



CAEL'S VISION

Meaningful learning, credentials, and work for every adult.

CAEL'S MISSION

We advocate and innovate on behalf of all adult learners, regardless of their socio-economic circumstances, to enhance their economic and educational opportunities. We do this in partnership with postsecondary institutions, employers, government, and communities. We conduct research and develop services and tools to expand opportunities for learning, employability, and career success.

INTRODUCTION

At the start of 2016, postsecondary education has never been more important to individual adults, and employers and policy leaders also recognize how critical it is for their workforce to have higher level skills and a broader set of workplace competencies.

CAEL's current vision statement is "meaningful learning, credentials, and work for every adult." In practical terms, this means that CAEL is focused on implementing strategies – and leveraging our position as a national thought leader – to help the 36 million American adults without a postsecondary degree or credential, and particularly those with "some college, no degree." These are individuals whose potential is cut short by a lack of skills and knowledge, and by the lack of a degree or credential to help them get ahead.

CAEL's strategic plan reflects the various ways in which our work can realize our overall vision for the country. The plan presents our approaches for transforming institutions, employers, and other stakeholders, while also implementing an ambitious plan to grow the organization and dramatically increase CAEL's impact on the success of the adult learner. Our strategic plan further relies on CAEL's unique efforts to integrate activities across multiple sectors in order to create a well-functioning educational ecosystem for the adult learner. In total, our integrative approach to meeting our strategic goals will make a real difference in how many adults return to college, complete their degrees, and gain meaningful employment.

The following are CAEL's strategic goals for 2016-2019, along with additional descriptions of why these goals are important for CAEL and for advancing our work to help the adult learner.

STRATEGIC GOALS

Goal 1: Improve access for and success of underserved adult learners through policy, research, and convening. Underserved adults include frontline and mid-level workers (both employed and job seeking), underserved minorities, mature workers, and veterans.

CAEL's success in realizing our vision depends upon building a movement that is larger than just a single organization. CAEL needs to enlist others in making changes in policies and practices that help adults. CAEL can influence other organizations, higher education, employers, and policy leaders to take action that changes lives. We do this through our research, publications, and policy activities. It is through this work that we not only multiply our efforts by causing others to act – but also by building CAEL's reputation as an expert advisor on important issues related to the adult learner generally, workforce development, financial aid, student veterans, underserved populations (particularly minorities), frontline workers, and so on.

Strategies: How will we get there?

1. Conduct and publish action-oriented research on adult-centered programs, approaches, and innovations targeted to audiences of institutions, employers, and policy leaders.
2. Educate policy leaders, employers, the media, and the adult learning field on CAEL's policy agenda through research and publications.
3. Influence policy leaders and national organizations on workforce and higher education policy changes that promote innovation in serving the 21st Century adult learner.
4. Expand and replicate current CAEL initiatives that target underserved populations.
5. Sustain and build CAEL's reputation as a respected authority on priority adult learning topics.
6. Convene employers, higher education, and community organizations, and facilitate discussions that lead to actions.

Goal 2: Assist postsecondary institutions to improve adult student enrollment, retention, completion, and success.

Postsecondary institutions face a very challenging set of circumstances: rising costs, declining public investments, questions from the public and employers about the value of a college degree, questions from public officials about rising costs, student success, declining enrollments, the challenge of navigating new technologies, and the demand for better data tracking – and on top of it all, a changing student population. Today, students over age 25 make up nearly 40% of all undergraduates, and the “non-traditional learner” (defined not just by age but also in terms of financial independence, full-time work, care of dependents, etc.) is now the norm rather than the exception. Institutions are recognizing that changes to support the non-traditional and adult learner are of critical importance to meeting their missions if not also for their survival.

Some outside the academy do not have faith that colleges and universities can change. CAEL, on the other hand, believes that innovation can and does come both from inside and outside of the academy. Colleges and universities can adapt and change. This is why CAEL is investing in programs and services to help colleges and universities serve the adult learner better. Through this goal, we will ensure that more institutions will have the tools they need to thrive as the world around them changes.

Strategies: How will we get there?

1. Increase the provision and use of adult focused practices in institutions and across systems.
2. Grow CAEL membership and participation in CAEL professional development programs.
3. Expand design and delivery of adult student success consulting and training services.
4. Foster the alignment of postsecondary degree programs and credentials with the needs of employers, communities, and industries.
5. Seek out innovative strategies to improve adult student success from CAEL member institutions, and use the annual conference and the *CAEL Forum and News* to share information and new ideas.

Goal 3: Expand opportunities for adults to earn meaningful credentials based on an assessment of what they know and can do.

Returning college students bring years of knowledge and expertise to their college experience. Even though they lack a college credential, they may have worked in their field for a long time, and that experience may have involved college-level learning. Requiring them to take classes in subjects they already know is not only discouraging; it is a waste of their valuable time and limited funds. Our *Fueling the Race* research study showed that students who earn credit for their prior learning are two and a half times more likely to persist to completion. It is vital that colleges assess what a person has learned outside of the classroom to determine if it is worthy of college credit. That is why CAEL has promoted prior learning assessment (PLA) – and trained institutions on PLA – for more than forty years. Now is a time when more colleges and universities are interested in PLA than ever before – as well as in other strategies, particularly competency-based education (CBE), that emphasize student learning over seat time. An important goal for CAEL is to continue to help colleges and universities as they work to incorporate methods of assessing student learning as part of an overall emphasis on what a student knows and can do, and to promote pathways to credentials that emphasize this as well.

Strategies: How will we get there?

1. Establish LearningCounts as the leading online developer and provider of innovative solutions for the assessment of learning for college credit.
2. Among postsecondary institutions, cultivate awareness, acceptance, good practice, and innovation in the assessment of prior learning.
3. Promote good practice and high quality in the awarding of alternative credentials to adults.
4. Expand awareness of PLA among adult students.
5. Expand CAEL's presence in the national dialogue on assessing prior and current learning.
6. Support the development of competency-based degrees and credentials.
7. Promote the systematic and consistent articulation of work-place training, professional development, and other learning experiences into academic credit at regionally accredited institutions.

Goal 4: Help communities, states, and regions to strengthen workforce skills, help more workers earn relevant credentials, and increase overall economic vitality.

All communities work to attract, retain and expand the number of jobs in high-growth and high-wage industries. More and more, companies go where the talent is, and they choose communities whose education and training systems can develop a workforce that meets their needs. No single institution

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can serve the broad range of industries in a community and a diverse group of learners. It requires a collective approach, involving a diverse set of education and training providers, and aligned stakeholders. For these reasons, an important goal for CAEL is to build our consulting services that give communities and states solid strategies for improving the link between learning and work.

Strategies: How will we get there?

1. Create education and training strategies that support communities' economic growth efforts.
2. Increase effectiveness, efficiency, and scalability of skills development and credentialing efforts by aligning community partners and resources.
3. Develop and deploy career action tools to increase awareness of regional target sectors and associated jobs, careers, and learning opportunities.
4. Encourage adoption of innovative strategies to meet the learning and credentialing needs of the workforce.

Goal 5: Work with employers to deploy innovative talent strategies that strengthen their organizations by increasing their investment in employee growth, credentialing, and career mobility.

Adults often do not return to school to pursue a degree or other credential because they don't know what to do and where, or how, to start. They know it is important to improve and validate their skills, but they do not know which skills will "pay off" and help to either build their career or protect their employability. They are the silent and hidden group – talking to friends at a barbecue, but never acting on their interest in education. They need to know not only which schools are trustworthy and cost-effective, but what career is right for them. Will there be a job with a living wage when they complete their education? What suits their skills, personality, and previous work experience or education? Will online learning be a fit for them? What about the responsibilities of day-to-day life? How will they handle these responsibilities as they complete their degree? Many factors weigh on their decision to return to school.

These are the issues addressed by CAEL's work with employers on their talent development strategies, particularly CAEL's adult-focused advising methods and interactive career pathway solutions. CAEL's long-standing work with some of the world's largest employers, as well as many smaller employers, has helped us develop tools that connect to employers' recruitment, retention, and engagement needs, while equipping thousands of their workers with the skills they need today and into the future. CAEL also works to advance this goal by working with employers to understand the value of the investment in talent development and expand learning and training opportunities for working adults, and by supporting public policies that incentivize employers to do so—particularly for the front-line workforce.

Strategies: How will we get there?

1. Maintain our market advantage by staying focused on frontline and mid-level employees.
2. Increase the number of employers offering career and education advising to their workforce.
3. Develop and deploy career pathway solutions to support industries and individual employers in the development of their talent pipelines.
4. Initiate, manage, and grow strategic partnerships that support workforce development for industry consortia.

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5. Promote change and innovation in corporate strategies and practices in order to expand learning, training and credentialing opportunities for working adults and diversify talent pools within companies.
6. Promote public policies that encourage employers to expand learning opportunities for working adults.

Goal 6: Develop systems, structures, products, and services to support the vitality, sustainability, and planned growth of CAEL and its social impact.

Recognizing the tremendous effort that will be required of all staff to support our growth plan, an important goal for CAEL is to make sure that staff benefits from support and personal development opportunities, that staff reflects the best that the organization can be, and that internal processes and systems are established to keep operations running smoothly behind the scenes.

Strategies: How will we get there?

1. Increase staff capacity, diversity, and agility to respond to emerging needs and increase CAEL's social impact.
2. Effectively increase and leverage staff diversity.
3. Attract and retain top talent.
4. Ensure staff stays informed about innovations and emerging trends for CAEL's adaptability and relevance in the market.
5. Ensure a high level of staff satisfaction.
6. Implement new IT strategies to increase efficiencies, ensure data security, and support organizational growth.
7. Establish and implement protocols for organization-wide account management, customer service, and compliance.