market their students' skills to employers at association events and conferences. Administrators emphasize the direct input board members have on program curricula in order to recruit potential board members.
Use Chambers of Commerce to Identify Corporate Contacts Interested in Local Presence	Local chambers of commerce maintain member directories, which administrators use to identify corporate contacts who seek to hire new workers. Because board members often serve as instructors and guest speakers in classes, administrators can present membership as an opportunity for companies to establish name recognition among students. These reputational benefits may especially appeal to representatives of start-up companies with less established brands.

Seek Industry Endorsements to Facilitate Recruitment

Many trade associations authorize training providers to prepare students for industry certifications. Prospective students value several of **University A**'s most popular courses because of endorsements from groups such as the Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM) and the Project Management Institute (PMI).

In some cases, endorsements recruit students to courses directly. The Virginia Association of Museums, for example, allows students in its museum management program to apply **University D**'s nonprofit management courses toward Association certificates.

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4) Promoting Self-Sufficiency and Sustainability

Establishing Price Points

Most Courses Cost Under $900 Dollars, and Many Certificates Cost Under $2500

At contact institutions, workforce training courses that last 12-18 sessions typically cost between $300 and $900, depending on course content and duration. Within a given industry, courses that lead to certifications tend to be more expensive. For example, **University A**'s 12-session medical terminology course and 16-session medical coding course cost approximately $350 each, while its 18-session certified dietary manager course, endorsed by the Association of Nutrition and Food Service Professionals, costs nearly $800.

Most noncredit certificate programs at contact institutions cost between $1,000 and $2,500, though the price of programs in high-demand occupations may exceed this range. For example, medical assistant programs at **University A** and **University C**, cost about $3,200 and $6,000 respectively.

Contract training prices vary according to program content and audience size. Each year, **University A**'s 30 to 40 contract training courses generate $200,000-300,000 in revenue, for an average of $5,000-10,000 per contract. One of **University E**'s largest contracts provides online educational technology workshops to 7,000 teachers for $250,000.

Adjust Prices Until Revenue from Target Enrollments Exceeds Expenses

In self-sufficient programs, course revenue must meet or exceed direct and indirect costs associated with program operations.

- **Direct costs:** Administrators expect most established courses to cover all of their direct costs, including instructor pay, course materials, and classroom rental (if applicable).
- **Indirect costs:** Administrators expect established courses to cover a portion of the unit's operational expenses, which may include staff salaries/wages, marketing needs, website support, and the maintenance of dedicated space.

General Program Pricing Formula

$$\left(\text{Direct Costs} + \text{Indirect Costs}\right) \times \text{Profit Markup} \geq \text{Minimum Enrollment} \times \text{Course Price}$$

Administrators at **University E** set this at **1.4** so courses generate surplus revenue equal to 40% of their costs.

The ideal program price matches the prices of similar offerings at other colleges and universities and is lower than the prices of programs at for-profit institutions. Units may offer some courses several times before enrollment trends reveal the suitability

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of initial prices. If enrollments fall below expectations, administrators may lower prices and raise minimum enrollments.

Supplement Benchmarking with Industry Contacts and Prospective Student Surveys

Before administrators decide on course prices, they often check the suitability of benchmarked values through industry consultations, surveys, and environmental scans.

Strategies to Evaluate Program Pricing

Consult Industry Experts to Gauge Program Value	Administrators consult program advisory boards, professional association members, or contacts identified by instructors to ensure that prospective prices seem reasonable to industry experts.
Survey Prospective Students to Establish Program Interest	Marketing staff sometimes develop surveys that ask prospective students to respond with their level of interest in and willingness to pay for upcoming courses. Administrators at **University C** purchase mailing lists from marketing agencies, sort members by demographic data, and distribute surveys to demographic groups deemed most likely to enroll based on market research. Staff may also send surveys to internal mailing lists of previous, current, and prospective workforce training students
Assess Trends through Environmental Scans	Marketing staff perform environmental scans to account for the effects of factors such as political climate, economic outlooks, and technology trends on program demand. For example, economic downturns may lower price points for contract trainings as corporate budgets tighten.

Enforcing Self-Sufficiency

Reevaluate Programs that Fail to Reach Self-Sufficiency within Two Years

Because many programs initially fall short of target enrollments, course expenses may exceed revenue during a program's first few terms. Administrators generally expect programs to reach self-sufficiency within one to two years. After this point, administrators of self-sustaining workforce training units rely on surplus revenue from existing programs to invest in new programs. Grant-funded programs must also meet target enrollments within limited time frames because many grants only last one year.

Programs that continue to fall short of enrollment targets after their second year face cancellation. Because enrollment may continue to fluctuate after a program's first self-sufficient term, administrators evaluate registration numbers for all programs at

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the start of each term. If they do not expect revenue from an established program to cover its expenses, they may cancel it for the term or permanently.

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5) Research Methodology

Project Challenge

Leadership at a member institution approached the Forum with the following questions

- What types of noncredit workforce training programs do four-year universities offer?
- What instructors, staff, space, and other operating resources do these programs require?
- What external sources provide program funding (e.g., private investors, industry partners, government grants, university resources)?
- How do program administrators identify sources of funding?
- How do administrators build relationships with potential investors and emphasize the need for programs to potential partners?
- How do funding sources change as programs mature? For how long do programs operate before they become self-sufficient?
- What is the price point of noncredit programs, and how do administrators set prices to promote self-sufficiency?
- What strategies do administrators employ to maintain enrollment and financial sustainability?
- How have recent trends in demand for noncredit workforce training programs impacted sustainability?

Project Sources

- Education Advisory Board's internal and online (www.educationadvisoryboard.com) research libraries
- National Center for Education Statistics [NCES] (http://nces.ed.gov)
- U.S. Government Accountability Office. *Workforce Development: Community Colleges and One-Stop Centers Collaborate to Meet 21st Century Workforce Needs.* Washington: US GAO, 2008. http://www.gao.gov/assets/280/275362.pdf.
- *The Chronicle of Higher Education*
- Institutional websites

Research Parameters

The Forum interviewed administrators who oversee noncredit workforce training programs at four-year universities and university systems

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A Guide to the Institutions Profiled in this Brief

Institution	Location	Type	Approximate Enrollment Total (Undergraduate)	Classification
University A	Midwest	Public	27,400 (23,000)	Research Universities (high research activity)
University B	Pacific West	Public	25,100 (21,000)	Research Universities (very high research activity)
University C	Mountain West	Public	27,400 (22,100)	Research Universities (high research activity)
University D	Mid-Atlantic	Public	24,600 (15,700)	Research Universities (very high research activity)
University E	Mountain West	Public	12,600 (10,500)	Research Universities (high research activity)
University F	Pacific West	Public	30,500 (25,700)	Research Universities (high research activity)
University System G	Pacific West	Public	31,200 (28,600)	n/a

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