Synthesis Report: Arkansas Governor's Workforce Cabinet Design Thinking Workshop

Produced for the AR Department of Transformation and Shared Services by Research Improving People's Lives

June 2023

RIPL RESEARCH IMPROVING PEOPLE'S LIVES

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

As a part of RIPL's ongoing partnership with the State of Arkansas, RIPL's policy and product innovation leadership facilitated a workshop of a cross-functional group of Arkansas workforce system stakeholders and collaborators to support the State's efforts to develop a data-driven strategic plan to inform workforce development and career education goals. These goals are outlined in [Executive Order 23-16](#) signed by Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders and will be coordinated by the Governor's Workforce Cabinet and the Chief Workforce Officer.

The workshop, held in May 2023 gathered a diverse group of state, regional, and external stakeholders to ideate toward a holistic, intentional vision that improves outcomes for Arkansas residents and employers. During the course of the workshop, groups surfaced the following characteristics to take into consideration in the development of a data-driven strategic plan:

- **Digital experiences that are "No Wrong Door" and "One Stop", are easy to use, and point customers to predictive pathways.** Reduce the need for customers to "come to" each state entity to uncover services that support their needs. The notion of digital hubs were a key mechanism many groups considered for how to connect customers with wrap-around services as well as enable "human and technology service harmony."
- **Leverage data and AI to intelligently create and match employer and jobseeker "profiles".** Make it easy for candidates and employers to align on job *and training* placement matches through the use of digital credentials and "digital twin" profiles. At the same time, support jobseeker and trainee decision-making by revealing cost-benefit or ROI to pursuing specific paths.
- **Centralize data on the cloud** where it can be combined and linked to other agency data or leverage more timely data points. In the context of matching and recommending new career trajectories linkages or integration of the following data are high priority:
    - Employer-reported wage, occupation, or labor market information (LMI) data
    - Education data (student records / resumes)

Workshop Purpose and Approach

The purpose of the session was to affiliate and bring together for the first-time a cross-functional, cross-organizational group to ideate around a holistic, intentional vision that improves outcomes for AR residents – both those that are seeking work opportunities and those that would like to hire. The workshop approach drew from a method called [Design Thinking](#), an iterative approach for defining new concepts that centers the needs of target users.

Design Thinking is a human-centered approach to innovation, concept development, and solution definition. The method allows teams to uncover insights and opportunities by closely examining a target user's needs and intentions. It is an intentionally iterative process meant to enable continuous learning and ongoing testing to clarify key problems to be solved and to ensure solutions are solving the "right" problems. Design Thinking focuses teams on identifying the intersection of three key factors:

1. **Desirability:** the needs of people as well as the preferences, conditions, or context that influence user demand for a solution.
2. **Feasibility:** the ability of the solution to exist (be designed and built).
3. **Viability:** the possibilities of the solution and its ability to work and remain useful / desirable over time.

The Governor's Workforce Cabinet organizers developed five fictional personas for the session participants to reference, expand upon, and consider as a first step toward generating a data-driven strategic plan with which the state of Arkansas can innovatively deliver impact. The session and associated activities had three core objectives:

1. Build understanding of what each stakeholder brings to the table and how their unique assets can deliver value for Arkansas residents.
2. Identify a few common and pressing resident-centered problems to address.
3. Collaborate and ideate toward a vision statement that is grounded in how the convened group might uniquely address residents' and employers' needs.

Mapping the Room

The first activity focused on built understanding of the assets in the room and building connections for how the group could intentionally work toward employment outcomes in Arkansas *together*. Each organizational entity documented and introduced themselves via a purpose statement which framed in a common format, why each organization exists as well as what they are offering in Arkansas.

AR Ecosystem Stakeholder Purpose Statements

Arkansas Governor's Workforce Cabinet Members

Arkansas Department of Commerce / Employers

We exist to facilitate private sector economic growth through increased productivity of AR workers.
For AR's current / future employers / COS.
By aligning with future supply system (K-12, HE, DWS, DHS, DOC) with demand and needs of employers.

Initiative Examples:
- Workforce Boards – State and Local
- Economic Development prospects (growing the economy)
- Be Pro / Be Proud (K-12)

Arkansas Department of Corrections

We exist to produce better humans.
For safer communities and keeping humans from justice (re)involvement.
By ensuring the human incarcerated experience is time well spent through effective programing, education, cognitive restructuring, treatment, and moral rehabilitation.

Arkansas Department of Education / Arkansas Division of Higher Education

We exist to enhance employment and quality of life.
For Arkansas citizens, institutions of higher learning, and employers.
By providing access to high quality education and training opportunities.

Initiative Examples:
- Career Pathways Initiative (CPI)
- Financial aid
- Formula funding
- Workforce grants

Arkansas Department of Human Services

We exist to protect the vulnerable, foster independence, and promote better health.
For Arkansans in need.
By delivering healthcare and social supports intended to strengthen and empower individuals, families, and communities.

Initiative Examples:
- Medicaid- ARHOME Opportunities for Success Initiative
- Prevention-Medicaid, TANF, Youth Services

Arkansas Department of Transformation and Shared Services (TSS)

We exist to enable informed, continuously-aligned policy and practice, and the transformation of Arkansas government operations and the resident experience.
For all Arkansas residents, employers, education and training providers, and the government entities who serve them.
By removing barriers to efficient and effective sharing of data and resources.

Examples:
- ARData
- Arkansas Data Hub
- Skills Data Coordinator

Arkansas Department of Veterans Affairs

We exist to serve and care for veterans (7% of Arkansans).
By providing long-term care, veterans services, and end-of-life (EOL) family care.

Examples:
- New home in NWA
- Increase the number of veterans in Arkansas

Third-Party Stakeholders

CiviForm (with support from Google.org)

We exist to make it simple.
For residents to find and apply for public assistance programs.
By developing open, shared, best-in-class technical solutions designed by and for communities.

Initiative Examples:
- Decreasing application times for the City of Seattle from 30 minutes to 3 minutes.
- Completely distributing an annual program budget in 4 months.

Coleridge Initiative

We exist to develop a strong evidence base to enhance decision-making.
For individuals, employers, agencies, and policymakers.
By building robust data infrastructure, creating collaborative communities around its use, training agency staff on its use, and developing data products to demonstrate value.

Initiative Examples:
- Applied Data Analytics (ADA) Training
- Dashboards

Credential Engine

We exist to make information about credentials, skills, and jobs clear and accessible.
For learners, workers, employers, policymakers, and all stakeholders in Arkansas.
By providing linked open data schema, infrastructure, and policy insights for credential, skill, and job transparency.

Examples:
- CTDL
- Registry
- Policy / advocacy

National Governors Association (NGA) / Brookings Institution

We exist to provide support and technical assistance.
For state policymakers in Arkansas.
By providing best practices, peer-to-peer state learning opportunities, policy research, convenings, and connecting state leaders to national policy conversations.

Examples:
- Skills-driven states initiative
- Learning and Employment Record (LER) landscape study
- Earn-and-learn communities of practice

Research Improving People's Lives (RIPL)

We exist to improve career-placement outcomes.
For AR jobseekers and employers.
By combining peer-reviewed scientific method, cloud-based technology, and user-centered design.

Initiative Example:
- Data for Opportunity in Occupation Reskilling Solution (DOORS)

US Chamber of Commerce Foundation

We exist to promote systems that align talent supply to employment and career advancement opportunities.

For AR employers and the providers and systems that serve them (including AR chambers and other business associations).

By elevating the employer leadership role and closing system level gaps around partnerships, data, finance, and quality.

Examples:
- Talent Pipeline Management (TPM)
- Jobs and Employment Data Exchange (JEDx)
- T3 Innovation Network (e.g.: LERs)
- JobSIDE and others

Walmart Foundation

We exist to accelerate economic advancement.

For frontline workers in Arkansas.

By building a workforce system that is people-led, tech-empowered through:
- Partner coordination,
- Thought leadership,
- Philanthropic giving, and
- Leveraging Walmart's voice and community engagement.

Chief Workforce Officer Vision

Idea Features:
- Own / Store Data
- Single Sign On (SSO)
- User Navigation
- Profiles / Persona / "Digital Twin"
- 6 Clicks
- Autofill
- System Agnostic
- Drill downs
- Maps overlay
- Full integration architecture
- Learning Management System (LMS) / Learning and Employment Records (LER)
- Chat / AI
- KPI / Metrics/ DB
- Assessments (IQ, EQ, capabilities, aptitude, demonstrating skills, situational, interest inventories)
- Credentials, certifications, licenses, Degrees, workplace DOC
- Longitudinal Data
- State lines / portable

Customer Barriers to Consider:
- Digital Literacy
- Language
- Reading comprehension
- Connectivity (hardware, internet)
- Awareness
- Inputs / Outputs

Cabinet Expertise to Leverage
- Commerce (business voice)
- Corrections
- Education
- Human Services
- Labor and Licensing
- Veteran Affairs
- 3 senators, 3 representatives
- Transformation and Shared Services

Outcomes to Measure
- Changes / gains to placement
- Changes / gains to retention

Workshop Breakout Groups: Persona Empathy Maps, Opportunity Statements, and Design Challenges

Attendees were split into five groups and assigned a strategic theme that aligns with [Executive Order 23-16](#) as well as a seeded persona. The personas were collected by the Governor's Workforce Cabinet and represent a **fictional character** that expresses a likely scenario of needs. The personas were used to support groups to tease out customer-driven needs and benefits each persona would have from a unified workforce and career education ecosystem. Each group was tasked with moving through a series of activities together aimed at defining the following as a group:

- **Constructing a persona "empathy map."** Participants discussed and documented perceived user tasks, thoughts, feelings, pain points, and goals. This exercise asked each group to explicitly name the actions and associated context each persona brings when seeking to leverage Arkansas' workforce and career education services to meet their objectives or needs.
- **Identifying a customer statement and reframing into a design challenge.** Participants used the persona empathy maps to distill the customer problem or opportunity into a concrete sentence. The exercise then required participants to reframe that statement as a design challenge to determine the parameters of the challenge Arkansas is creating this workforce and career education system to achieve.
- **Articulating a vision.** Participants outlined gaps that need to be filled and brainstormed ideas to solve the gaps and design challenges identified in the previous activity. The exercise then asked each group to formulate a vision that achieved the news headline by fleshing out the "body" of the article. The considerations of the article were a two-year timeline that addressed the outlined customer needs using the assets in the room to contribute to that vision.

Group 1: Assessment and Transferability of Skills and Competencies

User Persona 1

Name: Victor Van Buren

Occupation: Unemployed former HVAC tech

Education level: GED, HVAC Training

Location: Van Buren, AR

Age: 30

Gender identity: Male

Ethnic identity: Latino

Meet Viktor. Viktor has a history of substance abuse and was recently released from prison due for convictions associated with his addiction. Now, Viktor is sober and living back home with his wife and children in the Town & Country Estates subdivision in Van Buren.

Before his incarceration, Viktor was an HVAC technician. Unfortunately, his time in prison cost him his job. While incarcerated, Viktor began participating in occupational education training. To this extent, Viktor was able to retain most of his industry knowledge.

As a justice-involved individual in substance abuse recovery, Viktor is worried about his healthcare and the potential for relapse. He wants to pick up where he left off and secure that he is healthy and can focus on his family. Viktor's wife applies to add him to her existing ARHOME case.

Empathy Map for Victor

What do they DO?
- Secure healthcare
- Satisfy conditions of his release
- Avoid past bad people and behaviors
- Seeks employment

What do they THINK?
- About his physical, emotional, and mental health
- Is he an embarrassment to his community?
- Is he training obsolete?

How do they FEEL?
- Worried
- Diminished
- Anxious
- Concerned about family

What are their PAIN POINTS?
- Does not know his options
- Employability concerns

What are their GOALS?
- Focus on family
- Stay healthy
- Find stability - job

Opportunity Statement:

Today: Victor is a 30 year old father of 3 looking to re-enter his community and the workforce.
Has to: Stay clean, focus on family, and find a job.
When: He is worried, overwhelmed, and doesn't know where to start.

Design Challenges:

How might we: Provide structure and support for incarcerated individuals before and after they are released? * We want to find Victor, instead of him needing to find us*.
For: Incarcerated individuals, their families, and others with substance abuse and addictions.
When: Before and after they are released.

Group 2: Digital Credentials

User Persona 2
Name: Joe Arkansan
Occupation: Welder
Education level: GED
Location: Pine Bluff, AR
Age: 56
Gender identity: Male
Racial identity: White

Meet Joe. Joe got himself in a bit of trouble in his early 20s that cost him 35 years in the Forrest City State Penitentiary. Before his incarceration, Joe worked as a freelancing contractor. Thanks to the services provided to him in prison, Joe received his GED and participated in occupational education training. Joe even earned a degree in welding.

Now released from the federal correctional complex, Joe currently lives in a Transitional Housing Unit in Pine Bluff. He must begin putting his skills back to work as he reenters society. Joe understands he must look for additional resources through supplemental nutrition to help him get back on his feet.

Empathy Map for Joe:

What do they DO?
- Securing additional resources (SNAP)
- How to document their skills / qualifications

What do they THINK?
- What is society like now, 35 years later?
- How will he fit in with society and a new employer?
- How can he apply his skills best?
- Who will give him a chance?

How do they FEEL?
- Hopeless yet hopeful
- Insecure yet confident of his skills
- Ready for a fresh start

What are their PAIN POINTS?
- Connecting with employers that will consider him and need his skills
- Verifying his qualifications and capturing what he has learned during his 35 years

What are their GOALS?
- "Get back on his feet"
- Put his skills back to work as he enters society
- Obtain a living wage job
- Transition to their own living situation

Opportunity Statement:

Today: Joe is in his mid-fifties and recently transitioned from incarceration.
Has to: Find a stable job that leverages his skills near his current home in Pine Bluff.
When: He limits access to proof of his skills gained from certifications and hands-on job experience.

Design Challenges:

How might we: Empower individuals in transition with obtaining digital literacy and access to digital credentials and work history data.
For: To acquire employment.

Group 3: Career Exploration, Career Planning, and Career Pathway Navigation

User Persona 3
Name: John Smith
Occupation: None, recent High School Graduate
Education level: High School
Location: Springdale, AR
Age: 19
Gender identity: Male
Racial identity: Asian

Meet John. He lives in Springdale and just graduated high school. John loves getting his hands dirty and prefers to be outdoors. He's currently weighing his options for trade school or community college to jump start his career.

John grew up in a troubled household which directly affected his high school performance. John is a graduate, but is not, and has bever been employed. Now, John lives with his pregnant girlfriend and understands his obligation to provide for them.

Currently 19, John notices that the more he waits, the more life passes him by. Hungry for a better life, John begins to seek assistance and guidance to navigate the workforce and provide supplemental nutrition for his growing family in the meantime.

Empathy Map for John:
What do they DO?
- Needs to scale a pathway, intentional advising is needed
- Figure out a plan to support child
- Feed his family
- Find a mentor / guidance, but where?
- Use CiviForm to help
- Needs more information to help himself

What do they THINK?
- If John started his educational journey sooner, he would be better off
- 4-year education is not feasible now, needs a small bite such as one-semester to start
- Needs to figure out his "why" when he chooses a career
- He has a blind spot and thinks he needs to only choose a learning option
- Needs to find assistance for his family

How do they FEEL?
- Desperate
- Lost
- Confused
- Overwhelmed by the pressures of life
- Scared
- Burdened
- Nervous
- Lacking self-confidence

What are their PAIN POINTS?
- Hindsight - early intervention would have helped.
- Where does he turn for guidance / a mentor?
- No awareness / doesn't know where to start or what to look for.
- No previous work experience or network to use to help.
- Has a lot of blind spots.
- Doesn't know his skills – how to figure them out to lead potential careers.
- Disorganization of state resources available to people like him.

What are their GOALS?
- Stability to he can provide for his family.
- Find a job that can grow to a career and grow his skills.
- Find training to lead to a good career.
- Get shelter, food, etc.
- Find a career he can grow into but he may not realize this because he is too focused on finding any job that it may not be the right job.
- Figure out his own independence.

Opportunity Statement:
Today: John is a 19 year old high school graduate who is unemployed and has family obligations.
Has to: Figure out how to get a short-term job with long-term career opportunities with guidance and mentoring
When: He did not get exposure to work or guidance in K-12 and feels pressured to get on track.

Design Challenges:
How might we: Navigate people with limited work experience and skills to a short-term job that has long-term career opportunities and support their success?
For: Adults, especially those who are lacking a refence point or role models, seeking a transition or starting over and need information, guidance, work experience, support, and connections to services that exist.
When: There is no clear mentor or go-to person to help him navigate and connect his interested and abilities to options. WBL options are limited.

Group 4: Matching Candidates with Jobs and Supporting Resources

User Persona 4
Name: Jane Doe
Occupation: Hotel Receptionist
Education level: Associate's Degree
Location: Little Rock, AR
Age: Early 30s
Gender identity: Female
Racial identity: Black

Meet Jane. She's a Little Rock resident living with her two children, aged 5 and 8. Jane's children live with her and go to their local Elementary school. Her husband passed late last year, so this family is still trying to pick up the pieces. Her late husband used to work as a local bus driver. Jane currently works as a hotel receptionist making an average of 20 hours a week making $16.60 an hour. Without her late husband's financial contribution, Jane is left needing to find better employment to compensate for the reduction in her monthly budget.

With funds beginning to decrease more and more each month, Jane notices her cabinets becoming scarcer for food. She realizes she needs supplemental assistance to help her catch up with finances.

She begins looking for public aid so she can feed her two children and pay her bills comfortably while she continues to seek better or more employment to compensate for her family's newfound lack of nutritional sustenance.

Empathy Map for Jane:
What do they DO?
- Understand what resources are available
- Identify opportunities for better employment

What do they THINK?
- Of their children
- Providing for their family
- Where do I even begin?
- Who can help me?

How do they FEEL
- Confused
- Fear of getting by
- Frustration
- Overwhelmed

- Pain
- Stress
- Grief
- Trapped
- Shame
- Vulnerable
- Concern
- Unwelcome
- "Tyranny of the moment"
- Uncertainty

What are their PAIN POINTS?
- Navigating government
- Associated degree may be a barrier to success
- Not sure where to begin
- Overcoming stigma
- Kids need care while working
- Childcare is not affordable
- Working while children are in school
- Time with children is minimal
- Feel isolated
- Generational poverty but new to these programs

What are their GOALS?
- Feeling seen, heard, and understood
- Find assistance / resources
- Be treated with dignity and compassion

Opportunity Statement:
Today: Jane Doe is a single mother of two who is recently widowed and working part-time with limited financial and food resources.
Has to: Quickly find public aid that can help her pay bills and feed her family.
When: She is unfamiliar with public assistance programs and needs urgent assistance to get by. She is also working and taking care of her children.

Design Challenges:
How might we:
1. Have communicated which resources are available before she needs them in places that are familiar to them?
2. Proactively connect her to resources based on understanding her full range of needs (e.g.: school, husband's company, doctor's office, etc.)?
3. Identify other relevant resources across agencies.

For: Someone with immediate and urgent needs and limited time to navigate the system.
When: They are unfamiliar with the system, have limited time to work through it, and programs are siloed.

Group 5: Meeting Employer and Economic Development Needs

User Persona 5
Name: Daniel Dardanelle
Occupation: Unemployed
Education level: GED
Location: Fort Smith, AR
Age: 19
Gender identity: Male
Racial identity: White

Meet Daniel. Daniel grew up in a troubled home as the eldest son where he had many sleepless nights, and his education wasn't a priority. As a result, Daniel dropped out and barely received his GED.

With a passion to get his life together and help his siblings out of poverty, Daniel is eager to begin navigating the workforce. He's taken an interest in construction trades, but his friends say he must complete an exam and an apprenticeship program. Without the funds for either, Daniel learns that he must apply for public health services. He rides his bike to the nearest local DHS office where he fills out an application for ARHOME.

Empathy Map for Daniel:
What do they DO?
- Follow advice from friends (inaccurate / incomplete)
- Get access to support programs that he thinks will give him access to workforce opportunities
- Getting to support offices without reliable transportation

What do they THINK?
- Obligation to support family members
- Family motivation but no support structures / family stress
- Hoops to jump through before getting access to workforce pathways
- Financial needs
- Possibility of failure
- Risk vs. Reward
- Services / reliance on state programs vs. Jobs
- Lack of advice from school systems

How do they FEEL?
- Family stress / troubled home
- Financial stress / no money
- Transportation limitations / no car
- College / academics are not for him
- Inexperience / unprepared to navigate the systems
- Possible low self-esteem / feelings of being overwhelmed

What are their PAIN POINTS?
- Inaccurate / incomplete information
- Lack of connection / communication from state systems (high school / ABE)
- No support structures
- No understanding of organizations / employers that can connect him to opportunities
- Not academically inclined
- Transportation issues

What are their GOALS?
- Getting the skills to get a job
- Connecting to local employers
- Get a job to also support his siblings to move out of poverty (opportunity to support family members with information and support with education / training s

Opportunity Statement:
Today: Daniel is a 19-year-old unemployed male with a GED.
Has to: Get accurate information about job prospects and pathways to access them.
When: He needs to support his family immediately.

Design Challenges:
How might we: Provide clear data-driven, timely career pathway information?
For: Non-college educated males who are unemployed or underemployed and disconnected / unaware of education / training systems.
When:
- They have failed in the past
- Face financial and practical barriers
- Lack family support or social capital
- Have ambition but inaccurate information
- Want hands-on training vs. Academic programs (e.g.: earn and learn, apprenticeship, non-credit community college training)
- They might be connected to one state system (DHS) but not workforce training

Vision Statements

Group 1: Assessment and Transferability of Skills and Competencies

Vision Statement:

BREAKING NEWS:
Arkansas Leads Nation to Deliver on the Promise to Eliminate Recidivism.

Problem Summary: People get lost, don't know the options or how to find programs or services. Who owns Victor? Who is responsible for Victor? Who empowers Victor to find information and connect to opportunities?

Idea Summary: One stop digital platform, user-centered, that easily and effectively connects incarcerated individuals with employment, training, healthcare, and other resources and services.

Customer Experience:
- Removes stigma of physically applying for services
- User-centered, easy to use
- Easily connects to human supports
- Accessible across multiple platforms
- Provides structured pathways

Assets Leveraged:
- Leverages many agencies
- Supports state agencies, breaks down silos
- Scholarship funds, upskilling programs
- Eligible training providers (ETPs), WIOA funding

Group 2: Digital Credentials

Vision Statement:

BREAKING NEWS:
Arkansas Leads Nation to Connect Talent to Opportunity:

State Platform Uses AI to Digitally Match Job Seekers and Employers, Creating X% Increase in Employment and X% Decrease in Recidivism for Justice-Involved Individuals.

Problem Summary:
- Signal between employers and workers.
- Inability for Arkansas to capture and demonstrate skills and employment records.

Idea Summary:
- Build necessary infrastructure to enable the issuing, management, consumption, and sharing of digital records from learning, employment, and service of individuals.
- Utilizes AI to match talent to opportunities.

Customer Experience:
- "Digital Twin", "Digital Wallet" that captures key credentials (B.C., SSN, education, training, employment, etc.) created and housed on an easily accessible and secure online platform.
- Employers access allows targeting of "matched" skills.

Assets Leveraged:
- State Division of Information Systems data team (DIS ARData)
- State agencies with workforce, education, and human services purview
- External support groups and philanthropy

Group 3: Career Exploration, Career Planning, and Career Pathway Navigation

Vision Statement:

BREAKING NEWS:
Arkansas Leads Nation to Deliver the Workforce of Tomorrow through a Multi-Pronged Approach.

Problem Summary:
- Individuals at a pivotal stage (e.g.: early in their career, new grads, starting from scratch in a new industry / stage of life)
- Those lacking a reference point / life role model, guidance, and a support network.

Idea Summary:
- A multi-pronged approach to achieve success:
  o Skills inventory – connect to aptitude tests, etc. to identify their skills.
  o Decision tree with cost-benefit analysis of skills and then connect them to resources.
  o Career coaching to connect to employment resources
  o Retention support through the learning / training pathway
  o Employment retention once they are in the job
- Employer engagement throughout this process is important.
- Services glossary – there's so much assistance out there but it's difficult to find.
- In-person adult (18+) career exploration place that people can go to get all this information (career, training, personal supports, educational opportunities, etc.) in an organized fashion and discuss with a career counselor.

Customer Experience:
- Easy to find opportunities.
- Working with K-12 early ensures people come out of high school with a plan and an approach to a career so they can provide for their future families.

Assets Leveraged:
- State agencies / Governor's Workforce Cabinet
- WIOA
- Software / tools for career exploration and planning
- Chamber of Commerce / employer partnerships
- External partnerships outside of the state
- Nonprofits

Group 4: Matching Candidates with Jobs and Supporting Resources

Vision Statement:

BREAKING NEWS:
Arkansas Leads Nation in Streamlined Resource and Service Delivery.

Problem Summary:
- Jane Doe – Single mother, recently widowed, sudden reduction in income, unfamiliar with government services.
- Food is the first priority followed by other short-term needs and then address the long-term need of improved employment.

Idea Summary:
- "No wrong door" access
- 100% accessible virtual / mobile assistance
- Integrated information and case management
- Work directly with community-based organizations

Customer Experience:
- Processes are simple to navigate, resources are easy to access and use
- Access is convenient for her (e.g.: location, hours, time, schedule)
- Human needs are met with dignity and compassion
- Short-term stability enables long-term support and planning

Assets Leveraged:
- Shared information systems
- Simple intake / access processes
- Community organization partnerships
- Streamlined referrals
- Shared case

Group 5: Meeting Employer and Economic Development Needs

Vision Statement:

BREAKING NEWS:
Arkansas Leads Nation to Deliver Pacesetting Increases in Labor Force Participation.

Problem Summary: Daniel is a 19-year-old unemployed male with a GED who must get accurate information about job prospects and the pathways to access them so he can support his family immediately.

Idea Summary:
- Create a program that engages unemployed males who are the largest group disconnected from labor force participation in AR.
- This would be accomplished through agency vision alignment, technology, support of front-line workers, and alignment of wrap around supports, and outreach to communicate opportunity pathways for regional jobs.
- Cross agency alignment / front line state intake workers or advisors to make it as easy as possible for these staff to make referrals but need the right questions on common intake.

Customer Experience:
- Opportunities within reach / self-sufficiency
- Confidence / personal success
- Identifying / growing necessary skills
- Job secured
- Combination of human counselors and technology platforms

Assets Leveraged:
- Front-line advisors
- State data systems
- Common intake
- Relevant state agencies – leadership vision / common goals
- Technology tools
- Industry partners
- Training partners / education pathways
- Wrap around services (e.g.: transportation, DHS, etc.)

Recommended Next Steps

Design for Data Interoperability and Seamless User Transitions

Interoperability with key tools that enable a seamless user experience with Arkansas' workforce and education digital ecosystem can not only reduce barriers to accessing services it may also accelerate the pace at which Arkansans can achieve their individual career goals. The session called out a number of "smart" integration ideas aimed at reducing silos and creating more intentional connections across systems to support a range of use-cases.

The Governor's Workforce Cabinet characterized a technology-driven roadmap for workforce development in Arkansas with the following themes:

- **Digital experiences that are "No Wrong Door" and "One Stop" that are easy to use and point customers to predictive pathways.** Reduce need for customers to "come to" each state entity to uncover services that support their needs. The notion of digital hubs were a key mechanism many groups considered for how to connect customers with wrap-around services as well as enable "human and technology service harmony."
- **Leverage data and AI to intelligently create and match employer and jobseeker "profiles".** Make it easy for candidates and employers to align on job *and training* placement matches through the use of digital credentials and "digital twin" profiles. At same time, support jobseeker and trainee decision-making by revealing cost-benefit or ROI to pursuing specific paths.
- **Centralize data on the cloud** where it can be combined and linked to other agency data or leverage more timely data points. For an immediate DOORS implementation, consider linkages or integration with:
    - Employer-reported wage, occupation, or LMI data
    - Education data (student records / resumes)

Prioritize toward a Phased Roadmap That Will Enable Agility, Use of New Learning, and Frequent Iteration

The enthusiasm and commitment the Governor's Workforce Cabinet and partners demonstrated during the May workshop presents a unique opportunity to accelerate change that will leave a lasting impact in the lives of Arkansans. Capitalizing on this momentum is key to the design and delivery of a data-driven workforce system.

Thoughtful prioritization of a phased roadmap that demonstrates fast and impactful "wins" for Arkansan jobseekers and employers is key to sustaining that momentum. An intentional phased approach can also allow the team to get started in one area at the same time as they are refining the design or strategy to different elements.

Conduct Ongoing User Research and Testing

While the stakeholder workshop was a valuable first step, it is important that the Governor's Workforce Cabinet consult with their customers to ensure the ideas, vision, and ultimate solutions will address real-world requirements of students, jobseekers, counselors, education institutions, workforce professionals, employers, and industry stakeholders. While the state has put together thoughtful, seeded fictional personas with which to ground solutions in common customer needs, it will be important that the Governor's Workforce Cabinet continue to engage those customers – particularly direct customers or users of intended solutions – throughout design and delivery.

Where the state is introducing entirely new concepts that have not yet been designed, tested, or developed in or outside of Arkansas, it is recommended that those new concepts be first prototyped and tested with target audiences before confirming the direction or inclusion of those concepts in the state's roadmap. These tactics ensure continued involvement of resident needs into the scoping process and reduce risk in investing state resources in solutions that are not yet validated in a real-world context.

While there is a need to narrow toward a unified roadmap quickly, as the design and build begins for different facets of the roadmap, it is recommended that the team approach product development and implementation following an agile and iterative approach to more easily adapt and shift course, as new learnings or needs emerge.

Define outcome metrics and instrument new and existing tools to monitor progress toward those metrics.

Clarity toward a holistic technology-driven workforce roadmap should stem directly from the core outcomes most important to the state of Arkansas. From there, instrumenting priority analytics can allow the team to learn what content, functionalities, and / or data is most commonly used (or not) as well as which elements make the most progress toward stated objectives. Data collected here can also inform needed pivots or clarify future refinements to the roadmap overtime.

About RIPL

Research Improving People's Lives (RIPL) is a nonprofit tech-for-social-impact organization that works with governments to help them use data, science, and technology to improve policy and lives. Our scientists and policy experts partner with government leaders to frame their challenges, and develop and deliver the best scientific approach to solve them. Our technologists design databases, applications, and user experiences that make policy delivery effective and engaging. We partner with policymakers so that they can use data, science, and technology to positively impact lives, solve pressing social challenges, and build their own capacity to innovate and measure success going forward.

For more information about RIPL, please visit our website at https://www.ripl.org/.

APPENDIX A: Workshop Deck

Arkansas Design Thinking Workshop

Convening to ideate toward a holistic, intentional vision that improves outcomes for Arkansan residents.

Tuesday, May 16, 2023 | 10am – 2pm

Research Improving People's Lives (RIPL) is a nonprofit, tech-for-social-impact organization dedicated to using data, science, and technology to inform government policy and solve challenges.

- We help government leaders **identify policy issues they need to solve**;

- **Design data-driven solutions** guided by our scientists, economists, technologists, and policy experts;

- Build technical capacity to address pressing needs and **power effective, innovative policy going forward.**

Purpose of today's session

Today's goals:

- **Build understanding of what each party in this room brings** and how our unique assets can deliver value for Arkansas residents.
- **Define and distill customer needs** to design for.
- **Collaborate and ideate toward vision statements** that address customer needs.

At the end of the workshop, we will have generated:

- Purpose statements that name our unique differentiators
- Opportunity statements and design challenges grounded in customer needs
- At least five unique vision statements to refine and build specificity around in a future session

Agenda

Welcome, Introductions & Context Setting

Opening Remarks – Mike Rogers, Chief Workforce Officer

Mapping the Room: Purpose Statements

-- *BREAK for LUNCH* –

Customer Empathy Map and Needs Definition

News Headline Visioning Exercise

Wrap Up and Next Steps

Mike Rogers, Chief Workforce Officer

Mapping our Assets

What is this room uniquely positioned to contribute to the State of Arkansas?

What is your Purpose?

A good purpose statement clearly articulates *why your organization exists.*

We exist to…. [create this impact]

For… [intended customer in AR]

By… [how we do this uniquely]

We exist to **improve career-placement outcomes**

For **AR jobseekers and employers**

By **combining peer-reviewed scientific methods, cloud-based technology, and user-centered design.**

Example Initiative: Data for Opportunity in Occupation Reskilling Solution (DOORS)

What is your Purpose?

A good purpose statement clearly articulates *why your organization exists.*

Purpose Mapping Instructions

1. Gather with your colleagues from your organization or department (if they are here with you today).

2. Take 5 – 10 minutes to complete the large-format worksheets we have created for you.

3. Introduce yourself, your colleagues, and your organization's purpose to the room in 2 minutes.

4. Give your worksheet to a facilitator to tape your worksheet on the "purpose" gallery wall.

Share out: Introduce your Purpose

Introduce self, colleagues, org name

We exist to…. [create this impact]

For… [intended customer in AR]

By… [how we do this uniquely]

1-2 example initiatives that share this purpose

Preparing for Afternoon Activities

Introduction to a few seeded personas with which we'll focus our afternoon activities.

Themes

1. Assessment and transferability of skills and competencies

2. Digital Credentials

3. Career exploration, career planning, and career pathway navigation

4. Matching candidates with jobs and supporting resources

5. Meeting employers' and economic development needs

Start with Customer Needs
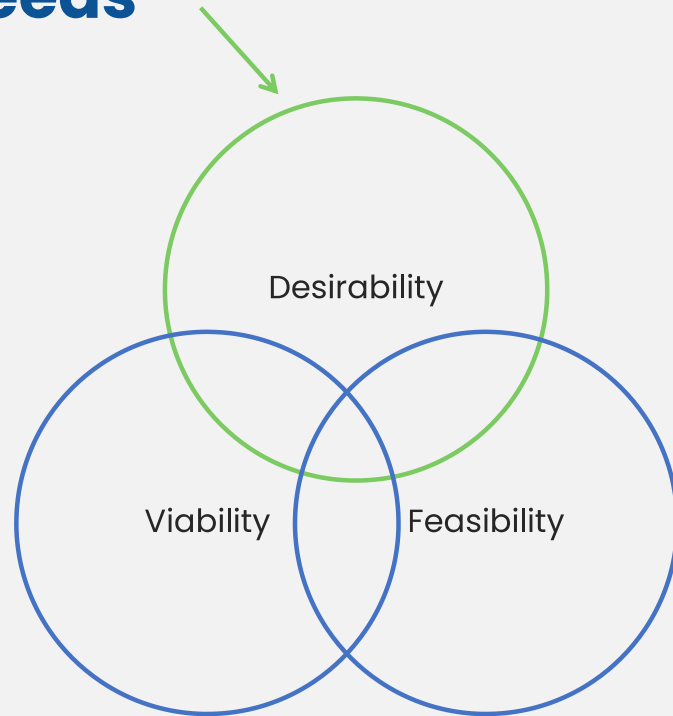
Desirability

Viability   Feasibility

After lunch we will break into groups to:

- Consider example Arkansas customer personas and how they interact with different state government services.

- Tease out the customer needs or problems our collective group is uniquely positioned to address.

- Define the strategies, ideas, and approaches that can solve those needs and customer opportunities.

Jane Doe

Occupation: Hotel Receptionist

Education level: Associate's Degree

Location: Little Rock, AR

Age: Early 30s

Gender identity: Female

Racial identity: Black

Meet Jane. She's a Little Rock resident living with her two children, aged 5 and 8. Jane's children live with her and go to their local Elementary school. Her husband passed late last year, so this family is still trying to pick up the pieces.

Her late husband used to work as a local bus driver. Jane currently works as a hotel receptionist making an average of 20 hours a week making $16.60 an hour. Without her late husband's financial contribution, Jane is left needing to find better employment to compensate for the reduction in her monthly budget.

With funds beginning to decrease more and more each month, Jane notices her cabinets becoming scarcer for food. She realizes she needs supplemental assistance to help her catch up with finances.

She begins looking for public aid so she can feed her two children and pay her bills comfortably while she continues to seek better or more employment to compensate for her family's newfound lack of nutritional sustenance.

John Smith

Occupation: None, recent High School Graduate

Education level: High School

Location: Springdale, AR

Age: 19

Gender identity: Male

Racial identity: Asian

Meet John. He lives in Springdale and just graduated high school. John loves getting his hands dirty and prefers to be outdoors. He's currently weighing his options for trade school or community college to jump start his career.

John grew up in a troubled household which directly affected his high school performance. John is a graduate, but is not, and has bever been employed.

Now, John lives with his pregnant girlfriend and understands his obligation to provide for them.

Currently 19, John notices that the more he waits, the more life passes him by. Hungry for a better life, John begins to seek assistance and guidance to navigate the workforce and provide supplemental nutrition for his growing family in the meantime.

Joe Arkansan

Occupation: Welder

Education level: GED

Location: Pine Bluff, AR

Age: 56

Gender identity: Male

Racial identity: White

Meet Joe. Joe got himself in a bit of trouble in his early 20s that cost him 35 years in the Forrest City State Penitentiary.

Before his incarceration, Joe worked as a freelancing contractor. Thanks to the services provided to him in prison, Joe received his GED and participated in occupational education training. Joe even earned a degree in welding.

Now released from the federal correctional complex, Joe currently lives in a Transitional Housing Unit in Pine Bluff. He must begin putting his skills back to work as he reenters society.

Joe understands he must look for additional resources through supplemental nutrition to help him get back on his feet.

Daniel Dardanelle

Occupation: Unemployed

Education level: GED

Location: Fort Smith, AR

Age: 19

Gender identity: Male

Racial identity: White

Meet Daniel. Daniel grew up in a troubled home as the eldest son where he had many sleepless nights, and his education wasn't a priority. As a result, Daniel dropped out and barely received his GED.

With a passion to get his life together and help his siblings out of poverty, Daniel is eager to begin navigating the workforce. He's taken an interest in construction trades, but his friends say he must complete a physical exam and an apprenticeship program.

Without the funds for either, Daniel learns that he must apply for public health services. He rides his bike to the nearest local DHS office where he fills out an application for ARHOME.

Victor Van Buren

Occupation: Unemployed former HVAC tech

Education level: GED, HVAC Training

Location: Van Buren, AR

Age: 30

Gender identity: Male

Ethnic identity: Latino

Meet Viktor. Viktor has a history of substance abuse and was recently released from prison due for convictions associated with his addiction. Now, Viktor is sober and living back home with his wife and children in the Town & Country Estates subdivision in Van Buren.

Before his incarceration, Viktor was an HVAC technician. Unfortunately, his time in prison cost him his job. While incarcerated, Viktor began participating in occupational education training. To this extent, Viktor was able to retain most of his industry knowledge.

As a justice-involved individual in substance abuse recovery, Viktor is worried about his healthcare and the potential for relapse. He wants to pick up where he left off and secure that he is healthy and can focus on his family.

Viktor's wife applies to add him to her existing ARHOME case.

Specifying Customer Needs

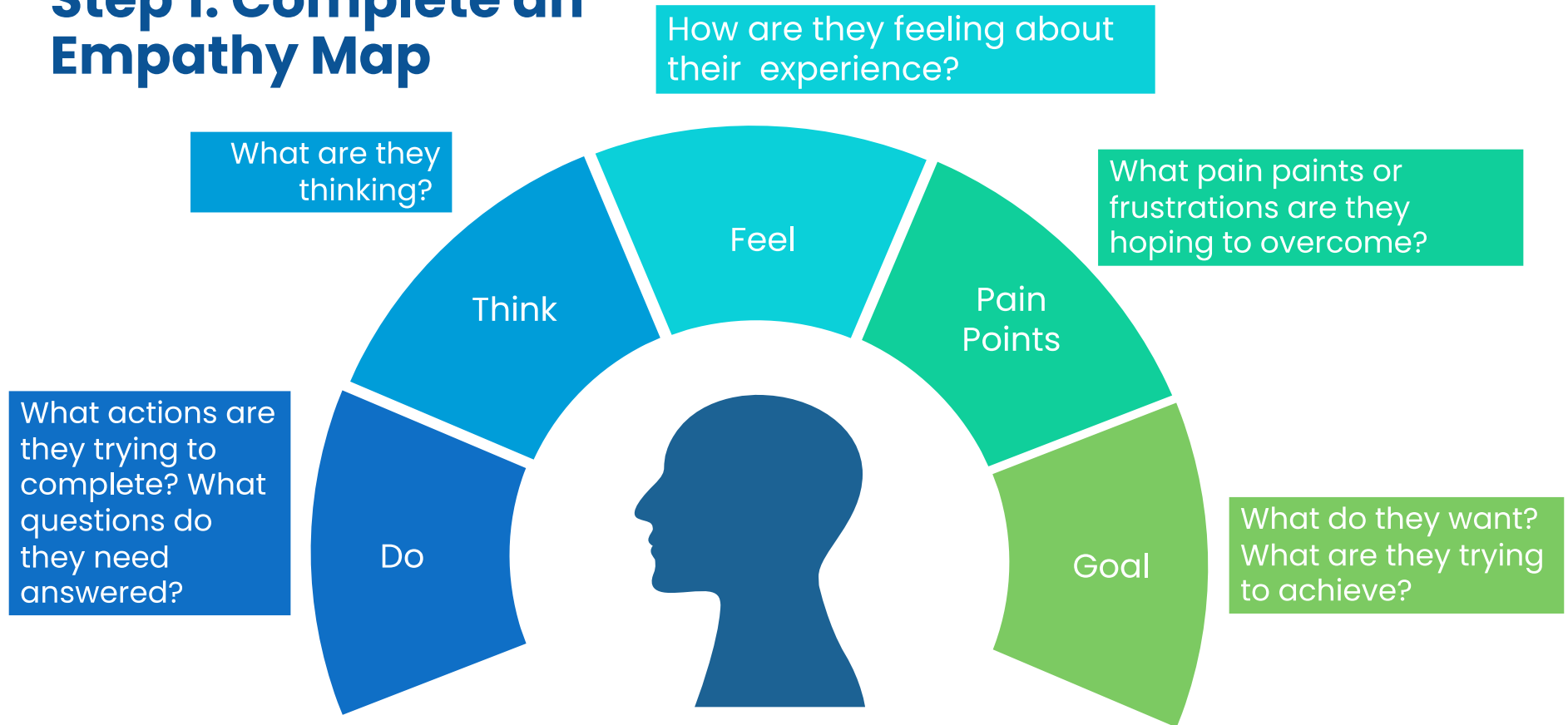*What customer problems and opportunities do we need to account for?*

Step 1: Complete an Empathy Map

How are they feeling about their experience?

What are they thinking?

What pain paints or frustrations are they hoping to overcome?

Feel

Think

Pain Points

What actions are they trying to complete? What questions do they need answered?

Do

Goal

What do they want? What are they trying to achieve?

Step 1: Persona Empathy Map

1. Introduce yourselves to your breakout group.

2. Read your assigned persona as a group and flesh it out if you think I needs it.

3. Complete the empathy map by adding bullets to each section.

Step 2: Define the customer problem or opportunity

Tip: Consider your customer's situation, motivation, and desired outcome.

Remember to focus on defining a problem, not a solution.

CUSTOMER TYPE

Today... [Noemi, a 46-year old high school Chemistry Teacher and mother of two]

PROBLEM

Has to... [find a reliable, convenient and fast way to get dinner on the table for herself and her family]

CONTEXT

When... [it's a hectic weeknight and she is up to her ears in papers and exams to grade, as well as lesson planning for hybrid instruction.]

Step 3: Reframe as a design challenge

"How might we" (HMW) statements are questions that allow us to reframe customer problems as a question to solve or design for.

"How" suggests that we do not yet have the answer. Opens up multiple avenues for ideation and reinforces we are still exploring the problem and solution space.

"Might" emphasizes there are many different paths we could go down when thinking about solutions. Promotes open-minded brainstorming and considering the problem from multiple perspectives.

"We" promotes collaboration and joint brainstorming toward defining an optimal solution.

Example design challenge

BENEFIT
How might we provide convenient and accurate status updates on the preparation and delivery of our pizzas

CUSTOMER DESCRIPTION
For customers like Noemi, a hardworking Arkansas residents juggling many responsibilities

CONTEXT
When they need to put food on the table on a weeknight

Customer opportunity:

TODAY, Noemi, a 46-year old high school Chemistry Teacher and mother of two

HAS TO find a reliable, convenient and fast way to get dinner on the table for herself and her family

WHEN it's a hectic weeknight and she is up to her ears in papers and exams to grade, as well as lesson planning for hybrid instruction.
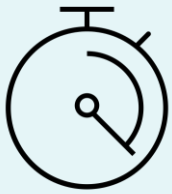
Fast Forward: It is January 2025, the midpoint of the current administration's term.

Rapid Individual Brainstorm:

Reflect on the design challenge question you just drafted.

In 5 minutes, take a sheet of paper and generate 5 big ideas that will help the customer achieve their goals and/or address their needs.

Final Exercise: News Headline

Share your individual ideas with your table to generate a shared vision that considers the following:

1. Is ambitious yet possible to deliver at the halfway point of the current administration (within 2 years).
2. Addresses critical customer needs highlighted in your table's empathy map and opportunity statement.
3. Considers a means to leverage the "assets in the room" and purpose statements you heard this morning.

Share out your new story

4-5 minutes per table

56

Thank you!

Next Steps:
- Please don't walk away with your worksheets!

Inputs generated today will be digitized and synthesized into:

- Combined Purpose Statements & Points of Opportunity/Overlap
- Opportunity Statements & Design Challenges
- Seeded Visions for further scoping

APPENDIX B: Workshop Attendees

Name	Title	Organization	Group Assignment
Nathan Barrett	VP, Programs & Development	Coleridge Initiative	2
Daryl Bassett	Secretary	Department of Labor and Licensing	5
Scott Carnes	HR Administrator	Department of Transformation and Shared Services	3
Charisse Childers	Director	Division of Workforce Services	4
Patti Constantakis	Director, Retail Opportunity	Walmart.org	3
Jared Diener	State Partnership Manager	Credential Engine	1
Corey Dixon	Consulting Director, Skills and Credentials	National Governors Association	2
Amber Garrison Duncan	Executive Vice President	Competency Based Education Network	1
Rasmi Elasmar	Technical Lead	Google.org	4
Jane English	Senator	General Assembly	3
Deborah Everhart	Chief Science Officer	Credential Engine	2
Annelies Goger	Fellow	Brookings Institution	3
Scott Jensen	CEO	Research Improving People's Lives (RIPL)	5
Hugh McDonald	Secretary	Department of Commerce	5
Robert McGough	Chief Data Officer	Department of Transformation and Shared Services (TSS)	4
Jon Mills	Research Scientist	Coleridge Initiative	3
Tina Moore	Director of Workforce Development	Division of Higher Education	2
Sean Murphy	Director, Opportunity	Walmart.org	2
Jacob Oliva	Secretary	Department of Education	1
Joe Profiri	Secretary	Department of Corrections	2
Kristi Putnam	Secretary	Department of Human Services	4
Mike Rogers	Chief Workforce Officer	Governor's Workforce Board	2
Heather Saco	Deputy Chief Data Officer	Department of Transformation and Shared Services (TSS)	3
Kristen Shryock	Skills Data Coordinator	Department of Transformation and Shared Services (TSS)	1
Nell Smith	Assistant Director	Division of Medical Services	4
Scott Stanger	Chief of Staff	Department of Veterans Affairs	1
Kaitlin Sweetin	Deputy Policy Director	Research Improving People's Lives (RIPL)	3

Name	Title	Organization	Group Assignment
Rebecca Tinkelman	User Experience Researcher	Google.org	4
Jason Tyszko	VP, Center for Education and Workforce	US Chamber of Commerce Foundation	2
Rachel Vilsack	Director of State Partnerships	Credential Engine	3
Cody Waits	Director	Office of Skills Development	5
Ken Warden	Commissioner	Division of Higher Education	3
Monieca West	Career Pathways Initiative Director	Division of Higher Education	4
Ross White	Director	Division of Career and Technical Education	1
Amanda Winters	Program Director, Center for Best Practices	National Governors Association	5
Randy Zook	President / CEO	Arkansas State Chamber	5

APPENDIX C: Idea bank

- Service glossary front and center or one-stop-shop state hub
- A one-stop-shop marketed by the Governor's Workforce Cabinet
- Curriculum updates in K-12 for career exploration, tool exploration, and glossary of services available
- Begin K-12 career exploration, career planning, and career navigation in earnest.
- Identify work-based / earning apprenticeship
- Build the infrastructure for one stop access for customers.
- Connected to decision tree with cost-benefit analysis of credentials and training
- Mentor web interface
- Marketing of options "need help? A better future?"
- Short run job placement (job board)
- Digital Guidance to Public Assistance
- Long run career mentoring
- Understand career pathway opportunities and how to achieve them
- No wrong door approach to finding opportunities (based on current need)
- Understand what supports are available to meet current needs
- Role models / mentors who can provide guidance / support
- Make sure high school grads have an education and career plan
- Scale WBL Pathways for youth and incumbent workers
- Provide all K-12 students opportunities for career exploration, job shadowing, and paid WBL (youth apprenticeships)
- Create an outreach campaign about career options and where to go for career guidance, including apprenticeship options
- Allow universal access to career counseling without eligibility questions
- Develop a "Netflix" of careers and learning opportunities
- Connect incarcerated individuals to employment opportunities before release
- Provide incarcerated individuals with a fully developed LER that collects their experience, work skills, and credentials
- Identify programs and services that currently exist to provide guidance and assistance to customers
- Create an asset map decision tree
- Identify opportunities to make the progress and services discoverable to customers
- Identify a mechanism by which customers can easily take advantage of programs and services "convenient, efficient"
- Adopt AI-crafted solutions to generate skills-based standardized LERs for past experience
- Enable a wide variety of education, training, and employment orgs to issue digital credentials / records
- Promote digital literacy and deploy training assets to ensure individuals are encouraged with data
- Enable the sharing of records so employers can correct with talent
- Support skill-based hiring and advancement practices with employers so they can tap into digital skills / records
- Career discovery platform for all ages
- Career pathways to job / career you want are easy to understand through clear articulation
- Translate and grow your skills into a career
- Demand-driven career pathways

- Assess skills, aptitudes, career discovery for all – no eligibility walls
- Decision tree – develop cost / benefit analysis
- Create re-entry centers for individuals released from prison
- Move available re-entry resources upstream into prisons
- Integrate data to inform transitions
- Align programs with needs, aptitude, and free world potential / opportunity.
- Communicate to community to invest in the success
- Create the infrastructure for interoperable, verifiable digital credentials to be used across the state
- Have the state government be a leader as an employer by adopting and providing digital credentials for all training and work experience provided by the state (including those earned during incarceration)
- Build a multistate compact so that this dan can be shared in different states and so credentials earned in other states can be used in AR
- Train front-line agency workers to recognize people needing reference to career prep programs
- Pay participants in future fit programs: 1 or 2 week prep 250 / week.
- Focus k-12 on CTE opportunities in all areas not just high population cities
- Get non-CTE teachers into business settings to see range of opportunities that are available
- Get employers to realize workforce problem will not get easier ever
- All training programs (if completed successfully) lead to a job
- Pay people during training – help with support "investments"
- Connect and align systems – sign-up for benefits you now automatically in the job pool
- Create a "nonprofit" recruitment organization" – business led
- Use robust workforce network as business recruitment tool
- Connect customers to as many public services as needed
- Maintain customer certifications / licensure through difficult life shocks
- Require healthcare transfer services for people in recovery
- Provide robust parole supports
- Design a virtual / app for finding supports