

The Aspen Institute Workforce Leadership Academy



The Greater Phoenix Workforce Leadership Academy Overview

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What is the Greater Phoenix Workforce Leadership Academy?

The Center for the Future of Arizona (CFA), the Aspen Institute, and local stakeholders have partnered to create a virtual Workforce Leadership Academy for workforce development professionals in the Greater Phoenix area. The purpose of this academy is to develop a network of workforce development leaders who are not only able to lead their own programs or organizations, but who can also work collaboratively to build effective workforce systems across sectors. Participants in the Academy are referred to as “Fellows.”

Workforce Leadership Academies create and support peer-learning communities from nonprofit organizations, business associations, community colleges and universities, union-based training efforts, and public agencies. Fellows in the Academies work with leading practitioners from around the country, learn about practical planning tools, and have the rare opportunity to together reflect on and develop effective workforce strategies to strengthen their local labor market and workforce system. Fellows also engage in leadership development activities, including a 360-degree leadership assessment. Fellows are selected in a competitive application process and are typically senior-level managers with authority to implement program changes. Alumni of the Academies are part of the Aspen Institute Economic Opportunity Fellows Network.

The Aspen Institute has run multiple, virtual academies across the U.S. during COVID-19 as has the Center for the Future of Arizona with their Beat the Odds School Leadership Academy in partnership with NISL (National Institute for School Leadership). The Beat the Odds School Leadership Academy provides executive leadership training to aspiring and current school and district leaders across Arizona.

What challenges and opportunities does the Academy address?

Workforce development has been shown to help individuals prepare for and connect to better quality jobs than they might secure on their own. However, effective workforce development strategies are complex because they frequently involve multiple partners and require collaboration. For example, to work across organizations or to engage with employers about their workforce practices in new ways.

Successful initiatives require strong organizations with capable leaders who understand the complexities of their labor markets, bring together disparate funding sources to support their strategy, and collaborate with partners, including employers, local government, and community organizations. They deal with systemic barriers to employment opportunity that their constituents encounter and address disparate outcomes that job seekers face due to race, ethnicity, and gender. At the same time, senior workforce positions can be difficult to fill with qualified and diverse candidates, and few training programs exist to support professionals in the field. The Academy responds to this need by building local and regional workforce leadership and capacity to strengthen local workforce systems and advance equitable opportunities for workers.

What are the goals of the Academy?

The Academy will address the following key goals:

- Support a 10-month fellowship among leaders from across the workforce development system including leaders from nonprofit organizations, business associations, community colleges and universities, union-based training efforts, and public (city and state) agencies.
- Provide a forum to work collaboratively to identify local and regional systems-based challenges and create shared solutions.
- Build the capacity of participating institutions to collaborate more deeply with employers and other strategic partners.
- Deepen skills and competencies of workforce practitioners to lead within their organizations and work collaboratively with stakeholders across the local workforce system.

How did the Academy get started?

Since 2012, the Aspen Institute Economic Opportunities Program has collaborated with local and regional organizations to offer Workforce Leadership Academies. Recent academies have taken place in Chicago, New Orleans, Hudson County, New Jersey, Detroit, Dallas, and Jackson, Mississippi. These academies evolved from the Economic Opportunities Program's long-running national Sector Skills Academy. The national Sector Skills Academy has documented success in supporting workforce leaders to develop and implement effective workforce strategies. In a 2015 survey of more than 200 national alumni, respondents indicated that the Academy

prepared them to effect meaningful change at the local level, create and strengthen partnerships with critical stakeholders, and strategize beyond their individual organizations for policy and systems change. The national Academy also provided participants with access to a unique and valuable network of peers.

What are systems changes?

Long-term, sustainable solutions to workforce challenges often require strategies designed to overcome structural issues faced by workers. The Workforce Leadership Academy draws on the Economic Opportunities Program’s systems change framework. “Systems change” refers to:

- **Industry practices** that shape the way individuals are recruited, hired, trained, promoted and compensated within the workplace.
- The **education and training infrastructure** including Workforce Investment Boards, community-based training providers, community colleges, union or apprenticeship programs.
- **Public policy** including rules, regulations, and funding streams related to the workforce and education systems as well as those that influence business practices.

Using practical tools, Fellows will explore strategies focused on systems changes, including job quality and skill development for workers; responding to industry needs within and across sectors; and navigating the workforce policy and funding environment. Fellows also bring systems thinking to issues of race, ethnicity, and gender, including how these impact opportunities in the labor market and service delivery strategies. Fellows have an opportunity to step back from their day-to-day experiences to reflect on their own leadership style and the role of their organization within the local system.

For more information on systems change, please see the Economic Opportunities Program’s paper *Sectoral Strategies for Low-Income Workers: Lessons from the Field*.

Who is qualified to participate?

Appropriate applicants are:

- Located and working within the Greater Phoenix area – primarily in Maricopa County.

- Workforce development representatives working within nonprofit organizations, business associations, community colleges and universities, union-based training efforts, and public agencies.
- In a position of leadership and decision-making authority related to workforce development efforts, with the capacity and ability to execute strategies on behalf of their organization.
- Engaged in or planning workforce development efforts in the Greater Phoenix area related to connecting workers to quality jobs and/or career pathways.
- Interested in designing and implementing effective strategies to strengthen their local workforce system.
- Committed to achieving equity across race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation.
- Eager for the opportunity to collaborate with others in their local workforce system, to reflect on their current work, to explore leadership practices, and to gain feedback from colleagues.

Inclusivity and diversity are core values of the Greater Phoenix Workforce Leadership Academy. Applicants of color are strongly encouraged to apply. The cohort will be established to represent diversity of organization type, industry focus, as well as race, ethnicity, and gender and other dimensions of diversity.

Advisory Council

The Council guides the recruiting of Fellows, localizes learning content and resources:

Kolu Wilson, Arizona Workforce Administrator, Arizona Office of Economic Opportunity/Arizona Commerce Authority (a part of the Governor’s Office); **Rob Stenson**, ARIZONA@WORK Manager, ARIZONA@WORK – City of Phoenix; **Tina Wadham**, ARIZONA@WORK Manager, ARIZONA@WORK– Maricopa County; **Elizabeth Cole**, Director, Outreach & Partnerships, Community Development, Rio Salado College, Maricopa Community Colleges; **Daniel Barajas**, Associate Vice Chancellor, Workforce Development, Maricopa Community Colleges; **Victor Contreras**, Director, Workforce Solutions, Chicanos Por La Causa; **Katrina Thurman**, VP Mission Development, Goodwill of Central & Northern Arizona; **Jesus Love**, Executive Director, Literacy Volunteers of America and ARIZONA@WORK City of Phoenix WIB Member; **Jennifer Mellor**, Chief Innovation Officer, Greater Phoenix Chamber of Commerce; **Kristin Ferguson**, Professor & Director, Center for

Human Capital & Youth Development, Arizona State University; **Chevera Trillo**, Administrator, Workforce Development, Arizona Department of Economic Security; **Liza Noland**, Director, Rural Programs & the Rural Development Council, Local First Foundation; **Kweilin Waller**, Deputy Director, Human Services, City of Phoenix; **Heather Carter**, Executive Vice President, Greater Phoenix Leadership