July 2018

A Platform for Lifelong Learning

Recap of June Commission Meeting

At the third meeting of the Governor's Commission on Digital Innovation and Lifelong Learning on June 26, 2018, members of the Commission expressed broad interest in the goal of establishing a "system" of lifelong learning for Massachusetts. Commissioners acknowledged the need for such a system to promote statewide goals in education, employment, and economic outcomes, as well as to help individuals promote their own goals in these areas.

Commission members were positive about the potential of such a system to (1) *connect* education, employment, and related entities in the system to each other, and connect learners to these entities; (2) *enable* these entities to leverage their capacity to contribute to lifelong learning activities, as well as *develop* their capacity to do so in areas where support is needed; and (3) *translate* perspectives, needs, and objectives among entities in the system. For instance, Commissioners noted how a system could help employers and education/training institutions bridge different understandings of learner needs, and each other; help learners gain information and advice about lifelong learning programs, and connect them to such programs, as well as support resources; and address policy and regulatory barriers affecting the development and growth of lifelong learning in Massachusetts.

At the same time, Commission members also highlighted the importance of modulating what a "system actor" might do, and guarding against it functioning as a central bureaucracy or regulator. Especially given the dynamic and still-forming market for lifelong learning in Massachusetts, Commissioners expressed that the goal should be to enable the conditions for learners and institutional players to thrive, as opposed to directing relationships between parties or dictating outcomes. As such, some members of the Commission gravitated away from the term "system actor," and toward the notion of a *platform* for organized, coordinated and facilitated activity in the lifelong learning arena.

As the Commission prepares for its committee meetings July and August 2018, this paper builds on the Commission's June discussion by further outlining a vision for what a Massachusetts system of lifelong learning, undergirded by a *platform*, could look like. The next section of the paper discusses the main functions of the platform and offers thoughts on how players in the emerging ecosystem of lifelong learning in Massachusetts would engage with it.

The last section of this paper offers some questions, based on this discussion, for the three committees of the Commission to consider in advance of the July 31st meeting.

Functions of A Lifelong Learning Platform

As noted above, a key priority for the platform will be to advance statewide interests for Massachusetts that a system of lifelong learning could facilitate—particularly in the areas of education, employment, and economic development. The platform would identify broad goals to be achieved in the three industry sectors prioritized for attention by the Commission: Healthcare, Advanced Manufacturing, and Information Technology. (For the purposes of the Commission's work, we consider Information Technology to be both an industry and a skill set that is important for many other industries in the Massachusetts economy.)

The platform could, for example, work with employers in those sectors, education and training institutions, and state leaders to identify general numbers of people to be trained in a time certain, specific jobs within those industries on which to focus, and the desired impacts of such activity in terms of educational attainment, outcomes relevant to employers in each sector, and broader economic outcomes for the Commonwealth. The platform might pay special attention to assuring that activity is coordinated in such a way that it reaches the various regions of the Commonwealth equitably, and serves the Commission's target populations of interest (working learners and opportunity youth, with either some college but no degree, or no college) equitably as well.

In addition, the platform would work with employers, education and training providers, and state leaders to articulate a broad normative instructional model to be used in the lifelong learning context. As has been discussed with Commissioners, the broad elements of such a model could include the following features: (1) structure, content, and goals that have been co-designed by an employer and an education/training provider; (2) a meaningful assessment of a student's prior learning; (3) an instructional core that competency-based and delivered online; (4) a meaningful experiential learning component, to buttress the work-oriented, competency-based nature of the model; (5) an explicit soft skill development element, and (6) robust student support/coaching. The platform would help the entities involved in the construction of a particular lifelong learning approach calibrate the extent to which these components would be present in a particular program for a particular industry, based on research, evidence and prior experience.

As the diagram below illustrates, the platform would also enable coordination among the diverse and independent players that populate the lifelong learning space. As

previously noted, a coordinating entity can empower entities in a system to better fill the gaps that currently exist in the delivery of education and training services to a target population of learners. In this mold, the platform would broker relationships between institutional players with complementary education and training services in order to best advance goals of the system. For example, the platform might connect an entity that specializes in delivering training for the Healthcare sector with an entity that specializes in student coaching and case management, and with an employer in the Healthcare sector, to create a comprehensive education pathway for a credential in Healthcare Administration.
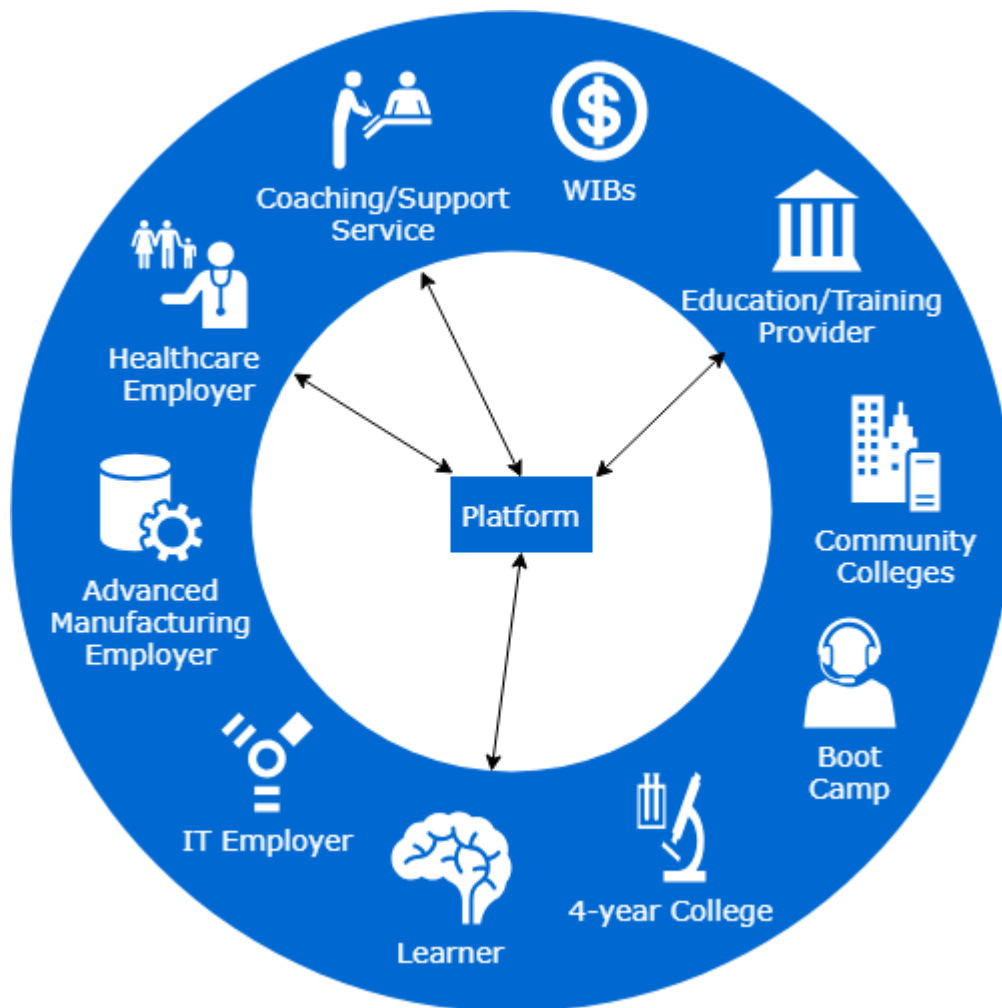
The platform might also function as a platform in the technical sense of the word. Bearing in mind that some education and training providers in Massachusetts have expertise in content, student support, and other elements of our proposed design model but have limited technological capabilities, a platform that is not only a staging ground for coordination and support of various entities, but also literally an online platform may be highly useful.

Finally, the platform would be a central directory and main point of contact for learners to gain information about the potential education and training pathways available to them. This structure would help learners become more informed about navigating their journey to a degree or career and connect education and training providers to learners more efficiently. It would also socialize the idea of lifelong learning as a discrete part of the education ecosystem in Massachusetts, thus raising awareness and understanding of lifelong learning as an organized activity that Massachusetts is encouraging and supporting.

How Else Might Institutional Players Engage with the Platform?

As a connecting entity, the platform will provide the opportunity for institutional players (i.e., employers, education and training providers, providers of other services relevant to the instructional model proposed, and state leaders) to join together in new and deeper ways to support lifelong learning-oriented programs and activities. As such, it is important to develop a framework that sets out how new and existing players might successfully engage with the platform so that it helps a comprehensive system of lifelong learning take shape and cohere.

On a high level, it will be necessary for each type of institutional player to help formulate and support the statewide goals for the system. As noted above, this will require the alignment of system activity and outcomes with the economic and workforce agenda of key industry sectors.

It would be valuable for the various institutional players who take part in the system to do some things in common. For example, it might be beneficial for education and training providers who participate in the system to recognize each other's activities, such that a learner's activities at one institution, or at one point in time, would be recognized at all institutions participating in the lifelong learning system. This recognition and transferability would be facilitated by a system in which different lifelong learning programs share a broad normative instructional model, as discussed above.

Since the idea of lifelong learning is an emerging and evolving one, it would also be valuable for participants in the system of lifelong learning to take part in data sharing and outcomes assessment, facilitated by the platform. The specifics of such activity would need to be determined, but regular feedback concerning learner and program outcomes would support the development of quality programs and help identify and spread best practices. Moreover, an understanding of the most effective education strategies in place (i.e. what works and what does not), especially combined with insights by sector, region, and type of learner, could enrich education and training providers' ongoing development of lifelong learning programs.

Questions for the Committees

As the Commission breaks into its three committees in July and August, we would like each committee to delve into specific questions that emanate from discussion above. Below, we summarize the three committees' memberships and their charges, along with several questions we would like you to think about in advance of the July 31 meeting.

Committee One: Lifelong Learning (organizational model)

July 31 meeting time: 10am – noon, at Commonwealth Corporation

Members: Acosta, Cedrone, Eddy, Gabrieli, Moquete, Ringrose, Vega, Wiese

Core charge:

- Further articulate the concept of a platform to support an organized system of lifelong learning in Massachusetts;
- Develop and express a set of statewide goals for lifelong learning activity in the target industry sectors of Healthcare, Advanced Manufacturing, and Information Technology that the platform could meaningfully promote.

<u>Questions for Committee One:</u>

We have articulated a few core activities for the platform supporting a Massachusetts system of lifelong learning: (1) identification of statewide goals; (2) coordination and support of system actors (employers, education/training institutions, learners); (3) serving as a technological platform (as needed). Are these the right core activities for the platform? What should be added or changed?

Massachusetts could identify statewide goals for lifelong learning in a variety of categories, for example: (1) target numbers of new programs in the three core industry sectors; (2) number of learners to be served in a time certain; (3) increases in postsecondary attainment; (4) increases in employment outcomes for participating learners; (5) economic impacts in target industries. Which of these resonate? What other categories should we consider?

What is needed to build an awareness of/culture of lifelong learning among the public in Massachusetts? What mechanisms are needed to build the pipeline/demand for lifelong learning among our target populations of interest (working learners and older opportunity youth, either with some college/no degree or no college)?

Committee Two: Programmatic Aspects of Lifelong Learning

July 31 meeting time: noon – 2 pm, at Commonwealth Corporation

Members: Cicco, Davis-Carey, Fuller, Leshin, McGaugh, Peyser, Sarma

Core charge:

- Articulate how a typical learner might experience the system of lifelong learning;
- Consider how the functional components of a general instructional model for lifelong learning might differ between the target industry sectors of Healthcare, Advanced Manufacturing, and IT, and for each of our target learning populations.

Questions for Committee Two:

We have articulated a proposed normative model for lifelong learning programs under our new system, which would include the following facets: (1) employer co-design; (2) prior learning assessment; (3) an online, competency-based learning core; (4) experiential learning opportunities; (5) soft skills development; and (6) student support/coaching. What should be changed about, or added to, this model?

What details from the UMass Online, edX, Western Governors University, and Duet presentations in June, and the Partners HealthCare/College for America presentation in May, are most useful in thinking about lifelong learning programs for working learners and opportunity youth with some college/no degree or no college?

How should the Commission think about cost models for lifelong learning programs? What do you think a lifelong learning program should cost for learners, and cost to deliver?

Committee Three: Institutional Partners in the Massachusetts System

July 31 meeting time: 2pm – 4 pm, at Commonwealth Corporation

Members: Dowling, Horn, Kilburn, London, Meservey, Mondejar, Royal, Sarris

Core charge:

- Identify and articulate what different institutional partners would bring to this platform structure;
- Identify and articulate what different institutional partners would need from this platform structure;
- Clarify how institutional partners might work with the platform to support the development of a coherent system of lifelong learning.

Questions for Committee Three:

How do you envision the entity *you* represent contributing to a system of lifelong learning in Massachusetts? What is your entity ready to do now?

What would your entity need in order to participate in a Massachusetts system of lifelong learning most effectively?

What would your entity be willing to commit to (i.e., data sharing/tracking, recognizing learners' experience from other partners in the system, etc.) in exchange for support from a lifelong learning platform?

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