

Workplace Development



LEARNING THAT PAYS:

Designing Education Members Value—and Invest In

TRACY KING, CAE, MA | Chief Operating Officer, InspiEd

Article developed from real-time session insights captured by Snapsight

At MSAE25, *Learning That Pays: Delivering Education Members Value—and Invest In!* challenged association leaders to rethink how education is designed, delivered, and positioned in a rapidly changing workforce. Tracy King, CAE, framed the conversation around a central reality: associations are no longer competing in a content economy—they are operating in a **skills-first economy**, where learners invest in programs that help them do something new, better, or more confidently.

“Topics don’t drive revenue—outcomes do.”

Drawing from her Michigan roots and deep experience working with associations nationwide, King emphasized that education must evolve from isolated learning events into intentional systems that deliver measurable, career-advancing outcomes.

Skills Are the New Currency

King grounded the session in compelling workforce data. Researchers such as Josh Bersin describe skills as the “metadata of people,” while Degreed CEO David Blake has documented the rapid rise of skills-based hiring—now shown to be more predictive of job success than degrees or years of experience. McKinsey further reinforces this shift, describing generative AI as a *skills-biased technological change* that rewards adaptability and continuous learning.

For associations, this shift represents both a challenge and an opportunity. Those that can clearly define, develop, and validate skills are uniquely positioned to lead in this new environment—if they design education accordingly.

Learning as an Ecosystem, not a Catalog

Using the cautionary tale of Kodak, King illustrated the danger of failing to recognize ecosystem shifts. Kodak didn’t fail because it lacked innovation, it failed because it misunderstood how digital photography changed the entire value ecosystem. Associations, she warned, face a similar moment with AI-enabled learning and skills-based education.

Rather than offering disconnected courses, King urged associations to **build impact ecosystems** - cohesive learning portfolios that intentionally develop expertise over time. This requires moving beyond “one-and-done” programming toward structured pathways that help learners progress from awareness to mastery.

The 4A Model: From Attendance to Application

To support this shift, King introduced her **4A Learning Design Model**:

- **Attend** – Capture attention and focus
- **Analyze** – Structure content so learners can make sense of it
- **Associate** – Personalize learning through reflection and relevance
- **Apply** – Practice, implement, and take action

Most programs, King noted, stop after the first two stages. The missing element is **integration**—the facilitated connection between learning and real-world application. Without it, participants may feel inspired, but lasting change rarely follows.

Designing for Access, Scale, and Sustainability

King highlighted examples of associations successfully operationalizing skills-based learning. AcademyHealth delivers high-demand skill workshops through multiple formats—virtual facilitated, corporate facilitated, and asynchronous—extending reach while maximizing revenue. The Public Media Journalists Association leveraged grant funding to support professionals navigating career transitions, pairing relevance with accessibility.

Differentiated pricing models, evergreen e-learning, and inclusive design were positioned not as optional enhancements, but as essential components of education that truly serves diverse learners—and sustains the organization.

Outcomes Drive Sales

Throughout the session, one principle remained constant: **outcomes drive sales**. Learners invest when they see themselves—and their aspirations—reflected in a program. That requires associations to deeply understand learner personas, market demand, and the challenges members are trying to solve.

King encouraged leaders to adopt a revenue mindset—not at the expense of mission, but in service of it. When education advances careers, builds confidence, and delivers measurable value, both members and associations benefit.

From Insight to Action

King closed with a call to action: stop treating education as a collection of offerings and start managing it as a strategic portfolio. Associations that operationalize continuity, invite learners to clear next steps, and design for transformation will be best positioned to compete in the skills-first workforce.

To help leaders move from concept to execution, King will lead a **hands-on workshop at MSAE's Meetings & Education Summit on September 14, 2026, at Weber's Boutique Hotel & Restaurant**. The workshop will give participants the opportunity to apply these concepts directly to their own programs and begin building education strategies that truly pay off.

Interested in designing education that delivers outcomes members value—and invest in? Tracy King, CAE, can be reached at tracy@inspired-ed.com, and will be leading a hands-on workshop at MSAE's Meetings & Education Summit on September 14, 2026 at Weber's Boutique Hotel & Restaurant.



Meet Tracy

TRACY KING, CAE, MA is Chief Operating Officer at InspirEd and an award-winning author who helps associations design learning ecosystems that deliver real-world impact. With more than two decades of experience in workforce development, Tracy specializes in skills-based education, accessibility, and sustainable learning strategy. They can be reached at tracy@inspired-ed.com.