



Introducing the Complete College Navigator

A high-touch, high-tech platform for scaling + sustaining adult learning

A College Unbound—Lumina Foundation
Innocentive Challenge

Submitted by



kinetic seeds

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

College Unbound (CU) has created a better educational experience designed specifically for the adult learner. It's a proven, high-touch model that helps those who might not otherwise attain a degree to succeed. Yet, not enough adult learners have access to it. To scale and sustain this experience, we propose a CU support platform that simplifies the degree completion journey by providing a single, networked resource that adult learners can turn to for any educational service need.

Introducing the College Unbound Completion Navigator Platform

The CU Completion Navigator shifts the center of adult learner gravity away from a set of traditional and grossly disconnected student service offerings or employer workforce development programs toward a concept of integrated “life and learning aid.”¹

Elements of a perfect Unbound experience

The CU **Completion Navigator Platform** will combine high-touch, high-tech and process to create a wholly new experience that:

- » Partners adult learners with a personal CU Completion Navigator
- » Provides multi-channel high-touch customer service to adult learners
- » Ensures access to high-quality basic services that typically hinder adult learners ability to persevere
- » Brings increased curriculum choice and access through a networked approach to content and collaboration and draws from a vetted and trusted network of partnering institutions, employers and support structures
- » Lends much desired structure to degree completion
- » Uses transparency and embedded learning to help adult learners build confidence in their actions
- » Provides analytics that help everyone in the learning community see learning progress and evolve services

Why this scalable approach?

College Unbound has a unique opportunity to own the adult learning support experience, and to position itself as the hub of connection, linking colleges and universities, employers and adult learners everywhere. In this unbound personal learning environment, adult learners have guidance at their fingertips whenever it is needed to help them navigate the complexity of degree completion through an intentional service experience designed exclusively for adult learners.

The following pages describe the concept in detail, and outline an approach to business model experimentation that can accelerate the design and realization of a model that would be adopted by students, higher education institutions and employers.

¹ We use the term “life aid” to include help and support with work and life obligations to ease the stress to which many adult learners succumb as they try to balance education and the circumstances of their lives.

² Around the nation, many states are adopting “K-16” policy initiatives designed to create an effective “pipeline” for

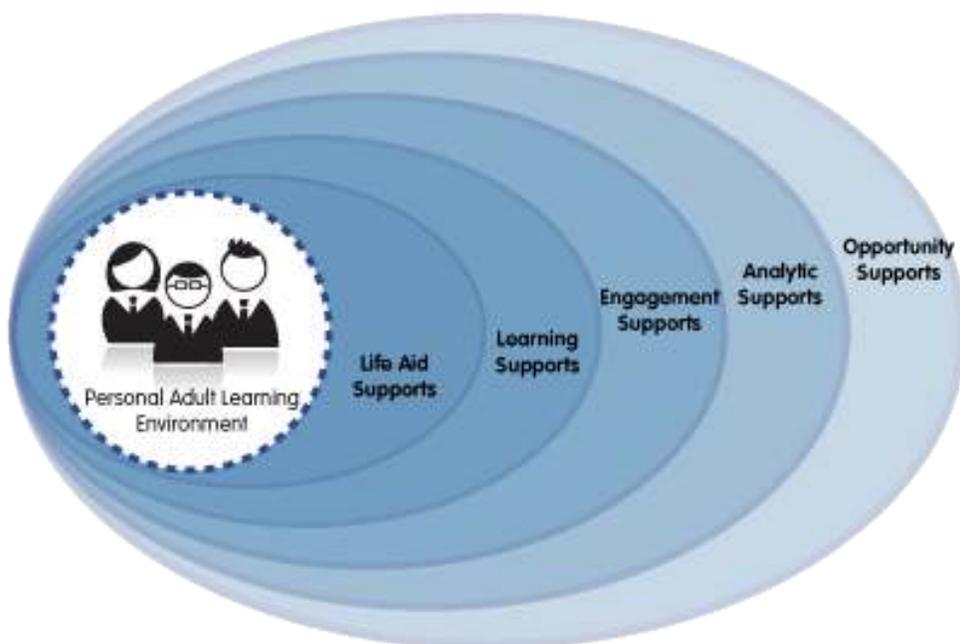
The Big Idea

For a variety of reasons, adult learners have had to step off the pipeline² that feeds the higher education system, isolating them from support systems, and leaving them largely on their own to navigate the complexity of attaining a degree. Though they prefer self-direction, learning that's problem-centric, and have a high level of internal motivation, adult learners often lack the necessary self-confidence to propel themselves to completion. Many have to overcome fears or conquer feelings of inadequacy as they return to a system that has not delivered a well-designed, intentional adult learning experience.

College Unbound has developed a proven process for deeply personalizing education for each individual, honoring an adult learner's life context and earned life competencies, and weaving education and work day responsibilities together. Strong program components designed around the needs of adult learners and ready to be rolled out to the estimated 37 million adults who are struggling to obtain a degree.

For this College Unbound—Lumina Foundation Innocentive challenge, we propose an approach to scalability that maintains the personalized student-centric philosophy of College Unbound while contemplating a new high-tech, high-touch student service delivery model.

The College Unbound Completion Navigator Platform



Aided by a personal College Unbound navigator, adult learners will be enveloped by several layers of support on the platform:

² Around the nation, many states are adopting "K-16" policy initiatives designed to create an effective "pipeline" for educational attainment. The goal is to develop an integrated system of schools and higher education institutions within each state where the continuum of student progress can be tracked and measured along defined transition points. Unfortunately for adult learners, they are re-entering this pipeline often characterized as depersonalized, inert, irrelevant and cumbersome. Source: *The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education*

- **Life Aid Supports:** Connects adult learners to critical resources and other necessities (finances, caregiving help, housing, transportation, etc.) that can be barriers to learning.
- **Learning Supports:** Provides access to content choice and selection, development of independent study programs, and academic and professional mentoring.
- **Engagement Supports:** Connects members of the adult learning community together in a collaborative space. Embedded learning and transparency makes the learning process explicit to the entire learning community as they use the platform.
- **Analytic Supports:** Helps students see where they are in the process and provides recommendations and aggregates social supports to aid decision-making.
- **Opportunity Supports:** Provides employment project and internship opportunities where adult learners can link education and work.

This new model³ would rely on CU’s deep expertise and empathy of the adult learner’s unmet needs. It empowers the CU model with a well-designed, multi-channel platform. It supplants non-relevant gen ed requirements with competency-based learning. It breaks the dependency on partnering with one higher education institution at a time⁴. It easily connects to institutions’ online platforms, but no longer needs to rely on online environments designed for content delivery of a limited core curriculum. Finally, it sets the stage for rich analytics related to the adult learner experience as critical student data is collected over time.⁵

A New Vision of Unbound Space

Imagine, through the use of enabling technology, a new College Unbound narrative:

It’s a well-known fact that although most non-credentialed adults love the idea of making more money and having a better job, most of them hesitate returning to school. College Unbound was founded to help adult learners who hate the idea of jumping back into higher education, offering them a way to easily create a degree program that isn’t overwhelming, inconvenient, and time-consuming. Navigators at College Unbound HQ create pathways for their students within a network of respected colleges and universities and employers; sending learners online to their personal learning environments to review, select, modify or refine their roadmaps. With the support of their navigator, Unbound learners follow their journey, always knowing where they are, where they’ve been, and where they need to go. The key to enabling the close relationships that College Unbound depends on—and scaling as the

³ There is precedent for this approach in adjacent industries. See Appendix for details.

⁴ In 2013, Florida’s state legislature passed the *Complete Florida* legislation to recruit and retain the state’s 2.2 million adult learners who have earned some college credit. Eleven public and private institutions across the state have come together to design and implement a program that will result in more Florida adult learners completing college. A network such as this would be an ideal candidate for a College Unbound pilot program. (Source: www.completeflorida.org)

⁵ In “The Rise of Big Data,” ACE Vice President of Policy Research and Strategy Louis Soares suggests that giving students an opportunity to see their data “in useful ways...can allow students to become better managers of their own educational experiences and can also, perhaps, improve collective outcomes across all of higher education.”

organization grows—is building a social profile for each learner, as enabled by technology.

Virtually, College Unbound maintains a record of everything having to do with its students—including, curricula selection, internships, portfolios, resumes, PLAs, communications, and social conversations—all in one place. Apps gives navigators insight into learner likes and dislikes, employment schedules, family factors and even health-related issues. There are private affinity-based learning communities where fellow students who share a common interest or degree profile can socialize, study and collaborate on projects together.

Recognizing that almost half of its learner web traffic comes from mobile devices, College Unbound makes it easier for learners to keep in touch with their navigators from anywhere via their smart phones. An app lets learners check-in at periodic times via a Four Square-like alert that indicates activities being accomplished. Students can also get advice from a professional mentor on what to say in a job interview. There's a "may day" button like Amazon's Kindle Fire for those critical "in-the-moment" needs when a learner needs support fast – like when a daughter gets sick before a critical presentation and a friends and family "Uber-like" childcare service arrives to help.

An employee social network helps navigators work together to leverage College Unbound's communities of mentors, role models, employers and academic institutions to help construct learning plans, share information on new learning opportunities offered by participating colleges, or describe how degree journeys work (or not) over time. Expert knowledge around curricula and experiential learning opportunities has been democratized across College Unbound's participating network of institutions using a Quora-like ratings system.

"We're using technology that enables rich one-to-one relationships. Our entire company is built around making every interaction feel human." ~ College Unbound Founder, Dennis Littky

Three Potential Business Models to Experiment

To get to a working model quickly, we recommend a short series of business model experiments to determine how the Completion Navigator Platform will support and sustain itself. For example:

Adult Learner Services for Higher Ed Institutions—Replace link farms, campus-based centers and student services barely modified beyond what's offered to 18 year olds with new adult learner CU platform and define and determine what institution, CU and adult learner gives and receives in the process.

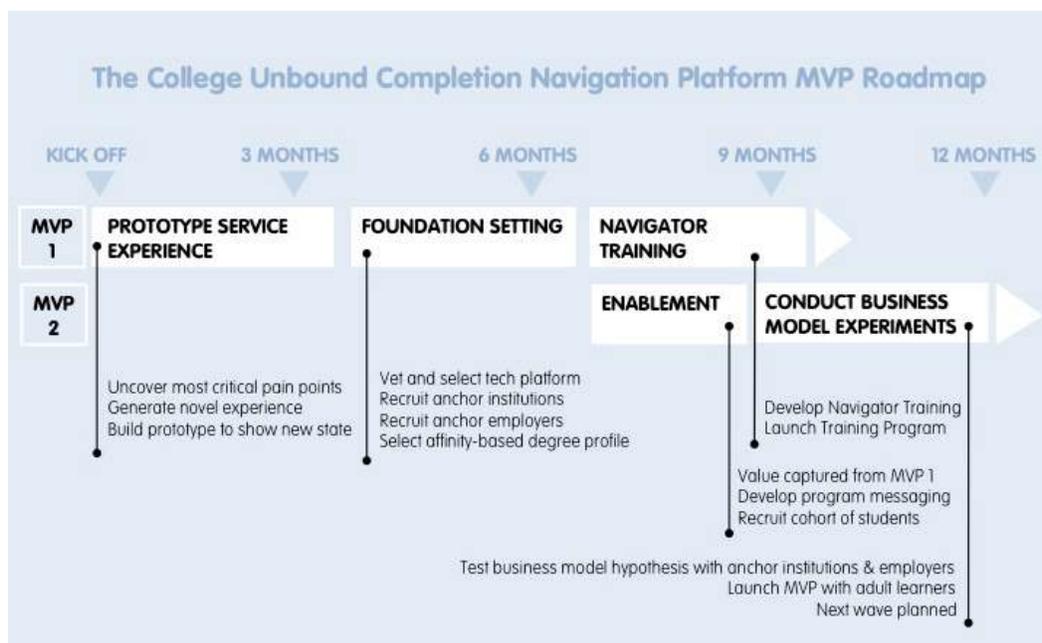
Employer Workforce Development—Create a CU benefit with the CU navigation platform at the center of its delivery. Employees take a prior learning assessment. Employers identify skills gaps and work with CU Personal Assistants to start employee on degree path.

Marketplace Exchange⁶—Higher Ed institutions are paid for the curricula delivered. Like physicians compensation by insurers for services delivered, institutions would be “reimbursed” by College Unbound for the value they deliver.

12-month MVP Roadmap

Taking a page from lean start-up philosophy, we propose utilizing a “MVP” (Minimum Viable Product) approach to new model development, shifting traditional thinking from building the perfect product to instead testing the “hypothesis” about what adult learners and the institutions that serve them really want and need and how the service will sustain itself. Fundamentally, we seek to accelerate the feedback loop and turn the idea of a College Unbound Completion Navigator platform into a real service, measuring how stakeholders respond, and learning whether to pivot or persevere expeditiously.

The following 12-month roadmap takes into consideration two parallel streams of work to get to a working model. In MVP 1, effort is placed on design of the online experience and navigator training. MVP 2 consists of enablement of the platform, student recruitment and business model experimentation. This should also include actionable metrics that can validate all learning throughout the process.



Conclusion

Connecting higher education with adult learners will require ongoing, continuous feedback between College Unbound and its customers (higher education institutions) and consumers (adult learners). We recognize for this model to succeed, College Unbound must create an environment of clarity, trust and shared purpose, as

⁶ We acknowledge the credentialing and federal financial aid implications of this unbundled model. We believe they can be overcome through transparency and experimentation of shared risk/shared reward/shared economy principles.

participating institutions focus on tuning the curricula and experiential opportunities they deliver to support learning and performance for adult learners.

However, by having a laser-like focus on knowing and learning what adult learners care about and building capabilities and strategies that reinforce its advantages over time, College Unbound will realize a long-term opportunity to design and implement a single-service to facilitate adult learner degree attainment across the country. One logical system that would scale dynamically as new learners adopt and use the services.

Who better to deliver this new system but an organization who deeply understands the adult learner experience. If not College Unbound, then who?

SOLVER TEAM BACKGROUND

Working at the intersection of innovation and behavior change, **Kinetic Seeds** is a design consultancy that helps organizations tackle complex challenges through the principles of human-centeredness and participatory design.

We have led a number of high-profile innovation programs and conducted several qualitative research studies focused on the human experience within the educational system. This includes a landmark study with the **College Board to understand the experiences of young men of color in the U.S. higher education system** and a **Gates Foundation supported study to understand the teacher experience in the U.S. K-12 system** which led to the investment and launch of a national teacher-driven innovation platform. Through a **Lumina Foundation grant, we co-pioneered a participatory design methodology** that engages faculty and students themselves in the development of new educational experiences, products and services.

Additional work includes supporting **Southern New Hampshire University to launch College For America, Utah State University to launch a new student service delivery model**, supporting a multi-state initiative to develop outcomes-based funding models in higher education and building the innovation capacity required to support the **State of Florida's Complete Florida initiative** to increase the number of adult learners earning a high quality credential.

BRIEF BIOS

Christine Flanagan

Inquisitive and an “intersectionalist” at heart, for the last twenty+ years Chris has been designing experiences defined by research and market strategy for leaders in the technology, education, consumer and B2B industries. As a consummate creative executive with a keen knowledge of branding, Chris draws on some crazy cool multi-disciplinary skills and competencies she’s earned over the years in human-centered research and iterative business design. She’s adept at guiding management teams to be capable and inspired to both pursue innovations generated and tackle new challenges on their own going forward.

Prior to founding Kinetic Seeds, she served as Strategic Innovation Executive at Salesforce.com supporting the creation of multi-channel innovation programs on behalf of the company’s customers. Previous, she served as Student Experience Lab Director for the Business Innovation Factory designing, prototyping and testing new models for delivering value in education. Her approach to innovation and design and has been instrumental in guiding diverse organizations such as Northeastern University, ACT, Coca-Cola, Southern New Hampshire University, College Board, USU, Lumina Foundation, FedEx, Monster, University of West Florida, General Electric Oil & Gas and many others.

Christine Costello

Part sociologist, part designer, and part futurist, Christine is at her best when she can combine her obsession for understanding the human experience with opportunities to apply her innate skill of making connections—connections that inform new thinking and inspire change. In her 18 years as an experience designer, researcher and facilitator, Christine has helped organizations from a range of industry and social sectors to practice human-centered innovation and to put people and their unmet needs at the center of any challenge.

Most recently, Christine served as Design Director for the Business Innovation Factory where she built the capacity for human-centered design (HCD) in BIF's Experience Labs—the non-profit's practice for accelerating systems level experimentation in areas of high social impact such as education, healthcare and entrepreneurship. With Chris Flanagan, she co-pioneered participatory design methods that invited people into the experience design process as collaborators. Previous, she served as an Associate Research Director in Razorfish's strategy group where in addition to helping design teams discover and translate insights into new experiences, she contributed to thought leadership that explored the changing nature of digital media.

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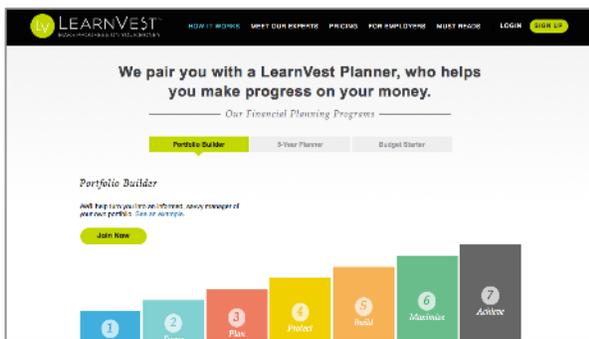
APPENDIX

We drew inspiration for this submission from the following companies and business models:



A resource who knows them, is on their side helps them get the right care and takes on much of the system legwork. Accolade drives better outcomes for their employer customers. Large, self-insured employers that have implemented Accolade's service have experienced a 5-7 percent reduction in annual healthcare costs, an 18 percent reduction in readmissions and a 5 percent reduction in in-patient days, along with increased outpatient care in areas such as preventive visits, mental health and well-baby visits.

Accolade Health has created an entirely new healthcare experience by combining high-touch, personalized engagement and clinical decision guidelines in one platform. People have a single, trusted resource to support them and their families across all of their health care needs. The model is specifically built around what consumers want and need: a



more financially savvy. In 2012, LearnVest pivoted to serve both men and women and became a full-fledged investment adviser. It offers a seven-step plan, called the LearnVest Action Program, that takes users from cutting expenses to budgeting for goals to investing money. All users work with a certified financial planner who offer specialized attention based on their financial needs and goals. Each of these advisers has gone through LearnVest training and is empathetic to all financial situations.

LearnVest empowers people to take control of their personal finances through a high-touch, high-tech advice-driven program that is personalized to users specific financial goals and life situations. With \$69M in funding and 170 employees, the company began as an online guide aimed at teaching women to become

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