

**SUMMARY OF IDEAS CONTRIBUTED BY PARTICIPANTS
in the
MONTANA GOVERNOR’S FORUM ON ADULT CREDENTIALING**

The Office of Montana Governor Brian Schweitzer collaborated with the Montana Department of Labor and Industry, the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education, Montana’s COLLEGE!NOW Initiative, and the Montana Economic Developers Association to sponsor a Governor’s Forum on Adult Credentialing on August 12, 2010. The National Governor’s Association contributed to funding the day-long event.

Sixteen presenters and 119 participants interacted in a program that explored needs and opportunities for career-related and adult postsecondary education and certification. Forum participants represented four broad sectors: Education (48%), Community Organizations (25%), Business and Industry (15%) and Government (12%).

Montana and national experts gave presentations and led breakout group discussion sessions on a range of topics relevant to the interrelationships between Montana economic development and educational opportunities for adults. As an integral part of the Forum program, participants were asked to contribute ideas on how more adults in Montana could be engaged in successfully pursuing a recognized postsecondary education credential. Of 119 participants, 37 offered suggestions about what the business sector, the education sector, and government should do to increase the number of adults who earn a postsecondary credential. The participants’ suggestions have been grouped into categories, and the nine categories containing fifteen or more suggestions are discussed in this summary report. While all 250 comments provided by Forum participants could not be included in this summary, sample comments were selected to illustrate the range of ideas offered in each category.

Category 1: Government and regulatory bodies should provide additional funding for students and student supports

Twenty-one comments suggested that additional funding should be provided in order to make post-secondary tuition more affordable, support adult students with appropriate services, and offer internships and mentoring. The following are sample comments from this category.

“Make higher ed affordable, adult learners have low to middle incomes with no ability to carry large post-education debt”

“Provide financial assistance to adult learners and help to create systems of support (i.e. childcare, bill assistance, health insurance) so they can focus more on educational efforts instead of day to day survival”

“More money for on the job training/apprenticeships”

Category 2: Government and regulatory bodies should provide additional funding for educational institutions

Sixteen participant comments suggested that education should receive more funding and new funding policies should be established. The following are sample comments from this category.

“Change funding to reflect student success, graduation, employment, goal attainment”

"If raising the education level of our citizens will have the economic impact Jim Applegate's information indicates, put money where it will have the most impact – education!"

"Consider having government pay for the last semester of college for those over 25 yrs of age, who are within one yr of graduation"

Category 3: Government and regulatory bodies should change how the higher education system works

Fifteen comments suggested changes such as less competition and bureaucracy, more responsiveness to citizens, more collaboration with business, and more attention to ROI. The following are sample comments from this category.

"Ask questions, visit programs or places to learn from the people there about the issues"

"Don't let politics remove your rationality – define desired outcomes, measure how well they are being met, invest in those areas that are doing the best. Think ROI"

"Promote a legacy (momentum) that transcends/sustains thru administrative changes"

Category 4: Business and industry should partner with higher education institutions

Thirty-three comments suggested that business and industry should partner with higher education institutions to inform institutions about workforce needs and participate in developing and funding workforce programs. The following are sample comments from this category.

"Provide feedback on applicable curriculum and the needs of your industry"

"Work to become a partner on the local level and communicate actual needs to administrators and teachers on secondary and postsecondary levels"

"Stop trying to do it all yourselves – Instead of trying to do the majority of training in-house, utilize the community colleges"

Category 5: Business and industry should provide support for employee education

Thirty-one comments suggested that business and industry should inform employees about education opportunities and encourage participation through incentives for employees to enroll in education programs and rewards for employees who complete programs/credentials. Other comments suggested providing student internships, job shadow experiences, and mentoring opportunities.

"Provide employees with a "career path" that details how advancement can be achieved within company."

"More businesses (local and not just large corporations) need to provide internship type opportunities for adult learners so they know exactly what classes they need to attain their goals"

"Recognize and reward skills and knowledge gained from retraining"

Category 6: Higher education institutions should form partnerships

Fifteen comments suggested that higher education institutions should partner with other colleges, educational consortia, high schools, and business / industry. Sample comments follow.

“Share resources ... we can’t afford you! The only way to cut your costs is by sharing resources, especially online coursework”

“Create and expand dual enrollment opportunities vs. increased regulation”

“Bring business/industry to the table along with workers from the field and economic development [experts] by way of industry skills panels”

Category 7: Higher education institutions should outreach to and serve various groups

Nineteen participant comments suggested that higher education institutions should reach out to and serve specific populations including nontraditional students; those who are place-bound; under-educated individuals; displaced workers; and students who have stopped out of higher education. The following are sample comments from this category.

“Allow specific testing to permit non-traditional students the opportunity to enter their training at the appropriate place for them.”

“Develop more flexible policies for off-campus, non-traditional, students (admissions, financial aid, etc.)”

“Align forces with ABE to provide more developmental education, make it more affordable for students, and shorten their time to degree”

Category 8: Higher education institutions should provide supports and services for students

Sixteen comments were offered related to providing students with services and supports including need-based financial aid, comprehensive advising, credit for prior learning, and job placement. The following sample comments are illustrative of suggestions in this category.

“Definitely help accelerate the credentialing process- importantly, ensure individuals DO receive credit for life-experience learning (prior learning, assessments). Substantial and meaningful credit must be offered and applied”

“Better advising for adult learners”

“Increase the amount of state-funded need-based student aid”

Category 9: Higher education institutions should innovate

Sixteen comments suggested that institutions should be innovative, break with tradition, and utilize new perspectives and approaches such as online learning. The following comments were offered in this category.

“Re-assess seat-time vs. outcome mastery as the determining factor for awarding credit”

“Offer more 100% online programs- Push the envelope and break the traditional mold of college”

“Bring onto your campus and into your system people from learning / training experiences that are totally different from your institution’s norm. They are more likely to have some “out of the box” ideas that might show up both blind spots and opportunities for you”