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Navigator Training, Volunteer Training, and Job Readiness Programs

Building the Workforce That Builds Compliance Capacity

The work requirement ecosystem described throughout this series depends on trained navigators, peer specialists, and community health workers who don't yet exist in sufficient numbers. Article Series 8 outlined the layered human infrastructure needed: professional CHWs handling complex cases, CISE providers offering peer support, faith-based volunteers providing community-embedded assistance. But where do these people come from? How do they get trained? And critically, can that training itself count toward work requirements for expansion adults who pursue it?

This article examines navigator and volunteer training as a distinct educational pathway, one that simultaneously builds individual human capital, creates system capacity, and satisfies compliance obligations. It also addresses the broader category of job readiness programs that prepare expansion adults for employment without providing traditional credentials. These programs occupy essential space between foundational education and vocational training, serving people who have basic skills but lack the soft skills, professional norms, and practical readiness that employers expect.

The Navigator Training Opportunity

Work requirements create demand for navigators that the current workforce cannot meet. The 18.5 million expansion adults facing compliance obligations will need help understanding requirements, gathering documentation, accessing exemptions, and maintaining coverage through life transitions. Professional navigator capacity serving this population might reach 60,000-90,000 nationally. The gap between need and professional capacity must be filled by peer navigators, trained volunteers, and community-based supporters operating at scale that professional services cannot achieve.

Training these navigators represents an educational activity that should count toward work requirements. Someone spending 120-160 hours completing navigator certification is engaged in genuine human capital development with clear labor market value. The training produces skills immediately applicable to employment in healthcare navigation, social services, community health work, and related fields. It also produces capacity to help others navigate work requirements, creating multiplicative benefit beyond individual compliance.

The virtuous cycle is significant. An expansion adult facing work requirements enrolls in navigator training. The training hours count toward their compliance obligation. Upon completion, they can work as a navigator, with employment hours continuing to satisfy requirements. Their work helps other expansion adults maintain coverage and comply with requirements. Some of those helped may themselves pursue navigator training, extending the cycle. Each trained navigator both satisfies their own requirements and builds capacity serving others.

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Navigator Training Curriculum

Effective navigator training covers multiple competency domains. The specific curriculum varies by credentialing body and state requirements, but core elements appear consistently across programs.

Medicaid eligibility and enrollment forms the foundation. Navigators must understand income thresholds, household composition rules, categorical eligibility, and the enrollment process itself. They need familiarity with both expansion adult coverage and traditional Medicaid categories to recognize when someone might qualify through multiple pathways. They must understand redetermination processes and the documentation required to maintain coverage.

Work requirement specifics build on eligibility foundations. Navigators learn qualifying activities, hour thresholds, reporting periods, and verification processes. They understand exemption categories in detail: which conditions qualify, what documentation is required, how long exemptions last, and how to pursue renewals. They learn to distinguish between state-specific rules and federal parameters, recognizing that requirements vary across jurisdictions.

Documentation and verification skills enable practical assistance. Navigators learn what documents satisfy various requirements, how to help people gather documentation they may not realize they have, and how to work with employers, educational institutions, and other entities providing verification. They understand submission processes, deadlines, and what happens when documentation is incomplete or rejected.

Communication and cultural competency shape how navigators interact with the people they serve. Training covers trauma-informed approaches recognizing that many expansion adults have experienced systems that harmed rather than helped them. Cultural competency addresses serving diverse populations with different languages, customs, and relationships to government systems. Motivational interviewing techniques help navigators support people facing difficult choices without imposing navigator preferences.

Professional boundaries and ethics protect both navigators and clients. Training establishes what navigators can and cannot do, when to refer to professional services, how to handle confidential information, and what constitutes appropriate relationships with people they serve. Navigators learn to recognize situations exceeding their competency and how to escalate appropriately.

Training Delivery Models

Navigator training can be delivered through multiple institutional pathways, each with different advantages for expansion adults seeking compliance credit.

Community colleges represent natural delivery platforms. Many already offer community health worker certificate programs that could be adapted or expanded to include work requirement navigation content. Community college delivery provides academic credit potentially stackable toward associate degrees, established verification infrastructure, and eligibility for federal financial aid. A 160-hour navigator certificate program at a community college might constitute a single semester of part-time enrollment, satisfying work requirements for that period while producing a marketable credential.

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Workforce development programs offer alternative delivery through the WIOA infrastructure described in Article 10B. American Job Centers could host navigator training as a workforce preparation program, with training hours tracked through existing WIOA reporting systems. This pathway connects navigator training to employment services, potentially linking graduates directly to navigator positions with MCOs, CBOs, or healthcare systems seeking trained staff.

Community-based organizations can deliver training embedded in the communities navigators will serve. A CBO serving a specific immigrant community might train navigators from that community who share language, culture, and lived experience with future clients. This delivery model sacrifices some standardization for cultural relevance and community trust. Credentialing such programs requires state frameworks recognizing non-institutional training while maintaining quality standards.

Online and hybrid models extend access beyond what physical locations can provide. Self-paced online modules covering knowledge content can be combined with in-person or synchronous online sessions addressing skills practice and supervised application. This flexibility serves expansion adults managing employment, caregiving, and other obligations that make fixed schedules difficult. Verification of online training hours requires learning management systems tracking engagement, similar to challenges discussed in Article 10A regarding online higher education.

Volunteer Training as Qualifying Activity

Not everyone completing navigator-related training will work as paid navigators. Many will volunteer through faith organizations, community groups, or informal networks described in Article Series 8. Should volunteer training count toward work requirements even when the resulting activity is unpaid?

The argument for counting volunteer training recognizes that training represents genuine educational activity regardless of how skills are subsequently used. Someone completing 40 hours of volunteer navigator training has engaged in 40 hours of human capital development. The training builds knowledge and skills with labor market value whether or not the individual immediately monetizes those skills. Excluding volunteer training would penalize people choosing community service over paid employment.

The argument against notes that work requirements aim to promote self-sufficiency through employment or employment preparation. Volunteer training leading to unpaid service doesn't advance toward employment in the way that vocational training does. Counting extensive volunteer training could enable compliance through activity that never transitions to paid work, potentially undermining policy goals.

A balanced approach might count volunteer training hours as qualifying educational activity while establishing expectations for subsequent volunteering. Someone completing 40 hours of volunteer navigator training receives compliance credit for those training hours. Subsequent volunteer service using those skills counts as qualifying volunteer activity under standard volunteer hour provisions. The training opens the door; ongoing compliance requires continued activity whether through volunteering, employment, or other qualifying pathways.

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States should establish *minimum training thresholds for volunteer programs seeking credentialing* as qualifying activity providers. A two-hour orientation doesn't constitute meaningful educational activity. A 20-hour training program covering substantive content and developing genuine competency represents education comparable to other qualifying activities. Setting thresholds ensures that volunteer training credit reflects genuine human capital development rather than token participation.

Job Readiness Programs

Beyond navigator training, broader job readiness programs serve expansion adults who have foundational skills but lack preparation for successful employment. These programs address the gap between educational credentials and actual employability, teaching soft skills, professional norms, and practical readiness that formal education often doesn't cover.

Soft skills training addresses interpersonal capabilities that employers consistently identify as hiring criteria. Communication, teamwork, problem-solving, time management, and adaptability appear on virtually every employer survey of desired employee characteristics. Expansion adults whose work history involved informal employment, frequent job changes, or extended unemployment may not have developed these skills through experience. Explicit training can build capabilities that enable successful employment.

Professional norms and workplace culture vary across industries and employers but share common elements that unfamiliar workers may not recognize. Expectations around punctuality, dress, communication with supervisors, handling of mistakes, and workplace relationships differ from norms in informal settings. Someone whose employment history involved day labor, gig work, or family businesses may not understand expectations in structured workplace environments. Training demystifies professional culture and prepares workers to meet expectations they can't meet if they don't know they exist.

Practical job search skills enable people to find and secure employment. Resume preparation, application completion, interview techniques, and follow-up practices all influence hiring outcomes. Expansion adults without recent successful job searches may use outdated approaches or make avoidable mistakes that prevent employment despite genuine qualifications. Practical training addressing job search mechanics improves employment outcomes independent of underlying skills or credentials.

Job retention skills address why people lose jobs, not just how they get them. Conflict resolution, stress management, work-life balance, and professional development all influence whether employment continues beyond initial hiring. Training that addresses retention alongside search prepares workers for sustained employment rather than repeated cycles of hiring and separation.

Employer-Based Job Readiness Programs

Large employers increasingly provide job readiness training for new hires rather than expecting workers to arrive fully prepared. These employer-based programs serve business needs while creating educational opportunities for workers including expansion adults.

Orientation and onboarding programs at major employers often involve substantial training hours. A new warehouse worker at Amazon might complete 20-40 hours of orientation covering safety

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procedures, equipment operation, company policies, and job-specific skills. A new retail associate at Walmart might complete similar orientation covering customer service, point-of-sale systems, inventory procedures, and loss prevention. These hours represent genuine training even when conducted by employers rather than educational institutions.

Seasonal employer training presents particular opportunities. Retailers hiring for holiday seasons, agricultural employers hiring for harvest periods, and hospitality employers hiring for tourist seasons all provide intensive training for large numbers of temporary workers. Expansion adults taking seasonal employment receive both work hours and training hours during compressed periods that can significantly advance compliance status.

Work requirement policies should **count employer-based job readiness training** as qualifying activity. Time spent in employer-provided orientation, onboarding, and skill development represents human capital development comparable to classroom instruction at external institutions. Verification is straightforward since employers can document training hours through the same systems tracking employment hours. The combined training and employment pathway enables compliance while building toward sustained work.

The distinction between training and routine work matters. Employer-provided training involves intentional skill development with educational content and structure. Routine work involves applying existing skills to job tasks. Relabeling routine work as "training" to generate additional compliance hours would undermine verification integrity. States should require that employer-reported training reflect genuine educational content with identifiable learning objectives, not simply hours on the job.

Verification and Credentialing

Training programs seeking recognition as qualifying educational activity need credentialing frameworks establishing legitimacy while remaining accessible to diverse providers.

State credentialing for navigator training should establish curriculum standards, instructor qualifications, and outcome expectations while allowing delivery flexibility. A credentialed navigator training program might be required to cover specified competency domains, employ instructors with relevant experience or credentials, and demonstrate that graduates can pass competency assessments. Programs meeting these standards receive authorization to provide verification for work requirement compliance regardless of institutional form.

Employer training verification requires different frameworks than institutional education. Employers don't seek educational accreditation, but they can be credentialed as verification submitters for training they provide. Credentialing might require documented training curricula, designated training staff, and systems for tracking training hours separate from general employment hours. Large employers with established training programs can meet these requirements readily. Smaller employers might use simplified verification through attestation rather than detailed documentation.

Audit and oversight mechanisms ensure verification integrity across provider types. Random audits confirming that reported training actually occurred, that content matched credentialed curricula, and that hours reflect genuine educational activity maintain system credibility. Providers

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with verification accuracy problems face enhanced scrutiny or loss of credentialing. The goal is enabling diverse providers while maintaining accountability.

The Dual Benefit of Navigation Training

Navigator training produces benefits beyond individual compliance. Each trained navigator represents capacity to help others navigate work requirements. This multiplicative effect distinguishes navigator training from most other educational pathways where benefits accrue primarily to the individual completing training.

If 100,000 expansion adults complete navigator training over the first two years of work requirement implementation, and each subsequently helps an average of 50 people navigate requirements, total navigation assistance reaches 5 million people. The investment in training those 100,000 individuals generates returns extending far beyond their individual compliance or employment outcomes. States recognizing this multiplicative benefit might prioritize navigator training support, potentially offering tuition assistance, training stipends, or enhanced compliance credit for navigator training completion.

The policy goal is not just individual compliance but system capacity. Navigator training serves both goals simultaneously, making it perhaps the highest-value educational pathway for work requirement infrastructure. States should actively promote navigator training as a compliance pathway, ensure training programs are accessible and affordable, and create employment pathways connecting trained navigators to positions serving expansion adult populations.

Next in series: Article 10E, "The Technical Framework: Hours, Calendars, and Verification Infrastructure"

Previous in series: Article 10C, "GED, ESL, and Adult Basic Education"

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