

# **#Prepared4PA**

## **Reflections & Recommendations**



**Prepared for the PASSHE Foundation and  
The Council on Adult and Experiential Education (CAEL)**

**June 2025**



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## Executive Summary

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The #Prepared4PA initiative was launched to better align Pennsylvania’s public universities with regional workforce needs, especially for adult and nontraditional learners. It brought together educators, employers, and workforce leaders through a statewide steering committee and regional working groups, resulting in competency maps, innovative pilot programs, and new infrastructure to support noncredit learning.

Standout accomplishments included Shippensburg’s frontline leadership training in partnership with GIANT. The lessons learned from #Prepared4PA informed PASSHE’s strategy in launching a work-based learning initiative in 2024, with philanthropic support from Strada Education Foundation and anchor employer commitments to participate.. The #Prepared4PA initiative also generated industry-specific competency maps, detailed later in this report, which have been “cross-walked” with academic courses at one PASSHE institution - Commonwealth University - to systematize credit for prior learning for specific workforce credentials. These crosswalks will be scaled system-wide during the academic year 2025-26.

However, in large part, #Prepared4PA’s impact and progress were uneven across campuses due to limited faculty engagement, staffing constraints, and cultural barriers around noncredit work. The effort underscored that pilot funding alone is not enough; sustained progress requires local leadership, clear incentives, and systemwide leadership and project management support. As higher education faces mounting pressure to deliver workforce outcomes, PASSHE is uniquely positioned to lead—if it continues to invest in employer engagement, flexible credentials, and institutional structures that embed workforce relevance into its core mission.

This report primarily focuses on the implementation of the pilot project, incorporating the full scope of the project for context and impact analysis.



## #Prepared4PA – Reflections and Recommendations

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Key Findings . . . . .	3
Purpose and Origins of #Prepared4PA . . . . .	4
Key Successes and Accomplishments . . . . .	5
Challenges & Lessons Learned . . . . .	6
#Prepared4PA Activities & Findings . . . . .	7
Implementation Timeline . . . . .	8
Statewide Summits and Competency Maps . . . . .	9
Steering Committee and Regional Working Groups . . . . .	10
Summary of Pilots . . . . .	11
Overall Pilot Observations . . . . .	23
Faculty Employability Webinar . . . . .	24
Spotlight: Systemwide Scan of Current Noncredit Offerings . . . . .	26
The Future . . . . .	28
Changing Context: What's Different Now . . . . .	29
Recommendations for Future Practice . . . . .	30
Conclusion . . . . .	31
Appendix: Impact Metrics for Consideration in Future Initiatives . . . . .	32

## Key Findings

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**Cross-Sector Alignment:** #Prepared4PA successfully brought together education, workforce, industry, and government leaders to align Pennsylvania's public universities with the state's talent needs, especially for adult and nontraditional learners.



**Pilot Programs Delivered Mixed Results:** Several innovative, employer-informed pilots launched (e.g., at Shippensburg, Cheyney, Millersville, and Kutztown), but implementation was uneven. Staffing shortages, faculty engagement challenges, and technology or union barriers limited scalability.



**Shippensburg Model Stands Out:** The Shippensburg-GIANT pilot demonstrated a strong model of employer co-design, high learner satisfaction, and potential for repeatable, stackable training.



**Faculty Openness, But Structural and Cultural Gaps Remain:** Faculty surveyed showed interest in noncredit and workforce-aligned programming but cited a lack of clarity, support, and institutional incentives as barriers. Many are not equipped to meaningfully engage with employers due to limited exposure to industry practices and a cultural divide in language, priorities, and expectations. Without targeted support, this gap will remain a barrier to sustained, workforce-aligned innovation.



**Need for Infrastructure & Incentives:** Many institutions lacked dedicated workforce offices or systems for delivering noncredit credentials. Without clear roles, resources, and rewards, promising ideas often stall.



**Cultural Shift Needed:** A broader cultural transformation is required to fully embed workforce relevance and employability across PASSHE institutions, linking it to core goals like enrollment, student success, and post-graduation outcomes.



**Future Promise Requires Sustained Investment:** With clearer governance, employer partnerships, and internal capacity-building, PASSHE is well-positioned to lead in delivering short-term, career-relevant learning that meets both student and labor market needs.

## Purpose and Origins of #Prepared4PA

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The #Prepared4PA initiative launched in 2018–19, at a time when Pennsylvania’s public universities were facing financial instability and demographic decline. Recognizing that austerity alone wasn’t a sustainable strategy, system leaders began exploring how to align their academic offerings with the state’s economic and workforce needs, particularly for adults and nontraditional learners who had been historically underserved by higher education.

The effort reflected a desired shift from a traditional residential college model to a broader view of postsecondary education—one that includes working adults, displaced workers, and learners seeking short-term credentials rather than degrees. With support from CAEL, the Lumina Foundation, Strada Education Network, and the PASSHE Foundation, the initiative adopted an ecosystem approach, engaging employers, workforce boards, community partners, and university faculty.

A pivotal two-day summit in November 2019 brought together PASSHE leaders and industry stakeholders to identify talent gaps in high-demand sectors, including agribusiness, manufacturing, energy, healthcare, IT, and finance. This led to the development of employer-validated competency maps across these sectors and the launch of pilot programs to test new credential pathways.

Ultimately, the goal was to create scalable models that support job readiness, upskilling, and equity, ensuring more Pennsylvanians could access career-relevant learning, even outside of traditional degree programs.



"The State System universities are committed to preparing the talent that powers our economy, and we are bringing together dedicated thought-partners to help all Pennsylvanians gain access to work-relevant learning pathways."

— Dan Greenstein, Chancellor, Pennsylvania's  
State System of Higher Education 2018-24

## Key Successes & Accomplishments

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The #Prepared4PA initiative made meaningful strides toward aligning Pennsylvania's public universities with workforce needs, especially for adult learners and noncredit pathways. It brought together leaders from higher education, workforce development, industry, and government through a statewide steering committee and four regional working groups. These cross-sector collaborations surfaced priorities, built shared understanding, and generated actionable recommendations to guide future work.

Several PASSHE institutions—including Shippensburg, Millersville, Cheyney, and Kutztown—launched innovative pilot programs co-designed with employers and/or community partners. These efforts addressed critical fields such as behavioral health, front-line leadership, workplace safety, and cybersecurity. Shippensburg's Front-Line Leadership program, developed in partnership with the GIANT Company, delivered strong learner outcomes, received high praise from employer partners, and established a repeatable training model.

In addition to pilot program launches, the #Prepared4PA initiative supported the development of essential tools and resources to enhance future scalability and impact. These included noncredit quality assurance toolkits, labor market frameworks, and employer-informed competency maps to guide curriculum development. The competency maps launched an effort at Commonwealth University to align industry-recognized credentials with academic courses. This effort systematized credit for prior learning for degrees in these fields and is being scaled system-wide during the academic year 2025-26.

The initiative also helped catalyze a 2024 work-based learning partnership—supported by the Strada Education Foundation—linking anchor employer partners with five PASSHE universities to build career on-ramps, including job shadowing and employer-driven course assignments, and to expand access to paid internships.

Collectively, these accomplishments mark an important step forward in embedding workforce relevance and employer engagement into the fabric of PASSHE's educational offerings.



"An excellent opportunity. We are proud to be in partnership with this program."

— The GIANT Company  
Shippensburg Frontline Leadership Pilot



## Challenges & Lessons Learned

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Despite a strong vision and valuable cross-sector partnerships, #Prepared4PA encountered a range of implementation challenges. Uptake across universities was uneven, with many faculty and mid-level leaders not directly engaged, incentivized, or accountable for progress. Several promising pilots—including Millersville's behavioral health program and Kutztown's agribusiness marketing credential—never launched due to staffing shortages, union concerns, and technology integration issues.

Even among programs that did move forward, many lacked formal employer feedback loops or struggled to align curriculum with real-world job needs. Faculty engagement remained a consistent barrier, often due to uncertainty about how noncredit or workforce-oriented work fit into traditional academic structures. For some institutions, the absence of a dedicated infrastructure for noncredit programming or workforce partnerships further constrained momentum.

The initiative highlighted that while convening power and grant funding can spark innovation, they are not enough to ensure institutional change. The statewide steering committee and regional working groups produced strong recommendations and helped bridge silos, but translating ideas into action required more localized ownership, clearer roles, and ongoing institutional support. In many cases, the pilot funding did not offer the type or scale of incentive needed to shift entrenched practices or priorities.

Programs that saw the most success were typically driven by entrepreneurial faculty or administrators, supported by committed external partners. Still, these efforts often depended on small teams operating with limited resources—departments of one or two tasked with managing existing responsibilities while also leading innovation. This strain was compounded by the need to provide wraparound supports (e.g., ESL, career coaching, navigation tools) for nontraditional learners—supports that were essential, but frequently underfunded or absent.

Ultimately, one of the key lessons is that meaningful, sustained change requires more than pilots. It demands aligned incentives, cross-functional collaboration, early resolution of operational barriers (such as platform and union alignment), and ongoing investment in faculty engagement and quality assurance. Embedding employability across both credit and noncredit programs—and treating workforce development as core to student success—will be essential to broader impact.

## #Prepared4PA Activities & Findings



This section outlines the core activities carried out during the #Prepared4PA initiative and highlights key findings from pilot programs, stakeholder engagement, and systemwide collaboration. Together, they offer insight into what was tested, learned, and achieved.



## Implementation Timeline

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The timeline below shows the initiative's major activities and phases.



In addition, to explore building faculty understanding and capacity in this area, a webinar was held in **late 2023** for faculty interested in developing innovative, non-credit, workforce-aligned programs.

Prepared4PA informed the launch of the new [work-based learning initiative](#), most notably the process for selecting pilots included commitments from university leadership to provide in-kind support through dedicated staffing during the three-year pilot period

## Statewide Summit and Competency Maps (2019-20)

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The statewide summit brought together employers, workforce leaders, and university representatives to collaboratively identify high-demand sectors and align on the core competencies needed for career success in those fields. The summit focused on six priority industries—agribusiness, advanced manufacturing, energy, finance & insurance, healthcare, and information technology—as well as education.

The outcome was the development of **employer-validated [competency maps](#)** for each sector, outlining the essential knowledge, skills, and behaviors that students should acquire through academic and workforce-aligned programs. These maps were intended to inform curriculum design, workforce training programs, and employer engagement strategies across PASSHE institutions.

While the summit was a significant step toward building shared language and alignment between higher education and industry, there is limited public information about formal adoption or follow-through across campuses. However, the competency maps have influenced several #Prepared4PA pilot projects, particularly in efforts to co-design programs and build stackable, short-term credentials tied to real workforce needs.

Competency Maps were designed to inform:

- Curriculum development
- Credential creation
- Workforce training programs

These maps are not meant to be prescriptive, but serve as adaptable frameworks based on region or employer specifics.

Despite being industry-specific, there's a notable emphasis on:

- Customer focus
- Technology skills
- Teamwork and leadership
- Adaptability and lifelong learning

The common threads across industries in the #Prepared4PA competency maps highlight the growing importance of transferable skills. While they don't always open the door to a first job, transferable skills are essential for long-term career growth and advancement. As all sectors evolve, workers need both technical and human-centered competencies, reinforcing the value of short-term, flexible learning pathways that support continuous upskilling.

## Steering Committee & Regional Working Groups (2021)

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The #Prepared4PA Steering Committee brought together senior leaders from Pennsylvania's education, workforce, industry, and government sectors—including representatives from the State System of Higher Education, Department of Labor & Industry, Department of Education, economic development agencies, and employers.

Four regional Working Groups (Western, Central, Northern, and Southern) engaged over 150 local stakeholders—including university leaders, faculty, K-12 superintendents, employers, workforce boards, and chambers of commerce—to identify regional challenges and opportunities at the intersection of postsecondary education and workforce development. Together, they conducted listening sessions, mapped regional assets, and developed recommendations to strengthen education-to-career pathways across the Commonwealth.



## Summary of Pilots (2022-25)

	Shippensburg Front-Line Supervisors	Millersville Behavioral Health	Cheyney Cybersecurity	Millersville Occupational Safety	Kutztown Agribusiness Digital Marketing
<b>Year(s)</b>	2022-23	2022-25	2022-23	2022-23	2024-25
<b>Target Population</b>	Hourly workers seeking advancement	Immigrants, Refugees, Non-college adults	Cheyney undergraduates (first-gen, African American)	Early- to mid-career adults (working learners)	Aspiring or current regenerative organic farmers
<b>Employer Partner</b>	Giant	Ponessa, Excentia	NA	NA	Rodale Institute
<b>Validation</b>	Co-Curricular Design	Registered Behavior Technician Certification	No	OSHA 30-hour	Google Digital Marketing & E-Commerce
<b>Other Partner(s)</b>	HACC, Harrisburg U, SCPa Works	Lancaster WDB	NA	NA	NA
<b>Launched</b>	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Completed</b>	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
<b># Certificate Earners</b>	15	0	13	5	0
<b>Participant Feedback</b>	Very Positive	NA	Generally Positive	Generally Positive	NA
<b>Follow-on programming</b>	Yes	No	No	No	No



## Shippensburg Agribusiness Frontline Leadership Certificate

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### Noncredit Course Description

The pilot offered a Frontline Leadership (Supervisor) Certificate in agribusiness, aimed at current and aspiring supervisors at GIANT Company (a major regional grocery and food distribution employer). The course included:

- Leadership principles
- Communication and conflict resolution
- Equity and inclusion
- Organizational performance and coaching

It was a noncredit course delivered in two in-person sessions, with a digital badge awarded upon completion.

### Rationale

The course responded to:

- GIANT's internal goals to diversify and upskill its frontline leadership ranks
- The need to retain and grow talent from within, especially among hourly workers
- Shippensburg's interest in expanding noncredit, workforce-aligned offerings that could stack into credit-bearing pathways

### Employer Partner(s)

GIANT Company was the lead employer partner:

- Helped co-design the course
- Sent 15 employees to participate
- Provided paid time for participants to attend
- Contributed financially to cover course costs

The curriculum was co-designed by Shippensburg and GIANT, with:

- HR and DEI staff from GIANT providing input
- Iterative planning meetings to tailor content to frontline work realities

### Other Partners

The pilot aligned with Shippensburg's broader work with:

- Local workforce boards
- HACC (Central Pennsylvania's community college)
- Harrisburg University
- PASSHE system efforts

### Launch & Completion

- Successfully delivered in early 2023

- Took place in person at GIANT's Carlisle facility

### **Certification Earned**

- Students received a digital badge issued by Shippensburg University

### **Learner Participation**

- 15 GIANT employees participated
- The majority were women and/or people of color
- All completed the course

### **Participant Feedback**

- Extremely positive
- Participants appreciated GIANT's investment in their growth
- Cited confidence boosts, better communication skills, and feeling seen by leadership

### **Employer/Partner Feedback**

- GIANT leaders praised the program
- Saw it as a first step toward longer-term talent development
- Expressed interest in scaling or customizing future offerings
- One executive called it "one of the best partnerships we've ever done with higher ed"

### **Successes**

- Strong employer–university collaboration
- High completion and satisfaction rates
- Aligned with GIANT's inclusivity and retention goals
- Demonstrated proof of concept for short-form, employer-aligned training

### **Challenges**

- Planning can be difficult, as more urgent needs often take precedence for employers.

### **Lessons Learned**

- Employer co-design is critical for relevance
- Delivering on-site during work hours increases participation
- Evidence suggests that investing in frontline leaders through short, focused programs may help increase loyalty, internal mobility, and drive meaningful organizational change.

### **Suggestions for the Future**

- Add pre- and post-assessments or tracking of career advancement
- Develop stackable modules that lead to credit or promotion
- Explore expanding leadership programming to other GIANT locations/similar employers



## Beyond the Pilot

Shortly after completion of their #Prepared4PA Pilot, Shippensburg University's Office of Workforce Development developed a **noncredit program quality assurance (QA) toolkit** designed to guide the creation, review, and delivery of noncredit courses that are responsive to labor market needs and adult learners. It includes:

- A **QA guide** outlining principles for high-quality noncredit offerings.
- A **labor market analysis framework** to ensure course relevance and demand.
- A **course development template** that supports the design of accessible, workforce-aligned learning experiences.
- An **instructor interview protocol** focused on evaluating teaching effectiveness, adult learning principles, and cultural competence.
- A **slide deck on credential quality**, distinguishing between WIOA-recognized, micro-, and digital credentials, and explaining their role in workforce development.

Together, these materials aim to ensure noncredit programs are industry-relevant, thoughtfully delivered, and supportive of adult learner success.



## Millersville Behavioral Health Program

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### Noncredit Course Description

Millersville planned to offer a noncredit training program leading to Registered Behavior Technician (RBT) certification. The course would include:

- 40-hour online RBT training
- Mentorship from MU faculty
- Culturally competent instruction
- Job readiness support and ESL integration
- Clinical supervision (required for certification)

The program was proposed in 2021 and then refined in 2023. The final decision to cancel occurred in early 2025.

### Rationale

The program aimed to:

- Expand and diversify Lancaster County's behavioral health workforce
- Create career pathways for immigrants, refugees, and non-college adults

- Help individuals move beyond low-wage, low-mobility jobs into high-demand roles

### **Employer Partner(s)**

- Ponessa Behavioral Health and Excentia Human Services were identified as partners and agreed to give interviews to all program completers who earned the RBT Certificate.
- Employer partners affirmed the value of the Registered Behavior Technician (RBT) framework set by the Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB).

### **Other Partners**

- Church World Service
- PA CareerLink® Lancaster County
- Local adult literacy organizations
- Lancaster County Workforce Development Board

These partnerships were intended to assist with recruitment, ESL, outreach, and wraparound support.

### **Launch and Completion**

The program did not launch. Despite repeated efforts between 2021–2025, Millersville was unable to implement the pilot due to resource constraints, staffing limitations, and external regulatory changes.

### **Certification Earned**

None awarded. The program was never implemented. The intention was for students to earn:

- Registered Behavior Technician (RBT) certification through the BACB
- Possibly a university-issued certificate of completion

### **Participant Feedback**

None collected. However, feedback from community organizations suggested:

- Recruitment would be difficult
- Trust and clarity were essential
- English-language marketing might be more effective than translated materials

### **Employer/Partner Feedback**

- Employers cited a critical workforce shortage
- Noted the demanding nature and low pay (\$14–\$17/hour) of DSP and RBT roles
- Community partners supported the idea but lacked capacity for meaningful involvement
- Suggested positioning the certification as a stepping stone to healthcare or education

### **Successes**

- Built a strong network of committed partners
- Created a detailed program design aligned with equity and workforce needs

- Developed a case study for future program development

### Challenges

- Multiple waves of COVID and refugee surges disrupted planning
- The BACB's RBT certification model is designed for employees, not external learners
- RBT certification requirements changed between proposal writing and the implementation attempt. As of 2023, only certified RBTs or above can serve as assistant trainers. Supervisors must now complete an 8-hour supervision training and be part of the same organization as the RBT candidate during the Initial Competency Assessment.
- Staffing shortages (both at MU and among community partners)

### Lessons Learned

- External credentialing programs are often only effective in noncredit settings when they have strong employer backing, such as hiring commitments, co-design input, or recognition of the credential's value
- Partner capacity must be secured and sustained early in the process
- ESL and cultural barriers require strategic messaging and community trust-building
- Consider targeting Direct Support Professional (DSP) roles instead, which require less upfront credentialing
- Position behavioral health training as a step toward longer-term careers
- Align noncredit offerings more clearly with employer hiring processes
- Explore models that embed certification training into paid employment



## Cheyney Cybersecurity Program

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### Noncredit Course

The proposed course was to be offered with a flexible, hybrid delivery of online and in-person training activities over the course of twelve months. Students were to be prepared to test for an industry-recognized technology credential in one of the CompTIA Core Certifications. Additionally, they were to receive mentorship from strategic industry partners, as well as coaching from a life success coach.

Instead, Cheyney offered a six-week course titled "Cybersecurity Fundamentals", intended to:

- Introduce students to core cybersecurity concepts and job roles
- Build digital literacy and basic IT confidence
- Offer hands-on exposure through labs, case studies, and resume development

The course delivered served as a career exploration and skills-building course, not directly tied to an industry certification, but designed to lay the groundwork for continued training or employment.

## **Rationale**

The pilot aimed to:

- Provide low-barrier entry into the high-demand field of cybersecurity
- Help students from underrepresented backgrounds, particularly Black and first-gen learners, explore tech pathways
- Address both technical and career-readiness gaps in early-stage learners

Cheyney identified the need for short, confidence-building programs that could build momentum toward long-term goals like degrees, certificates, or job placement.

## **Employer Partner(s)**

Employer engagement was limited. Cheyney initially reached out to employers, but:

- No employer co-designed the curriculum, or served as an internship/other partner
- A few industry advisors and faculty with cybersecurity backgrounds provided input

Faculty and career services co-developed the course with informal input from cybersecurity professionals, but without industry validation of learning outcomes.

## **Other Partners**

There were no external partners. The Campus Career Services Office and faculty from STEM and Business departments collaborated to support student engagement and program delivery.

## **Launch & Completion**

- Ran in-person at Cheyney University from June 12 – July 20, 2023
- 2x/week (evening sessions), in a computer lab setting
- The modified pilot was successfully launched and completed

## **Certification Earned**

- Students received a Cheyney University Certificate of Completion  
(No industry credential, such as CompTIA, Cisco, or ISC<sup>2</sup>, was awarded)

## **Learner Participation**

- 13 students enrolled, all current Cheyney students
- 12 completed the program
- Most were STEM or business majors interested in tech careers

## **Participant Feedback**

Student feedback was positive:

- Students found it accessible and confidence-boosting
- Appreciated the mix of technical and career-readiness content
- Requested more depth and follow-up offerings (e.g., coding, certifications)

One student noted, *“It helped me realize I could see myself in cybersecurity and gave me tools to take the next step.”*

### **Employer/Partner Feedback**

No formal employer feedback was collected. Internal faculty and staff believed the pilot met students “where they were” and served as a strong model for future noncredit-to-credit pathways

### **Successes**

- High retention and completion (12 of 13 finished)
- Strong student engagement and satisfaction
- The course served its purpose as a low-barrier exploratory experience
- Developed digital portfolios and resumes
- Sparked student interest in continuing into more advanced coursework or internships

### **Challenges**

- Although the original proposal was strong and compelling, launching the program proved to be much more difficult than expected. There were numerous stops and starts, and the effort never quite lived up to the initial vision.
- With no one clearly designated to lead the project, it took sustained pushing to build momentum and move things forward.
- Limited employer engagement or internship linkage
- No pathway to certification (e.g., CompTIA+)
- Needed better technology in classrooms and labs
- The course was too short to deeply build technical skills or job readiness

### **Lessons Learned**

- Students benefit from confidence-building courses early in their academic and career journeys
- Mixing career coaching with tech exposure is effective
- Lack of employer participation weakens job linkage
- Stronger tech infrastructure and funding are needed for scaling

### **Suggestions for the Future**

- Add a follow-up course tied to a recognized industry credential (e.g., CompTIA IT Fundamentals or A+)
- Explore employer partnerships for internships or job shadowing
- Consider hybrid delivery with asynchronous tech modules
- Create a noncredit-to-credit bridge for students pursuing cybersecurity or IT degrees



## Millersville Workplace Safety & Health Program

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### Noncredit Course Description

An eight-week, noncredit program titled the Workplace Health & Safety Professional Certificate was offered. It included OSHA 30-hour training and issued both an OSHA 30-hour card and a certificate of completion to participants.

### Rationale

The program aimed to reskill/upskill Pennsylvanians in occupational safety and health competencies, supporting entry or advancement into high-demand safety roles across industries. It responded to regional workforce needs, especially in manufacturing and healthcare.

### Employer Partners & Co-Design

While the proposal described industry partnerships, deep employer engagement was limited. Ten employers attended a “Lunch and Learn,” but none were significantly involved in co-designing or promoting the program.

While the program team intended to engage employers, the curriculum was largely developed by faculty without sustained employer input, limiting real-world alignment.

### Other Partners

Key collaborators included:

- Lancaster County Workforce Development Board
- Church World Service
- Spanish American Civic Association (SACA) – Tec Centro
- PA CareerLink™ of Lancaster County

### Launch & Completion

The program ran from January 11 to February 15, 2023, and was held twice weekly in person. It launched and completed as scheduled.

### Certification Earned

- OSHA 30-hour card
- Millersville-issued Certificate of Completion

### Learner Participation

- Targeted: 20 learners



- Enrolled & Completed: 5 learners (4 women, 1 man; mostly full-time workers)

### **Participant Feedback**

- 3 very satisfied, 1 somewhat satisfied
- Valued real-world applications and engaging classroom activities
- Some concerns about schedule/work-life balance

### **Employer/Partner Feedback**

No formal employer surveys or interviews were completed, given the lack of feedback mechanisms for partners and employers.

### **Successes**

- 100% completion and credentialing
- Positive learner satisfaction
- High-quality, OSHA-certified instruction
- Potential for future credit conversion into Millersville programs

### **Challenges**

- Low enrollment
- Weak employer engagement
- Misalignment between program level and target audiences (e.g., entry-level vs. supervisory content)
- Scheduling during working hours may have discouraged participation

### **Lessons Learned**

- Narrow targeting is essential (entry-level vs. experienced workers)
- Curriculum must align with employer needs and pain points
- Stronger one-on-one employer engagement is needed
- OSHA 30 may not be the best entry point—consider OSHA 10 + career exploration for future offerings

### **Suggestions for the Future**

- Consider developing an entry-level safety course with OSHA 10
- Embed career exploration and essential employability qualities (EEQs)
- Lengthen the course for better schedule flexibility
- Create SMART goals and metrics for future pilot evaluations
- Establish feedback loops with employer and partner stakeholders



## Kutztown Agribusiness Digital Marketing Program

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### Noncredit Course Description

The planned offering was a noncredit, stackable credential program using Coursera's asynchronous platform. The course content focused on:

- Digital marketing
- E-commerce
- Small business management

The goal was to equip individuals working in regenerative organic agriculture with the business and tech skills needed for direct-to-consumer sales and farm operations.

### Rationale

The program aimed to:

- Support future farmers trained by the Rodale Institute
- Address skills gaps in business and digital tools for small-scale, regenerative producers
- Expand workforce development capacity at PASSHE universities through flexible online credentials

### Employer Partner(s)

The primary partner was the Rodale Institute, which:

- Provided access to a network of aspiring regenerative farmers
- Helped identify relevant skill needs in farming communities
- Was expected to recruit up to 100 participants

The curriculum was curated from Coursera's existing offerings with input from Rodale on content relevance. Given that these farmers are self-employed, traditional employer engagement or validation was not applicable.

### Other Partners

- Coursera (platform/content provider)
- Modern Campus (student management system)

### Launch & Completion

The program never launched due to two key barriers:

1. Faculty union (APSCUF) objections to using Coursera content without a side agreement
2. Technological failure in integrating Coursera with the new Modern Campus registration system

### Certification Earned

None. The program did not launch, and no participants were enrolled or completed any coursework.

### **Learner Participation**

Targeted: 100 Rodale-affiliated learners

Actual: 0 participants enrolled or completed the program

### **Participant Feedback**

None collected — participants dropped out due to registration system barriers before starting.

### **Employer/Partner Feedback**

Rodale Institute remained supportive but frustrated by delays. No formal feedback from other employers due to a lack of implementation.

### **Successes**

- Identified strong future potential for online, workforce-aligned learning
- Strengthened Kutztown's strategic commitment to noncredit offerings
- Deepened partnership with Rodale for future initiatives
- Initiated a rebuild of Modern Campus/Coursera integration for future scalability

### **Challenges**

- Union opposition: Faculty collective bargaining agreement required union approval for non-faculty-led training; this approval could not be secured in time
- Tech barriers: The Modern Campus system was incompatible with Coursera registration
  - No opt-out clause in PASSHE's contract
  - Costly (\$40,000) external consultants needed to fix the integration

### **Lessons Learned**

- Secure faculty/union approval early, ideally before submitting a grant proposal
- Test and streamline registration systems for non-traditional learners
- Avoid technology decisions that limit program flexibility
- Legal, governance, and IT issues must be addressed before implementation

### **Plans for the Future**

- Complete system integration by April 2025
- Pilot faculty-led or microcredential options that bypass legal restrictions
- Build user-friendly enrollment systems
- Explore non-Coursera platforms for continuing education delivery
- Align all planning with faculty, legal, and union policies from the start

## Overall Pilot Observations

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In implementing the pilots, it was observed that many campuses and departments were not showing the expected responsiveness. A number of proposals submitted in response to the initial RFP were not selected due to limited alignment with workforce needs or insufficient readiness for implementation. The second RFP generated fewer responses than anticipated, suggesting ongoing uncertainty or capacity challenges among faculty.

The lack of engagement was likely a matter of both capacity and mindset/culture. Faculty involvement, in particular, was not always as intentional or robust as likely needed to support sustainable change. Workforce offices, often made up of just one or two people, were expected to drive change while also managing their existing responsibilities. These offices frequently felt understaffed and underfunded, yet still carried the burden of leading innovation.

For the system to evolve, incentives and structures will need to support that evolution. “Workforce development” may benefit from a more integrated definition—one that connects clearly to core institutional priorities such as enrollment, student success, and post-completion outcomes. Embedding this work more deeply across departments and leadership structures could help ensure it is resourced, sustained, and positioned as a shared responsibility.



## Spotlight: Faculty Employability Webinar

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In November 2023, a noncredit webinar for leaders and faculty was hosted by the PASSHE Foundation in collaboration with QA Commons and CAEL. Select PASSHE faculty and academic leaders likely to serve as champions for noncredit and workforce development initiatives were invited, with a total of 38 attendees.

The webinar aimed to build faculty understanding of noncredit programming and workforce trends, highlight their role in advancing PASSHE's #Prepared4PA strategy, encourage collaboration on employer-aligned pilot projects, and gain insight into what faculty think and need to engage in this work.

The survey results offered valuable insight into faculty awareness, openness, and concerns, highlighting both opportunities and barriers for broader engagement..

### Participant Snapshot

- Roles included: Provosts, Deans, Chairs, Faculty, Career Services, Workforce Directors  
Fields: Business, Humanities, Education, Public Health, STEM, Criminal Justice, etc.
- 71% of faculty had taught non-traditional students
- 21% had taught a noncredit course
- 43% expressed interest in teaching noncredit (none said no)

*The above represents 30 survey respondents from a pool of 58 webinar registrants.*

### Survey Findings

- **Awareness Gaps Exist**
  - Nearly half of the participants were unfamiliar with #Prepared4PA
  - Only 13% had explored or submitted a proposal
  - More faculty had heard of the Grow with Google initiative, but still lacked clarity on implementation
- **Employability Mindset Varies**
  - 36% of teaching faculty intentionally embed employability skills in the curriculum
  - Others had limited focus or didn't see it as a curricular priority
  - Business programs led the way in collaboration with career services
- **Positive Disposition Toward Workforce Alignment**
  - Several faculty members had already exemplified strong employer engagement and student-centered practices

- Many had taken noncredit courses themselves (Google, Coursera, LinkedIn Learning, FEMA, etc.), signaling openness to flexible learning models

➤ **Concerns & Barriers Identified**

Faculty concerns included:

- How noncredit work aligns with traditional degrees
- Whether short courses dilute the value of a college education
- Profit motives of corporate partners (e.g., Google)
- Impact on faculty governance and union agreements (e.g., APSCUF)
- Lack of clarity about quality assurance and student interest

➤ **Opportunities for Faculty Development**

- Most faculty wanted more information on how noncredit can support student success
- Many were “unsure” about participating, indicating opportunity for messaging, trust-building, and incentives

## Implications for Furthering Noncredit and Workforce Initiatives

- **Trusted Messengers Matter:** The survey suggests that many faculty are open but cautious. Visible, trusted faculty champions can help normalize noncredit and workforce-oriented work.
- **Faculty Want Structure & Clarity:** There is clear demand for resources on how to build, teach, and assess noncredit offerings—and how to protect quality and academic rigor.
- **Support Cultural Shift:** A cultural change is needed to embrace “both/and” thinking: preserving liberal arts education values while innovating for workforce needs.
- **Demonstrate Value to Students and Faculty:** Faculty want to see that students benefit, and that faculty aren’t disempowered or overburdened in the process.
- **Use Champions to Scale:** Faculty engaging in noncredit programming and collaborating with workforce and career services can serve as models.



## Spotlight: Systemwide Scan of Current Noncredit Offerings



The following represents a system-wide scan, conducted via basic web search, of noncredit offerings at each PASSHE institution to assess the current landscape and identify alignment with #Prepared4PA goals. It reveals a varied but growing commitment to workforce-aligned, short-term learning options, particularly through partnerships with platforms like Google, MindEdge, and Coursera.

While some programs are entry-level and aligned with high-demand industries, others—especially credit-bearing or post-baccalaureate certificates—tend to target professionals seeking to advance existing careers. Noncredit offerings differ from sub-baccalaureate certificates in that they typically focus on flexible, often faster pathways into employment without requiring formal enrollment in a degree program.

*More offerings may be available, but not easily visible via public-facing web search.*

University	Strategy/Offerings
Shippensburg	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Offers <b>noncredit programs through partnerships</b> with MindEdge, HCRI, Google, and AARP. Some are industry-recognized.</li><li>➤ <b>Leverages faculty expertise</b> to support noncredit learners pursuing industry certifications, ensuring academic rigor and contextual guidance.</li><li>➤ <b>Partners with local employers/organizations</b> (e.g., GIANT Company, Children’s Dyslexia Center) to deliver targeted, employer-aligned training.</li><li>➤ <b>Develops custom training solutions</b> for regional businesses, addressing specific workforce needs with tailored program design.</li></ul>
Commonwealth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Offers <b>noncredit programs through partnerships</b> with Google, Cengage, and NHA. Some are industry-recognized.</li><li>➤ Provides <b>access across all campuses</b> (Bloomsburg, Lock Haven, Mansfield, Clearfield) to serve regional workforce needs.</li><li>➤ Partners <b>with employers and chambers</b> (like Columbia–Montour) to co-deliver leadership and business training.</li><li>➤ Leverages <b>WEDnetPA</b> and state workforce funding to support short-term, stackable programs in high-demand sectors like healthcare, IT, and skilled trades.</li></ul>
Millersville	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Offers <b>noncredit programs through partnerships</b> with Google, Ed2Go, Focus, EduSolutions, and MindEdge. Some are industry-recognized.</li><li>➤ Offers a <b>training needs assessment to local companies</b> and organizations. Designs training to meet those needs.</li></ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>Hybrid programs</b> for industry-recognized certificates (e.g., Pennsylvania Certified Public Manager®).</li> <li>➤ Several career-aligned <b>post-baccalaureate certificate programs</b></li> </ul>
<b>IUP</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>Career, technical, and public safety training</b> in areas like IT, healthcare, business, skilled trades, and emergency response.</li> <li>➤ <b>Workplace readiness and digital literacy</b> programs, including Microsoft and Google tools, and basic job skills.</li> <li>➤ <b>Language and access programs</b>, such as English language learning (ALI) and free statewide online training via SkillUp PA</li> </ul>
<b>Kutztown</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Offers 27 subbaccalaureate and graduate certificates that are stackable and career-aligning <b>credentials that build applied skills</b>.</li> <li>➤ <b>Hires noncredit trainers</b> to design and deliver customized training programs for community stakeholders and employers.</li> <li>➤ Plans to offer a robust set of offerings via <b>Coursera</b> once integration with the Modern Campus registration system is complete.</li> </ul>
<b>East Stroudsburg</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Offers 17 credit-bearing certificates that can be completed as part of a full degree program or pursued independently by non-degree students. These certificates focus on specialized, résumé-enhancing skills. Many programs are designed to complement prior education and support career advancement and long-term professional development, rather than entry into the workforce</li> </ul>
<b>Slippery Rock</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Offers 37 credit-bearing certificates that can be completed as part of a full degree program or pursued independently by non-degree students. These certificates focus on specialized, résumé-enhancing skills. Many programs are designed to complement prior education and support career advancement and long-term professional development, rather than entry into the workforce.</li> </ul>
<b>PennWest</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ 15 undergraduate certificates, often available online, help build career-relevant knowledge in specialized fields</li> <li>➤ 34 graduate-level certificates help professionals upskill or specialize.</li> </ul>
<b>West Chester</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The non-degree program allows individuals to earn college credit and explore courses without enrolling in a formal degree program.</li> </ul>
<b>Cheyney</b>	N/A

## The Future



The following pages examine how the landscape has shifted since #Prepared4PA began and how these shifts affect relevance and opportunity for education and workforce initiatives within the PASSHE system going forward.

## Changing Context: What's Different Now

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Since the inception of #Prepared4PA in 2019, the landscape has changed—national trends are now catching up to the very challenges Pennsylvania's public universities have long been navigating. At the same time, new dynamics are emerging that demand fresh attention, from evolving employer expectations to the rapid rise of AI.

### **Enrollment Declines, Financial Strain in Higher Ed, and Increased Policy Focus on Workforce Outcomes**

Higher education is under growing pressure to prove its value, as enrollment declines and shifting student expectations drive demand for shorter, career-focused credentials. At the same time, public funding is increasingly tied to workforce outcomes like employment, wages, and equity, pushing colleges to align more directly with labor market needs.

PASSHE institutions have been grappling with enrollment pressures, financial strain, and shifting student expectations for years, well before these became national headlines. In many ways, this early exposure positions the system to lead, not follow. With a clearer understanding of what's at stake, PASSHE can now move proactively to build programs, partnerships, and policies that meet both learner needs and workforce demands.

### **Frontline and Healthcare Workforce Shortages**

Staffing shortages in healthcare, childcare, education, and frontline service jobs continue due to burnout, early retirements, and a lack of interest among younger workers. These gaps are a persistent challenge for workforce planners.

### **Validating the Vision**

Nationally, employers are placing greater emphasis on skills over degrees, driving demand for non-degree credentials like certificates, microcredentials, bootcamps, and apprenticeships, especially when employer-validated. This shift reinforces the #Prepared4PA approach: aligning education with job-market needs, emphasizing demonstrated competencies, and partnering with employers to design more flexible, work-relevant pathways.

### **□URGENT TREND: AI and Automation Are Reshaping Work for Everyone**

The rise of generative AI and automation is transforming jobs across all sectors—from frontline service roles to tech-enabled positions. Whether or not workers hold a degree, demand is growing for skills like AI literacy, adaptability, and ethical decision-making.

## Recommendations for Future Practice

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To realize the potential of efforts like #Prepared4PA, future initiatives will need to (1) incentivize faculty involvement in workforce-aligned innovation, (2) create system-level supports for noncredit program development, and (3) embed employer relationships into the academic planning process.

Building sustainable bridges between employers and academic departments—especially outside credit-bearing degrees—requires cultural change, stable funding, and leadership buy-in. This includes helping faculty develop the skills, language, and context needed to engage effectively with employers, including understanding industry expectations and navigating cultural differences. Thoughtfully curated systemwide technical assistance, shared templates, and planning tools could help reduce the burden on individual campuses. Ultimately, success depends on aligning public mission with workforce responsiveness, without compromising educational integrity.



## Conclusion

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As Pennsylvania and the nation grapple with a rapidly shifting educational and economic landscape, PASSHE is uniquely positioned to lead in aligning postsecondary education with workforce needs. The system's early recognition of enrollment and funding pressures—and its proactive embrace of employer partnerships, non-degree credentials, and adult learners—has laid the foundation for innovative, scalable models of workforce-aligned education. While challenges remain, including faculty engagement, infrastructure gaps, and sustaining momentum, PASSHE's collective capacity, regional reach, and commitment to the public good make it a natural leader in building equitable, flexible pathways that connect learning to opportunity.



## **Appendix: Impact Metrics for Consideration in Future Initiatives**

The following represent potential impact metrics that could be used to assess future initiatives modeled on or informed by #Prepared4PA's work.

### **Learner Outcomes**

- Post-completion employment rates (overall and by major)
- Median earnings of graduates (within 6–12 months of graduation)
- Percentage of graduates employed in the field
- Internship or work-based learning participation rates
- Growth in stackable credential attainment or certificate completions
- Equity-focused metrics: outcomes disaggregated by race/ethnicity, gender, Pell status, etc.

### **Employer Engagement**

- Number of active employer partners across sectors and regions
- Employer satisfaction ratings (with graduates, interns, or partnerships)
- Advisory board or partnership participation (e.g., frequency, scope, diversity of sectors)
- Employer-led curriculum alignment efforts or co-designed programs

### **Faculty and Institutional Capacity**

- Faculty participation in workforce-aligned curriculum development
- Number of programs aligned with high-priority industry pathways
- Usage rates of data dashboards/tools by faculty and advisors
- Adoption of employability or career-readiness learning outcomes

### **Systems Change and Innovation**

- Institutions adopting systemic practices or frameworks introduced by #Prepared4PA (e.g., career pathway maps, skills-based hiring collaborations)
- Cross-institutional collaborations (e.g., multi-campus initiatives, shared employer relationships)
- Policy adoption or strategic plan revisions are influenced by the initiative
- Leverage of additional funding due to #Prepared4PA's groundwork

### **Scale and Reach**

- Number of campuses and programs impacted
- Number of students reached through career-aligned programming
- Number of faculty, staff, and employers trained or engaged
- Regional ecosystem participation (e.g., economic development groups, workforce board)