

Calbright College Strategic Vision 2021-2023: Expanding Equitable Access to Better Jobs

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Message from the President and CEO

Calbright College is a new kind of college — a statewide California Community College designed to meet the unique needs of working adults who have fallen through the cracks in America’s existing higher education system; to quickly and flexibly get Californians the skills they need to secure their economic future; and to work as a part of the community college system to respond to an increasingly dynamic labor market.

Calbright was created because of a recognition that we, as a state, had to find new ways to meet the needs of working adults with affordable, flexible, competency-based opportunities for education. These adults without degrees have been historically targeted, recruited, and left behind by predatory, for-profit colleges — especially in times of economic uncertainty.

Since we first began serving students in October 2019, the global pandemic has upended the economy and the lives of the working adults in our focus population. Calbright sits at a unique nexus between the labor market and higher education, which gives us the ability to build programs that are responsive to — and predictive of — the needs of Californians as they navigate the shifting employment landscape.

In the Strategic Vision period ahead, we will root all of our program design and development in the human experience, skills, and responsibilities of California’s working adult learners. This

means integrating tailored support services throughout the student journey. And it means building programs based on our innovative market research — mapping how our learners' skills and interests connect to in-demand, good jobs.

As a student-first institution, we will keep the working adults we were created to serve — and their unique needs — at the forefront of everything that we do. And we will share what works, and what doesn't, with our sister colleges and the larger field. Today, we have the opportunity to build a more equitable economic recovery, and we are excited to do our part to help California meet that challenge.

This report is the result of a collaborative process, which gathered diverse input and perspectives from students, industry experts, employers, labor leaders, faculty, philanthropic organizations, executive and legislative branches of state government, and the expertise of our Trustees, Chancellor, and growing team of faculty and staff at the college. I am grateful to everyone involved in helping create the strategic vision for how Calbright College, as a part of the larger California Community College system, can remake the way we educate and train workers so we can rebuild as a stronger, more inclusive California.

Sincerely,
Ajita Talwalker Menon
President and CEO, Calbright College

Message from the Board of Trustees' President

I am pleased to present this work, the result of a focused joint effort between the Calbright Board of Trustees and college faculty and staff to build a Strategic Vision for Calbright's next stage of development and growth. This college holds so much promise, and all of us on the Board believe deeply in the necessity of its mission and the importance of its role as a complementary part of the broader California Community College system.

The Strategic Vision outlined here is focused on who matters the most: Calbright's students. These adult learners speak to who we are as a state, and our aspiration to expand who has access to education when they need it most: women, caregivers, and others working as much as they can to make ends meet. Calbright students are pragmatic about the education they are looking for, and Calbright is positioned to address their needs: for high-quality training and education and for flexible supports as they seek better lives for themselves and their families.

We need to ensure California is staying ahead of the curve, as leaders in other states are beginning to try new and different approaches to higher education — with goals similar to ours with Calbright. Our community college system has been and must stay invested in working mothers, people of color, veterans, rural residents, and the unemployed, because we cannot be content with a status quo that fails our communities.

I am excited about the critical work being done collaboratively with Calbright faculty, staff, students, and system partners, and am excited to make the most of the opportunities and

challenges we have before us over the next three years. This work is valuable and necessary, and I'm proud to support it.

Sincerely,

Pamela Haynes
President, Calbright Board of Trustees

Executive Summary

Calbright College was created for Californians who seek the skills they need for better jobs, and whose lives make online, self-paced education programs their only or most viable option. California's only statewide, digital community college, Calbright's skills-based, innovative programs are designed for working adults who do not have a college degree, and who are underrepresented both in traditional higher education and in good jobs. Committed to increasing equity and economic opportunity for working learners, Calbright is a public, affordable, high-value alternative to costly, for-profit colleges.

Even before the pandemic upended both education and the economy, more than 8 million California adults without a college degree were effectively stranded — without financial stability or opportunity for mobility. The problem struck especially deep for Latinx and Black families, women, service workers, and those seeking a second chance after involvement with the justice system. Meanwhile, experts were predicting a crisis where employers would face a million unfilled jobs in fast-growing industries because workers lacked the necessary skills.

Then COVID-19 turned that crisis into catastrophe. The same people who were already most likely to be struggling with a changing economy have borne the brunt of this pandemic, especially working mothers, others with caregiving responsibilities, and our communities of color. These are the Californians Calbright was built to serve, and the pandemic has only made our mission more urgent.

Now more than ever, Californians need high-quality, affordable pathways to get back into the workforce and into better-paying, more secure jobs.

Strategic Vision 2021-2023

The California Online Community College Act, which became law in July 2018, was a mandate to rapidly create a new kind of college from the ground up. The statute includes milestones that set a brisk pace for a "seven-year startup period." Launched as an early start-up in October 2019, Calbright has met all statutory requirements to date, despite both a leadership transition and the arrival of COVID-19 within the first year of operation.

The Strategic Vision sets Calbright's overarching direction for the next three years, as we shift from launch into high-quality growth.

Principles

These core principles will guide the work that fulfills the Strategic Vision. The principles are grounded in Calbright's founding mission and unique role, contribute to the California Community College (CCC) system's Vision for Success, and are informed by stakeholders' hopes and expectations.

- Add Value: benefit Calbright's students, the CCC system, employers, and the state
- Support the Learner: design to meet the specific needs of adults without degrees
- Focus on Good Jobs: prepare learners to secure and succeed in available jobs with career potential, in stable or growing industries
- Advance Equity: narrow opportunity gaps by race and ethnicity, gender, income, region
- Be Responsive: keep improving in response to relevant changes in economic conditions, research, policy, workforce needs, and learners' lives
- Align Quality and Growth: grow enrollment while strengthening outcomes through high-quality teaching, learning, and student experience, consistent with available resources

Goals for 2023

The Strategic Vision's three-year goals are both ambitious and achievable, assuming stable state funding of \$15 million per year. These goals define what success at the end of 2023 will look like for Calbright as a whole:

- High-Quality, Scalable Growth
 - Programs: Calbright has launched 10 new programs, including at least one developed with another CCC.
 - Enrollment: 5,000 students are enrolled, and 75% are from focus populations.
- Student Success
 - Completion: 1,200 students have completed a Calbright program.
 - Labor Market Outcomes: Between 250-550 students (depending on pace of economic recovery) have attained a positive labor market outcome.
- Collaboration
 - Partnerships: Calbright has engaged 20 external partners.
 - Governance: Calbright's participatory governance structure is in place.
- Innovation
 - Calbright has operationalized innovation to drive student success and high-quality growth.
- Shared Gains
 - CBE: Calbright shares our growing expertise in designing and delivering online, competency-based education (CBE) programs for working learners.

- Research and Development: Calbright’s R and D opens doors to innovation at other colleges, and informs workforce and economic development efforts.
 - Common Challenges: Calbright will identify and solve common challenges faced by working learners and community colleges.
- Accreditation
 - Candidacy: Calbright will have completed the accreditation application process by the end of 2021.
 - Accredited: Calbright will be fully accredited ahead of schedule by the end of 2023.
- Positioned for Acceleration and Influence
 - Acceleration: At the end of 2023, Calbright is ready to scale enrollment by 50% (to 7,500) the next year and keep growing, resources permitting.
 - Influence: Calbright has become a nationally recognized model for innovation and equity in serving adults without degrees.

Calbright in Context

Calbright’s Unique Mandate and Mission

Calbright College — the state’s only statewide, digital community college — offers skills-based credentials, certificates, and preparation for in-demand jobs, with self-paced programs and wraparound supports designed specifically for adults without degrees. Calbright is for Californians who want the skills that open access to better jobs, and whose lives — jobs, schedules, family responsibilities — do not fit typical semester-based course structures and timelines.

Calbright was created by law to be a high-quality, affordable, public option for adults who require new, responsive approaches to learning and support, people who might otherwise end up at costly, for-profit trade schools. Our statutory mandate is to build flexible, accessible pathways not only to jobs with career potential, but also to other community colleges, and to innovate and help expand options for adult students across the system. Narrowing equity gaps in education and earnings is central to our mission.

Mission Statement

Calbright College is committed to increasing economic mobility and closing equity gaps for working adults who lack easy access to traditional forms of higher education. We offer online, flexible, affordable, skills-based programs that provide tangible economic value for both working adults and hiring managers.

Equity focus

Calbright recognizes that many populations face structural barriers within the education system and labor market. Our equity focus includes (but is not limited to) narrowing gaps in enrollment

and outcomes by race, ethnicity, and gender, as well as lowering barriers based on gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, age, disability, national origin, veteran status, justice involvement, and rural residency.

Unique in the CCC system and nationally, Calbright provides exclusively competency-based education (CBE) programs — all employment-focused, online, self-paced, and not limited by traditional academic calendars — to adults with busy lives and little or no college experience. Calbright is data and evidence driven, based on what works for our adult learners. Calbright is also designed for ongoing learning and innovation, so we can adapt quickly to new findings as well as to changes in the job market and students' lives. Calbright also conducts research and develops models and practices to inform our own work, the state's community college and workforce development systems, and others invested in better serving truly underserved populations.

CBE at Calbright

Competency-based education (CBE) is a flexible approach to teaching and learning based on knowledge and skills that are transparent and measurable. Progression is based on demonstrated mastery of what students are expected to know (knowledge) and be able to do (skills), rather than hours spent in class.

At Calbright, we take an equity-based approach to CBE teaching and learning in all our programs. Our programs are designed to provide a flexible and engaging experience focused on the needs of our students: adults balancing competing responsibilities. Our CBE programs fully enable students to work at their own pace, moving more quickly through familiar material, and taking the time they need when the content is more challenging or life gets in the way.

Calbright's distinctive CBE approach integrates academic and career support from faculty and staff to position students for success. Our programs are connected to personalized student supports and job preparation from day one, draw clear connections between course content and career goals, and show students how what they learn can help them thrive in a changing job market.

Each program's online learning content and resources are developed based on market research and in consultation with industry leaders and experts in the field. This ensures students are being prepared with the skills employers are looking for, in a language that hiring managers recognize.

Our Students

Calbright's students are adults without degrees seeking economic stability and mobility. They have responsibilities that make online, self-paced programs their only or most viable option. They are working adults, whether or not they work for pay, and may be unemployed, underemployed, displaced, re-entering, or have jobs that are low-wage, dead-end, and/or in declining sectors. The majority of our enrolled students are people of color, including 33% who are Latinx and 23% who are Black. Here are three of their stories.

Monica is a single mother of three, born and raised in Sacramento. She has “a passion to fix things” but no background in technology beyond her experience using computers for work and school. She had tried an online for-profit program without success. Today, Monica is in our IT program pursuing a more stable future for her family. She said, “I think this is one of the best things to come to Californians, especially in a time like this. I can’t wait to get my hands on a Calbright future.”

Hector immigrated from Mexico as a child and lives in San Pedro. He was excited about the IT Support program when he first enrolled, but long hours at work meant that he had to pause his training. When he began working from home during the pandemic, he re-enrolled. With the help of a Calbright career coach, he updated his resume and landed a job at a robotics company when the hiring manager heard he was training for his industry-recognized CompTIA A+ certification. “Computers were always something I was interested in, and now I have the opportunity to really study them.” After completing the IT Support program, he plans to enroll in Calbright’s Cybersecurity program.

Deborah lives in Madera County. After 10 years as a stay-at-home mom, she was looking to re-enter the workforce and enrolled in our medical coding program. “My previous 20-year-work history was in healthcare as an admin assistant, but I felt I needed a refresher course. My experience with Calbright so far has been amazing. It is a user-friendly program and they have provided all the necessary books and manuals for studying. I have had routine follow-up phone meetings with student advocates wanting to know how my studies are going and how they can improve my experience.”

[Alt-Text] Image of California divided by county, with lines pointing to the counties in which Hector, Monica, and Deborah live.

A student survey conducted December 2020-January 2021 found that 9 in 10 are satisfied with their overall experience at Calbright, including more than half who say they are “very satisfied.” When asked for the three most important things to improve for Calbright students going forward, “program choices” was the most common response by far — chosen by nearly half — followed by “connections to employers” and “course navigation.” This valuable student feedback has informed operational priorities for Calbright as well as the Strategic Vision.

Economic and Demographic Context

Calbright first began serving students in October 2019, just five months before the global pandemic upended both education and the workforce. Even before the pandemic, more than 8 million adults with a high school diploma but no college degree were effectively stranded¹ — many of them employed, but without financial stability or mobility. The problem struck especially deep for Black and Latinx families, service workers, and those seeking a second chance after involvement with the justice system, and women made up a disproportionate share of California workers in low wage jobs.² Meanwhile, experts were predicting a crisis, where employers would face a million unfilled jobs in fast-growing industries because workers lacked the necessary education.³

Pandemic Impacts

Then COVID-19 turned crisis into catastrophe. The same people who were already most likely to be struggling with a changing economy have borne the brunt of the pandemic.⁴ While white-collar workers with college degrees have largely carried on in the safety and convenience of home offices, blue-collar and service industries have been decimated.⁵ The advantaged are positioned to recover rapidly, while those who were most vulnerable before the pandemic worked in fields that are least likely to bounce back quickly — or at all.

Despite the need to prepare for remaining and growing jobs, compounding financial and time pressures due to COVID-19 are causing many to delay or cancel their postsecondary plans, including 42% of U.S. households with incomes below \$25,000.⁶ Inequitable pandemic effects by race and gender also threaten both economic recovery and educational opportunity. Unemployment has risen fastest for women and Black, and Latinx adults, and Black, Latinx, and Indigenous people face greater COVID-19 exposure and higher death rates than other racial/ethnic populations.

The pandemic has been especially hard on women, particularly women of color, mothers, and those caring for other family members. Nationally, 2.3 million women left the workforce since the pandemic began, compared to 1.8 million men — a 28% difference.⁷ COVID-19 magnified longstanding inequities in women's economic opportunities, including pay disparities, occupational segregation, inadequate child care infrastructure, the lack of family-friendly workplace policies, and the lack of support and recognition for caregivers. Economists anticipate lasting negative effects on women's current and future employment and earnings, as well as their retirement security.⁸

Building for a More Equitable Recovery

Now more than ever, Californians need quality, affordable pathways to get back into the workforce and into better-paying, more secure jobs. Millions of Californians who are out of work or just scraping by are eager to gain the skills they need for better jobs, but they need a solution that fits their real lives. They are raising children, caring for parents, and cobbling together a living, often working two or more jobs or gigs. To get ahead, they need education options that fit their schedules and focus on requirements that are relevant, necessary, and build on what they already know.

As an uneven recovery begins, community college enrollment is expected to rebound. As seen in past recessions, higher education and workforce systems will be taxed to meet the needs of diverse learners. Our higher education systems were built for traditional-aged college students matriculating from high school. Our workforce systems were built for a time when people stayed in a single career in a single industry. To avoid exacerbating persistent equity gaps, new tools and strategies are needed to successfully serve Calbright's focus populations.

Rising Enrollment at For-Profit Colleges

To build a more equitable future, California needs to learn from past crises. Working learners, eager to improve their lives, are tempting targets for predatory for-profit colleges that promise

quick fixes, but often leave students deep in debt they cannot repay. Students who attended a for-profit college after losing their job during the last recession are, on average, financially worse off today than they would have been had they not attended college at all.⁹

The last two recessions brought historic surges in for-profit enrollments. With for-profits already dominating the online space before the pandemic, they're poised to capitalize once again. After years of steady decline, for-profit enrollment increased nationally by more than 5 percent from fall 2019 to fall 2020, while community college enrollment fell 10 percent.¹⁰

A decade from now, we do not want to be facing this same reality. California has the opportunity before us to build a more equitable economic recovery. In past recessions and recoveries, our focus populations lacked access to quality education opportunities. Calbright's programs provide high-quality, public options that are responsive to shifting economic conditions.

[Alt Text] A graphic showing the annual percent change of national fall enrollment between 2018 and 2020; for-profit colleges have increased 5.3% from 2019 to 2020 while community college enrollment fell 10.1% in the same time period.

Statewide Need

Currently, nearly 11 million California adults aged 25 or older have completed high school but do not have a degree.¹¹ They represent at least a quarter of the population in every county, and in some as much as two thirds. Meanwhile, the pandemic has driven up unemployment rates across the state, making an already tough job market even tougher for adults without degrees. In December 2020, county-level unemployment rates ranged from 5.5% to 17.7%. Because unemployment rates exclude people who have dropped out of the workforce, current rates understate COVID-19's impact on unemployment, especially for women.

[Alt Text] This map illustrates the statewide need for Calbright's unique role. County by county, it shows the December 2020 unemployment rate and the percentage of adults without degrees. Counties where both factors are highest are dark purple; counties where they are both the lowest are light grey. We use frequently updated information like this to inform our work, including both statewide and regional collaborations; the map shows darker counties in the northern and more rural parts of the state.

Calbright's Timeline

When the California Online Community College Act became law in July 2018, a legislative concept for a different kind of community college became a statutory mandate to rapidly create one. The statute includes milestones that set a brisk pace for a "seven-year startup period."¹²

Built from the ground up and launched as an early start-up in October 2019, Calbright began with three no-fee programs and deliberately limited initial enrollment. That "beta cohort" provided invaluable feedback on what did and did not work in the first iteration of Calbright's operating systems and program design. After assessing what was and was not working for our students, we paused recruitment during fall 2020 while making data-driven improvements to our

programs and the student experience. During 2020, Calbright also built internal capacity and started developing our Strategic Vision and operational plans for the next three years as we shift from launch to growth mode.

Calbright met all of our statutory requirements in 2019 and 2020, despite both a leadership transition and the arrival of COVID-19 within our first year of operation. These included a seven-year startup implementation plan; launching and enrolling students in three programs; plans for accreditation, enrollment, and statewide outreach; an accessibility review; and initial business plans and processes, personnel policies, and student experience mapping. The Strategic Vision's goals include, but are not limited to, meeting all statutory milestones during the three-year Vision period.

Timeline

- 2018
 - July 2018
 - California Online Community College Act became law
- 2019
 - February 2019
 - 7-year startup period begins; first CEO appointed
 - October 2019
 - Calbright launches 3 inaugural programs; first students enroll
- 2020
 - July 2020
 - Second CEO appointed
 - September - November 2020
 - Recruitment pause to make data-driven improvements
 - October 2020
 - California Teachers Association welcomed as Calbright's official faculty union
 - December 2020
 - All 2019 and 2020 statutory milestones met
- 2021
 - January 2021
 - Strategic Vision 3-year period begins
 - 507 students enrolled; 28 completers
 - May 2021
 - Working Learner Innovation Alliance launch
 - July 2021
 - Make student-informed improvements; design and validate 3 programs; apply for accreditation
- 2022
 - April 2022
 - Accreditation candidacy deadline
- 2023
 - July 2023

- Make student-informed improvements; design and validate 10 programs, at least 1 in collaboration with another community college.
 - December 2023
 - 5,000 students enrolled, 1,200 completed a program, 250-550 positive labor market outcomes; 10 new programs launched; 20 external collaborations; fully accredited
 - Strategic Vision 3-year period ends
- 2024
 - December 2024
 - Accelerated enrollment: increased 50% from end of 2023
- 2025
 - April 2025
 - Full accreditation deadline
 - July 2025
 - Make student-informed improvements
- 2026
 - January 2026
 - Begin independent evaluation of Calbright's programs, partnerships, and outcomes
 - 7-year startup period concludes

Strategic Vision

Purpose and Process

The Strategic Vision development process began in fall 2020. It included research and data analysis to inform goal development; and individual interviews, facilitated group discussions, and surveys to gather input from both internal and external stakeholders. There were also monthly discussions with Calbright's Board of Trustees and opportunities for public comment as the vision took shape, as well as an in-depth study session with the full board.

Stakeholders with a wide range of perspectives shared their hopes and concerns for Calbright, how they see the challenges and opportunities ahead, and what success in three years looks like to them. They included Calbright trustees, faculty, staff, and students; the CCC Chancellor; labor organizations; employer associations; philanthropic foundations; and both the executive and legislative branches of state government. Stakeholders pictured Calbright's success primarily in terms of student success, both completion and jobs. There was broad agreement about Calbright's potential to increase the CCC system's capacity to better serve working learners, along with some differences about how to do so. And we found wide variation in awareness and accuracy about Calbright's operating model, progress, and statutory requirements, and how our programs and design differ from our sister colleges'.

The Strategic Vision sets Calbright's overarching direction for the next three years, defining and conveying our strategy and goals. It will inform internal decisions and priorities during this crucial stage of development, in a very unpredictable environment. In the second half of 2020, Calbright was already shifting from learning from our initial launch period to using that learning to inform our growth. By spelling out what success in three years will look like, the Strategic

Vision increases transparency and supports accountability for Calbright's progress in meeting both our statutory milestones and self-imposed goals for success.

Principles

These are the principles guiding Calbright's work as we fulfill the Strategic Vision. These principles are grounded in Calbright's founding mission and unique role, contribute to the CCC system's Vision for Success, and are informed by stakeholders' hopes and expectations.

- Add Value: benefit Calbright's students, the CCC system, employers, and the state
- Support the Learner: design to meet the specific needs of adults without degrees
- Focus on Good Jobs: prepare learners to secure and succeed in available jobs with career potential, in stable or growing industries
- Advance Equity: narrow opportunity gaps by race and ethnicity, gender, income, region
- Be Responsive: keep improving in response to relevant changes in economic conditions, research, policy, workforce needs, and learners' lives
- Align Quality and Growth: grow enrollment while strengthening outcomes through high-quality teaching, learning, and student experience, consistent with available resources

Goals for 2023

At the core of the Strategic Vision are goals that define what success in three years looks like for Calbright as a whole. They provide an overarching, strategic framework for Calbright's operational planning and tactics, as well as greater clarity for external stakeholders. Both ambitious and achievable given limited resources, the goals are grouped into 7 strategic focus areas: High-Quality, Scalable Growth; Student Success; Collaboration; Innovation; Shared Gains; Accreditation; and Positioned for Acceleration and Influence.

In researching relevant benchmarks and comparison points for our Growth and Student Success goals, we found that very little was available or directly applicable to our mission, model, and focus populations. This paucity of relevant, high-quality data underscores just how different Calbright is: we are doing something that has not been done before. It also confirms Calbright's essential role in elevating the importance and capabilities of working learners and building the evidence base for how to serve them well.

Together, our interrelated goals:

- Set Calbright's strategic direction for high-quality growth through 2023;
- Preserve the flexibility needed to stay on course in unpredictable conditions;
- Directly inform internal decision-making and priorities;
- Include but are not limited to meeting statutory milestones; and
- Assume a base of stable state funding at \$15 million/year through 2023.

High-Quality, Scalable Growth

As part of the Strategic Vision process, we challenged ourselves to set ambitious, data-informed, and sustainable goals for serving more students and offering more programs -- without sacrificing quality to growth. To do so, we applied lessons learned from our first year of operation, analyzed multiple scenarios, questioned our assumptions, and tapped internal and external expertise. We also examined about 30 institutions that currently have online CBE programs and found that their trajectories — adding CBE and/or going online many years after their founding — constrained meaningful comparisons of early growth (the one partial exception is noted under Enrollment below). This due diligence, combined with financial assumptions based on the budget we currently have, underpin the following goals.

Programs: Calbright has launched 10 new programs by 2023, including at least one developed with another CCC.

By the end of the Vision period, Calbright will have launched 10 new, high-quality CBE programs designed specifically to prepare adult learners for good, available jobs, and we will develop at least one of them in close collaboration with a sister college. (An additional three programs will have been designed and validated for launch in 2024.)

Calbright's new programs will integrate innovative teaching, learning, and student supports, based on evidence of what works, and led by talented faculty and staff. This goes far beyond putting content online: it is a transformative change in the way faculty and staff engage with adult learners. Programs are built around students' needs, lowering common obstacles so they can focus more on learning and less on navigating institutional processes. For example, students can get help when they need it, not just during standard business hours when they are most likely to be busy with jobs and/or caregiving. And students who have to take weeks off because of a family illness can pick up where they left off, instead of having to start over at the beginning of another semester.

All Calbright programs will fill gaps in the availability and accessibility of high-quality, high-value training programs, providing working adults with an affordable, public alternative to for-profit colleges. Each program will provide a specific skill set that employers want, and which our students can instantly apply in the working world. These programs will be modular, not just stackable: students can combine them in different ways to position themselves for different roles within and across industries. For many students, our programs can also serve as stepping stones to continuing their education at other higher education institutions.

For example, Calbright faculty and staff are building a new program series called Transition to Technology, which is already well underway. Its programs are designed for working adults without prior tech experience, who are looking to move into roles and sectors that depend more on technology than their current or prior jobs. The foundational program, Customer Relationship Management (CRM) Platform Administration, was approved by Calbright's board in February 2021 and prepares students for an industry certification exam. New CRM Business Analyst and CRM Junior Developer programs, which build on the Platform Administration skills, are progressing from design through validation for board approval this year.

New programs will reflect changing workforce needs as well as emerging evidence of best practices. This means we expect to end or alter some programs as we add others during the Vision period.

Enrollment: 5,000 students are enrolled at Calbright at the end of 2023, and 75% are from focus populations.

Enrollment will rise tenfold during the Vision period, from 500 at the start of 2021 to 5,000 at the end of 2023. Our growing programs and partnerships will both drive and support this growth, as we simultaneously build out our systems, faculty, and staff to support more students. For context, Calbright will expand much faster than the most comparable example of early growth. Western Governors University, which was also built from the ground up to provide CBE online, took nearly seven years to go from launching its first program to enrolling 5,000 students.¹³ Calbright will do it in just over four years.

A California Community College, Calbright is an open enrollment institution. As we become better known, more students from outside our focus populations may seek to enroll. While we will not screen any eligible students out, we do have a goal for effectively reaching the students we were created to serve. Through outreach, marketing, partnerships, and a laser-focus on equity, we will aim to have at least 75% of our students from our focus populations: Californians who are age 25 and older without a college degree, who are Latinx, Black, or Indigenous, and others currently underrepresented both in higher education and in good jobs.

Student Success

Economic mobility and equity are the core of Calbright's mission: we only succeed if our students succeed and at equitable rates. For us, success means that students complete Calbright programs, and more importantly, that they are better off in the labor market as a result. These goals are our top priority and will be achieved by learning and improving as Calbright scales up throughout the next three years. We not only aim to reach or exceed the totals detailed below, but also to increase equity in how they are reached.

To develop these goals, we analyzed the limited relevant data from other public institutions and adult job programs. We reviewed research on how economic pressures, family responsibilities, and structural inequities — all compounded by the pandemic — are affecting our focus populations' lives and education decisions. And we looked to our own students' experiences at and beyond Calbright. The numbers tie back to the growth goals above, taking into account that program launches, program expansions, partnerships, and related enrollment will increase throughout the Vision Period.

Completion:

By the end of 2023, 1,200 students have completed a Calbright program.

A cumulative total of 1,200 students will have completed a self-paced Calbright program by the end of the Vision period, including industry- and employer- recognized credential, certificate, and skill mastery (badge and micro-credential) programs.

Our commitment to equity includes recognizing that our students have many non-negotiable demands on their time and attention, and respecting their judgement about when Calbright can come first. That is why all Calbright courses are self-paced, and it informs how we set this goal. The students Calbright was created to serve were also already under tremendous economic and time pressures pre-COVID. Now they are also contending with a year of closed schools, lost jobs or reduced hours, and higher COVID rates in their communities. Most must work whenever they can to keep food on the table, and many are in jobs that cannot be done from home. And then there is the essential, unpaid work of caring for their own children, elderly parents, and loved ones with disabilities.

This goal assumes that 23% of all students who enroll in 2021 and 2022 will complete a program within 12 months, taking competing responsibilities and pacing into account. That is nearly four times the national rate at which independent community college students complete a certificate within a much longer period (6% within 36 months).¹⁴ Calbright students who enroll in 2023 are not included because many of them will complete their program after the Vision period ends.

Labor Market Outcomes:

By the end of 2023, 250-550 students (depending on pace of economic recovery) have attained a positive labor market outcome within 6 months of program completion.

How quickly the economy recovers from the pandemic will affect the labor market for Calbright students and all Californians. Given high economic uncertainty, we set a range -- 250 to 550 -- for the cumulative total of students who will have attained a positive labor market outcome within six months of completing a Calbright program.

These figures do not include any students enrolled after June 2022 (halfway through the Vision period), because many of those students will not have time to both complete a program and reach their labor market goal by the end of 2023. The strong recovery goal of 550 parallels the pre-COVID success rate for California's adult employment programs: 90% as compared to 87.9%. The weak recovery goal of 250 is much higher than the current success rate for the same programs: 40% as compared to 17.5%.¹⁵

Together, Calbright's faculty, staff, and leadership will do everything we can to prepare and support students for success in the labor market, whatever it looks like at the time. The positive outcomes we will track will include, but are not limited to, moving from one job to another with higher compensation. They will also include moving from un- and underemployment into a good job, transitioning to a new role and/or industry with career potential, and keeping a current job that now requires new skills.

Collaboration

Collaboration is a core value for Calbright. It is built into how we do our work, add value, and fulfill our mission. Throughout the Vision period, we will be forming mutually beneficial partnerships with sister community colleges, regional and state entities focused on economic development, employer and industry associations, labor organizations, and individual employers. And we will have a fully operational participatory governance structure to facilitate internal collaboration.

Partnerships:

Calbright has engaged 20 external partners by the end of 2023.

Partnerships enable Calbright to tap into the different types of knowledge, expertise, and relationships we need to successfully meet both learners' and employers' needs. And partnerships enable Calbright to contribute to efforts beyond our virtual walls, by collaborating with others committed to equitably expanding educational and economic opportunity for adults without degrees. By the end of 2023, Calbright will have engaged 20 external stakeholders in partnerships involving a range of collaborative work, from short-term research projects to longer term relationships and programs.

Community College Districts and Campuses:

Calbright partners with more colleges and districts interested in working together on innovative ways to serve adult learners.

Calbright's partnerships with sister colleges may take different forms, but all will help model and expand opportunities for students — and colleges — throughout the CCC system. We look forward to working with interested colleges and districts to co-develop innovative CBE programs, to build paths for Calbright students into programs in other parts of the system, and to improve outcomes for adult learners.

We are already collaborating within the system. In partnership with Compton College, we are building bridges for Calbright students into Compton's certificate and degree programs, and giving Compton students access to additional job-search support. And a joint pilot program with Bakersfield College will increase access to skills-based badging and micro-credentials. We are also building a new Working Learner Innovation Alliance with community college districts eager to work together on better serving adult learners.

Economic Development Efforts:

Calbright engages in statewide and regional efforts led by entities such as economic development agencies, county and local governments, Workforce Development Boards, and CCC Districts' regional networks

These efforts are about helping people get jobs and employers get skilled employees. With economic development leaders statewide and in critical regions, we are exploring where and

how Calbright can best add value now and over the next three years. This includes finding innovative ways that workforce-focused entities and community colleges can work together to increase equitable access to good jobs.

For example, we are working with Workforce Development Boards in priority regions to help them better assess the value of skills their clients already have, and offer training through Calbright for good jobs in their area. This partnered approach will be piloted in four regions: SELACO (Southeast Los Angeles County), San Bernardino (Inland Empire), Fresno (Central Valley), and NOVA (San Jose area to San Mateo County).

Employer Associations, Industries/Sectors, Labor Organizations, and Individual Employers: Statewide and regional partnerships inform Calbright's programs, create employment pathways for students, and/or enhance labor market outcomes

By engaging with employment-related partners, we will identify gaps in skills, jobs that are unfilled, and needed training that is either not currently offered or not available statewide. These partnerships will help Calbright stay informed about important developments in a rapidly changing labor market, and provide insights into the hiring process that help us better support job-seekers without degrees.

Such collaborations are already helping Calbright ensure that new programs build the essential skill base for key jobs and sectors. For example, we have partnered with Cognizant, a rapidly expanding technology consulting employer, in developing our Transition to Technology program series as well as identifying a potential employment opportunity for some of our students. For example, we have partnered with Cognizant, a rapidly expanding technology consulting employer, in developing our Transition to Technology program series as well as an earn-and-learn opportunity for some of our students. Discussions with SEIU-UHW have been critical to ensuring our allied health programs will provide what frontline workers need most. We are working with the Association of California Healthcare Districts (ACHD) to assess training needs and job opportunities within rural community hospitals. And we will be engaging with the advanced manufacturing sector to explore strategies for developing needed skills in this field, supported by a new grant from the Governor's Office of Planning and Research, funded by the U.S. Department of Defense.

Governance:

Calbright's participatory governance structure is in place.

Faculty, staff, and students will all have a voice in shaping how the college fulfills our shared commitment to student success, and in building and maintaining an equitable and inclusive work environment. Calbright's fully realized governance structure will reflect Calbright's unique model and build on the strong tradition of participatory governance in the CCC system. Our structure will honor the leadership, contributions, and perspectives of faculty and staff across the institution, ensure student representation, and support collaboration across roles and divisions.

An anonymous staff and faculty survey conducted in fall 2020 included an open-ended question about Calbright's top three strengths. The three most common themes were colleagues' commitment to and passion for Calbright's mission, innovation, and resilience. These strengths will be reflected in a dynamic and collaborative approach to participatory governance.

"Calbright is different from other colleges, which is reflected in faculty roles. We don't just teach how to do a particular task or pass an industry certification exam: we make sure students can take what they've learned at Calbright out into the world to reach their goals. That's why we're building a non-traditional model for how faculty and administration collectively deliver for our students. There's an established, open-door relationship, and we work to keep it that way, with information flowing in both directions. Student success is what's driving us all, and that makes it easier to lead together," said Michael Stewart, President, Calbright Academic Senate.

Innovation:

Calbright has operationalized innovation to drive student success and high-quality growth.

Calbright's ability to innovate and grow depends on a combination of people, expertise, systems, and technology, all working together to build a new kind of community college and serve working adults in more effective ways. During the Vision period, these are the main, interrelated ways that Calbright will operationalize innovation to drive student success and high-quality growth.

- **Design:** Build and strengthen an innovative model for providing integrated learning and support online, designed specifically for working adults.
- **Implementation:** Continually improve our process for rapidly creating and launching high-quality CBE programs with integrated supports.
- **Student Experience:** Provide a unique, intuitive, end-to-end experience guided by the student's goals.
- **Research and Analysis:** Collect and analyze practical data so that we identify needed improvements and new opportunities, respond efficiently to changing workforce and student needs, and only scale what works.

Case Study: Collaborative Research and Design

To build successful, innovative programs, Calbright seeks deep insights into what specific skills are required for working learners to make the jump to better jobs. That is why we take a human-centered approach to researching workforce skills. The value of this research applies to employers across industries that rely on related skill sets.

After confirming that Customer Relationship Management (CRM) platform administration skills are sought after in the job market, Calbright set up a partnership with Cognizant -- a consulting company that has a large CRM practice. For six weeks, Calbright's faculty and staff listened to and observed employees, their managers, and subject matter experts to understand what it

really takes to do the job well. After all, who would know what skills were needed better than successful employees?

This collaborative research shaped the concept and design of an innovative series of new programs that Calbright will launch in 2021. The first, Transition to Technology: Customer Relationship Management Platform Administration, is for learners who have no previous technology experience. It integrates an industry-recognized certification with essential workforce skills like communication and time management, as well as career preparation supports, such as for resume writing and interviewing. Some learners will also have the opportunity to transition into an earn-and-learn program with Cognizant as they expand their Salesforce skills with Calbright, further integrating their learning and career development progress.

Our Potential Learners

In the summer of 2020, Calbright conducted a statewide study aimed at understanding the effects of the global pandemic on Calbright's focus population: California's adults without degrees. The research included a survey of 1,200 low-income adults without degrees between the ages of 25 and 50, and eight online focus groups across various economic regions. The research aimed to uncover the unique needs and transferable skills for potential learners across California's economic landscapes. This allows Calbright to honor the aspirations, motivations, and needs of our focus population in all aspects of our work.

Balancing Caregiving:

Many potential learners have previously pursued a degree, but found their formal education cut short in order to care for children or other family members. These Californians include both stay-at-home parents and people currently working in industries such as healthcare, food, and customer service.

In their words

- "I am excited by the possibility of being able to learn online"
- "I learn best setting my own path and pace"
- "My greatest achievements are ahead of me"
- "A woman can work and be a good mother"

Working in Vulnerable Industries:

Some learners recognize that economic shifts are changing their employment prospects and are open to gaining skills they need to get ahead or stay afloat. They are especially likely to work in retail, construction, or customer service.

In their words

- "I am open to starting over"
- "It is important to find work that challenges my mind"
- "I would prefer to find work that challenges me to think even when I'm not on the job"
- "Education just needs to give me the ability to succeed"

- “I am considering changing jobs based on the COVID-19 situation”

Experience in the Justice System:

For Californians who have had experience in the justice system, education can be a necessity for advancement. However, they typically lack support, struggle to make ends meet, and face the most barriers in getting training. They often do gig work, or work in construction, shipping or the food industry.

In their words

- “Education is necessary to succeed in life”
- “Education is a means to achieve my goals”
- “I enjoy having a structured work schedule”
- “I struggle to make ends meet”
- “I do not have a strong support system in my life”
- “I do not feel like I am living a fulfilling life”
- “I do not face the same struggles as the average person

Shared Gains

Calbright will actively share the knowledge, strategies, and tools that emerge from our innovation and research during the Vision period, adding value to the CCC system and the field. Such shared gains will include but not be limited to CBE program design, faculty and staff development, technology to improve the learner experience, and models for collaboration. Calbright will also help solve problems affecting sister colleges and the system as a whole.

CBE:

Calbright shares our growing expertise in designing and delivering online, competency-based education (CBE) programs for working learners.

Community colleges’ interest in CBE is rising because of its potential to help more working learners reach their career goals. While flexibility is a central feature of CBE programs, most CCC policies, processes, and structures are built for more rigid, conventional program structures and schedules. Calbright will support the growing interest in career-oriented, high-quality CBE — within and beyond the CCC system — through technical assistance, faculty and staff development opportunities, and sharing our program model.

Research and Development:

Calbright’s R and D opens doors to innovation at other colleges, and informs workforce and economic development efforts.

At Calbright, everything first happens in an R and D setting to determine if it is worth investing in for students and the state. Throughout the Vision period, we will document and disseminate what we learn to help build the currently scant knowledge base about what works best — and not so well — for working learners. We will also share what we learn about the labor market,

hiring practices, and our focus learner populations in ways that aim to strengthen employer engagement activities across the system.

As we continue to develop and launch new programs, we will use what we learn from our just-in-time research to decide not whether to grow but how best to grow.

Common Challenges: Calbright will identify and solve common challenges faced by working learners and community colleges.

As a statewide institution, Calbright is uniquely positioned to surface and tackle problems affecting our focus learner populations and community colleges across the state. Doing so is part of both our mandate and our strategy for high-quality, student-centered growth.

We have already begun to move forward on this goal. For example, we are helping rural sister colleges meet their technology needs in the wake of the pandemic-driven shift to remote learning. Our first partnerships with other community colleges, described above, are finding shared ways to better meet the needs of working learners. We have also identified and proposed solutions to equity issues with CCC Apply, the system-wide enrollment application (see box for details).

Tackling Common Challenges: CCCApply

Because Calbright is data-driven, we follow our learners from their first contact with Calbright. And because we always have equity in mind, we discovered that we were disproportionately losing Black and adult prospective students early in the application process. We then conducted a deep, user-centered analysis of CCCApply. After identifying specific, practical ways to make the application process less burdensome and confusing, we shared our findings¹⁶ with the whole system. The changes we recommend would both support the system-wide goal of narrowing equity gaps and benefit all students and the colleges that want to enroll them.

Accreditation

Accreditation is a federally recognized form of quality assurance in higher education. It is a key milestone that will set Calbright up for both faster growth and long-term sustainability. That is why we have prioritized reaching it as quickly as possible, and we expect to remain ahead of schedule. We are already in the process of seeking approval from an accreditor recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. Once Calbright is accredited, our students will have access to federal and state student aid. Pell Grants and Cal Grants can help working adults pay for childcare and limit the number of jobs they have to work, so they can afford to spend time on coursework and make more progress towards completion. Accreditation also opens the door to new funding sources for Calbright itself.

Candidacy:

Calbright will have completed the accreditation application process by the end of 2021. We will be in candidate status or its equivalent within 2021, which is not required by statute until 2022.

Completion:

Calbright will be fully accredited ahead of schedule, by the end of 2023.

We will remain ahead of schedule and reach full accreditation within 2023, which is not required by statute until 2025.

Positioned for Acceleration and Influence

By the end of the Vision period, Calbright will be poised to grow much more rapidly. And Calbright's work will have earned national recognition and influence.

Acceleration:

At the end of 2023, Calbright is ready to scale enrollment by 50% (to 7,500) the next year and keep growing, resources permitting.

Calbright will have the people, expertise, systems, and technology we need to accelerate our growth while ensuring that every student is served well. Faculty and staff will already be hired and prepared to take our innovation model to scale. We will have a well-tested, rapid program-creation process, a working fee model ready for implementation, and the research and marketing capability to support accelerated, high-quality growth.

Influence:

Calbright has become a nationally recognized model for innovation and equity in serving adults without degrees.

What Calbright learns, accomplishes, and shares during the Vision period will position Calbright, and our partners within and beyond the CCC system, as leaders for innovation and equity.

Calbright's value is recognized through stronger relationships with key stakeholders and collaborators: sister colleges, higher education and industry leaders, technologists, employers, labor organizations, student and equity advocates, think tanks, and policymakers. Calbright will use this earned visibility and influence to inform practice and policy — in California and nationally — to increase access to high-quality, skills-based education and improve economic mobility for underserved adults.

Conclusion

Calbright will fulfill this Strategic Vision by delivering innovative, student-centered, data-informed, integrated learning and supports to our growing base of students every step of the way; and by innovating, learning, and improving as we grow. We will meet or exceed our ambitious three-year goals by keeping equity at the center at every stage of a student's journey. That includes how we reach out to prospective students, how we respond when they express interest, and how we support them all the way through Calbright programs and then navigating the labor market. The results: more adults without degrees come to Calbright, gain valuable hard and soft skills, and end up in better jobs as a result. They have also laid a foundation for more education if and when they are ready, and the CCC system is stronger because it is better equipped to help working adults succeed.

As this one-of-a-kind community college moves through this critical stage of development, we will track Calbright's progress toward our goals and share what we learn from both successes and stumbles. This transparency will be apparent in the frequent public meetings of our Board of Trustees, annual reports to the Legislature, and ongoing communications with the public, policymakers, the CCC system, researchers, and others focused on increasing economic mobility and equity, in California and nationally.

Acknowledgments

Our heartfelt thanks to Calbright's staff, faculty, students, and board for their many contributions as this Strategic Vision took shape. We especially appreciate the time and support provided by the board's leadership throughout the process: Tom Epstein, Pamela Haynes, and Amy Costa.

We are grateful to the external stakeholders who shared their valuable time and perspectives through interviews: Lande Ajose, Senior Policy Advisor for Higher Education, Office of Governor Gavin Newsom; Dolores Davison, President, Academic Senate for California Community Colleges; Gareth Elliott, Partner, Sacramento Advocates; Louis Freedberg, Executive Director, EdSource; Jeff Freitas, President, California Federation of Teachers; Alma Hernandez, Executive Director, SEIU; Eric Kaljumagi, President, Community College Association; Virginia May, Vice President, Academic Senate for California Community Colleges; Eloy Oakley, Chancellor, California Community Colleges; Olgalilia Ramirez, Principal Consultant, Senate Committee on Education; David Rattray, President and CEO, UNITE-LA; Jeanice Warden-Washington, Chief Consultant, Assembly Higher Education Committee; Jim Wunderman, President and CEO, Bay Area Council; and Karen Zamaripa, President, Karen Zamarripa Consulting.

Thanks also go to the skilled consultants who made this report possible: Lauren Asher designed and led a strategy development process tailored to Calbright's needs, Diane Cheng's research and analysis expanded our frame of reference for goal-setting; and Thomas Weitz designed the report.

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