

FUNDING CAREER PATHWAYS FOR REENTRY

The Need is Critical.

The percentage of U.S. jobs requiring postsecondary education and training is expected to reach a new high in 2020 at 65 percent.¹ Yet the Center on Education and the Workforce at Georgetown University projects that the United States will face shortages of 3 million workers with associate's degrees or higher and 5 million workers with technical certificates and credentials by 2020.² Despite this dire need for skilled workers, and mounting evidence that postsecondary education has a direct and proportionate impact on earnings, the United States ranks only 14th among 37 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and G20 countries for higher education attainment.³

The United States must dramatically increase the number of Americans with postsecondary credentials that are needed by high-demand industries and occupations, or risk the outmigration of good jobs and a drag on the U.S. economy. To meet this goal, we must provide opportunities to all individuals, especially those who experience barriers to education and employment, and including individuals who are reentering the labor market from the corrections system—by helping them to access and persist in education and training strategies that result in industry-recognized postsecondary credentials and family-supporting careers.

Career Pathways

A **career pathway**, as defined in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, is a combination of rigorous and high-quality education, training, and other services that:

- Aligns with the skill needs of industries in states and regional economies;
- Prepares individuals for the full range of secondary or postsecondary education options, including registered apprenticeships;
- Includes counseling to support individuals in achieving education and career goals;
- Includes education offered concurrently with and in the same context as workforce preparation activities and training for a specific occupation or cluster;
- Organizes education, training, and other services to meet the particular needs of individuals in ways that accelerate their educational and career advancement;
- Enables individuals to attain a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, and at least one recognized postsecondary credential; and
- Helps individuals enter or advance within a specific occupation or occupational cluster.



Career Pathways—A Promising Strategy.

One of the most promising strategies for increasing Americans' education and skills attainment, especially individuals who are underprepared, is the development of career pathways in high-demand industries and occupations. **Career pathway systems** provide a framework for organizing and formally aligning the education, workforce development, and supportive services needed to guide a wide range of individuals, including those who are low-skilled, successfully through the continuum of education and training coursework that is necessary for credential attainment and family-supporting careers. Career pathway systems also require changes in the delivery, organization, culture, and financing of education and training systems.

The timing is right for system transformation as the nation's state and regional workforce and adult education systems are redesigning state and local programming as the result of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). The nation's career and technical education and higher education systems are also rethinking how best to encourage the increased attainment of postsecondary credentials that meet the skill requirements of high-demand careers. It is critical that reentry programs and officials are at these tables, seizing this opportunity to work with state and local workforce and education systems as they rethink and redesign their service delivery structures—especially as they consider how best to ensure the success of individuals with barriers to education and employment.

Under WIOA, career pathway system development is a primary reform strategy to be carried out in the nation's workforce system—including in reentry programs. State and local workforce boards are required to lead efforts in the alignment of education, workforce development, and human services systems to establish career pathway systems. Adult education providers are strongly encouraged to provide career pathway approaches for their students that contextualize content and integrate education and occupational training in ways that accelerate completion and result in higher levels of learning and positive labor market outcomes. And reentry programs under WIOA are encouraged to use career pathway approaches for program participants—integrating education and training and using concurrent enrollment strategies to increase outcomes for program participants. All of these

Figure 1. Braided Funding Approach



efforts will require significant system alignment and the leveraging and braiding of limited resources. To provide guidance for the development and implementation of career pathway systems, 12 different federal agencies have come together to issue a [joint letter](#) of commitment to promote the use of career pathways for assisting youth and adults in the attainment of marketable skills and industry-recognized credentials.

Braided Funding for Career Pathways in Reentry.

To do this, state and local program authorities must: agree upon a common vision for career pathway systems that serves all populations within their states and regions; establish partnerships for the delivery of services with articulation agreements across systems; map assets to identify resources and gaps; identify funding priorities; develop a work plan; and agree upon ways to leverage and braid funding in support of these efforts, all the while communicating, evaluating, and adjusting efforts.

Pursuing public and private funding is critical to developing, implementing, sustaining, and scaling career pathway systems. In addition to pursuing traditional funding sources (e.g., public funding for education, training, and workforce development), reentry program officials should become adept at braiding public and private funding so that resources are leveraged and can be used more flexibly. Private funding can come from partnering with community-based and faith-based organizations; philanthropic organizations; and partnerships with businesses who are willing to offer work-based learning opportunities and to share training costs for individuals leaving the corrections system. Public resources, including state and federal funding, should be aligned and, where possible, “braided” in ways that seamlessly support career pathway approaches.

Federal Funding Options for Use in Career Pathways

- WIOA adult, dislocated worker, and youth formula programs
- Adult education and family literacy
- Wagner-Peyser (employment services)
- Vocational rehabilitation
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families
- Supplemental nutrition assistance
- Program employment and training
- Reemployment eligibility assessment and services
- Veterans’ services/benefits
- Trade adjustment assistance
- Community services, community development, and Social Services Block Grants
- Economic development
- Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education
- Pell Grants, other student aid

While not an exhaustive list, federal funding streams that can be used to support the development of career pathways include those programs listed in the box. Once agreements have been reached among reentry officials and their partners as outlined in the figure on page 2, system partners should:

- Identify and seek out existing and new funding needed to build, sustain, and scale aligned career pathway systems (e.g., education; workforce development; human services; community and economic development; infrastructure funding; employer, labor, and philanthropic contributions; and alternative financing).

- Identify areas of overlap among multiple funding sources and explore ways to braid siloed funding with all partners coming to the table with resources they can dedicate to developing and implementing aligned career pathways.
- Conduct a coordinated outreach strategy to raise awareness of the need and build support for aligned career pathway systems, focusing on business, philanthropic funders, policymakers, and others that can help with private and public fundraising efforts.
- Examine opportunities for alternative financing (e.g., bond financing; augmented full-time equivalent calculations in public education; weighted or tiered funding strategies where programs that cost more to implement but have higher returns on investment are funded at higher rates; consortia funding; employer-provided training; discretionary grants; and philanthropic funding).
- Work to develop a sustainability plan for aligned career pathway systems that includes reentry programs.⁴

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Endnotes

¹ Carnevale, A.P., N. Smith, & J. Strohl. 2013. *Recovery: Job Growth and Education Requirements Through 2020*. Washington, DC: Georgetown Public Policy Institute.

² *Ibid.*

³ OECD. 2012. *Education at a Glance 2012: OECD Indicators*. Paris, France: OECD Publishing.

⁴ Clagett, M. 2015. *A Guide for the Development of Aligned Career Pathways Systems*. Boston, MA: Jobs for the Future. (Developed under the Advancing CTE in Career Pathways Project for the U.S. Department of Education, OCTAE.)