

# Greater Cincinnati Workforce Network

Annual Evaluation Report: 2009

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## Table of Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Introduction  | 3  |
| Evaluation Description  | 3  |
| The Greater Cincinnati Context—Challenges Raised by Stakeholders                                | 4  |
| The GCWN Response   | 7  |
| • An Active and Successful First Year: A Review of Activities Driven by the GCWN Strategic Plan | 7  |
| • Is the Strategic Plan Structured to Address the Region’s Challenges?                          | 9  |
| • How do GCWN’s First-Year Activities Address the Region’s Challenges?                          | 12 |
| Further Analysis of Stakeholder Interviews  | 16 |
| Career Pathways Partnerships  | 21 |
| • Health Care   | 21 |
| • Construction  | 32 |
| • Manufacturing   | 34 |
| Next Steps  | 35 |
| Appendices  |    |
| A: List of Interviewees   | 37 |
| B: About the Evaluation Team  | 39 |

## Introduction

In today's uncertain economy, it is widely recognized in Greater Cincinnati that workforce quality is a key factor affecting the region's economic future; addressing the challenge of enhancing the skills of the current workforce while creating opportunities for disconnected individuals to access good career tracks is viewed as an imperative. As the current recession continues, layoffs and unemployment plague the region (9.5 percent unemployment regionally in October 2009), and many individuals within the area live in structural, multigenerational poverty, unable to attain the academic or professional skills necessary to acquire family-sustaining work.

The Greater Cincinnati Workforce Network (GCWN) was formed in 2008—bringing together public, private, philanthropic, and community-based organizations from eight counties in the southwest Ohio, northern Kentucky, and southeast Indiana tristate region—to frame a common agenda that marshals the collective efforts of the participating organizations in order to improve the skills of the regional workforce. The region could be described as program rich and systems poor, meaning that despite the numerous organizations working to improve educational attainment and workforce skills, political subdivisions and a history of strong home rule make collaboration among the organizations in the eight counties challenging.

GCWN seeks to foster a regional workforce development system that overcomes the disjointed nature of the current landscape and meets the needs of employers and individuals.

Our evaluation makes five broad observations about GCWN's agenda, its position as a regional convener, and its support of career pathways partnerships:

1. GCWN has had a tremendously successful first year establishing an infrastructure and framework for carrying out its work, and is beginning to see outcomes.
2. The GCWN strategic plan is well-positioned to drive the initiative in the future; there is a need for additional clarity around the systems change goals articulated in the plan.
3. Stakeholders reported numerous workforce-related challenges in the GCWN region. GCWN does not directly address all of these challenges in its strategic plan and may wish to respond to some (not all) of the challenges raised by stakeholders.
4. Despite that not all challenges raised by interviewees are directly addressed in the strategic plan, in practice, GCWN's activities are addressing nearly all of them.
5. Stakeholders like the career pathways approach and are pleased with the opportunity to participate in career pathways partnerships; there are areas where the career pathways partnerships could improve their operations.

## Evaluation Description

Our evaluation team has partnered with GCWN as it addresses these challenges and brings employers and workforce partners together to enhance opportunities for low-skilled workers. Our evaluation has two goals: (1) provide a thorough assessment of accomplishments and outcomes

for stakeholders and funders, and (2) provide grounded and useful feedback to GCWN that fosters in-process improvements in strategies and tactics.

At this early stage, following GCWN's first year of operations, our evaluation has been a qualitative, formative assessment driven by interviews with key stakeholders in GCWN's Leadership Council and career pathways partnerships. Our approach seeks to examine the activities and accomplishments of GCWN during the last 12 months as it worked to establish its infrastructure and assemble an action agenda for the future. We examine these activities and accomplishments in light of the workforce-related challenges facing the Greater Cincinnati region as articulated by key stakeholders to assess if GCWN is addressing the region's greatest needs. We augment this assessment with an analysis of our key stakeholder interviews. Throughout this report we provide observations and recommendations for how GCWN can improve its already very strong work. As GCWN moves into a more mature stage over the next two program years, our evaluation focus will become more quantitative and outcomes-driven.

The key activities that the evaluation team has carried out since beginning our work in March 2009 are:

- Created an evaluation committee comprised of volunteers from GCWN's Leadership Council to guide and respond to our work.
- Interviewed 23 key stakeholders from GCWN's Leadership Council to assess strategic-level processes and outcomes.
- Facilitated a feedback session with GCWN Leadership Council to discuss findings from key stakeholder interviews.
- Interviewed 20 key stakeholders in the GCWN-funded career pathways partnerships to assess programmatic-level outcomes and processes.
- Initiated a Return-on-Investment (ROI) project that will quantify the returns that employers are receiving as a result of participation in the Health Career Collaborative (HCC).

### The Greater Cincinnati Context—Challenges Raised by Stakeholders

The first step in gauging the efficacy of GCWN's efforts is to capture the issues facing the Greater Cincinnati region. To help us see the issues more clearly, as part of our interview protocol, we asked interviewees to discuss the genesis of GCWN amid regional challenges. In one frequently cited anecdote, the mayor of Cincinnati, at the State of the City Address in 2008, charged the President/CEO of the Greater Cincinnati Foundation with developing a strategy for improving the employment opportunities of low-income urban residents—and the GCWN emerged.

It is clear, however, that addressing the employment opportunities of urban residents is not the only issue on GCWN's agenda. Each issue Greater Cincinnati faces has generated a variety of policy and programmatic responses from organizations in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. GCWN, as the emergent venue for regional collaboration, has the challenge of identifying and choosing which issues to elevate in search of collective solutions. This is no easy task.

The regional challenges that emerged from our nearly 50 interviews can be placed into five broad categories—economic, political, systemic, community-based, and individual—and are described below.

### Economic

- *Losing jobs in some industries.* Goods-producing sectors are undergoing long-term structural changes, resulting in declining employment. The manufacturing industry, especially, is experiencing declining employment – down over 24 percent in the region since 2001.
- *Fears about brain drain and out-migration.* Interviewees expressed concern that the region’s workforce was leaving to find work elsewhere. From 1990 to 2008, the region’s population grew 7 percent slower than the rest of the nation (14.1 percent regional vs. 21.1 percent national). Notably, the population under age 40 has actually declined in the region since 1990 (-0.1 percent); this is compared to a 7.6 percent growth nationally for this group.
- *Employers struggle to find some categories of skilled workers.* Nationally, and in the Greater Cincinnati region, employers report challenges finding some categories of highly skilled or technical workers. Some interviewees framed this as a “systemic” failure saying that educational institutions were not preparing students with the skills they need to succeed in the workplace.
- *Recession and recession recovery.* The recession has significantly slowed hiring in all sectors, some having been more dramatically affected than others. For example, in manufacturing, employers that we interviewed reported that layoff aversion is the principal concern—not hiring. There is also concern that regional workers who were un- or under-employed during the recession will need to have avenues for gaining skills and attaining work when the recession ends and jobs return.

### Political

- *Interstate competition.* Economic developers in Kentucky and Ohio compete against each other to make deals with companies. Each state has an economic development apparatus that pits state incentives against the incentives offered on the other side of the Ohio River. While this competition is expected, it makes fostering collaboration challenging for GCWN.
- *Cincinnati vs. surrounding areas.* Forty-two percent of residents in the GCWN region reside in Hamilton County. Outside of Hamilton County, there is a sentiment that regional politics tend to center around Cincinnati.
- *Union vs. nonunion.* Especially in the construction industry, our interviewees reported that unionized and nonunionized employers are in steep competition for major public construction contracts that include provisions such as living wage requirements.

## Systemic

- *Public- and nonprofit-sector competition.* Institutions and organizations that serve low-income and low-skilled students and workers compete for enrollment-based, head-count-based, or competitive grant funding. These organizations are frequently not willing to share resources or materials because sharing can damage the competitive position of the institution or organization.
- *Duplication of efforts.* A rough estimate by GCWN leaders is that there are hundreds of organizations, employing thousands of people and utilizing dozens of discrete funding streams, to address the region's workforce-related challenges. Unfortunately, these organizations typically work in parallel, often duplicating one another's services and administrative structures.
- *Too much focus on job attainment, not enough on advancement.* According to our interviewees, there is an over-emphasis, driven in part by the performance and accountability measures of key funding streams, on mere job attainment without enough emphasis on helping individuals to advance along career pathways. This challenge was also expressed by some in terms of a lack of connectivity among educational systems creating scenarios in which individuals complete one educational program without being prepared to advance into the next.

## Community-Based

- *Disparities between demographic groups, frequently framed in terms of race.* Earnings and educational disparities between racial groups in the region are large. In 2000, for example, whites in the region earned on average nearly 66 percent more per capita than blacks (\$24,615 whites/ \$14,870 blacks); whereas approximately 12 percent more blacks than whites attained only a high school degree or less (47 percent of whites with only a high school degree or less/ 58.7 percent of blacks with only a high school degree or less).
- *Geographic pockets of high poverty.* Within the region, there are geographic areas that experience high degrees of need. For example, the City of Cincinnati is the third poorest big city in the nation, with 27.8 percent of its residents living in poverty, compared to 11.9 percent in the region and 13.3 percent in the nation.

## Individual

- *Skill needs.* Our interviewees were careful not to "blame the victim" by asserting any individual failings, yet many low-skilled workers lack skills required to be successful at work, including:
  - *Soft or professional skills.* Our interviewees specifically mentioned appropriate office demeanor, appropriate dress, punctuality, teamwork, problem-solving, and conflict resolution as soft skills that many low-skilled individuals need to develop.
  - *Basic literacy or numeracy skills.* This is especially problematic among incumbent workers seeking to advance beyond the entry-level.

- *Lack of resources for education.* Many low-income individuals cannot afford to pay for postsecondary education. Others face challenges including transportation, childcare, and lack of appropriate work attire.
- *Overcoming criminal histories.* Many individuals struggle to gain traction on a career pathway because they have a criminal record. This is especially problematic for individuals who committed non-violent crimes and seek career-track employment.

## The GCWN Response

GCWN represents a visionary, yet challenging, approach to workforce development. It is clear from the wide variety of challenges that surfaced in our interviews, it is an ambitious task just to generate consensus on what issues to elevate and address. GCWN brings together the workforce development community into a common forum for this purpose. GCWN is comprised of educational partners, funders, employers, and social service providers. Collectively, these organizations form an infrastructure that serves as the regional coordinating body for workforce development efforts. A Leadership Council serves as the executive committee for the entire network; a Funders' Collaborative, comprised of the funding organizations, guides expenditure decisions; a Roadmap Committee works to create a systemic picture of all the disparate parts of the workforce development and education systems, and how they fit together; the Hard-2-Hire Network is comprised of organizations that serve individuals with criminal records; and the Policy Committee is dedicated to developing a regional policy and advocacy agenda.

The funding streams for the GCWN are diverse and reflect a commitment to this effort from a variety of partnering organizations. Over \$10 million in funding commitments have been secured from 18 funders for the 2009 to 2011 period; these include \$2.4 million in funds pooled for GCWN direct expenditure and another \$7.8 million in funds from partnering organizations that are aligned with GCWN objectives and activities.

## **An Active and Successful First Year: A Review of Activities Driven by the GCWN Strategic Plan**

GCWN has had a momentous first year highlighted by an impressive list of successes. It brought together an extensive group of partners, implemented an ambitious strategic plan, marshaled an impressive \$10 million dollar fund-raising campaign to support its agenda, hired highly competent and respected staff, instituted a committee structure to oversee the ongoing management of the initiative, and made investments in career pathways and other projects. This section details the many activities of GCWN as they relate to its mission and strategic objectives.

The mission of GCWN is: to grow the skills of the workforce by improving and aligning the policies, strategies, and resources of the region's workforce development system.

Four objectives have been identified to accomplish this mission:

- Align workforce resources and strategies across the system
- Close skill gaps in priority industries

- Build the capacity of the regional workforce system
- Advance a policy agenda to improve our workforce system and outcomes

Below are listed GCWN’s four objectives. Under each one are strategies for accomplishing the objective as well as related activities and accomplishments from 2009.

1. Align workforce resources and strategies across the system.

| Strategy  | Activities in 2009  |
|---|---|
| 1.1 Create a public/private Funders’ Collaborative to expand, pool, and align resources for workforce development.  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding leveraged from 18 sources.</li> <li>• Commitments of 2.4 million in pooled dollars and 7.8 million in aligned dollars.</li> <li>• Selected to participate in a National Fund for Workforce Solutions initiative, providing \$450,000 over 3 years and technical assistance.</li> </ul> |
| 1.2 Create and sustain a Workforce Network and Leadership Council to serve as a regional workforce development intermediaries that align strategies and programs among key players. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developed and engaged a Leadership Council, representing 19 organizations from philanthropy, government, employers, education, and service sectors.</li> <li>• Engaged over 150 organizations in the Workforce Network.</li> </ul>   |
| 1.3 Connect the adult workforce pipelines with the student education pipelines of Strive (a P-16 initiative).   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Created a Roadmap Committee, comprised of 12 individuals from 10 organizations, to map the interconnected continuum of education and training systems and support services; utilizing this road map, a strategy will be forthcoming on connections to Strive.</li> </ul>                       |

2. Close skill gaps in priority industries.

| Strategy  | Activities in 2009   |
|---|--|
| 2.1 Make targeted investments, and provide technical assistance to support expansion of the Healthcare Workforce Partnership to other employers in the tristate region. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technical assistance (“coaching”) funded for the Health Careers Collaborative (HCC); position funded for a healthcare career pathways director.</li> <li>• TriHealth hospital system joined the healthcare career pathways partnership in 2009, expanding the total number of hospitals from 7 to 9.</li> </ul> |
| 2.2 Make targeted investments, and provide technical assistance to launch two new workforce partnerships in priority industries in the tristate region.                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positions funded for manufacturing and construction career pathways directors; technical assistance (“coaching”) funded for manufacturing and construction career pathways partnerships.</li> </ul>   |

### 3. Build the capacity of the regional workforce system.

| Strategy   | Activities in 2009   |
|--|--|
| 3.1 Organize adult workforce success networks to improve and coordinate support services that help unemployed, low-skilled, and hard-to-employ workers prepare for, enter, advance, and succeed in the labor market. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Convened the Hard-2-Hire Network, consisting of over 50 organizations working to coordinate and improve employment services for adults who have a criminal record.</li> <li>• Supported professional development in workforce certification/career counseling for 40+ workforce development professionals.</li> </ul>   |
| 3.2 Develop a common data collection and management system for use by regional workforce organizations to track results and evaluate strategies.   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implemented the G*Stars data system, in partnership with United Way and local WIBs, to serve as a region-wide data system for all workforce providers to track and report key performance measures. Collected close to 1,500 participant records (as of Jan. 2010) for the Health Careers Collaborative (HCC) initiative. Regional data to be collected in 2010.</li> </ul> |

### 4. Advance a policy agenda to improve our workforce system and outcomes.

| Strategy  | Activities in 2009   |
|---|--|
| 4.1 Coordinate advocacy efforts addressing system alignment and barrier reduction for low-skilled workers at three levels of systems change: (1) policies at the regional and state level; (2) local infrastructure to support workforce development; and (3) industry practices. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formed a Policy Committee, involving representatives from 15 organizations, to discuss policy-related issues.</li> <li>• The Policy Committee finalized a policy agenda and dedicated resources to advance two priority goals.</li> <li>• Awarded a \$60,000 grant to the Ohio Justice and Policy Center to support statewide and local policy advocacy efforts to reduce barriers for people with criminal records to reenter the workforce.</li> <li>• Awarded a \$30,000 grant to the Northern Kentucky Chamber of Commerce to support policy research activities to help streamline and coordinate the employer services of the region's workforce system.</li> </ul> |

### **Is the Strategic Plan Structured to Address the Region's Challenges?**

*Yes, the strategic plan is well-positioned to address the regions challenges, although some additional specification is needed.*

To assess whether GCWN's strategic plan is structured to meet the challenges facing the region, we identify areas in the strategic plan that address each challenge stated during our interviews. There are two sections in the strategic plan that we reference: 1) the objectives, strategies,

outcomes, and indicators, which establish GCWN’s action plan, and 2) the guiding principles, which offer philosophical insight into how GCWN aspires to operate. For each challenge, we look for a corresponding strategic objective and guiding principle. In some cases, we note that there are corresponding objectives, but no related strategies, outcomes, or indicators in the plan.

### 1. Economic

| Challenge  | Response in GCWN strategic plan   |
|--|---|
| 1. Losing jobs in some industries                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic Objective: Not addressed</li> <li>• Guiding Principles: Adopt sector-based strategies, Dual customer focus</li> </ul>                |
| 2. Fears about brain drain and outmigration                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not addressed</li> </ul>   |
| 3. Employers struggle to find some categories of skilled workers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic objective: Close skill gaps in priority industries</li> <li>• Guiding principle: Dual customer focus, meet employer needs</li> </ul> |
| 4. Recession and recession recovery                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not addressed</li> </ul>   |

### 2. Political

| Challenge                          | Response in GCWN strategic plan  |
|------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Interstate competition          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic Objective: Align workforce resources and strategies across the system; no specific outcomes or indicators tied to this</li> <li>• Guiding principles: Regional scope, and Collaborative approach</li> </ul> |
| 2. Cincinnati vs. surrounding area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic Objective: Align workforce resources and strategies across the system; no specific outcomes or indicators tied to this</li> <li>• Guiding principles: Regional scope, and Collaborative approach</li> </ul> |
| 3. Union vs. non-union             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not addressed</li> </ul>  |

### 3. Systemic

| Challenge  | Response in GCWN strategic plan   |
|--|---|
| 1. Public and non-profit sector competition                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic objective: Align workforce resources and strategies across the system; no specific outcomes or indicators tied to this</li> <li>• Guiding principles: Systemic approach, and Collaborative approach</li> </ul> |
| 2. Duplication of efforts                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic objective: Align workforce resources and strategies across the system; no specific outcomes or indicators tied to this</li> <li>• Guiding principles: Systemic approach, and Collaborative approach</li> </ul> |
| 3. Too much focus on job attainment, not enough on advancement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic objective: Align workforce resources and strategies across the system</li> <li>• Guiding principles: Career pathways methodology</li> </ul>  |

#### 4. Community-based

| Challenges  | Response in GCWN strategic plan  |
|---|--|
| 1. Disparities between demographic groups, frequently framed in terms of race | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic objective: Not addressed</li> <li>• Guiding principles: Target low-wage, low-skill workers; no specific focus on minorities or diversity</li> </ul> |
| 2. Geographic pockets of high poverty   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not addressed</li> </ul>  |

#### 5. Individual

| Challenges   | Response in strategic plan   |
|--|--|
| 1. Skill needs: Soft or professional skills, Basic literacy or numeracy skills | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic objective: Close skill gaps in priority industries</li> <li>• Guiding principles: Target low-wage, low-skill workers</li> </ul>             |
| 2. Lack of resources for education   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic objective: Build the capacity of the regional workforce system</li> <li>• Guiding principles: Target low-wage, low-skill workers</li> </ul> |
| 3. Overcoming criminal histories   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic objective: Build the capacity of the regional workforce system</li> <li>• Guiding principles: Target low-wage, low-skill workers</li> </ul> |

Finding 1: Not all challenges are addressed in the strategic plan, but the overall scope of GCWN is on target; not all challenges can or should be addressed

#### Analysis

Not all challenges raised in our interviews are directly addressed in GCWN’s strategic plan; we do not view this as a major source of concern because these unaddressed challenges are either outside of GCWN’s control and scope or they are symptomatic of larger problems. The challenges that are not addressed are:

- Fears about brain drain and outmigration
- Recession and recession recovery
- Union versus non-union politics
- Geographic pockets of high poverty
- Disparities between demographic groups, frequently framed in terms of race

#### Recommendations

- Address concerns about the recession and recession recovery in the communication strategy. The “counter-cyclical” impact of GCWN’s work may be a message worth including in the communication plan for fundraising. Workforce development efforts in other parts of the country have suffered from reduced funding during recession economic times because employer demand for workers disappears.
- Incorporate a diversity objective. The issue of racial disparities was raised repeatedly in our interviews. Adding a diversity goal would respond to the voices of many of GCWN’s stakeholders. We note that the Health Careers Collaborative (HCC) has a diversity goal and

success with attracting and training a diverse population of entry-level workers. This concept should be modeled in the other pathways and addressed in the strategic plan.

- No change in strategy is recommended to address fears about brain drain and outmigration, union versus nonunion politics, or geographic pockets of high poverty. (We note that HCC is serving individuals from low-income urban areas, but that there is no specific guidance to target specific geographic areas in the strategic plan.)

**Finding 2: Action plans for addressing systemic and political challenges should be operationalized under the “Alignment” strategic objective.**

### Analysis

The strategic objective “Align workforce resources and strategies across the system” creates a space within GCWN’s strategic plan for addressing several challenges that were raised by stakeholders:

- Interstate competition
- Cincinnati vs. surrounding area
- Public and non-profit sector competition
- Duplication of efforts

However, there are no specific strategies, outcomes, or indicators tied to these challenges.

### Recommendations

- Additional fact-finding is recommended leading to a clearer definition of the root causes and impacts of these challenges. GCWN has an opportunity to clarify its goals related to systemic change; however, a diagnostic analysis needs to be done before an action agenda can be developed. For example, it is unknown if institutional competition actually represents a net detriment or benefit in the way that public dollars are spent. Also, there are significant inefficiencies in the expenditure of public dollars due to duplication, but additional specificity is needed about what duplication should be targeted for elimination.

## **How do GCWN’s First-Year Activities Address the Region’s Challenges?**

*In practice, GCWN’s activities are addressing nearly all regional challenges raised by interviewees, even when there are no specific objectives in the strategic plan tied to the challenge.*

Digging deeper, we assess how the activities being driven by the strategic plan are addressing regional challenges. We find that activities driven by GCWN’s plan are addressing nearly all regional challenges, even in cases where there is no specific objective tied to the challenge in the strategic plan. The exception is that there are no efforts supported by GCWN that specifically target geographic pockets of higher poverty.

Below are tables listing the challenges framed by stakeholders in our interviews and activities that GCWN is undertaking related to those challenges.

## 1. Economic

| Challenge  | Theory   | Activity        | Outcome  |
|--|--|-----------------|--|
| Losing jobs in some industries.                                | Reducing employers' workforce-related expenditures (e.g., cost of turnover) may help retain jobs.                        | Career pathways | Unknown  |
| Fears about brain drain and out-migration.                     | Job attainment and retention reduces out-migration.  | Career pathways | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Incumbent and non-incumbent completers are being placed and retained in jobs. Data on actual numbers of placements and retentions is being collected as of Jan. 2010.</li> </ul>  |
| Employers struggle to find some categories of skilled workers. | Connecting employers and educators results in improved pipelines for high-demand workers.                                | Career pathways | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>24 registered nurses scheduled to complete their education in February.</li> <li>838 State Tested Nurses Assistant completers</li> <li>649 Patient Care Assistant completers</li> <li>90 Health Unit Coordinator completers</li> <li>Discussion beginning regarding the initiation of an allied health pathways program.</li> </ul> |
| Recession and recession recovery.                              | Employer cost savings help counteract the recession's impact; programs help workers attain jobs when the recession ends. | Career pathways | Unknown  |

## 2. Political

| Challenge               | Theory  | Activity  | Outcome  |
|-------------------------|---|---|--|
| Interstate competition. | Identifying regional economic synergies and common needs will overcome some interstate competition. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leadership Council</li> <li>Career pathways</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leadership Council creates a venue for dialogue among institutions and agencies from throughout the region.</li> <li>Career pathways partnerships are recruiting partners in all three states.</li> </ul> |

|                                   |  |   |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|---|--|
| Cincinnati vs. surrounding areas. | Identifying regional economic synergies and common needs will overcome regional competition. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership Council</li> <li>• Career pathways</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership Council creates a venue for dialogue among institutions and agencies from throughout the region.</li> <li>• Career pathways are recruiting partners from throughout the region.</li> </ul> |
| Union vs. nonunion.               | Identifying regional common needs will overcome this competition.                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Construction career pathways</li> </ul>                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Both sides are engaged in career pathways planning sessions.</li> </ul>   |

### 3. Systemic

| Challenge  | Theory  | Activity  | Outcome  |
|--|---|---|--|
| Public- and nonprofit-sector competition.                    | There are benefits to partnering, even in a competitive environment, that are not being captured.                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funders' Collaborative</li> <li>• Collaborative grant applications</li> <li>• Planning for ROI analysis</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• \$7.8 million in funding has been aligned from partnering institutions and agencies.</li> <li>• Collaborative grant proposals totaling \$10 million have been submitted with GCWN's support.</li> </ul>   |
| Duplication of efforts.                                      | When parallel programs come together, they can reduce administrative costs, thereby preserving more funding for direct client services. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Career pathways</li> <li>• G*Stars</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Estimated 85 percent academic retention in healthcare career pathways, reducing the number of "retakers."</li> <li>• HCC partners have adopted a uniform assessment test, reducing repeat assessments when individuals touch more than one institution.</li> <li>• G*Stars creates a single location for participant tracking data.</li> <li>• Great Oaks relinquished/gave its practical nursing program to Cincinnati State.</li> </ul> |
| Too much focus on job attainment, not enough on advancement. | Better opportunities for job advancement improve individual earnings and employer return on investment in individuals.                  | Career pathways   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HCC pathways have enrolled 174 incumbents.</li> </ul>   |

#### 4. Community-Based

| Challenge   | Theory  | Activity   | Outcome   |
|---|---|--|---|
| Disparities between demographic groups, frequently framed in terms of race. | Targeting underserved demographic groups provides resources for those who need it most. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Career pathways</li> <li>• Hard-2-Hire Network</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One HCC goal is to increase the diversity of the healthcare workforce.</li> <li>• 467 nonwhite individuals were enrolled in HCC in 2009 (33 percent of individuals).</li> <li>• Hard-2-Hire Network is comprised of over 40 providers that serve individuals with criminal records.</li> </ul> |
| Geographic pockets of high poverty.   | n/a   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No specific place-based activities</li> </ul>             | n/a   |

#### 5. Individual

| Challenge   | Theory  | Activity  | Outcome   |
|---|---|---|---|
| Skill needs: Soft or professional skills, Basic literacy or numeracy skills | Attaining soft/professional skills and basic skills enhances the likelihood of career pathways success. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Career pathways</li> </ul>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HCC learning communities deliver soft skill training.</li> </ul>                               |
| Lack of resources for education   | Overcoming the financial barrier enables individuals to enroll in education or training.                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Career pathways</li> </ul>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HCC employer tuition advancement.</li> </ul>   |
| Overcoming criminal histories   | Once individual attain employment, they can retain employment and advance in careers.                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hard-2-Hire Network</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• H2H is comprised of over 40 providers that serve individuals with criminal records.</li> </ul> |

Finding 1: GCWN strategic plan is driving activities that are addressing the majority of challenges articulated by interviewees.

#### Analysis

- The lone exception is that the plan does not address the challenge of “geographic pockets of high poverty.”
- It is too early in the initiative to assess outcomes or impacts.

#### Recommendations

- Develop performance indicators that are tied to the challenges articulated by stakeholders in our interviews, especially systemic challenges and the diversity challenge. This will enable GCWN to demonstrate that it is addressing these challenges.

**Finding 2: GCWN's strategic objectives and intended outcomes could be tied more closely to outcomes pursued by regional economic development strategies.**

#### Analysis

- GCWN has a strategic objective to reduce skill gaps in targeted industries, but does not seek to prevent job losses or pursue layoff aversion in key industries, two key economic development objectives.
- GCWN measures its employer outcomes at the individual level (e.g. retention rate, turnover rate) rather than at the company level (e.g. company survival rate, company retention in region, new companies attracted to region), which is how economic developers measure.

#### Recommendations

- Consider adding an objective to reduce job losses in key industries by improving economic development outcomes such as company survival, retention, and attraction.
- Partner more closely with regional economic development entities to align the performance indicators of GCWN with those of the economic development community.

#### Further Analysis of Stakeholder Interviews

In June of 2009, the evaluation team interviewed 23 individuals from the GCWN Leadership Council; in December 2009, we interviewed another 20 individuals participating in a career pathways partnership. The purposes of the interviews were to (1) provide stakeholders with an opportunity to offer their thoughts regarding the strategies and direction of GCWN or career pathways partnership, and (2) identify key challenges in order to recommend course-correcting actions.

(Note: Interviewee comments are not direct quotes. They are reconstructions from notes taken during interviews.)

**Finding 1: Stakeholders approve of GCWN's first year activities, especially the establishment of a sound infrastructure, and are enthusiastic about the future of the initiative.**

#### Interviewee Comments

- The commitment of funding has been impressive.
- The committee structure allows us to talk about the major issues.
- The management has been excellent. (The Executive Director) has done a nice job in a challenging situation.
- They made some good hires to manage the career pathways.
- We have a venue that will help us tackle the toughest issues.
- Our grant applications are stronger because GCWN has facilitated partnerships.
- I know a lot more about what other organizations are doing thanks to GCWN.
- The G\*Stars project is a great experiment.
- GCWN's support of career pathways has been tremendous. Technical assistance and funding support have been very important.

### Analysis

- Stakeholders believe that in the first year of operations GCWN has been able to put in place an infrastructure that will enable it to be successful in the future. Staff, key hires, funding, and the committee infrastructure are cited as examples.
- Stakeholders also like the investment in career pathways. Technical support, funding support, and G\*Stars are cited as examples.
- Stakeholders also appreciate having access to a network of peer organizations. Collaborative grant applications and information sharing are cited as examples.

### Recommendations

- Continue the current course of action regarding the establishment of infrastructure, support for career pathways, and facilitating networking and information sharing opportunities.

Finding 2: There is a perceived lack of mission clarity among the participating organizations—specifically, around the concept of alignment.

### Interviewee Comments

- GCWN is an important and necessary thing, but there is a lack of understanding about what the central inefficiencies in the system are.
- This entire effort needs to be branded as a solution for employer problems.
- GCWN’s end goal is unclear; not sure how long-term success will be defined.
- There is a lot of disagreement in terms of vocabulary—*alignment*, *curricula*, *degrees*, *certifications*, *success measures*.
- GCWN does not address the elephants in the room, especially the need to overcome competition among institutions for funding and turf.
- The term *alignment* is interpreted in a variety of ways:
  - Regionalization
  - Information dissemination
  - Resource sharing
  - Student progression
  - Hiring and job retention
  - Too much duplication of services; some organizations or programs may need to close
  - Shared communication plan
  - Alignment of curricula among institutions

### Analysis

- Interviewees, on the whole, approved of the concept of aligning their efforts with those of their neighboring jurisdictions and peer organizations, but the objectives of such an effort are unclear. There were many thoughts, listed above, about what could possibly occur under an initiative to align efforts.
- Several interviewees stated that there are inefficiencies in the way that workforce development policies are administered and the way that organizations offer competing and overlapping services.

- The reasoning behind the decision to support the current career pathways strategy as opposed to supporting other initiatives in the region is not clear to some constituents.

### Recommendations

- Undertake a “mission clarification” exercise with key GCWN stakeholders to identify fundamental inefficiencies in the way that programs and policies are administered and the ways that institutions and policy streams collaborate; seek to discern a goal-oriented agenda aimed at improving these inefficiencies.
- The Leadership Council in collaboration with the Funders’ Collaborative should develop rules for identifying and supporting initiatives in the region that accomplish GCWN’s alignment agenda.

Finding 3: A feeling of greater inclusion is needed among partners in the areas outside of Hamilton County; **the strategic objectives for “alignment” and “capacity building” are hindered as a result.**

### Interviewee Comments

- It was voiced several times that Northern Kentucky partners are not engaged effectively. The following were cited as activities where Northern Kentucky partners felt that they did not provide adequate input:
  - Selection of industries
  - Process for choosing pathways coordinators
  - Process for choosing consultants
  - Discussion of green jobs too Ohio-focused
- Having the funder present at the Leadership Council meetings makes people clam up, so they don’t talk about issues like the regional collaboration issue.
- GCWN needs to build on the current career pathways strengths of Northern Kentucky.
- The process feels too Cincinnati-centric.
- Success metrics need to drive cross-river cooperation.
- It’s the responsibility of all partners to use the GCWN network to connect with others and to tie into GCWN’s plans.

### Analysis

- GCWN participants outside of Hamilton County believe that they are not engaged enough and that their voices are under-weighted.
- Organizations outside of Hamilton County have not always been as proactive as they could have been to become engaged in GCWN.
- The communication dynamics in Leadership Council meetings created by the presence of funders hinder open discussions about regional inclusion.

### Recommendations

- Charge the Leadership Council with taking on the issue of regional inclusion. Hold meetings without the funders present so open communication can take place.
- Identify opportunities to give leadership and contribution roles to organizations outside of Hamilton County.

- Identify opportunities for organizations outside of Hamilton County to connect to the current career pathways efforts.
- Mobilize the Leadership Council to ensure that there is awareness throughout the network of events, key dates, and key activities at partnering institutions.

Finding 4: Despite strong efforts from GCWN, there is concern among members of the Leadership Council about the strength of relationships with the employer community in seeking to support the strategic objective to close skills gaps in priority industries.

#### Interviewee Comments

- This is our primary focus. We're working on this every day.
- HCC employer engagement is excellent; we're working to enhance it.
- It's not happening in a meaningful way.
- The current economic situation makes it hard; it is especially hard in manufacturing because many employers are trying to avoid layoffs and not thinking about hiring.
- The value for employers to participate needs to be clearer.
- Businesses often do not have a sense of what they need; the business community does not have a unified voice, so simple questions about employer needs may actually be more complicated.
- Start by engaging employers that work both sides of the river.
- GCWN needs to figure out how to get employers to the table to make commitments.
- This entire effort needs to be branded as a solution for employer problems.
- Small employers are the ones who need the most help with human resources.
- A role for the chambers of commerce needs to emerge.
- GCWN needs to engage employer panels at educational institutions and WIBs.
- We've had some feedback with employer surveys.

#### Analysis

- GCWN is very obviously working hard to engage employers in their efforts—and having some success despite the challenges brought on by the recession. Nonetheless, in June, many of our interviewees felt that employer engagement needed to be emphasized more.
- A way to communicate the most important benefits to employers is needed. The forthcoming ROI analysis of the HCC that the evaluation team is leading will help with this need.
- The manufacturing career pathways project is struggling the most to engage employers.

#### Recommendations

- Continue the current activities regarding employer engagement.
- Consider partnering with industry champions in manufacturing to help engage additional employers.
- Look for best practices or ROI analyses done in other parts of the country for examples of benefits to collaboration that may be meaningful to employers.
- Continue to pursue employer surveys as a way to collect employer input.

Finding 5: Communicating the benefits to potential partnering institutions is an emerging challenge that is affecting the ability to accomplish all of the strategic objectives.

#### Interviewee Comments

- Advantages to institutions need to be clearer.
- Advantages to employers need to be clearer.
- GCWN needs a methodology for identifying good partnerships and incentivizing them.
- Thoughts from interviewees about the benefits of GCWN's efforts:
  - Systemic improvements:
    - Best practice sharing
    - Resource sharing
    - Increased opportunities for students
    - Reduction of duplication of services
    - Alignment of curricula among institutions
  - Organizational benefits:
    - Referrals and recruitment of clients
    - Increased student retention and advancement
    - Reduced turnover and improved worker productivity
    - Increased service to community for mission-driven organizations

#### Analysis

- While only three comments are listed above, these comments were made repeatedly and emphasized as extremely important by our interviewees.
- Interviewees had many thoughts about what the benefits were. Some were thinking in terms of systemic improvements and offered ideas that resemble the suggestions for the meaning of the term *alignment*; others were thinking in terms of advantages to participating employers and organizations.

#### Recommendations

- The Leadership Council needs to develop a communications plan that succinctly tells institutions the goals of the network and the benefits to their organizations from partnering. This communications plan should articulate the benefits to each type of institution – workforce system, community-based service provider, education provider, and employer. The plan should also explain the expectations for partnering organizations including time commitment, committee participation, and commitment to changing policies and practices.
- Work with stakeholders to articulate all of the perceived benefits of participation and ensure that they are included in the communication plan for recruiting additional partners.
- Continue to undertake the HCC ROI analysis examining the benefits to employers, individuals, and educational institutions. Use this ROI analysis to add specificity to the messages that emerge in the communications plan. Consider an ROI analysis for the other two pathways once there is sufficient data.

**Career Pathways Partnerships**

GCWN is providing financial resources and technical assistance for the administration of partnerships—consisting of education and training institutions, community-based service providers, and employers—for the purposes of developing career pathways. A career pathway is a stepwise series of education and training programs, linked with employment opportunities, that enables individuals to attain employment and advance incrementally over time. The career pathways strategy was chosen by GCWN to 1) address employers’ occupational shortages by creating opportunities for low-skilled individuals to attain employment and advance above the entry level into high demand occupations; 2) offer a framework for bringing together regional partners and employers.

GCWN provides funding and technical assistance for three career pathways partnerships, focusing on creating opportunities in three industry sectors: health care, manufacturing, and construction. Cumulatively, the goals for enrolling individuals in education and training programs in the GCWN-supported career pathways are depicted in the table below.

Table 1: Enrollment Goals and Actual in GCWN-Supported Career Pathways

|                                    | Year 1: 2009 | Year 2: 2010 | Year 3: 2011 | Total |
|------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|-------|
| Goals—Enrolled in Career Pathways  |              |              |              |       |
| Unemployed/low-skilled workers     | 460          | 420          | 500          | 1,380 |
| Incumbent low-wage workers         | 40           | 40           | 40           | 120   |
| Actual—Enrolled in Career Pathways |              |              |              |       |
| Unemployed/low-skilled workers     | 1,254        | n/a          | n/a          | 1,254 |
| Incumbent low-wage workers         | 174          | n/a          | n/a          | 174   |

**Health Care**

The health care career pathways partnership, which calls itself the Health Careers Collaborative of Greater Cincinnati, or HCC, has been operating since 2004. The stated objectives of the partnership are to 1) create avenues of access to healthcare careers for underutilized labor pools, including lower wage incumbent workers and unemployed or underemployed individuals, 2) alleviate healthcare workforce shortages, and 3) increase the diversity of the healthcare workforce in Greater Cincinnati.

The collaborative has seven primary partners:

- Cincinnati Children’s Hospital and Medical Center
- Cincinnati State Technical and Community College
- Dress for Success Cincinnati
- The Health Alliance of Greater Cincinnati
- Great Oaks Career Campuses

- TriHealth, Inc.
- Mercy Neighborhood Ministries

The employer partners represent close to 50% of the region’s health care workforce.

The partnership has undertaken a process to understand the workforce needs of employers, coordinate education and training programs with those needs, and to provide support services for participants that assist them toward advancing successfully in health care employment. Incumbent and unemployed workers are eligible for participation. As noted in Table 2 below, HCC enrolled 1,254 individuals in the last 12 months. This first-year total nearly surpasses the total three-year enrollment goal of GCWN, indicating a need to revise the goals. It is also noteworthy that a higher percentage of incumbents than non-incumbents are black, indicating that employers are successfully recruiting minorities into the program.

Table 2: Total Participants

|         | Non-incumbents |         | Incumbents |         |
|---------|----------------|---------|------------|---------|
|         | Count          | Percent | Count      | Percent |
| Total   | 1,254          |         | 173        |         |
| Black   | 317            | 25%     | 81         | 47%     |
| White   | 820            | 65%     | 88         | 51%     |
| Other   | 68             | 5%      | -          | 0%      |
| Unknown | 49             | 4%      | 4          | 2%      |

Table 3, below, reflects that there is an enrollment requirement for individuals to have at least a high school diploma and shows that over half have at least some college indicating that this initiative may not actually target the lowest skilled individuals. This is a point for further study. Many students may have started college and dropped out, or may have attended college in the past in a field that is not high demand.

Table 3: Education of non-incumbent workforce

| Education category                | Count | Percent |
|-----------------------------------|-------|---------|
| High school diploma or equivalent | 393   | 31%     |
| Some college                      | 659   | 53%     |
| Associate's Degree                | 10    | 1%      |
| Bachelor's Degree or higher       | 69    | 6%      |
| Unknown / Missing                 | 123   | 10%     |

The career pathways program that HCC has organized, depicted in the chart on page 25, is comprised of entry-level certificates (Patient Care Assistant (PCA), State Tested Nursing Assistant (STNA), State Tested Nursing Assistant/Patient Care Assistant combined, and Health Unit Coordinator (HUC)), advanced certificates (Practical Nursing and Medical Assisting), and associate degrees in patient care and allied health disciplines.

Table 4 below indicates that that the bulk of enrollments are in STNA and PCA programs, which experience 100 percent or nearly 100 percent completion rates. Note that individuals are permitted to enroll in more than one program.

Table 4: Participants and completions by program type

| Program type                               | Number of participants: |            | Percent completing |
|--|-------------------------|------------|--------------------|
|  | Receiving               | Completing |                    |
| STNA Certificate Training                  | 841                     | 838        | 99.6%              |
| PCA Certificate Training                   | 648                     | 649        | 100.2%             |
| HUC Certificate Training                   | 103                     | 90         | 87.4%              |
| On-the-job Training                        | 28                      | 12         | 42.9%              |
| Workplace Readiness / Life Skills Training | 12                      | 12         | 100.0%             |
| Other training                             | 5                       | 4          | 80.0%              |
| Computer Literacy Training                 | 1                       | 1          | 100.0%             |

### Best Practices Driving the Initiative

Participating organizations cite several noteworthy aspects of this career pathways program as important to the initiative’s success:

- Pre-enrollment remedial education  
 Prior to enrolling in courses, students take an assessment test to determine their readiness for undertaking academic course work. If a student requires remedial education, he/she is denied immediate enrollment and referred to an appropriate provider, or, if a student’s assessment indicates a minimal amount of remedial education is needed, he/she may take a pre-enrollment “brush up” course, offered by Great Oaks just before the academic semester begins.
- Cohort-based instruction  
 Once enrolled, all students—including those in entry-level certificate, advanced certificate, and associate degree programs—are placed in a cohort, comprised of students pursuing the same award. Students in a cohort take all classes together, through to the end of their respective program. The cohort model, it is believed by the partnering organizations, creates a sense of collegiality, support, and positive peer pressure among students, resulting in increased program retention.
- Learning communities  
 Aside from their academic course work, students are required to take courses—called Learning Community—that provide contextual familiarity with the professional healthcare working and postsecondary educational environments. Partners cite that many individuals struggle to adapt to the professional expectations of jobs above the entry level or to the rigors of postsecondary learning. Learning Community courses seek to overcome these challenges by teaching professional communication and writing, soft skills development, healthcare-career familiarization, college orientation, and introduction to basic science concepts. Two key features are a five-credit course that integrates developmental writing instruction with

instruction on professionalism in the healthcare workplace, delivered partially by the social service provider Dress for Success, and a course that blends introductory college math and introductory chemistry, meant to familiarize students with the basic concepts of these disciplines before they enroll in college-level courses.

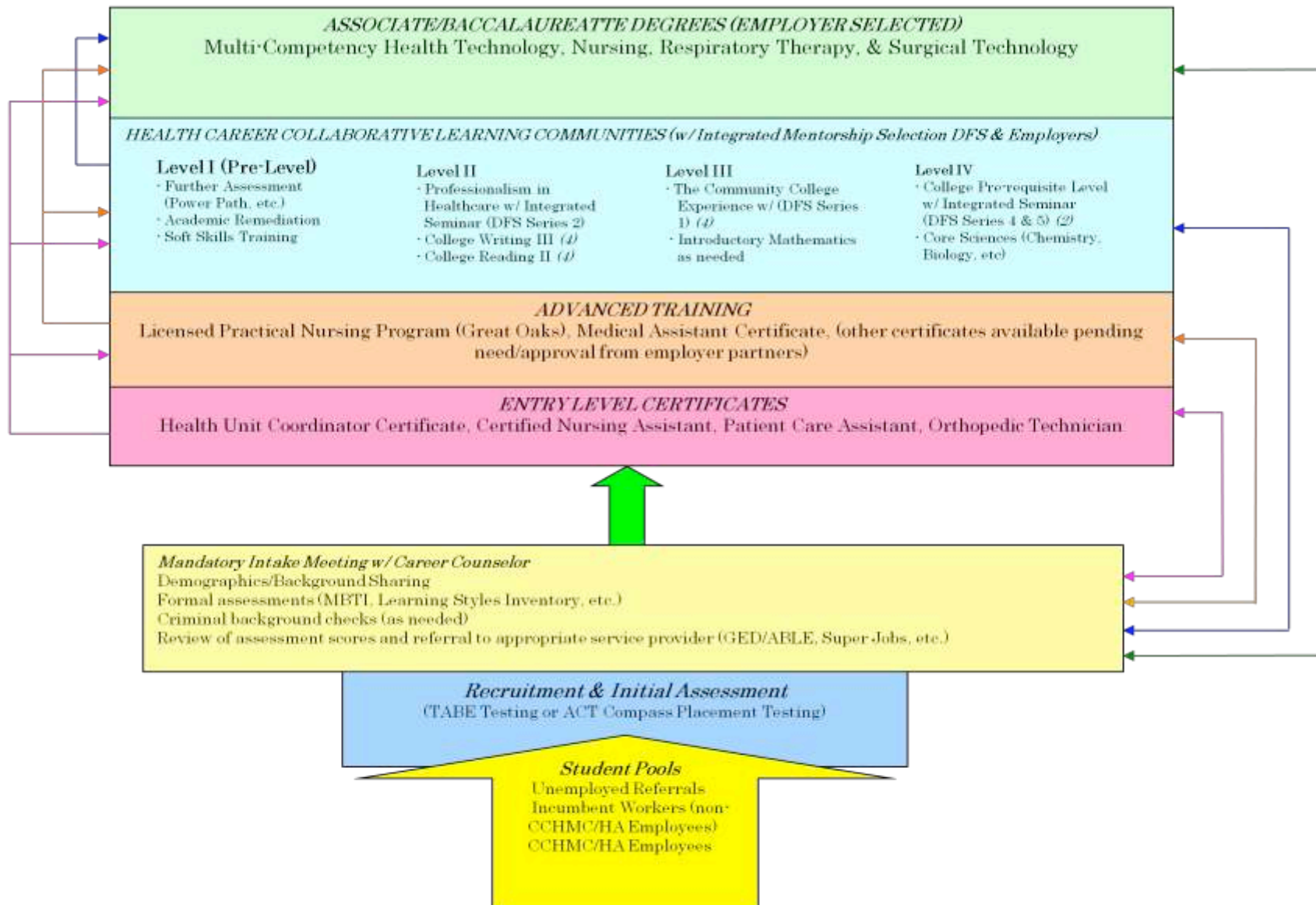
- Up-front employer tuition assistance

As a condition to participation in the partnership, employers are required to provide up-front tuition assistance to students enrolled in a career pathways program. Prior to joining the partnership, all of the employer partners offered tuition assistance on a reimbursement basis, which required students to use their own money for school enrollment—a significant barrier for many low-income individuals.

- No waiting lists for clinical opportunities

Students enrolled in programs that have clinical requirements are prioritized for clinical placements. Employers in the partnership stated that the typical waiting list for clinical training could be one to two semesters if pathways students were not prioritized. It is believed that this aspect of the program improves retention.

Career Pathways Chart published by Health Careers Collaborative



## Further Analysis of Stakeholder Interviews

In December of 2009, the evaluation team interviewed seven individuals that have been part of the HCC partnership—six representatives of partnering organizations and one individual who provides technical assistance to the partnership. The purposes of the interviews were to (1) provide stakeholders with an opportunity to offer their thoughts regarding the activities and direction of the partnership, and (2) identify key challenges in order to recommend course-correcting actions. The findings from those interviews are described below.

(Note that interviewee comments are not direct quotes. They are reconstructions based on notes.)

**Finding 1: The partners all believe that this project is extremely successful and deserves recognition as a national best practice.**

### Interviewee Comments

- This is a good group. If we have any issues, they get put on the table.
- We've been working together for so long that we have a high level of trust.
- Our pathway is so robust and includes so many feature aimed at helping participants that it is really a model program.
- The commitment of partners to serving individual is remarkable.
- Our employers have really been great partners and their contributions in terms of financial, management, and program design have been so important.
- Our students remark that this program is creating opportunities for them that they never would have had without it.
- We (employers) have been happy to be engaged partners in something that provides an additional opportunity for our employees, and keeping our good workers in the system.
- We have been managed well and communication is very clear. I feel like I always know what's going on.

### Analysis

- The partners are all enthusiastic about the model and the opportunities for advancement that the career pathway offers to participants.
- There is a common sentiment that the partners work well together.
- There is also a common sentiment that the partnership is managed effectively.

### Recommendations

- Maintain the same level of trust and engagement among the partners.
- Maintain the high-quality of management of the pathways partnership.

**Finding 2: The mission of HCC is clear to partners, but a lack of formal goals—especially systems change goals—may be limiting the potential impact of the initiative.**

All seven individuals interviewed knew the three aforementioned objectives of the HCC partnership and emphasized that their organizations were very much in support. This alone is significant because it demonstrates that there is a common agenda for the initiative. However, a

series of questions probing how the objectives are being put into practice received varied responses, indicating that there may be an opportunity to enhance the impact of the effort.

### Interviewee Comments

What are the systems change goals of the initiative?

- We don't have any formal ones, although there are aspects of the initiative that could be described as systems change. For example, the fact that clinical wait lists have been removed for our students is significant.
- The relationship between educators and employers is strong and atypical.
- The change of employer tuition assistance policies is important in systemic terms.

How does this career pathways initiative help to advance GCWN's alignment objectives?

- It brings employers and educators together.
- We are able to leverage employer-funding resources to help low-income individuals to advance.
- We have worked together to go for grants.
- We have three of the largest healthcare employers in the region agreeing on the operating principles of the HCC.

How many individuals should this career pathways program serve in the region?

- We're at a good number now because we're being constrained by our classroom and clinical capacity.
- We would like to serve more, but it's hard to recruit new employers because many have their own programs and may not see the added value of our initiative.

Do you have plans to establish metrics for success?

- We should move in that direction.
- It would require a lot of negotiation among the partners.
- Some of the partners feel that we already have a good project so formal metrics aren't needed.
- There may be concern about making this initiative more directed than it needs to be. It would be a layer of formality that the group may not agree on.

### Analysis

- Many best practices have been implemented by the HCC partnership to help individuals overcome barriers as they seek to advance along a career path. While there are no formal goals regarding systems change, the individual members of the HCC partnership have many thoughts on how these best practices may amount to systems change.
- The HCC partners can cite many examples of how their programs and services are better aligned to serve individuals, but it is not clear how this alignment is formally supporting or informing GCWN's mission of alignment. In other words, it is not clear if HCC is meeting the systems change goals of GCWN.
- The HCC partners do not agree on whether formal performance metrics should be specified. Some believe it is necessary to benchmark the performance of the initiative;

others believe that this changes the intent to work as good faith partners without the pressures of external expectations.

### Recommendations

- Establish systems change goals for how HCC wants to improve the regional workforce system. A few suggested goals could include:
  - Shift the focus of regional workforce development to include a focus on career advancement.
  - Enhance the systemic role of employers in helping low-income and low-skilled individuals to advance. The change of tuition assistance policies from a reimbursement to a prepaid basis was an important change. The HCC sets an important example of how employers are critical operational partners in the system for advancement.
  - Enhance the coordination of support services. One interviewee commented that support service providers do not always know if an individual receives support from other service agencies or what services were provided. Coordination among providers could help to eliminate repetitive services, and possibly overhead.
- Facilitate an internal discussion to determine if the group wants to establish performance metrics. One theme emerging in this finding and Finding 4 is that there is disagreement among the partners about whether or not to enhance the formal management structure of the partnership. Performance management and financial management, as discussed in Finding 4, are the two principal issues that emerge from this theme.

Finding 3: Employer engagement is highly successful due in large part to the specificity of what is expected of employers; expansion to include other employers will require additional classroom capacity and stronger communication.

The three hospital systems that are HCC participants have signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that dictates the expectations for membership. The primary expectations are that tuition assistance will be prepaid rather than reimbursed and that HCC participants will be placed at the top of waiting lists for clinical slots. In our interviews, employers were very pleased with the direction of HCC and perceived benefits to their institutions from participation. They all independently cited the MOU as an important factor in their satisfaction with the initiative because it challenged their organizations to make policy changes and also made the conditions for participation very clear. The level of satisfaction of the existing employer participants suggests that the principal challenges in expanding the initiative to include other employers will have to do with effective communication and program or classroom capacity.

### Interviewee Comments

What practices have been altered at your hospital as a result of joining the HCC partnership?

- Funding through tuition advancement is a major change, so is the change in clinical waiting list procedures.
- Job coaches are a good practice that has emerged as critical in career pathways.
- We prioritize pathways students for clinicals.

What improvements would you like to see in how the HCC pathways operate?

- We need to do a better job communicating to our managers what their employees are doing.
- We need to figure out how to help our clinical students get some sort of paid time off from their jobs so they are not overwhelmed with work and the time requirements of being in an academic clinical program.
- On the whole, we need to do a better job of promoting lifelong learning. And the career pathways program should be seen as only one option out of many.

Why aren't more hospitals involved?

- There may be a perception that this initiative is very Cincinnati-centered, and new partners may want to feel a stronger sense of ownership. Or, if the employer is in another part of the region, they may want to work with their own local partners.
- We tried to discuss the model with another hospital in Northern Kentucky, but they did not immediately understand the value of participation.
- There is another hospital system that may come on line, but they are still stuck on the tuition advancement requirement.

#### Analysis

- The pathway has greatly surpassed its participant goals for incumbent and non-incumbent participants in year one. It nearly surpassed its three year goal during the last twelve months, the first year of the NFWS initiative.
- The hospitals that are involved have been pleased to make tuition assistance and clinical wait-list policy changes that have a positive impact on their employees. The policy changes that hospitals have made should all be considered best practices in the field.
- There are opportunities for improving the role of the current employer partners around the engagement of participants' managers and the provision of paid time off for participants.
- Expansion to include more participants will be constrained by classroom capacity.
- The strategy for communicating to potential new employer partners the value of participating in HCC and the key features that make the initiative successful has had mixed success.

#### Recommendations

- Craft a message that communicates the benefits of participation to employers; in describing the initiative, focus on communicating the characteristics that make it successful, not the programmatic specifics.
  - Incorporate the findings of the ROI analysis, currently underway, into the communication plan.
  - Key characteristics to communicate:
    - The initiative focuses on advancement beyond the entry level, creating backfill opportunities at the entry level.
    - Tuition advancement broadens the pool of workers who can participate.
    - Meeting employers' workforce needs is the principal goal of the training partners involved.
    - The plan builds on the strengths of local partnerships.

- Develop plans to address observations of employers for how the initiative could be strengthened:
  - Individuals who are enrolled in clinical training need partial relief from the burdens of work and school. This relief must include a financial component that enables participants to meet the time requirements of their clinical programs (i.e., take time off work) while still earning enough to meet their personal financial obligations.
  - Engage participants' managers in an orientation to explain the scheduling demands of academic classes and clinical programs.

Finding 4: There is a lack of agreement among partners regarding how the partnership should be managed that needs to be addressed in the near-term.

It is very clear from speaking to the HCC partners that they feel the management of the partnership has been very strong. However, there is disagreement on whether HCC should implement a more structured management framework.

#### Interviewee Comments

Do you feel that HCC is effectively managed?

- Yes, (the coordinator) is good.
- Yes, the mission of the group is clear, and I feel like communication is good.
- The employer MOU is an effective management tool.
- Yes. Each partner has the opportunity to contribute to the partnership based on their strengths, and we have strong partner organizations that have good roles in the partnership.
- Yes, but separating the HCC chair position from the partnership director position will be a good thing. It will spread the responsibilities.

What tools do you use to assess if HCC is being run as efficiently as possible? Do you do budget or performance analyses?

- The biggest indicator that we're successful is that partners continue to come to the table.
- Our partnership meetings are a sufficient venue for discussing any issues that we're having.
- We don't do much budget analysis because we don't have any authority to tell partners how to spend their money.
- To do a budget analysis or performance analysis would require a different level of organization. We are a set of organizations guided by a few operating principles, but we are not an independent entity.

Should HCC be a 501c3? Why or why not?

- I could see it moving in that direction. It would help us to solidify some fund-raising and performance management aspects.
- I would like to see that happen. It would give us more flexibility.
- No, it would change the intent of the partnership, and it could develop an agenda that's separate from that of the member organizations.

- No, it would reduce the input that my organization gets to contribute to the planning and delivery of programs.
- In the recent USDOL grant-writing exercise, there was a fight over who would be the fiscal agent for the grant.

### Analysis

- There is disagreement on what HCC should be as it moves into its second five years in operation—some partners believe it operates best the way it is; others believe a more formal structure would be beneficial.

### Recommendation

- A strategic planning discussion regarding the future organizational structure of HCC is needed for the managing partners in the near term. The partners have differing viewpoints on whether HCC should be a 501c3 or if the structure should continue as it is. Symptoms of these differing viewpoints have emerged in deliberations about recruiting new employer partners and during discussion of increasing the program capacity. The issue also surfaces during discussions about grant fiscal management. Because tension has emerged in the past over these issues, this session should be facilitated by a neutral entity.

**Finding 5: The initiative has the pieces of a “continuous improvement” system; now that the first associate degree graduates are nearing completion, it is time to formalize continuous improvement.**

### Interviewee Comments

What sort of continuous improvement activities does the group do to ensure that the pathways programs are functioning well?

- Technical assistance is strong.
- Information sharing among employers is effective.
- Descriptive data collection is good.
- The G\*Stars system will give us more data visibility.
- The upcoming ROI analysis will help us understand the value of our work from an employer perspective.

### Analysis

- Useful technical assistance and opportunities to adopt new practices based on the activities of their peers are two pieces of a continuous improvement system that HCC has in place and that partners cite as effective.
- The ongoing implementation of the G\*Stars system, a database that allows all partners to enter and access participant data, will enable the partnership to track students as they progress through the career pathways program and identify places where individuals incur barriers to advancement.
- Anticipating a positive finding, the upcoming ROI analysis will be a valuable tool for communicating the value that employer partners are recouping from participation in the effort.

## Recommendations

- Set performance expectations for enrollments, completions, upward educational transitions, and job attainment and retention.
- Mine the data in the new G\*Stars database to identify points where pathways participants are experiencing barriers to advancement.
- Following the employer ROI, implement an ROI study to examine the return that the education and support service partners are experiencing.

## **Construction**

The construction pathways partnership is in its infancy, having had only two group meetings in fall 2009, and does not have a brand name. The partnership's mission is to "improve and create construction career pathways designed to meet the regional workforce needs." The vision is to develop "a construction career pathways system that drives regional economic prosperity by providing employers with skilled workers who sustain and build their businesses and who are empowered to grow and advance their careers."

The principal coordinator of the partnership is a highly qualified consultant, who is funded through a contract with GCWN, and whose office is located at the Cincinnati USA Regional Chamber. The coordinator is working to assemble a partnership comprised of educators, employers, and support service providers to build career pathways in the industry. Currently, there are 22 organizations, including employers, participating in the early discussions, with a roughly equal split among employers, educators, and community-based organizations. Formal roles for these organizations have not been designated; so far, they are serving as discussion participants.

Currently, the partnership is undertaking a research effort, investigating the opportunities and issues facing employers and workers in the construction industry. This research will build upon work done previously in the city of Cincinnati but has expanded the geographic scope to include the rest of the region. While many issues affecting workers and businesses and opportunities to develop programs are known to the individuals involved in the partnership, further discussion will be forthcoming to plot career pathways and an agreed-upon plan for the group.

Concurrently with the research and partnership development agenda, which are ongoing, the partnership participated in several recent grant applications—amounting to approximately \$10 million in potential funds, if all grants are awarded.

(Note: Interviewee comments are not direct quotes. They are reconstructions based on notes.)

Finding 1: Partners are excited about the opportunity to be involved in this effort.

## Interviewee Comments

- This is very much needed in our region and in the construction industry.
- There is so much that we can do to improve the way we work together.
- We're looking forward to this work.
- We know that we'll be looking for skilled workers when the economy turns around and this is a great opportunity for us.

### Analysis

- There is enthusiasm about the potential of this initiative.
- Partners are ready to dive into the work of building the pathway.

### Recommendations

- Maintain the positive momentum that has been started.

Finding 2: There is concern that it is too early to undertake or participate in grant-writing without agreement from career pathways partners on the **partnership's** objectives.

### Interviewee Comments

What are your thoughts on the direction of the construction partnership so far?

- (The coordinator) is great. She was a great hire.
- The mission is clear, but the actions are not—is this about career pathways or fund-raising?
- Not clear on what is meant when we say the system is fragmented.
- Too much focus on fund-raising early without a clear idea of how it ties to our career pathways.
- Will need to be careful to select high-performing partners as implementation gets closer.
- It's not entirely clear who has control of the agenda, GCWN or the partners.

### Analysis

- There is concern that applying for grants this early was premature, given that the group is still working to specify the issues that it would like to address.
- There is an opinion within the partnership that career pathways partners should control the action agenda. When the construction grants were pursued, it evoked a fear that partners do not control the action agenda; that it is actually controlled by GCWN leadership or the construction pathways coordinator.

### Recommendations

- Establish ground rules with career pathways partners for approving or disapproving of the partnerships' participation in grant opportunities or other initiatives. The construction pathways coordinator needs the latitude to make management decisions that she thinks will ultimately benefit the partnership, but the pathways partners also need a sense that there is a shared agenda.

Finding 3: Construction is viewed in Cincinnati city as an industry well-suited to an economic inclusion agenda.

### Interviewee Comments

Why is your organization participating in the construction partnership?

- Many individuals don't understand why they can't get jobs in construction, and they're extremely frustrated by that; we need to do better at connecting people to jobs.

- We are trying to overcome barriers to employment for our clients. We're worried that the key needs of some people will not be met by this project—e.g., legal histories, ex-offender status.

### Analysis

- Two interviewees raised the issue of economic inclusion and improving diversity in the construction workforce, indicating that this may be an emergent theme in the partnership's goals.

### Recommendation

- Set formal goals around improving diversity in the construction industry.

## Manufacturing

The manufacturing pathways partnership, like the construction pathways partnership, is only beginning to collaborate. To date, they have had three partnership meetings and an “advanced manufacturing” employer symposium in fall 2009. The mission of the partnership is to “create an advanced manufacturing career pathways system, responsive to the needs of employers and employees in the Greater Cincinnati region.”

The principal coordinator of the partnership is a 30-year retired auto industry veteran, now consultant, who is funded through a contract with GCWN, and whose office is located at the Cincinnati USA Regional Chamber. The coordinator has assembled a partnership comprised of educators, employers, and support service providers to build career pathways in the industry. Currently, there are 22 organizations participating in the early discussions, with a roughly equal split among employers, educators, and community-based organizations. Formal roles for these organizations have not been designated; so far, they are serving as discussion participants. One of the employer partners has agreed to chair the career pathways partnership team.

The manufacturing pathways partnership is currently undertaking a research effort, investigating the opportunities and issues facing employers and workers in the industry. These efforts include a survey of employers that inquires about their workforce needs.

Our interviewees characterized manufacturing as an industry that suffers from a lack of cohesion and community, and as a result, gaining momentum in the partnership development efforts has been difficult. Additionally, many manufacturers are struggling to maintain employment levels in the current recession, so discussions of workforce needs and hiring have fallen by the wayside. Our interviewees believe the decline in employment, driven by the industry's ongoing shift from labor-intensive to technology-intensive work, has created a negative image of employment in manufacturing among members of the public.

(Note: Interviewee comments are not quotes. They are reconstructions based on notes.)

Finding 1: Partners are adamant that there is opportunity for improvement in manufacturing workforce development.

#### Interviewee Comments

- Many young people don't even want to consider manufacturing as a career opportunity even though it is a high-tech field with many job opportunities.
- Employers need to realize that this work is extremely important to the future of manufacturing in the region.
- There are pockets of hiring demand in the region that we don't know how to serve.
- Career pathways are a good way to bring partners together to talk about workforce problems.

#### Analysis

- A core group of committed partners is ready and willing to move this initiative forward.

#### Recommendations

- Work quickly to develop an action agenda in order to maintain the level of enthusiasm among the partners.
- Continue to work on the gap analysis and survey of employers about the employment needs.

Finding 2: A communication plan that tells potential employer partners the biggest benefits of participation in the partnership is needed.

#### Interviewee Comments

What are your thoughts on the direction of the manufacturing partnership so far?

- This work is needed in this industry, so we're glad that it's happening.
- Getting companies to come to the table has been hard; companies are in survival mode and don't want to spend time doing things where they don't see an immediate impact.

#### Analysis

- Recruitment of employer partners is the principal challenge of the partnership.

#### Recommendation

- Focus additional efforts on communicating the returns that employers will experience as a result of partnership.

#### Next Steps

Now that GCWN's first year is complete and it is beginning to collect data on outcomes from HCC, our evaluation will incorporate plans for assessing impacts:

- Return on investment analysis: January–June 2010. Identifies and quantifies factors that impact Health Careers Collaborative employers.

- Quantitative analysis of student outcomes: 2010. Analyze data from the G\*Stars data system for HCC participants.
- Interview series: During 2010 continue the formative analysis of the construction and manufacturing career pathways partnerships.

Required for National Fund for Workforce Solutions:

- Employer survey: Before November 2010. During the 2010 calendar year, implement this survey in coordination with the ROI.

## Appendix A: List of Interviewees

### GCWN Leadership Council interviews—June 2009

- Eric Avner, vice president and senior program manager, Community Development, Carol Ann and Ralph V. Haile, Jr., U.S. Bank Foundation
- Kara Clark, vice president, Vision 2015
- Myrita Craig, executive director, Agenda 360
- Jeff Edmondson, executive director, Strive/KnowledgeWorks Foundation
- Quinten Harris, regional economic development director—Region 5, Ohio Department of Development
- Marianne Krismer, dean of health and public safety, Cincinnati State Technical and Community College
- Sherry Kelley Marshall, president, Southwest Ohio Region WIB
- Kathy Merchant, president/CEO, Greater Cincinnati Foundation
- Doug Moormann, vice president of economic development, Cincinnati USA Partnership, Cincinnati USA Regional Chamber
- Rob Reifsnyder, president, United Way of Greater Cincinnati
- Elijah Rudolph (Rudy), GCWN advanced manufacturing director
- Bob Scarborough, director of adult education, Great Oaks Career Campuses
- Harry Snyder, Ohio Skills Bank coordinator—Region 5, Great Oaks Career Campuses
- Nancy Spivey, vice president, Workforce and Education Solutions, Northern Kentucky Chamber of Commerce
- Jennifer Spohr, regional workforce coordinator—Region 5, Ohio Department of Development
- Barbara Stewart, director, Northern Kentucky Workforce Investment Area
- Pete Strange, CEO, Messer Construction; chairman, Cincinnati USA Chamber
- Angie Taylor, vice president of business and industry services, Gateway Community and Technical College
- Dennis Ulrich, executive director, Workforce Development Center, Cincinnati State Technical and Community College
- Janice Urbanik, GCWN construction director
- Robin White, president/CEO, Great Oaks Career Campuses
- Wonda Winkler, associate operating officer, Brighton Center

### Career pathways partnership interviews—December 2009

- Kathy Atkinson, program director for education, Mercy Neighborhood Ministries
- Pat Bready, president, Quest Management Consulting
- Cheryl Breuggeman, assistant dean of workforce development, University of Cincinnati—Raymond Walters College
- Scott Ellsworth, vice president of U.S. operations, Tipco Punch
- Barbara Endel, GCWN technical assistance provider
- Bradley Hughes, senior manager of human resources, Amylin Ohio, Inc.
- Joe Hummel, executive director, Allied Construction Industries
- Mary Ivers, founder and president, Dress for Success

- Alan Jones, corporate vice president of human resources, Health Alliance
- Marianne Krismer, dean of health and public safety, Cincinnati State Technical and Community College
- Bill Lecher, Health Careers Collaborative coordinator, senior clinical director, Cincinnati Children's Hospital
- Brooks Parker, craft force vice president, Messer Construction
- Elijah Rudolph, advanced manufacturing career pathways coordinator
- Sister Sally Sherman, director of mission integration, Mercy Neighborhood Ministries
- Jennifer Skinner, director of corporate educational services, TriHealth
- Harry Snyder, adult education supervisor, Great Oaks Career Campuses
- Steven Tucker, director of adult services, Urban League of Greater Cincinnati
- Janice Urbanik, construction career pathways coordinator
- Rea Waldon, senior vice president of economic empowerment and entrepreneurship, Urban League of Greater Cincinnati

## Appendix B: About the Evaluation Team

### Christopher Spence

Mr. Spence has worked with workforce and education providers in Ohio and throughout the United States to develop regional workforce development strategies. He is currently an independent consultant providing technical assistance to workforce development, adult education, economic development, and postsecondary providers in Ohio. Prior to beginning his independent consulting career, Mr. Spence spent several years at Workforce Strategy Center, a New York–based group that specializes in workforce development policy and practices, where he worked with regional partnerships around the country to realign workforce services to serve individuals and regions. He is an author or coauthor of several publications, including *The Career Pathways How-To Guide* and *Working Together: Aligning State Systems and Policies for Individual and Regional Prosperity*. Mr. Spence is pursuing a doctoral degree in public policy at the New York University–Wagner School of Public Service, where his dissertation evaluates incumbent worker training policies in Ohio. Early in his career, Mr. Spence was a captain in the United States Army.

### Dr. Joel A. Elvery

Dr. Elvery is an assistant professor of urban studies at the Maxine Goodman Levin College of Urban Affairs at Cleveland State University. He received his PhD in economics from the University of Maryland in 2004. His research focuses on the intersections of labor economics, urban economics, and public policy. His quantitative evaluation of the effects of enterprise zones on resident employment was recognized with an Honorable Mention for the 2005 W. E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research Dissertation Award. His work has been published in *Economic Development Quarterly* and the *Journal of Regional Science*. He teaches courses in workforce development, labor market analysis, and quantitative research methods. Prior to joining the Levin College faculty, he was a research economist at the Bureau of Labor Statistics in Washington, DC.

### Linda Stacy

Linda Stacy is a national expert in adult education and community-college-centered workforce development. She currently serves as a loaned executive from the University of Toledo to the Lucas County Improvement Corporation. She is also the Ohio Skills Bank coordinator for economic development–Region 2, a technical assistance provider to Ohio Skills Bank efforts in economic development–Region 3, interim executive director of the WIB for the Lucas County Economic Development office, and the regional P-16 director. She has been an adviser in the state process to move Ohio’s Adult Career Centers/ABLE programs into the Ohio Board of Regents and the move of the state’s Targeted Industry Grant Program into the Ohio Department of Development. She has served as the Academic Quality Improvement Program evaluator for the Higher Learning Commission and was on the steering committee for the KnowledgeWorks Foundation Ohio Bridges to Opportunity initiative. Additionally, she served on the Ohio steering committee for the MDRC Opening Doors initiative. She is also a past president of the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education.