

Future Finder Challenge

Virtual Panel Discussion Transcript

Monica Tinyo (00:04):

Great. So today, again, thank you so much for joining us. My name's Monica Tinyo. I'm a Senior Associate here at Luminary Labs, which is a strategy and innovation consultancy in New York. We have been engaged by the Department of Education to run the Future Finder Challenge. I'm also joined by my colleague Eden Baker, who will be facilitating the Q&A portion of today's session. The portion of this one hour session is to provide an opportunity for potential entrants to hear from experts about who adult learners are, what are their career navigation needs, and what are considerations for designing digital tools to support them.

(00:43):

The discussion is not intended to focus on specific challenge details. We encourage you to reach out via the hello@FutureFinderChallenge.com for any questions related to submission form or criteria. This is really to hear from these subject matter experts about adult learners in adult education. We'll start with introductions and that will be followed by a panel discussion, which incorporates questions from the Eventbrite. We'll then have about 15 minutes for live questions at the end.

(01:18):

We'll be using the Q&A function in Zoom, and so, feel free to submit questions during the presentation and we'll come back to them. In case you missed it at the beginning, we will be recording today's session and we'll be sharing it via the challenge website as well as the newsletter. Just before I pass it over to our panelists for introductions, I just wanted to say thank you again to our panelists for joining today. We are really, really excited to have them and they have an incredible amount of knowledge to share today. We will do this in alphabetical order, so Eric, I'll start with you and we'll go from there.

Eric Nesheim (01:56):

Thank you and thanks for the opportunity to join you guys today. This is wonderful. My name is Eric Nesheim. I'm the interim managing director of Northstar Digital Strategies. I'm the longtime executive director of Literacy Minnesota and stepped back this past year to focus entirely on digital equity and we created a division around it called Digital Strategies, which oversees Northstar Digital Literacy, which some of you have probably heard of, which is an online platform that assesses and offers skills, training and so on around digital skills. I'm excited. I come from an adult education background and edtech background as well, and essentially, a non-profit that started a for-profit arm essentially around Northstar. I'm excited to share what I've learned through that. Can't wait to talk.

Hector Martinez (02:53):

Well, good morning. My name is Hector Martinez. Thank you again for the invitation and be part of this panel. It is great to be here. Well, first of all, my position right now is I'm overseeing the adult education at the state of Kansas through the Kansas Board of Regents. I have been in adult education since 2000 when I moved to United States. I have the fortune to be, I believe, most of the roles in adult education, from student to volunteer, teacher, coordinator, director of a program, local program, and now overseeing the state in Kansas. Then with my background on going through different backgrounds on students and be able to have different grants through

our local programs, I believe we can have a good conversation on how a career navigator has to be or it needs to be for adult learners. Thank you again for the invitation.

Jen Vanek (04:04):

And hello, my name is Jen Vanek. I'm Director of Digital Learning and Research at the EdTech Center at World Ed and thanks for the invitation to talk with you all. I'm excited about the challenge. My role, I think the part of my role that's most relevant is at the EdTech Center at World Ed, we've done field testing of learning technologies specifically designed to support adult learners, and then we've also done a full channel of field testing on technologies not explicitly designed for adult learners in order to consult with developers to help them understand how implementation should be framed or the technologies themselves should be redeployed or redirected in order to better serve adult learners. Through all this research, I also craft technical assistance and professional learning for adult basic skills, adult literacy, adult ESL educators and how to use technology and support digital literacy.

Monica Tinyo (04:59):

Great. Thanks so much. I will turn it over to our colleagues at OCTAE for quick introductions. I'll start with Grace, or Travis, if you are available, I can start with you.

Travis Combs (05:22):

Yep.

Monica Tinyo (05:22):

Great.

Travis Combs (05:23):

Thanks, Monica. Thanks, Eric, Jen and Hector for being here today and sharing your expertise and experiences with the attendees for this webinar. My name's Travis Combs. I'm the Branch Chief for the Innovations and Improvements team here in the Division of Adult Education and Literacy at OCTAE. I work closely with Eden and Janna and Monica and the entire team at Luminary Labs on the Future Finder Challenge. We worked with them on the Rethink Challenge last year or a couple years prior to last year and worked closely with Carolyn who I will introduce next. Carolyn?

Carolyn Lampila (06:01):

Hi, I'm Carolyn Lampila. I work on Travis's team in OCTAE and want to thank everyone for your interest in the Future Finder Challenge and for joining today and for the panel for coming and sharing your expertise. Yeah, thanks to Luminary Labs of course for hosting and all your work on the challenge.

Monica Tinyo (06:23):

Thank you everyone for those introductions and thank you again for joining. I will pass it over to Eden for our panel discussion.

Eden Baker (06:32):

Great. Thanks so much, Monica. If anyone did not see me at the virtual information session, my name is Eden Baker and I am an Engagement Manager here at Luminary Labs. Really thrilled

to have you all here today. Before we open it up for our discussion with our panelists, I did want to address a few questions that we received by our Eventbrite that are around the challenge itself. The first question was really around the rationale for this project, and I think the OCTAE team did cover this at the information session, but just to recap quickly, we did get a few questions that are around what are the gaps in the market and why are we running this challenge.

(07:09):

What we essentially wanted to share here is we know there are a growing number of digital career navigation tools out there, but these are typically designed for established professionals and higher education students. Few of these are designed specifically for adult learners, and this does mean that many adult learners who are already often underserved do not have the support they need to enter and thrive in their careers. With all of that in mind, the challenge really aims to spur the creation or improvement of tools specifically for adult learners. This could be encouraging people to adapt tools for adult learners. For example, if you already had a product that was maybe serving higher education students and you wanted to adjust the content and design for adult learners, that would be welcome.

(07:54):

It also could be that you have an existing tool for adult learners, but you are looking to maybe improve a particular functionality or component of it or you're looking to scale it. Really open to both new and established tools here. Through the challenge, we're also hoping to bring broader awareness to the importance of adult education and improving the career navigation experience more generally. Another question we got by the Eventbrite, which I believe we've also received today, was around whether or not you can mark specific information in your submission as confidential. The answer is yes, absolutely.

(08:28):

As per of the Rules, Terms and Conditions, each entrant must clearly delineate any confidential information in their submission. You can read more about this in the intellectual property provisions in the Rules, Terms and Conditions. I hope that's helpful information for a few folks who asked questions before today's session. As Monica said, the purpose of today is really to hear from the experts around adult education more generally as opposed to addressing specific questions about the challenge.

(08:57):

If you do have specific questions around the challenge, I would encourage you to send the challenge team an email or ask them today and we'll get back to you after the session. With all of that in mind, I wanted to dive into the panel discussion so that we can hear from the three experts we have here today. The first question is big picture. We know that the process of understanding and entering the workforce can be incredibly overwhelming and confusing, particularly for adult learners. I wanted to hear from some of the panelists around what does a good career navigation experience, particularly for adult learners, look like? And Hector, I'm going to start with you for that one.

Hector Martinez (09:40):

Thank, Eden. Yes, I believe a good career navigator or navigation experience is one that will include everyone and I will refer this to probably a diversity, equity and inclusion to where every student feels comfortable using a tool related to what they are looking for and with the background that they will possess. We have students in the adult education that they have no skills or workforce skills in the United States coming through our system and they need to be acclimated to that.

(10:26):

We have professionals coming through our country that they're going through the adult education and they may need it totally different because they already went through a schooling system that they have to have a different way to perceive the career continuing education or how do they integrate themselves into the workforce. But most likely, students, they're coming through a rough time and they are getting their high school diploma or they're getting into the English as a second language and trying to find a way to acclimate into their communities.

(11:06):

It is the handholding, the things that we are doing in adult education now to help the students move through different steps, that is the system that needs to be looking. Step by step with samples and put in face into where the student is going to go and progress to their near future. They need to see that goal, they need to see that pathway and they're going to be able to see what the step is needed and how they accomplish that step to be moving forward.

Eden Baker (11:45):

That's really helpful context. Thank you Hector. Eric, is there anything further you would add from a digital skills perspective?

Eric Nesheim (11:53):

Yeah, thanks. That was a really good answer. I think that encompassed a lot of what we need to talk about. The only thing I would add is that I think often overlooked is the concept of digital skills and there's lots of assumptions about that and I think we found out over the last few years that you can't make assumptions about the skill levels of our workers and of people going through the job seeking process. In fact, as a literacy organization, I was surprised.

(12:26):

I do some tutoring in one of our local labs and I was surprised to find out that many of the people coming into learn about digital literacy would actually have been considered fully literate in normal times and just didn't have those skills, and so, I think it's a new concept maybe for some of our workforce systems to see that as an issue. I'm thinking that the easiest answer is just to do some screening alongside this and then some potential skill building as well. Any app that's working on that I think would be moving in the right direction.

Eden Baker (13:07):

It's interesting. I think that makes me think of accessibility and considering digital skills and access to technology when thinking about designing a digital tool for adult learners, which I know we'll get to a little later in the conversation. It's building on what I shared at the beginning. We know that there are a lot of digital career navigation tools that do cater to higher education students and establish professionals who are already well into their careers, but there aren't that many tools that cater specifically to adult learners. With that in mind, what should entrants consider when designing a tool that is specifically for adult learners? Jen, we'll pass that to you and then other panelists, feel free to chime in.

Jen Vanek (13:50):

Yeah, thank you. I've just chatted a link to some key points that we advise technology developers on when it comes to creating tools for adult learners. We are funded by an entity called the Employment Technology Fund to field test a bunch of edtech and other tech, and this

is after nearly two years of research and understanding how the development trajectory had to shift according to what we were seeing. This is the list of things you should definitely attend to.

(14:27):

I just want to call specific attention to the importance of whatever technology has developed of being really lightweight. It's got to be portable, it's got to work well on phones. It can't suck up all of the learners' data for the month just to log in once or twice. If you really want a community of learners who we know to be smartphone dependent for access to wifi and access to the resources that are conveyed online, it's got to be super lightweight. It's also got to be super easy to onboard. One or two clicks to onboard to get started and every time they log in, it's going to be a huge barrier if the login and verification process is super cumbersome.

(15:16):

Once they get in, the interface needs to be super evident. Navigation needs to be clear. People have to know where to click. Along with that, I think you need to make sure that you're developing really rich and diverse media for support materials that learners can easily link to so that they have access to a short video really quickly to see how something particular in the app or the affordance works. That's a short list. There's a longer list in the report that's chatted, but these are the things that we've learned over the years through our research.

Hector Martinez (15:55):

Eden, I will jump in here as well. I concur what Jen said about videos and I believe that for the first time ever, the tool needs to be started with a sample of what it looks like to be completed from zero to the end, but also, this needs to be flexible enough to mirror the needs of the adult education. If John is looking for information, the answer of the program needs to be John given the answers, then they need to mirror that.

(16:38):

That's going to be a little hard to do, but with a little bit background of the user, they will know what is the background, their needs and what they're looking for and the answers to handholding that student through the process that needs to occur. That could be created with an avatar, that could be created with some additional intelligence or programming in the background, then that will be definitely something that will be revolutionary, the career navigation.

Eden Baker (17:22):

I have a few follow-up questions. One, Jen, you mentioned that it's really crucial that the onboarding process is one or two clicks. Why do you think that's so important and what else might people consider in terms of what an optimal onboarding process would look like?

Jen Vanek (17:39):

I think it's incredibly important to have an easy onboarding process because learners might not see themselves as legitimate users of the technology or use the technology to accomplish the task. They might be tasks and things that they're used to handing their device to a more knowledgeable other next to them to help them log on, help them get started, but they don't have agency in that process themselves unless they're able to get onto the app directly and with confidence when they need to use it.

(18:10):

Every time they need help, every time they need somebody, it just diminishes their self-efficacy and doesn't really help build digital resilience in the other aspects of their lives. Hopping on a

career path is something that would seem to require tons of agency and self-efficacy if you're going to feel confidence and feel engaged in it. The other thing that's really important other than the ready access to onboarding materials like support materials and not just a PDF that lists steps like click here with screenshots. Really media rich stuff that's videos that are annotated that show learners exactly where to click and when.

(18:45):

Also, there should be a human element to supporting onboarding. In our work with the XPRIZE Adult Literacy Communities Competition, we found that the apps that had the most success were being used in programs where there were things like onboarding parties where learners would come together with a tutor or a volunteer or whomever and they would actually walk through getting on practice, getting on asking questions, resolving things. They literally did call it a party and they would have pizza. It was super fun and attractive, comfortable environment for them to feel confidence using the app so that they could then go on their way and make use of it independently.

Eden Baker (19:30):

I love that. I would use almost any tool if it involved a pizza party. In case folks missed it, Jen also just popped a follow-up message in the chat just about the importance of considering supporting multilingual resources. Jen or others, I'm not sure if there's anything additional that you would want to add to that point.

Jen Vanek (19:49):

No, just can't assume that everybody's comfortable all the time in English and why not support to the extent that's possible their communication in a language that can help them reach their goals.

Eden Baker (20:07):

Great. I think a lot of what we've started talking about already does relate to our next question, which is around specific accessibility consideration. Building on what you've all shared so far, is there anything you would add in terms of what entrants should consider in order to ensure their tools are accessible to adult learners? Jen, I'll throw that to you and then others chime in.

Jen Vanek (20:30):

Yeah, the risk of talking too much all at one time. I think that it's really critical to go to learners really early on in your design process and not just learners who are known to be really confident with technology, but to integrate learners who represent a range of skill and confidence using technologies so that their perspectives can be embedded into design.

(20:59):

When I say design, I mean not only the design of the actual technology but design around the wraparound services and other supports that humans would provide as they're making use of the tool. You need to take accessibility very seriously, so attend to any guidance given from the federal resources that are provided around clear language and color contrast. Really make sure that any accessibility tools that are possible just to help the learners are possible. They can use them within the environment you're creating. Yeah, I'll leave it there. I'll leave there. I think that's enough for now.

Hector Martinez (21:49):

I'd like to make a comment on this and I just wanted to refer back to the multilingual accessibility for this navigation. I think it's critical but also, we need to take in consideration the market information system. We need to know that the market information is embedded into the community needs and the students are able to see that that is a need on the community and they may be already working in some capacity on some of those areas and they can be concentrated and feel comfortable enough to be able to utilize the tool that they can refer easily to this tool.

Eden Baker ([22:40](#)):

Building on what I believe Jen may have mentioned earlier, but in regards to consideration of bandwidth and how much data a tool might suck up, is there anything further that entrants should be thinking about early on in the design process to make sure that their tool does not require anything flashy or a lot of data and would be easily accessible on devices that adult learners often have.

Eric Nesheim ([23:07](#)):

I could talk from a perspective of Northstar, which isn't an app, it's an online platform, but we do go through a lot to make sure that it's accessible and it is just a lot of work to do that which is important, and then the other thing that I was thinking as you're thinking about... And I see that we have some adult educators along with some maybe for-profit groups... Think about the cost piece too a little bit and not just for the adult learners but for the programs that you might be working. What's the affordability? What's the sustainability of it? For sure, cost on the ground is a no-no. Do not be charging learners for things. Find ways to make sure that programs can use it and that programs and teachers and so on are buying into what the model looks like.

Eden Baker ([24:05](#)):

I think that's a really good point, Eric, about fees and not wanting adult learners themselves to pay to access any of these tools. I think that's a really important accessibility consideration as well. Jen, I can see your hand is raised.

Jen Vanek ([24:23](#)):

Yeah. I just wanted to add one more thing. Around technology, there are some really wonderful examples of digital navigator programs in the world today. Eric's organization runs some. We are doing pilots and writing about digital navigator programs where learners have a need to use technology, they get access to that technology and then they also get a through line to the support and technical assistance and ongoing digital skills training to help them make use of that. From a program perspective, if you're thinking about developing something that's more than just an app, pairing something like a technology-rich career pathways tool with a digital navigator program seems like it would be a really winning combination. You can just Google digital navigator programs and you'll come up with a lot of different examples.

Eden Baker ([25:27](#)):

Very good tip. Thank you, Jen. Building on what I think a few of you have shared already about the importance of getting input early on, do you have any recommendations on how entrants should go about seeking input from both adult learners but also adult educators and maybe some other stakeholders that are involved in the adult education ecosystem?

Hector Martinez ([25:52](#)):

Eden, I think the best approach to this is get to know your adult education providers. I think the best input you can have is to talk to your adult education providers and then reach out to organizations nationally for those that serve adult education programs, but it will be interesting for you to know if you go and visit one of your local programs and talk to directors or instructors and most likely students and just ask what you want to do next.

(26:38):

One of the major things I see is students coming through adult education, they just need that help to be able to know the system. They most likely are out of the educational system and that's when they are moving through those other options. Then, my immediate response to that it is get connected to your local program, to the directors, instructors and most importantly, students. Get the feel from them.

Eric Nesheim (27:17):

I would just add that's exactly what I would've said as well. We've been lucky to have a built-in literacy program with teachers and students that we can go directly to and have them work on experiments essentially around what we've been working on, which is exactly what you'd want I think, but I would suspect that there're programs out there that would be happy to test things out and try things if you can link up with those programs and that's how you get direct access to students.

(27:52):

There are ways of doing it and Jen would be better at answering this, but there're ways of doing research around getting information from learners and there're some groups out there doing that, finding out what's been going on during the pandemic, what are the needs, what are the virtual needs and so on. There is information out there that you can access. Important to note that a lot of times, it helps to offer a prize or to pay people to participate because they are helping you and there's a lot going on in people's lives, both learners and practitioners.

Eden Baker (28:30):

That is such a good point Eric. I think that's a really good thing for people to be mindful of when you're asking folks for their time and input and I think, Jen, is that what you were also going add with your hand raised up? Yeah. Yeah, I think that's a really good thing. Appreciate you highlighting that. I did want to go back. Hector, you mentioned that it's really crucial to essentially find your local programs and essentially go and visit them and talk to instructors, talk to directors. I know this sounds a little bit silly, but if someone really doesn't know where to start, how would you recommend they go about firstly finding local providers and then, two, reaching out to them. Can they pick up a phone, can they send an email? What would you recommend in terms of facilitating those early connections?

Hector Martinez (29:12):

Couple things I will direct them to. Just in Google, they can search adult education and they will come out with different places across the nation on state adult education programs and they can connect even through the state to be directed to different programs because it's going to be a totally different situation from rural communities to urban communities. I think for a best field testing, it has to be connected to both. It has to be someone that could be connected to a rural community and also the urban local programs.

(29:56):

But the best way is use your Google search and adult education or state adult education, and you're going to be able to find the state agencies. Call them at any point and they will connect

you to the local programs. The other great research that I will say that the organization at large is through the organization from COABE. Then you will have a lot of resources on COABE. This organization serves professionals in adult education directly, not necessarily a lot of adult students, however they will have some connections to adult local programs.

Eden Baker (30:49):

Great. It sounds like start with trusty Google. I can see that Jen has popped a few links in the chat as well including a link to AEFLA-funded providers. I'm assuming there's a list there. I have a click through and then also reminded folks to keep in mind the workforce boards in their area and then if you didn't it, we can also a link COABE which is what Hector mentioned, the Coalition of Adult Basic Education. That sounds like a few really great places to start. I'm mindful of time and I do want to make sure we also get to a few of the questions that we have live.

(31:27):

We'll ask a few more that we received before today's session. If you do have a question in the audience, I encourage you to pop them in the Q&A window and we'll come back to them in a moment. I should actually also take this opportunity in thinking about how to find adult ed providers to plug our challenge community. I think Monica's going to share a little bit more about that in a moment, but I know that it does have already quite a few people who have signed up from adult ed organizations that are interested in either teaming up with people or offering their expertise.

(31:59):

If you haven't already joined that, that's probably another great resource if you are looking to connect with adult ed providers. Okay. I want to change tracks slightly and dig into workforce data and needs a little bit more. The first question here is what different data sources would you recommend to effectively understand workforce needs in relation to adult learners? Again, if someone wasn't sure where to start, where would you suggest is a good point? Hector, I'll pass that to you and then other panelists, feel free to chime in.

Hector Martinez (32:32):

I think one of the questions or response that I wanted to start with is we need to understand why adult learners are looking at adult education. Most likely, it's to better themselves economically. They like to have a better job, a better life, a better situation. Then with that in mind, we need to start looking into what is the data that we need to have as resources. First of all, we need to identify what is the adult education needed. What are the numbers of participants in the state and the community and the nationwide needing adult education services, English as a second language or high school equivalency diploma.

(33:24):

With that we need to be looking into what is the local marketing that is needing for those students or participants to be part of it. Type of jobs. What are the jobs that students coming from adult education after receiving their high school equivalency or even learn English are able to perform? Salaries. What is the adult education salary that is going to be able to do and have that... And openings. It is good to have the jobs, but also, what are the openings saying on perspective with those students to be able to go through that.

(34:02):

Also, one important part and piece of this is across the nation in adult education, we are implementing more and more pathways to career and integrated educational training service,

then how do we collectively engaged with employers and how programs are delivering those services? I believe all that data needs to be plugged into a system that a student is going to be able to recognize and be able to utilize that to move forward.

Eden Baker (34:51):

Thanks, Hector. I think on a related note, another thing that's come up a few times is just the impact of COVID. We know that COVID has had a huge impact on workforce trends. What advice would you give entrants looking to understand changing industry needs but also changing education needs? Eric, I'll hand that one to you.

Eric Nesheim (35:10):

Yeah, thanks. Yeah, that is exactly the \$100,000 question I guess. COVID has changed everything and spit everything up and the economy changes have really made a huge difference too so that everyone's scrambling to either hire people or move forward. One of the things that we're running into is some just really basic needs in the workplace that I think people maybe didn't expect. Some very basic things like people not knowing how to create passwords to get into the systems that they're working with.

(35:45):

It's even pre some of the work that we've been doing with digital literacy assessment. That's important to note that that's the current economy that we're working with. I think also important to note is that obviously, things continually speed up with technology but things are speeding up even faster than they have before. Whatever's being developed needs to be constantly adapted and updated to approach the needs that are ongoing. That's a very important piece to note for anyone working on developing something. As we all know, virtually every job requires digital skills. That's what you hear from me every time.

Eden Baker (36:31):

I think it's worth reminding folks of that over and over, Eric. It's absolutely crucial and now more than ever, right?

Hector Martinez (36:38):

I will just add one piece of this also, and I know after COVID, the increase of enrollees to adult ed from 16 and 17 years of age, it is increasing across the nation. Then we need to be thinking about how can we implement a career navigation at the early stages when they're 16 or 17 years of age to be able to be placed into a job.

Eden Baker (37:12):

Really good point, Hector. I think that might relate to one of the questions we've got in the Q&A, which we'll come back to in a moment. One or two final questions for the panelists and then we'll jump into the live Q&A. One thing we really wanted to focus on today is thinking about what outcomes of these tools might be and how entrants will assess them. What data might entrants collect to measure whether their tool is effective and how might they go about collecting this, including incorporating some measurement into the tool itself? Jen, I'll hand that one to you.

Jen Vanek (37:48):

Yeah, I'm going to spin this question just a little bit because I think that the data collection and understanding the potential impact of the tool actually has to happen during the design. You'll do some research to understand your learners and do some building, but rather than waiting for

something to be complete, in a design process, I think it's really important to allow for a sheltered usability and feasibility phase of using the build, use and redesign.

(38:24):

During that phase, you're actually collecting qualitative data on the ways that learners think they should be using the app and how whatever human is helping them can help them actually understand how to make it work better too. I guess don't wait until the very end. In terms of ongoing, once an app is launched, once a program is launched and people are going, I think ongoing qualitative... The system is set up to point people toward the long-term outcomes and the quantitative data.

(39:04):

So yes, figure out ways to integrate that stuff in, but please don't neglect qualitative data that is maybe longitudinal, where you're checking in with learners many times over time to understand what their experience is within whatever system, process, pairing of human support with use of a technology. It has to happen in order for you to understand how the apps or the system is set up and how it's leading to some of the more quantitative outcomes-based data that you might be able to collect along the way too. Yeah, talk to people. It's so important when you're designing technology and systems to actually talk to people.

Eden Baker (39:51):

I've written that down as one of my big takeaways from today already, Jen. Talk to all the people and early. They're my big learnings so far. Okay, as I said, mindful of time. Before we open up for Q&A, I did want to ask each of the panelists if you could just share one tip for a potential entrant on something that they should really keep in mind as they're designing digital tools for adult learners. What would it be? Eric, I'm going to start with you and then we'll go through with Jen and Hector.

Eric Nesheim (40:21):

Okay. 30 seconds. I think it's important to remember... And some of you may be thinking about designing things specifically directly for adult learners. Some of you may be thinking of it for programs. I think the point being, if you are working on developing something that will be used by programs, also be thinking about the people within those programs who would be using it and facilitate the use for them and sustainability for that program and how they might use it. Those are all things that need to be thought about as you're doing this. Cost, facility of use, adaptability, who pays for it, how sustainable is it?

Jen Vanek (40:58):

Yeah, I would add that consider learners and talk to learners often. Make sure that you're designing a tool that aligns with what learners see their goals as being so that they can see themselves playing an agentic role within whatever use of the technology or the process you've set up. So yeah, make sure you attend to learner goals and involve them early on in the process.

Hector Martinez (41:27):

Well, I probably will add make this personal. Do a personality analysis if you collect data to make sure you are meeting the needs of the learner. If you're going to go and buy a car, do you buy a car for your neighbors or do you buy a car for you. That is going to be the system that it will talk to a student and it will be related to a student to move forward and continue using the system.

Eden Baker (42:00):

I think that's such a good reminder Hector, that when we're talking about adult learners, we're talking about people and when we're talking about users, we're talking about people and they each have very different, specific needs and I think that reinforces what you've all been saying about really seeking input early and often. Okay, so I did, as I said, want to start looking at some of the questions that folks have been asking during the conversation so far.

(42:25):

The first one actually ties in very nicely to what Hector just mentioned, which is, "Is there a defined user persona or profile developed already?" I did want to elaborate a little bit on another response that we shared to this. Just to really remind folks that when we're talking about adult learners, we are using a very specific definition from WIOA. That definition is in the rules, terms and conditions, but just to quickly recap, it is someone who has attained 16 years of age, is not enrolled or required to be enrolled in secondary school under state law and is basic skills deficient, does not have a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, and has not achieved an equivalent level of education or is an English language learner.

(43:08):

I know that was a lot of information. Please take a look at the definition in the Rules, Terms, and Conditions just to make sure that you're keeping that specific definition in mind when thinking about adult learners. As I mentioned, that is taken from WIOA, the definition for eligible individual. Just to build on that, in terms of the actual group of adult learners, you are welcome to design a tool for all adult learners or you're welcome to design a tool for a specific group of adult learners.

(43:37):

For example, that could be English language learners or it could be veterans. Just as long as you are demonstrating that your tool has been designed with the specific needs of adult learners in mind. You'll see when you take a look at the submission form that it does ask for more information in terms of who your specific target users are and what their unique needs may be. Okay, I think you've had enough from me on that one. I wanted to open up to the panel with some of the questions that we received from folks. The first one is for Hector. Hector has been mentioning this concept of handholding a few times. Are you able to elaborate a little bit on what you mean by that Hector? And I guess more specifically, what that might look like in a digital context?

Hector Martinez (44:21):

Yes. I believe from adult education, and we have adult education providers in the audience, it is just taking it step by step. We're not going to take anything for granted, and we're not going to be assuming anything from adult education learners. We have to take them step by step. When I said handholding, it is providing all the information possible for them to make a decision of what is their next step, because their life can change from one point to another and from one day to the next.

(44:56):

That's why we probably need to be consistent, engage them in possible assessment every day, is this what you want to do? Is this your future that you see for yourself? It is just taking and encouraging them to continue with the path. We need to have in our mind that adult learners change in their life. It is not as a regular high school student or college student. They have a light behind them and they're trying to find a new way to survive. That's why I was referring to handholding because they can drop the ball at any point.

Eden Baker (45:46):

That's such an important point, Hector. I know in a lot of early conversations we had as part of the design of this challenge, people really emphasize that the journey is absolutely not linear. I think a phrase we had a few times was, "Often, life gets in the way." That might be financial things, it could be caring responsibilities, but the journey is absolutely not linear. I think that's a good thing to reinforce. We have another question here, which is, "What is the bigger issue? Finding the right job opportunity or finding the right resources to prepare for an existing job opportunity?" Going to open that up to the panel if people have thoughts. I don't know if you can prioritize one or the other. I would be curious about any reactions to that question.

Jen Vanek (46:35):

Can you say it again?

Eden Baker (46:37):

Yes. "What is the bigger issue? Finding the right job opportunity or finding the right resources to prepare for an existing job opportunity?"

Hector Martinez (46:51):

I will start, Eden. I believe most of the adult learners, they have some skills, but it is going to be the resources. They need to identify the resources and they need to identify how they're going to utilize those resources in their benefit. Job opportunities they may have already and they may already have a job themselves, but finding new opportunities and finding resources to change a job to identify themselves in what they want to do, I think it is the most important.

Jen Vanek (47:29):

The reason I asked to have you repeat the question is because I don't think it's about the job. It's about getting established on a pathway of career development that is sequenced with work, training, credentialing perhaps, and advancement rather than jumping from frontline service job to frontline service job across different industry sectors. Yeah, it probably starts with a job, but it's not about the job, it's about something that's more long-term I think.

Eden Baker (48:08):

That's an interesting point. Back to what we're talking about of seeing this as a journey as opposed to necessarily just one point in time or one step. Interesting. There's a question here that I think is probably well suited to Eric, which is, "Is there a standardized assessment we can use to measure or estimate a learner's digital skills?"

Eric Nesheim (48:31):

Yeah, I think one of the things that we found, and again, we're a nonprofit organization. Years ago, a library system in St. Paul said, "Hey, is there a way that we can assess digital literacy skills in our community? Because people are coming in looking for jobs we don't know." Back then, Jen Vanek was actually working with us and we looked around, couldn't find something, so we started developing something and it became what it is, Northstar Digital Literacy Assessment.

(49:02):

There isn't a lot out there that assesses lower level digital literacy skills. In some ways, Northstar is it. It offers an assessment in 15 different categories and curriculum and an online learning to

go along with it. We're nonprofit, but we do charge for larger systems to use it, but it's free to any learner who wants to use it. There is something out there you might want to take a look at to see if it works for people and for anyone developing something to look and see what has worked in terms of making something sustainable out there, because again, in our world, you create something and then if there's no more funding, it goes away. That's really not what we want to be looking for here.

Eden Baker ([49:54](#)):

Great, thanks, Eric. In case people missed it, there's also a link to that in the chat if you want to take a look at that too. Okay. I think we've got maybe time for one more question. I know there are a few that we haven't had a chance to address live, so if you like, you're welcome to reach out to the challenge team. Otherwise, we can also post some additional information on the FAQs on the challenge website. Final question here, "Is it the panelists' understanding that adult learners actually understand what a career is as opposed to a job?"

Jen Vanek ([50:29](#)):

Can I just say... So in our 21st Century Learning Ecosystem Opportunities research that World Ed did with Portland State University, I would say the answer to the question is yes, because many of the migrant workers are immigrants, refugees that we were working with as participants in the study had come from careers. They were highly trained, they had skills, they had confidence in those skills, and they were not able to find a job that was aligned with that career here. Yes, I think they do. Many of them do. It's actually up to us and the programs and perhaps even part of the tool that you all might be developing in order to unearth that stuff, to help create alignment with prior learning, knowledge, experience, credentials and career opportunities here in the US.

Hector Martinez ([51:23](#)):

Yeah, I will echo what Jen said. Sometimes, I will like to say this out loud that we stereotype adult learners to be only English as second language or the GED students. It's not only that. There is more, more, more than that and those professionals coming, they already have a career and they may have 20, 30 years of experience, but there are difficulties in life that move them to the United States. Now, they try to begin their career again or they're trying to find a new job. They're not finding another career. They're just trying to find a job to survive here in the states.

Eden Baker ([52:12](#)):

Hector, I think that is the perfect note to end on and I think that aligns very nicely to a lot of what all the panelists have been really reinforcing today. I hope that's something that all the attendees take away with them. I'm going to recap super quickly some of the big takeaways and then hand over to Monica to share a little more information on next step. I think a few big takeaways, at least for me, and panelists chime in, is that accessibility is crucial, easy onboarding, low data, simple interfaces, free to use, really think about all of those considerations from the very start of your design process.

([52:46](#)):

Engage potential users really early on, seek their feedback, but also be incredibly respectful of time, so consider a stipend or some way to reimburse them for their time that they are giving you. Same goes for adult ed providers. Reach out to them early and often. There are a few great links in the chat for follow up. AEFLA and COABE sites are a great place to start there.

Same goes with data collection. Think about that early and often as well. Any final takeaways from the speakers before we wrap up? Okay. All right, I'm going to pass it over to Monica to just quickly remind folks of next steps.

Monica Tinyo (53:41):

Just to echo Eden, just wanted to say thank you again to all the panelists. They provided some really incredible insights and great to see the questions flowing through. We wanted to remind people that the submissions are due on December 15th. That is six weeks away. To enter the challenge, you'll need to do all of the following by 6:00 PM Eastern Standard on December 15th of this year. You'll want to create Luminary Lightbox account and that's something that you can do through the submission form on the Future Finder website.

(54:12):

We also encourage you to review the stage one selection criteria before submitting, and finally, of course, complete and submit the stage one submission form at FutureFinderChallenge.com. We recommend that you complete all of these steps well ahead of the deadline to allow to resolve any potential technical issues or anything that may come up. We also wanted to plug the Challenge community. There are several resources on our website. This is one of them. The Challenge community is a great opportunity to connect with potential team members or offer your expertise.

(54:53):

This screenshot is only a snippet of the growing challenge community, and as you can see, many people have already offered their expertise in areas such as adult education, career navigation, and edtech. I really encourage you to sign up if you haven't already. Also, if you have, be sure to return to find potential partners. Collaboration as, hopefully, you heard from these subject matter experts is really crucial to creating a successful tool, whether it be with adult educators, adult learners, or workforce professionals.

(55:27):

We also wanted to share the stage one resources, and this is a general resources page that contains a curated list of resources about adult learners, adult ed ecosystem and career navigation. A lot of these resources build upon the knowledge that was generated today. There's also just additional resources on who adult learners are and just many resources that can be of use. There also is a recording of the virtual information session that was in October. You can visit FutureFinderChallenge.com/resources for more information.

(56:10):

Lastly, just to sum it all up, we wanted to say thank you again to our panelists and thank you everyone for joining today. If you have any additional questions, you can contact hello@FutureFinderChallenge.com. We also encourage you to add hello@FutureFinderChallenge.com to your address book to make sure that any messages aren't marked as spam. Lastly, we just encourage you to the website to sign up for the newsletter, join the challenge community and look at additional resources. Thank you everyone.