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# THE CALIFORNIA CAREER PATHWAYS TRUST

Lessons About the State Role in Sustaining  
Efforts to Improve Economic Advancement

Between 2014 and 2016, California policymakers invested a half-billion dollars in the California Career Pathways Trust (CCPT). The initiative funded regional and local partnerships to establish career pathways designed to lead secondary school students to postsecondary degrees or certifications aligned with regional workforce needs. The state made a particularly big bet—over 70 percent of grant funding—on regional consortia of K-12 districts, community colleges, regional workforce systems, and industry leaders, thinking that such collaboratives could cooperate in perpetuity to create the conditions needed for expanding and sustaining pathways that high schoolers could follow into postsecondary programs and work-based learning experiences that ultimately led to high-wage careers.

[JFF's research](#) with Milbrey McLaughlin and Barry Groves has described how that vision largely went unrealized. Although all consortia created important pathways during the grant period, many of them disbanded, did not sustain staffing of CCPT functions, and saw members turn their attention to other matters as new grants or initiatives surfaced. There were exceptions: Some consortia did embark on new initiatives whose goals were consistent with those of the CCPT. With a hard-won sense of mutual trust, those groups erected shared and distributed leadership models and deepened collaboration during and after the grant as



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they embraced new ways of working that reached across the typically impenetrable silos of the K-12, community college, workforce development, and commercial sectors. But by and large, organizations in CCPT collaboratives defaulted back to business as usual after the demands of the grant requirements diminished.

This brief suggests lessons that state policymakers can learn from CCPT about what it would take to increase the likelihood that cross-sector career pathways partnerships succeed and remain viable so they can make a sustained effort to both increase the number of skilled workers coming out of California’s educational institutions and strengthen

demand for those workers. We describe instances where regional efforts needed more state support to succeed and endure. We then recommend steps that state leaders could have, and still can, take to cultivate stronger regional collaboration to advance strategies that, like career pathways, depend on systemic changes across sectors to improve economic advancement for the state’s citizens and communities.

In every observed challenge, we saw opportunities for state leaders to accelerate progress on current and future efforts. This chart summarizes those challenges and opportunities:

CHALLENGE	OPPORTUNITY TO IMPROVE & ACCELERATE PROGRESS
<p><b>Lack of continuity in prioritizing cross-sector collaboration and systems changes.</b></p>	<p>Prioritize <b>continuity</b> of state support for cross-sector approaches and infrastructure through a state leadership team.</p>
<p><b>Competition from other initiatives that stretched local capacity.</b></p>	<p>Reduce the noise of competing initiatives by establishing a cohesive and coordinated impact narrative across initiatives.</p>
<p><b>A need for new capacities on the ground and at the state level.</b></p>	<p>Invest in the development of <b>new cross-sector network capacities</b> in local and state leadership.</p>
<p><b>A need to find a way to capitalize on current funding and priorities to sustain progress.</b></p>	<p><b>Use momentum</b> and emerging funding to reinforce efforts for cross-sector work at the state and regional levels.</p>

## CHALLENGES WHERE MORE STATE SUPPORT WAS NEEDED

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### Continuity of State Support for Cross-Sector Collaboration and Systems Changes

The California Career Pathways Trust pushed the field to begin the process of breaking down barriers across segments of education, industry, and workforce development, and the momentum generated by this investment created important regional partnership tables focused on career pathway development. But the four-year time frame for CCPT grants generally wasn't long enough. Grantees didn't have enough time to build the relationships and the trust needed to continue investing in their partnerships, particularly when new grants with different priorities were in the offing. For example, the Career Technical Education Incentive Grants, which started with a three-year \$900 million legislative investment on the heels of CCPT and whose priorities overlapped with those of the CCPT, could have breathed further life into the development of career pathways. However, the Career Technical Education Incentive Grants program did not prioritize cross-sector partnerships, much less provide incentives for establishing such partnerships, which are a critical component of any effort to create seamless pathways between education systems and into careers. Combined with the anticipated wind-down of CCPT resources, the start of the new initiative led to a decline in interest in investing further resources—including dedicated staff positions—in cross-sector collaboration and infrastructure.

### Competing Initiatives

At the same time that CCPT was underway, other regional conversations were being organized through initiatives from other state agencies. As a result, the same collection of local partners involved in CCPT efforts—K12 school districts, postsecondary educational institutions, and employers and workforce development partners—were often asked to participate in multiple regional conversations. Competing initiatives included efforts stemming from the Board of Governor's Task Force recommendations, state requirements under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, and the Governor's Innovation Fund, to name a few. Although many of the topics of discussion overlapped and were potentially complementary, each new undertaking competed for the scarce personnel resources of the organizations likely to participate. The presence of multiple initiatives in a given region could also create political tension around who should join and head any given table, and often fostered confusion and fatigue among businesses and other non-education organizations that were asked to join multiple conversations. Also, each new pot of funding was typically tied to new or different priorities. Though these different funding streams could have been administered in a complementary fashion to further regional goals to create stronger pathways across education sectors and employers, more often than not they were earmarked to support discrete efforts that distracted from a sustained collective focus.



### **Need for New Capacities on the Ground and at the State Level**

Working across institutional and organizational lines, and across the silos of education, workforce development, industry, and other sectors, requires a new set of skills and habits, and an understanding of how to exert influence in a collective effort where there are no formal lines of authority or hierarchy. Unfortunately, leaders at state agencies that are trying to build regional capacity still operate within a bureaucracy that emphasizes hierarchical, compliance-oriented structures. To appreciate and effectively support the work of regional consortia, leaders of state agencies must engage in efforts parallel to those at the regional level and create parameters for initiatives that sustain and do not distract from a collective focus. Leaders at the regional and state levels need opportunities and time to practice new and more effective ways of working across their silos if they are to bring about the systemic changes they desire.

### **Sustaining the Progress of Foundational Cross-Sector Partnerships**

On the one hand, as noted earlier, the existence of multiple initiatives administered by various state agencies can distract local leaders and thereby hinder regional collective efforts. On the other hand, the fact that agencies such as the state Workforce Development Board and California Community Colleges have been willing to fund efforts to strengthen cross-sector regional approaches to building career pathways is a positive trend that creates opportunities. Moreover, the Community College Chancellor's prioritization and support for guided pathways transformations at college campuses and the new performance-based funding formula that rewards colleges for student performance should provide opportunities and incentives to create stronger partnerships between sectors. This funding has created interest in and appetite for more such cross-sector work and has sparked conversations about a related range of critical issues for career pathways, including quality, equity, access, and economic impact.

State leaders can leverage this momentum, learn from the successes and challenges of current and past efforts, including the CCPT, and use the lessons learned to make this moment a true tipping point that serves to transform our state agencies and systems so that they better support economic opportunity for all Californians and strengthen the state's economy.



# EVERY CHALLENGE PRESENTS AN **OPPORTUNITY**

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Each of the challenges has implications for strategies that state leaders and policymakers can use to support, deepen, and accelerate the ambitious changes that regional leaders still hope to bring about through cross-sector efforts to scale up career pathways.

## **Prioritize Continuity of State Support for Cross-Sector Approaches and Infrastructure Through a State Leadership Team**

Short-term, one-time, or supplemental funding from individual agencies for discrete projects is unlikely to foster long-term systemic and cultural change. Moreover, existing state bureaucracies and management structures are prone to perpetuating and, indeed, incentivizing isolated efforts that compete for resources, even though regional initiatives are ironically undertaken with the goal of overcoming the institutional predisposition toward siloed initiatives.

An existing or new high-level cross-sector state leadership team ought to focus on coordinating efforts being advanced by leaders in multiple systems (e.g., guided pathways, dual enrollment, CTE/career pathways, credit for prior learning) that would benefit from stronger alignment with one another. The mission of such a team would be to elevate intersections in the work of multiple agencies, identify ways to harness existing funding streams

so that they better support aligned goals, network and share expertise, and support coherent and consistent communication to the field around a shared vision for advancing economic mobility and development.

## **Reduce the Noise of Competing Initiatives by Establishing a Cohesive and Coordinated Impact Narrative Across Initiatives**

The existence of multiple specially-funded initiatives creates local competition and stretches local capacity. State leaders could develop an integrated statewide communication campaign that advances a cohesive narrative that positions economic development outcomes as central goals and articulates how various initiatives, such as career pathways, relate to those goals and to each other. There needs to be a clear, succinct, and integrated message that focuses the field on the benefits and potential of strong cross-agency efforts. Such a message would highlight the shared goals of economic development and equity and would thereby sustain the momentum and progress generated by recent investments. State leaders could establish protocols for building consistent messaging, common metrics, and cross-agency coordination into specially funded initiatives so that they are viewed as being consistent with a common vision.

## Meet the Need for Developing New Capacities by Local and State Leaders

Cross-sector efforts require different leadership competencies and shifting paradigms at the local, regional, and state levels. Leaders must learn to understand cross-sector network models, develop behaviors and competencies that foster growth of the collective, and take on the primary role of championing and leading systemic cultural change. Across regions and state agencies, leaders are struggling to build and apply these competencies, and this presents a barrier to taking calculated risks to cooperate and make changes that would create lasting transformation.

The development of such competencies by leaders at the state, regional, and organizational levels is critical to advancing sustainable systemic reform across the various organizations and agencies that are engaged in expanding career pathways. State leaders could support the development of these capabilities by designing and promoting a common framework that supports broad engagement and an understanding of the tenets of a strong cross-agency career pathways model. They could also advocate for and identify funding that supports strategic leadership development at the state and regional levels.

## Capitalize on Remaining Opportunities to Use Momentum and Emerging Funding to Reinforce Efforts

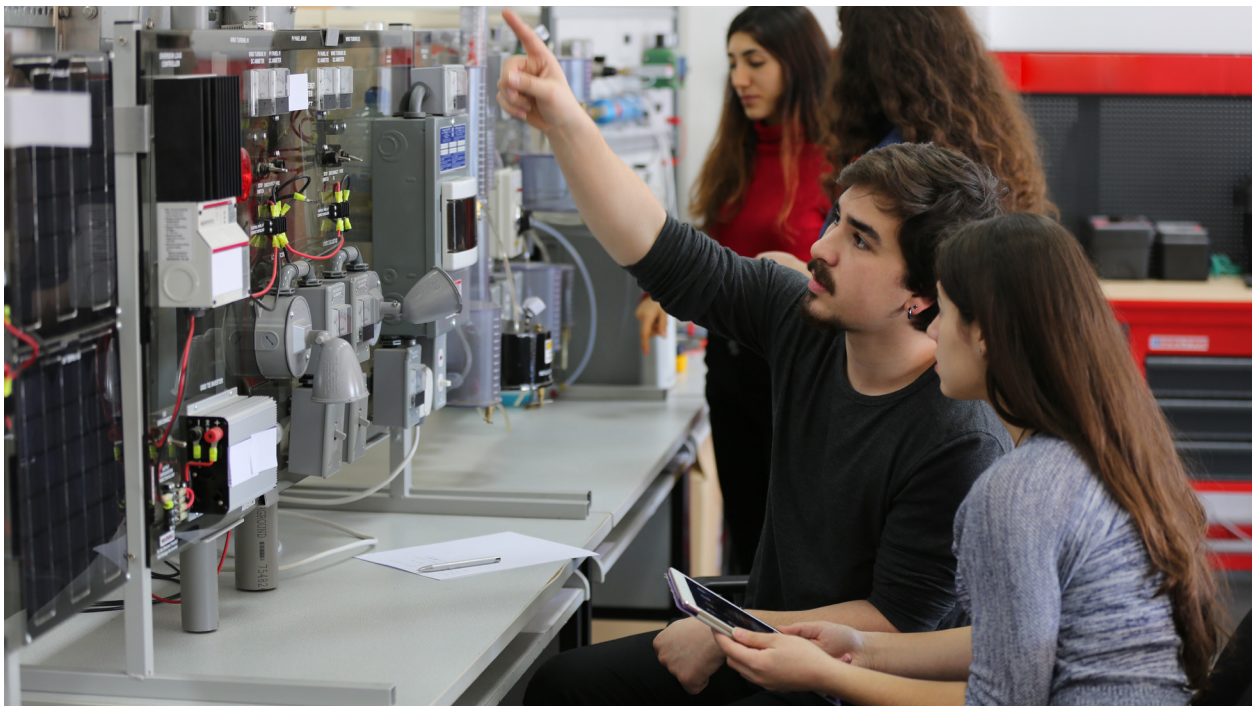
Momentum for cross-agency strategies to advance economic development—through expansion of career pathways or otherwise—will not grow or thrive unless state leaders make an ongoing effort to maintain the new focus. In an example of the new approach that is required, the recent state investment in K-14 pathways funding through the Strong Workforce efforts of the state community college system will prioritize grantee engagement in regional efforts to align workforce, employment, and education services. This presents an opportunity to bring the regional support structures that have been created (through CCPT and the Community College Chancellor's Doing What Matters regional support teams, for example) together with state agency leaders to build regional-state connections and improve capacity for the work. This could be done through an advisory structure designed to integrate and act on input from parties in the field, including representatives of industry, workforce associations, regional education systems, and community-based organizations. This kind of channel could also be used to support ongoing leadership capacity-building in the field and to disseminate messages corresponding to the overarching impact narrative recommended earlier.

## LESSONS FROM THE REGIONAL COLLABORATIVES

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The Career Pathways Trust investments in California advanced much important programming but brought few enduring changes to systems and did not result in much long-term cross-sector collaboration. However, the lessons from the regional collaboratives can and should inform current and future state investments and priorities. Our recommendations for capitalizing on still-present opportunities can be summarized as follows:

- ▶ Develop leadership at the state, regional, and organizational levels to drive sustainable systemic reforms across the various organizations and agencies that are engaged in advancing economic development and improving economic mobility through career pathways and other efforts.
- ▶ Launch an integrated communications effort to disseminate a clear, succinct narrative that focuses the field on the benefits and potential of cross-agency collaboration, emphasizing the idea that cooperative efforts are critical to the long-term viability of career pathways programs and other initiatives undertaken to advance state economic goals.
- ▶ Establish a high-level state leadership team whose members will be accountable for crafting an economic development and mobility agenda and will be empowered to move that agenda forward across multiple agencies and audiences in order to generate ownership, engagement, and forward momentum.





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