



Workforce Leadership Café #1 — Pima Community College + Center for the Future of Arizona

Hosted by the Aspen Institute Economic Opportunities Program, November 16, 2023

Description

In Arizona, a unique partnership between [Pima Community College](#) and the [Center for the Future of Arizona](#) is investing in leaders of the workforce development system as a key leverage point for change in the system. The [Southern Arizona Workforce Leadership Academy](#) brings together workforce practitioners in order to strengthen the leadership pipeline, deepen collaborative relationships locally, and invest in developing professionals who lead our workforce organizations. This conversation with Amanda Abens of Pima Community College and Tennille Penaloza-Hagen of the Center for the Future of Arizona explores the role of leadership development in the workforce development ecosystem, the challenges of talent development in such an interdisciplinary field, and what this partnership between a community college and a statewide “do-tank” has the potential to accomplish.

For more information about this event — including video, audio, transcript, speaker bios, and additional resources — visit our website:

<https://www.aspeninstitute.org/events/workforce-leadership-cafe-1-pima-community-college-center-for-the-future-of-arizona/>

Speakers

- [Amanda Abens](#), Dean of Workforce and Continuing Education, Pima Community College
- [Tennille Penaloza-Hagen](#), Project Manager, Workforce Development, Center for the Future of Arizona
- [Dee Wallace](#), Senior Fellow, Economic Opportunities Program, The Aspen Institute
- [Sheila Maguire](#), Senior Fellow, Economic Opportunities Program, The Aspen Institute

Transcript

Dee Wallace (00:04)

Hello and welcome. I'm Dee Wallace, senior fellow with The Aspen Institute's Economic Opportunities Program, and I'm so pleased to have you join us here for our first Workforce Leadership Café. I'm here with my colleague Sheila Maguire, also a senior fellow with The Aspen Institute, and we'll introduce you to our guests in just a second. We're launching this series of conversations with leaders in the workforce development field who are interested in the state of what we call the workforce, workforce, or those practitioners that are working hard to connect people with economic opportunity. So we're going to be doing a series of informal conversations over the fall and winter with leaders who are going to share their insights and experiences with us. First, before we get started, though, just a review of our tech. All attendees are muted. If you would like to, and we encourage you to, provide your perspectives or ideas and questions as we're going, please use the chat function or at the bottom of your screen, press the Q&A and submit a question.

Close captions are available. Just click at the bottom of your screen again in order to enable those for you. The session is being recorded, and we will be making that available through email and also on our webpage. Then if you have any technical issues, please chat to us in the chat box or send a message to eopprograms@aspeninstitute.org. So let's grab our coffee and get started. We're here as part of The Aspen Institute's commitment to leadership development in economic opportunity and the workforce development field. We have sponsored over the past couple of decades leadership academies at the national and the local level to support fellows who are working in their communities on systems change and sector strategies. This past year, we've partnered with eight communities across the country who responded to an RFP who wanted to bring an academy to their communities.

The academy is a 10-month peer learning community where leaders across the workforce development ecosystem and local communities come together from community colleges, from nonprofits and community-based organizations, from business associations, public agencies, philanthropy, economic development, and all the different kinds of organizations that are engaged in the local workforce development ecosystem. They come together, learn together and create action plans together, all working through lenses of systems thinking, racial equity and personal leadership development. Our partners that we've been working with across the country this year who are actually delivering academies themselves in their local communities come from a wide variety of different kinds of organizations and different vantage points in their community, and we want to hear from them. We want to hear from them about their own personal leadership experiences in their own rights in their communities and leading these academies.

We want to hear about what they're learning about the state of the workforce, workforce in their communities and the things that we need to think about going forward as we look at talent development in our field and job quality in the workforce development field. So it's my pleasure to introduce to you our guests today who are running the Southern Arizona Workforce Leadership Academy. We're joined today by Amanda Abens, who is the Dean of Workforce Development and Lifelong Learning at Pima Community College and Tennille Penaloza-Hagen, who is Project Manager for Workforce Development at the Center for the Future of Arizona or CFA. We'd also like to just take a moment and thank Holly Kurtz from the Center from the Future of Arizona who is out on medical leave

right now. Doing well, but she couldn't be here with us today. So let's get started by asking our guests to just introduce yourselves and tell us a little bit about your organizations. So Tennille, let's start with you. Tell us about you and your role at the Center for the Future of Arizona.

Tennille Penaloza-Hagen (04:51)

Thanks, Dee. Hi, everyone. My name is Tennille Penaloza-Hagen. I am the project manager for our workforce development initiative at Center for the Future of Arizona, or CFA for short. It's quite a long name. CFA is a nonprofit, nonpartisan do tank. So what is a do tank? We are committed to working on research-based ideas and putting them into action. We identify unmet needs as well as new possibilities. We deep dive into research and most importantly, we turn ground groundbreaking ideas into reality. So we bring Arizonans together to create a stronger and brighter future for our states. This is through survey research reports, our Arizona Progress meters as well as our impact initiatives and programs. We listen most to what matters to Arizonans, and we share trusted data about how Arizona's doing in priority areas. Excuse me. The areas we work in is civic health, education and workforce development.

Dee Wallace (06:01)

Thank you. Amanda, what about you and Pima Community College?

Amanda Abens (06:05)

Awesome. Thank you so much, Dee, for having us here today. I am so excited to be part of this conversation. So I work with Pima Community College, which is in Tucson, Arizona. I am honored to serve as the Dean of Workforce Development and Lifelong Learning. We are the only community college for our county, so we are in the southern part of Arizona about an hour north of the Mexico border. Our county serves about a million folks. People think of Tucson usually as a small community. We like to say we're one of the big small towns out there. With a million residents, we're not so small, but we are the only community college to serve our region, which does include two Native American reservations as well.

We serve the Pascua Yaqui Tribe and the Taona Odham Tribe as well. We are a Hispanic-Serving Institution as well, reflecting our community, and we serve a community that is largely in poverty, unfortunately. About 75% of our learners are part-time and the majority of them are working at least one job. In working in workforce development, we really work at that intersection of achieving our college mission, which is to serve every learner every day for every goal and the intersection of that, of working with business and industry to ensure that our business and industry have the workforce they need today and tomorrow and ensure that we're really creating economic development and social mobility for all of our county residents.

Dee Wallace (07:50)

Thank you. We are so pleased to be working with both of your organizations. Recently, we published a piece called The Cobbler's Children Have No Shoes, where we raised the question of whether the workforce development field is able to treat itself as well as we hope employers are treating the job

seekers that we serve. We argue that it could be beneficial for the workforce development field, for the practitioners in the field to have a real talent development strategy of its own as we work to encourage other employers to create more economic opportunities. I'm interested in hearing from you, both of you. Why do you think intervening at the leadership level in the workforce development field could make a difference for our field and create economic opportunity, when arguably frontline workers make up more of the workers in any industry? What's your take on leadership development in the field, Amanda?

Amanda Abens (09:04)

So leadership development, I think, is so incredibly important. For us to be able to achieve our goals, for us to be able to work together as an ecosystem, you have to have leaders that have the time to do that and are doing that intentionally and are doing that by being informed by what is happening out there. What are best practices? What's the latest and greatest in innovation? Workforce development we like to say is not for the faint of heart. It is not easy, it is difficult, it is challenging, sometimes backbreaking work. We all get so involved and we're so committed to this mission that we have 'cause we have a lot of work to do. Our communities need us. We often are so entrenched in just doing the work every day and doing the good work that we often don't take that time to develop our leadership skills that can really help advance us to be able to do that work better, to be able to reach those outcomes better.

Things like partnerships take time. Strategic planning takes time. It takes skill. We aren't just born knowing how to strategically plan or how to partner. Those are skills that we all need to learn and practice and hone. One of the things that I see, and I'm fortunate to work for an organization that really takes leadership development and professional development, they really put that as a priority and an importance. I've had the ability and the honor to engage in my local community as well as nationally. One of the things that I see, especially in partnership work is that we're all, again, just so engaged in doing the work every day that we're often not getting down to really working at the strategic level, that we really often are just working at alleviating the symptoms. What's the latest funding opportunity we have? What's the latest project? And we're not really getting down below to some of the root causes to make long-lasting change. Time and leadership development through The Aspen Leadership Academies can really give us that opportunity to do that and develop those skills.

Dee Wallace (11:39)

I appreciate how you talked about the symptoms. We talk about how the iceberg model of systems changes a lot, and what I'm hearing you say is that we're so busy doing the work at the tip of the iceberg that we can't get below the surface often in advance. Tennille, what's your take on that? What do you observe about that?

Tennille Penaloza-Hagen (12:05)

I really felt when Amanda shared that workforce development, this sector, this industry, it's hard work, and it takes partnerships, collaboration, strategic planning, which takes time and dedication. I think it takes time and dedication, and it's one of those things where as we're moving through the time in society and trying to create a brighter future for no matter where we are in this world, we're also

learning as professionals. We have to rely not only on those great opportunities like the academy, but also ourselves. The partnership and collaboration helps break up the siloing.

I think that's super powerful when it comes to professional development opportunities for workforce development professionals because that is something that so often we're like, "Oh, this is happening for me, and I want to do this, but I don't know where to go here." Then you meet someone by chance, and sometimes it happens in conference and summits and that's great too, but I think if we're opening more of those lines that we can connect together instead of just remaining siloed with each other I think is super helpful to the overall trying to continue changing the workforce development for the better, workforce ecosystem for the better.

Dee Wallace (13:35)

Hearing you talk about the silos and leadership in those silos, what do you observe in the fellows as they go through these leadership journeys and community? What do you observe in yourself as leaders in this work, in your communities trying to make that struggle, deal with that struggle?

Tennille Penalzoza-Hagen (14:03)

I think one that was comforting to me was that we have all shared this feeling of just imposter syndrome. We're here together doing the work, trying to make change, but the back of the head, we're second guessing. We can spend all day trying to figure out where that comes from. Where was that turning point in my life that happened? But at the same time, it's realizing that we are all brave enough to share that, that was a really... I think, I don't know, in a very inspirational moment that we shared with our fellows that we had all felt this at least one point in time, if not continually and that we're all in here together, so how can we continue doing the work we love while also trying to help each other with our imposter syndromes along the way?

Dee Wallace (15:04)

Wow, that really landed right here for me to hear that. It's surprising to me. I look at folks like you, I look at our fellows, and I'm totally intimidated and in awe of them. So that really lands and strikes me that people like you could feel imposter syndrome 'cause I'm just totally intimidated by you, Amanda, do you experience anything like that?

Amanda Abens (15:30)

Yeah, absolutely, and it triggers it. Sometimes those compliments trigger it too, frankly. Dee, and I love the compliments, and I appreciate it. You know how I feel about you, Dee, as well and you and Sheila just to have such great respect and admiration for everything that you've done, but sometimes it can feel like, "Me? Really me?" I think we all have that and experienced that, and it is good to have that camaraderie with other folks and hear about the struggles that everybody is dealing with. It can be challenging. As we build up our network, it absolutely helps us very much, and we find folks to mentor and we find individuals to mentor us. I think those things are incredibly powerful as well too. But we often also work in some very political systems, whether it's internal to our own organization or in our region. That can be a challenge as well too to sometimes talk through things with and talk through ideas. I like

to think of it as, I'll often ask for somebody to be my thought partner on something and talk through something with me.

But sometimes my network is just not who I need for that. One of the things that really works for me and helps ground me is having that network that is not just within workforce development or higher education, that I have individuals in my network who are leaders, whether they're my friends or professional contacts that are in a different line of work. It helps ground me, especially higher education is steeped in a lot of tradition, and we like to just reinvent ourselves. We're not always the best at always innovating. For myself and us at Pima Community College, innovation is at the heart of what we do every day. Having those other individuals to reach out and be a sounding board and I can run ideas past them, and they're not entrenched in all of the things I'm entrenched with, or I don't have to worry about that political aspect with them, I can really feel like I get some great honest feedback. That really helps my leadership development to have that wide circle of a network.

Dee Wallace (18:14)

Thank you. Thank you both for sharing so much of yourselves that way. I really appreciate that, sharing about your own practice as leaders. Let's turn to your organizations. Now, I mentioned that you, CFA and Pima Community College are partnering to deliver the Southern Arizona Workforce Leadership Academy. Each of your organizations in their own right are well-established, well-respected, incredible capacity, very prominent, and yet, you choose to partner in this academy to deliver this academy. Why, Tennille? CFA has even had experience with an academy before in Phoenix. Why did you choose to partner this time?

Tennille Penaloza-Hagen (19:11)

We chose Pima Community College just because they are in the work of system change. I think it is super helpful when you are working with another organization that understands not only, yes, the iceberg model, but also understands we can work together in the sense that yes, we have smaller parts we need to fix, but what is that we can focus on to create the bigger change? Also, just recognizing that Pima Community College, not only are they such a strong institution for Southern Arizona, but also nationally as well. We are so grateful for their partnership throughout this 10-month academy, and we're looking forward to the future with them.

Dee Wallace (20:05)

Thank you. Now, Amanda, Pima Community College, the Academy is a peer learning community. Pima Community College is literally an educational institution. Why did you need to partner for something like this?

Amanda Abens (20:23)

Such a good question. One, because we know that we can't do anything without partnerships, we really can't. One of the things, being the only community college in our community, we often deal with that kind of pressure of trying to be all things to everybody, which we just can't. We just can't do it, and so partnership is the answer. Center for Future of Arizona is an amazing partner, not an unknown entity

to us. We have been working with the Center of Future of Arizona for a very long time, and the work they do is just phenomenal.

So when this opportunity came up, it really was... walking the talk of partnership in a workforce ecosystem, nobody can do it on their own. So why not do that with a leadership academy and have it be in partnership? We each bring different strengths and perspectives to the table that make it an incredibly rich experience. Then just on a really practical level, it's work to do this. It's incredibly rewarding work, but we all, Tennille and myself and Holly and you, Dee, we all put a lot of time and effort into this. It's a labor of love, but it is a labor. If we weren't partnering, just on a practical note, it's about spreading the workload too, frankly. It's incredibly powerful to do it together and for the fellows to see us working together as an ecosystem.

Dee Wallace (22:24)

While you were talking about partnerships, you reminded me of an activity, silly activity that we do in the academy in the partnering session where we ask the fellows to write their organization's personal ads, personal dating profiles as a way to talk about the different institutional strengths that we bring together in this ecosystem. We ask folks to write their dating profiles where they talk about not only the assets that they're bringing to the table, but also the baggage that they're bringing to the table. Amanda, thinking again about Pima as a community college, I'm remembering that over the decades that we've been doing these academies, at one point in time it was hard to attract community college professionals into these fellowships, in the academies. At one point we struggled to get people to apply to be fellows, but things have changed over the past few years to the point where even a few years ago, Hudson Community College was the host of an academy. What are you seeing is why that evolution in terms of community college engagement?

Amanda Abens (23:50)

I also think of the evolution of Pima Community College and our role in workforce development, and it has evolved over the last several years. I like to believe that we are a leader in workforce development and have devoted a great deal of time and effort to that. But 10 years ago, you couldn't say that about Pima Community College. We have evolved, and I think many community colleges are devoting more time, effort, energy, leadership to workforce development than we have before. Workforce development really has been having its moment, and I really am glad to say it's not a trend. I think it really is here to stay, that we've seen the power and the need for this to be able to serve our communities and bring up everybody to be able to have the opportunity to have family-sustaining wages in our community. So I think it really is seeing that intersection of, again, economic mobility for our residents and the role that a community college plays in that.

Again, going back to higher ed often is very entrenched in traditions and history, we can be sometimes slow to move and change. I think we're really seeing colleges starting to make those transitions and changes and doing things differently and innovative in workforce development. Working within a workforce development ecosystem, I think, really is starting to evolve. I have the honor of serving on the National Council for Workforce Education Board and we serve individuals, community colleges and other individuals serving workforce development needs, including nonprofits. We're seeing a transition and a change as well to more individuals working in partnerships, more individuals coming to the table

working towards workforce development. So community colleges, working with their workforce development entities and their communities and workforce development entities working with their community colleges and looking to the community college to be that provider of training and education.

Dee Wallace (26:27)

Tennille, I want to ask you about something that I've heard you talk about before. In your role at CFA, you play significant roles with the workforce development, but you're also engaged with another leadership academy that CFA is involved with that works with the education system, right? Is it with principals, a principal development? Could you say a little bit about that and how you see alignment or differences between working in the education system versus the workforce development system?

Tennille Penaloza-Hagen (27:08)

Yeah, of course. So it's called Beat the Odds Academy, and it's one of our education initiatives at CFA. It could be principals, it could be assistant principals, it could be teachers who are either that is the career path they're aiming for or maybe that's the track that they're on. But the program is that we offer that program to high school districts and that... I'm sorry, school districts. We recognize that whether it's workforce development or our future and current teachers and then, of course, anyone else really in a leadership role that leadership matters. It's important that we continue to invest and support leaders in system thinking to help create those system changes that we need, whether it's for a brighter future for Arizonans here or wherever nationwide or in our audience in their home state.

Dee Wallace (28:12)

Great. I hear you. You mentioned the career pathways for principals, etc., people interested in being principals. It strikes me that one difference between the environments in which that program works and the workforce development environment is the articulated career pathways in the field. It's not quite so structured in workforce development. I can imagine in the Beat the Odds Academy, you have cohorts of people who are in the same kind of positions, playing the same roles, and have followed similar career paths. It's so interesting to me to think about, well, in your cohort in Southern Arizona, you've got people from all different kinds of backgrounds and career paths. Tennille, how did you find yourself here in this workforce development field?

Tennille Penaloza-Hagen (29:18)

A great question. That's something I keep asking myself now. I'm super happy to be here. I'm happy I figured out what it was that I was trying to get to. You're right. I went to college, I got my degree in global health. I did not go the two routes that were predicted for that, and then I also got a degree in nonprofit management leadership. I've always been involved whether... I had a career in retail corporate for a while, but my other passion was in formal education, whether it be science centers, camps, I would say Makerspace education I thought was my calling at one time. I still think it is. But I've always known that there was something that A, I wanted to give back to my community. I wanted to find, "How can I actually create effective change, even though I know it's going to take time, where do

I need to go? Who do I need to work with? Over time I thought maybe HR in a retail company, leadership roles in general.

But then I realized with my nonprofit management experience, that degree and my experience so far has given me better understanding of A, understanding how CFA runs and all the people like our operations team, our development team. Then all our, what I like to say, our impact team, all the ones who run initiatives like myself, we all have to work together to make sure, that I guess, the wheels are greased and we're all moving forward together. That was the same thing with a nonprofit experience as well. With my degree, that gave me the understanding when I was studying that and I also have a background in operations in nonprofits. Then this opportunity came about, and I was really passionate, and I was really happy to be recognized by some of our retailers that we work with statewide, but as well as just knowing that workforce development professionals, this is hard work, but this is where I want to be. I want to continue to grow and meet people in this field and learn what they're doing and see if maybe this could be applied here or we can connect on this.

Dee Wallace (31:54)

Thank you. That rich background that you have is encouraging to old people like me to know that you're bringing that rich variety of experiences to the field. That's something, it's a hallmark of the workforce development field, I think. Right? We talk about this a lot, Sheila, it's an interdisciplinary field!

Sheila Maguire (32:20)

Absolutely. Yes, a very interdisciplinary field, which I think makes it, in some ways, very conducive to career pathways across institutions, but that also becomes an issue in terms of making sure that jobs at all levels have career pathways within the industry itself and keeping the talent that we have. Dee, there's a great question in the chat from Bobby Shaw at the Brown Foundations for Tennille and Amanda, "What do you think might change in the workforce system in Southern Arizona as a result of the academy, addition to some of the changes you've mentioned in terms of connections amongst the cohort?"

Amanda Abens (33:08)

That's what is most exciting about doing this academy really is 'cause it's about leadership development for those of us working in the field, but it really is about taking that into action. In Southern Arizona, we are really good at having a lot of good plans, and we're actually good at coordinating those plans. Be it economic development, workforce development plans, we have a number of them from the county and the city and our economic development entity and our workforce board. Again, they're coordinated very nicely. But what we don't do so well is take those plans and go, "Okay, great. What are we going to do to make this happen? Who's doing what? How are we working together to do it? How are we looking at those plans?"

Really going back to that iceberg model, really, "How are we getting below the symptoms, and how are we really planning in our community to make long-lasting change and being able to do the systems-level work together?" So that's what I'm most excited about and see happening. I see the fellows doing that now. They are working together towards that means now. I really think that we are

going to see lasting change in our community and be able to have measurable effects from this, really be able to look at some KPIs that actually come of the change from the fellows and their engagement and their systems-level work.

Dee Wallace (34:54)

As I hear you talk about the systems level at the Southern Arizona level, and then I hear Tennille talk about how she's enjoyed the role of helping the organization's systems work together, I wonder, Amanda, if you have a perspective on how you've seen Pima look at its own organizational systems, because we see systems change needing to happen both at the organizational level in order to engage with systems change at the big, capital S Systems level. When you've turned that lens to your own organization, what are some of the things that you've seen evolve?

Amanda Abens (35:48)

We've had such incredible leadership here at our institution by our now former Chancellor Lee Lambert and our current interim chancellor who has been our provost, Dr. Dolores Duran-Cerda. We really have seen an incredible focus on what the community needs. You can hear that by our mission, every learner, every day for every goal. Thanks to, again, former chancellor Lee Lambert, we have been overt in describing Pima Community College as a social justice institution and really taking on that role. To be able to transform a community and empower our citizens to be able to have that upward mobility, that has to be workforce development.

That has to be a focus on a strong focus and putting resources onto workforce development and doing it in a very intentional systems-level way that has DEI at the core of everything that we do. So we really have transformed our institution to operate in very different manners and to offer programming in different ways outside of traditional higher ed ways of offering programming. As we've gone about doing that, we really have started to uncover all of those things that really are at a systems level that have often been barriers for us to be able to achieve those. So we have been breaking down barriers and breaking down silos and again, doing that very intentionally with the support of our leadership. We've been-

Dee Wallace (37:42)

Can you give us an example of one of those things that you've done to break that down?

Amanda Abens (37:46)

Yeah. So one of the things that we've developed, we are calling it new models for new majority learners. We don't want to refer to our students as non-traditional anymore, new majority learners, meaning those individuals who are parenting. They may have been incarcerated. They may be individuals of color. They may be Indigenous, working, all of those things. Those are who we are serving. So developing new models for new majority learners, including what we've branded our Pima fast track, which is non-credit, quick bursts of micro-pathways training, all developed within business and industry. Then we also have a model out of Washington State, well-researched model, IBEST, Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training, that is also one of our new models for new majority learners. But doing

things in different ways like blurring the lines between credit and non-credit, actually putting on the official transcript of our learners their non-credit learning and their industry-recognized credential, those are all things that break the mold of the systems that we have.

Dee Wallace (39:07)

Thank you for sharing that. Our goal is to have these be relatively short conversations, so we're coming to the end of our time. Before you turn to see if there's maybe one question, Sheila, that we want to pose to our panel, I want to ask both Amanda and Tennille as we close this conversation, Tennille, what is a direction, given your experience in the field and your hopes for the field, what's a direction, what's some advice, what's a lesson that you would encourage the field to take into consideration in order to help us live up to the promise of workforce development?

Tennille Penaloza-Hagen (39:56)

We need to continue having strategic partnerships. We need to continue talking to each other. We have fellows from a healthcare-based organization, the one fellow from a mining organization, their both roles are in workforce development for their organizations and continue those communication channels, especially when it comes to ideas for talent, upskilling, talent management, retention, good jobs, and then just understanding and seeing the value of strategic partnership and just the importance of how we need to continue investing in workforce professionals for the ecosystem.

Dee Wallace (40:52)

Thank you. Amanda?

Amanda Abens (40:56)

Other than ditto to everything Tennille just said, very well said, Tennille. Very well said. I would say devoting that time to professional development and training specifically on systems-level work. Again, it's not always something that we know about we know how to do. Again, we're so just busy day to day, we need to devote time. There needs to be time devoted to be able to address the systems-level work.

Dee Wallace (41:32)

Thank you both. Sheila, is there anything that we need to make sure to address from chat? Sheila, you're on mute.

Sheila Maguire (41:51)

There's one kind of question. One thing that often happens with an academy is people walk in the room and they say, "I've heard of all these people, I know these names," or, "I've never heard of these people. I've been working in this field for a long time and these..." Just highlight any little thoughts of the connections you're seeing happening across this very interdisciplinary, siloed, can be difficult, just

anything that strikes you, specific little connections that warm your heart as leaders to see that are being made.

Amanda Abens (42:29)

Oh, wow. You know what? I feel like we've had that since day one. Every time we get together with the fellows we hear comments from, "I've only seen you on Zoom," to, "Now I get to see you in person and isn't this wonderful?" to the hearing the fellows talking to each other and going, "I didn't know you worked on that too. I'm working on a very similar project. We have to get together and talk about it and plan together." Our state sponsored a workforce development event up north from us in Phoenix, and it was like a reunion. Without knowing it, we had so many of the fellows in the room, we did a group picture. Every time they're together, whether we're together virtually or in person, you're seeing those pieces. You're seeing them at events. I see people at events that I didn't see at events before. So I'm seeing folks engaging more in the ecosystem that may have been on the periphery. I'm seeing them come in more and meet more people and engage in planning more than they had been before.

Sheila Maguire (43:46)

Thank you.

Tennille Penaloza-Hagen (43:53)

Ditto what Amanda just said. I think it's one of the things I get excited for too when it is a session or a collab day with our fellows, even when it's virtual, just seeing them and then hearing their excitement and all the questions they ask and the curiosity. That also helps me remember that when I'm at summits and meetings with other workforce developments, I can carry that same energy, and I can be in that moment and be present. So I just really think it's great... the Academy presents... gives that space and time for the fellows, for workforce professionals to really let all the content sink in and come up with their great ideas that they're currently working on.

Dee Wallace (44:46)

Thank you. As we come to a close, thank you both. Thank you, Tennille. Thank you, Amanda. Thank you so much for joining us today and for contributing to the development of our field. Thank you for sharing yourselves personally, as well as sharing of your organizations. Thank you for kicking off this series of the Workforce Leadership Café. We're going to be having cafés through the fall and winter, so everyone, please register for that series where you can join us for some coffee and listen in on some conversations that we're going to be having with philanthropy, talking about funding in their local communities.

We'll be talking about a workforce board and how they are able to do this kind of work. We'll be talking with the chamber of commerce and with some statewide professional organizations. So please join us throughout this series and help us contribute to the thinking about the workforce, workforce and the workforce development field. Thanks to our amazing Aspen EOP comms staff for all the support on this. We look forward to continuing to engage with you all around this conversation, and we just thank you for all of the work that you're doing. So all the best for a great weekend. Again, thank you for joining us in the café. Hope to see you again soon.