



## Women Employed

### INCREASING WOMEN'S ACCESS TO AND SUCCESS IN POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

The mission of Women Employed (WE) is to improve the economic status of women and remove barriers to economic equity. Founded in 1973, WE has played a leadership role in every important economic advance women have made, and is a recognized expert on fair workplace practices, postsecondary educational access for low-income individuals, affirmative action and equal opportunity practices, and career development.

Women Employed pursues its mission by analyzing issues, developing practical policy proposals, educating decision-makers and the public, and conducting advocacy. **The organization has two main priorities: increasing access to and success in postsecondary education and training, and improving workplace conditions for women in low-wage jobs.**

Education and training is key to women's economic advancement because it is a proven strategy for raising incomes. A woman with a two-year associate's degree earns 28 percent more and a woman with a bachelor's degree earns 75 percent more than a woman with only a high school education. Most lower-income individuals currently receive their postsecondary education and training in community colleges. In fact, nearly half of all undergraduates nationally are enrolled in community colleges, making their programs essential to women's economic advancement.

Too many adults face barriers to postsecondary credential attainment such as low basic skills attainment, inadequate financial aid programs, lack of student supports, and poor program quality, in addition to personal and family barriers.

### OUR STRATEGIES

- **Ensure adequate and effective student supports to enable more individuals to enroll in and complete college programs**

**Work directly with community colleges to improve practices:** Women Employed works with colleges and related community organizations to develop innovations and spread best practices for improving student supports through our *Clear Connections Project*. With 20 collaborating institutions in Illinois, we focus on academic advising, financial aid administration, tutoring, career counseling, child care, transportation, and job placement.

*It's up to us.*

**Improving student supports policies and funding:** Women Employed works directly with state and federal policymakers, including the Illinois Student Assistance Commission, to improve student supports (such as advising and career counseling) and financial aid policies, with a special focus on the needs of working adult students. WE is the leading advocate for increasing state funding and financial aid outreach to ensure that adult students with financial need can obtain assistance to attend college. Our work with policymakers has led to millions in increased appropriations of tuition assistance funds, benefitting hundreds of thousands of Illinois students.

**Promoting wide availability of career information and planning:** Too often, adult students enter community colleges with little information or planning about their career goals, resulting in mistakes in program choice and a waste of financial aid. To address this, Women Employed developed an innovative online *Career Coach*, which helps individuals assess their skills and interests, explore careers, and make plans to reach their goals. WE has also developed *Career Coach* workshops for staff of community colleges and community-based service providers to enable them to help low-income adults with career planning.

■ **Improve the quality of community college programs in order to increase degree and credential attainment leading to good employment**

**Creating a career pathways system for community colleges in Illinois:** Women Employed's *Career Pathways Initiative* brings together policymakers, college leaders, community groups, researchers, and advocates to develop better ways for economically disadvantaged students to progress through college programs and obtain family-supporting employment. The *Career Pathways Initiative* promotes alignment of the various missions of the colleges—workforce preparation, academic transfer, and remediation—to obtain better student outcomes.

**Establishing “bridge programs” as a first step to comprehensive career pathways systems:** Bridge programs are designed to prepare individuals, particularly those with limited academic or English skills, to enter and succeed in postsecondary education, by combining remediation with vocational skills. Women Employed participates in national efforts to implement and assess bridge programs and is the leader in Illinois, working with colleges and educating policymakers on how to eliminate barriers and increase funding for these programs.

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To download publications and learn more about Women Employed's Career Pathways Initiative, the Clear Connections Project, and Career Coach, visit [womenemployed.org](http://womenemployed.org).