

For online version of report see: <http://act-on-eval.impaqint.com>

Need for the ACT-On Program

The ACT-On grant addresses the need for high-quality retail leaders by attracting people to the industry and offering relevant, accessible, and accredited educational opportunities. The consortium of colleges funded by the grant identified that by focusing on retail, they provided an important opportunity for unemployed and underemployed adults in their regions. This need, and the opportunity for students, relates to the following issues:

- Retail's changing role in economy
- Labor Demand for retail jobs by (consortium) state
- Retail management salaries in surrounding areas of grant colleges

The retail sector constitutes one of the largest industries in the United States. With more than 15 million jobs, retail constitutes the U.S.'s largest employer, and accounts for more than 4 trillion dollars in annual revenue spread across 1 million stores.^[1] Within this sector, 3.4 million people work in grocery retail, which was the original industrial focus of the grant. The retail grocery industry in 2015 reported sales close to \$650 billion and net profits of \$9.75 billion.^[2] Grocery retail represents a diverse composition of stores that range in size, goods, and regional structure.

Technological Advances Require Higher Skilled workers

The workforce that comprises the retail industry (and the grocery industry in particular) is diverse and ever-changing.^[3] Retail stores must now contend with the encroachment of multi-national and online competitors, more sophisticated and informed customers, and an aging workforce.^[4] As a result, the industry has undergone many changes in technological sophistication and capabilities over the past 10 to 15 years. These changes have posed a significant challenge to businesses; particularly, businesses have struggled to find a skilled and quality retail workforce. The rapidly changing skills that employees need to succeed in retail jobs and the fact that those employees have low levels of postsecondary degree or certificate attainment places a strain on the pipeline of qualified retail managers. Additionally, the low level of education perpetuates the stereotype that the retail industry does not provide a viable career path and meaningful career to workers. The ACT-On grant intends to address these workforce challenges by enhancing the labor supply of high-quality retail managers.

Key Findings

- The retail sector comprises 15 million jobs and accounts for more than 4 trillion dollars in annual revenue.
- The grocery industry, alone, results in sales of close to \$650 billion and net profits of \$9.75 billion.
- Technological advances have created a significant challenge for businesses that seek to find a skilled and quality retail workforce.
- Low levels of educational attainment of many retail employees perpetuates the stereotype that the retail industry does not provide a viable career path and meaningful career for employees.

[1] <https://www.franchisehelp.com/industry-reports/retail-industry-report/>
http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/naics2_44-45.htm

[2] <http://www.fmi.org/research-resources/supermarket-facts>

[3] http://action.naacp.org/page/-/economic%20opportunity%20documents/Retail_Race_Divide_Rename.pdf

[4] Basker, Emek. (2005). *Job Creation or Destruction? Labor Market Effects of Wal-Mart Expansion*. *Review of Economics and Statistics* 2005 87:1, 174-183
<http://www.strategyand.pwc.com/media/file/Four-forces-shaping-competition-in-grocery-retailing.pdf>

The ACT-On Consortium aims to increase the number of trained and qualified retail managers to meet the rising labor demand. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), there were approximately 1.53 million first-line supervisors of retail sales workers employed across the United States in 2014.^[5] BLS projects first-line supervisors' employment will increase to 1.6 million by 2024, a 4.4 percent increase from 2014, which is slightly below the expected growth for all occupations across the country at 6.5 percent. Despite overall employment levels increasing slightly, BLS projects that slightly more than 411,000 job openings will occur from 2014 to 2024. This estimate includes job openings due to growth in the industry and the replacement needs that will result from workers retiring from or permanently leaving an occupation.

Labor demand for retail positions in the four states that the grant served—Alaska, California, Oregon, and Texas—was higher than the national average.

For this study, we have imported Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) hiring and earnings data from 2011 to 2015 for the counties in each of the four grant states. For each state and for each year, one can see the total number of jobs and the number of jobs per capita for each count. These data are displayed in the maps linked below.

Key Findings

- Nationally, BLS predicts that retail management positions will grow by 4.4 percent from 2014 to 2024; slightly below the national average of 6.5 percent growth rate ([see Exhibit 1 here](#)).
- In 2015, in Alaska, retail management hires in both raw and per capita terms are higher in the relatively more populated southern parts of the state, but average wages are higher in the more sparsely populated northern part of the state.
- From 2011 to 2015, in California, raw hirings were higher in the urban areas of Los Angeles, Sacramento, and San Francisco. However, more hirings per capita occurred in the more rural areas of Northern and Southern California.
- From 2011 to 2015, average earnings in the retail industry were highest in the more urban counties of Oregon, but more hirings per capita occurred in the southern, more rural counties.
- Both in raw numbers and per capita, the highest density of hirings in the Texas retail industry were focused around the urban centers in eastern Texas in 2015.

For a more detailed look at how retail labor demand has evolved, click above to open interactive labor demand and earnings maps of the grant college states

- [Alaska](#)
- [California](#)
- [Oregon](#)
- [Texas](#)

[5] BLS Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) Code 41-1011 First-line supervisors of retail sales workers

Estimates related to retail management salaries vary depending on the data source and the job title. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, median annual wages for first line supervisors at the national level in 2015 were \$38,310 or \$18.42/hour. Other data sources, for instance www.glassdoor.com (a popular salary aggregation website), estimate that national median average salaries for retail store managers is around \$45,000.

Key Findings

- According the BLS, employees in first line supervisor positions earn on average about \$2000 above the national median wage annually.
- Salary estimates vary greatly depending on job title and store type.
- Salaries for retail positions in all consortium states are above national averages.

- Retail manager positions can be offered salaries near \$80,000, and retail district managers have reported salaries up to \$113,000.

[Learn more >](#)

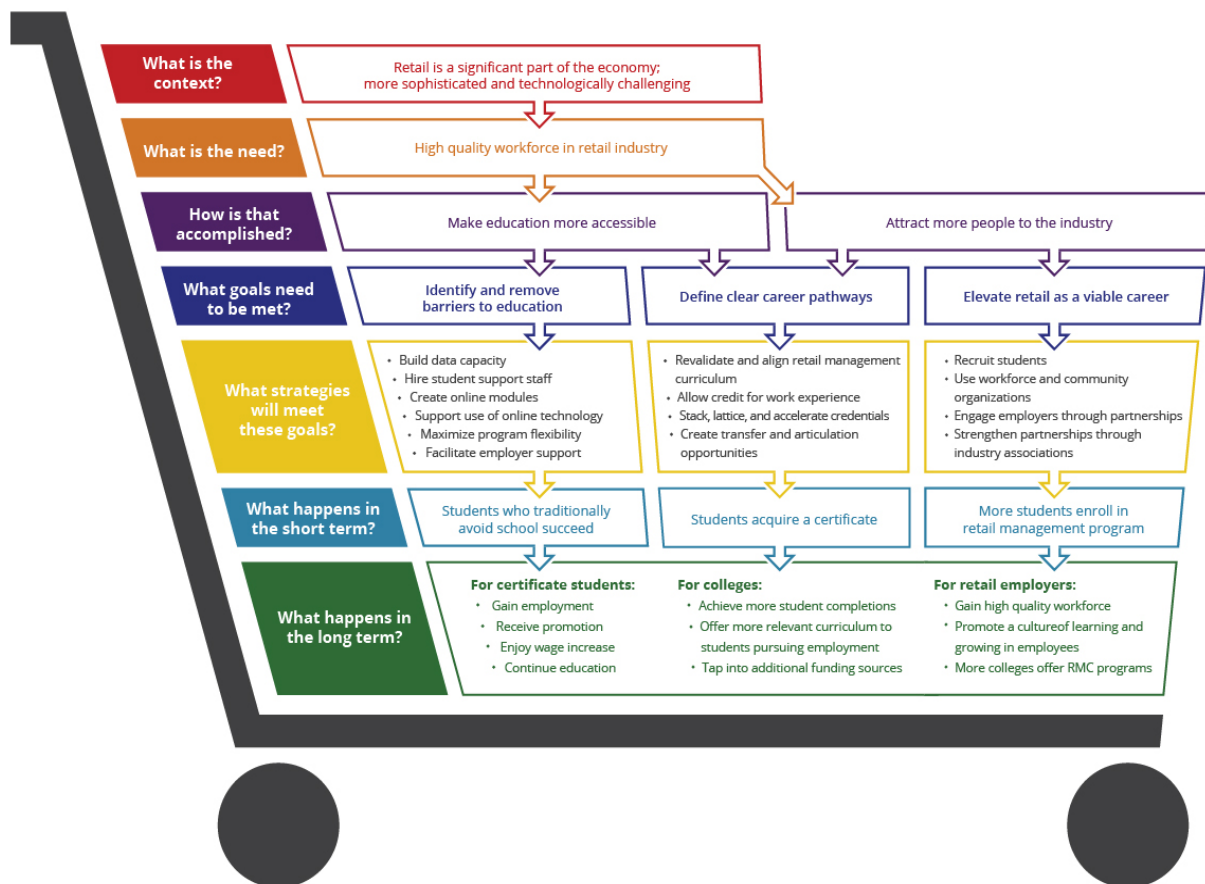
In this section we present the following information:

- [The ACT-On Retail Management Certificate Program](#)
- [The ACT-On Consortium of Colleges](#)
- [Program at a Glance](#)
- [Cost Analysis](#)
- [All About TAACCCT](#)

The ACT-On Retail Management Certificate program was created in 2000 by the Western Association of Food Chains and was originally targeted to employees in the grocery

industry. The certificate program consists of 8 to 10 college level courses that address competencies and student outcomes needed to ensure a high quality retail workforce.

In the 2012-13 academic year, the Department of Labor (DOL) funded a consortium of four colleges through the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) program to strengthen and expand the RMC program. DOL designed the grant program to make education more accessible and simultaneously to attract more highly qualified workers to the industry. The program offered strategies to identify and remove barriers to education, define clear career pathways, and elevate retail as a viable career. The colleges used multiple strategies to meet these goals including hiring career coaches, developing online curricula, creating a system of stackable credentials, and engaging retail employer partners. The full range of strategies are highlighted in the theory of action model below.





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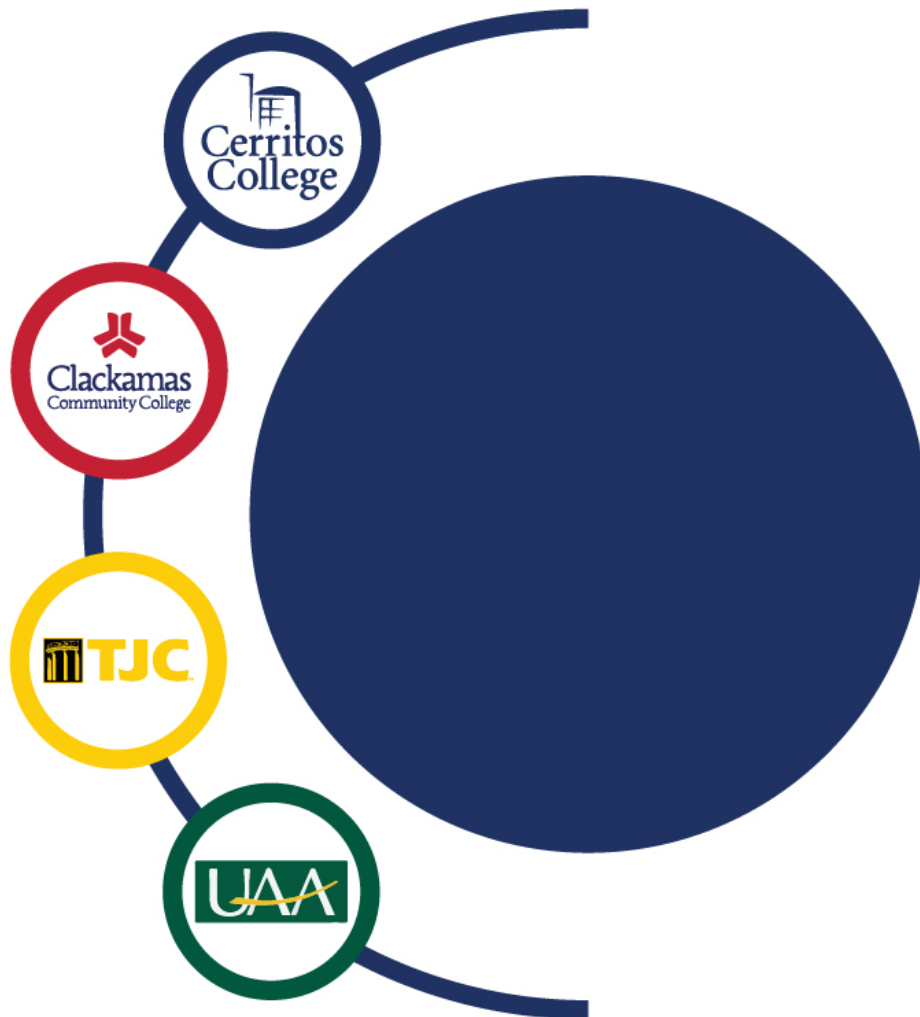
ACT-On stands for the Alaska, California, Texas—Oregon National) Retail Management Careers Consortium.

Tyler Junior College, University of Alaska Anchorage, Cerritos College, and Clackamas Community College make up the consortium of colleges that DOL chose as Round 2 TAACCCT grant recipients to implement the retail management certificate on their respective campuses. Together, they received \$12 million to *"build the capacity of the colleges to train Trade Adjustment Assistance-eligible and other adult workers for new*

careers in grocery retail management through an industry-endorsed curriculum and credential that is highly valued in the grocery industry and will bring multiple employment opportunities."

The grant's period of performance was from October 1, 2012 to September 30, 2015, with a fourth year for participant follow-up and evaluation.

Consortium colleges started the grant at different stages of implementation. Two colleges, Cerritos and Clackamas, already had established programs. They sought to expand the program to reach more employers and serve a wider group of students to include un- and under-employed individuals. TJC and UAA were just at the beginning stages of offering the RMC credential when the grant began. **Select a college on the left to learn more about each college's program.**



- **Business**

Department chair and faculty were strong advocates of the program• Industry partner approached them about implementing the RMC program• Most of the participating students were working with one employer, Brookshire's, and this college/employer relationship deepened over time

Costs of the ACT-On Program

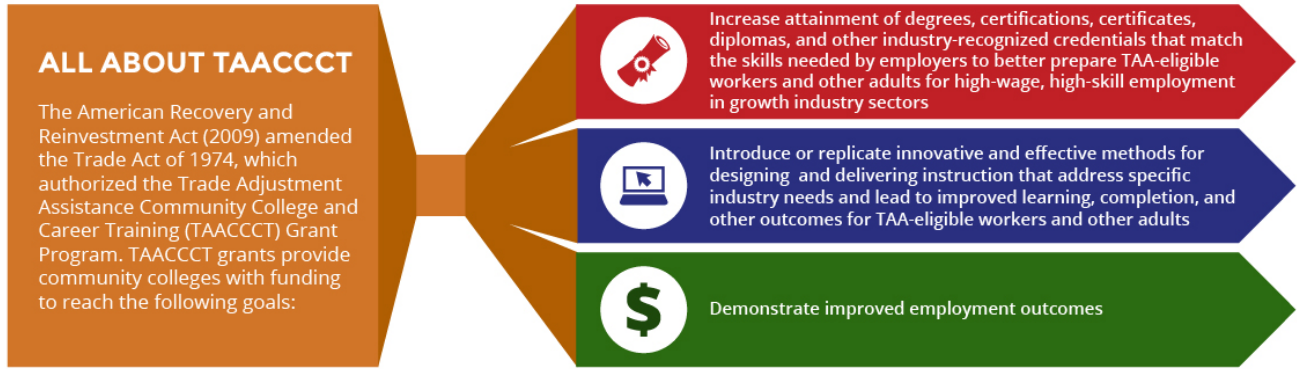
The cost study examines program-related costs by comparing budgeted expenditure to actual expenditure. Program-related costs include administrative costs and leveraged resources. Administrative costs can include expenditures on personnel and supplies, and other expenditure items such as communications, insurance, lease, and utilities.

We examine the cost of the ACT-On program per enrolled student in each college. These analyses will shed light on how the various colleges, and the grant as a whole, deviated from planned expenditures. The per student analyses also provide a crude estimate of the cost of educating each student.

Sources of Program-Related Costs

The main data source for the cost study is the ACT-On Budget and Expenditure Report provided by the lead institution, Tyler Junior College (TJC).

[Learn more >](#)



Source: https://www.doleta.gov/grants/pdf/taaccct_sga_Final.pdf

The ACT-On grant sought to make education more accessible to students interested in retail management careers. While the program included students who were employed, under-employed, and unemployed, college students face similar barriers regardless of employment status. These barriers may include having a busy schedule, being confused or overwhelmed by the process of enrolling, or lacking the funds to pay for school expenses. ACT-On

colleges tried to identify and remove barriers that students' faced using through the following strategies:

- **Build Data Capacity**—Increase data collection efforts to identify, recruit, and provide supportive services to students
- **Hire Student Support Staff**—Hire staff to serve as advisors to navigate students through the entire process of getting a Retail Management Certificate at a community college
- **Create Online Modules**—Develop curriculum that can be accessible to everyone interested in the RMC program
- **Support Use of Online Technology**—Use technology in the classroom to fully engage and reach students who have diverse learning styles
- **Maximize Program Flexibility**—Use a variety of strategies to enhance flexibility for students to fit school in their busy lives
- **Facilitate Employer Support**—Encourage employers to support their employees and encourage them to participate

Goal and Strategy

One important way for colleges to identify barriers that impede students' education is a comprehensive data collection system. Each college in the consortium was required to create a data collection and analysis system that would enable them to accurately assess the program's design and outcomes, and provide them with relevant and timely information for continuous improvement. The strategy was also intended to improve each college's institutional data capacity.

Key Findings

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One of the big insufficiencies that the college had was data. There were some **very big gaps in our data and research capacity**. Had it not been for the ACT-On grant, we would not be

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even close to where we are today.

- Dean

- Data provided important recruitment information to career coaches.
- The academic data helped departmental and grant staff identify difficult classes; they and used this information to counsel students to switch the order of classes to increase students' success.
- This strategy supported the third party evaluator (TPE)'s data collection for continuous improvement reports and the final evaluation.
- Accessing student wage data was a particular challenge for two of the colleges.

- Complexities and lack of clarity on the definitions of terms such as 'participant,' 'completion,' and 'exit' led to different types of reporting across the four colleges.
- Some colleges encountered institutional resistance to access students' academic data.
- Level of effort required by the unique requirements of the grant and staff turnover hindered success.
- Colleges had different degrees of success influencing college-wide data collection.

Sustainability

- Data collection systems that the grant developed are not sustainable.
- TJC, Cerritos, and Clackamas were able to turn their data analysts into full-time, permanent employees within their institutional research departments.
- TJC will implement a college-wide data system designed to support student advising called "Who's Next" and will continue querying reports called "Near Completers."
- Cerritos is piloting a data system called "**Viridis**" that collects student information and helps provide job search guidance to students based on their certificate attainment and other background information.

[Learn more >](#)

Goal and Strategy

Students often find college hard to navigate, from registration, to selecting the best classes for their career path, to understanding processes required before they can receive certificates or degrees. To address these barriers, the ACT-On program funded student support personnel, referred to in the grant as 'career coaches,' to promote student success.

Key Findings

- In-depth advising and counseling services, which one college referred to as 'concierge' service to students, were considered invaluable to students.
- Flexibility in defining the role to build on skills of staff contributed to the success of this strategy.
- Department chairs were instrumental in supporting these student services.
- Block enrollment was an efficient method to enroll cohorts of students.
- Employers preferred having one point of contact at the school.

Sustainability

- Overall, the student support strategy was considered one of the least sustainable elements of the program.
- Employers, through their HR departments, might be able to take on the role of student support staff.
- Each college is addressing sustainability differently.

[Learn more >](#)

Goal and Strategy

To make education more accessible and to facilitate the creation of more RMC programs across the nation, the ACT-On grant proposed to develop an online curriculum for each RMC class. Once completed, the colleges would make the class curricula publicly available so that other colleges could pick up and use the curricula as easily as possible.

Key Findings

- Many faculty members and grant staff expressed mixed opinions on the relative success of the process and products that resulted from this strategy. Disagreement was in part due to different interpretations of the goal of the final product: some believed the online classes should be complete courses, and others believed they should be supplemental materials.
- Faculty considered the courses to be useful as supplemental material, and as a resource to add ideas and activities to their classes.
- When viewed as stand-alone courses, faculty believed that the modules lacked rigor, were too brief to be engaging, and did not provide comprehensive review of each topic.
- Faculty, college leadership, and grant staff expressed concerns that promoting the use of the modules would infringe on academic freedom.
- Faculty members reported that writing in teams across the consortium was a difficult experience.
- Opinions varied on the ease of use and accessibility of SoftChalk.
- After the experts reviewed the modules, a faculty member discovered copyright law issues that required extensive, unforeseen follow-up.
- The assessment piece that was originally planned as part of the online courses was not completed.
- By the end of the grant, grant and college staff agreed that professional organizations should develop online curriculum rather than college faculty.

Sustainability

- Curriculum for each of the eight RMC courses is available to the public.
- Curricula potentially will be out of date unless they are taken 'under the care' of another organization.

[Learn more >](#)

Goal and Strategy

Under the overarching goal of increasing access to RMC classes through online and technology-enabled learning, the grant proposed two strategies: 1) create and align on-line curriculum that builds on core competencies; and 2) provide support for faculty to teach classes online. This section explores the training activities implemented to support faculty and encourage them to incorporate more technology in their classrooms, and promising online practices identified by RMC faculty and students.

Key Findings

- Faculty who were familiar with the teaching academy modules viewed them favorably; however, the modules were not publicized well.
- Faculty who attended grant-funded training found that it was valuable and wished for more training opportunities.
- Although faculty appreciated the grant-funded training, many thought that their institution's training on online teaching was just as helpful.
- RMC students identified the classroom activities that they found most useful in keeping them and their peers engaged in the RMC classes, whether offered in-person or online.
- Faculty and students identified the following categories of best practices to ensure that online classes were as useful as in-person classes:
 - Giving students in online classes greater opportunity for personal connections;
 - Facilitating student collaboration;
 - Motivating student engagement; and,
 - Enhancing support systems.

Sustainability

- Teaching Academy Modules will continue to be available to the public, but use is uncertain.
- Online technology at the colleges will continue to be incorporated in classes.

[Learn more >](#)

Goal and Strategy

This certificate attracts many students who are employed before they begin the program. Because of this, employed students face barriers related to the schedule and location of classes. To address these barriers, the ACT-On colleges worked with their schools' leadership and employers to provide as much flexibility as possible for students, both working students and unemployed students. Schools offered condensed classes (full courses over shorter period of time), online and hybrid instructions, and face-to-face classes at satellite or employer locations.

Key Findings

- Students and faculty agreed that the condensed classes were both convenient and rigorous enough to replace a typical length class.
- Many students would not have been able to complete the program without on-site classes and online options.
- Some target populations, in particular TAA-eligible and veterans, found it difficult to meet a college semester schedule.
- Several participants would have preferred night classes so that they could still attend in-person classes that align with their work schedules.
- Optional hybrid classes, in which students had the option to choose weekly whether they would attend face-to-face or online classes, were considered to be very useful for working students.
- Each type of class format had pros and cons; students tended to prefer the face-to-face classes but recognized the convenience of and need for the online options.

Sustainability

- Grant staff and employers were optimistic that many of these practices will continue after the grant.
- Employers wanted to continue to provide space for classes at their locations.
- Community colleges increasingly offer various modes of instruction; colleges will continue to offer a variety of formats beyond the grant.

[Learn more >](#)

Goal and Strategy

One way to accomplish the retail industry's need for a high quality workforce is to make education more accessible not only for unemployed students, but for working learners as well. Students who are trying to work while also attending college experience a host of barriers to their education. These barriers include the cost of education (including textbooks and tuition) and balancing their school and work schedules. The ACT-On grant attempted to identify and remove these barriers by facilitating employer support.

Key Findings

- Students were encouraged when their companies offered formal recognition of their graduation of the program.
- Tuition reimbursement makes a positive difference.
- Covering the costs of textbooks reduced financial barriers to education.
- Employers emphasized the need for colleges to creatively support registration and tuition payments.
- Employers who encouraged the RMC program from the top down experienced culture shifts towards education.

- Although some employers accommodated student schedules, others did not, and this negatively affected students' success.
- Open sharing of ideas can enhance or hamper students' experiences in cohort classes that contain students from only one company.

Sustainability

- Employer support from Western Association of Food Chains (WAFC) companies is likely to continue.

[Learn more >](#)

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It starts out with a **retail management certificate** but it is the **catalyst for their entire future, especially if they've never gone to school**. It starts with being at the job to pay for gas and go on dates and they're **not ever considering that this might be a career path for them**. Until they get tapped on the shoulder, get the RMC, get promoted, and now they're making more

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money than you can make in a career position with a bachelor's degree.

To make education more accessible and to attract more people to the retail industry, the RMC program needed to define clear career pathways. With clear pathways, students were able to map out, plan for, and accomplish their academic and career goals. The ACT-On colleges provided students with pathways by doing the following:

- **Revalidate and Align Retail Management Curriculum**—engage with industry partners to ensure the curriculum is relevant to current needs of the retail industry
- **Allow Credit for Work Experience**—work with colleges to ensure students who have work experience receive credit for it
- **Stack, Lattice, and Accelerate Credentials**—stack credits together horizontally and vertically to make sure students can maximize success and pursue related interests at an accelerated rate
- **Create Transfer and Articulation Opportunities**—make sure students have clear pathways to pursue education beyond community college offerings

Goal and Strategy

To attract more qualified workers to the retail industry and to make education more accessible, the grant helped to define clear career pathways by re-validating and aligning the curriculum. The process included engaging industry and education experts in intensive reviews of the existing curriculum to ensure that it was high quality, relevant, and matched the most current needs of the retail industry.

Key Findings

- Employers and college leaders identified 15 competencies that were directly relevant to a successful career in retail management.
- Colleges found it reasonably easy to align their curriculum successfully to the 15 competencies and related course outcomes.
- In few cases, the capstone ‘Retail Management’ course needed to be added to college offerings.
- Most interviewees agreed on the relevancy of the competencies but had never seen the list before.
- This strategy offers a high degree of sustainability.

Sustainability

- WAFC will remain dedicated to ensuring competencies are relevant to the retail management industry.
- The curriculum has been aligned at the colleges so they will continue using it.

[Learn more >](#)

Goal and Strategy

To accelerate education and training for students who have work experience, DOL encouraged colleges to provide college credit for knowledge gained through workplace experiences. Referred to as Credit for Prior Learning (CPL) and Prior Learning Assessment (PLA), this strategy has the potential to save certificate seekers time and money, and improve enrollment and completion rates for the colleges that accept them.

Key Findings

- Faculty and career coaches reported that CPL/PLA was rarely used.
- Students were unaware of the opportunity to use CPL/PLA.
- Reasons for infrequent use of CPL/PLA included the following:
 - Schools did not advertise or promote the PLA/CPL process to students.
 - The PLA/CPL process was considered cumbersome, unclear, and varied across departments on campuses.
 - Taking a class to develop an e-portfolio for PLA was not seen as a time or cost-effective option.
 - Concern that credit earned from CPL/PLA may not be transferrable to four-year colleges.
 - Colleges encountered institutional resistance; reducing the number of credits required also reduces the college's tuition revenue.

Sustainability

Although the grant's full intent of CPL/PLA strategy was not met during the grant period, most of the colleges acknowledged that the DOL requirement did push their colleges (and in some cases, state Departments of Education) to get the conversation started. By the end of the grant, most of the colleges were taking steps towards getting a standardized CPL/PLA in place.

[Learn more >](#)

Goal and Strategy

Creating a system of stacked and latticed credentials is essential to attract students to the retail industry and support their ability to succeed in college. Stackable credentials are a sequence of credentials that students can accumulate over time to enhance their qualifications. Portable and stackable credentials allow students to quickly achieve industry

certification at a community college that can lead directly to employment or promotion, and improve the quality of the workforce in the retail industry.

Key Findings

- Offering a credential that provided college credit in a short amount of time not only encouraged students to complete the RMC credential, but also inspired them to continue their education further.
- Colleges experienced red-tape and delayed processes in trying to change policies to facilitate these strategies.
- The availability of classes for students to take is crucial to support students' success.
- Students saw the value in accelerated classes.
- Faculty expressed mixed views on compressed/accelerated classes.

Sustainability

- The stacking and laticing plans will remain after the grant and offer a high level of sustainability.
- Increased class offerings will continue, although not at the same level as during the grant.
- Condensed classes will continue.

[Learn more >](#)

Goal and Strategy

This program intended to create opportunities for retail students to continue their education. In contrast to many other career-based programs, the RMC program requires that all of the classes be offered for credit. Students then have the option to pursue a two-year, four-year, and potentially even an advanced degree. To facilitate students' opportunities, colleges were to create formal agreements known as articulation agreements with regional and online schools that offer appropriate programs for these students so that they could build on courses completed for the RMC program and continue their education.

Key Findings

- The transfer and articulation agreements were designed to save RMC students money and make it easier for them to transfer to four-year schools.
- Contrary to the outcomes study findings, qualitative interviews suggest that many students were interested in continuing their education at the end of the RMC program.
- Faculty members also had contradictory assumptions about the future aspirations of their students.
- Students preferred to transfer to local colleges rather than transfer to online-based WGU.

- Faculty did not advertise or promote the opportunity for students to transfer to WGU.
- Colleges' structures of different types of associate degrees may have discouraged some students from transferring.

Sustainability

MOUs remain in place and negotiations during the grant may support future efforts for the colleges.

[Learn more >](#)

To ensure a high quality workforce in the retail industry, the ACT-On colleges needed to attract more people to the industry. The program addressed this by promoting retail both locally and nationally as an attractive career that has high wages and requires diverse skills. Elevating retail as a viable career required the following strategies:

- **Recruit Students**—market to remove the 'stigma' and misconceptions of retail to students and faculty
- **Use Workforce and Community Organizations**—reach out to workforce and other community agencies to recruit non/under-employed adults

- **Engage Employers through Partnerships**—partner with employers to ensure that the certificate remains relevant and addresses the current needs of retail employers in the region
- **Strengthen Partnerships through Industry Associations**—build strong partnerships with associations, in particular the Western Association of Food Chains (WAFC) and the Food Marketing Institute (FMI), to reach a national audience and ensure sustainability

Goal and Strategy

To attract and train a high quality workforce, the ACT-On colleges conducted on-campus outreach and built on their relationships with employers and workforce/community partners in their area to recruit students.

Key Findings

- To attract more students, grant staff emphasized a focus on business instead of retail.
- Recruitment of displaced workers and TAA eligible individuals was challenging because retail salaries did not match the salaries that most of these workers earned when they lost their jobs.
- On campus recruiting was an effective way to gain participants.
- Limited resources hindered success at UAA.
- Colleges found success using staff who focused on one group of potential participants.
- Despite recruiting efforts, many students remained unaware of the RMC program.

Sustainability

- Much of the sustainability of recruitment rests on the departments within the community colleges and the employer partnerships they established.

[Learn more >](#)

Goal and Strategy

In order to help attract, train, and place TAA eligible and other dislocated workers into retail management careers, the consortium colleges were to partner with community organizations and the public workforce systems to get students training through the RMC program.

Key Findings

- Across the consortium, workforce partners were not likely to promote the RMC program.
- Many TAA-eligible individuals were not interested in retail as a career.
- By partnering with Goodwill and other community organizations, Cerritos was able to recruit and provide supportive services to veterans.
- Previous experience with workforce agencies, as in the case of Clackamas, facilitated stronger working relationships.

Sustainability

- The Goodwill program at Cerritos will be sustained.
- A former career coach at Clackamas was hired by the local workforce center ensuring a high chance of sustainability.

[Learn more >](#)

Goal and Strategy

The RMC program was initiated by the WAFC in 2000 and has been supported by employers from its beginning, started by the WAFC, in 2001. The ACT-On grant sought to leverage the existing employer relationships and expand the program to other employers in their regions. By strengthening ties with employers, colleges would be able to recruit working learners into their program as well as have those connections necessary for students interested in gaining employment.

Key Findings

- Employers were dedicated to having employees at all levels participate in the program.
- Employers provided incentives for students to complete the RMC.
- The RMC program provided employers with a college-educated workforce.
- UAA employers viewed RMC students as a pool to recruit from.
- Colleges struggled to engage non-grocery employers.
- For successful employer engagement outside WAFC companies, hiring dedicated staff is crucial.
- WAFC-affiliated employers and colleges shared similar opinions on the value of the RMC program.

Sustainability

- Colleges with faculty "champions" of the program will continue the employer relationships that were built during the grant period.
- Employer staff who serve as adjunct faculty will help sustain the employer/community college partnership.
- In some companies, HR representatives at employers will take on the role of 'career coach' at their companies.

- The WAFC will facilitate continued engagement between employers and community colleges.

[Learn more >](#)

Goal and Strategy

Two important strategies to attract people to the industry were to (1) build on the work of the Western Association of Food Chains (WAFC) to continue to strengthen employer/community college partnership, and (2) partner with Food Marketing Institute (FMI) to convene a National Summit on Retail Management Careers. By using these associations, the RMC program could be marketed much more effectively to employers and community colleges.

Key Findings

- WAFC served as a strong advocate and champion of the program.
- Re-validation of the curriculum by employers, which was led by the WAFC, added to the legitimacy of the certificate.
- Advisory meetings facilitated by WAFC were generally seen as important but some employers questioned whether colleges were able to be responsive to employers' needs.
- The **RMC website** served as a marketing resource for colleges and employers.
- WAFC was committed to the requirement that RMC courses be required 'for credit,' which sometimes resulted in conflict between colleges and employers that were interested in the program, but were not completely convinced that academic credit was essential for the program to be useful.
- WAFC served somewhat as the accountability organization, which kept the RMC program uniform across campuses.
- The National RMC Summit, convened by FMI, was successful in getting several new community colleges on board and promoting toolkits for implementation.

Sustainability

- WAFC and FMI will continue to be advocates for the RMC program after the grant ends.
- Community colleges and employers will continue to be recruited to promote the certificate.
- WAFC's website will continue to be updated with resources that students, community colleges, and employers can use to learn more about and market the program.
- Toolkits targeted towards colleges, retailers, and state associations that provide guidance on how to implement the RMC program will continue to be marketed on WAFC's and FMI's websites.

[Learn more >](#)

Goal

The ACT-On RMC program was designed to provide students with a certificate that would prepare more adults for employment, raise their wage income, and possibly prepare them for continuing their education. To assess the success of the program in achieving these goals, we answer the following research questions in this section:

- [What were the characteristics of the students who participate in the ACT-On program?](#)
- [What were the student expectations of the program? To what extent did the students perceive that their expectations had been met?](#)
- [What were the education and employment outcomes of the ACT-On participants? How did outcomes compare to those of other students within the same college?](#)

Understanding the demographics of the ACT-On participants not only helps us understand who was attracted to the program, but also provides useful context for interpreting outcomes.

We examine age, TAA status, employment status, education level, race, ethnicity and gender of participants.

Key Findings:

- ACT-On participants were on average 6.3 years older than other certificate students at the colleges.
- In all colleges but one, most students had been previously employed.
- Very few TAA workers were enrolled, even though this was a stated purpose of the grant.
- The racial, ethnic, and gender makeups of each college cohort resembled the general population of that area.

[Learn more >](#)

Goal

The ACT-On program was based on the premise that a clear education pathway to a competency-based certificate would improve individuals' skills and lead to job attainment, wage increase, and/or promotion. IMPAQ conducted student surveys at two points of time—soon after enrollment and after graduation—to assess expectations and perceptions of program outcomes.

Key Findings

- Completers of the program generally perceived themselves to have modestly increased their proficiency in all 14 ACT-On competencies.
- Students had positive perceptions of the potential value of the ACT-On program when they started, and graduates of the program retained that positive perception for the most part.
- At entry, students were generally positive about ACT-On improving their prospects for promotion to management positions. However, after graduation, a lower share of students agreed with statements about ACT-On's effect on an employer's likelihood to promote.

- Overall, 20 percent of students reported they were able to transfer academic credit into the program, though substantially higher proportions of students at TJC and UAA were able to than at the other two colleges (44 percent and 58 percent, respectively).

[Learn more >](#)

Goal

The ACT-On grant aimed to encourage individuals to complete an 8 course ‘for credit’ academic program to earn a Retail Management Certificate (RMC). Not only is the program designed to increase employment opportunities, but also leave the door open for students to continue their education. We also compared the outcomes of ACT-On students to students in other certificate programs at the ACT-On colleges.

Key Findings

- Completion rates in the program were low, as 12 percent of participants received an ACT-On credential within the evaluation time frame.
- Of the completers, 11.6% continued on to a four-year program.
- The average time for students to complete the RMC program across the consortium was nine months; however, this varied significantly by college.
- Approximately one-third of all completers reduced the number of classes required by applying prior academic credit to the program.
- 80% of students retained their employment throughout the program and 31% of unemployed enrollees gained employment.
- Mean wages tended to increase from before enrollment to after completion.
- The percentage of students with no earnings fell by a marginal amount across the course of the program.
- Students with some college experience and students who were unemployed at enrollment were less likely to complete the RMC program within the grant period compared to participants with a high school diploma or less.
- Students with some college education experienced greater wage increases 4 quarters after enrollment than students with only a high school diploma or lower. This was true for all participants as well as those who completed the course.

[Educational Outcomes >](#)

[Employment Outcomes >](#)

[Other Analyses >](#)

“ ”
The students who were already in retail did get **promoted**.

“ ”
It gave them **confidence** that they could **attend college**.

“ ”
The one who were not in retail **felt confident** that they could participate in those type of
”
occupations.

“

”

If you go online for a job search, it's going to say **education required**.

“

They have a skillset and a **strong sense of business acumen**, which I don't think all students

”

have.

“

It puts them above all other students or other unemployed people **looking for jobs** that

”

don't have any kind of certificate or training.

“

”

My company offered up a **scholarship** for any employee **seeking higher education**.



Working toward an eight-course certificate can help students gain confidence in educational opportunities

Many students we talked with shared that they were nervous or reluctant to go back to college. However, because the commitment was relatively small—eight courses—and the outcome was concrete and immediately useful—an industry recognized certificate—students were willing to take the risk. After they started classes, they discovered that college was not as difficult as they had imagined. Students talked fondly of doing homework next to their own kids, and feeling proud of the grades they made. Others shared that they hoped to continue their education later, and were excited that program laid the groundwork.

Having the opportunity to gain additional certificates, by taking just a few more classes, also increased their feelings of success.

The Retail Management Certificate (RMC) may give students an edge in hiring and promotion decisions.

We consistently heard employers talk about the increased opportunities that an RMC student could receive, including preference in hiring, promotion, and wage increases. Employers are willing to offer these incentives to participants and completers because the RMC teaches skills that employers believe are crucial to successful careers in retail management.

Students already employed in retail but want to move forward may be able to get financial and other types of support from their employers.

We observed many different types of support that employers were willing to give to their employees who wanted to improve their job opportunities in the company. Types of support that employers provided students in this program include tuition, reimbursement for books (or instituted a textbook borrowing program), flexible work schedules, formal praise through events or company newsletters, and opening space on their location for onsite classes. Employers saw the benefit of a more educated workforce, and often have funds to support their employees.

Student support services are most effective when colleges ensure that students are aware of the services and seek them out.

Nearly all students we interviewed explained the importance and value of student support staff in helping them reach their goals through the variety of services offered. For students to receive these services, whether from a designated RMC counselor or an academic advisor, colleges should continue to promote these services so that students are aware of the opportunities that can help them succeed. Additionally, student support staff noted that most of the time, they had to reach out to students via email, text, and phone calls. If the colleges promote the role of the student support staff, then students can begin to seek services more independently.

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“ “ It gives them an **edge** when it comes time to **possible job promotions.** ” ”

“ “ We're giving them the **opportunity to build** on the **skills** they already have. ” ”

“

We want to have an **educated workforce** so we can continue to be **competitive** with other

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"We want to have an **educated workforce** so we can continue to be **competitive** with other employers in the industry."

"Having the retail management certificate makes one a lot more **well-rounded** and **more prepared** for taking the next step in their career."

The RMC program teaches skills directly relevant to retail management.

Because retail employers were directly involved in the curriculum validation and alignment process, it ensures that an RMC graduate learns the material relevant to the ever-changing retail management industry. This relevancy ensures a high quality workforce for employers

who want to stay competitive and nurture talent, externally and internally. Additionally, a college-level education can enhance in-house training programs by the increased depth of skills and competencies students learn.

Employers can promote the program to employees in several different ways.

Interviewees repeatedly mentioned two promising ways that employers can encourage and support their employees throughout the RMC program: (1) creating culture shifts within the organization to place emphasis on higher education—this was done by advertising the program throughout the company and formally acknowledging graduates; and (2) giving financial support in the form of tuition and textbook reimbursement. Employers spoke at length about the benefits of a college-educated workforce to their business.

Successful RMC programs rely on a strong partnership between employers and colleges.

For an RMC program to succeed, colleges and employers need to collaborate in a way that enables consistent communication and an opportunity for creative problem solving. Often, this occurred through a point person at the company (usually someone associated with HR or training) with direct connections and communication with someone at the college—often a business department chair or a college advisor. Employers often described the registration process as the most difficult for their employees; having someone at the company who knows the procedures and dates and can advise interested employees can greatly increase the chances of a successful start to the program. Employers can also provide feedback to colleges by attending advisory meetings so that colleges can hear their input and working alongside the advising offices to get their student employees' needs met.

“ “ Investigate **why you want the RMC** program and its value. ” ”

“ “ I would talk to the **students in business [departments]** and see if there is **interest** for it. ” ”

“ “ **Talk to the industry members** about how they see the **value** of the program. ” ”

“ “ It really helps to have **support of the industry** behind it. ” ”

“ “ You need the **buy-in of faculty**, typically maybe a **dean** and a **program chair**. ” ”

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“ Have the [college] **administration's support**. Period.

” You need to have a **really strong relationship** whomever in doing **employer outreach** and

the traditional business department so there is communication.

“ We've seen our students be **more successful** because we try to connect them to the

appropriate support services on our campus.

“

Having a **positive relationship with companies** that are going to **hire your students** is a

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“

”

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Three types of buy-in are necessary: college, student, and industry.

Grant staff and faculty were generally enthusiastic about the opportunity that this program gave their colleges to attract new students (especially working ones) and its direct relevance to improving the quality of workforce for the retail industry in their communities. However,

having four colleges with four different contexts also helped identify some of the essential factors that need to be in place for the RMC program to be successful.

College buy-in: Staff across the colleges expressed the importance of making sure that faculty and college leadership are open to and enthusiastic about supporting an RMC program. This support is important because faculty members will be teaching and promoting the RMC on a daily basis and college leadership is responsible for making decisions that affect the program on a larger level. Colleges talked at length about needing to have a "champion" at each school who promotes and takes ownership of the RMC program. This "ownership" also relates to deciding which department can house the RMC program and offer the greatest chance for success. Colleges found success in situating the program in the business departments at their schools, as the program directly relates to business.

Student buy-in: Program managers suggested making sure that this is a program that interests students, which will ensure that there are students to actually take the classes and graduate from the program. Colleges suggested reaching out to typical business students to determine their receptivity.

Industry buy-in: Across the consortium, grant staff emphasized the need to ensure a significant amount of buy-in from potential industry partners, because the program is designed to help address their labor needs. Strong industry partners will send their employees to the program and hire graduates. This support is especially important to attracting students who want to know what opportunities they might have as an RMC graduate.

Aligning college curriculum to meet RMC requirements is relatively easy because community colleges usually already offer most or all the courses needed.

The eight courses required for the RMC credential are basic business and management classes. For a college to start a program, it needs to make sure that the courses are addressing the learning objectives of the competencies. The one course least likely to be taught is the retail management class, and at the time the grant ended, some colleges were considering creative ways to share that class with other surrounding community colleges. In addition, the ACT-On consortium and WAFC developed materials that are now available to those interested in avoiding "re-inventing the wheel". These materials include online modules that can serve as curriculum or a supplement, and as marketing and advising materials. These resources are available on retailmanagementcertificate.com.

Investing in student support staff is crucial for a successful program.

Students and grant staff attributed student success largely to the staff that guided them throughout the whole process. During the grant period, schools had designated staff to assist students. However, due to budget restrictions, this might not always be possible. Therefore, colleges addressed this issue by transferring their knowledge of the program to the employers' HR representatives so they can assist their employees. They accomplished the transfer by creating clear guidance manuals and identifying a college point person for the HR person. Colleges also trained in-house advisors and identified a faculty member formally responsible for the RMC program and advising students.

Grant and college staff agreed that online curriculum development would best be completed by professional organizations, rather than college faculty.

Grant staff and faculty from each of the colleges stated that a significant lesson learned was that online curriculum development should be left to professionals and not faculty. Interviewees said that while faculty might traditionally gather content for their courses, they are not generally prepared to develop the curriculum, especially in an online environment. Also, leaving the curriculum development to professionals would ensure a greater degree of sustainability as they would be able to update the curriculum long after the grant ends.

Some strategies that DOL intended Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) grantees to adopt were hindered by the climate at the community colleges.

Some colleges experienced difficulty implementing some strategies due, in part, to the greater climate at the college outside of the grant. As an example, the credit for prior learning/prior learning assessment (CPL/PLA) strategy was unable to gain traction in some of the colleges due to internal or state policies. Another example was realizing that successful programs must have the capacity to place students in employment, which might be more challenging for community colleges. One grant staff member recommended conducting a readiness assessment for colleges seeking grants to determine whether the community college would be receptive to such a program.

Data requirements for the evaluation presented challenges for colleges.

Wage data was a particular challenge for some states to collect. The best source for reliable wage data is Unemployment Insurance (UI) records. However, states have different rules on how and when this data can be shared with other institutions. In California and Alaska, the offices that hold this data only provide it in aggregate form; conducting the required analyses that involved individual-level data was not feasible. Data analysts, industry liaisons, and career coaches worked together to collect this data in other ways, but this ultimately resulted in missing data and an additional burden on staff.

Additionally, the data requirements for the evaluation required the colleges to set up "home-grown" data systems, often separate from their colleges' existing data systems. This data handling was burdensome and often resulted in less than ideal data.