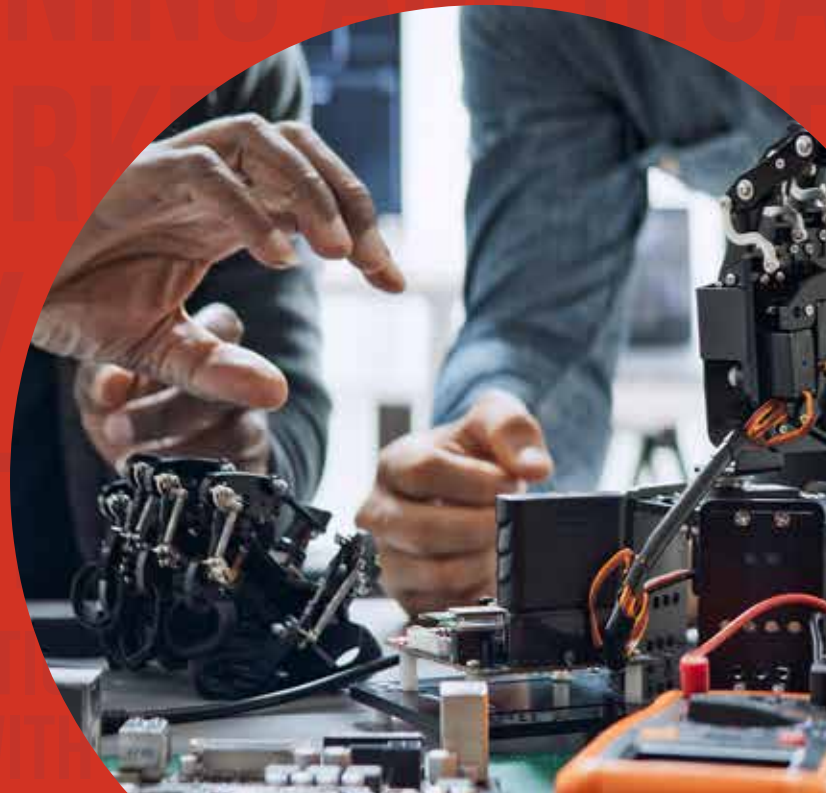


How Community College eLearning Partnerships Can Prepare Americans for the Future of Work

By Rosa Mendoza

Founder, President and CEO, ALLvanza



ALLvanza

JUNE 2026

Today, the United States faces a defining educational and economic challenge: preparing Americans for the jobs of tomorrow and doing it at scale. Traditional higher education pathways, including four-year degree programs, remain vital, but they alone cannot meet the needs of learners, employers, and communities across the country.

We need a more agile and collaborative model, one that leverages public-private partnerships between community colleges and Online Program Managers (OPMs). [OPMs](#) are third-party entities that help colleges design, market, and operate online programs. They bring expertise in digital curricula, student recruitment, platform technology and retention strategies, capabilities that many colleges cannot develop on their own. Partnerships between OPMs and community colleges can strengthen skills-based workforce programs that meet employer needs and provide students with meaningful, transferrable credentials.

I know firsthand the life-changing power of accessible, high-quality education. As a first-generation college student who grew up in a small town in Central Washington, college created opportunities for me that my peers without an education couldn't share. Local, affordable community colleges in towns like mine have long provided vital gateways to opportunity, but not without limitations. Programs designed to prepare students for future jobs haven't always been directly aligned with local economies. In those cases, graduates may find themselves trained for jobs that are obsolete or no longer in demand.

Today, we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to ensure that effective workforce preparation programs reach the learners who need them most. The change? Workforce Pell, which has opened the doors of college to millions of American students in the past, are now being extended to workforce programs at community colleges.

National policy leaders and education experts have described the changing dynamics created by Workforce Pell, while underscoring the importance and potential:

"There has been long-standing bipartisan interest in expanding Pell Grants to short-term workforce programs. Now, Workforce Pell is about to become reality: Among its other provisions, the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBA) expands federal Pell Grant eligibility to short-term job training programs that are fewer than 16 weeks in length. Workforce Pell extends federal financial aid to programs that were not previously eligible, allowing more students to receive assistance and likely increasing demand for short-term training programs."



Betsy Tessler and Alyssa Ratledge
with Bipartisan Policy Center and MDRC
[Bipartisan Policy Center](#), September 25, 2025

“Workforce Pell is one of the largest shifts in federal higher education policy in decades. The new law allows students to use Pell grants to cover the costs of short-term, high-quality postsecondary programs that lead to valuable credentials... The requirement that credentials earned through Workforce Pell must be “stackable and portable” is especially crucial for young people, who are at the beginning of their college and career journey. Portability expands opportunity for young people by ensuring that the credentials they earn are recognized and valued by multiple employers –giving them more options at the start of their career.”



Brooke DeRenzi and Kate Kreamer

National Skills Coalition

[National Skills Coalition](#), January 13, 2026

“The consistent message across more than a dozen sessions was that Workforce Pell is not simply a compliance exercise, but an opportunity for Governors to make strategic improvements to workforce systems that will outlast this single funding stream. Approaching July 1 as a starting point by investing in data infrastructure, engaging employers seriously, and building cross-agency governance structures will position states to integrate Workforce Pell into their larger workforce development and education strategy and build a durable, long-lasting system.”



National Governors Association

Host of the Workforce Pell Implementation Lab conference

[National Governors Association](#), May 13, 2026

“Workforce Pell Grants represent a powerful step toward building the future-ready talent development system needed to sustain a world-class workforce. Congress and the Administration should continue advancing policies that expand opportunity, strengthen U.S. competitiveness and enable American workers to succeed in an evolving economy. By building on the bipartisan momentum behind Workforce Pell Grants, we can help ensure the United States remains the global leader in innovation, productivity and economic opportunity.”



Donald McIntosh

Business Roundtable Vice President, Workforce

[Business Roundtable](#), January 30, 2026

By combining expanded federal support with innovative partnerships between colleges and the private sector, and affirming a bundled services provision, we can equip students with the skills that local economies desperately need. ALLvanza’s recent white paper ([Briefing Paper – Digital Learning: Advancing Higher Education through OPM Partnerships, May 15, 2025](#)) explores the impact within Hispanic communities – particularly highlighting how collaborations can expand access, improve outcomes, and strengthen workforce alignment.



“To meet the demands of a changing economy, we must expand workforce pathways beyond traditional models. Throughout the nation, this means strengthening community colleges through innovative public-private partnerships and leveraging innovations in online learning. With the expansion of Workforce Pell, we have a critical opportunity to deliver flexible, skills-based education at scale, connecting more student to in-demand careers and supporting the needs of our local economies.”

Rep. Darren Soto (D-FL-9)

Deputy Chair of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, also echoed the value of these concepts

The Role of Community Colleges in Workforce Development



Community colleges occupy a unique position at the intersection of education and workforce development. Over 1,000 institutions nationwide educate millions of students each year, including working adults, first-generation college students and those seeking career pivots.



1,000+
Community College's
Nationwide



1.3 M
CTE Graduates
Each Year

Critically, career and technical education programs at community colleges graduate more than 1.3 million students annually. These programs are generally designed to be responsive to local labor market demands, and they're often co-designed with employers and regional workforce boards.

Yet, as we've seen, many workforce programs are still not well aligned with local businesses' needs and can struggle to provide meaningful work-based learning. Without this connection, students may finish training without the skills employers require, while employers miss out on the skilled talent they need to grow.

One school board from my home state of Washington:

"The implementation of [Workforce Pell] allows community colleges and training schools to reach new student groups that they otherwise would not be able to serve.... Workforce Pell Grants will lead to a new and significant administrative load for institutions, but with partnerships with online program managers (OPMs), colleges will be able to meet growing demands."

[The Daily Astorian](#), November 19, 2025



Public-Private Partnerships: Why OPMs Matter

Public-private partnerships and a wide variety of strategic collaborations offer a scalable, high-impact solution.

In workforce development, OPM-college partnerships can:



Ensure program relevance.

By working with employers, OPMs help colleges develop curricula aligned with current and emerging industry needs, preparing graduates to be job-ready.



Expand resources and expertise.

OPMs provide technology platforms, marketing, and industry insights that enhance a college's ability to deliver high-quality programs at scale.



Strengthen job pipelines.

Many partnerships create direct pathways to internships, apprenticeships, and employment, connecting students immediately to career opportunities.



Drive regional economic growth.

Online and hybrid programs tailored to local labor markets help communities build resilient workforces and boost economic development.

While debates often focus on revenue models or regulatory frameworks, it is critical to recognize how OPM-college partnerships expand access to flexible, career-focused training, particularly for adults, working learners, rural students, and underrepresented populations. Research demonstrates that [colleges partnering with OPMs](#) often see increased enrollment, improved retention and better workforce outcomes, all of which are key to local economic development. Further, allowing colleges to retain curricular control while leveraging external expertise where it is most needed remains a core facet of partnerships.

The result? Higher education institutions avoid significant costs and time to develop programs on their own. Benefits are generated through flexible pathways to in-demand careers for learners, a skilled talent pipeline for employers and stronger economic outcomes for communities.

Why This Matters for Americans and the Future of Work



The future of work demands continuous learning, agility, and cross-sector collaboration, goals that OPM-college partnerships are uniquely positioned to achieve:

Rapidly evolving skill needs.

New technologies, from artificial intelligence to renewable energy, are transforming the labor market faster than traditional degree programs can respond. OPM-college partnerships enable rapid development and delivery of programs aligned with employer input, ensuring students acquire relevant skills today and tomorrow.

Non-degree credentials and micro-credentials.

These programs can efficiently offer certificates, badges, and short-term credentials that provide portable evidence of skills. Such credentials improve employability and career mobility, especially for learners outside traditional degree pathways.

Economic mobility.

By expanding access to flexible, online, and hybrid programs, OPM-college partnerships open pathways for rural students, working adults, first-generation learners, and underrepresented populations, ensuring that education translates into economic opportunity.

From the agricultural valleys of Central Washington to emerging tech hubs nationwide, students benefit when vocational education aligns closely with industry, and employers benefit when talent pipelines are co-created through partnerships. OPM-college collaborations make this alignment scalable, responsive and inclusive, bridging the gap between the classroom and the workplace.

A Call to Action

Investing in and expanding public-private partnerships between community colleges and OPMs is not merely a policy preference; it's a vital approach to Workforce Pell and to future-proofing America's workforce.

Policymakers, educators, and industry leaders must:

- 1 Support the expansion of OPM-college partnerships that preserve academic quality, transparency and student outcomes.
- 2 Reduce unnecessary regulatory barriers by establishing clear, consistent rules that allow colleges and OPMs to partner without excessive and unnecessary administrative or compliance burdens.
- 3 Support innovation and scalability by creating policy frameworks that allow colleges and OPMs to pilot, expand and adapt workforce programs in response to evolving labor-market needs.
- 4 Provide regulatory clarity and predictability by codifying the bundled services provision into statutes so colleges and partners can invest in long-term partnerships without uncertainty or abrupt dismantling of partnership frameworks.
- 5 Leverage federal financial aid, including Pell Grants, to make college-OPM workforce programs more accessible, ensuring students can participate in high-quality, skills-aligned programs without financial barriers.

When community colleges, eLearning providers, employers and policymakers work together, we don't just train students. We empower Americans with the skills, credentials and opportunities they need to thrive in an ever-changing economy.