Arizona Career Readiness Credential

Project Background and Overview

Background

At the direction of Governor Ducey, a multi-agency, cross-disciplinary team began to look for ways to implement the governor's vision of "opportunity for all" and to help make Arizona the best state in the nation in which to work.

The commitment of this team was to the development of data-driven solutions, so the initial effort included extensive research into the state's economy and labor market. Resources from the Arizona Office of Economic Opportunity, the Arizona Commerce Authority, and the Department of Economic Security collaborated on an initial report which included some very relevant findings.

Challenge

Arizona's labor force participation rate is low. In particular, among Arizonans in what should be the prime earning years of their careers, 35-54 years old, we rank 51st among the states for our percentage of citizens who are in school, working or looking for work. While this large pool of potential talent is on the sidelines and not participating in this robust economic recovery, Arizona employer regularly tell us that their difficulty in finding qualified talent is approaching crisis level.

Through a series of industry summits and strategy labs, these employers have clearly indicated that the available supply of job candidates is lacking in the foundational academic, technical and personal competencies needed to be successful in their businesses.

Solution

The new Arizona Career Readiness Credential will validate an individual's cognitive mastery of seven core skill areas that are relevant to a large majority of jobs in the American workplace:

- Applied mathematics
- Reading for information
- Workplace data and graphics

- Professionalism
- Teamwork and collaboration
- Communication
- Critical thinking and problem solving

The intent of the governor's Goal Council #2 through the Arizona Career Readiness Credential project is to illuminate an alternative path back to the labor force for these individuals who may be well-removed from his/her last educational accomplishment or successful employment.

The desired effect is that jobseekers, especially those who have been unsuccessful for a long time in efforts to rejoin the workforce, will be able to demonstrate to potential employers that they have mastered the skills that are most important to success in the roles they are trying to fill.

Implementation and next steps

<u>User Experience</u>

Individuals will be able to sit for an initial, unproctored assessment that is parallel in structure to the summative assessment. This initial assessment will indicate the jobseeker's incumbent skill levels and will provide a starting point for accessing the courseware and remediating or improving skills. When the jobseeker's performance in the courseware system is satisfactory, he/she will enroll in a scheduled proctored assessment, and on successful performance there, will earn one of four levels of the Arizona Career Readiness Credential.

To earn any level of the ACRC, a jobseeker must pass all four soft skills areas, plus a minimum of level 3 on a 1-7 scale on each of the applied academic assessments. If a jobseeker passes all four of the soft skills areas and scores a minimum of 3 on Applied Mathematics, Reading for Information and Workplace Data and Graphics, he/she will have earned a bronze-level ACRC. Passing the soft skills assessment and scoring a minimum of four on the applied academics assessments results in silver. Scores of five result in gold, and sixes result in platinum.

More than 800 occupations have been profiled in terms of the levels of these skills needed to be successful. Partner employers will know the level of the ACRC needed for their positions, and will be looking for applicants with the appropriate credential level.

<u>Employer Outreach</u>

The goal of the employer outreach campaign is to request from Arizona employers that they sign a pledge to either **recognize, request** or **require** the Arizona Career Readiness Credential as a component of their hiring processes. The formal and quantifiable demand from employers will drive participation by individuals. Understanding that a desirable employer values the ACRC will cause potential jobseekers to make the investment in themselves. We will build employer awareness of the program through four streams of work:

- **Direct engagement** – OEO resources, in partnership with ARIZONA@WORK BSR's will schedule in-person meetings with as many high-value partners as possible. In these meetings, we will present the value proposition of the ACRC and solicit the business' commitment to **recognizing**, **requesting** or **requiring** the credential.
- **Business intermediaries and industry associations** – Leveraging the abilities of these organizations to connect with multiple employers at once, OEO resources will request time on the agendas of Chambers of Commerce, SHRM, industry associations, and other organizations that represent employers.
- **Arizona@Work Business Services Representatives** – Understanding of the ACRC project will be included in the training and development requirements of ARIZONA@WORK Business Services Representatives from. These resources have relationships with their local employers. Some host regular events like *lunch-n-learns* or *bagels-n-business*. We will request time on those agendas and will make the commitment letters available there. OEO resources, in cooperation with local directors will plan regional business outreach campaigns, in which the OEO resource and the BSR jointly call on employers to request commitment letters.

- **A public kickoff campaign** – Leveraging the public relations and marketing resources of the governor's office, Arizona@Work and OEO, we will plan and execute a campaign of kickoff events, press releases, earned media and social media to target employers and jobseekers.

Jobseeker awareness

Jobseekers must understand and be able to articulate the role of foundational skills in the world of work. They need to be able to communicate their own skill levels in ways that matter to employers. They need to understand the potential value of earning an ACRC. We will build jobseeker awareness through two streams of work:

- **One Stops** – Case managers and counselors will be equipped with information needed to effectively encourage appropriate candidates to enroll in the program. Case managers and career advisors will be able to enroll jobseekers into the system and to administer the initial skills assessment. A jobseeker's status vis-à-vis the credential will be part of the ARIZONA@WORK intake process.
- **Partner organizations** – Community and nonprofit organizations that work with unemployed and disconnected populations will have the option to become program partners. As a partner, each organization will be able to enroll participants and either to proctor the final assessments themselves or to refer jobseekers to participating ARIZONA@WORK One Stops.

Summary

This project is designed in direct response to input from Arizona's business community, and is a validation of foundational skills that are relevant to the world of work, regardless of the type of career.

To leverage the concept of a work-ready labor supply for economic development purposes, the second phase of the project envisions a Work Ready Communities program, in which localities which meet a threshold for awarding the certificates, offer approved Soft Skills training via their ARIZONA@WORK One Stops, and meet other criteria around employer engagement would earn a Work Ready Community designation. This could be used by both the state and the communities themselves in marketing and business attraction efforts.

Finally, this concept positions the Governor's office as the thought leader for the state's efforts to re-imagine our approach to workforce development. The concept is large in scope, and will affect real change in both the career opportunities for our citizens and the perception of the state as a proactive change agent in the areas of workforce development and career readiness.