

# Workforce Accelerator Fund Impact Brief



## **Practical Lessons from Accelerator 1.0 - 4.0: Innovative Solutions, Project Successes, and Learning Experiences**

With the rapid transformation of the labor market toward more on-demand and contingent employment in emerging and growth industry sectors, the workforce system has failed to achieve scale and impact in efficiently and effectively helping Californians access and attain middle skill employment. The California Workforce Development Board (State Board) has contributed funding through the Workforce Accelerator Fund (Accelerator) to improve jobs outcomes for California workers, particularly individuals with barriers to employment, by accelerating service delivery through effective innovative solutions.

### **The Aim of the Workforce Accelerator Fund**

Accelerator funds innovative solutions to accelerate system-wide changes to better address the challenges and barriers that keep Californians from achieving success in their professional lives. Through a combination of seed funding and an initiative-wide support network, Accelerator provides an opportunity for the workforce system to create services in unique ways, tailored to the needs of customers.

Many Californians face substantial challenges in finding good jobs and supporting themselves and their families in an era with volatile, rapidly evolving labor markets. At the same time in regions across California, employers in key industry sectors are searching for qualified workers for occupations at all skill levels.

Traditional workforce and education strategies have had little impact in helping these workers to build relevant skills and connect to good jobs. Even promising strategies lack the speed, agility, or scale needed to accelerate employment for workers desperately in need of that help. We need to bring the creativity for which California is known to bear and create new strategies that achieve scalable impact with workers who face difficult employment prospects.

The Workforce Accelerator Fund provides grants to projects that create and prototype innovative strategies to accelerate skill development, employment, and

reemployment for California job seekers, students, and workers. Innovations that emerge from these prototypes can then be scaled and replicated across the state, infusing new ideas into the bloodstream of workforce development.

## **About this Brief**

This brief provides information on outcomes and lessons learned from Accelerator 1.0 - 4.0. The outcomes are summarized into dashboards differentiated by project leads - those working either within or outside the workforce system. Dashboards contain overall project success indicators and define project outcomes and outputs as **innovative solutions** and **project success**. Information gathered from reports provide **learning experiences and project outcomes** related to the innovation process. The brief concludes with a set of **practical lessons** that can inform successive iterations of Accelerator as a catalyst and space for innovation and in accelerating improvements in workforce services for Californians with barriers to employment as well as California businesses looking for skilled and ready employees.

## **New Components of Accelerator 3.0 and 4.0**

Despite our state's overall prosperity, many Californians are in danger of being left behind, not making ends meet, and unable to create a middle class life for themselves and their families. Targeted populations served in Accelerator 1.0 and 2.0 included individuals who were long-term unemployed, returning veterans, individuals with disabilities, low-income workers, disconnected youth, and ex-offenders, expanding the targeted populations to include CalWORKS participants and immigrant job seekers for Accelerator 3.0 and 4.0.

Accelerator 3.0 and 4.0 project teams were encouraged to create new tools, borrow methods from other disciplines, or apply models from other sectors or populations in order to achieve their desired outcomes. Projects were granted funds based on four types of projects: New Accelerator Projects, Innovation Impact Projects, and Innovation Network Projects. Innovation Impact Projects replicated and scaled successful Accelerator 1.0 or 2.0 project models in a new region, with new system service providers or partners and/or focused on a new eligible target population, while Innovation Network Projects were Innovation Networks of multiple Accelerator projects working with a technical assistance provider to coordinate network activities. An important component of Accelerator 3.0 and 4.0 is the funding for Technical Assistance and Support activities to aid all the Accelerator projects. Information gathered from reports and State Board staff provides insight about the importance of team building, knowledge sharing, course corrections, and sustainability.

## **What is the Accelerator opportunity for innovation and how is it designed?**

Accelerator creates a space for innovation and acts as a catalyst for change by incentivizing workforce practitioners to prototype innovative solutions, scale what works, and share learning experiences.

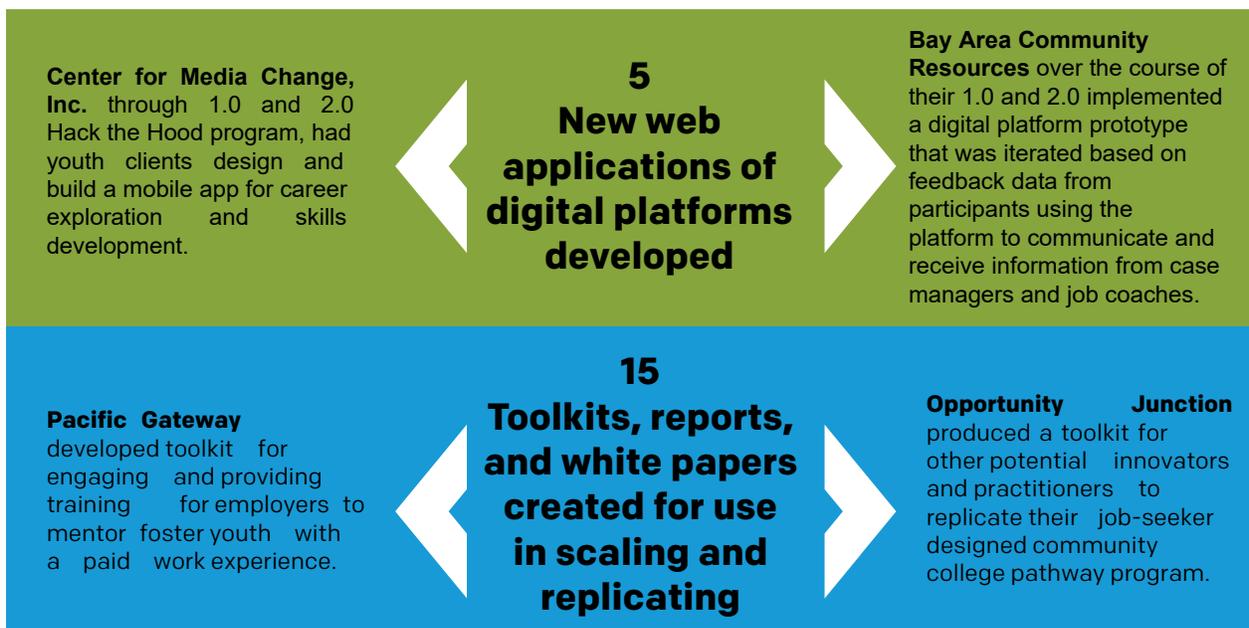
The Workforce Accelerator Fund is designed to:

- Allow project teams to develop and prototype solutions for system change or service delivery that work
- Provide an opportunity to scale and replicate what works
- Create opportunities to learn lessons and share experiences across projects
- Support networks of workforce innovators and practitioners
- Grant flexibility and encourage a new “business as usual”
- Foster a culture of innovation throughout the broader workforce system

## **How is success measured through Accelerator?**

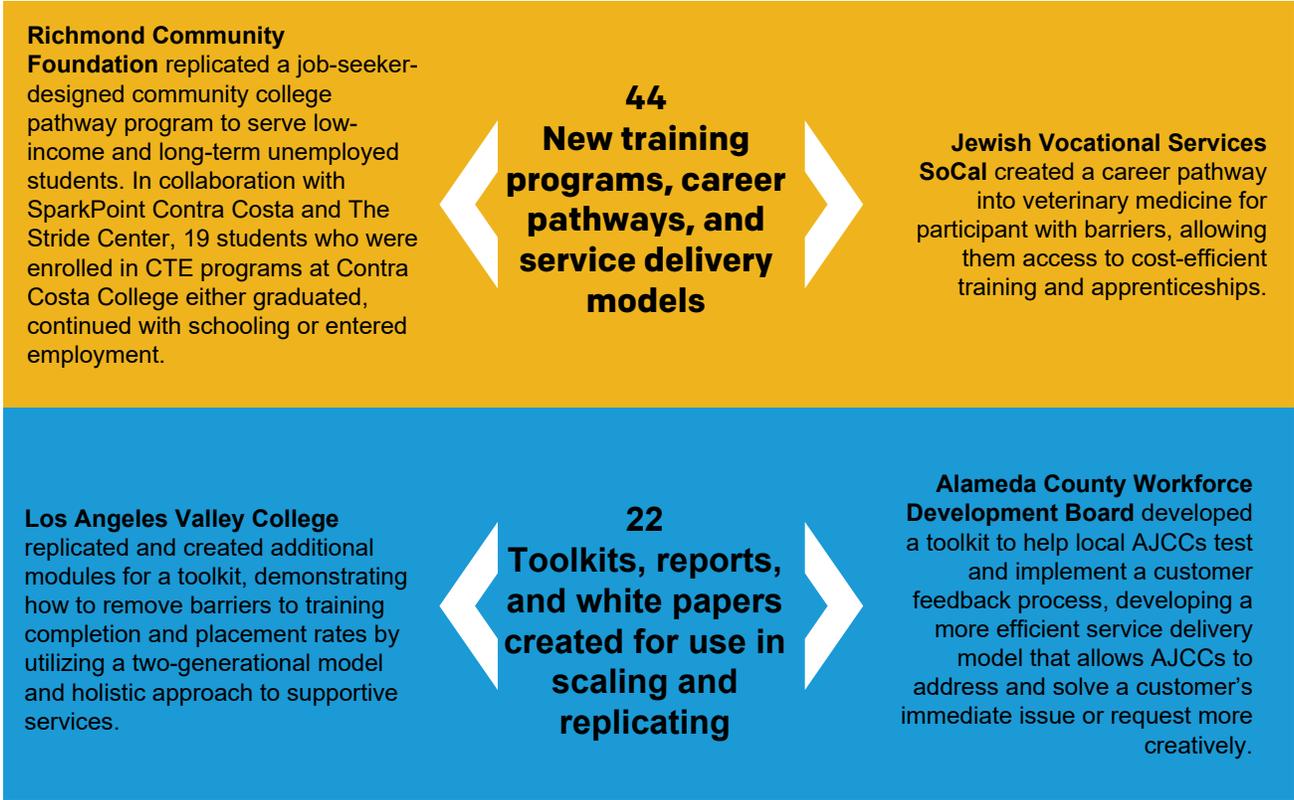
Through this space for innovation, Accelerator projects are able to self-identify goals. All of the projects from Accelerator 1.0 - 4.0 either exceeded, achieved or mostly achieved project goal success. Project goals, project goal success indicators, and overall project **innovative solutions** and **project success** from each project are located in two tables titled *Accelerator 3.0 and 4.0 Project Success Dashboard*. Many of the goals are process-oriented, measured to identify goals that lead to *innovative solutions* and/or **project success**. Successive projects funded to scale and replicate their *innovative solution* prototype typically attempt to achieve *greater project or participant success*. The table below summarizes the types of *innovative solutions* and *participant success* numbers achieved by all of the projects:

### **Innovative Solutions from WAF 1.0 and 2.0**





**Innovative Solutions from WAF 3.0 and 4.0**



**Allen Temple Health & Social Services Ministry** partnered with 8 community colleges to validate the use of Virtual Services applications and how it can improve workforce outcomes for adults and youth, successfully increasing attendance rate, communication requests and employment skills.

**22**  
**New web applications or digital platforms developed**

**San Diego Workforce Partnership, Inc.'s** new mobile application created a better and more accessible communication process between case managers and job seekers, allowing them to communicate as frequently as possible via text messages and phone, reducing the amount of travel time to an AJCC for job seekers.

**Marin County's BrightFutures** maintained an online listing of career professionals who wanted to volunteer their time to provide career talks to students in grades kindergarten to 12th grade. They engaged over 200 volunteers with affiliations to business chambers, university alumni association, rotary clubs, public agencies and large employers, allowing them to develop new employer partnerships.

**304**  
**New employer partnerships**

**Upwardly Global** secured 6 employers to support and commit to interviewing and hiring their pilot project participants after they completed their training.

## Participant Success from WAF 3.0 and 4.0

**LeadersUp** engaged employers and AJCC practitioners to inform, design, and pilot a model OJT framework with the LA County workforce system, placing 10 disconnected youth into OJT opportunities.

**82**  
**Paid internship, externship, work experience, on-the-job training (OJT), work readiness, mentorship, and pre-apprenticeship participants**

**NoRTEC** developed a program to serve first-time offenders ages 18-24, providing them with wraparound services, including housing, education services, cognitive therapy, and vocational services that lead to employment opportunities. Participants were placed into paid internships and On-the-Job opportunities.

**NOVA Workforce Development** graduated 12 students from their Coding Corps program, who were all able to find employment opportunities in coding technology.

**630**  
**Participants that entered employment, postsecondary education, or apprenticeships**

**Worker Education and Resource Center** developed an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) apprenticeship program, securing employment for 17 participants in the medical field.

### **Community Housing Partnership**

developed the Service Corps Program, an innovative model of using volunteerism as a way to practice job skills, gain experience, network and make connections and step into employment. They trained 21 participants in the program, connecting 60% of participants to employment opportunities.

**701  
Participants  
completed  
training**

### **Livingston Community Health Services**

retrained 21 Medical Assistants and Licensed Vocational Nurses (LVNs) to become Health Coaches, resulting in a wage increase and a new job title for those who completed the training.

### **Mother Lode Job Training's**

participants who completed the Water Resource Management Training Program received various certifications, ranging from a water resource management certificate to an Operator-in-Training (OIT) certificate to a skills attainment certificate.

**152  
Credentials  
attained**

**USNRG, Inc's** veteran participants completed training in a new energy efficiency career pathway and received dual certifications in BPI Building Analyst (BPI-BA) and BPI Health Home Evaluator (BPI-HHE).

### **Hospitality Training Academy**

developed and implemented outreach strategies that concentrated in organizations serving African Americans, Asian Americans, transgender individuals and other under-represented populations and placed them into employment opportunities with 10 various business partners.

**15  
Employers  
served**

### **The California Conservation Corps**

Foundation partnered with Pride Industries and Alta Regional Center to identify employers and participants for their pilot project, placing 15 participants with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) into culinary training at four local Eskaton Senior Living locations.

## ***Where is innovation occurring in the workforce system?***

Innovation is occurring throughout the workforce system, yet innovation depends on where practitioners are located in the broader workforce system. Projects led by workforce development boards and community colleges operate "within" the workforce system because they are more embedded within local and regional government administrative structures. Projects led by community-based organizations, industry associations, labor unions, and chambers of commerce, tend to operate "outside" the workforce system and are not as embedded within government administrative structures. Both of these categories of workforce innovators and practitioners and their projects have similar yet differing sets of opportunities and constraints. Innovation is happening both within and outside the workforce system and through project-driven interaction innovators and practitioners can learn a lot from each other through the innovation process.

### ***What can workforce innovators and practitioners learn through the innovation process?***

Workforce innovator and practitioners throughout the broader workforce system can learn about the innovation process by sharing their **learning experiences**. Many times innovators and practitioners operate individually, without a proper means to network and learn from one another about their innovation process. Based on information provided in project reports, interviews, and facilitated convenings, Project Team members shared their learning experiences through the process of innovating a solution and serving participants or implementing strategies that created or reinforced a unique approach to addressing workforce pipeline gaps with other project teams, Technical Assistance coaches, and State Board staff. Technical Assistance support was implemented for Accelerator 3.0 and 4.0 to provide individual and group-based assistance to project and grantees in the design, development, and implementation of projects and to provide a forum for cross-project communication and learning.

Opportunities were created for project teams to share best practices and ideas during webinars, convenings, and ongoing communications with Technical Assistance coaches. Coaches engaged with project teams, supporting reflection and expanded thinking, along with confidence to carry forward with the project's initial approach. Community of practice gatherings and webinars allowed Project Team members to promote and highlight best practices and learning experiences by sharing knowledge and expertise around various innovative practices.

Learning experiences varied depending upon the type of innovation solution, population services, regional labor market need, and Project Team leads.

### ***How can Accelerator stakeholders learn from innovative solutions, project successes, and learning experiences?***

Stakeholders, which include the State Board, Employment Development Department, and the Labor and Workforce Development Agency, as well as workforce system policy makers can learn **practical lessons** about how to better support projects engaging in the innovation process to be more impactful and create a "new business as usual." Evidence from the learning experiences of projects within and outside the workforce system about innovating solutions to workforce programs that enable participant and project success provides examples of the types of practical lessons that can inform and be applied in successive iterations of WAF, both as a space for innovation and to accelerate service delivery for California jobs-seekers, students, workers and employers.

- ***Increased flexibility for grantees***

Providing administrative flexibility encourages grantees to take risks, try something new, and move their projects along more expediently; grantees

are more likely to share experiences and lessons if not stifled by structural impediments and it helps create a new “business as usual.”

- ***Sharing accountability to enable risk-taking***

Traditional forms of performance accountability constrain innovation and do not support projects that are designing system efficiency or developing new program models; innovative, more qualitative process-oriented measurement yields lessons learned that helps support networks.

- ***Making networks matter***

Networks connect, unify, and provide support to innovative workforce practitioners across the workforce system; in California, with diverse regional economies, supporting a network to share and learn experiences fosters a culture of innovation.

- ***Bringing voices from outside into the workforce system***

Many workforce practitioners work outside the federally-funded workforce education and training system; their voice represents the expansive and interconnected workforce system and help move the workforce system toward innovative solutions and better understand customer need.

- ***Listening closely to the field***

The field is the front-line for understanding client needs; creating capacity and developing a customer-centered perspective is central to the success of innovative solutions.

- ***More inclusive of community-based organizations***

CBOs are embed in communities and closest to those in greatest need; finding opportunities and creating the space for inclusion would benefit workforce policy and increase success system outcomes.

- ***Meeting who we serve, where they are***

Innovation increasingly happens locally and virtually; supporting solutions to reach and provide access to those in greatest need helps move the system toward greater outcomes for workers and employers.

- ***Integration of technology***

Workforce practitioners understand the challenges in serving a diverse population; integrating technology into service delivery models can innovatively enhance communication processes and tackle a number of barriers to employment.

**Learning Experiences from Innovating Solutions  
Workforce Development Boards and Community Colleges**

Project Lead	Innovative Solution	Learning Experiences
<p><b>Verdugo WDB</b></p> 	<p>Developed recruitment and outreach strategy to build web-based information sharing network for female veterans seeking training and employment opportunities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marketing and design was possible through the guidance of an Advisory Committee which helped build more space for innovation;</li> <li>• Recruitment is understood through eligibility and placement opportunities;</li> <li>• Articulating constraints to partners helpful for shared understanding;</li> <li>• Opportunity for innovation strengthened community-based outreach to bridge needs.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Pacific Gateway</b></p> 	<p>Developed toolkit for engaging and providing training for employers to mentor foster youth with a paid work experience.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research and development phase was key to understanding how to bridge need;</li> <li>• Engaging employers to mentor youth difficult to scale because relationships take time to develop;</li> <li>• Require more space to expand upon innovative outreach methods and operate with greater flexibility.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Merced WDB</b></p> 	<p>Development of Career Pathway to advance medical assistants and LVNs to "health coaches."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engagement from employers to develop a health coaching program was integral and lead to participant success;</li> <li>• Personally identifiable participant data and eligibility became a barrier</li> <li>• Shared accountability needs to be addressed because of funding requirements, articulation possible through a "kick-off" event.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Chaffey College</b></p> 	<p>Developed streamlined process for local and regional public workforce education and training partners to effectively and efficiently serve participants and meet employer need.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Duplication in delivery of services required a streamlined process due to the number of partners engaged in alignment process;</li> <li>• A focus was the articulation of need, of shared institutional process and accountability;</li> <li>• Scale is not just defined as number of participants served, but additional partners aligned;</li> <li>• Outside providers found the streamlined process difficult to operationalize;</li> <li>• Gaps remained in labor market outcomes, but learn and earn opportunities provided to be most effective.</li> </ul>
<p><b>NOVA</b></p> 	<p>Development of informative media to compliment web-based interaction for long-term unemployed who were provided opportunities for "externships" with engaged tech employers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development occurred over 1.0 and 2.0 to identify opportunities to make program components have greater "stickiness";</li> <li>• Intermediary had difficulty establishing connections with employers for externships;</li> <li>• Utilizing administrative flexibility with an institutional partnership minimized risk-taking for the grantee and for employers to subsidize externships;</li> <li>• The model is effective yet dependent on particular geographical labor market needs.</li> </ul>
<p><b>NoRTEC</b></p> 	<p>Developed new model through partnerships within juvenile justice system to provide assessment, training, and job placement for out-of-school youth.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As partnerships became more firm there was an increased sense of shared accountability;</li> <li>• Risk was removed from process which allowed a prototype to develop;</li> <li>• Articulation of need bridged disparities allowing for participants to experience a more seamless service delivery;</li> <li>• Scale is possible at the local/regional level and dependent upon embedded institutional coordination.</li> </ul>

**Learning Experiences from Innovating Solutions  
Community-Based Organizations, Industry Associations, Labor Unions, and Chambers of Commerce**

Project Lead	Innovative Solution	Learning Experiences
<p><b>Opportunity Junction</b></p> 	<p>Development of a Job-Seeker Designed Pathway to fill a gap between low income participants' navigation to successfully complete a community college career technical education program.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Operating with flexibility, necessary partners were brought into the project to assist with participant support;</li> <li>• Listening strategies for pathway development resulted in greater engagement and program attachment;</li> <li>• Institutional barriers remained in successive cohorts because pathways were individualized.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Bay Area Community Resources</b></p> 	<p>Development of customizable technology-based tool to accelerate communication between service providing staff and customers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bridging the job seeker, staff and product development needs required constant engagement;</li> <li>• Trouble-shooting effective methods for communication lead to design improvement;</li> <li>• Prototyping aligned with solving problem to resource issue of providing initial and follow-up services;</li> </ul>
<p><b>Center for Media Change</b></p> 	<p>Developed "Hack the Hood" program for disconnected youth to receive mentoring and learn in-demand tech and entrepreneurial skills.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Innovation occurred by getting "best guess" wrong – better integrating media supports into classroom instruction increased engagement;</li> <li>• Program participation spurred by tech-entrepreneurial opportunity;</li> <li>• Addressing target population need was challenging and might have benefitted from system support;</li> </ul>
<p><b>CEO</b></p> 	<p>Development of digital assessment tool to help integrate use of technology and accelerate training and placement opportunities for ex-offenders.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enabled partnership with workforce system that had not previously been established;</li> <li>• Constraints of system needs made interoperability of tool less flexible;</li> <li>• Better understanding system needs would help foster attachment of innovation to help serve a population with employment stigma.</li> </ul>
<p><b>JVS LA</b></p> 	<p>Establish a Professional Intervention Team Approach to help build and support successful self-identities for target populations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effective use of counseling and education supports;</li> <li>• Awareness of system constraints enabled successful working relationship with case management professionals;</li> <li>• Iterative outcomes allowed greater labor market attachment when partnering with firmly embedded training programs.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Shirley Ware</b></p> 	<p>Development of healthcare apprenticeship model for low wage workers through engaging employers, navigating approval process, and standardizing curricula.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positioned for successful engagement from partners and stakeholders at varying levels of public and private sector;</li> <li>• Build-out from learning phase to pilot program more successful because of shared understanding of governing process;</li> <li>• Scale and replication is dependent upon initial space for engagement to tailor or redefine program elements.</li> </ul>
<p><b>UCLA</b></p> 	<p>Development of toolkit to help practitioners better understand transgender youth needs for work experience and employment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project is exploratory in scope and built around a network of community and non-profits;</li> <li>• Work experience success is dependent on participants and voice and recruiting and mentoring employers about needs;</li> <li>• Significance of population need is a cultural imperative to enable the workforce system to be responsive</li> </ul>