

CUNY's Workforce HUB

From Promise to Proof



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I Introduction

More than three years after its launch, the NYC Accelerated Workforce Recovery HUB (the HUB) has established itself as a potentially transformational engine to provide best-in-class occupational skills training and career-track employment services in New York City. A partnership of Hostos Community College and LaGuardia Community College, both within the City University of New York (CUNY) system, the HUB utilizes established best practices in workforce development while leveraging the resources and credibility of higher education. It has produced strikingly effective outcomes for participants, while beginning to shift the culture of its host institutions and other stakeholders within the workforce ecosystem.

The HUB focuses on thoughtful matching of students to programs, and provides customized support that can range from scholarship awards to access to food pantries and referrals to housing assistance.

As the analysis below details, the HUB's unusual status as a high-quality workforce program operating in a college context is both a strength and a vulnerability. Operating out of the Adult and Continuing Education (ACE) departments of its partner colleges, the HUB must contend with the pronounced divide between degree programs and ACE programs. Above all, the HUB is rapidly approaching a moment when it will need to supplant or replace its initial philanthropic support with reliable, repeatable public dollars.

This is the second of two policy briefs assessing the HUB. The first summarized how the project came to be, set out the HUB's theory of change and basic elements of the model, highlighted innovative practices and early lessons learned, and detailed participants' demographics and outcomes thus far. Where that brief sought to describe and explain the HUB, this one takes a broader view, considering the HUB in the context of national best practices for education-related workforce programs. It also looks at how city and state policymakers and CUNY leadership can act to sustain the HUB, helping it reach its potential for systems change.

II The HUB: an Overview

The direct impetus for the HUB was the economic shock triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020. As New York City immediately became the epicenter of the national public health crisis, public officials ordered a near-total shutdown that closed schools, shuttered most "non-essential" businesses, and emptied the streets of the city. Within weeks, New York lost nearly a million jobs. Those losses were largely concentrated in low-paying, face-to-face industries that disproportionately employed young adults and non-college graduates, and were felt most acutely in communities such as Long Island City and the South Bronx, where LaGuardia and Hostos respectively are located.

The crisis put a spotlight on the shortcomings both of New York City's traditional approach of leaning on community-based organizations to provide workforce services, and how CUNY colleges manage workforce programs through their ACE departments. In response, workforce leaders at Hostos and LaGuardia began to develop new concepts for how to offer job training and employment services, and agreed to jointly approach potential funders to seek resources for a new program. The New York Community Trust, a venerable philanthropic organization with significant workforce investments, showed strong interest and soon made a multimillion-dollar commitment to launch the effort.

The two core components of the HUB model are training that is responsive to employer demand and culminates in an industry-recognized credential, and comprehensive wraparound services that begin at program intake and continue beyond job placement. The HUB focuses on thoughtful matching of students to programs, and provides customized support that can range from scholarship awards to access to food pantries and referrals to housing assistance.

Innovations include new staffing roles within CUNY ACE programs such as Education Case Managers (ECMs), who work with students to determine their needs and connect them to the services that will enable them to remain in class.

Another new element is expansion of work-based learning activities, particularly internships and clinical experiences. Across the two colleges, training programs have included a range of healthcare opportunities, from Patient Care and Pharmacy Technician roles to Certified Clinical Medical Assistant and others, as well as programs in Plumbing and Electrical, QuickBooks, and Information Technology. The overall program completion rate was 79 percent through late 2024. Buoyed by a strong emphasis on employer engagement, HUB-trained students secured jobs at an average hourly wage of \$22.67—more than 20 percent higher than the average wage for those placed through the publicly administered Workforce1 Career Center system. The HUB additionally saw growing success in connecting training participants to degree-track academic programs, and strengthened their partnering colleges' capacity to offer scholarships for training programs.

For a much deeper dive into the origins and operations of the HUB, click [here](#) to view Brief 1, “CUNY’s Workforce HUB: A New Model for College-Based Career Training.”

III The HUB and the Standard: National Best Practices

The HUB’s mix of demand-responsive training and intensive support services for participants roughly mirrors the focus of a handful of college systems across the U.S. that have made commitments to prioritizing workforce development. These systems typically develop programs that closely reflect and respond to the needs of their local economies. For instance, San Jacinto College, a Texas community college in the Greater Houston area, offers programs in the maritime, petrochemical, and aerospace programs, while Northern Virginia Community College emphasizes information technology and cybersecurity.¹ In New York City, there is no comparable tradition of utilizing higher education institutions to meet employer demand at scale. Without systemic support, the HUB engages with employers at an organization rather than an industry level, though it resembles other regional programs in prioritizing in-demand job titles and shifting its program menu in response to changing labor market conditions.

Quality Indicators

In recent years, Washington, DC-based research nonprofit New America conducted an extensive study of best practices in non-degree workforce programs offered at community colleges. After extensive literature review, stakeholder interviews, site visits and other research activities, New America identified five criteria to evaluate the quality of non-degree workforce programs.²

FIVE CRITERIA TO EVALUATE THE QUALITY OF NON-DEGREE WORKFORCE PROGRAMS

- 1 **LABOR MARKET OUTCOMES:** The program leads to quality jobs with strong labor market outcomes.
- 2 **EQUITY:** The program advances equity and diversity in occupationally segregated jobs.
- 3 **STACKABILITY:** The program opens doors to advanced credentials or degrees.
- 4 **AFFORDABILITY:** The program is affordable.
- 5 **COMPLETION:** The program has strong completion rates.

¹ Robert B. Schwartz and Rachel Lipson, editors, *America’s Hidden Economic Engines*, Harvard Education Press, 2023.

² Iris Palmer and Shalin Jyotshi, “[How to Deliver High-Quality, Non-Degree Workforce Community College Programs](#),” New America, December 2022.

To put the work of the HUB into context, it is useful to assess how it stacks up against these five indicators. As **Table 1** below shows, the HUB performs very strongly on two of the indicators, and shows promise on three others.

TABLE 1: HUB PERFORMANCE ON NEW AMERICA QUALITY INDICATORS

Indicator	HUB Performance	Notes
Labor market outcomes	IN PROGRESS	910 HUB students placed into training-related employment; wages are well above the average for public workforce system
Equity	IN PROGRESS	Equity is an institutional priority that the HUB advances by providing access to previously underserved groups
Stackability	IN PROGRESS	HUB partners are working with academic counterpart to increase access to Credit for Prior Learnings
Affordability	EXCELLENT	This has been a priority for the HUB, which has awarded hundreds of scholarships
Completion	EXCELLENT	80% of students completed all courses, and 1187 have earned industry credentials

The previous brief offers much more detail regarding how the HUB addresses these indicators. It is worth noting that the HUB model was designed with four of these five outcomes explicitly in mind. As described below, the HUB's engagement with equity is more implicit. click [here](#) to view Brief 1, "CUNY's Workforce HUB: A New Model for College-Based Career Training."

The HUB performs the best on the two criteria, **Affordability** and **Completion**, over which it arguably exercises the most control. This is a direct consequence of choices made by the program designers. The focus on affordability is both a choice and a necessity for the HUB, as reflected by the emphasis on scholarships offered to students, as well as targeted recruitment of low-income jobseekers or marginally employed individuals who would significantly benefit from skills training and credential attainment. The HUB's emphasis on intake and assessment as potential learners first engage with the program, as well as on wraparound support services, contributes to a completion rate far higher than the two colleges' comparable pre-HUB workforce programs.

As the HUB has gone through multiple program cycles and refined its model, participants' subsequent labor market outcomes have improved.

The HUB also boasts strong results for **labor market outcomes**, reflecting other core program elements such as the emphasis on internship and clinical experience, putting Industry Specialists on staff, and working to incorporate employer feedback into program design. As the HUB has gone through multiple program cycles and refined its program model, these outcomes have improved, and should continue to do so, assuming adequate support and a steady hiring climate.

With respect to **Stackability**, the workforce divisions at Hostos and LaGuardia have strived to make learners aware of opportunities to enroll in degree programs and get a leg up on completion through Credit for Prior Learning (CPL), for which CUNY articulated a system-wide policy several years ago. As detailed in the previous brief, certain program tracks, such as Community Health Worker (CHW) at Hostos, fit well with the CPL policy: HUB students at Hostos who earn CHW certification can receive up to nine college credits toward an associate degree at Hostos in either Community Health or Aging and Health Studies.

Other tracks, however, confer fewer credits or none at all.³ While academic departments are ultimately responsible for decisions around the creditworthiness of certificates and other learning experiences, CUNY and its ACE programs should also be putting more of a priority on expanding opportunities for CPL for ACE students transitioning to college.

The final indicator, **Equity**, is a core value for CUNY and the two partner colleges—though not necessarily in the way that New America defines it. Specifically, reducing occupational segregation was not a primary motivator when decision-makers at the two HUB partner colleges were putting together a menu of training opportunities. Rather, the HUB advances equity by connecting low-income individuals to jobs and career opportunities with top-tier employers such as Weill-Cornell Medicine, Northwell Health, Mt. Sinai, Amtrak, and many more.⁴

Inputs to High Quality Programming

The HUB offers a high-quality affordable training option to a diverse and high-need student population positioned to greatly benefit from training and credential attainment. It provides services within the program that support learners' completion and subsequent job placement, and/or enrollment in degree programs. An important additional point is that the HUB has achieved these results while operating at a relatively large scale.

Our next step in assessing this model is to look under the hood at the factors that help shape high quality non-degree workforce programs. By considering these elements, we can better understand not only whether the HUB is effective, but also why it is performing well—and what might threaten its continued success. Additionally, these criteria provide a roadmap for policymakers who might be considering how to replicate the HUB model, in whole or in part.

Extensive review of the research literature around these programs⁵ suggests that **six factors matter above all others**:

- 1 **FUNDING** is reliable and consistent, enabling the college to offer a clear and steady value proposition to both learners and employer partners, and to take advantage of new opportunities as they emerge.
- 2 **PROGRAM DESIGN** effectively incorporates best practices related to staffing and facilitates strong partnerships with employers and other stakeholders.
- 3 The **PROGRAM MENU** and **CURRICULUM** address employer needs and reflects their input.
- 4 **JOB QUALITY** and **WRAPAROUND SERVICES** advance larger goals of equity & support student success.
- 5 **COLLEGE** and **SYSTEM LEADERS** are actively engaged and fully supportive of the effort.
- 6 **DATA** are clear and illuminative, helping to inform program improvement.

³ In those cases, under CUNY's CPL policy students might have the option of taking an exam to get a relevant requirement waived.

⁴ CUNY views equity as embedded within its [origins and history](#). Additionally, both Hostos and LaGuardia Community Colleges are designated Hispanic-Serving Institutions.

⁵ Including but not limited to Schwartz and Lipson, eds., *America's Hidden Economic Engines*; Iris Palmer and Shalin Jyot

“[How to Plan High-Quality, Non-Degree Workforce Programs at Community Colleges](#),” New America, December 2022; Palmer and Jyotishi,

“[How to Deliver High-Quality, Non-Degree Workforce Community College Programs](#)”; Melissa Leavitt, Ph.D. and Elaine W. Leigh, Ph.D.,

“[Employer and Community College Partnerships: Models and Practices for Supporting Students and Strengthening the Workforce](#),”

Strada Education Foundation, 2023; and Jim Jacobs, “[Rethinking Community College Workforce Programs](#),” Inside Higher Ed, May 25, 2021.

Table 2. Below indicates that the HUB is well positioned on three of these inputs, moderately strong on two others, and at significant risk on one. Unfortunately, the input at risk—funding—ultimately influences all the others. Indeed, resource limitations help to explain why the two “moderate” inputs are not stronger.

TABLE 2: HUB PERFORMANCE ON KEY PROGRAM INPUTS

Input	HUB Status	Notes
Funding	AT RISK	Increasingly urgent need for HUB to diversify funding sources
Data	MODERATE	CUNY system issues are a challenge
Program menu	MODERATE	Menu limited in part owing to resource challenges
Program design	STRONG	Staffing is a strength; partnerships are a mixed bag
Job quality/wraparound services	STRONG	Wraparound services are a priority
Leadership support	STRONG	Both college presidents are fully committed to the HUB, and system leaders are interested as well

As detailed in the previous brief, the HUB has received generous funding support from New York Community Trust, which awarded a grant of \$1.65 million to launch the effort in 2022. Since then, project leaders have secured additional grants from federal and state funding sources, as well as other foundations and individual donors. Importantly, the two partner colleges have made substantial in-kind contributions, including the salaries of senior administrators and other staff working on the initiative. This institutional commitment on the part of the two colleges reflects the deep belief of their Presidents, Kenneth Adams at LaGuardia and Dr. Daisy Cocco De Filippis at Hostos, in the power and potential of the HUB as an engine of economic mobility.

These philanthropic and in-kind investments have supported the wraparound services and other components that HUB administrators view as the model’s secret sauce, delivering results that should stand as a clear proof of concept. To sustain the HUB, however, and even more so to expand it, will require a new approach to funding the model, as the Trust’s original grant expires. The recommendations section below explores the issue of funding in greater detail.

Regarding the other inputs, compared to the pre-HUB status quo—, in which the colleges only collected limited information for grant-funded learners data capacity is far stronger. At LaGuardia, HUB administrators meet monthly to review a dashboard of performance indicators, including placements by program track for completers, a range of outcome milestones for currently enrolled participants, and a longitudinal view on how placed program completers are faring with individual partner employers. Hostos utilizes a similar process to produce its own internal analyses. The result has been a much-enhanced ability to communicate about the HUB using both data and individuals’ stories. Obstacles to further improvement remain, however, including the differences between data systems at the two colleges, and constraints on how colleges share data across CUNY.

Two other core strengths of the HUB are program design and job quality/wraparound services. The bulk of the previous brief detailed the HUB model, particularly its staffing innovations, which were put in place largely to help provide wraparound services. With job quality, too, the HUB offers a positive contrast to most workforce programs of similar size: it is not placing completers into minimum-wage roles with no advancement potential, but rather into positions that offer clear paths to career success. The increasingly urgent question now is whether and how the program will be able to sustain its quality and scale.

IV Where the HUB Goes from Here

Three and a half years after its launch, the HUB has reached a crossroads. Its early results offer compelling evidence of its value, and as noted above, in many respects—program structure, partnership support, leadership buy-in, and more—it seems well positioned for sustained success. At the same time, its initial philanthropic support is winding down, and sustainable funding has yet to be secured. Without a reliable and repeatable funding stream, at best the HUB will tread water, with staff expending time and energy on securing and administering grants. At worst, philanthropic support will dry up, and the program eventually will disappear.

At a time when working-age adults and employers alike desperately need the kind of high-value training the HUB offers, and as colleges look for new ways to connect with and serve all kinds of students, this would be a disastrous outcome. On the other hand, if sustainable funding comes through, the HUB is poised for robust growth and much larger impact at a system level. This brief concludes with three overarching recommendations for program leaders, CUNY administrators, and public officials to boost the HUB toward fulfilling its transformational potential.

1 Secure operational funding for the HUB and pursue additional tuition support to enable more learners to take courses, earn credentials, and get on track toward career success and economic security.

Program Funding

It is a truism of funding for social services programs that philanthropic investment helps launch innovative practices, and then public dollars take the most successful of those practices to scale. This was the blueprint for the HUB. The New York Community Trust invested in its blend of demand-driven and credential-focused training, meaningful work experience, and comprehensive support services. From program completion to credential attainment, job placement, and average wages, the results indicate that the bet has paid off.

Unfortunately for the HUB, CUNY policy blocks the most straightforward source of public funding: direct subsidy. The City University requires that ACE programs pay for themselves.⁶ Without access to subsidies that could pay for the components that drive the model's success—above all, the wraparound services—the HUB's main revenue options are philanthropic grants or student tuition.

The treadmill of seeking grant funding carries a substantial opportunity cost. The more staff time spent applying for, administering, and reporting on grants, the less is left to refine the model, seek new partners, or otherwise improve or expand programming. It is also an inherently unstable way to operate: the nature of private funding is to seek exciting new ideas and projects, and it is often the case that by the time a grantee has iterated a model to deliver consistent high quality, the dollars that drove its development are all spent. In turn, this makes it harder to retain staff, let alone to plan ahead.

Nor is charging higher tuition a viable option, at least not if the HUB is to maintain its commitment to equity. Self-paying students account for the majority of HUB learners: raising the cost to cover non-tuition expenses would mean pricing many of them out. Because non-tuition costs, including for services and the staff who provide them, are relatively inelastic, an enrollment decline driven by higher tuition costs could quickly render the program impossible to run.

⁶ [City University of New York, "Standard Operating Procedures, Adult and Continuing Education," July 1, 2011.](#)

That the HUB is governed by CUNY's rules for ACE is administratively straightforward but operationally harmful. It is better understood as a high-quality workforce program embedded within a postsecondary system, leveraging its assets and resources to support participants toward labor market success. In considering whether and how to resource the HUB, CUNY leaders must grapple with a question raised in the first brief: whether its highest institutional priority is to support students' labor market and life outcomes, or to deliver academic programming without regard to what happens after learners leave campus. In one recent encouraging development, the CUNY Central office directed funding from the statewide Workforce Development Institute to sustain the HUB through the next year. Even so, long-term sustainable funding remains an urgent need. Click [here](#) to view Brief 1, "CUNY's Workforce HUB: A New Model for College-Based Career Training."



Tuition Support

For the most part, the federal Fiscal Year 2026 budget passed in July 2025 was a bitterly partisan affair, with headlines focused on its enormous upper-income tax cuts and potentially devastating reductions to Medicaid and other social assistance programs. But it included one measure that did enjoy robust bipartisan support: expanding Pell Grant eligibility for qualified low-income applicants to cover the cost of training programs that last from eight to 14 weeks (150 to 599 hours) and meet certain standards of quality. Previous Pell rules limited eligibility of at least 15 weeks, or 600 class hours.⁷ "Short term Pell" will go into effect on July 1, 2026, and while many regulatory questions must be resolved before then—including how program quality is defined and who sets the definition⁸—at least some HUB training programs should fit the criteria.

A parallel public measure closer to home is already technically in effect, but presents daunting implementation challenges. Since 1974, New York State has offered the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) to help state residents cover the costs of college. In early 2024, Governor Kathy Hochul announced that TAP recipients could now use their awards to pay tuition costs for non-degree programs at CUNY and SUNY that lead to employment in high-demand fields and meet other eligibility criteria, including articulation to academic credit.⁹

"Workforce TAP" was piloted at select colleges across SUNY and CUNY in Spring 2024. Within CUNY, LaGuardia Community College and Kingsborough Community College were the two participating schools. Four students in LaGuardia's Certified Medical Administrative Assistant program applied for awards that would cover about 80 percent of tuition costs. Two of the four ultimately were approved, and LaGuardia received funds from the state in September 2024, several months after the program concluded.

⁷ Jennifer Stiddard, "[Short-Term Pell remains on the radar of both the House and Senate in early 2024](#)," Skills Blog, National Skills Coalition, March 26, 2024.

⁸ Sara Weissman, "[How Colleges and States Can Make Workforce Pell a Reality](#)," Inside Higher Ed, July 17, 2025.

⁹ CUNY News, "[Gov. Hochul Announces Launch of Tuition Assistance Program Eligibility for CUNY and SUNY Workforce Development Programs](#)," Feb. 2, 2024.

CUNY's determination to work through these issues reflects its strong motivation to make Workforce TAP broadly accessible.

The 2024 pilot illuminated the significant policy and operational obstacles that must be overcome before Workforce TAP can support large numbers of HUB learners. That TAP is available only on a reimbursement basis is one challenge: either the student or the college must pay up front and shoulder the risk that the application for aid is rejected. Another is that the amount of a TAP grant is based on the number of credits the course articulates to, excluding many HUB programs and meaning that the award for others might cover only a small portion of the cost. Operationally, the lack of software connecting non-degree students' information to CUNYfirst, the system through which CUNY manages financial aid, meant that staff members had to input

their information by hand, a time-intensive process that would not be feasible at scale.¹⁰ Given the administrative burden, including the requirement that applicants complete the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) form even though TAP funds are not federal, students and staff could reasonably conclude that Workforce TAP is not worth the effort.

Formidable as these challenges are, CUNY is proceeding with plans to dramatically expand access to Workforce TAP. Administrators have identified 30 courses that meet eligibility criteria, including six at Hostos with a total of 150 seats annually and nine at LaGuardia seating up to 416 learners per year. At least two of these courses are HUB program offerings across all CUNY campuses, the Central office is hoping to make up to 1,500 awards between the Fall 2025 and Spring 2026 semesters.

CUNY's determination to work through these issues reflects its strong motivation to make Workforce TAP broadly accessible. TAP operates as an entitlement, meaning that any qualified applicant will receive funding, up to a lifetime individual cap of eight semesters, with a maximum per-semester award of \$2,582.50. That programs must articulate to credit for students to be eligible should provide incentive to more clearly define equivalencies and remove barriers between degree and non-degree programs, as further discussed below. Even the work of building data systems to capture the information needed to apply has a big potential payoff: experts have observed that states with strong data and quality control systems already in place will be best positioned to access short-term Pell when it begins to make funding awards in mid-2026.¹¹

Beyond the public sector, the HUB should more aggressively engage employers, at an organizational level or through industry intermediaries, as prospective funding partners. One potential model for this could see employers covering some or all costs for a cohort of learners in a given title, such as Certified Clinical Medical Assistant or Central Service Technician, while Hostos and LaGuardia recruit students from the community. As an alternative, sponsoring employers could refer workers at lower-level job titles, such as Home Health Aide, who are interested in earning certification for higher-paying roles along a career ladder. In recent years, Monroe Community College in Rochester, New York ran a similar program, engaging long-term care facilities to cover a share of costs for up-skilling of current workers to become certified nursing assistants.¹²



¹⁰ CUNY has taken one important step toward easing this operational challenge by creating a CUNYfirst identification number and account for every non-degree student, meaning that they can receive direct financial aid. The next challenge is to reconcile CUNYfirst accounts with the separate enrollment management system.

¹¹ Kenyatta Lovett, "Noncredit Pathways: A Federal Policy Blind Spot," Inside Higher Education, July 8, 2024.

¹² Dana Archer-Rosenthal, "Funding Non-Degree Workforce Programs at Community Colleges: Lessons Learned from New America's New Models for Career Preparation Project," New America, January 2022.

ROI Analysis

As these two briefs have shown, the available evidence suggests that the HUB has delivered significant value not only for learners, but also for employers and taxpayers. Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this analysis to precisely quantify that value. A true Return on Investment (ROI) analysis would be a powerful tool in making the case for sustained investment in the HUB, particularly as its original philanthropic support draws to a close.

There is a recent precedent for such an approach in New York City. In 2020, the Mayor's Office of Economic Opportunity published research conducted by the research group Westat to measure the effectiveness of the City's industry-focused investments in job training, the publicly funded programs most comparable to those offered through the HUB. Analysis of six publicly funded job training programs found that every dollar invested in training yielded a return to society of between \$6.32 and \$35.21 over a ten-year period, compared to investing that dollar in a standard job matching program. Further, all six of the programs produced statistically significant earnings increases for trainees, with earnings effects sustaining through five- and ten-year estimates of ROI.¹³

To be sure, ROI studies are neither inexpensive nor easy to conduct. They require access to administrative data on employment and earnings for participants—things CUNY ACE divisions historically have been reluctant to ask their students to disclose—as well as receipt of public benefits such as Cash Assistance and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNAP) Program. The multi-campus, multi-program nature of the HUB intensifies these challenges. But given the transformational potential of the HUB and its highly encouraging early results, as well as the urgent need for a stable, long-term funding source, CUNY should pursue the resources to conduct such an evaluation and work through the administrative barriers to acquiring the necessary data.

2

Continue efforts to institutionalize the HUB within CUNY by facilitating transition into degree programs and continuing to build culture and community within the program.

ACE/Academic Alignment

To a considerable extent, the challenges facing the HUB arise from the longstanding tradition, at CUNY and across the higher education field, of drawing a bright line to separate degree and non-degree programs. Indeed, a 2021 report from Opportunity America, “Today’s Students, Tomorrow’s Workforce,” which helped inspire the HUB, called for CUNY to “create a continuum of credit and noncredit job-focused programs.”¹⁴ The idea takes as its premise that socioeconomic advancement is a driving motivation for students in degree and non-degree programs alike. Since both degrees and industry credentials can boost earning power, colleges should consider how they can make it easier for learners to obtain both and transition frictionlessly from one to the other.

Across CUNY for the 2022-23 school year, enrollment in ACE programs (219,914) was nearly equivalent to enrollment in degree programs (225,881).¹⁵ It is unclear exactly how many students migrate from one side of the line to the other, although anecdotal evidence suggests the number is as low as 5 percent.¹⁶ Hostos administrators report that over 500 alumni of its Continuing Education and Workforce Development programs have transitioned into Hostos as matriculated students since 2018. LaGuardia has made extensive efforts in this area as well, with promising results.

¹³ Joseph Gasper, Ben Muz, and Dawn Boyer, “[Return on Investment Analysis of Industry-Focused Job Training Programs](#),” NYC Mayor’s Office of Economic

¹⁴ Opportunity America, “[Today’s Students, Tomorrow’s Workforce: A Roadmap for Change at CUNY Community Colleges](#),” September 2021.

¹⁵ Office of New York City Comptroller Brad Lander, “[Spotlight: CUNY and the New York City Economy](#),” April 9, 2024. Note that workforce programs comprise only one part of the total ACE program portfolio.

¹⁶ Opportunity America.



For the most part, however, the division remains. In fact, without necessarily intending to do so, CUNY has put daunting structural and psychological obstacles in the way of students looking to transition from ACE programs to degree programs. Academic and ACE divisions usually operate separate processes and support distinct teams for student recruitment, registration, intake, advising, and career services. Further, as noted above, ACE data systems have not integrated into their colleges' primary systems for enrollment, billing, advising, and more. The result is that students in ACE programs typically must engage in a repetitive and time-consuming set of activities to enroll in a degree program. It also means that colleges are paying for redundant capacity.

This unnecessary expenditure functions as a “prestige tax” that CUNY imposes on itself to maintain the distinction between credit and noncredit subsystems. This speaks to the psychological barrier: the enduring notion that non-degree programs are different from and inferior to traditional academics. Colleges frequently reinforce

this message, intentionally or otherwise, through policies such as limiting the access of students in ACE programs to libraries, gyms, and other campus facilities. For working learners whose previous schooling experiences might have been challenging or traumatic, this is the exact wrong message to send.

To say that CUNY should reconsider distinctions between ACE and academic programs is not to say that they should be eliminated. There are real and meaningful differences in accreditation processes, aid eligibility, and much more. At the same time, all students have an interest both in gaining specific skills that can help them secure specific jobs, and in building broadly applicable knowledge that they can apply across a wide range of employment options and in other aspects of their lives.

Colleges also should have strong motivation to facilitate easier transitions from workforce into degree programs. Enrollment challenges are real, driven by simple demographics: the falling birth rate over recent decades means a smaller potential pool of “traditional age” first-time freshmen.¹⁷ Integrating processes and systems could yield a significant payoff in new enrollment, positioning ACE programs to serve as another door into degree programs. Options to do so range from dipping a toe in—choosing one department or discipline, such as allied health or construction management, to test combining select administrative activities—to a full-on merger of offices and functions.¹⁸

¹⁷ David Rosowsky, “[The Cliffs of Higher Ed: Who’s Going Over and Why?](#)” *Forbes*, Feb. 8, 2024.

¹⁸ See for instance the profile of Prince George’s Community College and its Teaching, Learning, and Student Success division, in Education Strategy Group, “[A More Unified Community College: Strategies and Resources to Align Non-Credit and Credit Programs](#),” 2020.

Across the 64 colleges of the State University of New York (SUNY), CUNY's statewide sister system, faculty have spent years determining how credit and non-credit programs relate and equate to each other.

Related to but distinct from their involvement in the HUB, both Hostos and LaGuardia have taken significant steps toward supporting ACE students looking to enroll in degree programs. LaGuardia's Career Development Center functions as "a mini admissions office for ACE students," in the words of one administrator. Specifically, its small team provides information sessions for students in HUB and other workforce programs and helps interested learners to apply for financial aid by completing applications for FAFSA and TAP, among other funding sources. The LaGuardia Foundation also helps ACE transitioners by covering the CUNY application fee (typically \$65-70) and providing targeted scholarship support. LaGuardia officials report that the Career Development Center has helped at least ten HUB students to transition into degree programs—although since their reliable tracking extends only up to one year after HUB participants complete their courses, the true number could be considerably higher. Hostos provides similar focused college transition support for continuing education students, supporting an average of 30 to 35 ACE students per semester to enroll in degree programs.

Institutionalizing CPL

A key step and potential accelerant to enabling more HUB learners to enroll in degree programs would be to expand opportunities to earn academic credit through programs such as those the HUB offers. As described in the first brief, CUNY has a thoughtful system-wide policy that guides how colleges award credit for prior learning (CPL). The process for doing so, however, remains bespoke on multiple levels.

Within each college, each academic department enjoys wide latitude around CPL. At different CUNY colleges, the same workforce credential might count differently in terms of whether its credits can be applied toward degree requirements, or simply as elective credit. The result is a mishmash of inconsistent rules that frustrates students, baffles employers and presents a barrier to meeting industry needs at scale by making it more difficult to collaborate across multiple colleges.

One helpful step would be to better define equivalencies between the two "sides of the house." Across the 64 colleges of the State University of New York (SUNY), CUNY's statewide sister system, faculty have spent years determining how credit and non-credit programs relate and equate to each other, connecting microcredentials across dozens of disciplines to academic coursework. Among other benefits, this meant that when New York State expanded TAP eligibility to include workforce-focused programs, a whopping 286 SUNY courses qualified.¹⁹

Both LaGuardia and Hostos have put resources behind expanding uptake of CPL. Hostos received funding from the Workforce Development Institute to create an office to support two staff dedicated to assist CEWD students transition/matriculate at Hostos. LaGuardia secured a substantial grant from the Robin Hood Foundation to help expand its CPL capacity, putting a small team in place to work with academic faculty in beginning to align workforce programs and other forms of experiential learning with credit. Administrators report that they have fielded nearly 2,000 inquiries regarding CPL, awarding credit to nearly 60 percent of them. The team has codified a number of "ACE-to-credit" agreements, which will be honored across CUNY. Specifically for LaGuardia's HUB programs, the Certified Clinical Medical Assistant course sequence converts to three credits, as does Electrician training. Like the HUB itself, however, this important work faces an uncertain future as the grant that supported it comes to an end.

¹⁹ SUNY, "[Get NYS tuition assistance for non-degree programs at SUNY](#)," accessed Oct. 29, 2024.

CUNY and its colleges have additional steps available to bolster CPL. Beyond standardizing industry credentials and workforce courses, they can put more resources into helping colleges assist students to earn CPL through the other options to do so.²⁰ At a system level, the Chancellor and other officials can elevate this as a priority, continuing and expanding efforts already underway to assess broadly applicable credentials and make recommendations for awarding credit to be considered across all CUNY colleges. Within institutions, college presidents can convene academic instructors and non-credit program staff to better define standards for CPL and set campus goals for awarding credit.

Another benefit of closer communication and stronger coordination between credit and non-credit teams would be in presenting a clearer and more scalable value proposition to employers. CUNY's Inclusive Economy Initiative, featuring support for industry engagement, career advising, internships and more, has leveraged millions of dollars in new investments from city government and private funders.²¹ Yet, this effort has not tapped into the often-substantial resources of ACE workforce teams and programs.

While the history of missed connections has hurt both students and employers, building those bridges now could lead to better outcomes for all concerned. Specifically for the HUB, it would mean access to employer contacts and insights that academic departments have cultivated, as well as engaging those employers as potential partners to host work-based learning experiences and hire program completers. Hostos has taken an important step in this direction by hosting industry summits that bring together academic departments, employers, and students—including ACE learners—for topical discussion and networking opportunities.

Connecting, Celebrating, and Expanding The HUB

Both to further expand the HUB network among participants, and to raise visibility for recruitment and advocacy, Hostos and LaGuardia should hold a **HUB Expo**. Such an event could feature current students, program alumni, educators, administrators, funders, and employers. It would serve as a celebration of all that the program and participants have achieved to date, as well as an advertisement for the model targeted at CUNY leaders, city and state policymakers, and private funders. This event could function as a networking opportunity for learners and employers, a means to recruit new students and partners, and potentially raise revenue for the HUB through industry sponsorships and other philanthropic giving.

An additional activity to explore would be creating an alumni support capacity for HUB program completers. An unfortunately common phenomenon within workforce development is that once participants complete a training program and find a job, many avoid having an ongoing relationship with the organization that ran the program. This might be because they do not wish to dwell upon a more difficult time in their lives, or because they do not perceive value in continuing the relationship. Colleges, of course, often have a very different relationship with their alumni, who might choose to stay connected to friends, professors, and the institution for their entire lives, for both social and professional reasons. As noted in the first brief, many alumni of HUB programs choose to stay in touch and share their successes after completing training and finding a job. As a workforce program embedded within a college setting, the HUB can leverage this dynamic, including for the purpose of drawing its own alumni back into degree programs.



²⁰ Including military training, portfolio assessment, and a variety of standardized exams.

See <https://www.cuny.edu/academics/academic-policy/credit-prior-learning/> for more detail.

²¹ CUNY, "[Mayor Adams, CUNY Chancellor Matos Rodríguez Announce Near \\$12 Million Expansion of CUNY Inclusive Economy Initiative](#)," May 20, 2024.

3 Strengthen connections with the publicly supported NYC workforce system.

New York City's publicly funded and administered workforce system serves hundreds of thousands of city residents per year, operating across multiple city agencies with approximately \$640 million in annual investments from different levels of government.²² The resources of that system include the sector-focused Industry Partnerships managed through the Mayor's Office of Talent and Workforce Development (NYC Talent) and the network of 18 Workforce1 Career Centers administered by the NYC Department of Small Business Services (SBS).

On paper, CUNY is a strong partner of this system. Chancellor Félix Matos-Rodriguez serves on the Workforce Development Board and co-chaired the Future of Workers Task Force convened by Mayor Eric Adams in 2022 to inform citywide policies and priorities around employment services. Efforts like the Inclusive Economy Initiative, noted above, and CUNY Career Launch, a summer jobs program for CUNY students, utilize public funding. CUNY administrators work with their counterparts in the Mayor's Office, NYC Department of Education, and Department of Youth and Community Development to align programs and resources in supporting NYC youth and young adults toward career success.²³



In practice, however, CUNY's structural connection to the workforce system is far stronger on the degree side than with explicitly labor market-focused programs such as those offered by the HUB. Building stronger ties in this area—connecting the best-in-class training of the HUB with the powerful job placement apparatus that the City has built—could yield great value for learners, employers, the participating colleges, and CUNY as a system.

Workforce1 made 23,599 job placements in Fiscal Year 2023, the last year for which numbers are available.²⁴ This reflects job postings from thousands of employers in sectors such as construction, healthcare, media, professional services, transportation, and more. Workforce1 Center staff members work with jobseekers to prepare them for employment and connect them to opportunities that match their skills, experience, and interests. A recent scan of job postings shared online indicates that employers are bringing vacancies to Workforce1 that both align to HUB training programs and pay a decent wage, including a healthcare Billing Specialist position offering \$25 per hour or Certified Nursing Assistant jobs at nearly \$22 per hour.²⁵ The average wage at placement for a Workforce1 client,

however, was just \$18.04 in Fiscal Year 2022.²⁶ As noted in the previous brief, this is well below the HUB's average placement wage of nearly \$23 per hour.

This suggests that HUB training completers could be fast-tracked for job openings posted with Workforce1. Given the recurring nature of many vacancies within healthcare and other sectors, training could be proactive, with employers engaging the HUB on their own or in consortia to form cohorts of learners to master specific skill sets and earn related credentials.

In addition to helping more HUB trainees (and other CUNY students and graduates) find employment, Workforce1 could bring needed resources to the HUB by helping to subsidize the costs of training. As noted above, HUB administrators should be working with CUNY Central colleagues to open the spigot of potential Workforce TAP state funding, determine how best to access short-term Pell grants starting in 2026, and explore how to bring private sector money to bear by partnering with employer intermediaries.

²² NYC Employment and Training Coalition, "[Putting Our Dollars to Work](#)," March 2025.

²³ CUNY, "[Mayor Adams Announces Citywide Action Plan to Build Inclusive Career Pathways for Young People](#)," December 11, 2023.

²⁴ The City of New York, [Preliminary Mayor's Management Report](#), January 2024.

²⁵ NYC Department of Small Business Services, "[Explore Job Openings](#)." Accessed on October 29, 2024.

²⁶ NYC Workforce Development Board, "[Meeting Minutes](#)," Tuesday, September 12, 2023.

Another potential source is the city-issued Individual Training Grant (ITG). Funded by the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), ITGs can cover trainee costs related to course tuition, registration fees, testing fees, and books for short-term training, defined as less than one year.²⁷ Virtually all HUB learners meet the eligibility criteria for ITGs: grantees must be actively looking for work, or employed but earning less than \$63,928 per year; ready to work immediately after training; and have at least a high school diploma or equivalency. ITG applicants also must register as Workforce1 “members,” a relatively quick and easy process. Subject to change at the discretion of the NYC Workforce Development Board, ITGs currently can fund training only in 11 occupations, two of which are Certified Nursing Assistant and Clinical Medical Assistant, and providers must be registered on the NYC Training Guide website.²⁸

Through the IPs, NYC Talent works with employers to anticipate hiring demand, match jobseekers and students to vacancies, and inform training programs that will position New Yorkers for career success.

A final major potential advantage of closer ties to the public workforce system is improved access to the Industry Partnerships (IPs) now managed by the Mayor’s Office of Talent and Workforce Development (NYC Talent). Through the IPs, NYC Talent works with employers to anticipate hiring demand, match jobseekers and students to vacancies, and inform training programs that will position New Yorkers for career success. The office currently supports four IPs: the Construction Industry Partnership, New York Alliance for Careers in Healthcare (NYACH), NYC Tech Talent Pipeline (TTP), and Manufacturing and Industrial Innovation.²⁹

Here too, CUNY has strong involvement on paper with at least two IPs, working closely with both NYACH and TTP, which lists five CUNY senior colleges—Hunter, Lehman, City College, John Jay, and Brooklyn College—as partnering academic institutions. TTP rightly takes pride in facilitating a more diverse tech workforce in New York City, including through its CUNY 2x Tech initiative to boost the graduation rates of students in computer science and related degree programs and connect a majority of students to paid internships or apprenticeships.³⁰ Again, however, engagement with the IPs largely has focused on students in degree programs. Broadening these ties to include the HUB and other workforce programs would benefit all parties.



²⁷ NYC Small Business Services, [Individual Training Grants Frequently Asked Questions](#). Accessed on Oct. 29, 2024.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Mayor’s Office of Talent and Workforce Development, [Industry Partnerships](#). Accessed on Oct. 30, 2024.

³⁰ CUNY 2x Tech, [The LaGuardia CUNY 2x Tech Academy](#). Accessed on October 31, 2024.

V Conclusion

As an institution, CUNY is New York City's most powerful workforce talent development engine, with no other entity coming close. The system has graduated one million students since 1991, the large majority of whom come from and remain in New York State to pursue careers and start families.³¹ Its alumni comprise a sizable share of New York's healthcare workers, teachers, and public administrators, and collectively pay billions of dollars in both state and city taxes each year.³² The City University is recognized nationally as an almost uniquely effective engine of economic mobility,³³ an honor of which the system is understandably proud.

From a different perspective, however, many if not most CUNY students are falling off the path to career success and economic security. Even among degree students, barely over half (53.7 percent) complete a bachelor's degree within six years,³⁴ while fewer than one in four associate degree students (23.2 percent) complete within three years.³⁵ Subsequent labor market outcomes among graduates present a mixed picture, varying widely by college and major.

To their great credit, Chancellor Matos Rodriguez and his team have put students' career success front and center within CUNY's strategic plan,³⁶ and have backed up their commitments with real investments and action. The City, too, has leaned in through the Inclusive Economies Initiative and other measures. Thus far, however, this collaboration has not extended to non-degree workforce programs.

As a highly successful workforce development program within a postsecondary context, the HUB could change that. It recruits from a high-need population, intentionally matches learners to training opportunities, delivers exceptional instruction with complementary wraparound services that support students to complete training at high levels and earn industry credentials, and places completers into jobs with competitive wages. The workforce teams at Hostos and LaGuardia who developed the concept set forth a vision of offering in-demand occupational training, at no or minimal cost to learners and with robust supports services. They won the support of their college presidents, and secured an eye-catching level of grant funding to launch the HUB. They navigated through early implementation challenges, adjusted their program menu and operational tactics, and learned as they went along. They have achieved outstanding results on program completion and job placement, and have made headway on transitioning learners into degree programs.

The HUB's theory of change—address employer demand, provide top-shelf instruction, and support participant success at every step along the way—reflects common sense born of the designers' experiences as workforce practitioners. The results have more than borne out its logic. Yet, for all its success and promise, the HUB faces a highly uncertain future.

To their great credit, Chancellor Matos Rodriguez and his team have put students' career success front and center within CUNY's strategic plan.

³¹ Spotlight: CUNY and the New York City Economy." 80 percent of alumni remain in-state ten years after graduation.

Note that city-level data are not available, although it is a reasonable assumption that the majority of graduates remain in the five boroughs.

³² Ibid.

³³ [CUNY News, "CUNY Tops List of Best Colleges for Upward Mobility According to 24/7 Wall Street,"](#) December 12, 2023.

³⁴ CUNY Office of Applied Research, Evaluation, and Data Analytics, Student Data Book, [Institution Persistence Rates for Full-time First-time Freshmen Enrolled in Bachelor's Degree Programs](#), accessed Jan. 27, 2025.

³⁵ CUNY Office of Applied Research, Evaluation, and Data Analytics, Student Data Book, [Institution Persistence Rates for Full-time First-time Freshmen Enrolled in Associate Degree Programs](#), accessed Jan. 27, 2025.

³⁶ CUNY Lifting NY, [Goal #2, Initiative #3](#).



The greatest challenge facing the HUB might be simple institutional inertia. The tendency to continue doing things as they always have been done helps explain why ACE programs are underappreciated and held separate from the academic side. It is part of the reason why many academic departments resist the CPL process. It contributes to the reluctance among other CUNY colleges to join forces across campus lines and more effectively engage employers. And it is a factor in why city and state officials and administrators have not yet embraced the HUB as a template for programming, or committed reliable and repeatable funding to sustain and expand it.

The elements to overcome inertia in public policy are a great idea backed up with evidence and committed leadership. For a recent example within the world of CUNY, one need look no further than the ASAP (Accelerated Success in Associate Programs) initiative. As with the HUB, ASAP focused on removing barriers to student success: the program covered costs such as books and transportation, organized courses in condensed periods of time so students could more easily meet work and family obligations, limited class sizes, and provided more intensive advising.

The program launched as a pilot in 2007 with funding and evaluation support from the NYC Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO). The results stunned even the program designers, as ASAP students roughly doubled the two- and

three-year graduation rates of comparison groups.³⁷ Over the years since, and through three mayoral administrations that agreed about very little else, ASAP has continued to expand. Today it not only serves approximately 25,000 students across nine CUNY colleges, but also has been replicated in a half-dozen states across the U.S., with similarly impressive outcomes.

The similarities between ASAP and the HUB are not coincidental. Indeed, the LaGuardia team used the term “ASAP for ACE” as an early shorthand term for their concept. But there are a few important differences as well: from the outset, ASAP had the firm backing of then Chancellor Matthew Goldstein and his team, as well as a close partnership with CEO that ensured robust evaluation. Those factors made it much easier for ASAP to attract the attention and support of Mayor Michael Bloomberg, who invested public dollars to expand the model.

The HUB faces stronger headwinds. At CUNY, as at colleges across the U.S., faculty and administrators seem to be moving toward greater acceptance of the notion that part of their role is to prepare students for success in the world of work. But we have not yet reached the tipping point of integration between credit and non-credit programs, or even a consistent dynamic of collaboration around CPL.

³⁷ Scrivener, Susan, Michael J. Weiss, Alyssa Ratledge, Timothy Rudd, Colleen Sommo, and Hannah Fresques. 2015. [Doubling Graduation Rates Three-Year Effects of CUNY's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs \(ASAP\) for Developmental Education Students](#). New York: MDRC.

Nor does the public workforce system in New York City seem to fully appreciate that CUNY students in programs such as those offered at the HUB are overwhelmingly low-income jobseekers whose only meaningful difference from other Workforce1 members is enrollment in higher-quality training courses. If the two goals of that system are to help employers meet their talent needs while facilitating workers' economic advancement, learners in HUB programs are among the best bets they could make.

In a high-stakes moment of transition for higher education, workforce development, and the labor market, the HUB offers valuable insights and enormous promise. The first brief presented the HUB in its evolution from original concept to current state. This second brief has attempted to evaluate the model in national context, and to set out a series of recommendations that can put the HUB on a path toward sustained success at potentially much greater scale. The opportunity now is in the hands of CUNY's leaders, and their counterparts in city and state government, to embrace this model as the next step toward supporting career success for New York City's workers and learners.

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