Skills to Succeed
Insight to Action
Paving the Pathways to Employment
# Table of Contents

**Foreword** 3

**Setting the Stage: Today's Labor Market** 4
- An Increasingly Dynamic Landscape 5

**Insights and Recommendations for Pathways to Employment** 6
- New Imperatives for Workforce Development Practitioners 7
- Pathways to Employment Framework 8
- Design the Program—Assess and Plan 10
- Design the Program—Recruit and Partner 13
- Equip Individuals—Develop and Validate Skills 16
- Equip Individuals—Connect to Opportunities 19
- Sustain the Program’s Impact—Support Employment 22
- Sustain the Program’s Impact—Measure and Improve Program 24
- Adapt with a Strategic Mindset—Develop a Digital Strategy 26
- Adapt with a Strategic Mindset—Foster an environment of continuous improvement 28

**Driving Success on the Pathway to Employment: Taking Action** 31
- Take the Test 32
- Interpret Your Responses 34

**Conclusion** 38

**Asset Repository** 39

**Appendix and Notes** 40
Foreword

The world in which we live and work is being transformed by economic, geopolitical and digital forces. Today’s job seekers, notably those from disadvantaged communities, are forced to navigate a more difficult and complex environment to get a job. What is needed now is different—and workforce development organizations will be required to understand, navigate and respond to these changes.

In this spirit, we are pleased to share Accenture’s Pathways to Employment report which provides practical examples, tips and tools that practitioners can use to navigate the new climate and create the best employment outcomes—including workers who bring relevant skills to the job, increased hiring and retention rates, and better income and advancement opportunities.

Insights have been informed by interviews with over 75 practitioners and subject-matter experts, an online survey of over 30 subject-matter experts and an extensive literature review. The research highlights new imperatives for workforce development practitioners, key success factors needed to drive positive outcomes and a tool that can help practitioners to assess their current capabilities to support continuous improvement and innovation. We hope these insights help organizations achieve sustainable employment outcomes for their clients and communities.

We want to thank the Skills to Succeed practitioners from Accenture and non-profit workforce development delivery partners who co-created this content through their participation in the research. Through surveys, interviews and roundtable discussions, these practitioners provided great insight which culminated in our collective best thinking on the key success factors in the pathways to employment. We want to thank in particular, those practitioners who were part of our research Learning Circle—Jean Van Metter (Voluntary Service Overseas), Rodrigo Bustos (Plan International), Pranav Choudhary (Dr Reddy’s Foundation) and Tamara Johnson (Year Up). This Circle pushed to make this work relevant and actionable.

The impact of collaboration across an ecosystem of non-profit partners, government agencies, employers and other donors, to create meaningful work, lasting change and sustainable economic growth for millions of people worldwide is vital. We will continue to harness the power of a global learning network of Skills to Succeed practitioners, sharing actionable insights that can help us collectively improve our impact. We encourage you to work with us and help us shape the journey ahead together.

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Setting the Stage: Today’s Global Labor Market
Setting the Stage: Today’s Global Labor Market

An Increasingly Dynamic Landscape

Rapidly changing geopolitical and economic landscape, and the pace of digital advancements are changing the dynamics of today’s labor market.

A confluence of forces—including geopolitical and economic volatility, mass migrations and increased global competition among private- and public-sector organizations and NGOs—is driving unprecedented change in labor markets around the world. At the same time unemployment challenges are becoming more acute in many countries. For example, the International Labor Organization reports that more than 2 billion working-age people do not have jobs. According to the Solutions for Youth Employment coalition, roughly 500 million young people are unemployed, underemployed or working in insecure jobs.

At the same time, the global digital economy is expected to be 25% of the world’s economy by 2020, a trend that will impact the way the world works and lives, and the skills that are needed. Advances in digital technologies are creating new opportunities and challenges. These technologies are transforming the workforce itself—including giving rise to new types of jobs that need to be filled and new skills that are needed to excel in those jobs.

Technology advances will enable workforce development practitioners to achieve new efficiencies by automating and digitizing important operational processes and program design elements. These digital accelerators are also helping practitioners, beneficiaries and employer partners to interact in ways that foster the fresh thinking, innovation and adaptability needed for ongoing success.

Some observers maintain that digital disruption will lead to a net decrease in available jobs globally; others anticipate considerable job creation thanks to the emerging digital technologies. While only time will reveal what new jobs will come into being and which existing jobs may be lost, one thing is clear: workforce development organizations are operating in an environment characterized by profound opportunity paired with great uncertainty.

In this increasingly dynamic labor market, many disadvantaged people—for instance, those who lack access to adequate education—have an especially difficult time finding and keeping jobs. Such individuals include vulnerable young people as well as disadvantaged women, persons with disabilities, veterans, migrants and members of indigenous communities. There is a clear call for action and workforce development practitioners are uniquely positioned to respond.

About Accenture’s Skills to Succeed Initiative

Having the right skills to open doors to meaningful, lasting employment or business ownership is critical. Accenture launched Skills to Succeed in 2009 to address this need and to advance employment and entrepreneurship opportunities in markets around the world. By mobilizing our people, partners, clients and others, we strive to make a measurable and sustainable difference in the economic vitality and resilience of individuals, families and communities.

By the end of fiscal 2020, together with our strategic partners, we will pursue the following targets:

- **Demand-Led Skilling**: Equip more than three million people with the skills to get a job or build a business.
- **Employment and Entrepreneurship Outcomes**: Increase our focus on the successful transition from skill-building programs to sustainable jobs and businesses and improve our collective ability to measure and report on these outcomes.
- **Collaboration for Systemic Change**: Bring together organizations across sectors to create large-scale, lasting solutions aimed at closing global employment gaps.
Insights and Recommendations for Pathways to Employment
Insights and Recommendations for Pathways to Employment

New Imperatives for Workforce Development Practitioners

Our insights and research suggest that a shifting landscape is creating four key imperatives for workforce development practitioners. These imperatives point to the type of mindset needed by practitioners and how they approach their work rather than specific activities. Channeling global support for improving people’s chances of getting a job, being local, nimble and agile, balancing changing requirements and embracing disruption will enable workforce development practitioners to be prepared for and respond to change—and better serve their beneficiaries.

Channeling global efforts

Organizations and agencies around the world have acknowledged the challenges facing disadvantaged populations and have set out to address them. For example, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) recently launched by the United Nations include a clear focus on improving employment conditions and opportunities for these populations. Clearly, top down, global efforts such as the SDGs will prove crucial for equipping disadvantaged individuals with the support and advocacy they need to strengthen their skills and find work. And stronger cross-sector collaboration and multi-stakeholder partnerships that demonstrate innovative, sustainable and scalable approaches will be needed to promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth for these underserved groups.

Being local, nimble and agile

At the same time workforce development practitioners can serve as local and “on the ground” agents of change. Alongside key public- and private-sector organizations (such as government agencies, policy-makers and businesses), they can play a critical role in enhancing economic inclusion, helping disadvantaged individuals build marketable skills and sustaining employment outcomes. In their role as change agents, these practitioners should be nimble and adaptable as they craft and execute workforce development programs and forge partnerships with employers and other stakeholders.

Balancing demand and supply

Today’s workforce development practitioners should also focus on striking a balance between skills supply and demand—by creating programs that enable job seekers to build the very skills that employers need, when they need them. Moreover, practitioners should move beyond reliance on traditional classroom training and embrace other effective skill-development methods—such as digital learning, coaching, collaboration and experiential learning. Meanwhile, they should adapt their own expectations to the more rigorous expectations and standards coming from industry bodies, donors and partners regarding Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) of their programs. Instead of relying heavily on ‘small data’ and anecdotal evidence to measure impact, they should use data analytics to generate more meaningful insights that lead to better decisions.

Embracing disruption

Employers’ demands have shifted. The pace of technological change has accelerated. And competition among NGOs has stiffened, owing to higher donor expectations and concerns over funding availability. Practitioners are working harder to persuade employers to hire their beneficiaries, and to inspire potential beneficiaries to join their programs. Under these conditions, strategies and operating models that worked well in the past may not work so well today. For example, workforce development practitioners can no longer rely solely on periodically published labor data to gauge the level of demand among employers for specific skills. Rather, they should augment such data with real-time information at increasingly granular levels, for example down to the level of individual communities, through rigorous labor-market assessments and building strong partnerships with local employers.
Accenture's Pathways to Employment Framework

Drawing on our research and extensive experience with the Skills to Succeed initiative and to support the four imperatives, we have defined a framework that we call Pathways to Employment. The framework highlights key success factors for each of the four major phases of the workforce development program lifecycle: design the program, equip individuals, sustain the program's impact and adapt with a strategic mindset (see Figure 1).

The key success factors are relevant to not only workforce development practitioners but also to their beneficiaries, their employer partners and other stakeholders, such as donors and government agencies. In this report, we pay particularly attention to employer partnerships, because we see many opportunities emerging for practitioners to forge creative, value-adding collaborations with employers. Of course, private-public partnerships, multi-sector collaboratives and other forms of unified effort will also prove critical to driving efficiency, effectiveness and scale of workforce development programs in the future.

For each phase we highlight the key success factors that our research suggests are most critical to achieving successful employment outcomes. Along the way we identify common CHALLENGES to achieving the key success factors, offer TIPS AND TOOLS to overcome those challenges by adopting a continuous improvement mindset and embracing a culture of innovation. We also present INSIGHTS IN ACTION CASE EXAMPLES showing how high performing workforce development organizations are successfully applying these insights and practices.
FIGURE 1: Accenture’s Pathways to Employment Framework

**Design the Program**
- **Assess & Plan**: Conduct a market assessment to understand economic, political, and sociocultural factors by location/geography.
- **Recruit & Partner**: Align recruitment criteria and process to bring in the target demographic.
- **Equip Individuals**: Make the development of employability skills central to program design.
- **Develop & Validate Skills**: Align individual needs and expectations to job opportunities.
- **Connect to Opportunities**: Offer wrap-around services (e.g., legal, psychological) to help beneficiaries manage personal life challenges.
- **Support Employment**: Leverage coaches from the community to fill cultural gaps.
- **Measure & Improve Program**: Modularize interventions to enable customization of curriculum paths to individual needs.
- **Evaluate**: Use blended learning to take advantage of digital learning benefits.
- **Put theory into practice through on-the-job training (shadowing, internships, apprenticeships)**
- **Sustain the Program’s Impact**: Maintain ongoing connection to help beneficiaries surmount challenges and sustain employment.

**Equipping Individuals**
- **Develop & Validate Skills**: Make the development of employability skills central to program design.
- **Connect to Opportunities**: Align individual needs and expectations to job opportunities.
- **Support Employment**: Offer wrap-around services (e.g., legal, psychological) to help beneficiaries manage personal life challenges.
- **Measure & Improve Program**: Leverage coaches from the community to fill cultural gaps.
- **Evaluate**: Modularize interventions to enable customization of curriculum paths to individual needs.
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**Sustain the Program’s Impact**
- **Support Employment**: Make the development of employability skills central to program design.
- **Measure & Improve Program**: Align individual needs and expectations to job opportunities.
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**Adapt with a Strategic Mindset**
- Develop a digital strategy that aligns technology investments with organizational priorities; identify processes that digital technology can enhance.
- Foster an environment of innovation and continuous improvement.

**Factors addressed within this report**
- Conduct a market assessment to understand economic, political, and sociocultural factors by location/geography.
- Align recruitment criteria and process to bring in the target demographic.
- Provide counseling to help candidates engage in the right program and maximize value.
- Understand target demographic’s needs beyond skill gaps.
- Supplement the market assessments with insights from target employers and data analytics.
- Identify a network of partners to help serve the target demographic’s needs from recruitment through job placement.
- Build an ecosystem of trusted relationships between beneficiaries, employers, community partners, family, and other service providers.
- Collaborate with other actors (government agencies, other NGOs) toward national skill development plans.
- Develop a value proposition for hiring that goes beyond an employer’s CSR mission to include measureable business value.
- Involve employers throughout the program in mutually beneficial ways (e.g., to validate competencies taught, take part in mock interviews, take on teaching roles).
- Prepare employers to adapt to new joiners from different backgrounds.
- Report success metrics (number hired, number of hours worked) back to employers and maintain buy-in by engaging them in shared value approaches.
- Stay connected with employers to understand career path opportunities, alumni reskilling needs, etc.
Spotlight on Market Assessment

INSIGHT

To keep up with the pace of change in today’s labor market, workforce development practitioners need timely data on the economic, political and sociocultural factors affecting their beneficiaries and employers. This data should be augmented with input from employers on the specific skills these companies need to achieve their organizational priorities. Together, this information could be used to inform strategies for programs such as skills training and other services, and will help ensure that program offerings meet both beneficiaries’ and employers’ needs.

Up to 65 percent of the workforce development practitioners participating in our survey agree that programs that stay ahead of skill demand (e.g. by regularly engaging employers and assessing market needs) have higher placement rates.6

CHALLENGES

• Gathering relevant and timely data on labor markets and employers’ skill needs
• Analyzing data collected to inform program design
• Having the capabilities needed to be agile enough to quickly pivot programs in response to changes in skill requirements
• Gaining a specific-enough understanding of employers’ skill requirements to design programs that help beneficiaries build the right skills

TIPS & TOOLS

Use the right frameworks and tools. Use market assessment frameworks and tools that accelerate research planning and execution (see Figure 2; full market research framework can be found here). These assessments can help identify potential barriers to success (e.g. socioeconomic or cultural factors) facing target demographics, skills and jobs that are in demand, and industry certifications employers are seeking.

Get online. Follow online resources like Burning Glass Technologies or the LinkedIn Economic Graph to gain new insights on how to create economic opportunity for beneficiaries. Burning Glass data, for example, can help identify the skill gaps that keep job seekers and employers apart and offer tools that enable both sides to bridge that gap and connect more easily. LinkedIn data from the constantly evolving Economic Graph can also help monitor trends such as the latest skills employers require and the industries most likely to hire people seeking to change careers.
**FIGURE 2: Example of a Market Research Framework**

Market research in workforce development can typically include research into market sizing, landscape assessments, stakeholder research, and other logistical considerations such as funding availability and accessibility to public transit.

### SUPPLY SIDE
- **Target Demographic/Beneficiaries**
  - Supplier
- **Target Schools**
  - Market Sizing
  - Competitive Landscape
  - Stakeholder Research
- **Competitive Landscape**
  - Current Players
  - Pricing Research
  - Focus Groups
- **Stakeholder Research**
  - Surveys
- **Other Considerations**
  - Funding
  - Foundations
  - Gov’t Grants
  - Subsidies

### DEMAND SIDE
- **Target Employers**
  - Market Sizing
  - Competitive Landscape
  - Stakeholder Research
- **Jobs**
  - Current Employment
  - Job Postings
  - Wages
  - Public Transit Accessibility
- **Note:** Not every pillar or sub point may be suited to every organization’s needs—practitioners pick and choose aspects most relevant to their work.

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**Qualify skill-demand claims.** Industry associations or third-party stakeholders may claim that certain very specialized skills are in high demand, such as digital marketing or cyber security. However, it is important to reflect on how important such skills are in key geographies and with employer partners. They may—or may not—be relevant.

**Unearth true job availability.** Use market assessments to identify skill gaps and mismatches in order to reach out to the employers most likely to hire target beneficiaries. An understanding of the types of jobs that are available in different contexts (e.g. urban versus rural) matters. Take Plan International’s program A Working Future in Uganda. The program was initially designed to develop employment and business opportunities for young people in a rural area of Uganda, by collaborating with private sector partners. However, an initial phase study conducted to understand the skills required by private-sector organizations revealed a weak private sector in rural Uganda that mainly comprised small family-owned enterprises offering few or no job opportunities. This finding suggested that program leaders needed to adapt their approach to urban and rural markets. Specifically, while building employability skills is usually the focus of programs targeted to urban settings, building entrepreneurial and agricultural skills is more appropriate in rural areas that lack a strong private sector.

Source: Talent Growth Initiative

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**Compare role descriptions.** The actual responsibilities characterizing jobs with similar or identical titles can vary widely across companies. Job descriptions should be carefully analyzed for target positions to understand which skills employers want for each role and how performance in that role will be measured. Asking employers to articulate the specific skills they require, and determining the relevance of these skills for beneficiaries is key. Working with employers to carry out a job-task analysis can help to clarify the key tasks that workers must perform in these positions. Consider transferable skills that beneficiaries should have but that employers might not have identified yet as crucial for a particular role.

“Increasingly, we are recognizing that employer relationships are so vital, not just for a potential pipeline of placements, but more so for the types of insights that they can provide as to how we can best prepare our beneficiaries for the workforce. They also provide insight into the types of job needs that might be needed in the future. We’re really seeing our employer relationships as clients.”

*Katrin Kark*, Local Initiatives Support Coalition

**INSIGHTS IN ACTION**

**Plan International**

Using market insights to drive program design and decision-making

Plan International has developed a digital market-scan tool to assess the feasibility of setting up a youth employment program in a targeted geographical area. The scan helps youth-employment practitioners gather in-depth and context-specific data about employers’ skill demand and young people’s needs. The organization uses the data to customize technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programs to improve beneficiaries’ employability. It also collects and analyzes key economic data at country, region, industry and labor-market (supply and demand sides) levels. Practitioners then highlight priority areas, such as industries that have high demand for such skills. And using insights and evidence, they confirm the interventions they will invest in.

**Institute for Veterans and Military Families**

Combining market insights with on-the-ground employer validation

The Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) at Syracuse University developed a comprehensive solution aimed at reducing potential barriers to employment for transitioning U.S. military service members and spouses. The solution focused on demand-led training and credentialing. As part of its market research, the IVMF analyzed in-demand jobs, key skills and characteristics associated with those positions. It also assessed societal considerations for service members, veterans and military spouses, such as relocation preferences. By analyzing these considerations, research revealed that a large number of customer service positions were available. To help beneficiaries acquire the skills needed to excel in these positions, the IVMF developed Customer Service Excellence Training (CSET). Throughout the CSET development, IVMF analyzed job descriptions using data from Burning Glass Technologies to ensure that the training would build skills required by in-demand jobs and would be considered valid by industry standards and employers. The IVMF then validated customer service core competencies with several leading businesses. By cross-referencing key skills cited in job descriptions with hiring managers, the IVMF confirmed that the skills taught in the CSET would satisfy a range of hiring needs. As a result, the CSET has helped an increasing number of service members and military spouses attain customer service positions and build skills that will undoubtedly support their progress along civilian career paths.”
Spotlight on Aligning Recruitment Criteria and Processes to Bring in Target Demographic

**INSIGHT**

Workforce development practitioners should align recruitment processes to their target beneficiaries’ needs. Some seek to serve individuals who have a higher likelihood of success with their program (for instance, such beneficiaries are very motivated to find a job, or they have access to transportation). Others seek to recruit people who lack basic job-readiness skills or face other significant obstacles. Each approach has trade-offs. Practitioners who recruit individuals with a high likelihood of success may boost the odds of generating good employment outcomes, but they neglect individuals who need considerably more help before they can demonstrate potential to succeed. On the other hand, by focusing recruitment on those who lack fundamental skills or the right attitudes, practitioners encounter more personal barriers to generating the hoped-for employment outcomes.

Regardless of the recruitment strategy used, understanding the trade-offs and knowing what has prevented people from entering and completing workforce development programs is key to helping beneficiaries to get and keep jobs. In addition, building an ecosystem of trusted partnerships with employers, community actors and other relevant actors is equally crucial for equipping disadvantaged individuals with the support they need to strengthen their skills and find work.

**CHALLENGES**

- Designing a recruitment strategy and process that breaks down barriers to employment and accommodates individual needs
- Establishing long-lasting partnerships and gaining buy-in from relevant actors in the ecosystem (e.g. employers, other community organizations, etc.)

**TIPS & TOOLS**

**Stick to the organization’s mission.** It is critical to always keep the organization’s reason for being, and focus areas in clear sight when developing interventions. This can help determine how to reach, attract and screen candidates (e.g. those who lack fundamental job-readiness skills and personal attributes and thus need considerable support or those who need a “lighter” push toward employment). And define intended outcomes for the target demographic group.

**Use data to establish a beneficiary baseline.** Collect pre-intervention data on target beneficiaries (e.g. their technical skills, employability skills and income level) from a wide range of sources (e.g. household census data). If possible, use psychometric testing to determine potential candidates’ aptitude and personality traits, along with their programmatic “fit”. Using the information to create a baseline against which to compare similar data after beneficiaries have completed a program offers insights into the outcomes delivered and efficacy of the program itself. Once beneficiaries have been screened and accepted into the program, it is important to acknowledge that pathways to employment will differ.
Programs should be adapted for those who do not need the same level of support as others. For instance, individuals already proficient in computer skills won’t likely need basic, entry-level training in this area. Emplea+, an application which is part of the cross-sector initiative in Spain, Juntos por el Empleo de los Mas Vulnerables, for example, screens beneficiaries for employability skill proficiency using rigorous diagnostic tools. Emplea+ then provides them with remedial training to strengthen weak areas before they enter the core program.

**Offer “wrap-around” services.** Consider the influence of personal factors on individual success, and craft strategies for overcoming barriers that have prevented people from finding or staying in jobs (e.g. single-parent household, lack of qualifications, etc.). Offer to connect people with “wrap-around” services to help them succeed, such as legal assistance, psychological counseling, childcare or transportation. Also consider the importance of gender. In some cultures, it may be helpful to assign trainers who are the same gender as program participants. For example, the presence of female trainers may help girls and women feel more comfortable or safe taking part in training programs. As a result, they may be more likely to complete the training.

**Modularize interventions.** Wherever possible, modularize interventions by developing stand-alone training courses or optional mentoring interventions tailored to different levels of skills. Modularization helps create curriculum paths customized to individual needs. For instance, drawing on decades of experience in learning and development, Dr Reddy’s Foundation is combining modularity with designing certain components to be common across all programs, such as those related to employability skills (e.g. problem-solving and communication skills). The new initiative is currently in the design phase. The Foundation also refines individual curriculum paths to ensure that students gain the skills they need. While this customization entails additional cost, it expands the pool of individuals who can participate and focuses on enhancing competency levels of youth.

**Get help from alumni.** Encourage program alumni to refer peers and to volunteer as coaches or mentors. They can help smooth over cultural differences between the staff and beneficiaries and can help connect beneficiaries to the right services. For example, Upwardly Global has created an Alumni Ambassador Program that aims to encourage alumni to “pay it forward” by mentoring other job seekers. Keeping alumni engaged is an inexpensive way to build a team of individuals who are familiar with the organization’s staff and culture. This program has helped Upwardly Global forge strong connections between staff and beneficiaries from the start.

**Qualify employer partners.** Define criteria for selecting potential employer partners, and conduct research to gain a sense of their reputation, credibility and commitment to tapping into non-traditional talent pools. Example criteria could include: working with those that have demonstrated willingness to hire untapped segments of today’s workforce, abide by international standards for decent work, etc.

**Involv e employers in program design.** Per Scholas shares training curricula with employers to ensure that it is teaching the skills that employers need. Another Skills to Succeed partner, Quest Alliance, shares a “heat map” with employers showing locations where it sees batches of people arriving in search of seasonal jobs. VSO analyzes specific sectors in countries attracting foreign direct investment, identifies skill gaps and designs interventions to help the most vulnerable people gain the job capabilities needed to work in those sectors.

**Find allies.** In addition to employers, identify champions in target markets, such as influential elders who can persuade local community members to try the program or other successful workforce development organizations with an already established reputation and network. For example, Dr Reddy’s Foundation attributes its ability to swiftly gain credibility and succeed in new markets to the partnerships it establishes with other organizations and government agencies that have built trusted relationships with members of the communities served, mainly in their Persons with Disability program.

“Through our training, the participants learn more about themselves, their place in the world, the job markets. So the strongest incentive we have for our partner companies is that people get out of here really engaged, really understanding who they are and what they need to do.”

Alice Quintão, Rede Cidadã
INSIGHTS IN ACTION

Dr Reddy’s Foundation
Addressing personal obstacles to employment by involving family members

Dr Reddy’s has a keen understanding of the local settings it operates in—and what it takes to succeed. As it set out to work with youth in smaller towns in India, Dr Reddy’s ran into difficulties: it saw young people graduate from its programs (mainly female students) only to be blocked by their parents from moving on to job placements. Most of these youth were first-time workers especially in the service industry, which has a different workplace culture and atypical work hours. To overcome this barrier, Dr Reddy’s developed a communications outreach program (Parents Meet) aimed at helping parents understand the job-placement program, the nature of the roles being filled and ways in which their families could benefit if their children were allowed to work in the jobs. Parents then became supporters of the program.

Year Up
Clarifying the mission through a rigorous selection process

Year Up clarifies its mission by sharply defining which beneficiaries it will serve. It starts by identifying risks facing beneficiaries that could make it difficult for them to succeed in a training program or job. Examples include being part of a single-parent household, having been incarcerated and struggling with addiction or mental illness. Year Up’s leaders believe that their “sweet spot” candidates are those who have two to four of these risk factors. If an individual has fewer than two risk factors, there are other people who could benefit more from Year Up’s help. If someone has more than four risk factors, this individual is not ready for the Year Up program and is not likely to successfully complete it. Year Up often refers such candidates to other relevant resources in the community, such as counseling centers, and invites them to return and re-apply once they have addressed their risk factors. Year Up delivers maximum impact for the beneficiaries it serves by ensuring that they can successfully navigate the rigors of the program and excel once they've found a job at one of Year Up’s employer partners.
Spotlight on Developing Employability Skills

INSIGHT💡

Academic and technical skills are clearly important for getting jobs. But success in the workforce also hinges tightly on what we call employability skills, such as the ability to communicate effectively, solve problems and think critically. Evidence increasingly shows that, around the globe, employability skills rival academic or technical skills in their ability to predict employment success and earnings, among other outcomes.⁸

To thrive in today’s volatile labor markets, workers should not only excel at creativity and problem-solving but also possess certain personal attributes, such as persistence, curiosity and drive. In fact, in a recent report released by the World Economic Forum, of the 16 skills that students need to succeed in the 21st century, 10 are employability skills.⁹ Given the increased importance of employability skills, workforce development practitioners should strike a balance between helping their beneficiaries develop needed academic and technical skills (for instance, through partnerships with vocational and professional training institutions) and helping them build employability skills.⁹

CHALLENGES🔍

- Arriving at consistent definitions of employability skills and consistent approaches to developing them
- Identifying which employability skills will help beneficiaries obtain employment and achieve long-term success in their careers
- Helping people adopt strong employability attitudes, including managing resistance from beneficiaries who don’t see how such attitudes can improve their employment prospects

TIPS & TOOLS🛠️

Choose an employability-skills framework. Since there is no clear consensus on which employability skills correlate most strongly with workforce success, pick one of the available frameworks¹⁰ to inform the employability-skills training and align the training to the skills most commonly identified in the job-task analyses and role descriptions of target positions for beneficiaries. Consider validating these with key employers. For example, Save the Children developed a self-assessment tool aligned to Lippman et al.’s framework¹¹ (see Figure 3) of skills essential for youth workforce success which consists of a series of tests that show young beneficiaries how they are progressing through training. Tools as such will facilitate the measurement of the beneficiaries’ employability skill competency pre- and post-training.

Convince beneficiaries that employability skills matter. Help beneficiaries to understand the advantages of building their employability skills. During training, role-play scenarios are a great way to provide opportunities for beneficiaries to practice such skills, including conflict management, personal accountability, motivation and task prioritization. Role-playing helps students not only build the skills but also see the relevance of the skills in real work scenarios.
Use non-traditional employability training. Online training can be an excellent tool for building employability skills. The Skills to Succeed Academy is a case in point. Academy training programs engage participants with advanced character-based learning technologies, gaming techniques, role-based simulations, telestrations, videos, quizzes and interactive exercises. Participants must make decisions, and with each decision, they receive instant feedback—from the realistic characters in the training, and from an online coach voiced by an experienced employability practitioner.

Measure employability-skill acquisition. Assess how well is the workforce development program helping beneficiaries acquire and build employability skills. The Prince’s Trust, for instance, encourages beneficiaries to create a roadmap of their skill-building journey, including strengthening their employability skills. During one-on-one meetings, trainers and beneficiaries assess progress toward specific milestones on the roadmap. Another organization, Education for Employment (EFE), administers tests for certain employability skills trainings to gauge participants' progress. In addition, EFE enlists employers to provide insight into how well new hires have mastered such skills. EFE then uses these evaluation results to refine its programs as needed to improve employability-skill acquisition.

Map skills-building progress. For example, Goodwill uses a scorecard system during its core employment readiness training that measures students’ progress in building employability skills. The scorecard system is a pre-test and a post-test of each Goodwill Works module that is taught which enables the instructor to determine if each participant has grasped the core competencies that are addressed in each module and that are critical to participant’s success in the workplace. Students are graded on skills such as time management and workplace ethics, and their learning is reviewed at the end of training. If the participant struggles in achieving an 80% post-test passing rate, then they are encouraged to retake the module prior to continuing on in the training program. Participants who complete the modules have indicated a very high satisfaction rate with the curriculum and have applied the competencies in both their professional and personal lives.

Address general life skills, too. Use employability-skill training as an opportunity to educate target beneficiaries on general life skills as well. Some organizations, like Fundación Pescar, even conceptualize their employability-skills development effort as a life-skills project. In this way, they teach beneficiaries skills related to the labor market, but also essentials such as nutrition, sexual health and, most importantly, personal responsibility.

Help beneficiaries keep improving on the job. Even the most comprehensive programs can’t prepare beneficiaries for all scenarios they’ll encounter on-the-job. New skill needs may emerge, or need to be reinforced. For example, as beneficiaries who get jobs begin facing tight deadlines and other pressures, they may struggle to prioritize their responsibilities. Knowing how to prioritize tasks is a vital employability skill. So provide coaching to help them manage these situations. In line with this idea, Upwardly Global is designing an online platform aimed at providing alumni with ongoing career development services, including further bolstering their employability skills.

"It’s not the most technical person in the training class that will be most successful. For example, an individual in our Cyber Security program was the only one willing to travel two hours each way to an internship. I knew then that he was going to be successful and that he would get hired. Positive attitude, reliability and general willingness to help is what helped him get him a job.”

Patrick Cohen, NPower
Cincinnati Works
Teaching employability skills with ingenuity

Cincinnati Works uses an innovative method for teaching employability skills. To increase engagement in the workshop training and avoid beneficiary passivity, the organization has developed an interactive, experiential workshop for teaching skills like problem-solving and conflict management through role plays, vignettes, staged interaction and storytelling. During training, participants do more than just practice filling out an application—they build confidence, learn professionalism, and find practical ways to rise above the parts of their past that hold them back from success. By gaining exposure to situations they might encounter in the workplace, students can see what constitutes appropriate behavior and discuss ways to handle specific interactions. The training gives beneficiaries a sense of daily achievement to keep them motivated, as each day has its own clearly enumerated learning outcomes and procedural expectations. The participants’ day-to-day (or even hour-to-hour) progress is defined and measurable, and their successes are continually celebrated. After introducing this training, Cincinnati Works’ training graduation rates went from 85% to 92% and job acquisition rates went from 50% to 63%, with program beneficiaries citing skills and confidence learned in the training workshop as a major factor to their employment success.

Fundación Entreculturas
Personalizing paths for employability skills training

Fundación Entreculturas, in collaboration with Accenture, has created an innovative market-oriented virtual learning program for young people with limited resources. The program ensures that skills provision matches employers’ needs by equipping beneficiaries with foundational and in-demand technical skills, combined with Job Access Services. Firstly, beneficiaries undergo training to acquire the ability to learn virtually. This is followed by a pre-training virtual self-assessment that measures their level of proficiency in 5 core competencies (communication, self-esteem, self-control, rules/behaviors and logical thinking). Depending on factors such as the level of education of youth, self-assessment average score and lowest rated competencies, the beneficiaries’ competency improvement is attained through different types of online training and measured through a post-training virtual assessment. To become suitable for a particular job profile, beneficiaries are also required to undergo a cross-competency training process in which they choose a series of additional skills, such as flexibility, interpersonal skills, teamwork, initiative and decision making, problem analysis and solving, creativity and innovation, negotiation, etc. 175,000 disadvantaged youth in more than 20 countries across Africa, Latin America and Spain are expected to benefit from this program and gain the skills to get a job.
Spotlight on Creating a Unique Employer Value Proposition

**INSIGHT**

For many employers, hiring disadvantaged individuals supports their social responsibility agendas. But companies are increasingly interested in knowing how hiring such individuals can help drive productivity, reduce costs and create value for their organizations. By defining a unique employer value proposition that addresses these issues, workforce development organizations can attract more employer partners to their cause.

As many as 83 percent of the workforce development practitioners in our survey agree or strongly agree that establishing clear value propositions for cross-sector partners, such as employers, is more likely to help them meet their *Skills to Succeed* objectives.13

**CHALLENGES**

- Instilling attitudinal change among employers, such as helping them understand the value of using non-traditional talent pools (including people from disadvantaged backgrounds) to fill their hiring needs
- Developing a data-driven business case for hiring program beneficiaries and articulating the business case in a compelling way to employers

**TIPS & TOOLS**

*Involve employers throughout the program lifecycle.*

Many workforce development practitioners say they build successful relationships with employers by "starting small" such as inviting them to teach a course in their organization’s curriculum or volunteer for a mentoring activity. These small gains can set the stage for forging deeper partnerships that lead to greater job placement. By involving employers in activities such as mentoring, coaching and teaching, they will be able to see first-hand the services that beneficiaries are receiving to prepare for on-the-job success. Additionally, encourage employers to provide apprenticeships and internships, to further establish connections between the companies and the beneficiaries and to enable beneficiaries to learn more about what employers are looking for. Often, this kind of interaction also enables employers to provide real-time feedback on skill demand to practitioners and beneficiaries.

Learning about the workforce from employers can also motivate beneficiaries to persevere in the program and get hired into jobs. For example, the YCAB Foundation invites employer representatives to talk with beneficiaries about the jobs that might be open to them in the future. This can inspire beneficiaries to invest effort in preparing for specific roles.
Also consider involving employers in the candidate-selection process. With its larger employer partners, Education for Employment (EfE) invites them to take part in screening final candidates for the training program, after EfE has conducted an initial screening. This gives employers a stronger sense of ownership of the process, which can strengthen their commitment to helping ensure that new hires succeed on the job.

Build trust-based relationships with employers. Treat reliability and transparency as core tenets of relationships with employer partners. Dr Reddy’s relies on strong, trust-based relationships to hold employer partners to hiring commitments they’ve made. Similarly, thanks to such relationships, The Prince’s Trust has the opportunity to stay in touch with beneficiaries who get jobs with these companies, so it can check on their progress after placement and offer help if needed. Methodic approach to building private sector partnerships can be found here.

Deploy predictive analytics. Using talent analytics can help quantify beneficiaries’ potential to succeed at target employers. Specifically, by understanding what an employer considers “high performance” skills in a worker, practitioners can highlight how their programs develop those skills. More employers are using predictive analytics to identify a larger talent pool they might not traditionally consider and to make hiring decisions. During discussions with employers, share cost/benefit analyses and show how the company is hiring individuals who demonstrate potential for high performance. To show the cost/benefit advantages of the employer value proposition, one of the available frameworks downloadable here can be used (please note that this framework needs to be tweaked if it targets other types of demographics, apart from youth).

Help employers see the advantages of changing their hiring practices. As an analytics-based approach to talent becomes more prevalent, more employers are looking for the value proposition for hiring those outside of their standard target recruiting pool. For example, Accenture, an employer of over 373,000 people, embraces the practice of hiring from non-traditional labor supply pipelines and is seeing the benefits of this value proposition in practice. In Brazil, Accenture conducted an analysis to quantify the value of broadening their talent pools and reach. The performance and engagement of Accenture employees hired from non-traditional labor-supply pipelines—i.e. graduates of Skills to Succeed workforce development programs—was evaluated and the results were clear. The employees demonstrated the traits of high performance at Accenture, including motivation, commitment and willingness to learn. This analytics-based approach has helped strengthen the value proposition for Accenture in Brazil and can help other employers take advantage of the multitude of benefits that result from these new hiring practices. These benefits include offering new opportunities for disadvantaged groups, expanding the talent pool so as not to rely only on traditional acquisition pipelines (i.e. universities) to meet talent demand, and above all, having more great talent in their organization.
Build a quantifiable business case for hiring target beneficiaries. Develop a business case to help employer partners understand the financial impact and value of hiring target beneficiaries. Quantifying the value and extrapolating impact provides the evidence needed to scale or replicate employment programs. Toward this end, Accenture and Plan International are partnering with a large hotel chain in El Salvador to demonstrate that youth employment programs can provide a positive, significant and measurable return on investment in the form of reduced costs associated with recruiting and turnover, as well as better on-the-job performance by new hires. Accenture, in collaboration with Plan International and the employer, used specific tools to compare the productivity of Plan International graduates to that of non-Plan International graduates. They analyzed the results to generate and implement ideas for improving work-readiness training and identifying opportunities to replicate the program across the hotel chain's other business units. To access the framework used, please click here.

Educate employer partners. Help employers interact effectively with target beneficiaries. Leonard Cheshire Disability does this by delivering disability-equality training workshops to employers to help them understand and accommodate the challenges that people with disabilities face in the workplace. Alternatively, government information can be drawn upon to promote the benefits of hiring people from marginalized groups. The Australian government’s JobAccess program, for instance, provides information to employers about the benefits of hiring persons with disabilities—which include fewer workplace accidents and lower absenteeism and recruitment costs, among others.

Underscore philanthropic benefits. Although the employer value proposition must go beyond Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)-related benefits, remember that philanthropic benefits remain value drivers to employers. Since companies are motivated by employees’ desire to support social issues, when creating the value proposition, also consider that hiring target beneficiaries can give employers and their employees an opportunity to work together toward achieving greater social impact.

Address beneficiaries’ expectations and ambitions. Make sure beneficiaries understand that they may need to be practical and realistic in their job search. Explain that what would constitute the perfect job for them might not necessarily be immediately available at a particular employer. Find out what they consider a living wage, and measure the program’s effectiveness at placing alumni in jobs that pay such wages. For example, Maya LaborNet does this by tracking not only how many beneficiaries have built the required skills but also how many are earning a decent wage.

“The single-most important practice that leads to good employment outcomes is the work that happens in the front end with building partnerships with employers, being demand-driven, responding to employer needs. Our training is great, but there is a lot of good training out there.”

Taleb Salhab, Education for Employment

INSIGHTS IN ACTION

Fast Track to IT and Per Scholas
Assuring employers of the long-term value added by beneficiaries

Fast Track to IT and Per Scholas deliver trained IT workers who are keen to stay in their jobs. By contrast, many college graduates view entry-level jobs as short-term stepping stones on their career path. Willingness to stay in a job has much value for employers who have invested heavily in recruiting and onboarding with the goal of improving retention. Fast Track to IT and Per Scholas also stress to employers that their beneficiaries have completed a rigorous training program that builds required skills, enabling new hires to start delivering results with minimal initial on-the-job training.

Plan International
Using talent analytics to build individual profiles and satisfy skill demand

Plan International uses talent analytics to develop and implement training that matches employers’ skill requirements. Plan promotes its programs to young people to capture their interest. It then conducts psychometric testing on potential trainees, building profiles cataloging their skills and interests. In El Salvador, it currently has 1,000 such profiles for young trainees. When it receives a request from a company for a specific profile, it searches the database to find a trainee who suits the job’s requirements. Program leaders determine the type of training needed to prepare the trainee, and then execute the training. Thanks to this approach, Plan International ensures that its training investment doesn’t go to waste.
Spotlight on Maintaining Connections with Program Alumni

**INSIGHT**

Maintaining connections with program alumni after they've been placed in jobs is critical to sustaining their employment. In particular, it gives workforce development practitioners the opportunity to learn which forms of support their beneficiaries need to succeed in the initial job or to move to a different job. Ongoing support also enables practitioners to continue gathering outcome data for program measurement, evaluation and improvement.

Only 30 percent of the workforce development organizations we surveyed said that most beneficiaries remain in placements for more than 12 months.

**CHALLENGES**

- Maintaining ongoing connections with program alumni to provide additional support and gather data (especially on those who are transient or not motivated to stay connected)

**TIPS & TOOLS**

Find inexpensive ways to stay connected. Consider using social networking sites like Facebook and LinkedIn or creating other online communities to maintain connections with beneficiaries after they've been placed in jobs. For example, organizations such as Philippine Business for Social Progress, Fundación Pescar and others have adopted Facebook as one of the key fora for connecting with and gathering feedback from beneficiaries, owing to Facebook's popularity.

Factor in costs for continued support. In tracking costs, include those associated with offering more extensive continued support to beneficiaries, in such forms as further coaching, mentoring and job placement services. Per Scholas provides ongoing support for at least two years after initial training. Such support takes the form of employment verifications, provision of alumni instructors and access to learning management systems that alumni can tap into. The organization factors such costs into its calculations of overall costs per beneficiary.
**Offer alumni ongoing learning.** Provide online learning modules or events to encourage members of the alumni community to stay engaged with the program and with one another. Through such interactions, practitioners can learn about alumni’s work experiences and gain insights into other skills they might want beneficiaries to build. For example, during alumni meetings, Anudip Foundation for Social Welfare offers upskilling to those who want to learn additional skills important for getting better-paying jobs, such as social media marketing or mobile app development.

**Have alumni maintain updated online profiles.** Integrate any online training events offered (such as on LinkedIn) into the career-readiness curriculum, by helping beneficiaries create LinkedIn profiles and engaging beneficiaries on the platform (for example, by posting mini-challenges and research assignments) to ensure that they keep their profiles updated over time. In this way, not only will an alumni community be built, but also program participants’ long-term careers and other employment outcomes will be tracked.15

“It’s through a variety of different actions that we keep in touch with our beneficiaries. Most importantly, they’re being told repeatedly ‘If you don’t hear from us and you need us, you come to us.’ The initial placement after our course is about 55%, but after a three-year mentoring process, our placement goes up to about 78%.”  

**Peter Davitt, Fast Track to IT**

**INSIGHTS IN ACTION**

**Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO)**  
Overcoming barriers through mobile technology

VSO knows it’s hard to stay in contact with alumni, particularly in countries where beneficiaries’ mobility is high and people easily change contact details. With these challenges in mind, VSO has begun developing a web and mobile-based application to keep in touch with alumni and provide them with services. Beneficiaries sign up for the app and set up a profile which includes some of the following details: age, gender, education, aspiring career and current employment status. The app is then reminding them to regularly update their details and is tracking their progress in obtaining employment. For those who need additional support, it also allows them to access examples of typical career pathways, further online employability-skills training as well as specific industry training manuals and guidelines. In the case of a secondary education up-skilling program, the app can even be used by trainers and parents to ensure more dialogue with students. VSO believes that this is an effective way of incentivizing beneficiaries to stay connected, as well as monitoring their progress and evaluating the overall success of their programs.
Spotlight on Monitoring Achievement of Program Objectives

INSIGHT💡

Rigorous Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) helps workforce development practitioners assess their programs’ effectiveness and drive continuous improvement. A robust system tracks not only job-placement rates but also retention rates and other important employment outcomes at intervals after placement. In addition to these outcomes, a good measurement system considers specific program components, such as quality of curricula and efficiency of recruiting processes. Having a sense of what’s working well and what isn’t can help practitioners make the improvements needed to scale programs and thus help more of their target beneficiaries.

CHALLENGES❓

- Lack of an internationally recognized approach to quantifying the impact of workforce development programs, resulting in inconsistent analysis and difficulty ascertaining what needs modification to improve program effectiveness
- Lack of resources required to support a data-driven approach to measuring and quantifying program impact
- Staying connected with beneficiaries to collect outcome metrics at intervals after they have left the program

Of 30 workforce development organizations we surveyed, only 23 percent said that said they can collect information on 75-100 percent of beneficiaries.16

TIPS & TOOLS🛠️

Create a disciplined accountability system. Identify, document and communicate “SMART” (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, time-bound) program objectives. Track the progress in achieving them. Define the program’s intended inputs (e.g. specific training investment), outputs (e.g. number of people trained) and outcomes (e.g. number of people hired into jobs).

Build a change theory. Identify the major employment outcomes the program intends to deliver, the sub-outcomes that “roll up” to each outcome and the outputs required to achieve the desired outcomes. You can find a comprehensive online resource for this here.

Take advantage of tools. There’s a wealth of tools that can help you build a solid Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) program. For example, tools offered by Better Evaluation, an international collaboration to improve evaluation practice and theory. Such tools allow to assess the program’s effectiveness in helping beneficiaries get—and keep—jobs as well as track placement and retention rates at various intervals after placement.
Get feedback from beneficiaries. Ask target beneficiaries to evaluate the program and to share their thoughts about how it could be improved. Inviting feedback could motivate alumni to self-report on their employment status after placement, generating additional data that can be drawn on to further improve the program.

Pick a suitable data-collection method. Determine which method of data collection best suits the program’s needs. Examples include census, modified census (only reports people who can be reached) and sampling. Each has its own advantages. For instance, census enables more specific alumni tracking, while sampling may be less expensive.

As many as 67 percent of our survey respondents chose census as their method for collecting information on their beneficiaries after program completion.\(^ {17} \)

Prioritize insight and learning. Include an insight and learning component in the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) process, to build evidence of what works and doesn’t work in program design and execution. Practitioners can then draw on the evidence to make changes needed for continual improvement of the workforce development programs.

Measure broader impacts. In addition to assessing employment outcomes of the program, take the next step and measure the program’s broader economic and social impact. Cincinnati Works quantified the social and financial benefits that taxpayers gained from each beneficiary who completed the program and went on to get jobs through which they paid taxes. Results showed that the organization provided the program and went on to get jobs through which they paid taxes. Results showed that the organization provided beneficiaries with additional training, and certifications intended to help them get their first job as well as subsequent, higher paying placements.

More specifically, to better measure the impact of their workforce development programs, through collection of long-term outcome data for program participants and to create, manage and execute alumni programs.

As one such organization, East London Business Alliance, explained: “We are very, very happy to be part of the LinkedIn Impact Tracker pilot, as it allows us to free up resources in terms of tracking outcomes. This provides us with a real way of pushing out opportunities for young people and to anyone that engages with us on employment and skills.”

“Teaching someone skills and helping them find a job is often not enough to really move the dial on an individual’s economic stability. What is really important is to look at the entire financial picture of a beneficiary, not just the job and what wage they might be earning. You need to assess whether someone is able to build some net worth and assets over time to really get to a place of long term financial wellness.”

Katrin Kark, Local Initiatives Support Coalition

Follow the alumni’s futures. Use program alumni’s LinkedIn profiles to gather long-term data (e.g. job titles and tenures) on the program’s outcomes. With this advantage in mind, Accenture has launched the Impact Tracker\(^ {18} \) pilot program with LinkedIn and 10 youth-development organizations from the US, the UK and India. This initiative aims to address the core issue of outcome tracking and metrics facing youth employment. Through this program, participating organizations can use LinkedIn profile data to understand the long-term career outcomes of their program participants. Specifically, to better measure the impact of their workforce development programs through collection of long-term outcome data for program participants and to create, manage and execute alumni programs.

INSIGHTS IN ACTION

Per Scholas
Measuring all the facts in the beneficiary’s journey

Per Scholas prioritizes outcome measurement. To ensure accuracy of the outcome data it collects, it focuses on metrics such as its beneficiaries’ industry certification rates, graduation rates, placement rates and one-year job retention rates. When it comes to placement and retention rates, the organization counts only those data points that can be verified through sources like pay stubs or a third-party wage reporting system. Although this method risks under-reporting, it also mitigates uncertainty that comes with relying on assumptions about continuity of placements. After participating in a national study sponsored by the White House Social Innovation Fund, Per Scholas adopted a theory of change aimed at understanding what was needed to break the cycle of unemployment afflicting its beneficiaries. The theory held that an excellent training program isn’t enough in itself, and that true success comes with sufficiently rigorous follow-on support. Per Scholas then embarked on a two-year journey with its beneficiaries to act on the theory of change. During that time, the organization provided beneficiaries with additional training and certifications intended to help them get their first job as well as subsequent, higher paying placements.

Per Scholas has thus developed a system for tracking its impact in meaningful terms and quantifying the value it generates for beneficiaries. For example, its Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) approach shows that taking part in its program increases income for beneficiaries: typical Per Scholas grads have a pre-training income of $7,000 and a post-training income of $35,000 and often much more. Moreover, 80 percent of Per Scholas graduates land jobs.
Spotlight on Aligning Technology Investments with Organizational Priorities

**INSIGHT 🌟**

Digital technologies can help workforce development practitioners achieve cost-saving efficiencies through process automation as well as drive program innovation. For instance, such technologies can enable them to construct new operating models that support scaling programs’ reach, extract more actionable data from their Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) systems and communicate and connect with employer partners and beneficiaries through new channels. But to capitalize on these advantages, workforce development practitioners should define a long-term vision, backed by a digital strategy for realizing that vision.

**CHALLENGES 🤔**

- Investing in digital technology under conditions of constrained resources
- Poor understanding of how to take full advantage of digital technologies

**TIPS & TOOLS ✂️**

**Combine ambition with realism.** Have an ambitious digital strategy, but focus on executing it through targeted programs of manageable scope. Use such programs to demonstrate how digital tools (e.g., eLearning platforms) can help beneficiaries get the most value from training programs and succeed in the workplace. Show how such tools can make internal processes, such as recruitment and training, more efficient and effective. For instance, training supported by digitally enabled materials and methods—such as personalized and adaptive content, communication and collaboration tools and interactive simulations and games—can prove remarkably powerful.

**Enlist employer partners.** Look into the employer partners’ existing resources to see if there are any useful digital tools that can be leveraged. Some of them may use an app, website or other tools for tracking beneficiaries’ accomplishments. Apps may be simple, easy to use and inexpensive, and they’ve become game changers in countries where technology infrastructure is limited.
Use digital for knowledge sharing. Consider using social media to create a collaboration platform. Organizations and their employer partners can use the platform to share knowledge and best practices and to explore potential joint projects or programs.

Take advantage of digital learning. Try introducing a digital curriculum, as it allows for the customization needed to adapt training content for people from different cultures or languages. Going digital in this way can also help achieve cost savings, an advantage corroborated by some of our Skills to Succeed partners. Take the Anudip Foundation for Social Welfare. The Foundation has adopted a digital curriculum, moving from an instructor-led-only program to more extensive self-paced learning, blended learning, remote learning and use of different forms of instruction (including mobile apps and cloud computing). Such technologies have helped the Foundation expand its training capacity without incurring a proportionate spike in costs.

INSIGHTS IN ACTION

Leonard Cheshire Disability
Sealing with a digital mindset

Adopting a digital mindset enabled Leonard Cheshire Disability (LCD) to scale its program offerings and make services more accessible to individuals with disabilities. LCD realized early on that as a physical location, it was too difficult for some target beneficiaries to access. So it set up smaller centers in rural areas that leverage connection to the centralized hubs to get the information they need and sustain operations. The organization now has 17 satellite service locations, and its digital-backed expansion has enabled it to scale up its program offerings and serve more beneficiaries, more flexibly than before.

Using technology to build more inclusive economies and societies

Another example is LCD’s Access to Livelihoods program, which uses digital technology to help persons with disabilities around the world to actively take part in the economy. The Jobability portal is an online site that matches people with disabilities with job vacancies, placements, resources and information on disability and employment for job seekers, employees, employers and service providers. The portal thus serves as an interface between disabled individuals and prospective employers. All parties can gain access to a wealth of information and services. For instance, employers can post open jobs and manage candidate applications, and job seekers can find out about training opportunities. The portal helps get people into jobs who might not otherwise have access to such opportunities and lets employers tap a whole new talent pool to fill their skill gaps. To date, the program has helped more than 8,000 people across Asia with disabilities gain employment in several sectors, including IT and business process outsourcing.
Spotlight on Innovation and Continuous Improvement

**INSIGHT**

To keep pace with the rapid, complex changes reshaping their environment, workforce development practitioners should foster an organizational culture characterized by commitment to ongoing improvement and innovation. Those that meet this imperative stand the best chance of getting the most from their scarce resources and creating maximum value for their beneficiaries and employer partners—no small feat in today’s difficult labor markets.

Innovation can take numerous forms, including new operating models, service offerings and organizational processes, or new ways of doing business. For example, forward-looking practitioners who have embraced new types of partnerships are achieving unprecedented efficiencies and cost savings as a result of pooling resources like learning assets. And those using digital learning to supplement traditional classroom training are reaching more beneficiaries thanks to their increased scale.

**CHALLENGES**

- Making a compelling case for change to workforce development staff
- Fostering an “intrapreneurial” mindset among employees to encourage them to brainstorm fresh approaches to their work that help the organization expand its impact

**TIPS & TOOLS**

**View innovation through the lens of opportunity.** Creating a culture of continuous improvement and innovation can seem like a daunting task. But viewing it through the lens of opportunity can help. Be willing and encourage other practitioners to experiment with new ideas, with the goal of breaking down resource constraints and other barriers to create new forms of value for beneficiaries and employers.

**Take a data-driven approach to innovation.** Leverage insights from the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) process and be inspired to brainstorm ideas for new programs or processes with other peers. Develop the most promising of these, put them into action and evaluate their impact.
Think like the private sector. Determine how strategic risk taking can help the organization to stay competitive, grow, better satisfy beneficiaries’ and employers’ needs and manage costs. In the digital age, for example, many private-sector companies are making what Accenture calls the “Corporate Cultural Shift” and are rapidly creating a vibrant and successful digital culture. In fact, in the last year, more than 90% of organizations have significantly adjusted their operating model. And 80% of them are using analytical tools and capabilities to develop business insights.

Create time and space to innovate. Take steps to nurture an innovation-friendly culture, such as having cross-functional project teams tackle a key issue in an off-site setting. Through such moves, it can be ensured that employees’ creative energies don’t get overshadowed by short-term priorities.

Host “innovation days.” Invite representatives from the entire ecosystem (employees, partner companies, beneficiaries) to take part in days devoted to innovation. In October 2015, approximately 200 France-based Skills to Succeed practitioners across all sectors came together to tackle the question of how to scale workforce development programs for greater impact. The attendees formed teams and, using Accenture’s Design Thinking approach, generated more than 10 relevant solutions (to learn more, see Figure 4). Equally important (we maintain), they had tremendous fun in the process. This example of ‘revving up’ a collaboration engine to foster innovation demonstrates collective impact in action.

Put beneficiaries at the center of program design. Use design thinking to understand beneficiaries’ needs. For example, IDEO’s approach is effective for conducting interviews with beneficiaries. Translate the resulting insights into ideas for designing new programs or strengthening existing ones so they create even more value for beneficiaries.

“Think like the private sector. Create time and space to innovate. Host ‘innovation days.’ Put beneficiaries at the center of program design.”

Taleb Salhab, Education for Employment

Design Thinking is gaining traction in organizations across industries, sectors and geographies as a great way to drive innovation.

As Tim Brown, president and CEO of design firm IDEO, put it: “Design thinking is a human-centered approach to innovation that draws from the designer’s toolkit to integrate the needs of people, the possibilities of technology, and the requirements for business success.”

Design thinking is a mindset and a protocol that goes beyond what typically comes out of exercises aimed at brainstorming solutions to problems. It’s highly human-centered—focused on understanding what people need and how they interact with service systems, and defining solutions tailored to these needs. In this sense, anyone can be a designer, thanks to the simple tools now available to support the effort.

“Design Thinking is gaining traction in organizations across industries, sectors and geographies as a great way to drive innovation.”

Source: Accenture

“Design Thinking is a human-centered approach to innovation that draws from the designer’s toolkit to integrate the needs of people, the possibilities of technology, and the requirements for business success.”

Taleb Salhab, Education for Employment
Create an operating model that enables adaptability. For example, Cincinnati Works set up a change-focused team that analyzes trends, data and employment outcomes to identify and address current challenges facing its programs.

Make it safe to fail. Promote organizational risk-taking, reminding peers that failure is an inherent part of the innovation process. From every failure, insights and lessons can be extracted and used to refine an innovative idea. So, make it safe to fail, by rewarding staff who gain and use valuable insights from ideas that didn’t work out.

Stay current. Monitor expert knowledge-sharing resources to stay up to date on trends in the workforce development sector along with insights that could be useful for driving innovation. There is no shortage of online resources to tap into and in fact the volume of content can be daunting. It’s important to have a ‘select few’ resources that are consistently used as well as a process for curating and synthesizing relevant content.

Consider the human factor. Understand how seemingly small design changes can have an outsized impact on programs by making it easier for beneficiaries to learn new skills, find jobs and apply new abilities in the workplace. Minor refinements in training materials or methods—introduction of a job-interview role-play activity, for instance—can tip the scales for some students in their ability to master the material.

INSIGHTS IN ACTION

Year Up
Innovating a new business model

Year Up has created a spin-off organization, YUPRO (Year Up Professional Resources)—a staffing agency for program alumni. In addition to helping beneficiaries set out successfully in their careers, this for-profit public benefit corporation also opens up new revenue streams for Year Up specifically supporting their alumni. The revenue generated by the new venture helps balance the often steep costs incurred from developing and implementing alumni-support programs.

Spanish Red Cross
Leveraging hard data about what works to drive continuous improvement

Spanish Red Cross and Accenture are teaming up to analyze and interpret hard data on program impact. The goal? To determine what works and use the resulting insights to drive ongoing improvement. By analyzing three years of Spanish Red Cross data on program results, the team has learned which activities, how many and in what sequence, in the Red Cross’s programs deliver the best employment outcomes. To illustrate, preliminary insights show that the more interventions beneficiaries receive, the better the employment rate. Yet after a certain threshold, additional interventions have no impact on the rate. Such analyses will help the organization uncover opportunities to enhance program efficiency and effectiveness. Indeed, Spanish Red Cross plans to make data analytics a standard component of its operating model.

“I think innovation comes from an organizational commitment to continuous improvement. Innovation is building that culture to admit we tried something and failed. I also think there’s been a paradigm shift from the funder and a partner perspective, which allows us to be really transparent—to look long and hard about what’s working well and then dig deeper.”

Janice Barresi, Youth Services Bureau
Driving Success on the Pathway to Employment: Taking Action
Driving Success on the Pathway to Employment: Taking Action

A clear focus on continuous improvement and innovation will require workforce development practitioners to assess their current capabilities, including how well they’re mastering key success factors and practices. We offer an assessment tool, inspired by Accenture’s High Performance Business functional mastery model, to help you reflect and act on the questions posed.

Take the Test

Consider each statement. Place a ✔️ in the appropriate box for each statement depending on whether you agree with that statement or not.

N.B.: We acknowledge that some of these practices might not be applicable to some organizations, owing to the nature of their work, vision and/or mission. If this is true for your organization, please complete only the parts of this assessment that are applicable to you.
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<td>Our employer partners advise other organizations and businesses to hire our beneficiaries</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We coordinate with government agencies and other workforce development non-profits for collective impact program at city/state/national level</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Our beneficiaries gain access to meaningful opportunities in the first three months after training</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sustain the Program's Impact</th>
<th>AGREE</th>
<th>DISAGREE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Our beneficiaries do not drop out of job placements when they encounter their first challenge</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our beneficiaries continue to draw on our support and assistance after completing training</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our beneficiaries' employment status is easily accessible (such as through LinkedIn and other tools)</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have prepared our employer partners to work with new recruits who come from disadvantages backgrounds</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have a rigorous Monitoring and Evaluation (M&amp;E) system for assessing the effectiveness of our programs</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We collect data on our beneficiaries before, during and at least six months after they complete our program</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We analyze program evaluation data and use the resulting insights and lessons to strengthen program design</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Adapt with a Strategic Mindset

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Develop a Digital Strategy</th>
<th>AGREE</th>
<th>DISAGREE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Throughout our organization, people acknowledge the importance of leveraging digital technologies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We use digital technologies to improve our program design and execution and achieve efficiencies in our organization</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Continuously Improve & Innovate |          |          |
| Innovation and user-centricity lie at the heart of our program design and organizational structure |          |          |
| Our employees feel engaged in their work here, and free to generate and explore innovative ideas |          |          |
| We can clearly articulate to stakeholders innovation and process improvements that we have made |          |          |

### Interpret Your Responses

Depending on where you identified gaps in your organization’s effectiveness in the four major phases of the workforce development program lifecycle, the questions on the following pages will help you and your colleagues reflect on capabilities you may want to focus on strengthening to improve your practices and processes.

**KEY**

If you agree with **ONE-THIRD** of the statements, your organization is at a **BASIC** level of mastery of key success factors and practices.

If you agree with **TWO-THIRDS** of the statements, your organization is at a **PROGRESSIVE** level of mastery of key success factors and practices.

If you agree with **THE MAJORITY OR ALL** statements, your organization is at a **PIONEER** level of mastery of key success factors and practices.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DESIGN THE PROGRAM</th>
<th>EQUIP INDIVIDUALS</th>
<th>SUSTAIN THE PROGRAM’S IMPACT</th>
<th>ADAPT WITH A STRATEGIC MINDSET</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>BASIC</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• How can we regularly gather up-to-date information on labor markets and local conditions important to our mission?</td>
<td>• How good are we at teaching skills, particularly employability skills, to our beneficiaries? What can we do to improve such training?</td>
<td>• Over what period do we track our beneficiaries’ work experiences after they graduate? How might we extend that period if it’s too brief?</td>
<td>• How can we identify ways to take fuller advantage of digital technologies?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What are some ways we can get specific information from our employer partners about the skills they require?</td>
<td>• How closely do our beneficiaries’ skills match our employer partners’ requirements after training? What can we do to make our program more demand-driven?</td>
<td>• To what degree, if any, do beneficiaries receive our help and support after training? How can we provide consistent support?</td>
<td>• What could we do to lay the foundations of a culture of continuous improvement and innovation in our organization?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How clear is our mission and vision; for example, whom are we trying to help? Why? What could we do to achieve greater clarity on these?</td>
<td>• How would we rate the degree of trust in our relationships with our employer partners and other members of our ecosystem? What might we do to strengthen that trust?</td>
<td>• In what areas might our Monitoring and Evaluation (M&amp;E) system be weak? How might we address these weaknesses?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What types of wrap-around services should we offer?</td>
<td>• How convincing is our employer value proposition? How might we make it more convincing?</td>
<td>• How effective are we at extracting actionable insights and lessons from the implementation of our programs? How can we use such information to make savvier future investment decisions?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How could we tailor our employer-partnership agreements to help our partners more easily quantify the value they get from hiring our beneficiaries?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>PROGRESSIVE</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How might we deepen our understanding of the labor market, cultural characteristics, level of development and diversity of players in the settings where we operate?</td>
<td>• What can we do to make our employability-skills training more innovative and effective?</td>
<td>• Over what time period do we track our beneficiaries’ employment post-training? Is there value in extending the tracking period and if so, how will we do that?</td>
<td>• How can we use digital technology more effectively in our program design and execution?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What steps could we take to know more about the skills our employer partners require?</td>
<td>• How quickly can we fill employers’ skill demand? What could we do to speed up the process?</td>
<td>• How effective are we at offering our beneficiaries support after training? If that period of support needs to be extended, what steps would help us do that?</td>
<td>• What could we do to fully embrace innovation and adopt a continuous-improvement mindset in our organization?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How effective are we at offering wrap-around services? What can we do to help more beneficiaries tackle their individual needs?</td>
<td>• How consistently do we receive positive feedback from employers on our services and beneficiaries? If feedback is mixed, what steps could we take to enhance our program offerings?</td>
<td>• How robust is our system for tracking employment outcomes? For instance, do we track not only job-placement rates but also retention rates and other important outcomes at often-enough intervals after placement? If our system needs improvement, what actions should we take now to make those improvements?</td>
<td>• How can we continue embracing the best new methods, tools and approaches for creating value for our beneficiaries and partners and for differentiating ourselves from other organizations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How can we build a stronger business case for employers to hire our beneficiaries? In what ways could data-driven tools and frameworks help us prove our employer value proposition?</td>
<td>• How can we report to employers on the impact of their investments in our programs? What could we do to make such reporting a standard process?</td>
<td>• To what extent do we base our investment decisions on insights and lessons from previous grants? How can we make this information a critical factor in our investment decisions?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESIGN THE PROGRAM</td>
<td>EQUIP INDIVIDUALS</td>
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<tr>
<td>PIONEERING</td>
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<tr>
<td>• How consistently do we leverage data to prioritize our investments for the greatest outcomes? If we could improve in this area, what actions would help us build a fully data-driven decision-making process?</td>
<td>• How can we design a state-of-the-art employability-skills training with creative and innovative components?</td>
<td>• How might we enhance our effectiveness in Monitoring and Evaluation, in terms of length of tracking period and number of beneficiaries tracked?</td>
<td>• How can we become a digital disruptor among workforce development organizations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How can we make our employer partnerships even more effective and impactful?</td>
<td>• How can we take more advantage of talent analytics tools and processes to quantify beneficiaries’ potential to succeed at target employers?</td>
<td>• What could we do to further strengthen our alumni network of support?</td>
<td>• To what extent do we share assets and resources with other practitioners and help them learn from our successes? How might we provide even more support in these ways, to further strengthen the ecosystem we operate in?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How can we continue to meet our beneficiaries’ changing individual needs through the services we offer?</td>
<td></td>
<td>• How might we measure our broader impact on the economies and communities in geographies where we operate?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• How can we get even more value from insights and learnings for our future investment decisions?</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
Conclusion

Highly dynamic labor markets, ever more powerful and transformative digital technologies and a growing body of evidence about what works well and what doesn’t requires workforce development practitioners to reflect and respond to the changing landscape. This is a period of great opportunity for practitioners to enhance their organization’s capabilities and effectiveness. But the time to act is always ‘now’.

Our study findings make it clear that the themes of agility, continuous improvement and collaboration are very much on practitioners’ minds. In that spirit, we hope that the Pathways to Employment framework, insights and recommendations, and case stories offered here serve as springboards for reflection and action.

This report is the result of a comprehensive and collaborative research project—but our work does not end here. There is an imperative to continue the dialogue, particularly since what constitutes best practice in this sector will keep changing. Our vision is that this report will inspire ongoing collaboration among members of the Skills to Succeed practitioner network, and that such collaboration will lead to a measurable and sustainable difference in the economic vitality and resilience of individuals, families and communities.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECTION</th>
<th>ASSETS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assess and Plan</td>
<td>Market Research Framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connect to Opportunities</td>
<td>Approach and Framework to Create Strategic Private-Sector Partnerships</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ROI &amp; Cost and Benefit Analysis (Grads of Life)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Approach and Framework to Creating a Shared Value Business Case</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measure and Improve Program</td>
<td>How to Build a Theory of Change</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How to Improve Evaluation Practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adapt with a Strategic Mindset</td>
<td>Methods for Human-Centred Design Thinking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## About the Pathway to Employment Research Project

We conducted research across our internal and external network of skilling practitioners to understand what works best to drive demand-led skilling to achieve sustainable employment outcomes at scale and, more specifically, what the key success factors are.

Our objective was to generate insights into what works and to share practical information with workforce development practitioners on how to improve their programs to generate better employment outcomes. To that end, we took the following approach:

- Interviewed 20 Accenture leaders running each Geographic Unit within our global Skills to Succeed network
- Interviewed 50 workforce development practitioners from 36 of our Skills to Succeed practitioner network organizations
- Conducted an online survey with our Skills to Succeed partners (which focused on measuring outcomes)
- Analyzed impact and outcome data on organizations we interviewed, from our Skills to Succeed measurement efforts
- Conducted secondary research by examining Skills to Succeed publications and external sources

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### Skills to Succeed Practitioner Network Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTERVIEWEE</th>
<th>ORGANIZATION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anita Carroll</td>
<td>Access Employment (Canada)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dipak Basu</td>
<td>Anudip Foundation for Social Welfare (India)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perrine Agha, Charles Edouard</td>
<td>Ashoka (France)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Aikarchalil</td>
<td>Bosco (India)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peggy Zink</td>
<td>Cincinnati Works (USA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin Kasper</td>
<td>Childaid Network (Germany)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pranav Choudhary</td>
<td>Dr. Reddy’s Foundation (India)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyn Vicary</td>
<td>Dress for Success (Australia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taleb Salhab</td>
<td>Education for Employment (MENA Region)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jade Gayle, James Innes</td>
<td>East London Business Alliance (UK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter Davitt</td>
<td>Fast Track to IT (Ireland)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silvia Uranga, Dolores Mase</td>
<td>Fundación Pescar (Argentina)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer Davis, Joylin Kirk, Sonya Francis, Kristin Ortun</td>
<td>Goodwill (USA)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunah Lee</td>
<td>Junior Achievement (South Korea)</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gayathri Vasudevan</td>
<td>LabourNet (India)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary-Alice McDevitt, Leanne Massey</td>
<td>Leonard Cheshire Disability (UK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seung Kim, Katrin Kark</td>
<td>Local Initiatives Support Coalition (USA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diego Daza, Camilo Franco</td>
<td>Minuto de Dios (Colombia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrick Cohen, Stephanie Cuskley</td>
<td>NPOWER (USA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cécile GLAS, Sébastien Lailheugue</td>
<td>Passeport Avenir (France)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angie Kamath</td>
<td>Per Scholas (USA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristine Rivadello</td>
<td>Philippine Business for Social Progress (Philippines)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rodrigo Bustos</td>
<td>Plan International (El Salvador)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aakash Sethi, Abhijeet Mehta, Ashutosh Tosaria, Sinil Francis</td>
<td>Quest Alliance (India)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice Quintão, Fernando Alves</td>
<td>Rede Cidada (Brazil)</td>
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<td>Phuc Le Thi Dieu, Eko Kriswanto, Lv Jicheng</td>
<td>Save the Children (ASEAN Region)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabriele Möhlke</td>
<td>Social Business Women (Germany)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eliza Chang, Ehtesham Azad</td>
<td>S.U.C.C.E.S.S (Canada)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wiebke Rasmussen</td>
<td>Teach First (Germany)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lara Kruger</td>
<td>The Prince’s Trust (UK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tadd Wamester</td>
<td>Upwardly Global (USA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean Van Wetter, Katie Spencer-Smith</td>
<td>VSO (Tanzania)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meina Tanzil</td>
<td>Yayasan Cinta Anak Bangsa (Indonesia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamara Johnson, Betsy Goodell, Valerie Beilenson, Cathy Zimmerman</td>
<td>Year Up (USA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janice Barresi</td>
<td>Youth Service Bureau (Canada)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Accenture is a leading global professional services company, providing a broad range of services and solutions in strategy, consulting, digital, technology and operations. Combining unmatched experience and specialized skills across more than 40 industries and all business functions—underpinned by the world's largest delivery network—Accenture works at the intersection of business and technology to help clients improve their performance and create sustainable value for their stakeholders. With approximately 373,000 people serving clients in more than 120 countries, Accenture drives innovation to improve the way the world works and lives. Visit us at www.accenture.com.

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