

A photograph of two men, one Black and one white, smiling and looking at a document together. The man on the left is holding the document. They are in an office or meeting setting. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue banner containing the title text.

Action Guide for Pathways Ecosystem Stakeholders

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June 2022

Introduction

Students and workers in the United States have endured some of the most challenging years in recent memory. The COVID-19 pandemic, domestic unrest and global conflict have resulted in economic and social volatility. **Despite this volatility, students still envision futures where they are thriving and have access to a good job that allows them to enjoy a good life.** As one rural-based, first-generation high school senior shared with us during an interview, “College is definitely something that I’ve looked forward to and something that I’ve always strived for. I’m an ambitious student ... I would like to get a degree in English and get my bachelor’s in that. I would like to become an author and have considered law school afterwards.”¹

Students—particularly students of color, students experiencing poverty and students in rural communities—face systemic barriers that complicate their journey to a good job. Currently, only 75 percent of Black and Latino/a/x college graduates are employed within a year of graduating college compared to 83 percent of white graduates.² At the same time, Black median incomes are 10 percent lower, and Latino/a/x are 5 percent lower than their white peers.³ Recognizing that higher education is an important step in a student’s journey to good jobs, the disparities in postsecondary attainment rates are alarming. While 42 percent of white adults ages 25 or older hold at least a bachelors degree, just 28 percent of Black adults and 21 percent of Latino/a/x adults ages 25 or older do.⁴ Additionally, just 19 percent of rural Americans hold at least a bachelor’s degree, compared to an average of 33 percent nationwide.⁵

In light of these realities, students need the systems around them to transform and create clearer pathways to jobs and careers where they can earn family-sustaining wages. Successful pathways approaches blend systemic changes such as policies that create new funding mechanisms or data-sharing agreements between institutions, with programmatic changes like dual-enrollment opportunities and structured advising. By creating structures of support that span K12, postsecondary and workforce sectors, stakeholders can ensure that students have greater access to opportunities where they can thrive. **Pathways intermediaries play a crucial role in this process.** These organizations work to coordinate K12, postsecondary and workforce systems together to create the systemic changes and programmatic supports students need.

Students are not the only ones who benefit from greater coordination between education and workforce systems. Employers can strengthen a reliable pipeline of local talent; policymakers can

¹ Education First Interview (2022).

² [National Center for Education Statistics](#) (2019).

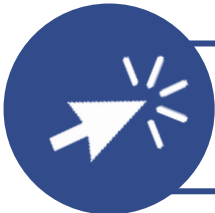
³ Ibid.

⁴ [National Student Clearinghouse Research Center](#) (2020).

⁵ [Lumina Foundation](#) (2019).

better support their constituents and bolster economic development; K12 schools and systems can motivate students to engage in learning and graduate on time; and postsecondary providers can engage well-prepared students at an increased enrollment rate. **When all stakeholders buy in to creating a coherent system of pathways for students, everyone benefits.**

With support from the [Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation](#) and [Ascendium](#), Education First conducted a nationwide landscape scan of pathways intermediaries in 2022. This research found that **multiple stakeholders have a crucial role to play in launching students on paths to economic mobility by partnering closely with intermediaries.** Through a literature review, student survey and interviews with proximate leaders across the pathways ecosystem, Education First identified implications for stakeholders seeking to support intermediaries' pathways efforts. The full landscape scan, executive summary, literature review and project equity framework can all be found at the links below.



[CLICK HERE TO EXPLORE THE RESEARCH BEHIND THIS ACTION GUIDE:](#)

[Executive Summary](#) | [Full Report](#) | [Literature Review](#) | [Equity Framework](#)

This action guide builds on the findings and implications of the full report and is intended to serve as a starting point for stakeholders across pathways systems as they consider actions to take to support intermediaries and build stronger pathways systems. The way in which partners show up and engage helps create the enabling conditions that allow intermediaries to serve a crucial coordinating role, aligning partners and creating cohesive momentum.

Organization of the Action Guide

Our full report elevated implications and insights that we have organized into four categories of action below. The detailed action guide beginning on page 5 shares detailed recommendations for how five different stakeholder groups can best support pathways intermediaries and the conditions that enable their work.

For each stakeholder group we provide examples and resources for implementing the recommended actions, as well as quotes from proximate stakeholders that we spoke with over the course of this project that informed these recommendations. These recommendations for stakeholders take into account principles of race, diversity, equity and inclusion and seek to specifically consider the ways in which equitable pathways systems can best support students of color, students experiencing poverty and students from rural communities.

While the recommendations in the following pages are broken out by stakeholder group, it is important to understand that these actions should be happening in tandem. **Stakeholders should be working collaboratively and simultaneously toward the goal of building equitable pathways.**

Core Stakeholder Groups

Below are the five core stakeholder groups our research identified as critical to supporting strong pathways systems and pathways intermediaries. Click the links to navigate to the sections below.



Funders

National and local foundations who are supporting intermediaries



Policymakers

State chiefs and SEA leaders, state boards of education, governors, legislators



K12 Leaders and Educators

Leaders of K12 systems, districts and/or schools



Postsecondary

Leaders of postsecondary institutions and/or systems



Employers

Businesses with jobs that provide family-sustaining wages and opportunities for career progression

Our research also elevated actionable implications for intermediaries, which you can find [here](#).

Recommended Actions for All Stakeholder Groups

These research-based actions are organized in four categories and explored in detail for each stakeholder group in the following pages, including detailed recommendations, examples, resources and perspectives from proximate leaders from our interviews.



Partner to support pathways efforts in your community.



Cultivate the conditions that enable intermediaries to more quickly build pathways and cross-sector partnerships.



Develop and disseminate new research, tools and frameworks to support intermediaries in their work.



Amplify stories of how transforming local systems for greater equity can transform opportunities for young people.



Actionable Implications for Funders



Partner to support pathways efforts in your community.

ACTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Fund networks of intermediaries and communities of practice that allow for intermediaries to **learn from each other** and receive **technical assistance** in order to identify and replicate best practices, particularly around building data infrastructure and analysis capacity.
- Invest in **general operating support** for intermediaries.
- Ensure—through reflection and collaboration with other funders—that both **implicit and explicit** dimensions of place-based systems change efforts are supported through grantmaking.
- Seek to invest in intermediaries with **proximate leadership**, particularly BIPOC leaders, leaders from low-income backgrounds and leaders from rural communities. Proximate leaders have the experience, relationships, data and knowledge that are essential for developing impactful solutions.
- Identify methods for **prioritizing simple grant applications and reporting requirements** and **creating clear expectations** for grantees.
- Consider prioritizing investments in intermediaries working in **rural communities** that have historically had a smaller base of philanthropic support.
- Consider prioritizing investments in intermediaries working with **BIPOC** and **students from low-income backgrounds**.
- Take time to **learn from those you wish to partner** with about **what their greatest needs are** in order to accelerate their work and impact.

EXAMPLES & RESOURCES

General operating support

- [GEO](#) has created a helpful resource articulating the importance of general operating support as part of their [Smarter Grantmaking Playbook](#) work.

Implicit and explicit dimensions of systems change

- Equal Measure and Mathematica have developed a [tool for funders](#) to reflect and act on investments in implicit and explicit dimensions of place-based systems change.

Networks of intermediaries

- With support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Walton Family Foundation, Bloomberg Philanthropies and other funders, Jobs For the Future’s (JFF) [Building Equitable Pathways Network](#) has helped bring together intermediaries to push forward learning on improving education and workforce systems to build strong pathways.
- New America’s [Partnership to Advance Youth Apprenticeship \(PAYA\)](#) provides grant funding and technical assistance to organizations developing intermediary capacity and strategies to launch youth apprenticeship and runs a learning network of these organizations.

“I would love to have a network of solely intermediary organizations whose focus was coming together to codify and learn best practices.”
 —National Subject Matter Expert



“When you look at [our state] demographics, I have a higher poverty level and more demographic diversity in rural than in our metro and suburb districts. And yet all the foundation dollars all go to the metro area. If foundations really wanted to make an impact on equity, they should look to rural.”

—Rural Intermediary Leader

“I’m from the region, my leadership team is from the region, we’re all from there, we all have the lived experience that’s similar to the people we’re serving ... I think that it is important for the intermediary to mirror the place and to be connected to the place.”

—Rural Intermediary Leader

“Philanthropy can help as well with the glue for intermediaries to operate ... Without that glue, there’s no way we can get there.”

—Rural Intermediary Leader



Cultivate the conditions that enable intermediaries to more quickly build pathways and cross-sector partnerships.

ACTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Assess the existing community ecosystem alongside other pathways partners to determine how best to enter and support. Listen to **local stakeholders** to better understand how partners can be most able to deliver on collaborative work.
- Seek to deeply understand local context and **coordinate between local and national funders** in order to deepen trust and ensure intermediaries have access to diversified funding sources.
- Put forth RFPs and investment opportunities that **incentivize cross-sector teams** to work together and apply as a joint effort.
- Commit** to the long haul and provide **multiyear funding** opportunities as well as meaningful thought partnership to intermediaries on their sustainability plans.
- Consider multiple ways to support intermediaries as they mature as organizations and in their programs, such as offering **planning grants, implementation grants and scaling or sustaining grants**.

EXAMPLES & RESOURCES

Partnering with local funders

- The TLL Temple Foundation partners with the Aspen Community Foundation, Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas and JFF to support [Deep East Texas College & Career Academy](#).

Multiyear funding

- The Center for Effective Philanthropy’s [New Attitudes, Old Practice: The Provision of Multiyear General Operating Support](#) report and companion publication, [Making the Case: Foundation Leaders on the Importance of Multiyear General Operating Support](#), outline benefits of multiyear grant funding.

RFPs that Incentivize Cross-Sector Teams

- The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation’s [AccelerateED: Seamless Pathways to Degrees and Careers](#) initiative invited design teams of K12, postsecondary and other cross-sector stakeholders to submit a proposal for pathways that would allow more students to earn their associate degree by their 13th year of education.



“[The intermediary] in our rural region has really sat with me as a superintendent. That has been my role, to broker and leverage people to not only get systems change locally but change at the state level. We’ve tried to make sure that we are lean in administration. So, [being lean] does limit us in our ability. I have been creating relationships across sectors, whether that’s with the business sector to get them engaged and listen to their needs or listening to our faith-based organizations and trying to bring people around a common vision. But it’s very, very time consuming.”

—Rural Superintendent

“The good work that we all do together when we have to go through the process of applying for money together is where all the muck gets worked out ... When funders come in and encourage folks to apply together and provide a planning grant and outside facilitator and don’t look to name a lead in the process—there’s something in that that’s really productive.”

—Intermediary Leader

“Philanthropy has to be thinking about investing long term in intermediary organizations and supporting their operations during the times where dollars to do the work might be less.”

—Rural Intermediary Leader

1. Develop and disseminate new research, tools and frameworks to support intermediaries in their work.

ACTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Fund rigorous research on **promising practices** of intermediaries, focusing on how intermediaries can best deliver on their core capacities. Structure and prioritize the research to help intermediaries address questions they are grappling with.
- Fund **organizational training** for intermediary staff to bolster their ability to engage in the core capacities of pathways intermediaries.
- Fund the development of tools and trainings that support intermediaries in applying **equitable design** to pathways efforts.
- Support intermediary partners in **assessing their goals for scale** and the **feasibility of scaling** up their efforts.

EXAMPLES & RESOURCES

Research on promising practices

- [Square Button’s](#) research analyzing the total cost of operating a quality career pathway and development of financial sustainability plans helps to validate and codify exemplar models of career pathways intermediaries.
- [Equal Measure’s](#) formative evaluation work helps to develop evidence around organizational models of pathways intermediaries.
- JFF’s [resources on intermediaries](#) provide a helpful library of knowledge for those seeking to understand and/or partner with pathways intermediaries.
- Education First’s [literature review and report](#) on pathways intermediaries identifies core capacities and enabling conditions of pathway intermediaries.



- Fund collaboration between educators and industry leaders to develop **standards, competencies** and/or **curricula** to ensure pathways are valued by industry.
- Build a **strong evidence base** to demonstrate the benefits of multiple pathways. Fund research that assesses the extent to which pathways programs are **disrupting patterns of inequitable access** to learning opportunities and credentials, labor market segmentation and/or labor market attachment, particularly focusing on BIPOC, students from low-income backgrounds and students from rural communities.
- Seek to **support researchers who are proximate** to the communities intermediaries are serving.
- Prioritize research focused on pathways efforts in **the rural context**, where there is currently a gap in the literature.

“What I want to figure out is how much of creating the ecosystem and specifically designing it [is the role of the intermediary]. I feel like it is a missing piece in how we in the field are conceptualizing what we need to do to have pathways stick and scale.”

—Intermediary Leader



Amplify stories of how transforming local systems for greater equity can transform opportunities for young people.

ACTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Support the development of high-quality **communications materials** that articulate the role and impact of intermediaries.
- Leverage relationships with **media outlets** to highlight stories of pathways opportunities and impact.
- Prioritize **sharing stories** focused on the experiences of BIPOC, students experiencing poverty and students from rural communities.

EXAMPLES & RESOURCES

Communication materials

- Education First’s [We Refuse to Lose](#) series tells the stories and experiences of communities driving positive systems change, highlighting the important role pathways intermediaries hold in these efforts.
- Chiefs for Change’s [Education-to-Workforce Learner Pathways: How Intermediary Organizations Can Support and Help Sustain Effective Partnerships](#) report



- **Submit conference proposals** with intermediaries you support to help elevate the work they are doing and expose the work to a broader audience of funders and practitioners.

highlights the role and impact of intermediaries in the pathways space.

- JFF’s [resources on intermediaries](#) provide a helpful library of knowledge for those seeking to understand and/or partner with pathways intermediaries.
- StriveTogether’s [case studies](#) demonstrate how cradle-to-career backbones’ work leads to more equitable outcomes for students.

“Presenting and showcasing work at conferences, conferences that funders attend like, GFE [is helpful for intermediaries]. I’ve made it a point that with intermediaries and evaluators I’ve hired to always say, let’s submit a conference proposal together. We need to get this work out there.”

—Funder

“We’ve been doing a lot of great work, but not enough people understand who we are and what we do ... if you don’t know that we’re here to help organize the ecosystem and help you navigate the ecosystem, you’re going to think there’s nothing going on. The communications capability is so critical.”

—Intermediary Leader

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“We must ensure the pathways through higher education lead to successful careers by reimagining the connection between P12, higher education, and the workforce.”

**—Secretary Miguel Cardona
U.S. Department of Education
January 2022**

Source: [Twitter](#) (2022)



Actionable Implications for Policymakers



Partner to support pathways efforts in your community.

ACTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Identify ways in which the legislative process and structure **reinforce silos** between the K12, postsecondary and workforce systems and consider approaches to **break down these siloes** through incentivizing collaboration across systems.
- If not already in place, establish an entity to channel state **cross-agency shared priorities** for developing equitable pathways.
- Establish meaningful and formal channels to gather and incorporate **perspectives of those most impacted by career pathways efforts** (students, families and employers) into decision-making at the state level.
- Fund **networks** of communities who are advancing pathways initiatives, allowing them to share learning and resources and facilitate peer-to-peer exchanges.

EXAMPLES & RESOURCES

State cross-agency entity

- [CO Revised Statues 24-46.3-101](#) establishes the [Colorado Workforce Development Council](#), which enables a high level of coordination across state agencies and is supported at the local level by partnerships among K12, community colleges and business partners.
- The Federal Reserve Bank of Boston designed the [Working Cities Challenge](#) as a competitive grant program. The program provides funding and learning support for cross-sector design teams that prioritize leading collaboratively across sectors, engaging community members, using evidence to track progress toward a shared goal, and working to improve the lives of low-income residents by changing systems.

“Policymakers have a big role to play [in building cross-sector partnerships]. Not just broker the partnership but create a structure that enables partnerships.”

—Intermediary Leader



Cultivate the conditions that enable intermediaries to more quickly build pathways and cross-sector partnerships.

ACTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Draft and advocate for policies that make **funding streams accessible** to intermediaries.
- Create and support policies that build cross-sector **longitudinal data systems**.

EXAMPLES & RESOURCES

Longitudinal data systems

- [KRS § 151B.132](#) and [KRS § 151B.133](#) outline the duties of [KYSTATS](#), a longitudinal data system that helps create connected, centralized and timely access to data in Kentucky.



- Ensure policies that support **access for all students** are **equitable in distribution** of services.
- Incentivize employers to actively participate by creating **taskforces or joint industry and education roundtables** that create opportunities for employers to provide input into pathways design and for intermediaries to recruit employers.
- Consider carve-outs for **rural** communities to ensure equal access and tailored solutions to complement existing assets in communities.

Equitable access

- [Dual enrollment](#), AP and IB course policies that support free or low-cost access for all students can help bolster intermediaries’ efforts to build strong pathways.

Incentivizing employer participation

- The Urban Institute’s [Local Workforce System Guide](#) provides a helpful overview on sector strategies and notes that the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act encourages sector strategies and partnerships.

“Funding is a major issue. We have been very blessed to have major support from [the state education agency] through school action fund grants and Perkins grants. A vision without funding is day dreaming. [The state funding] has allowed us to progress in a rapid state.”

—Rural Intermediary Leader

“We are working with current city government officials to put money in the next budget cycle to build out the \$15–20 million changes that will need to be made to the longitudinal data system.”

—Intermediary Leader



2. Develop and disseminate new research, tools and frameworks to support intermediaries in their work.

ACTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Support the creation of and actively participate in **commissions and/or working groups** that explore promising practices for building stronger pathways efforts and more deeply understand the role of intermediaries in pathways ecosystems at both the **state** and **regional** levels.
- Partner with intermediaries to **assess their goals for scale** and **identify key geographies and approaches** for potential expansion of impact.

EXAMPLES & RESOURCES

Commissions and working groups

- [SREB’s Commission on Strategic Partnerships for Work-Ready Students](#) brought together policymakers across the Southeast to explore how work-based learning can prepare more students for the modern world of work and recommended promising practice to create systemic change that supports pathways.
- CLASP’s [Alliance for Quality Career Pathways](#) brought together leaders from ten states with strong pathways efforts to establish a common understanding of quality career pathways and systems.

“Being in a state where the SHEEO or the governor has an explicit verbal commitment to equity and outcomes for students of color—that always helps.”

—Funder



Amplify stories of how transforming local systems for greater equity can transform opportunities for young people.

ACTIONS TO CONSIDER

- **Highlight** stories of intermediaries and pathways efforts within your state, clearly making the link between pathways and positive outcomes for employers.
- **Governors** in particular can play a strong role in communicating vision of pathways efforts by helping to align on a unified vision for a state tying together pathways efforts, student outcomes and state economic development.
- When sharing stories of the impact of pathways efforts, seek to include the **voices of students** and their lived experience with pathways.

EXAMPLES & RESOURCES

Governor support for pathways

- Governor Polis has vocally supported CareerWise Colorado in public venues, including [congressional hearings](#), and uses his position to highlight the importance of strong pathways.
- In his 2022 [State of the State remarks](#), Governor DeWine vocalized his support for career centers, community colleges and four-year universities who are working to ensure that every Ohioan has an opportunity to get a satisfying and well-paying job.

“



“By investing in [pathways programming], this administration continues to flex its creativity in how we support the commonwealth’s economy through the development and retention of skilled workers—with the ultimate goal of providing financial security and a better quality of life for the citizens of Pennsylvania.”

—Secretary Jennifer Berrier
Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry
May 2022

Source: [EIN News](#) (2022)



Actionable Implications for K12 Leaders and Educators



Partner to support pathways efforts in your community.

ACTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Have a **dedicated liaison** who owns and advocates for pathways efforts within the K12 system and serves as primary contact with intermediaries, postsecondary representatives, employers and other community-based organizations.
- Seek to have liaisons who have **similar lived experience and identities** to the student communities being served.
- Commit **personnel, money and time** to pathways efforts. Consider using **Perkins** funding to set aside dedicated resourcing to support pathways and coordinate with intermediaries.
- Commit to **building deep relationships** with intermediaries, postsecondary and employer partners to help education systems better understand which **jobs are in-demand** and **what skills are required** and to inform the design of programs and curriculum that benefit both students and employers.
- Transparently **share** disaggregated data related to goals and communicate the progress of work on an ongoing basis.
- Send **decisionmakers** from district leadership to the table for pathways partnership conversations.
- Trust the community and other stakeholders: Come to the table with **an open mind and willingness to engage**.

EXAMPLES & RESOURCES

Dedicated liaisons

- The [Homegrown Talent Initiative](#) in Colorado works with K12 districts to ensure they specify coordinators who are leading this work on the ground and then supports those liaisons
- In Georgia, each school has a [Work-Based Learning coordinator](#) that serves all students and coordinates placements relating to a student’s career pathway

“We have a monthly coordinator network meeting where the coordinators come together. Those coordinators are the ones who really support the work-based learning and career-connected learning work outside of the principals and the teachers in the school.”

—Intermediary Leader



Cultivate the conditions that enable intermediaries to more quickly build pathways and cross-sector partnerships.

ACTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Ensure that **district policies** support work-based learning opportunities.
- Review** district and school calendars, bell schedules, student schedules, credit policies and student transportation options so that all students are able to take advantage of work-based learning programs.
- Listen to those on the ground who are most directly impacted by the implementation of pathways efforts: Solicit direct feedback from **students, educators and employer partners** in order to better understand and address potential district-level policy barriers and identify priority areas for growth.
- Regularly partner with local economic development partners and/or employers to **review labor market information** and use that data to inform updates to programming or launch new programming focused on high-demand, high wage industries in the area.

EXAMPLES & RESOURCES

District policies

- The [Rural School Innovation Zone's](#) K12 partners help support transportation so that all participating students can attend their academy of interest.

Listening to those on the ground

- The [Perkins Comprehensive Local Needs Assessment \(CLNA\)](#) process can potentially be used as an avenue for more deeply understanding the needs of students, educators and employer partners.

"[Pathways work is] a system shift toward receiving the information from its external partners and building and designing, and then building the pathways, and then designing the internships, and then receiving feedback and doing one-on-ones with students."

—Intermediary Leader

"We fundamentally believe that pathways work needs to happen within institutions ... clearly K12 and postsecondary systems need to think about prioritizing career success in both of those systems. Where is that happening well? What are the barriers?"

—Intermediary Leader

3. Develop and disseminate new research, tools and frameworks to support intermediaries in their work.

ACTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Support and **participate in research** examining the unique role of K12 leaders and educators within pathways efforts, partnering with researchers to

EXAMPLES & RESOURCES

Research highlighting the K12 perspective

- California Collaborative on District Reform's brief [The Career Pathways Approach: A Way Toward Equity?](#)



provide quantitative and qualitative data to support learning in the field.

- Create **data-sharing agreements** with postsecondary and intermediary partners through memoranda of understanding to ensure that all partners can work collaboratively together while protecting student data as needed.
- Transparently **share** disaggregated data related to goals and communicate the progress of work on an ongoing basis.
- Set **research and learning agendas** for pathways work. Analyze district-level data to better understand pathways programming enrollment patterns, identify additional data to be collected and gather qualitative feedback from participants and alumni.
- Study **examples of existing successful pathways efforts** and build on those examples by considering the ways in which that work could be adapted in a different community context.

raises up the role of K12 school systems in making good on the equity promise of pathways efforts.

- The [Advancing Equitable Industry Specific Career Pathways: K12 to Postsecondary Playbook](#) seeks to help K12 school systems and other actors develop strong pathways in their community.



Amplify stories of how transforming local systems for greater equity can transform opportunities for young people.

ACTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Districts who have successfully worked with intermediaries to build out pathways efforts should **share that work directly with their network and other local K12 entities** who could benefit from partnering with pathways intermediaries. Utilize senior leadership networks ([AASA](#), [NASPP](#), state associations, etc.) and connections to **elevate communications about the benefits, impacts and outcomes** of pathways efforts.
- When sharing stories of the impact of pathways efforts, seek to **include the voices of students** and their lived experience with pathways and **build community knowledge** about pathways opportunities.

EXAMPLES & RESOURCES

Network communications

- In the AASA report [Expanded Pathways: Youth Apprenticeships Give Students Brighter Futures](#), AASA spoke with superintendents, a state leader and CareerWise Colorado to elevate the potential of the apprenticeship model to build strong pathways.

Student voice

- New America PAYA participants engaged in a structured co-design process, launching the [Youth Apprentice Voice Design Sprint to engage](#) youth perspectives on program's recruitment strategies to more equitably reach students of color.



- Highlight the stories of **postsecondary instructors** and **employers** who have seen the positive benefits of pathways efforts in term of increased student and employee skills and readiness.
- Chicago Public Schools' [Teach Tomorrow Chicago](#) initiative explores the value of pathways into teaching through the voices and perspectives of students.

“We also have to crack the code on communications. [There are] so many tools on soft skills and power skills, but we have proximate partners that don’t know these are available. I ask myself always, ‘How do they not know?’ ”

“



Source: Education First Interview (2022)

“If more students knew about [pathways programming], I think it would be such a game changer ... to know that just because you may be in a lower income area in high school, that doesn’t mean you can’t be successful.”

—Lanna Hernandez
Apprentice, CareerWise Colorado
April 2022



Actionable Implications for Postsecondary Providers



Partner to support pathways efforts in your community.

ACTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Engage in **active outreach** to K12 systems, particularly to underserved schools and students, to help strengthen connections between K12 and postsecondary.
- Send **decisionmakers** to the table for pathways partnership conversations.
- Commit **personnel, money and time** to pathways efforts. Have dedicated resourcing set aside to support pathways and coordinate with intermediaries.
- Commit to **building deep relationships** with intermediaries, K12 and employer partners to help education systems better understand which **jobs are in-demand** and **what skills are required** and to inform the design of programs and curriculum that benefit both students and employers.
- Create **data sharing agreements** with K12 and intermediary partners through memoranda of understanding to ensure that all partners can work collaboratively together while protecting student data as needed.
- Transparently **share** disaggregated data related to goals, and communicate the progress of work on an ongoing basis.
- Elevate the voices of leaders with **similar lived experiences and identities** to proximate to the communities being served.
- Trust the community and other partners: Come to the table with **an open mind and willingness to engage**.

EXAMPLES & RESOURCES

Active outreach to K12

- [Sinclair College](#) in Ohio works with local high schools to administer a skill- and interest-based career assessment, then has Sinclair counselors meet with students to review the results. Counselors meet with students again every six months to consider pathways for college connected to their career interests.
- [Austin Community College](#) in Texas has a range of dual-credit program opportunities for high school students and a team of staff members dedicated to support high school student success who work closely with students and their K12 institutions.

“When people come to the table believing that the other partner really knows things that are valuable—when that happens, you can build a good partnership.”

—Postsecondary Leader



Cultivate the conditions that enable intermediaries to more quickly build pathways and cross-sector partnerships.

ACTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Ensure that **institutional and/or system-wide policies** support work-based learning opportunities. Review institutional calendars, student schedules, credit policies and transportation options so that all students can participate in work-based learning programs.
- Listen to those on the ground who are most directly impacted by the implementation of feedback efforts: Solicit direct feedback from **students, educators and employer** partners in order to better understand and address potential institution-level policy barriers and inform relevant programming.
- Regularly partner with local economic development partners and/or employers to **review [labor market information](#)** and use that data to inform updates to programming or launch new programming focused on high-demand, high wage industries in the area.

EXAMPLES & RESOURCES

Review labor market information

- The [Rush Education and Career Hub \(REACH\)](#), an employer led-intermediary housed within Rush University Medical Center, has used regional labor market analysis to inform the selection of health career pathway programs.

“There are a bunch of different sets of mind frames that have to change. We need to change the way postsecondary works to wrap around a working student. Not just a student working at a job to survive, but so they can actually further their career goals. [We need to] organize college so that it allows you to have a job in the field you’re interested in in a way that is acknowledging you’re also in school. There is a way to have those two worlds talk to each other and make sure the young person isn’t caught between two worlds and trying to navigate between them.”

—Intermediary Leader



4. Develop and disseminate new research, tools and frameworks to support intermediaries in their work.

ACTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Support and **participate in research** examining the unique role of postsecondary institutions within pathways efforts, partnering with researchers to provide quantitative and qualitative data to support learning in the field.

EXAMPLES & RESOURCES

Research highlighting the postsecondary perspective

- CCRC’s [Using Guided Pathways to Build Cross-Sector Pathways Partnerships](#) report articulates the way in which postsecondary institutions implementing the Guided Pathways model can work to create strong



- Set **research and learning agendas** for pathways work. Analyze institution-level data to better understand pathways programming enrollment patterns, identify additional data to be collected and gather qualitative feedback from participants and alumni.
 - Study **examples of existing successful pathways efforts** and build on those examples by considering the ways in which that work could be adapted in a different community context.
- cross-sector pathways partnership ranging from K12 to workforce.
 - WestEd’s brief [Stronger Together: How an Ecosystem of Partnership Leads to Change](#) highlights ways in which community colleges can invest to increase capacity in K14 pathways and build industry partnerships.
 - The University of Washington’s [Employment Projections Dashboard](#) provides job seekers, policymakers and training providers an idea of how the number of jobs and annual potential income are expected to change over time.



Amplify stories of how transforming local systems for greater equity can transform opportunities for young people.

ACTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Postsecondary institutions who have successfully worked with intermediaries to build out pathways efforts should **share that work with their networks** to promote the value of pathways efforts on a regional, state or national level. Utilize senior leadership networks ([AACC](#), [AAC&U](#), state associations, etc.) and connections to elevate communications about the benefits, impacts and outcomes of pathways efforts.
- When sharing stories of the impact of pathways efforts, seek to include the **voices of students** and their lived experiences with pathways as well as stories from **employers** who have seen positive workforce benefits from engaging with pathways efforts.

EXAMPLES & RESOURCES

Network communications

- Ozarks Technical Community College, a [rootEd Alliance](#) host site, was profiled by [Forbes](#) and highlighted the early impact of their rootEd college and career advisors.

“The competency or experience to have the knowledge and understanding/empathy of the people from these communities [is important for doing this work]. Basically, you need the understanding of systems ... People need to see themselves as part of the institutions and not just recipients.”

—Postsecondary Leader



Actionable Implications for Employers



Partner to support pathways efforts in your community.

ACTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Support the sustainability of intermediaries by committing to **partnership as a host site for work-based learning opportunities** over multiyear periods.
- Employers with philanthropic or corporate social responsibility arms should consider providing **funding programmatic and/or general operating support** for intermediaries.
- Commit to **building deep relationships** with intermediaries, K12 and postsecondary partners to help education systems better understand which **jobs are in-demand** and **what skills are required** and to inform the design of programs and curriculum that benefit both students and employers.
- Trust the community and other stakeholders: Come to the table with **an open mind and willingness to engage**.

EXAMPLES & RESOURCES

Programmatic support

- In addition to serving as an employer partner site, Bank of America provides funding that allows [SA WORX](#) to provide interns to other organizations at no fee to that company, helping allow for greater engagement with smaller businesses or nonprofits.
- Dallas Independent School District’s [P-TECH industry partners](#) play an important role in giving students exposure to the world of work through site visits, job shadowing, career panels and guest speaking, mentorships and hosting student interns.

Build deep relationships

- [Alamo Colleges’](#) whole-institution industry advisory group structure supports the engagement of employers and postsecondary institutions by meta-major groups.

“We have a lot of employers that, through their foundations locally, really see this as, ‘This is a difference maker for us as the private sector, to really influence the talent that we’re investing in [our city].’ And so, year over year we’ve seen a lot of philanthropic support [from them].”

—Intermediary Leader

“Employers also need to advise on the skills needed and open the doors to host 17-year-olds in their workplace.”

—Intermediary Leader



Cultivate the conditions that enable intermediaries to more quickly build pathways and cross-sector partnerships.

ACTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Build **internal support** of and **champions** for pathways efforts by engaging in consistent internal communication about why the organization is participating in pathways efforts.
- Understand that working with more diverse student populations may require **internal knowledge building** and cultural competency building if the workplace has not been diverse historically and **invest in training** for current employees.
- Consider ways in which **hiring practices** may be excluding students who do not take standard paths to the labor market and evaluate whether current education requirements for roles are truly needed.
- Be **transparent** about company needs for talent and workforce diversity and participate in **sharing relevant data** with partners.

EXAMPLES & RESOURCES

Build internal support

- EmployIndy's [Modern Apprenticeship Program](#) articulates clear benefits (building a diverse workplace, establishing a talent pipeline, meeting staffing needs, joining a network of influencers) that employers can use to demonstrate pathways efforts' value to internal stakeholders.

"Employers should engage with the community and meet with the community and key people in the community. Whoever's working with individuals and families, they should learn the culture of the areas they seek to employ from."

—Postsecondary Leader



Develop and disseminate new research, tools and frameworks to support intermediaries in their work.

ACTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Participate in **state and/or regional task forces** or other work groups seeking to understand the career pathways landscape and provide recommendations on approaches for improving pathways and the role of employers.

EXAMPLES & RESOURCES

State task force

- The [Career Connect Washington Task Force](#) included a range of employers from across the state and resulted in actionable recommendations that led to the creation of the intermediary organization [Career Connect Washington](#).



- **Analyze** organizational data to better understand common hiring entry points, skills of successful employees and trends in promotion practices in order to better **understand internal talent pipelines** and **organizational culture**. Share these data with intermediaries to aid in understanding pain points and areas for growth.
- Study **examples of existing successful pathways efforts** and build on those examples by considering the ways in which that work could be adapted in a different community.

“We currently don’t have employers coming together at outset and saying, ‘This is what we need; here are the common things we need.’ ”

—Intermediary Leader



Amplify stories of how transforming local systems for greater equity can transform opportunities for young people.

ACTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Share **stories of successful partnerships with intermediaries** with professional networks to promote the value of pathways efforts on a regional, state or national level.
- Utilize professional networks and connections to **elevate communications** about the benefits, impacts and outcomes of pathways efforts, highlighting the ways in which participating in pathways efforts has bolstered the organization’s workforce.
- Serve as a **champion** for pathways efforts and actively seek to recruit peers and competitors in the industry into pathways conversations.

EXAMPLES & RESOURCES

Network communications

- Pinnacol Assurance, an employer partner of CareerWise Colorado, had their partnership profiled on the [Denver 7 News](#) channel.

Champion pathways efforts

- AT&T, Walmart, IBM and more than 50 other major companies have joined the [OneTen coalition](#) to meet a common goal of hiring and promoting one million Black Americans over the next ten years into family-sustaining jobs.

Implications for Intermediaries

In addition to the implications for ways in which pathways partners can support intermediaries to better deliver on their core capacities, our interviews with stakeholders across the pathways ecosystem surfaced a number of implications for intermediaries to consider as they engage in building equitable pathways.

ACTIONS TO CONSIDER	EXAMPLES & RESOURCES
<ul style="list-style-type: none">For those seeking to launch a new intermediary organization, there can be benefits in housing or incubating the intermediary within a larger network.Intermediaries should consider the ways in which they can support or expand state agency capacity for pathways efforts, including potentially co-funding positions.Intermediaries should seek to build a strong evidence base that articulates the impact of their approach.	<p>Incubating new intermediaries within larger networks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">The Rural Schools Innovation Zone taps in to a number of networks that help provide technical assistance and support, including Empower Schools and the Leadership Academy Network.The Colorado Rural Education Collaborative lives within the Generation Schools Network and finds value in the back-end support the network is able to provide. <p>Expanding state agency capacity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Partners for Education (PFE) has helped to co-fund positions at KYSTATS, the state longitudinal data system, in order to bolster their capacity and deepen connections between the data system and PFE. <p>Articulating impact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Year Up has sought out funding specifically to bolster their research and evaluation practice, partnering with a range of researchers to increase the effective evidence behind their approach by engaging in gold-star methods research, including randomized controlled trials.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

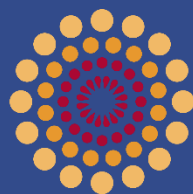
Thank you to the many individuals and organizations who contributed rigorous thought partnership and critical friendship on this action guide. In particular, we are grateful to Isa Ellis from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Kirstin Yeadon from Ascendium Education Group for their support, guidance and encouragement. We also thank Dakota Pawlicki from CivicLab, Taylor White from New America and Kim Braxton and Robert Roach from Equal Measure, who provided ideas and input on these actionable implications. At Education First, we recognize Joselin Padron-Rasines, Aman Falol and Jack Hill, who supported the research, analysis and graphic design for this publication.

LEARN MORE

To learn more about this research or building equitable pathways, reach out to [Kelly Kovacic Duran](#).

ABOUT EDUCATION FIRST

Education First is a national, mission-driven strategy and policy organization with unique and deep expertise in education improvement. Our mission is to deliver exceptional ideas, experience-based solutions and results so all students—and particularly Black, Indigenous and other students of color and students living in low-income communities—are prepared for success in college, career and life. We envision a world in which every student is prepared to succeed—a world in which income and race no longer determine the quality of education. We work closely with policymakers, practitioners, funders and advocates to design and accelerate policies and plans that support strong systems, outstanding educators, engaged students and effective investments.



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