



Sustaining New Mexico's Workforce Through Postsecondary Non-Credit Education

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Over the last 18 months, Santa Fe Community College (SFCC) has demonstrated that high-quality, non-credit workforce training can move New Mexicans into stable, better-paying jobs. Program graduates are entering jobs as fiber optic technicians, help desk administrators, early childhood educators, 3D printing technicians, electric vehicle maintenance technicians, and building analysts. Through New Mexico's Government Results and Opportunity (Workforce GRO) grant, SFCC trained 715 workers. Workforce GRO supports the development and delivery of non-credit postsecondary workforce training courses at the state's community colleges and branch campuses. Our results to date show that 92% of SFCC Workforce GRO alumni are employed or seeking jobs in New Mexico and 60% are engaged in jobs that pay higher than \$20 per hour, with most alumni reporting annual income of \$42,000 per year.

Success Is Uneven Without Basic Needs and System Alignment

However, this **success story** is tempered by additional findings that impact about 20% of SFCC's non-credit Workforce GRO students. SFCC has confirmed **three critical challenges** to advance equitable access to upskilling, job advancement, and sustained employment in New Mexico:

- Low-wage workers living in areas of concentrated poverty lack access to quality education, stable housing, transportation, food, medical, and mental health resources that prohibit their participation in upskilling programs;
- Low-skilled workers are disenfranchised and marginalized because employment resources, postsecondary education, and government assistance programs are structurally misaligned;
- Employers are disconnected due to non-existent, outdated, under-funded, or under-staffed state job centers;

These critical workforce challenges are directly linked to the *Yazzie Martinez vs State of New Mexico* decision which highlighted ethnoracial and class disparities in New Mexico's public schools. Disparities that impact the state's high school graduation rates and enrollment into postsecondary skills-based training necessary to obtain higher-wage jobs.

New Mexico has responded to these challenges by investing more than \$1 billion in public education reform, \$60 million in non-credit postsecondary education, and yet-to-be determined amounts in community support programs such as universal early childhood education and care.

Pre- and post-program **data collected by SFCC** demonstrates that high quality non-credit workforce programs can significantly increase students' earning potential, if the student has reliable transportation and housing.

Early findings from the [Albuquerque Workforce Leadership Academy](#) support SFCC's findings and show the promise of holistic workforce ecosystems that implement strategies to address systemic basic needs barriers.

When [basic needs are not met](#), students are unable to engage in postsecondary education, enter career pathways, continue their personal and professional development, and ultimately achieve economic stability.

The resources that fund New Mexico's Workforce GRO are set to expire in June 2027. In the coming year, state lawmakers will determine how Workforce Pell, a new federal program, will be distributed. Students who engage in Workforce Pell eligible programs will receive an annual award up to \$7,395 toward the cost of attendance. SFCC estimates, however, that the minimum investment required to train a worker in a sustainable career pathway is about \$14,000 per student, which includes costs of training and industry certifications, direct coaching, and post-placement mentorship and structured communication led by a workforce program coordinator between instructors, students, and employers.

The return on investment (ROI) in high-quality, non-credit postsecondary education is evident and measurable two to three years post-program ([Bahr, 2025](#)). During this extended time, students are often engaged in pre-apprenticeship or apprenticeship opportunities.

Policy Actions to Sustain and Scale What Works

SFCC believes New Mexico should build on its [key findings](#) that non-credit postsecondary education; aligns with workforce demand, innovates for emerging job sectors, and increases institutional responsiveness by doing the following:

- Create clear guidelines for non-credit postsecondary workforce programs to meet New Mexico's Workforce Pell eligibility.
- Include the state's Workforce Pell-eligible, non-credit workforce programs as part of the New Mexico Opportunity Scholarship so that students are fully funded for these programs.
- Create a permanent, postsecondary workforce education development fund that supports short-term, in-demand, non-credit and for-credit programs that increase the impact and effectiveness of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I and II programs statewide.
- Fund a collaborative education-workforce-worker resiliency task force that engages expertise learned from [New Mexico Higher Education Department Basic Needs Program](#) in response to the Opportunity Scholarship, and [New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions' Building, Energizing, and Connecting through Apprenticeships](#) (BECA) program that supports a holistic response to building worker resilience.

New Mexico stands at a critical junction. For current programs to remain integral to sustainable employment pathways, the state must act decisively. By fully funding eligible non-credit programs through the Opportunity Scholarship and establishing a permanent, dedicated workforce education development fund, New Mexico can demonstrate leadership in responsive workforce innovation, maximizing its investment in WIOA and empowering a next generation of skilled trade professionals.

Read more in Anair, Monique, "Reimagining Non-Credit Higher Education: The Impact Of Non-Credit Short-Term Accelerated Postsecondary Workforce Training At Santa Fe Community College" (2024). *Theses and Dissertations*. 6408.