Learning Recognition Collaborative

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Postsecondary education in the United States has historically adapted and responded to the changing needs of student populations in times of massification of educational access or shifting state and national priorities. The time is again to review and modify the systems created, improving them for learners currently served, as well as for those which our systems have not historically been designed to support. Without such review and modification, we cannot address equity gaps in educational attainment that have been institutionalized within our educational systems—determining the fate of learners based not on what they know and can do, but on their ability to conform to the existing system.

The Learning Recognition Collaborative consists of postsecondary education experts and external reviewers brought together to support and scale needed postsecondary education system changes. The Collaborative seeks to enable broader recognition of learning through the development of tools and resources that institutions can adopt to address systemic issues of equity in learning. The Collaborative tools and resources address the needs of adult learners, especially under-represented groups including students of African American, Hispanic, and Native American origins and first-generation and veteran learners. However, an educational system based on recognition of learning is beneficial to all.

The efforts of the Collaborative are timely because while postsecondary education has been aware of shifts in student populations entering institutions, we have yet fully explored "non-traditional" in terms of who our institutions historically have been and continue to be designed to serve. Further, the changes required to recognize learning of today's students are increasingly complex and collaborative in terms of solutions. Thus, the development of related tools and supports were guided by the following four principles.

1. **The learning that unfolds throughout the life of a learner has value and should count toward credentials, future education and/or employment.** Learning occurs, is reinforced, and developed in a variety of spaces and places including work-based learning, training, military, formal education, co-curriculum, and unstructured educational opportunities. This vast array of institutional and non-institutional learning can be documented and validated, such that learners' knowledge, skills, and competencies count in ways that advance their aspirations. This is counter to our existing system which recognizes and validates particular types of learning over others, creating inequitable structures and hindering educational advancement and opportunity for students—particularly historically underserved populations and especially adult learners. The challenge is not simply transactional, but an outcome of a learning system that

currently defines what learning is legitimized and subsequently credentialed. To this end, we support equity of learning in addition to equity in outcomes.

2. **Competencies and associated pathways should be discoverable, transparent, and portable.** Competencies upon which educational programs are designed and aligned should be widely discoverable and transparent to learners. Such clarity ensures that the learning acquired, relevancy of the learning to various contexts, as well as what counts as evidence of demonstration of learning is pushed out to learners. This information alerts learners to exactly what is expected of them as well as what documentation of learning or competency attainment is accepted. While our current system offers passive solutions to recognition of learning for the learners who are lucky enough to stumble across them, the mere existence of a pathway or a boutique program which serves a small portion of a particular student population will not suffice to address equity gaps or system change. If learning, competencies, and pathways are not widely discoverable to learners, if the pathways of attainment are not clear or accessible, and if learning is transferred through credits but those *credits are accepted but not applied towards degree programs,* then student learning is not equitable, portable, stackable, or meaningful.

3. **Recognition and validation of learning should be automatic, pushed out to learners, and not overly complex.** While the onus to learn is upon the learner, the onus to seek out opportunities to prove their learning in ways that are acceptable to postsecondary education should not be. Currently, a vast majority of students are not aware of opportunities to demonstrate their learning in ways that count towards degree attainment. Those that do find such opportunities through prior-learning or other means are tasked with documenting a portfolio of evidence with little assistance or clarity as to what counts as credible evidence of postsecondary learning at a particular level. Learners should be able to put forward evidence of what they know and can do, regardless of where they may have acquired such knowledge and skills, in ways that are translatable, widely accepted as valid, and not overly burdensome to the learner. Where applicable, this process should be automatic and for all learners and available throughout their educational journey – not just at the onset.

4. **To solve for the complex challenges of recognition of learning, system-wide structural changes and redefinitions of stakeholder roles are required.** To create the necessary infrastructure and to foster the learning ecosystem envisioned requires a reimagining and revisioning of partnerships within institutions of postsecondary education as well as between education providers, employers, certification bodies, technology providers, and military, among others. The creation of the system of the future that recognizes learning from a variety of sources cannot be developed or supported in isolation—it must be done in partnership with other stakeholders and organizations working together to ensure responsiveness for our learners by meeting them where they are. It requires shareable and transferable data, clearer signals, and a willingness to engage in a system-view for collective benefit in learning and attainment.