



Stackable Credentials: Building Career Pathways for Working Adults

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AGENDA ITEMS



- What are stackable credentials?
- Setting the stage – why it's important
- Examples of Stackable Credentials
 - Edmonds College, WA
 - Reynolds Community College, VA
 - Stark State College, OH
- Employer Led Partnership
- Discussion

What are Stackable Credentials?



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| What are they?

- Short, credit-bearing credentials that build progressively into higher credentials (certifications → certificates → advanced certificates → associate degree → bachelor's degree)
- Designed specifically to make education **more flexible, accessible, and immediately relevant** to career advancement without requiring a long-term time or financial commitment upfront
- Portable and transcribed; credits stack toward larger credentials or credentials recognized by employers.

| **Why they're important**

- Flexible pathway for career advancement without requiring long-term enrollment
- Improves access for low-income and first-generation students
- Responds quickly to labor market demand; increases employability and earnings
- Reduces time and cost to employment...first steppingstone.

| Core Concept and Structure

Stackable credentials are built on the idea that education should be delivered in manageable "chunks" that directly correlate with labor market needs.

- **Modular Design:** Credentials range from small, specific qualifications (e.g., a software certification or micro-credential) to larger, more comprehensive degrees (Associate's, Bachelor's)
- **Sequential Value:** Each smaller credential (or "stackable unit") has **stand-alone value** in the job market, can get a better job or a raise upon completion
- **Credit Transfer:** Credits earned for a smaller credential (like a certificate) automatically count toward the next, larger credential (like an Associate's degree). This provides a clear, efficient **career pathway**.

| Knowing Adult Learners

- Highly motivated to learn
- Complex lives – children, rent, utilities, debt, caring for parents, etc.
- Not 9-5 learners...need offerings scheduled when they are available
- Need next job or credential quickly
- May have negative prior college experience
- Extraordinarily diverse with different needs depending on their life circumstances.



| On-ramps for working adults



- Evening, weekend, hybrid, and online course options to fit work schedules
- Prior learning assessment (PLA) and credit for experience to accelerate progress
- Short-term “earn-and-learn” options: apprenticeships, employer partnerships, work-based learning
- Clear credential maps and advising (micro-pathways, career coaching) showing next steps and labor-market outcomes
- Financial supports: tuition vouchers, stackable funding, employer tuition assistance, & emergency aid.



The stackable model
directly addresses the major barriers
that typically prevent working adults
from accessing higher education.



| Benefits for Working Adults

- **Affordability & Risk Mitigation:** Adults pay for smaller, high-value credentials vs. a four- year degree. If their life circumstances change, they still have an **employable credential** rather than debt and incomplete coursework
- **Immediate Career Mobility:** Workers gain qualifications that lead to a raise or promotion quickly, vs. waiting years for the benefit of their education
- **Flexibility:** Programs are offered with flexible scheduling (evenings, weekends, online) and often include **Credit for Prior Learning (CPL)**, acknowledging skills gained through work or military service.

How they differ from traditional degrees

- Flexibility in Learning
 - Stackable credentials offer learners the flexibility to study in smaller, manageable increments unlike fixed lengthy degree programs
- Immediate Skill Application
 - Learners can apply newly acquired skills immediately through recognized credentials earned incrementally
- Easier Education Re-entry
 - Stackable credentials facilitate easier re-entry into education by allowing learners to continue earning qualifications progressively

Credential Examples

Credential Level	Example Timeframe	Example Value
Micro-credential/Badge	Weeks or Months	Validates a single, specific skill (e.g., Python proficiency).
Certificate (Level 1)	6 Months to 1 Year	Entry-level job eligibility (e.g., HVAC Technician).
Certificate (Level 2)	1 to 2 Years	Advanced specialization (e.g., Advanced Welding).
Associate's Degree (A.S / A.A.S.)	2 to 3 Years	Career advancement and eligibility for management roles.
Bachelor's Degree	4+ Years	Higher-level leadership and specialized roles.

Stackable Credentials – Key Role in Pathways

They are the backbone of **Career Pathways**—education and training that lead to successively higher levels of employment and earnings.

- **Entry Point:** An adult may start with a basic **industry-recognized certificate** to land an entry-level job
- **Upskilling:** While working, they can "stack" that certificate into an **Associate's degree**, deepening their expertise and qualifying them for better pay
- **Advancement:** the Associate's degree credits transfer directly into a **Bachelor's degree program**, allowing them to pursue leadership or highly technical roles.

This process ensures that education remains relevant and provides a continuous, supportive ramp toward higher-skill, higher-wage employment.

Setting the Stage...Why it's Important



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Community Colleges



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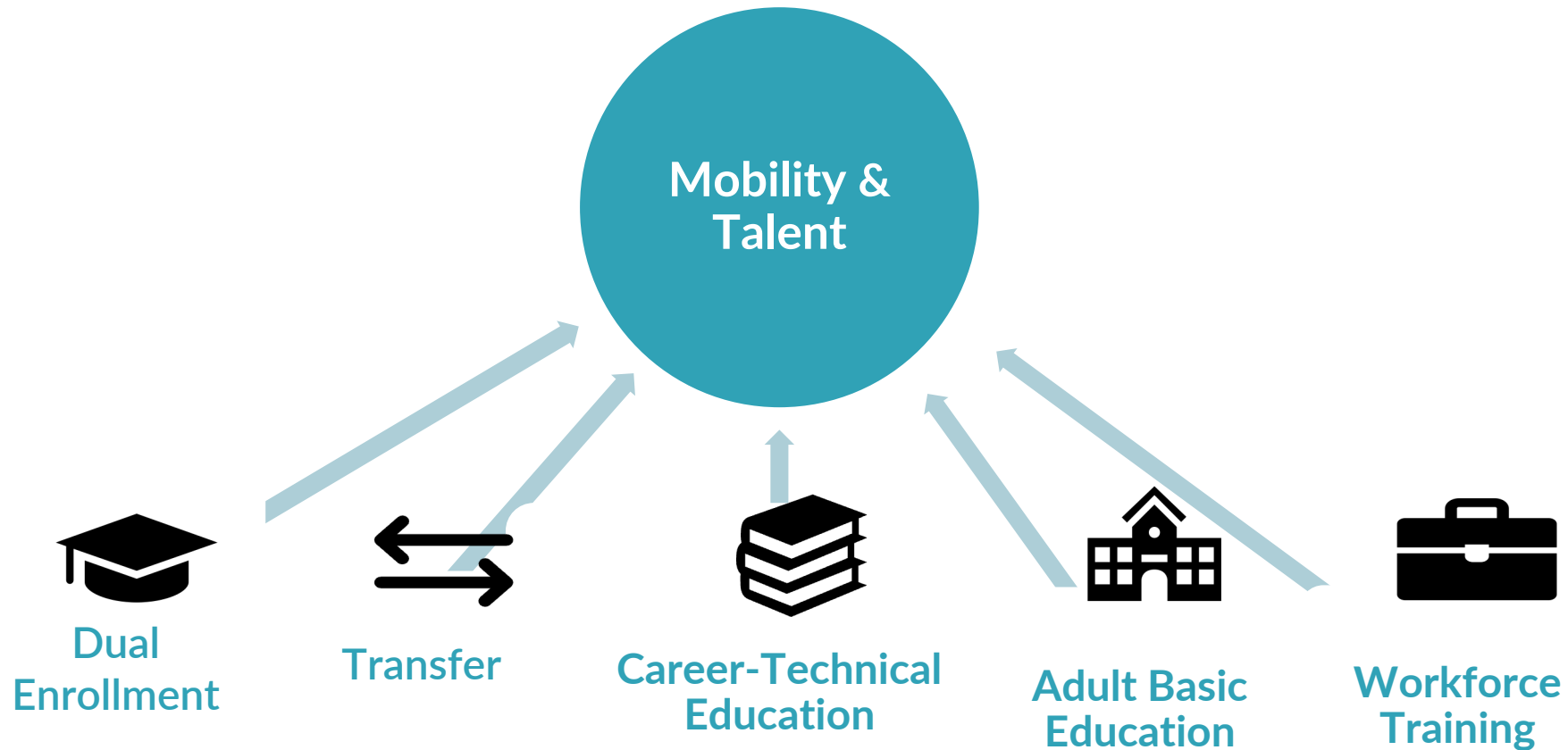
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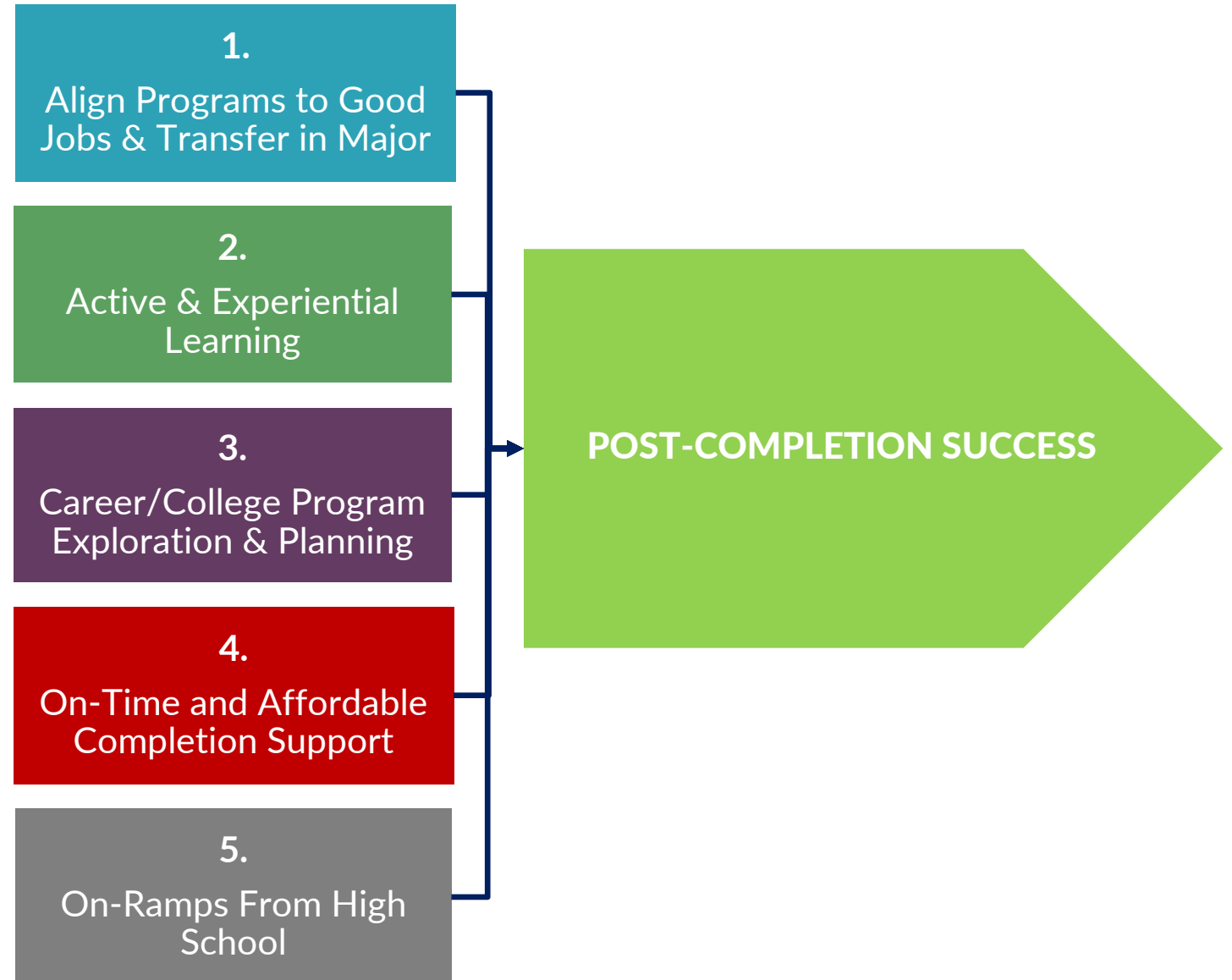
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Community colleges are more essential than ever for their communities



Five frontier strategies for strengthening community colleges pathways

Starting with post-completion success in mind



| Align Programs to Good Jobs & Transfer in Major

Frontier 1

- Mapping pre-major transfer programs
- Expanding and diversifying the technician workforce
- Growing and diversifying community college bachelor's degrees
- Expanding and diversifying high-return workforce associate degrees
- Building career ladders in high-demand fields for working students
- Assess the post-completion value of all programs
- Institutionalize career and transfer program mapping.

College Examples of Stackable Credentials



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- Actively promotes **stackable credentials** as part of its educational offerings, allowing students to earn smaller, qualifications that can be combined to achieve a larger degree or certification
- The college provides various programs, enabling students to build their qualifications progressively
- Stackable credentials offer flexibility, allowing learners to enter the workforce sooner while continuing their education
- Edmonds College has resources and advising services to help students navigate stackable credential options.

Benefits of Micro Credentials



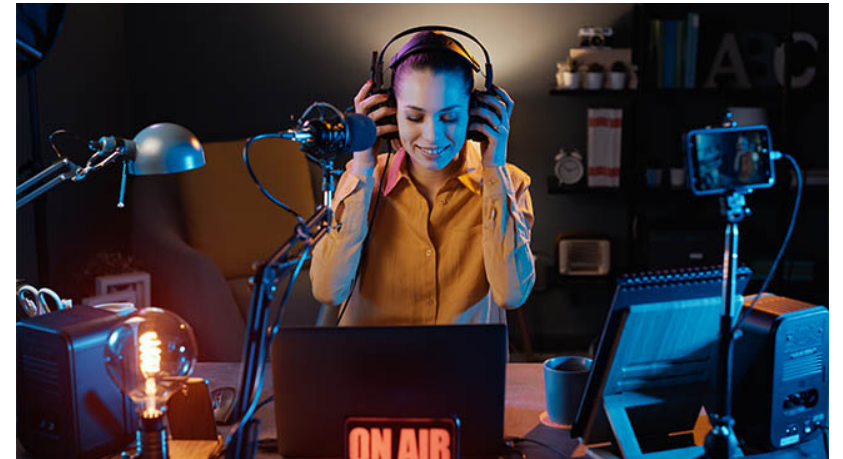
Benefits of Micro-Credentials:

- Micro-credentials allow students to gain recognition for specific skills
- They can be completed in a shorter time frame compared to traditional degrees.

| Why Media Production? *(from catalog)*

Discover the way to use *creativity* to open the gateway to a *vibrant* career in the ever-evolving landscape of digital communication.

- Gain essential skills to produce podcasts, radio shows, and various digital content formats in a tailored curriculum
- **Stackable Credentials** help you transition from our Career Studies Certificate to a Liberal Arts, Associate of Arts degree
- Transfer your credits towards a Bachelor of Science in Mass Communications at VCU, specializing in Media Production.



Early Childhood Education

Earn **stackable credentials** that pave the way for further education and career advancement, including the opportunity to pursue an Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degree.

Our program sets you on a trajectory towards higher qualifications and expanded job opportunities in the field.



Stackable Credentials: Important for Success in Employer-Led Partnerships



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Stark State College developed employer led partnerships...

- Address declining number of working adults
- Assist employers in workforce needs
- Increase enrollment in in-demand programs
- Support student success
- Students in employer led partnerships complete in greater numbers
- Leverage stackable credentials for student success.



| **Stark State defined employer-led partnership**

Employer led partnerships are defined as an employer sending individuals to pursue training, a certificate, and/or an Associate's Degree within the framework of an official partnership agreement between the employer and Stark State College.



| Hospital Partnership at Stark State College

- Career Launch partnership with college and local hospital in Akron, OH
- Available to current workers and community members
- Employer not only provides employment but tuition support along with wrap around services
 - childcare, loan default payment, books, supplies, laptop, work release, transportation, etc.
- Over 75 students enrolled annually.



| Meet Kim



- Female
- 30s
- Underrepresented minority
- Single Mom
- Public housing recipient
- Career Launch Partnership
- Pursuing Respiratory Care AAS
- Currently works minimal hours
- Graduates in Spring 2024
- Guaranteed full time employment with benefits
- Will earn a living wage upon graduation

Applied Industrial Technology Partnership at Stark State

- Partnership began in 2008 and going strong
- Last 5 years awarded:
 - 317 unduplicated student completers
 - 916 total certificates awarded
 - 213 one-year certificates
 - 703 Career Enhancement Certificates
 - 80 students earned all four credentials (basic precision machining, precision machining operations, conventional machining, and precision machining one-year certificate)
 - 133 students earned 3 credentials
 - 39 students earned 2 credentials
 - 68% of students earned two or more credentials.



Meet Bob



- Male
- 36 years old
- Employed as an hourly production engineer
- Pursued training through our Applied Industrial Partnership
- Completed the Precision Machining One Year Certificate
- Promoted to:
 - Precision Machining Associate
 - Trainer
 - Assistant Training Manager
- More than doubled his earnings with his employer (\$30 per hour)


Your thoughts?



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**What stackable credentials
are available at your
institution?**



**Where do we redesign our
on-ramps for credential
attainment for working
adults?**



What are our biggest opportunities to improve our stackable credentials?



QUESTIONS?

THANK YOU!

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