



FORD PARTNERSHIP FOR ADVANCED STUDIES

Next Generation Learning 

Ford Partnership for Advanced Studies NEXT GENERATION LEARNING COMMUNITY Designation Process Revised: 3/20/2009

History

Ford Partnership for Advanced Studies (Ford PAS) curriculum and program was developed between 2000 and 2004 by Education Development Center and Ford Motor Company Fund. Initial implementation of the curriculum in school districts in several states suggested that schools found it challenging to engage business and other stakeholders in “coordinated learning experiences,” a key component of the curriculum.

Ford Fund provided a grant to Social Marketing Services, LLC (SMS) to study best practices in communities that had successfully engaged the business community to support scaling up and sustaining career-themed small learning communities or career academies. SMS believed that communities that had united in a belief that educational and workforce outcomes would benefit from the adoption of the career academy redesign model would also recognize the value of a project and inquiry based curriculum like Ford PAS.

The SMS study resulted in the identification of 12 best practices, each with several indicators of success. These were fashioned into a rubric to guide community leaders, both academic and business, in formulating a master plan to scale up and sustain successful career academy networks. The Ford PAS Next Generation Learning Community (Ford PAS NGLC) designation program was launched early in 2006.

As of the end of 2008, nine communities have been selected and designated as either “leadership level” or “prospective level” communities. These communities are described at the www.fordnglc.org web site. Full descriptions of each community are provided along with an array of resources that help new communities better understand each of the best practices.

While we focus the discussion around developing strong and sustainable career academy networks, it is important to note that this objective does not preclude other important career development tools. Quite the contrary. We strongly support career exploration in early grades, job shadowing, paid internships, adoption of curricula like Ford PAS, as well as business engagement programs such as “principal for a day.”

We emphasize the development of career academy networks because we have powerful data that illustrates the power of this high school redesign model to dramatically improve both educational and workforce outcomes. These outcomes are enhanced by the adoption of other career development tools.

Useful definitions

Career academies are career-themed smaller learning communities. To be successful, they embrace certain organizational essentials:

- Students are cohort scheduled with a team of teachers who have common planning time to share student observations and plan academic integration of the academy's contextual theme into the academic courses.
- Career academy leaders are provided with release time to plan and lead the academy activities.

Next Generation Learning Communities are communities that have adopted the of Ford PAS NGLC 12-Point Master Plan as their roadmap to guide their community in scaling up their career academy networks.

Leadership-level communities are those who, in our estimation, have accomplished all indicators in at least eight of the 12 best practices. We strongly believe that communities sharing this majority of best practices are likely to have built a substantial and broad-based reservoir of support that will sustain their career academy network over time, even through changes in business, intermediary, or district leadership which continually plague workforce and education improvement initiatives.

Leadership level communities become our mentoring force to drive the continuous improvement process and help new communities evolve to leadership level. As of December 2008, our leadership level designated NGLC communities include: Philadelphia, Sacramento City, Fort Myers, Daytona Beach, Putnam-North Westchester BOCES (tech center model), Mountain Home, AK (rural model). Pensacola and St. John's district (in Jacksonville, FL) will be designated in January 2009.

Prospective-level communities are those that meet our selection process (see below) and are willing to commit to developing a successful and sustained career academy network. As of December 2008, we have designated Pensacola, Chattanooga, and Coachella Valley, CA as prospective-level communities. We plan to designation Long Island, NY (through Long Island Works) in February 2009.

We don't have a hard and fast definition of the term "**community**." Ideally, the community will encompass a Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) with one or more school districts, and distinct workforce and economic development intermediaries.

Community Selection Criteria

- ***First and foremost, we seek to support communities who have committed stakeholders at the table and seek an organizational design/support to improve educational and workforce outcomes.*** Many communities fit this description and have been working together for years without realizing success because they lacked the right model or set of priorities.
- ***Second, we prioritize communities that we believe have the necessary cohesiveness to rapidly, within 24 months, achieve leadership level.*** This is important for two reasons. We recognize that the biggest threat is leadership turnover among stakeholders. Experienced individuals from leadership communities often become our mentoring force ready to help new prospective communities. We have been amazed and gratified at the willingness of such inspiring people to give of their time and energy to advocate on behalf of and support new communities.
- ***Third, we have focused a majority of our support to communities in launch states, (California, Florida, and Texas) where we are building state-wide networks.*** In communities not in these states, we can provide guidance, full access to the best practices on the web site, and introduction to communities that might provide mentoring services. In addition, we will list the technical assistance providers we fund in prioritized states who could be retained through local funding to provide the same services we fund in our targeted communities.

Community Selection Process

Once a community believes they meet the criteria and would like to be selected for designation, we begin a dialog aimed at carefully reviewing the 12 NGLC best practices. This review helps a community better understand the rationale behind each best practice, where they stand in terms of satisfying the indicators

of success, and the type of assistance they might ask for prior to and after the designation event. Some would describe these conversations as a needs assessment.

We may be able to assist in facilitating this discussion if the community believes outside facilitation would be useful in bringing the stakeholders to a consensus on goals.

The community is also in a better position to determine if they have the necessary stakeholders at the table and are collectively willing and interested in continuing toward designation. If so, we ask the community to provide us with the following information.

1. Select a community leader to act as our central point of contact. This person will facilitate community team meetings to plan and carry out the designation as well as the development of the community master plan which sets forth the community goals and the tactics to reach those goals.
2. Become familiar enough with the best practices to identify a list of needed technical assistance support they will need during the first year following designation.
3. Reached consensus on the percentage of high school students they believe their career academy network should serve within five years following designation. We understand that picking such a goal will be better informed through the development of a master plan. However, the community discussion around the establishment of a target surfaces a number of critical issues that all stakeholders will be better able to consider when a tangible outcome is put on the table.

With confirmation of this information, Ford Fund requests a letter from the community indicating the community's interest in obtaining the Ford PAS NGLC designation and support. Letter should be sent to Cheryl Carrier, Program Director, 21st Century Education Programs at Ford Motor Company Fund (ccarrier@ford.com). In that letter, the community should identify a primary contact who will serve as a liaison with the community through the designation event and beyond.

Pre-designation activities

Following our agreement to proceed, the most important activity is to select a Ford NGLC designation date. This is an important decision. The primary purposes of the event are to:

- clearly state the public purpose of the Ford NGLC initiative,
- win over the public in general and specific, targeted, new supporters, and,
- further strengthen the bonds between stakeholders behind this important objective.

Ford NGLC Designation events have served a variety of specific purposes. Some examples are:

- the launch event was the centerpiece of the community's workforce summit,
- the event served to announce a new executive engagement initiative,
- the event was aimed at reinvigorating the community's decision to aggressively develop their career academy network in prior years.

Ford Fund will also assign a communications professional to assist the community maximize the publicity outreach from the designation event. This individual will help coordinate publicity for most of our designations and will provide valuable input on how to maximize the value of the event with the media in the community. They will coordinate with individuals within the community who will also be developing publicity to collectively maximize the value of the event.

Conference calls are convened on a regular basis leading up to the designation event to ensure that all participants understand the flow of the event and are able to provide input.

Designation event

The Ford NGLC designation event is a celebration of the community's desire to change how its high school students are prepared for careers and college as well as a call to action. The event itself typically

takes place in a formal setting over the course of about 45 minutes. Several community leaders are asked to say a few words of support and a Ford spokesperson or representative delivers a 10 to 15 minute presentation that congratulates the community for taking this decisive step. If there are other sponsoring organizations, they too will have a chance to speak.

The Ford NGLC designation venue is often a high school, community center or hotel ballroom depending on the other activities taking place. We recommend staging the event as part of a day-long celebration that encourages the local press to better understand the career academy model. This may include:

- visits to high school career academies
- talks with career academy teachers, statistical presentations by district officials, and business leader panels whose participants discuss why their firms have decided to support this initiative,
- interviews with career academy students as to how this experience has changed their life or given them direction, etc.

Technical assistance in preparation for leadership re-designation

Ford Fund provides designated communities the technical support necessary to address the barriers many communities often experience as they seek to scale up the number of students learning in successful career academy networks. Ford Fund identifies and then pays for TA providers who have specific proven capabilities. Here are several categories of technical assistance to consider in planning your communities request.

- Alignment of business support. As the number of students learning in career academies increases, so does the complexity of aligning and coordinating business support. Failing to plan for the increase in scale tends to diminish the career academy experience for some portion of the student population. Best practices 2, 4, 8 and 10 relate to this topic. Technical assistance is provided by Ford Fund advisory team and leaders from communities who have successfully tackled these best practices.
- Master plan development. All best practices feed into the development of a successful master plan. This document establishes the NGLC goals and lays out the strategies for reaching these targets. It outlines the evolution of the career academy network and the milestones to reach stated goals. Technical assistance is provided by Ford Fund advisory team and leaders from communities who have completed their master plans.
- Career academy essentials. Several best practices, including numbers 3, 5, 6, 7, and 11, address the importance of establishing and maintaining high quality career academies. These best practices guide the community's understanding of district policies that it needs to support. Technical assistance is provided by Ford Fund advisory council members and experienced career academy practitioners who have agreements as Ford Fund TA providers.
- Relationships among stakeholders. Best practices 9 and 12 relate to communicating with community stakeholders like parents, local government and post secondary. Technical assistance is provided by Ford Fund communications contractors and members of leadership communities.

Re-designation as NGLC leadership community

As mentioned above, an important selection criteria is our belief that a community has that potential to rapidly assimilate the best practices and, within two years, is ready to become part of the mentoring team that is ready to assist other communities. We hope that leaders from communities like yours will become presenters at up-coming regional Ford NGLC Institutes and available as mentors to communities in your state and nationally. The Ford Fund hopes to continue to be in a position to underwrite these mentoring activities and will be joined by other funders who are like minded.