

RECONNECT RE-ENROLL & RISE

An illustration of a college campus. A winding white path leads from the bottom center towards a large, multi-story yellow building with a red roof and a central tower. The path is flanked by green hills and various trees in shades of blue and green. Several small figures of people are walking along the path. The sky is a bright yellow with stylized white clouds.

**Five Imperatives
to Help Community Colleges
Enroll Stopped-Out Students**

insidetrack.

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Acknowledgments

This report is the product of both secondary research and analysis, as well as direct interviews and conversations with institutional leaders, practitioners, public policy experts and other leaders in the community college sector. To reflect the wide range of issues and perspectives that affect adult learner re-engagement and re-enrollment, we intentionally sought out individuals with a wide range of perspectives and divergent experiences to better understand the complex nature of the issues discussed in this paper — as well as the needs, challenges and aspirations of adult learners seeking to re-engage and re-connect with higher education. We are particularly grateful to the following individuals who contributed their time, expertise and perspectives to this publication:

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Foreword

InsideTrack has supported the successful return of adult learners for nearly two decades. Now, more than ever, we feel called upon to further strengthen our commitment to getting students back on the path to completion, given the realities of declining enrollment and increasing stop-outs. As an extension of direct services and technical assistance to colleges, universities and state systems, we are committed to publishing our findings, implementation insights and expertise regularly to widen the impact of our work. We value partnering and sharing with fellow institutional leaders, philanthropists, public policy experts and other practitioners on re-enrolling and graduating students. We believe the only way to effectively address the skills and credential gaps for learners is through a new attitude of open collaboration, with the goal of accelerating and enhancing the impact of all practitioners.

This paper distills insights and tools InsideTrack has developed and derived from our work with community colleges and adult learners through more than two decades of frontline interactions serving 2.9 million learners and partnering with more than 300 institutions.

Our aspiration is to advance the field's understanding of not just the reasons why adult learners require personalized support, but also how all community colleges can actively help them navigate their return to college. At a time when colleges are working to re-engage the nearly 40 million students who have left higher education, we hope this paper provides college leaders, experts and policymakers with a field-tested roadmap to take action. We believe it can play a small part in providing more colleges with the tools and support they need to help these learners chart a path to a credential of value — and long-term economic opportunity.



Kai Drekmeier
Chief development officer and co-founder of InsideTrack

About InsideTrack

InsideTrack is passionate about helping all learners achieve their education and career goals through the transformative power of coaching. Since 2001, we've served 2.9 million learners, partnering with more than 300 institutions and organizations to directly improve enrollment, persistence, completion and career readiness. Our coaching methodology is evidence-based and research-confirmed, with proven outcomes for every type of learner — from traditional to adult, part-time to full-time, online to in-person — including first-generation students and those who face systemic barriers to postsecondary success. We also work with partners to build internal coaching capacity through staff training and professional services — designed to sustain advances in-house for lasting, scalable impact. InsideTrack is a part of Strada Collaborative, a mission-driven nonprofit. To learn more, visit www.insidetrack.org and follow us on Twitter [@InsideTrack](https://twitter.com/InsideTrack) and LinkedIn [@InsideTrack](https://www.linkedin.com/company/insidetrack)

INTRODUCTION

Community College Enrollment Realities and Opportunities

In the fall of 2019, 2.6 million students started their college careers. The following semester, the COVID-19 pandemic arrived, bringing with it unprecedented adversity for learners. Facing financial hardship, learning challenges and overwhelming anxiety and grief, 679,000 students [would not return](#) for their second year. As the impact of COVID-19 ebbed and flowed with vaccine rollouts and seasonal surges, college enrollment continued to fall.

Community colleges have been hit the hardest, losing [nearly 830,000 students](#) since spring 2020, according to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. Research by Gallup and Lumina Foundation found that more than 40 percent of associate degree students report having considered stopping out of college [in the past six months](#). These learners are joining a cohort that is as staggering in its scope as it is diverse in its members: [the 39 million Americans](#) with some college credit but no credential.

Half of such students are adult learners, and a disproportionate number are from historically underrepresented populations. Despite making up roughly 35 percent of all undergraduates, Black, Latinx, and Native American students [account for 44 percent](#) of students with some college but no credential. Black students are especially overrepresented among learners who left college without a credential, making up nearly 19 percent of that population but representing under 14 percent of all undergraduates.

Though certainly exacerbated by COVID-19, the enrollment woes of two-year institutions pre-date the pandemic by about a decade. Approximately 22 million students last attended a community college before stopping out. Community colleges have grappled with shrinking enrollment since 2010, when the economy began to rebound from the Great Recession. Meanwhile, college leaders have long been concerned about

a looming [demographic cliff](#) in which a decline in birthrates during the 2008 recession will soon result in far fewer high school graduates and prospective college students. These trends are here to stay, even as the disruptions of the pandemic and other economic factors create new challenges for community colleges. Among those challenges are an increase in wages for jobs that do not require a two-year degree and rising interest from younger learners in non-degree pathways.

The Adult Learner Re-Enrollment Opportunity

Community colleges have an immense opportunity and an urgent responsibility to enroll adult learners, who — despite the difficulties that drove them from higher education in the first place — are still signaling a desire to pursue a college credential that can help them advance their careers and earn family-sustaining wages. According to research by Lumina and Gallup, [85 percent of students](#) who left college during the pandemic now say they want to return to school. Of the more than 944,000 learners who re-enrolled during the 2020-21 academic year, [according to a study](#) by the National Student Research Clearinghouse, 38.5 percent re-enrolled in a community college after last attending a community college, making it the most common pathway for re-enrollees.

Finding ways to dramatically boost community college adult learner re-enrollment can help two-year institutions address ongoing enrollment declines, while giving millions of learners a second chance to pursue a life-changing postsecondary education.

“The learners that have dropped out during the pandemic are different from those that dropped out during the last recession,” said Louis Soares, chief learning and innovation officer at the American Council on Education. “Likewise, there are now different opportunities for re-enrolling learners. We have a new understanding of how students learn and what motivates them to succeed. We’ve experimented more. There are a lot more moving pieces and resources we can tap for re-engagement and, ultimately, re-enrollment.”

Key Challenges in Re-Enrolling Adult Learners

Community colleges face many challenges when working to re-enroll students. Adult learners are juggling competing responsibilities alongside their academic pursuits, from working full-time to raising children. Many adult learners are also members of the “sandwich generation,” individuals who must care for their children, as well as their parents or other older relatives. The amount of time student caregivers can spend on studying and completing coursework is severely limited. For instance, students [caring for preschool-aged children](#) have, on average, just 10 hours per day to devote to sleeping, eating and studying.

In addition, returning adult learners come from a wide range of backgrounds and circumstances and bring with them an equally wide range of work and learning experiences. That means there’s no one-size-fits-all solution to re-enrolling students and ensuring they persist. Each learner needs an approach tailored to their unique needs and situation.

“Prior to the pandemic, we thought we knew what adult learners needed and wanted,” said Dr. Johnny Smith, vice president of strategic initiatives and community engagement at Pitt Community College. “We’re now realizing we have a lot more to learn. We need to listen to the adult learner and begin to customize, individualize and personalize their learning.”



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*Louis Soares, chief learning and innovation officer,
American Council on Education*

Colleges must first identify not only which students have left their institutions, but which of those students are most likely to be interested in returning to school. Colleges must then determine the best ways to connect and re-engage with students who have stopped out and provide them with a compelling argument as to why they should return. Finally, they must help returning students navigate a re-enrollment process littered with bureaucratic and financial hurdles — from transfer credit policies to outstanding student debt.

“We need to determine what promises we should go out into the community and make,” said Kevin Stump, vice president of economic mobility and workforce innovation at SUNY Rockland. “And we need to figure out how we actually deliver on those promises.”

“

We’re now realizing we have a lot more to learn. We need to listen to the adult learner and begin to customize, individualize and personalize their learning.

Dr. Johnny Smith, vice president of strategic initiatives and community engagement, Pitt Community College

Indeed, once students have re-enrolled, colleges should be prepared to offer targeted support around both their academic and life needs. Institutions will have to provide personalized success coaching, engage in frequent and consistent outreach, and identify pathways that better connect credentials to career advancement. They must also help students balance their family and work obligations with their academic aspirations.

This takes developing a student-centric mindset across administrators, faculty and staff. It means determining who specifically will interact with adult learners, what transitions should exist between departments and roles, and how data and insights can be shared across departments.

Financing these kinds of initiatives can also prove difficult, especially for resource-strapped institutions already struggling with dwindling state funds and flagging enrollment. While re-enrollment programs often have a strong and quick return on investment, funding for addressing the many challenges listed above may not be freely available in the college’s existing operating budget.

Lisa Larson, former president of Eastern Maine Community College who now works for the nonprofit Education Design Lab, said solving these challenges is going to require reimagining many long-standing policies, systems and structures.

“You can offer microcredentials, you can have rolling start dates, you can acknowledge students’ prior learning and experience, you can rethink seat time, and you can be creative with or loosen the grip of traditional thinking,” Larson said. “We have tens of millions of people out there that have done amazing things and they are looking for their next opportunity, but they need help. If we are going to help them, we’re going to have to become more open-minded. It’s up to us to make changes to better accommodate them and their needs, not the other way around.”



The Five Imperatives of Adult Learner Re-Engagement and Re-Enrollment

WITH CASE STUDIES AND TOOLS FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGES

To help community college leaders develop an effective re-enrollment campaign, this guide identifies five imperatives to guide activities and investment. The imperatives correspond broadly to the critical stages of re-enrollment: establishing a campus-wide plan, marketing a return to college effectively to adult learners, prioritizing students to contact, re-engaging and motivating students to re-enter higher education, and helping them navigate the final process steps to matriculation. To assist community colleges in implementing the imperatives, this publication also provides case studies and ready-to-use tools. These resources are drawn from the re-enrollment campaigns conducted by community colleges and InsideTrack.

1 Assess Institutional Readiness for Re-Enrollment

Community colleges should take a holistic look at how existing marketing, admissions and registration processes meet the needs of adult learners, and address any shortfalls accordingly. This might require the revision of existing systems, the creation of new programs, and the training of faculty and staff. It will require reprioritizing items in the operating budget or finding new funding sources altogether. Fortunately, national and regional foundations have shown interest in funding this work, especially as it relates to regional economic development and minority and low-income learners. There are also federal and state grants that can be used for these initiatives.

The goal is to create bandwidth for institutional processes to treat each student's case uniquely. An institution must fully assess its readiness for this endeavor.

"I've been in higher education for over two decades, and I don't ever recall taking a course on how to effectively advise a student," Dr. Johnny Smith of Pitt Community College, said. "It was just always assumed that if you had a master's degree and you had a good heart that you could take care of students. But it takes more than that."

This analysis will likely reveal some uncomfortable but important truths. When the City Colleges of Chicago began encouraging current and prospective students to share honest and direct feedback about its strategies for adult learners, the college learned that many of its existing policies and practices were creating the very barriers it sought to eliminate.

"Some of that reflection has been a little painful," said Dr. Stacia Edwards, the college's deputy provost. "Because in having those conversations we have come to realize



that a number of the problems shutting adult learners out can be traced back to our own front door.”

One institutional policy that merits re-examination concerns unpaid balances. Most colleges do not allow students to re-enroll (and will withhold their transcripts) until they clear outstanding debts. [One study](#) estimates unpaid balances affect up to 6.6 million students, with stopped-out community college students owing an average balance of \$631. Community colleges should explore a student debt forgiveness policy as part of the institution's re-enrollment strategy.

“Offering student debt relief is a win-win: it removes a re-enrollment barrier for adult learners, while colleges get the tuition from returning students, which exceeds the debt even if colleges could collect it,” noted Martin Kurzweil, Vice President, Educational Transformation, at Ithaka S+R.

Resources to assess your institutional readiness

Before embarking on a campaign to re-enroll stopped-out students, community college leaders have to assess whether their institution possesses the appropriate processes and resources to engage and advance stopped-out students. The assessment focuses on how the institution can better serve adult learners by posing a series of questions, including:

- How do our enrollment processes and policies cater to the unique needs of adult learners?
- Do we have sufficient staff within enrollment management and advising with the time and capabilities to help adult learners navigate a return to college?
- What funding sources do we have for the marketing, administrative, financial aid, and support services a re-enrollment campaign requires?
- Should a public-private partnership be considered to aid our re-enrollment initiative?
- How can we forge consensus to create and implement a re-enrollment initiative across departments and roles, and set goals and accountabilities?

The preceding questions are not exhaustive—community colleges benefit from having a holistic view of their institutions’ readiness to support an adult learner re-enrollment initiative. Doing so ensures there is clarity around what resources the initiative needs — and the investments required to successfully implement it. To help institutional leaders conduct this exercise, InsideTrack has created this tool:

COMMUNITY COLLEGE RE-ENROLLMENT INSTITUTIONAL READINESS ASSESSMENT TOOL



The tool incorporates InsideTrack’s insight from helping dozens of community colleges develop and implement initiatives targeting stopped-out students. The readiness assessment provides a structured series of questions to help community college leadership understand where the college stands in terms of core issues such as:

- What is the timeline for the re-enrollment work?
- Who should champion the initiative on campus?
- What financial incentives could be used to spur re-enrollment?
- How do we track and measure the impact of the re-enrollment initiative?

Engaging and re-enrolling adult learners requires orchestrating a range of activities, from targeted marketing and personalized outreach to student support services that shepherd students through to matriculation. A comprehensive re-enrollment strategy, therefore, needs investments that many colleges may not have the funding for. To support institutional leadership in sourcing funding, InsideTrack has created this additional resource:

GUIDE TO SEEKING FUNDING SOURCES FOR RE-ENROLLMENT INITIATIVES



This guide identifies a set of funding sources and screening questions to help community colleges explore options for re-enrollment investments.

2

Tailor Marketing and Community Outreach Efforts to Adult Learners



Effective marketing that speaks to adult learners is crucial to reconnecting with and reengaging with returning students.

“At first glance, some of these learners can seem quite unreachable,” said Suzanne Harbin, vice president for advancement and innovation at Wallace State Community College. “Many of our learners are not social media folks. They don’t get a newspaper. So how do you reach them? Is it a flier in the grocery store? And then how do you take that inquiry and get them to re-enroll?”

Building marketing around career outcomes is an especially effective tactic, demonstrating to prospective returning students just what they stand to gain from going back to school. Bringing that message to trusted institutions and resources within a community, such as churches, workplaces and libraries, can help amplify its impact. Dr. John Lane, vice president for academic affairs and equity initiatives at SHEEO, recalled how when working as the associate vice president for academic affairs at Allen University, a historically Black college in South Carolina, he relied on local churches to reach learners.

“We were working with a population of African Americans communities in a very rich, Deep South church tradition, but the basic idea can be a template for a variety of students in different parts of the country,” Dr. Lane said. “The idea is to find partners who already have education as part of their mission and have a high degree of engagement within their communities.”

Resources to tailor your outreach efforts

The following guidelines and case studies highlight innovative marketing tactics to build awareness and engagement among adult learners.

ADULT LEARNER MARKETING GUIDELINES

Marketing is essential for any re-enrollment campaign to build awareness and receptivity to returning to college among stopped-out students. Adult learners have responsibilities and life circumstances that have already led them to stop out. So the marketing messages must be tailored to these circumstances and must feel personally tailored enough to capture the learner’s attention. The following guidelines will enhance adult learner marketing messages:

- Establish a clear connection between education and economic mobility — jobs are available, and college provides the pathway to better-paid careers
- Highlight different pathways to a credential — certificates, not just degrees — and the time involved in earning them
- Indicate that there are different modalities available for learning, from in-person to remote to hybrid
- Emphasize the ease of application and support available to help students re-enroll
- Spotlight available financial aid and tuition assistance options
- Identify and highlight the wraparound services that support academic and career success
- Ensure visuals/images used in marketing campaigns feature adult learners (25+), not traditional students

Blue Ridge Community College's Grassroots Community Outreach Strategy

In addition to traditional marketing, community colleges also benefit by finding opportunities for in-person connections with adult learners. Blue Ridge Community College (BRCC) saw the opportunity to bring their adult re-enrollment message to where the people are, where they are comfortable, and where they go to learn — libraries and churches in faith-based communities.

As an institution serving a rural community, BRCC conducted a series of community outreach events as part of the 2021 NC Reconnect program — an initiative designed to bring more adult learners to five North Carolina community colleges. Initially launched as a cohort of five institutions, NC Reconnect has expanded to 15 campuses across the state. Kirsten Bunch, vice president for student services at BRCC, and her team understood that reaching adult learners in-person and in non-school environments would be impactful, as some rural community residents are skeptical about higher education being of value to them. The team visited with congregations to share information on NC Reconnect and how BRCC could help learners acquire the credentials that local employers were actively seeking. In addition,

BRCC team members set up tables at local libraries to connect with people who already show an interest in learning and reading.

The exportable lessons from BRCC's innovative approach to community outreach include:

- Harness the support networks created by faith-based organizations and libraries to have personalized conversations that help make education more real, attainable and relevant to better paid and higher skilled jobs.
- Leverage the "power of proximity" — tapping into the community spirit and family support of congregations that can spur learners to re-enroll — and the commitment to learning demonstrated by library patrons.
- Tackle the stigma over higher ed in rural communities. One-on-one discussions about economic opportunity and education draw on the empowerment and support of congregations. Many faith-based groups emphasize the power of education in helping congregants and the community advance.
- Talk to learners about returning to college outside of school contexts, in a community setting where learners live their lives and where they ask for support in making important decisions — and sticking to them.

“

Visiting faith-based communities allowed us to engage adult learners who otherwise would be hard to reach. The conversations are really fruitful as we interact with people in their comfort zone, among their community, including some who might push back on the idea that education is for them.

— Kirsten Bunch, vice president of student services, Blue Ridge Community College

LOCATION:

Winterville, North Carolina
(suburb of Greenville, NC)

ENROLLMENT:

8,237 students, 43% full-time

KEY DEMOGRAPHICS:

50% minority enrollment (majority Black), 28% adult learners

How Pitt Community College Leveraged a Career Fair to Connect with Former Students

Under the leadership of its president, Dr. Lawrence Rouse, Pitt Community College (PCC) participated in the initial 2021 NC Reconnect program aimed at adult learners in North Carolina. PCC recognized that learners who have stopped out need a compelling reason to return, and it cannot just be that going back to school is beneficial.

Making the explicit connection between career advancement and education is a powerful motivator for stopped-out learners. Dr. Johnny Smith, vice president of strategic initiatives and community engagement at PCC, determined that a local job fair would attract adult learners and others seeking better employment opportunities. The job fair also offered the perfect platform to demonstrate the link between skill-based job opportunities and education. PCC partnered with local economic development agencies, Greenville Eastern North Carolina Alliance and Pitt County Economic Development, and a foundation, the John M. Belk Endowment, to host the [“Better Skills, Better Jobs” fair](#) in 2021. The job fair hosted local employers seeking

workers and drew over 400 adult learners. The fair’s success led PCC to host a similar job fair in September 2022 which attracted another 447 adult learners.

PCC shows how community colleges can use an event as a pull marketing strategy — incentivizing people to seek you out. Creating the job fair enabled PCC to connect with large numbers of adult learners in an environment that speaks to the demand for skilled workers and how education helps get these jobs.

The takeaways from PCC for other institutions include:

- Positioning the job fair as “Better Skills, Better Jobs” emphasizes the connection between employment opportunities and skills — which link to credentials
- Offering community residents the opportunity to learn about and apply for positions with local companies creates a compelling event
- Building partnerships with development agencies and employers lends support and resources to promote and organize the event
- Providing adult learners with dedicated time slots to talk with PCC representatives ensures the institution can focus discussions with them



Photo by Rob Goldberg, Jr., Media Relations, Pitt Community College

3 Focus Re-Engagement Outreach on the Most Viable Students



Given resource constraints, institutions should conduct proactive outreach to their most viable stopped-out students. These learners can be pinpointed via “re-enrollment” filters, such as those closest to completion, those who stopped out no longer than two years prior, and those who may have small unpaid balances.

As part of its [Degrees When Due initiative](#), the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) conducted degree audits with participating institutions to determine which students were close to graduating when they left college. IHEP found that one in four students included in the audit were within just six credits of receiving their bachelor’s or associate’s degree. More than 40 percent were within 15 credits.

“Institutions can use strategies like degree audits to look within their own systems, analyze their data, and figure out who’s close to attaining a degree — or, in some cases, has earned a degree that has not yet been awarded,” said Amanda Janice Roberson, senior director of strategic engagement, planning, and operations at IHEP. “Among the population of stopped-out students identified through Degrees When Due, one in ten had already earned a degree, and one in four was within six credits of completing an associate’s or bachelor’s degree.

Roberson argues that “data-informed insights” can “go hand-in-hand with other engagement strategies, like removing financial holds and ensuring that entry back into higher education is as seamless as possible.”

Resources to focus your outreach

Community colleges frequently have a large number of stopped-out students on their books. The probability of these students re-enrolling varies considerably — some have moved away, earned a credential somewhere else, have challenging personal circumstances, etc. Reaching out to thousands of stopped-out students is not feasible, given the resources available to the vast majority of

community colleges. Therefore, it is important to identify and prioritize stopped-out students using a series of re-enrollment screens based on college data. To assist community colleges with this process, InsideTrack has developed a checklist of re-enrollment screens that can be applied by all community colleges:

THE OUTREACH CHECKLIST: IDENTIFY THE MOST VIABLE STUDENTS



This checklist details the key characteristics to screen stopped-out students and create the most promising outreach list.



4

Develop and Implement a “First-Point-of-Contact” Strategy



Community colleges should implement a proactive first-point-of-contact intervention that surfaces where the learner is — including their life circumstances and mindset — regarding re-enrollment. They should build on that information to create motivation and momentum.

The first-point-of-contact strategy culminates in a one-on-one conversation with the student that:

- Identifies the challenges the student faced during their previous enrollment experience and assess if they are ready to return
- Reconnects them to their purpose for pursuing a degree or credential initially
- Sets out a plan for re-enrolling and motivates them to follow through

“It’s about trying to understand who that learner is and how we best support them from the start,” Kate Smith, president of Rio Salado College, said. “Some students need more of a listening ear. They’re trying to figure out where they’re going, and they need to talk through that. Other students already know exactly what they need, they just can’t get through some roadblock in the enrollment system. So the job becomes really parsing out how to use our resources to best support all of these learners no matter where they are on the path to re-enrollment.”

Resources to develop your “first-point-of-contact” strategy

Once community colleges identify and prioritize the stopped-out student most likely to return and complete, the next step is reaching out proactively. Adult learners are busy with work, family and childcare, so re-engaging them works best with a proactive and personalized approach. The first-point-of contact must meet students “where they are.” In this context, colleges must take a multichannel approach to reach the student (text, email, phone calls) and then connect with the student with the goal of understanding their mindset towards college.

Conducting this one-on-one outreach often presents bandwidth challenges for the institution. Having sufficient staff to reach out to long lists of stopped-out students is a challenge. In addition, re-engaging the student involves guiding a discussion that surfaces interest, alleviates concerns over returning to school, and motivates them to take a defined set of next steps. This is a coaching conversation — not leading with expectations on what the student needs or should do — and works best through a proven coaching methodology. For these reasons, many community colleges partner with InsideTrack, allowing trained coaches to connect with and re-engage stopped-out students.



Coaching for Re-Connection

As a participant in the 2021 NC Reconnect initiative, Pitt Community College (PCC) sought to contact and re-enroll stopped-out adult learners in North Carolina. PCC partnered with InsideTrack to proactively contact and re-engage these students. Partnering with InsideTrack coaches not only supported holistic one-on-one conversations with learners, but also helped PCC navigate staff capacity and time constraints.

During the coaching process, each InsideTrack coach contacts a set of stopped-out students prioritized through the [Outreach Checklist](#). As the students are juggling work, family and other commitments, the coaches employ a multichannel outreach approach, connecting through a mix of phone calls, emails, text messages and video chats. When they reach out proactively, coaches make it as easy as possible for students to connect and stay engaged.

Coaching conversations center on “possibilities” rather than “deficits,” helping the student reconnect to their original purpose in pursuing higher education and

jumpstart the thought process for thinking about school again. The coach must understand each student's goals, values, strengths and potential re-enrollment obstacles. Achieving this involves the coach helping the student explore their:

- **KNOWLEDGE:** Understand their strengths and goals, the resources and support they need to return to PCC
- **SKILLS:** Consider the abilities they have and need to return to school — problem-solving, goal-setting, resource management, and self-advocacy
- **BELIEFS:** Help reinforce and celebrate the beliefs that support their goals — “I can learn and grow,” “I have the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed”

Knowledge, Skills and Beliefs play key roles in encouraging a student to want to develop a plan to complete their education. InsideTrack's coaches have found that Beliefs, in particular, catalyze actions by helping adult learners tap into a “growth mindset” (embrace challenges, persist through obstacles and learn from criticism) around completing their degree or credential.



The dialogue between the coach and the adult learner seeks to help the learner reconnect to their educational goals, to PCC, and to develop next steps for re-enrolling. To coach students toward the “how” of returning to PCC, InsideTrack’s coaching methodology employs five core techniques:

- **BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS:** Using authenticity, transparency and compassion to build a solid relationship with students, helping support and guide them through the decision-making process
- **ASSESSING:** Conducting a holistic assessment to learn about the student’s life before and after they stopped out of school
- **ADVANCING:** Providing suggestions and brainstorming concrete steps with the student to advance them toward re-enrolling
- **BUILDING MOTIVATION:** Helping the student connect their short-term actions to their long-term goals — the bigger “why” — to motivate action
- **STRATEGIZING:** Establishing a student-led plan to tackle obstacles and move forward

After concluding the call, the InsideTrack coach alerts a member of the PCC team on the outcomes and next steps. This hand-off ensures that the institution can follow up with the learner and help navigate them through the enrollment process.

PITT COMMUNITY COLLEGE RE-ENROLLMENT CAMPAIGN RESULTS

(JULY–SEPTEMBER 2021)

590

students outreached

36%

contact rate

262

students
re-enrolled

44%

enrollment rate
from outreach

\$500k+

tuition revenue

25x

return on
investment

FIVE ELEMENTS OF INSIDETRACK COACHING



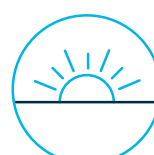
BUILDING
RELATIONSHIPS



ASSESSING



ADVANCING



BUILDING
MOTIVATION



STRATEGIZING

5

Guide Students to — and Through — the Last Mile



Finally, community colleges must guide learners through the last mile of re-enrolling. Too many students struggle to complete the required steps or fail to enroll. Institutions should provide a dedicated resource to help learners navigate financial aid, course selection, registration and other critical systems and structures. Importantly, the staff who provide this guidance to students need to know their primary job is to provide answers to the best of their ability. The goal is not to get through a queue of students as fast as possible, but to ensure every student gets access to the information they need through the conversation. Ultimately, the goal is to get students re-enrolled for the upcoming semester.

Dr. Stacia Edwards of City Colleges of Chicago says this will require a mind shift on many campuses, where student support service offices are under immense pressure to help as many students as quickly as they can during peak enrollment periods. “Campus administrators need to say, ‘We’re going to praise you for spending an hour with that person and getting them enrolled,’” she said. “As opposed to saying, ‘I’ve got 50 people waiting, why are you taking so long?’”

“Career navigation is a value proposition for community colleges that speaks most to adult learners,” said Stacey Clawson, associate vice for learning at JFF. “Adult learners are coming in with a purpose, whatever that might be. Our job is to align that purpose with skills, credentials, social capital and careers of value. If they can play that navigator role, that’s a gap that community colleges are especially well suited to fill.”

Resources to help guide your learners

Many adult learners seeking to return are stymied by process and administrative barriers as they work through the enrollment process. It is incumbent on the institutions to ensure that campus staff and processes are responsive to the particular needs of adult learners. The following resources draw on InsideTrack’s

experience with re-enrollment and interviews with community college leaders on how to best help adult learners navigate the last mile of their return to college.

SETTING THE INITIATIVE UP FOR SUCCESS

Developing an end-to-end re-enrollment plan prior to launching an initiative ensures the college manages the last mile as part of supporting the student journey. Creating such a plan involves several key steps:

- **Establish an adult learner re-enrollment team:** Gather appropriate stakeholders from the administration and key campus units (admissions, financial aid, registrar, faculty) to forge consensus on the initiative, the plans and resources needed.
- **Appoint a project leader:** The college needs a senior leader as a point person to facilitate buy-in campuswide, coordinate the work and address issues as they arise.
- **Develop an adult learner enrollment journey map:** Have a cross-campus team map out the steps and interactions for a student to re-enroll. By mapping out the experience from the student’s perspective, colleges can pinpoint obstacles to address and opportunities to streamline as well as the right campus unit to own the next step.

» **TIP:** Review the map with currently enrolled adult learners to validate it and identify other improvement opportunities

» **TIP:** Create a student-facing version to share with adult learners as a visual guide to support them through the process



ALIGNING CAMPUS RESOURCES FOR LAST MILE SUPPORT

Colleges should take these steps to ensure students remain on task and on time to complete the final stages of the enrollment process:

- **Designate a campus concierge for adult learners:** Appoint a dedicated campus stakeholder to connect adult learners with staff to complete financial aid, course selection, registration, etc. The concierge can be someone who is a success coach or an advisor.
- **Institute a student progress and escalation process:** Utilize the CRM or other system to track the progress of each student through the re-enrollment process. This tracking will highlight students who have stalled and where campus staff needs to follow up. Additionally, tracking helps manage expectations on student yield and spotlights where students tend to veer off track.
- **Align campus office hours with adult learner lifestyles:** Adult learners are managing jobs, families, childcare and other responsibilities, so standard campus office hours will not work for them. To better accommodate learners, colleges can explore options such as having admissions and financial aid offices open before and after night classes, or offering extended morning or evening hours on specific weekdays.

PINPOINTING STUDENT NEEDS: PITT COMMUNITY COLLEGE'S STUDENT INTAKE FORM

Pitt Community College (PCC) recognizes that every student seeking to enroll or re-enroll benefits when the college has an in-depth understanding of their background and needs. Under the leadership of Dr. Thomas Gould, executive vice president of academic and student services and enrollment services, Brian Jones, assistant vice president, enrollment services, and Katherine Clyde, dean of business sciences, PCC created an adult learner [Intake Form](#). The purpose is articulated on the form itself: "School personnel will only use this form to facilitate a student's successful experience at Pitt Community College."

The staff member speaks with the student to capture a holistic picture of their educational goals, knowledge about a desired course of study, need for financial aid and other support from laptops to transportation. The information enables PCC to create an individualized support plan for the student.

PCC has generously shared their intake form, and a customizable version is available here:

RETURNING STUDENT INTAKE FORM



“

Listen to the adult learner.
Allow them to tell you what
they need, and then build your
programs around their needs,
not around what you have.

— Dr. Johnny Smith, vice president, strategic initiatives and
community engagement, Pitt Community College



CONCLUSION

From Re-Engagement to Re-Enrollment

The enrollment scenarios for community colleges will remain challenging for many, if not most, for years to come. Competition for new students — and with other education and training providers — will continue to intensify, especially as demographic shifts impact high school graduate numbers. Against this background, there is an untapped pool of former students: 39 million Americans have some college credit but no credential, and, of these, the majority — 22 million — last attended a community college. Community colleges have the opportunity to rise to the re-enrollment challenge, support learners to come back to school, and ultimately guide them along the path to achieving their education and career goals.

Re-enrolling their former students may have once seemed an adjacency for most community colleges. Now, it's increasingly clear that it is central to the community college mission itself, which is to serve the needs of the community and everyone in it, regardless of demographic or condition.

A growing number of community college leaders and staff are correctly treating re-enrollment as an organizing principle and an imperative in its own right — a core component of how the institution operates. But tweaking existing services is insufficient for meeting the needs and career and educational objectives of adult learners. In many cases, community colleges will need to fundamentally reorient internal processes, staffing resources, and structure to fully meet the complex educational and career needs of returning students. Frequently, this requires a degree of self-reflection on the long-standing processes and procedures used by institutions, some of which make it more difficult for returning students to stay on time and on task to matriculate.

Institutions will also need support from funders, policymakers and partners in the public and private sectors to make the necessary changes. There are lessons to be learned from the frontlines on how to develop and implement a more holistic and effective approach. This guide — with its five imperatives, supporting case studies and ready-to-download tools — is designed to spur decision making and facilitate change for community colleges ready to commit to holistically re-enrolling stopped-out students. It provides foundational resources that can inform the development of re-engagement and re-enrollment initiatives at institutions across the United States.

By removing barriers to adult learner re-engagement and re-enrollment, community colleges can boost the economic prospects and quality of life for millions of students who may be just a \$100 unpaid bill or a few credits shy of a college degree — creating a pathway to a better life. Ultimately, re-enrollment is a financial and economic imperative for community colleges themselves — and a vital strategy for advancing social and economic mobility for learners, families and communities.



APPENDIX

Re-Enrollment Toolkit

- A. Institutional Readiness Assessment Tool
- B. Guide to Seeking Funding Sources for Re-Enrollment Initiatives
- C. The Outreach Checklist: Identifying the Most Viable Students
- D. Returning Student Intake Form



APPENDIX A

Community College Re-Enrollment Institutional Readiness Assessment Tool



This assessment provides a series of questions to help community college leadership understand if the institution has the necessary infrastructure and resources to successfully re-engage and re-enroll adult learners.

How does a college know if they are ready to support stopouts?

- ☐ Does the college have an enrollment challenge?
- ☐ Does the college have students who previously stopped out prior to completion?
- ☐ Does the college want to improve completion rates?
- ☐ Would the college benefit from additional tuition revenue?

The easy part of the readiness assessment is now complete. So, how does a college know if they are ready to bring back AND support former stopouts?

GETTING STARTED

InsideTrack has developed a set of questions to help institutions like yours understand where they fall in the journey of providing holistic re-enrollment support for learners. These questions will guide the institution through a reflection exercise to determine the willingness, capacity and ability to provide the required components that will provide the maximum benefit to students and the institution.

The goal is not to answer positively to all of these questions. The questions are designed to test your institution's readiness for re-enrollment, aid your conversations with your campus team, and identify where and when you most need support.

Questions to consider about your institution's capacity to pursue a re-enrollment initiative:

- What is the institution's willingness to implement the changes necessary to re-engage and help adult learners matriculate?
- Does the institution's processes and policies align with the needs of adult learners?
- Does the institutional staff have the time and capabilities to engage and enroll stopouts?
- Does the institution have the ability and resources to support more enrolled adult learners?
- Is the institution able and willing to be flexible with returning learners, providing incentives and/or waiving holds?

Questions to consider about the re-enrollment timeline:

- How much time and internal capacity can the institution commit to holistic re-enrollment practices?
- What semester is the institution looking to launch the re-enrollment initiative, and how long is that from now?
- Is the institution willing and able to commit to retention support for recently re-enrolled students to ensure they remain steady toward their completion goals?
- Has the institution considered allocating time and resources for:
 - » Evaluating data at the beginning and end of the re-enrollment cycle.
 - » Sending pre-messaging to students prior to official re-enrollment campaign launch (recommended for maximized engagement)
 - » Processing escalations, which will depend on the nature of the escalations and often consist of ensuring students receive support and communication from various departments.
 - » Internal meetings with stakeholders to evaluate how the process is going and to make adjustments in comms plans based on engagement levels

Questions to consider about potential incentives to support re-enrollment:

InsideTrack has found that incentives such as balance reduction, forgiveness, scholarships, hold flexibility, appeals process navigation and enrollment support increase the success of re-enrollment efforts.

- Is the institution willing and/or able to deploy any of the following incentives to support re-enrollment?
 - » Scholarships specifically for returning students
 - » Balance reduction
 - » Balance forgiveness
 - » Balance forgiveness upon completion, with holds removed
 - » X number of credits covered following the successful completion of the first semester of return
 - » Credit for prior learning from workplace training, military service, and other experiential learning
 - » Removal of financial and academic holds upon an agreed upon plan with the student to meet specific requirements to rectify the cause of holds.
 - » Small incentives such as gift cards (these are less effective, but still something to consider)
 - » Support navigating the appeals process

Questions to consider about institutional ownership of the re-enrollment initiative:

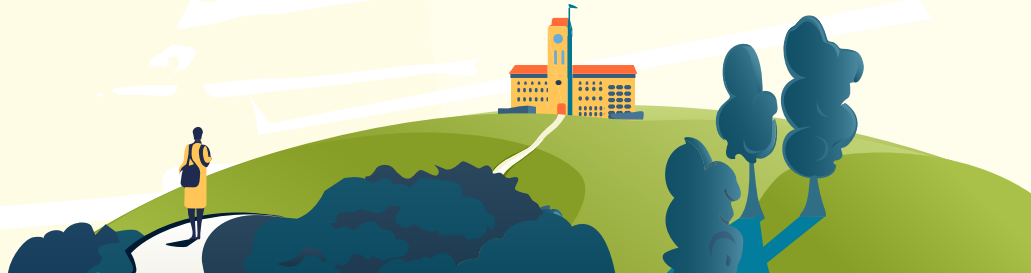
- Has the institution thought about or identified a stakeholder or a set of cross-department stakeholders to plan and coordinate the initiative campuswide? And to set and manage key metrics and KPIs across the different stages of re-enrollment? Potential stakeholders could include:
 - » Executive Sponsor - President, VP Enrollment Management, VP Academic Affairs
 - » Student Success/Retention Coordinator Director
 - » Enrollment Management/Admissions Team Representative
 - » Registrar
 - » IT Director/Staff
 - » Advisors/Coaches
 - » Scheduler for operational team members
- Can the institution's designated team of stakeholders commit to staying engaged in the re-enrollment process to give incoming and recently retained students the support they need to thrive?

Questions to consider about how to track and measure the impact of the re-enrollment initiative:

- What institutional data tracking and measurement tools are available to assess the performance of the re-enrollment initiative?
- What are the appropriate objectives and KPIs for the overall initiative and the different stages — outreach, application, enrollment, matriculation?
- How do you forge consensus on these KPIs across the campus?
- Does the institution have staff with the skills and time to dedicate to analyzing and reporting on progress against KPIs?
- Is there a payback time period necessary to recoup the investment needed to bring students back?

Questions to consider about funding the re-enrollment initiative:

While re-enrollment programs often have a strong and quick ROI, funding for many of the items listed above may not be available in the college's operating budget. There are alternative funding sources, both internal and external, that institutions can explore. This guide includes [*A Guide to Seeking Funding Sources for Re-Enrollment Initiatives*](#) which helps community colleges explore different funding sources.



APPENDIX B

A Guide to Seeking Funding Sources for Re-Enrollment Initiatives



Developing an effective re-enrollment strategy requires making investments — for which many community colleges may lack the budget. This guide identifies a set of funding sources and screening questions to help community colleges explore options for re-enrollment investments to help maximize their impact.

Potential Funding Sources

- College operating budget
- President/Provost special projects fund
- System office
- College foundation
- Employer partnerships
- Local grants
- State grants
- Federal stimulus funds
- Federal grants
- Local/regional philanthropic partnerships
- National philanthropic partnerships

Questions to Consider for Each Funding Source

COLLEGE OPERATING BUDGET

- Is there money left in the current fiscal year? Or, when will the institution know if there are funds left in the current fiscal year budget that can be allocated?
- When does the budgeting process begin/end for the next fiscal year?
- Can a program be designed to start now and grow later?

PRESIDENT/PROVOST SPECIAL PROJECTS FUND

- If this is a strategic priority, what executive funds exist?
- If this is a strategic priority, can the budget be pulled from a lower priority and put towards a re-enrollment program?

SYSTEM OFFICE (IF YOU ARE PART OF A SYSTEM OFFICE)

- Does the office have funding available to support one campus? Multiple campuses?
 - Does the office have an innovation fund?
 - Does the office have a fund that supports adult learners or historically underserved populations?
-

COLLEGE FOUNDATION

- What's the purpose of the college's foundation, and would it be interested in supporting the initiative?
 - Where does the college foundation raise money from?
-

EMPLOYER PARTNERSHIPS

- Are there local/regional employers who need the college to graduate more students who are ready to enter the workforce (both hard and soft skills)? Would they be willing to pay for some of the re-enrollment program?
 - Do your large local employers have a foundation to support the local community?
-

LOCAL GRANTS

- Are there local economic development grants?
 - Are there local funding programs to improve equity, economic or social mobility?
-

STATE GRANTS

- Does the state have a degree/certificate attainment goal that the program can be linked with?
 - Are there state-level economic development grants?
 - Are there state-level funding programs to improve equity/social mobility?
-

FEDERAL STIMULUS FUNDS

- Is there HEERF or other federal program funding available?
-

FEDERAL GRANTS

The use of federal grants for re-enrollment efforts requires institutions to include a retention component. Please keep this in mind for the following specific grants.

- Does the institution serve a low-income student population? (Title III)
 - Is it a minority-serving institution? (Title V)
 - Is it a predominantly black institution? (PBI)
 - Does your program support workforce development? (Perkins)
-

LOCAL/REGIONAL PHILANTHROPIC PARTNERSHIPS

- Are there philanthropies that support the populations that overlap with stopped-out students? Adult learners? Minority learners? Low-income learners? Single parents? Veterans?
 - Does the re-enrollment program have an economic development angle?
 - What organizations in the college's region could fund community-enhancing programs?
-

NATIONAL PHILANTHROPIC PARTNERSHIPS

- Are there philanthropies that support the populations that overlap with stopped-out students? Adult learners? Minority learners? Low-income learners? Single parents? Veterans?
 - Does the re-enrollment program have a large-scale economic development angle?
 - Is the institution willing to work with other institutions and organizations on a larger initiative?
-



APPENDIX C

The Outreach Checklist: How to Identify the Most Viable Students to Re-Enroll



This checklist is designed to identify which stopped-out students are most likely seeking to go back to community college.

To create an effective list of stopped-out students for outreach, assess students based on the following characteristics:

- ☐ Students who have stopped out within the past 2 years or fewer
- ☐ Students who have a non .edu email address
- ☐ Students who have a mobile phone number, so you can use texting as part of your outreach
- ☐ Students you have run through the National Clearinghouse to ensure they have not transferred or finished elsewhere
- ☐ Students who are close to completion — stopouts who may only need 10–30 credits to complete their AA degree or 60 credits for their BA can be more receptive to re-enrolling
- ☐ Students who don't have significant academic holds, unless you're prepared to help them improve their GPA, aid with tuition, and/or qualify for financial aid
- ☐ Students who don't have significant financial holds, unless your institution is willing/prepared to cover the outstanding balance to bring them back
- ☐ Students who were pursuing a degree may now be a better candidate for a certificate or other credentials based on accumulated credits
- ☐ (If enrolling for on-campus learning) Students who are still residents and eligible for aid, scholarships, or can confirm that they have the ability to pay

APPENDIX D

Returning Student Intake Form



GENERAL CONTACT INFORMATION

Date: _____ ID: _____

First Name: _____ Middle Initial: _____ Last Name: _____

Preferred Name: _____ Preferred contact phone number: _____

COLLEGE CAREER PATH

Which scenarios best describe you at the present time? Please mark all that apply.

- ☐ Freshman *I have no college experience*
- ☐ Career and College Promise (CCP) *I took classes through my high school to count as college credits*
- ☐ Transfer College-Level Credits *I have taken college-level courses at another school but want to finish my degree*
- ☐ Transfer Program *I want to complete an associate's degree and transfer to a University to complete a bachelor's degree.*
- ☐ Returning Student *I previously enrolled but did not finish my degree at that time.*
- ☐ College Graduate *I have finished a 2 or 4-year degree at another institution.*
- ☐ Visiting Student *I only want to take a few classes and transfer back to another school.*
- ☐ Adult Learner *I am 25 years of age or older.*

My chosen degree is: _____

How confident are you about your chosen major and career path?

- ☐ Not at all confident
- ☐ Somewhat confident
- ☐ Very confident

I understand the difference between degree, diploma and certificate options? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Goal (please check all that apply):

- ☐ Complete 2-year degree
- ☐ Certificate
- ☐ Diploma
- ☐ Transfer to 4-year program
- ☐ Take a few classes and transfer credits back to another college/university
- ☐ Personal interest
- ☐ Professional interest
- ☐ Other: _____

Do you have a clear understanding in the difference between Curriculum and Continuing Education courses/programs?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Desired Career/Job after completion: _____

ENROLLMENT STATUS

Are you transferring any coursework from another college/high school? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If so, have you requested all transcripts? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Have you submitted your high school transcripts? ☐ Yes ☐ No

What time do you prefer to take classes? Please mark all that apply.

Morning Afternoon Night Online

Can you take classes at any time offered? Please mark all that apply.

- ☐ Traditional (classroom/in-person format)
☐ Blended (classroom/in-person and less than 50% online)
☐ Hybrid (classroom/in-person and more than 50% online)
☐ Hy-flex (classroom/in-person, synchronous internet and asynchronous internet-combination of all)

Preferred class option: _____

EMPLOYMENT STATUS

Do you have a job? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Currently Looking

How many hours a week do you work? ☐ 0-10 ☐ 11-20 ☐ 21-30 ☐ 31-40 ☐ 41+

MILITARY BACKGROUND

Are you a veteran? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Military Branch _____

Military Status ☐ Active ☐ Non Active ☐ Reserve ☐ Retired

Will you be using a veteran's benefit package to pay for classes? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Unsure

FINANCIAL AND PERSONAL INFORMATION

Have you applied for financial aid by completing the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid)?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Do you have access to a computer, are computer proficient, and have reliable Internet service to complete assignments and communicate with instructors?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Do you anticipate any transportation problems?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Do you worry about childcare issues impacting your ability to attend classes?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Are there any other challenges in your life that you feel may impact a successful experience? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Please Explain:

In order to feel supported and successful, I would like a referral to (or I need assistance with) the following areas:
(Please check all that apply)

- ☐ Academic Support (Math, Reading, Writing, etc.)
- ☐ Distance Learning
- ☐ Paying for my Education and Course Materials
- ☐ Choosing a Major or a Career
- ☐ Time Management/ Test Taking
- ☐ Accessibility Services (Recommended for students with a high school IEP or 504 plan)
- ☐ Minority Male Support
- ☐ Food Assistance
- ☐ Counseling Services
- ☐ Financial Aid/ Financial Literacy Counseling
- ☐ TRIO (First Generation College Student)

PRIVACY AUTHORIZATION

Will you have anyone other than yourself asking questions about your academics? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, have you completed a FERPA form for this person(s)? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Unsure

Without the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) form on file with your signature, we are not authorized to discuss matters with a family member without a FERMA form on file. This intake information is not in lieu of the FERPA form. Please visit the website for more information on the FERPA form.