

DECEMBER 2021

BUILDING STATE CAREER PATHWAYS SYSTEMS

**A Toolkit for State Policymakers,
Human Service Agency Leaders,
Community Colleges, and Partners**

By Kate Kinder, Brooke DeRenzis and Amy Ellen Duke-Benfield

Contributors: Marc Goldberg

PURPOSE OF THE TOOLKIT

This toolkit is intended to help states create career pathways systems that integrate and expand partnerships between state human service agencies and postsecondary systems and institutions so that more people who want to train for a quality career can do so. Career pathways partnerships can help community colleges and human services work better and more equitably for working people by mitigating structural barriers that too often keep adults of color and those from low-income families from accessing credentials that lead to quality careers.

The toolkit includes action that state policymakers, agency leaders, community colleges, and partner organizations can take to build career pathways partnerships that pair quality postsecondary education and training with support services. This toolkit highlights Arkansas' Career Pathways Initiative (CPI) and Oregon's Community College SNAP Training and Employment Program (STEP) as examples of leading-edge state career pathways models that other states can learn from as they rebuild their economies and support workers – particularly workers of color and low-wage workers disproportionately impacted by COVID – in their return to the workforce.

Included in this toolkit are recommendations for how Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grants can support career pathways system development and partnerships, as Oregon and Arkansas have done. The toolkit is not intended to provide exhaustive guidance on all programmatic and fiscal components of these federal funding streams, given existing toolkits and technical assistance. Rather, it is designed to complement these resources and guidance available, offering strategies for how states, community colleges, and human service partners can use these funding streams to build, scale, and improve career pathways systems that increase equity and economic mobility for students and workers.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Why career pathways?	5
Career pathways systems that center the student and worker.....	9
Federal funding sources that states can use to support career pathways partnerships	13
Identifying SNAP E&T match and expansion funding.....	14
Career pathways in Arkansas and Oregon – outcomes from two states.....	17
Recommendations for states.....	19

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

SNAP: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly Food Stamps) is the nation’s largest anti-hunger program, providing food benefits to eligible individuals and families with low incomes.

SNAP E & T: SNAP Employment and Training is the broad umbrella of employment, education, training, and support services available to recipients of SNAP to boost their skills and employment opportunities. Programs include ABAWD (Able Bodied Adult Without Dependents), SNAP 50/50, and 100% (administration) funds. For purposes of this toolkit, SNAP 50/50 is the largest program utilized to build out career pathways partnerships.

SNAP 50/50: SNAP 50/50 provides eligible recipients of SNAP (and not TANF) education, work- based learning, job skills training, case management, and support services to build skills that lead to employment. SNAP 50/50 is a cost reimbursement program where providers

pay for eligible services and expenses up front and are reimbursed for fifty percent. The other fifty percent must be covered by non-federal sources of funding.

TANF: Temporary Assistance to Needy Families provides time-limited cash assistance to families with children or dependents, with very low-incomes.

TANF block grant: Block grant funding that is provided to states to fund TANF cash assistance and can be used broadly to fund other programs as long as the activities are in alignment with TANF’s purpose and goals, which includes job preparation and skill building activities.

CPI: Career Pathways Initiative, Arkansas’s Career Pathways programs that is offered at public two-year colleges for individuals with low incomes.

STEP: SNAP Training and Employment Program, Oregon’s SNAP 50/50 program.



As states look to rebuild their economies, they should adopt policies that ensure an inclusive recovery where working people have access to better jobs than they had prior to the pandemic and access to skills training that puts them on a path to a quality career.

WHY CAREER PATHWAYS?

Career Pathways Systems Can Support an Inclusive Economic Recovery

Jobs that require skills training are the backbone of our economy. Skills training includes any education or training beyond high school that's not a four-year degree. This could include licenses, certificates, apprenticeships or work-based learning programs, or other credentials.

The pandemic showed that working people – from those who care for us when we are sick to those who move essential goods across the country – are critical to keeping our country running. At the same time, it put a spotlight on the fact that too many working people are struggling to make ends meet, underscoring the need for a better safety net. Seemingly overnight, record numbers of workers lost their jobs and paychecks, putting basic needs like food and housing in jeopardy. Disproportionate job loss among low-wage workers and workers of color reflects long-standing inequities that existed in the labor market prior to the pandemic.

Mass layoffs – along with major changes to industry practices – have resulted in millions of workers wanting to train for a new career. As states look to rebuild their economies, they should adopt policies that ensure an [inclusive recovery](#) where working people have *access to better jobs* than they had prior to the pandemic and *access to skills training* that puts them on a path to a quality career. States should make it easier for people with low incomes to train for a new career, if they so choose, and measure success not by the first job, but by the career pathway developed over several years.

Career pathways address people's basic needs while they train for a quality career that offers opportunity for economic mobility. Career pathways connect progressive levels of education, training, support services, and credentials within a specific industry or occupational sector. Through career pathways, people can earn in-demand credentials that lead to good jobs, pursue additional postsecondary education, and advance their careers. They offer multiple entry and exit points along the pathway to support this skill develop-



ment and career advancement. Career pathways also help employers meet their workforce needs by training workers to meet skill demands while also assisting states and communities in strengthening their workforces and economies.

To ensure that career pathways contribute to an inclusive economic recovery, they must intentionally address the needs of workers who have been most impacted by COVID-19, as well as by structural barriers of discrimination or limited opportunity, specifically workers who earn low wages and workers of color. An array of policy decisions, from unequal K-12 education to drivers of the racial wealth gap, have contributed to racial disparities in college attainment and earnings.¹ Effective career pathways programs promote positive education and employment outcomes for adults of color by redressing the impact of such policies and ensuring that students of color have what they need to thrive in postsecondary education.

Career Pathways Models Can Make College, Workforce Development, and Human Services Work Better and More Equitably for Working People

States' community colleges, workforce development partners, adult education, and human service agencies can combine their respective resources to develop robust career pathways programs. These programs pair high-quality training with holistic support services so that working adults can succeed in postsecondary education. Doing so, however, requires states to recast traditional higher education and human service policies.

Higher Education Requires Changes to Meet the Needs and Career Goals of Today's Students

Community colleges play a crucial role as engines of opportunity, supporting economic mobility by offering students vital pathways to quality careers. Yet higher education policies and programs often don't reflect the needs or goals of their students.²

Seventy percent of today's undergraduates do not fit the former mold of a student who enters a four-year college right out of high school.³ This is especially true at community colleges, where students are increasingly diverse, part-time, working, and parenting. In 2019, the average age

of a community college student was twenty-eight. Sixty-five percent were attending part-time. The majority were also working, with 62 percent of full-time and 72 percent of part-time community college students juggling jobs and college.⁴ Despite this reality that many adults at community colleges are balancing complex lives, attending classes, and studying while working and caring for others, many postsecondary programs are not designed with these challenges in mind. Thus, they create unnecessary and systemic barriers to completion for many adult students.

Financial aid policies were not designed with adults with low incomes in mind, so they are not structured to cover the full cost of attending college faced by today's students. These costs include tuition and fees, but also books and supplies, equipment, child care, and basic needs like food and housing. Yet, nearly half of independent students at community colleges earn less than \$20,000 per year, making it tremendously challenging to cover all of these costs even with financial aid. In fact, 71 percent of today's students have unmet financial need, the gap that exists between the cost of attendance and what is covered by financial aid and earnings, outside of student loans. For more than half of students, that unmet need is at least \$5,000.⁵ Insufficient financial aid and basic needs insecurity are even greater challenge for students of color,⁶ as structural racism has created racial income and wealth gaps that leave Black and Latinx families with fewer financial resources for postsecondary education and related non-tuition costs.⁷ In fact, Black and Latinx students are more likely to take on student debt than White students, which can exacerbate the racial wealth gap and can also have a negative impact on college persistence and completion.⁸

Postsecondary counseling and advising practices are often not designed to support the needs of adult students and first generation college students. For instance, some community colleges use a self-service approach to education, offering a wide array of courses, programs, and scheduling that may or may not consider the needs of working and parenting students. Additionally, the offerings may not be closely tied to employer demand and jobs in the local economy.⁹ College student to adviser ratios are also high, making choosing among an extensive variety of courses especially daunting for adult students juggling the demands of work and family. These practices disproportionately affect students of color since Black and Latinx college students are more likely than their White counterparts to be the first in their families to attend college.¹⁰ While the Guided Pathways reforms underway at many community colleges across the country are making strides to address these challenges and place

THE #REALCOLLEGE SURVEY OF STUDENTS AT 247 PUBLIC TWO-YEAR INSTITUTIONS FOUND THAT:



Nearly 6 in 10 experienced **basic needs insecurity**



Rates of **food insecurity** among students ranged from 42% to 56%



Rates of **housing insecurity** among students ranged from 46% to 60%



Rates of **homelessness** among students ranged from 12% to 18%



The **Black/white gap** in basic needs insecurity was **19 percentage points** during pandemic.

https://hope4college.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/2019_RealCollege_Survey_Report.pdf

https://hope4college.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Hopcenter_RealCollegeDuringthePandemic.pdf

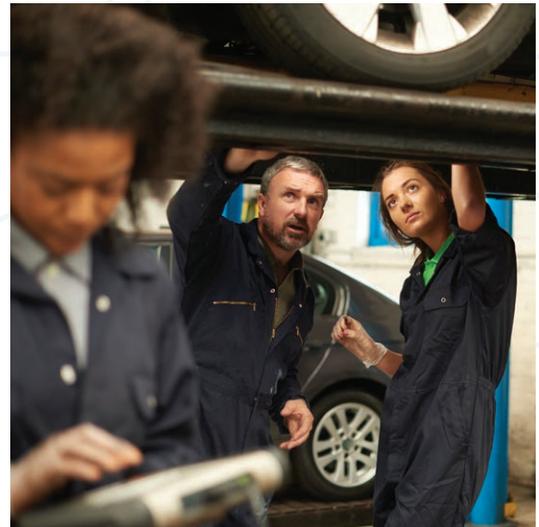
students at the center, there can still be a tendency to focus on academic transfer pathways and full-time students, rather than working adults. Clear academic pathways, visual roadmaps, and advising support can have a noticeable impact on student retention and college completion. However, these efforts may not address all the intersectional basic needs, child care, and financial challenges facing many students.

Moreover, not all postsecondary systems are designed to provide mental health and wellness supports for students who have experienced trauma or challenges that have been exacerbated by the pandemic. Many community college students have dealt with adversity and been exposed to traumatic experiences: some are military veterans who served our country, some have been displaced by political and social upheaval or natural disaster, some have been victims of domestic and community violence, while others have themselves struggled, or had family members struggle with addiction; and many have faced systemic racism and inequality. By understanding and responding to trauma and mental health needs of students, community college administrators, faculty, and staff can help reduce its negative impact, support critical learning, and create a more positive campus environment for student success.¹¹

Additional investments in community colleges are needed for institutions to offer and support these services. Despite enrolling a disproportionate number of students with low-incomes and students of color with financial needs, community colleges receive \$8,800 less in education revenue per student enrolled than four-year institutions.¹² Lower revenue means community colleges have much less to spend on students' needs, whether it be robust academic advising, child care, or food and books. Research shows that state spending on institutions is intimately tied to students' ability to persist through college and graduate.¹³

Human Services Programs Must Shift from Focusing on Any Job to Quality Careers

Our nation's safety net programs can play a transformative role in supporting economic mobility by protecting people from basic needs insecurity and providing support to those who can and want to train for a better career. However, safety net programs like TANF and SNAP too often focus on putting people into any (often low-wage) job, due to their "work-first" design.



The number of people in need of our public safety net significantly increased due to the COVID-19 recession. For example, in June 2021, 10 percent of all U.S. adults reported that their households did not have enough to eat compared to just 3.4 percent in 2019.¹⁴ Black and Latinx adults, who experienced greater rates of job loss during the pandemic, also faced food insecurity at more than twice the rate of White adults.¹⁵

People participating in SNAP or TANF may need to upgrade their skills or train for entirely new careers to connect to good jobs as the economy recovers. Unfortunately, both TANF and SNAP have work requirements that create challenges for participants to access education and training that leads to a quality career. Work requirements are based on false and racist perceptions of safety net participants,¹⁶ and research has shown that these requirements have a disproportionate burdensome impact on people of color.¹⁷

In a skills-based economy, where postsecondary credential attainment consistently increases economic mobility and access to quality jobs, states should use the flexibility they do have within SNAP and TANF programs to create career pathways and connections to community colleges. States can reorient their human services programs from traditional "work-first" approaches to educational and career advancement strategies that benefit workers and businesses alike. Career pathways can help states focus on moving families out of poverty and into careers that offer economic mobility, through a continuum of aligned services and programs, instead of focusing on immediate employment that moves people off of benefits in the short term.



Career pathways must intentionally address the needs of workers who have been most impacted by COVID-19, as well as by structural barriers of discrimination or limited opportunity

CAREER PATHWAYS SYSTEMS THAT CENTER THE STUDENT AND WORKER

Career Pathways Partnerships Can Shift the Paradigm

Career pathways programs meet the needs and aspirations of many adult students by including the following components:

- **Strong connections to the regional labor market and employer needs.** Career pathways should be industry responsive and sector based. Training programs should be designed to prepare and connect people to quality careers in specific industries and occupational areas that have strong regional labor market demand and offer longer-term career advancement and economic mobility.
- **A balance between training, work, and family needs.** The best career pathways programs generally include sequences of specific courses leading to “stackable” credentials that are articulated over time to support workers to move up within targeted industries, and particularly focus on providing working students with multiple entry and exit points that allow for training at the level, pace, and intensity that makes sense for the individual and their career progression. Such programs should provide education and training ranging from basic skills and English language instruction to occupational skills training leading to degrees. Students should have the opportunity to seamlessly learn and earn by acquiring shorter-term credentials with clear labor market value even as they continue to build on those credentials to access more advanced jobs and higher wages. In this way, career pathways are more responsive to the life circumstances of adult students who are balancing multiple responsibilities and may need to spread their education and training and stack credentials over a longer time than a student who enters postsecondary immediately after high school and attends college full time. The credentials students attain should be portable, recognized across the state and, preferably the country, not only by a specific employer, to support workers who want to continue their education and career advancement if they change employers.
- **Funds for the full costs of training:** Programs should be structured to cover gaps in tuition and fees and to support students in accessing support services such as child care subsidies, transportation assistance, access to broadband internet, books, fees, tools, supplies and certification and licensing exam costs.
- **Coaching and navigation assistance to meet the needs and support the success of adult students.** Coaching and navigation services ensure that adult education, part time, and working adult students also receive the holistic guidance that responds to their goals and needs. Ongoing assessment of student needs for both academic and nonacademic support allows navigators to connect students with the career pathways programs, workforce services, and the comprehensive supports that are available within the community college, human service agencies, and workforce partners. Integrated, individualized coaching, navigation assistance, and connection to support services are essential components of effective career pathways models.
- **Connections to resources and community-based organizations.** Career pathways systems require partnerships and collaboration. In addition to effective partnerships with human service, adult education, and workforce development stakeholders, career pathways systems can bolster the connections with mission-driven community-based organizations whose staff are representative of the community and have a deep knowledge of the needs of adult students and workers. Culturally responsive services and resources can complement human service and community college supports, often filling in critical gaps for students.





These components of career pathways models provide the building blocks to ensure adult students get access to the postsecondary education and training and comprehensive supports they need to reach their educational and career goals. Shifting the paradigm to a more holistic approach to serving working adults and putting these building blocks in place is the foundation states need to build career pathways partnerships that help more students succeed.

The Nuts and Bolts of Career Pathways Approaches

Partnerships between state human services agencies, workforce development and adult education entities, and community college systems and institutions can support the wide-scale development and implementation of career pathways programs that ensure more people with low incomes can access training for quality careers.

Career pathways partnerships allow states to leverage federal funding to offer the robust student supports that have been shown to increase persistence and completion in combination with education and training that pays off in the local labor market.¹⁸ Specifically, by drawing from the TANF block grant and SNAP E&T's 50/50 reimbursement funds, in combination with more traditional sources of workforce development and postsecondary funding, states with career pathways partnerships have more resources to increase student success.

By coming together, postsecondary, workforce development, and human services partners can better achieve their individual goals, whether it be college completion on the postsecondary side, gainful employment, or poverty alleviation on the human services side.

These partnerships leverage each organization's comparative strengths without duplicating services. Community colleges can utilize their higher education and workforce development funding and expertise to deliver stackable, portable, sector-based training and to offer "intensive" career coaching/advising. Human service agencies can use their TANF block grant and SNAP E&T funding, as well as public benefits programs, to provide funding for education and training costs, including support services that are not typically directly available through higher education and utilize their referral network of community-based, direct service providers to offer additional services (e.g., support with housing). They allow institutions and agencies to weave together postsecondary education and training and support services that place the student at the center. Many community colleges are shifting their enrollment strategies to serving more adult students who could benefit from postsecondary credentials. Human service agencies and their community-based partners already provide a safety net and supports to many of these adults, so this collaboration creates better access to the prospective student population that colleges are trying to attract.

Partners jointly determine: 1) which individuals will be served 2) what services will be offered by each partner, 3) how funding will be used, 4) and the outcome measures they will use to guide implementation and impact. Some of these answers are dictated by the rules of the federal funding streams that support the programs, but others are left to state policymakers or partners as they determine what services will lead to student educational and economic success. For instance, eligibility for services offered through a partnership funded by SNAP E&T will be limited to those who are eligible for and receiving SNAP, while use of the TANF block grant is limited to services connected to poverty reduction. Other decisions are more flexible, such as how recruitment is conducted, referrals are made, and services are offered and by whom.

Career pathways partnerships can be formalized through legislation, a memorandum of understanding, or simply an agreement between agencies and institutions that outlines services offered at the state and local level. They can also take different forms in how the postsecondary, workforce development, and human services entities partner together. A partnership may include the state human services and workforce development agencies and the postsecondary or community college system joining together to provide services; a model that is easier to accomplish in states where the state's community colleges are joined together in one larger administrative entity and where the state's workforce development and human service agencies work collabora-



tively to administer TANF and SNAP E&T related funding and services. Another partnership may include the state human service agency joining with a group of community colleges—an easier goal to attain in a state with decentralized postsecondary education or community college systems.

There is also no universal model for how to embed the services offered across a partnership to ensure they endure across time or leadership changes. States have the flexibility to do what works best within the bounds of their funding streams given their unique circumstances including agency structures, procurement laws, and state administrative rules. Ultimately, the foundation of the partnership is a shared appreciation of the strengths each partner brings to the table and an understanding that the student outcomes are greater when coming together than when pursued separately. There is also a recognition that none of these partner agencies have all the expertise nor sufficient resources to provide all the holistic support and services needed to position participants for success.

PATHWAYS TO OPPORTUNITY

Career pathways can also pave the way for more systemic policy, partnership, and programmatic systems transformation to advance racial and economic equity. Oregon's Pathways to Opportunity initiative aims to close opportunity gaps and increase student economic mobility and racial equity by expanding the federal, state, and local resources available to students with low incomes to increase college access and completion. Oregon's Community College STEP program is a part of the larger Pathways to Opportunity umbrella. Due to the Pathways to Opportunity Coalition's efforts, a Benefits Navigator bill (HB 2835) was recently enacted. It allocates \$5 million in state funding so that every community college and public university will have a Benefits Navigator position to help students access SNAP food benefits, STEP, housing assistance, and other basic needs resources.¹⁹ Coalition leaders from Oregon's community colleges, Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon, Oregon Food Bank, and the Oregon Student Association also centered student and worker voices in the policy development and design. They ensured student voice would continue through implementation by including requirements in the bill for students to be involved in the program design and implementation.

Embedding the Community College STEP Consortia within this larger-scale Pathways to Opportunity initiative, as a program that demonstrates how policy, partnerships, and practice can increase racial equity, rural opportunity, and economic mobility, has been a crucial strategy that has increased support for SNAP E&T. States looking to expand SNAP E&T should identify what other initiatives are underway in the state that are designed to increase postsecondary completion, support economic mobility, and align efforts.



CPI has proven its effectiveness at helping students overcome barriers to education and employment and offers best practices useful for all students, not just those with low income or special circumstances.

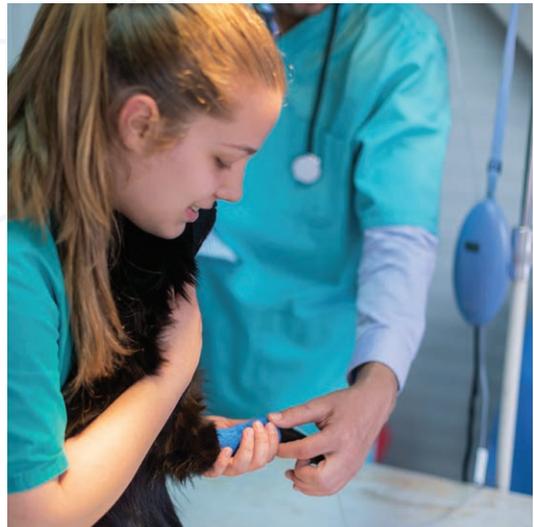
—Dr. Maria Markham, Director, Arkansas Division of Higher Education

FEDERAL FUNDING SOURCES THAT STATES CAN USE TO SUPPORT CAREER PATHWAYS PARTNERSHIPS

States have several federal funding sources available that can be used to finance elements of career pathways programs. These include federal formula-based workforce and higher education funds, as well as the TANF block grant, and SNAP Employment & Training funds.

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). Our nation's federal workforce law requires state and local workforce development areas to develop career pathways programs and move from career pathways as special programs to career pathways as the workforce development system's approach to serving workers. People participating in SNAP and TANF, among others, are also priority populations for WIOA services. While WIOA does not mandate postsecondary or career and technical education institutions as required partners, many local workforce boards have actively engaged with education partners to implement career pathways programs through a mix of funding. Although WIOA does not provide dedicated resources for career pathways, states can use the governor's WIOA discretionary funds to support career pathways programs. Local workforce development boards can also use WIOA training funds to support adults in participating in career pathways programs with community colleges. Additionally, WIOA Title II funds may be used by adult education providers to develop integrated education and training career pathways programs for students enrolled in ESOL and/or GED preparation courses.

Federal Higher Education Funds. The tuition and fees for career pathways programs can be covered by need-based Title IV financial aid provided through the Higher Education Act (HEA), for those with a high school diploma or its equivalent or who qualify for aid through HEA's "ability to benefit" provision.²⁰ However, under current financial aid regulations, many of the shorter, high-quality career pathways programs do not qualify for federal financial, leaving many low-income workers without resources to cover the costs. Advocates



have been pushing for legislation that would expand federal financial access to programs that are shorter in length, which would not only increase the funding available to millions of adults, but also provide a sizable resource for expanding access to career pathways. Another significant challenge is that the support services provided through career pathways partnerships are grossly underfunded through HEA. The Federal TRIO Programs in Title III of HEA support the types of student support services provided through career pathways partnerships, including academic and financial counseling and tutoring, but these funding streams are tiny in comparison to the need.

TANF Block Grants. Each state receives a federal TANF block grant that can be used broadly, as long as the activities it funds meet TANF's purposes, which includes promoting job preparation and work. As a condition of the TANF block grant, states must also spend their own dollars (called "maintenance of effort"). TANF dollars do not need to be spent directly on services for people receiving cash assistance. In Fiscal Year 2019, only eighteen states spent 50 percent or more of their federal and state TANF funds on core services for families, providing custodial and non-custodial parents with basic cash assistance, child care, and work, education, and training activities.²¹ This data shows that more states can reorient their TANF spending to fund core services, including career pathways programs. In particular, TANF funds can be used to cover the costs of child care and other support services that are typically difficult to fund with limited postsecondary and workforce development funds.



SNAP Employment and Training Grants.²² As part of the SNAP program, states must operate employment and training programs. Under federal law, states' SNAP E&T programs can provide a range of work-related services, including postsecondary skills training to people enrolled in SNAP. State agencies that administer SNAP E&T can partner with education and training providers – including community colleges – to provide SNAP E&T services. Under federal law SNAP participants who are not eligible for certain exemptions must register for work. However, states can choose to make participation in their SNAP E&T programs completely voluntary for work registrants, meaning that SNAP participants can choose whether or not to participate in SNAP E&T.

All states receive formula-based grants from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) to pay for SNAP E&T services. They can cover administrative costs and mandatory programming. States can also utilize 50/50 funding streams. In SNAP 50/50 programs, FNS provides a 50 percent reimbursement for all E&T expenses that expand, enhance, or create new services for individuals receiving SNAP who are enrolled in approved services. Services can include career pathways programs that offer career and technical education certificates and degrees, apprenticeship, Integrated Education and Training, work-based learning, and many other employment and training services. The most common SNAP 50/50 model is a third-party model, in which a community college or community-based organization partners with the state or county human service agency and is contracted to provide a SNAP 50/50 program and receive the reimbursement directly from the state human service agency.

Expenses that can be reimbursed include staffing to provide holistic coaching, tuition and fees, and support services like transportation, books and supplies, equipment, and child care. Providers must have 50 percent covered by nonfederal sources of funding, which can include state, local, or philanthropic funding streams.²³ The reimbursement funds can be put back into the program and are not considered a federal source of funding. This ability to reinvest funds back into the program is a critical lever that allows providers stable revenue to provide the career pathways services and supports that adults and those with low incomes need. Through voluntary SNAP E&T programs and these third-party partnerships with community colleges, states can increase the resources and build the framework needed to make postsecondary career pathways programs available to a larger number of eligible workers.²⁴

IDENTIFYING SNAP E&T MATCH AND EXPANSION FUNDING

Identifying sources of match funding—the other 50 percent of funding SNAP 50/50 providers must have secured—can be one of the most complicated elements for new providers and community colleges. It's a common misconception that providers need to come up with new funding to start a SNAP E&T program. There is also frequent confusion by grants and contracting administrators, who think of match in terms of a traditional grant, with match being a leveraged resource. It's important to think of SNAP 50/50 as a reimbursement grant. Providers must cover 100 percent of the costs up front and are then reimbursed for 50 percent of these expenses, with the other 50 percent coming from nonfederal sources of funding. This nonfederal funding that covers 50 percent of the expenses is considered the match, “matching” the 50 percent reimbursement funds. In addition to the frequent confusion about match, concerns about supplanting or disallowed costs can also limit thinking on what and how to identify sources of match.

Fortunately, identifying sources of match and funding is much easier than many providers initially think. Colleges should begin by considering what existing programs are already effectively and equitably serving low-income students. They can then determine how to enhance or expand these programs and services for recipients of SNAP, to build their SNAP E&T program off of proven models. They should also explore what new services could be added to fill a gap or need. By identifying what new, expanded, or enhanced



Oregon's STEP program has been a critical strategy to close equity and opportunity gaps by addressing the obstacles facing so many adult, parenting, GED/ESOL, and students of color. By connecting students with SNAP benefits to meet their basic needs, support services to help with the costs of college attendance, and holistic success coaching, we are seeing more students access and complete college credentials that lead to careers. The partnerships forged between Oregon's Department of Human Services and community colleges are creating economic mobility in communities across the state. This systemic approach to ending poverty helps to redress historic inequities and resource gaps, creating opportunity for generations to come.

—Mark Mitsui, College President, Portland Community College

services/programs will be included in a SNAP E&T program, providers can avoid supplanting and begin mapping out match sources.

Once the programs and services (new, enhanced, or expanded) are identified, community colleges or community college systems can identify sources of existing funding. Common sources include general fund (including state community college formula funding, local property taxes and levies), state grants, and/or philanthropy. Community colleges can then intentionally allocate a portion of this funding towards creating and supporting their SNAP E&T program. Staffing can be a significant expense that is critical to the program's success and can also provide a sizable source of match and reimbursement. For example, a career pathways coach position may exist at a community college, funded through state grant funds. A community college could dedicate a portion of this staff time and effort to provide holistic case management to students enrolled in the SNAP E&T programs. The services are unique for students receiving SNAP, and enhanced with more in-depth assessments, case management, and access to support services that differs from other students. Time and effort forms ensure only the time spent supporting students enrolled in SNAP E&T program is charged to the SNAP 50/50 program. This intentional allocation of existing funding can then be a source of match and an expense that is reimbursable.

Community colleges can also charge their full federally negotiated indirect rate, or de minimis in absence of an approved rate, applying indirect to those expenses that are included in their indirect cost rate study. Indirect reflects the total cost to a college to operate a grant program and is therefore reimbursable and a source of match. Similarly, a community-based organization may be charging for utilities or rent.

Colleges can also secure new sources of funding through nonfederal grants and philanthropy. Colleges can identify the SNAP E&T programs and recipients of SNAP as a preferred population. This approach can leverage public-private investments and has been very compelling to foundations and philanthropists to maximize their impact and investments to increase economic mobility for lower income workers and students.

Another key source of match and funding that can help grow the program over time are the 50 percent reimbursement funds. Providers receive a 50 percent reimbursement for their total expenses that they expend to operate new, enhanced, or expanded SNAP E&T services. These 50 percent reimbursement funds are unrestricted and not considered a federal source of funding, and as such are an

Career pathways address people's basic needs while they train for a quality career that offers opportunity for economic mobility

allowable source of match. Therefore, they can be reinvested back into the program, during the current or future fiscal years. These funds can pay for support services, tuition payments, or staffing. Providers can then be reimbursed for allowable staffing or support service expenses that are paid for by these reimbursement funds. Oregon community colleges have found that having 60 to 75 percent of their STEP program covered by state, local, or philanthropic funding has allowed them to roll the balance of reimbursement into the following year's STEP program. This has been a key strategy in growing the program and scaling to meet the needs of the community and students.

Key Considerations for Finding Match and Funding SNAP E&T:

- ▶ Identify existing sources of nonfederal funding that could be intentionally reallocated to a SNAP E&T program and its services
- ▶ When reallocating or earmarking existing funding, clearly identify what is new, enhanced, or expanded to avoid supplanting and disallowed costs
- ▶ Staff time and effort can be a key source of match and reimbursable expense, with effective time and effort documentation
- ▶ Consider how new philanthropic, legislative, or nonfederal grant funding streams could be targeted for SNAP E&T expansion and services (staffing, tuition/fees, and support services) and engage the community college foundation, association, or grants offices

This information is based on best practices and is not official guidance. Before putting SNAP E&T match and expansion funding practices in place, community colleges and other organizations should consult with their state or local human service agency and the U.S. Food and Nutrition Service to ensure that their planned practices meet program rules and regulations and to ensure there is alignment with the state and regional approach to SNAP E&T implementation.

CAREER PATHWAYS IN ARKANSAS AND OREGON – OUTCOMES FROM TWO STATES

Arkansas and Oregon have each developed career pathways frameworks that are instructive to other states. Career pathways in both states have shown positive credential attainment and employment outcomes.

Arkansas' Career Pathways Initiative (CPI) is a partnership between the Arkansas Department of Workforce Services (DWS), the Arkansas Department of Higher Education (ADHE), and the state's community colleges and university technical centers. Using funding from the TANF block grant, CPI aims to ensure more student parents – specifically those receiving TANF, SNAP, and/or Medicaid and/or those with incomes below 250 percent of the federal poverty level – access and complete postsecondary credentials that support them to advance over time to higher levels of education and training in a given occupation or industry sector.

Oregon's Community College SNAP Training and Employment Program (STEP) Consortia is a career pathways partnership between Oregon's Department of Human Services (ODHS) and the state's seventeen community colleges. Through SNAP E&T funding, the Oregon Community College STEP Consortia helps recipients of SNAP access postsecondary education, whether entering this career pathway in GED or ESOL or working towards in-demand credentials with value in the labor market.

Oregon's career pathways framework has been in existence at the community colleges for over fifteen years, helping to scale and replicate career pathways models in other states and codify the approach in federal Departments of Labor and Education regulations.

Evaluations of the impact at the community colleges and through a Department of Labor Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) state-wide grant have found career pathways effective at closing opportunity gaps and increasing economic mobility. The combination of enrolling in a stackable credential career pathway cohort with wrap-around supports provided by a career coach and the provision of financial supports led to positive student outcomes.²⁵

CAREER PATHWAYS IMPROVE STUDENT OUTCOMES



More than half of all CPI participants obtained at least one postsecondary credential or degree, compared to just 24 percent of non-CPI participants.



CPI participants earned \$3,100 more per year than Arkansas TANF recipients not enrolled in CPI programs.



Low-income parents participating in CPI graduated from college with a degree or a certificate at greater than twice the average of their community college peers at Arkansas community colleges (52 percent vs 24 percent).



CPI completers were employed and earned significantly more income than a matched comparison groups of similar low-income parents from their communities.



Black students in CPI are three times as likely as their counterparts in the general community college population to obtain a certificate or degree, and Latinx CPI students are four times as likely as their non-CPI counterparts to earn a credential.



An evaluation of certificates in Oregon shows that completing a community college certificate typically boosts workers' overall earnings by \$5,000 or 19 percent compared to their previous earnings. Pell Grant recipients who earn certificates in Oregon increase their earnings by \$9,600. Certificate recipients ages 29 and younger reap substantial earnings gains, often more than doubling what they earn before they enter a program.²⁶

The Community College STEP Consortia is designed to significantly expand access to this effective model for individuals receiving SNAP – a subset of those populations who can benefit from career pathways. Only in its fifth year, and second year with all seventeen community colleges, the project has yet to undergo an extensive evaluation. Initial assessment and anecdotal, collective feedback has shown the model is continuing to show promising results that benefit students of color and those with low incomes. Such outcomes explain why the Arkansas and Oregon partnerships enjoy widespread support.



Partnerships between state human services agencies, workforce development and adult education entities, and community college systems and institutions can support the wide-scale development and implementation of career pathways programs that ensure more people with low incomes can access training for quality careers.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STATES:

Using the examples of Arkansas and Oregon, this toolkit details five steps that states can take to build career pathways partnerships. These elements also help address barriers facing students of color pursuing postsecondary credentials and degrees erected by a history of systemic racism in our postsecondary system and economy.

1 Build a strong partnership that recognizes mutually beneficial goals

A successful career pathways partnership is built on a foundation of mutually beneficial goals. Current day career pathways partnerships in Arkansas and Oregon were built upon smaller pilot models that were expanded once it became apparent how advantageous it would be to both students with low incomes and the state to combine high quality education and training at community colleges with comprehensive support services. Both states' career pathways partnerships were built upon mutually beneficial relationships across the human services and community college spheres with a shared understanding of the value of the partnership.

Arkansas' DWS and ADHE understand that their career pathways partnership helps both agencies achieve their goals. The partnership increases the likelihood that DWS will reach its goal of increasing the number of Arkansans securing in-demand employment and providing employers in key industries with skilled workers, while also meeting ADHE's goal of increasing college access and attainment. DWS' focus on job advancement and addressing labor market needs is itself a departure from some other state agencies that administer TANF funding that remain focused on reducing TANF caseloads by moving recipients into low-wage, entry-level jobs that provide little opportunity for career development or substantial earnings gains. In this regard, the CPI program has also provided a significant return on investment. Arkansas receives \$1.79 in benefits over five years for every dollar invested, due to increased state taxes on earnings and reduced outlays for public assistance.²⁷

Staff in Arkansas attribute the longevity of the program to its existence in legislation, which has provided stable and sustainable funding. The Arkansas General Assembly passed bipartisan legislation in 2007 that codified CPI, including setting basic eligibility requirements and establishing performance indicators on program completion, employment, and job retention. The legislation clarifies that the goal of the program is to increase access to low-income parents

and other individuals to educational credentials that qualify them to higher-paying jobs in their local area, and to develop training in consultation with local employers and workforce development boards to ensure that skills and credentials are aligned with business needs.

Although the administration of Oregon's career pathways partnership is different from Arkansas, it has the same aim. Instead of program administration responsibility residing with the state postsecondary agency, Oregon's postsecondary partner is Portland Community College, the largest higher education institution in the state, which serves as an intermediary between Oregon's Department Human Services (ODHS) and the state's 16 other community colleges, making up the Oregon Community College STEP Consortia.

ODHS leaders want the state's anti-poverty programs to focus on moving families out of poverty. They recognize that one of the best ways for recipients of SNAP to gain economic mobility is by providing access to the skills training offered through career pathways programs at community colleges in combination with support services that address non-academic needs and provide financial stability. ODHS leaders also see that the partnership helps low-income Oregonians leverage additional programs, services, and resources that the community colleges can offer beyond what ODHS provides directly to their participants. Oregon postsecondary leaders see that the valuable academic and non-academic supports funded through the SNAP E&T 50/50 partnership helps create opportunity for more students with low incomes and close racial equity gaps. The Oregon Employment Department identified in 2018 that there were 448,000 adults between the ages of twenty-five and fifty-four across the state that were either unemployed or working making fifteen dollars per hour or less without postsecondary credentials. This population has historically not been served equitably by postsecondary education systems and institutions and could benefit from career pathways programs and complementary supports from human service agencies. These numbers have clearly increased during the COVID pandemic and subsequent recession.

2 Develop sector-based career pathways geared toward in-demand occupations

Career pathways partnerships are built upon the best principles of career pathway design, which means they are aligned with the skills needs of employers in their region. Both Arkansas and Oregon's career pathways programs connect students to skills training that is responsive to the needs of local employers and stacks to progressively higher credentials that lead to quality employment. Both states support students from adult education through technical degrees and from non-credit to credit pathways.

Oregon's Community College STEP program is built on the state's long-standing statewide career pathways program that gives students the opportunity to earn short-term, quality postsecondary career pathways certificates that stack toward degrees. Students in STEP can enroll along the full career pathways educational continuum from contextualized adult education GED prep and/or ESOL Integrated Education and Training programs through two-year associate degrees, including pre-apprenticeships and apprenticeship programs. Priority occupational areas reflect regional labor market demand, with the most popular career pathways sectors being health care, manufacturing, business/information technology, and construction.

In Arkansas, CPI students enroll in one of more than 400 approved career pathways across the twenty-two community colleges and three university technical centers. These pathways map out the relevant sequences of adult education, certificates, and degree programs that align with industry demand, and ensures that each step along the pathway articulates to the next level of education and training. Allied health is the most popular occupational area across the state, which reflects labor market demand for radiology, respiratory care, and surgical technicians, as well as nurses.

Educational tracking – the practice of separating students into different groups, classrooms, or learning pathways by perceived ability level or learning goals – was historically used to steer students of color into vocational educational programs that did not connect them to jobs in high-demand fields or provide them with an on-ramp to a college credential of value.²⁸ This type of tracking has contributed to occupational segregation and racial income disparities.



Career pathways partners need to provide training and establish guardrails to ensure coaches and coordinators are not contributing to or tracking students of color into career pathways that lead to low paying jobs.²⁹ They also need to ensure that career pathways are part of a larger pathway that offers economic mobility. Career pathways programs, by design, stack to further college credentials and degrees and support career advancement with wage progression. They are based on labor market demand in priority industry sectors. Colleges in Oregon and in other states are also addressing this by creating clear academic pathways from career technical education AAS degrees into applied baccalaureate four-year degree programs within their own institution or with university partners.

3 Maximize higher education and human services resources to address the full costs of training

By maximizing federal and state funding streams, career pathways partnerships can help students address financial gaps and ensure community colleges have the funding necessary to provide a range of support services to help students succeed. They allow states to braid together various funding sources to support student success and bring to bear resources where there are holes. The TANF block grant and the SNAP E&T 50/50 reimbursement funding stream offer greater flexibility than many of the existing funds community colleges draw from to provide support services. Arkansas and Oregon have used the TANF and SNAP E&T funding streams to address the full cost of training, which goes well beyond tuition and fees.

Arkansas and Oregon use TANF and SNAP E&T 50/50 funds, respectively, to pay for a range of costs, including (within the specific rules of each funding stream):

- Direct tuition assistance that is not covered by Pell Grants or state tuition aid
- Books, fees, tools, and supplies
- Certification or licensing examination costs
- Child care, housing, utilities, and transportation assistance
- Tutoring and counseling
- Computers and the internet/broadband

Funding is also used for personnel at the college level who serve as coordinators in Arkansas and coaches in Oregon. In Arkansas, ADHE provides direct funding to each college to support a career pathways office with dedicated staff who are responsible for administering the program and providing intensive coaching and support services for students. These staff assess what in-demand career pathways might best fit a student's occupational goals and interests and identify the academic and non-academic supports necessary for that student's success. They coordinate the various services students will access, whether it be financial aid or academic supports

such as tutoring and advising, or non-tuition supports like child care and housing. They may help a student apply for other public benefits or connect them with resources offered by community-based organizations. CPI staff work closely with instructors and other college personnel to address potential challenges for students, liaise with TANF case managers, work with other state and local agencies to coordinate services, and ensure students have access to the comprehensive supports necessary to succeed.

In Oregon, each college also offers holistic coaching to any student enrolled in STEP. Recently passed legislation funds benefit navigators at each community college, ensuring more students are connected to SNAP and eligible for SNAP E&T to increase access to essential support services and public benefits. Coaches support students by helping them navigate college enrollment, access resources at the college and in the community, provide support and advocacy, ensure they are progressing in their education goals, and can assist with job search, interview preparation, and connection with work-based learning or employment opportunities. STEP and CPI staff also help ensure students meet the requirements related to SNAP and/or TANF eligibility.³⁰

STUDENT ELIGIBILITY BASED ON FUNDING STREAM

Student eligibility for both SNAP and TANF block grant funding should be key considerations in building out SNAP E&T or TANF career pathways programs. Income-eligible students who are enrolled more than half time at a community college can receive SNAP without meeting work requirements when enrolled in a career and technical education program, courses, or pre-requisites as defined by the Carl D. Perkins Act or when enrolled in an employment and training program, along with other exceptions. ODHS conducted an extensive federal and state policy review of student SNAP eligibility and determined that students who met income and household criteria could be eligible for SNAP without meeting work requirements when enrolled in an education program that leads to a career and is intended to be completed in four years or less, or when enrolled in a training or education program on the states Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL).

The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 also temporarily expanded SNAP eligibility to students who have a \$0 expected family contribution or are eligible for federal work study. ODHS partnered with community colleges, universities, and hunger advocates to conduct outreach and notify students of the expanded eligibility.

TANF block grant funding has a level of flexibility that other government programs may not, allowing states to prioritize services for students with low incomes. As a result, Arkansas is set to implement three special pilots. Education Pays is an incentive program that rewards enrollment and satisfactory progress towards credential attainment. A TANF funded work study program will place students in positions on campus, providing CPI students the opportunity to earn much needed discretionary income and access career readiness training. A work based learning pilot will provide community workplace experiences while the student is enrolled.

Both examples highlight how states can prioritize benefit and service access for students with low incomes.

4 Build avenues to continually improve service delivery to ensure more students succeed

Oregon and Arkansas have built components into their partnership to continually improve services delivered to ensure more students reach their educational and economic goals, with a focus on communities of practice and professional development.

Both states recognized the importance of building learning opportunities among community college staff to help the partnership grow and better serve students. In Oregon, members of the Community College STEP Consortia hold quarterly gatherings and meet monthly for technical assistance calls. This community of practice includes ODHS and college staff, including deans, faculty, and coaches. It has supported peer learning, sharing of best practices, and the development of a common framework that can be tailored at the local level.

In Arkansas, a community of practice is also cultivated across the twenty-five CPI sites to share proven strategies

for enhancing career preparation and learn from national leaders. ADHE's CPI office provides technical assistance and numerous opportunities for staff training and continuous improvement. The CPI office routinely conducts Bridges out of Poverty workshops and poverty simulations to help college team members and community partners better understand the challenges experienced by students participating in CPI. State staff also provide ongoing training for CPI staff who facilitate career development service and may be interested in achieving certification in the field. The state agency also organizes regional work groups to provide a smaller environment for training and sharing best practices.

Given the importance of advancing equitable outcomes for students of color, all staff should be trained in culturally competent case management techniques and receive ongoing racial equity training. Such training can help ensure that coaches and coordinators have enough awareness to mitigate their own implicit bias that could lead to steering students toward jobs that reinforce occupational segregation.

COACHING AND NAVIGATION SERVICES ARE ESSENTIAL FOR STUDENTS IN CAREER PATHWAYS

As part of the Oregon Community College STEP Consortia, each college offers holistic coaching to any student enrolled in STEP. This has been one of the key enhancements that has increased student success. Coaches support students by helping them navigate college enrollment, access resources at the college and in the community, provide support and advocacy, ensure they are progressing in their education goals, and can assist with job search, interview preparation, and connection with work-based learning or employment opportunities.

Coaches offer individualized and group orientations. They conduct an in-depth holistic assessment to understand students' background, goals, needs, and challenges. Lastly, they develop a case plan in concert with the student to determine what program components and activities will support them to realize their college and career goals. As part of this plan, they also identify which support services or tuition/fee resources are needed. Resources are equitably allocated to students, using student-centered design processes to streamline the steps and avoid processes that require students to perform their poverty or repeatedly share their story.

Coaches and navigators also work closely with other E&T providers to leverage resources, and with ODHS staff to resolve any benefit issues. They frequently assist students with tapping into other public benefits and community resources. For example, some community colleges work closely with the Oregon Employment Department, community-based organizations, or workforce partners to leverage resources and WIOA services. Each provider can offer complementary services and support services funding. Along with these community resources, coaches connect students with the suite of college supports that STEP students frequently access: tutoring centers, identity-based resource centers, college scholarships, counseling services, disability services, and emergency aid.

Consistent feedback from students, many of whom have previously enrolled at a community college but not completed a credential, is that the coach has been essential to their success and sense of belonging at the college. The coach ensures that systems and benefits are integrated for the student, instead of placing this oftentimes confusing and laborious process onto individual students. It's a way of recognizing and redressing the systemic inequities and challenges facing many students of color, as well as many first-generation, low-income, parenting, and English-language learning students.

tion and that they understand and can address barriers that students of color may face due to structural racism. Oregon's Pathways to Opportunity community of practice summits have featured racial equity training and college STEP staff are receiving training around student-centered design with a poverty-informed, anti-racist equity lens.

5 Use program data to track performance outcomes and make program changes or improvements

Another component of a successful career pathways partnership is the use of program data to assess performance outcomes and to make program changes in light of that information. Arkansas has made strategic investments and has a data system that tracks participant outcomes on key metrics such as credential attainment and employment. These data have been instrumental for the state agency working with colleges to refine their program services and demonstrate successful outcomes to state policymakers. They are using data to track and reward performance at the college level. Performance Based Student Support funds are awarded yearly to the twenty-five CPI college sites based on institutional performance on the annual performance goals. These dollars must be spent on direct or indirect student support, such as childcare, transportation, course related supplies, new computer labs or additional career assessment resources. Performance measurements include enrollment levels by year, number of certificates/degrees attained by type, success rates of students, and employment rates.

As outlined above, Oregon has broader career pathways system data and is working on developing a system for STEP. Oregon's Higher Education Coordinating Commission has also been piloting a system for reporting and analyzing career pathways completion data. For SNAP E&T, ODHS integrated its SNAP Employment and Training data tracking system into the Oregon Employment Department's existing employment data system several years ago. There is increasing opportunity to align these data efforts and systems to allow colleges and the Community College STEP Consortia the ability to locally disaggregate and analyze their program equity and efficacy, including completion, employment, wages, and economic mobility indicators. Investments into both systems and staffing are important considerations in building out career pathways systems. Frequently, data across community college, human service, and workforce development systems are siloed. In aligning data, there are also data privacy and student/participant rights that need to be considered. In addition to developing aligned systems to

collect data, states need to consider how to use the information. Along with looking at employment outcomes, credential attainment, and economic mobility over time, states should disaggregate such data by demographic characteristics, including by race, ethnicity, gender, and disability status, while protecting individual privacy.

6 Listen to student voices

Another essential characteristic of a successful career pathways partnership is to use student feedback to improve program design and delivery. Both Oregon and Arkansas have sought out student insights to change their programs. Arkansas has collected student feedback individually in meetings with coordinators and conducted surveys with participants to determine the most effective ways for outreach and student engagement. Oregon has done so in several ways. Student voices have been elevated in the statewide Pathways to Opportunity community of practice through student panel discussions during quarterly summit meetings. As part of Oregon's involvement in the National Skills Coalition SkillSPAN network and the statewide Pathways to Opportunity work, the [All In: Student Pathways Forward podcast](#) was created to elevate student voices to shape inclusive policies, practices and partnerships. Students who have accessed the STEP grant and other public benefits programs have been featured on the podcast. These students, whose voices are not typically front and center as parenting, adult education, working and/or immigrant students, have shared their insights on the value of support services and career coaches to help them navigate these complex systems. Students interviewed on the podcast have provided suggestions on what more colleges could do to address student challenges related to financial and basic needs insecurity, to better support their college completion and career goals. College decision makers, including presidents, have also been on the podcast reflecting on these student conversations and responding to their recommendations. The podcast has been an effective advocacy tool with state legislators who can listen to students from their district describe their needs in detail. Certain colleges in Oregon have been able to integrate students even further by creating peer mentor work study positions to provide a space for students to learn about benefits and resources from their classmates with similar lived experiences. Community colleges in Oregon continue to explore other ways to engage career pathways students to shape inclusive policies.



STUDENT STORIES

JAMES TOMS is a student at Treasure Valley Community College (TVCC) in Ontario, Oregon, in a rural part of the state. James dropped out of college in his younger years to start a family and go to work. He decided to go back to college mid career after a workplace injury and recognized opportunities for careers with economic mobility were limited without a postsecondary credential. James faced financial challenges to complete his education but was able to access supports through the STEP grant and other TVCC programs to help cover costs of his education beyond tuition, including transportation, books, fees, and more. James is pursuing a Medical Assisting career pathway certificate and has received support from the career coach there. He has also been hired as a peer mentor for the STEP program to provide guidance and support to other students accessing the STEP grant and other resources. Students can connect naturally with him as a fellow student and individual who has navigated through these complex systems himself. James attributes his education at TVCC to his bright future ahead. “Because I started school, I had a hope that I didn’t have the first time. Once I graduate school, I see where I can go into not just one profession, but I can go into four different professions. So I’m never going to be falling back into a spot where I can’t do something for my family...because now I’m getting that education.”



[Listen to James Toms/TVCC podcast episode](#)

BAKR ALKARAWI is a student at Mt. Hood Community College (MHCC) in the Portland Metro area who immigrated to the United States from Iraq while he was in high school. He needed to find work to support his family while in high school and was not able to complete his secondary education. Bakr began his educational journey at MHCC taking GED preparation classes. At that time, he faced housing insecurity but was able to stabilize his situation by accessing critical benefits and resources through his career coach at MHCC and other community partner agencies. Bakr is extremely passionate about addressing student housing insecurity and student homelessness. He has worked with college leaders and state legislators on a bill to garner more resources to support students facing housing insecurity. Bakr is a pre-med and biology major and plans to transfer to Oregon Health and Science University with the goal of becoming a physician. He started his healthcare educational pathways at the college gaining two stackable certificates that led to meaningful work experience and skills development. Bakr has accessed valuable supports through the STEP grant. “The STEP program is a resort I would go to whenever there is something that is really major that requires immediate help.” Bakr speaks appreciatively of his college career coach. “Whenever I needed something, she [the career coach] comes up with something that is absolutely life-saving, whether the brief housing insecurity that I experienced, any financial insecurity or financial needs. She’s been able to connect me with all those people and get that resolved.”



[Listen to Bakr Alkarawi/MHCC podcast episode](#)



ENDNOTES

- 1 <https://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resource/publications/the-roadmap-for-racial-equity/>
- 2 <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/09/17/working-adults-increasingly-interested-postsecondary-education-more-skeptical-about>
- 3 https://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Investing-in-Postsecondary-Career-Pathways_web.pdf
- 4 <https://www.aacc.nche.edu/research-trends/fast-facts/>
- 5 <https://www.clasp.org/publications/report/brief/when-financial-aid-falls-short-new-data-reveal-students-face-thousands>
- 6 https://hope4college.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/2019_RealCollege_Survey_Report.pdf
- 7 <https://ips-dc.org/report-the-road-to-zero-wealth/>
- 8 <https://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resource/publications/the-roadmap-for-racial-equity/>
- 9 <https://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resource/publications/the-roadmap-for-racial-equity/>
- 10 Postsecondary National Policy Institute, First-Generation Students in Higher Education, 2018, <https://pnpi.org/first-generation-students/>.
- 11 <http://cccstudentmentalhealth.org/docs/TIC-Fact-Sheet.pdf>
- 12 <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-postsecondary/reports/2020/10/07/491242/78-billion-community-college-funding-shortfall/>
- 13 David J. Deming and Christopher R. Walters, "The Impact of Price Caps and Spending Cuts on U.S. Postsecondary Attainment" (Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2017), https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/ddeming/files/DW_Aug2017.pdf.
- 14 <https://www.cbpp.org/research/poverty-and-inequality/tracking-the-covid-19-recessions-effects-on-food-housing-and>
- 15 <https://www.cbpp.org/research/poverty-and-inequality/tracking-the-covid-19-recessions-effects-on-food-housing-and>
- 16 Minoff, Elisa. "The Racist Roots of Work Requirements." Center for the Study of Social Policy, February 2020. Available at: <https://cssp.org/resource/racist-roots-of-work-requirements/>
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 http://www1.cuny.edu/sites/asap/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2015/04/Kolenovic_Linderman_Karp_CCR_2013_Improving_Student_Outcomes_PRINT_VERSION.pdf
- 19 <https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2021R1/Measures/Overview/HB2835>
- 20 The Ability to Benefit (ATB) provision in the Higher Education Act (HEA) allows low-skilled individuals to access necessary workforce training and education that can help lift them out of poverty. It does so by allowing individuals without a high school diploma or equivalent to qualify for federal financial aid for postsecondary education when they participate in an eligible career pathway.
- 21 <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ofa/map/tanf-and-moe-spending-basic-assistance-work-education-training-activities-and-child-care-fy>
- 22 Description of SNAP E&T is taken from this paper: <https://www.seattlejobsinitiative.com/wp-content/uploads/SNAP-final-web.pdf>
- 23 More detail on OR match: Oregon uses a variety of expenditures for the 50 percent match to draw down federal SNAP E&T dollars. The majority of the match sources come from the allocation of staff time and effort, each institution's federally negotiated indirect rate, philanthropic funding, and scholarships. Reinvestment of the reimbursement funds, which are not considered a source of federal funding, also provide a match source. By reinvesting these reimbursement funds, each college can grow their local program and increase the resources available to assist STEP students further with support services and/or key career coach staffing roles.
- 24 More detail on OR match: Oregon uses a variety of expenditures for the 50 percent match to draw down federal SNAP E&T dollars. The majority of the match sources come from the allocation of staff time and effort, each institution's federally negotiated indirect rate, philanthropic funding, and scholarships. [Need more clarity on this] Reinvestment of the reimbursement funds, which are not considered a source of federal funding, also provide a match source. By reinvesting these reimbursement funds, each college can grow their local program and increase the resources available to assist STEP students further with support services and/or key career coach staffing roles.
- 25 Students in programs funded by the Credentials, Acceleration and Support for Employment TAACCT grant saw 89 percent completion rates. It also closed opportunity gaps, with the completion rate for students of color at 91 percent in comparison to 87 percent for white students. 28 percent of CASE participants received SNAP, illustrating
- 26 Kinder 2020. <https://repository.library.georgetown.edu/bitstream/handle/10822/1052640/CEW-Oregon-Report.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.
- 27 <https://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/how-tanf-can-support-skills-for-low-income-parents-and-how-policymakers-can-help-1.pdf>
- 28 <https://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resource/publications/the-roadmap-for-racial-equity/>
- 29 Leonardo, Zeus and W. Norton Grubb. Education and Racism: A Primer on Issues and Dilemmas. 2018.
- 30 CPI college staff are responsible for ensuring that students who receive TANF cash assistance meet work participation rate requirements to the extent possible. Most students are counted as participating in vocational education for the first twelve months of their CPI participation. Many students (especially those pursuing occupational credentials) complete their education within twelve months. If students participate in work-study for at least twenty hours a week, work-study can count as subsidized employment, and hours of school attendance can then be counted as job skills training, which is not capped. This allows students to continue their postsecondary education since it is in conjunction with another work activity. Some students also participate in work-study internships as a way of meeting the work participation rate.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This project was funded by generous support from ECMC foundation and Lumina Foundation. We are grateful for their financial investment in National Skills Coalition. The findings and views expressed here are those of the authors and National Skills Coalition.

ABOUT NATIONAL SKILLS COALITION

Jobs that require skills training are the backbone of our economy. National Skills Coalition fights for a national commitment to inclusive, high-quality skills training so that more people have access to a better life, and more local businesses see sustained growth. Since 2000, through expert analysis and technical assistance, broad-based organizing, targeted advocacy, and cutting-edge communications, NSC has changed hundreds of state and federal skills policies that have changed thousands of lives and grown local businesses and economies.

We build networks representing businesses, workers, colleges, community organizations, public officials, and advocates. We engage these networks to craft policy proposals and mobilize them to win concrete policy change. Our networks include SkillSPAN (state affiliate coalitions), Business Leaders United for Workforce Partnerships (thousands of small and medium-sized business owners and state affiliates), and Voices for Skills (tens of thousands of workers and grassroots skills advocates).