

What Are Adult Career Pathways (ACP)?

Adult Career Pathways represent a specialized application of *Career Pathways*. A Career Pathway is

a coherent, articulated sequence of rigorous academic and career/technical courses, commencing in the ninth grade and leading to an associate degree, baccalaureate degree and beyond, an industry-recognized certificate, and/or licensure. The Career Pathway is developed, implemented, and maintained in partnership among secondary and postsecondary education, business, and employers. Career Pathways are available to all students, including adult learners, and lead to rewarding careers. (Hull et al., *Career Pathways: Education with a Purpose*, CORD, 2005)

An Adult Career Pathway focuses more on the special needs and circumstances of adults, especially those who were not initially successful in public education.

Whereas the target population of Career Pathways is high school students, the target populations of Adult Career Pathways include demographics such as high

school dropouts, holders of GEDs (but no further credential), high school graduates with no college, foreign-born residents, ex-offenders, re-entering workers, and employed persons who seek to upgrade their skills. (For more on Adult Career Pathways, see Hinckley et al., *Adult Career Pathways: Providing a Second Chance in Public Education*, CORD, 2011.)

Our focus will include the many career-limited *adults* who do not have the education and/or training necessary to earn a “living wage.” (For statistics on “living wages” for localities across the country, visit the “Living Wage Calculator” at <http://www.livingwage.geog.psu.edu>.)

Career-limited adults need a second chance in public education that enables them to enter and exit the Career Pathways system as their circumstances dictate. ACP provide the necessary flexibility in points of entry and exit. The need varies from region to region, and the partners in each region must work together to define the role of ACP in the broader communitywide Career Pathways system.

The population of American adults who need a second chance in public education comprise the following groups (which sometimes overlap):

1. High school dropouts
2. High school completers who did not pursue further education and training

ALL COURSE SEQUENCES *should have multiple entrances (including for the adult learner) and multiple exits.*

3. College noncompleters
4. Returning veterans who entered military service after high school
5. Immigrants
6. Criminal offenders who have completed their terms of incarceration
7. Adults who need to retool (to change careers, reenter the workforce, or advance in their present careers)

National Vision of ACP

As noted above, ACP programs work within the Career Pathways umbrella and offer multiple entrance and exit points for adults. An ACP program consists of the guidance, remediation, curricula, and other support elements required to enable career-limited adults to enter the workforce and progress in rewarding careers. It is a systemic framework that connects adult education programs, work, and postsecondary education. Each step in an ACP program is designed to prepare the student for the next level of work and education.

Typical ACP program components include the following:

- A “prep stage” designed to prepare participants for job entry and college study
- Industry-focused curriculum
- A multistep career ladder
- Partnerships with community and government agencies
- Part-time employment (usually beginning after completion of the prep stage)
- Personal and academic support services

ADULT EDUCATION *is at a crossroads and finds itself changing to meet the new demands of a global economy.*

ACP programs are designed to *expedite transitions*—from unemployment to employment, from underemployment to better employment, or (as in the case of displaced workers) from one industry to another. (Hinckley et al., *Adult Career Pathways: Providing a Second Chance in Public Education*, CORD, 2011)

The following graphic describes some of the key aspects of ACP programs.

Systematic Framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ACP is a systemic framework that consists of a connected series of education programs, with integrated support services and work experience, that enables adults to combine work and learning.
Connections to Economic Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ACP is an economic development <i>process</i>—the synergy created when best practices and resources are aligned to target an employment sector that is critical to a regional labor market.
Connections to Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Business (the customer) drives the process by identifying targeted sectors, skills, and competencies and reviewing curriculum.
Clear Goal: Work-Readiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ACP programs empower adult education students to enter postsecondary education and earn degrees, certificates, and/or industry credential.
Stackable Credentials	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All training counts (<i>college credit</i>). ACP programs provide academic credentials and increased educational opportunities .
Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ACP programs involve collaborative efforts among stakeholders and the joining of educational missions (<i>workforce, academic, remediation, student affairs and categorical programs</i>) to eliminate <i>silos</i>.
Bridge Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ACP programs bridge gaps between <i>adult basic education</i> and <i>college</i> and between <i>remedial</i> and <i>for-credit courses</i>
Contextual Teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ACP programs use contextualized, integrated academics that optimize learning gains and career and college readiness.

The following graphic describes the “new basics” toward which adult education is evolving via ACP programs.

Customer	Student is the primary customer	→	Students and employers are the customers
Goal of Curricula	Life skills are the primary goal	→	Work readiness skills and preparation for postsecondary education are the primary goals
Content focus	Applying literacy, numeracy and English language learning to everyday life tasks	→	Literacy and numeracy and English language learning as well as thinking and reasoning skills such as problem solving, team work and following instructions
How work readiness is taught	Might include some employment-related tasks like filling out a job application	→	Teaches basic skills in a work context and stresses good work habits such as punctuality, diligence, communication, and appropriate dress and behavior
Program focus	Driven by students' personal goals, needs and interests	→	Driven by students' employment goals, the skill needs of family-sustaining jobs and the entry requirements for postsecondary education and training
End goal	Most Adult Education students never achieve a GED, much less the postsecondary education that is the key to success in today's economy. ⁹	→	Most students achieve a high level of basic and workforce readiness skills and are prepared to enter postsecondary education and training and family-sustaining jobs.

Source: *Guide to Adult Education for Work: Transforming Adult Education to Grow a Skilled Workforce*, National Center on Education and the Economy, 2009

FORM 1	FORM 1 will help you obtain a “pulse” of the adult education system in your community and whether the system is moving toward the “new basics.”
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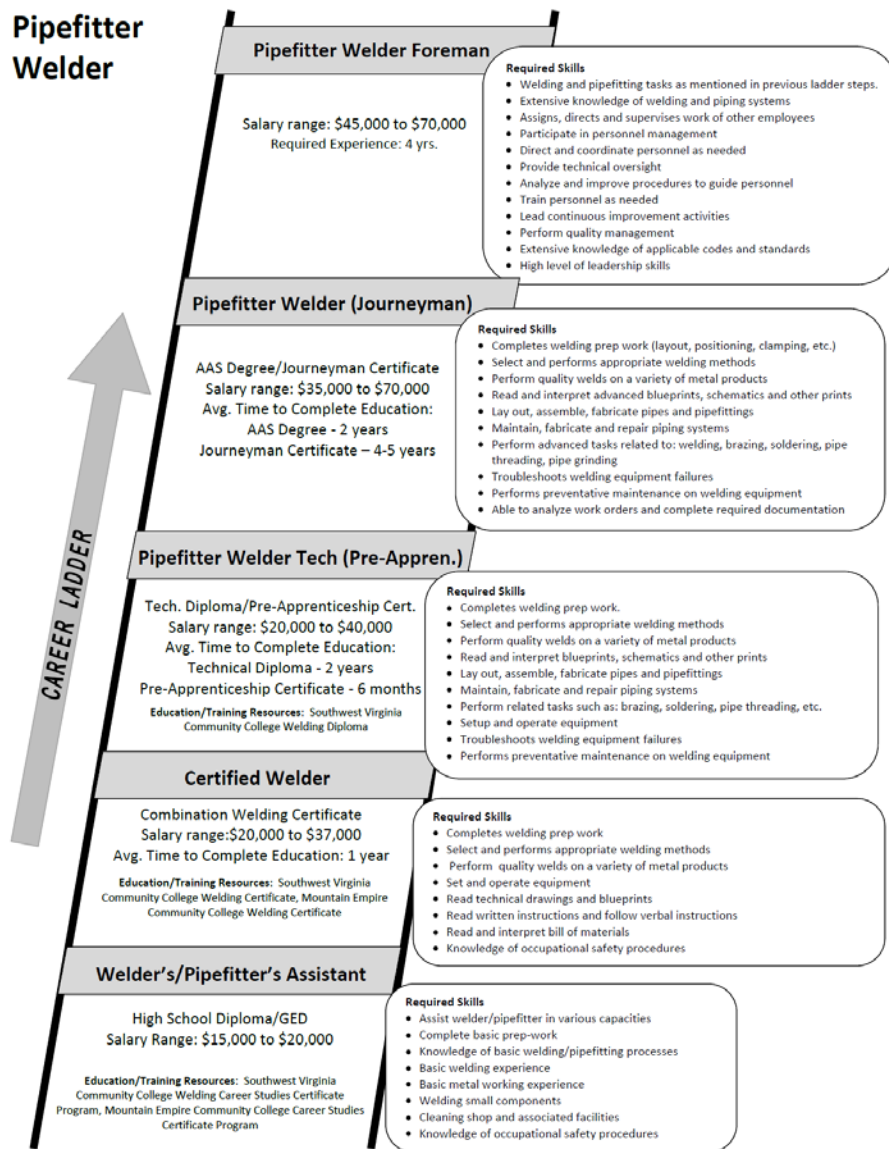
Career Ladders (Maps)

Every ACP program can be represented visually by a ladder or map that illustrates the steps to further education and employment. (In the literature, the terms *ladder* and *map* are used interchangeably. We will use the term *ladder*.) The key components of pathway ladders commonly include the following:

- Potential jobs in the pathway industry
- The progression of education and training within the pathway
- Salary information
- Service providers

- Partnerships
- Support services
- Linkages between pathway components

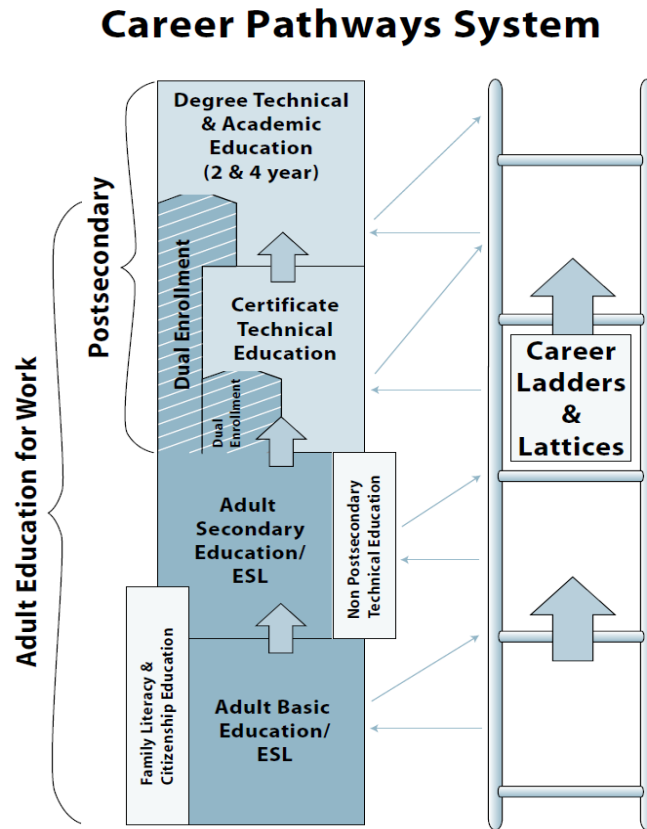
Following is a sample career ladder for a pipefitter welder for the coal mining industry in southwest Virginia.



Pathway ladders are developed as information is collected on the pathways they represent (e.g., labor market data, related postsecondary courses). Each regional partnership must decide what industry sector(s) and related occupations are imperative for the region and develop the

corresponding career ladders. The ladders should be updated regularly to reflect changes in partners or course requirements or other relevant changes.

In an ACP program, the academic ladder should be aligned with the career ladder of the targeted industry, as in the following illustration.



Source: *Guide to Adult Education for Work: Transforming Adult Education to Grow a Skilled Workforce*, National Center on Education and the Economy, 2009

Key features of a comprehensive, fully implemented ACP system should include:

- Basic skills instruction contextualized for a specific occupation or cluster of occupations within an industry or field
- Support services, such as counseling, academic advising, tutoring, career counseling, financial aid, and job placement
- Curriculum and coursework that are broken into steps that are aligned with and articulate to academic and career advancement