

Virginia Sector Strategies and Career Pathways Academy



BACKGROUND:

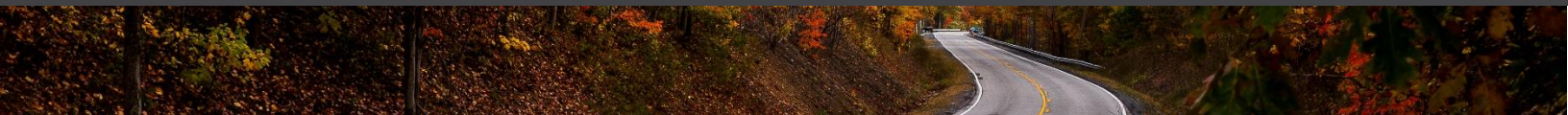
Virginia's state workforce partner agencies joined together to create a Sector Strategy and Career Pathways Academy and online Community of Practice.

The agency partners sought to use sector strategies and career pathways to strengthen the workforce system partners' responsiveness to the demands of business and needs of jobseekers. Sector strategies place businesses at the center of regional business engagement activities, and career pathways show comprehensive advancement opportunities with on/off ramps that align with industry needs. Key partners provided ongoing leadership through a statewide Steering Committee, and a Trainer Workgroup provided insights about needs and opportunities in specific areas of the workforce system.

The Virginia Community College System's collaborators in this work included the Virginia Employment Commission; the Virginia Department of Education, Adult Education; the Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services; the Virginia Department of Social Services; the Virginia Department of Veterans Services; the Virginia Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired; and the Virginia Association of Workforce Directors.

OUR APPROACH:

1. **Analyze staff needs:** We reviewed survey results, conducted focus groups, and held consultations to identify the right training topics and instructional design approach.
2. **Design comprehensive and learner-focused curriculum:** Subject matter experts led the design of curriculum using evidence-based practices with an emphasis on the 'how-to' for implementation.
3. **Develop the Academy:** Our blended learning solution utilized virtual instructor-led coursework for foundational and system-specific insights, along with pre-work to introduce concepts, self-paced online modules, and curated resources to fully explore sectors and career pathways. Learners participated in cross-regional discussions to share lessons learned and online peer workgroups to identify and problem-solve challenges unique to this work. The Academy was built on the [Moodle](#) platform and was tailored to the brand, learning experience, metrics and reporting requirements of our client.
4. **Pilot the training:** We piloted the Academy to a small group of participants who provided initial feedback and served as champions of the program. We listened to their feedback and adjusted to meet their needs.
5. **Evaluate and measure:** We created an evaluation strategy and tools to measure reaction, learning, behaviors, and results (Kirkpatrick's Four Levels of Evaluation). Knowledge checks, surveys, and observations were used to measure outcomes for Academy participants, their customers, and the larger workforce system.
6. **Recognize success:** Badges were awarded for achieving milestones, and participants received certificates upon completion of their Academy coursework.
7. **Replicate and continuously improve:** The training is now being offered on an ongoing basis, with new cohorts starting each month, along with ongoing support and training for champions.



OUTCOMES AND IMPACT:

Over 500 workforce system staff throughout the state have participated in training to date. They have examined effective models through their coursework and are able to put strategies into practice through peer workgroups. Participants appreciate the opportunity to align around a common language, interact with their peers, gain a greater understanding of the diverse parts of the workforce system, and better serve customers. These experiences help learners connect the content to their work.

90% of participants felt that they can now apply promising practices from the courses to their work in their region.

The training has strengthened the capacity of workforce system partners to operationalize sector strategies and career pathways and deliver business-driven services throughout every Virginia region.

Maher has worked with a number of states to design and implement [sector strategies](#), facilitate sector partnerships, and align career pathways to drive robust and sustainable talent pipelines. Sector strategies and career pathways are proven approaches for helping job seekers to find middle-skill jobs and helping employers to find skilled workers.

"I just completed the Sector Strategies training. It was a well-designed layout, easy to navigate (even for those of us who are technology challenged!), clear and concise. I also appreciate that the quizzes were not an identical format in each section. Variety is the spice of life!"

- Course Participant