



Moving Career Pathways Forward: LEARNING FROM THE NEW SKILLS FOR YOUTH INITIATIVE

Introduction

[New Skills for Youth](#) (NSFY) aimed to transform career readiness education and bridge the skills gap by supporting innovative strategies in 10 states across the United States.¹ Launched in 2016 and supported by JPMorgan Chase, NSFY was a \$75 million, 5-year initiative to strengthen and expand high-quality career pathways for youth. Advance CTE, the Council of Chief State School Officers, and Education Strategy Group served as the national partners to help states strengthen their career pathways systems.

JPMorgan Chase awarded grants in two phases to help states develop and implement action plans.² An independent advisory committee helped select 24 states and the District of Columbia for Phase 1. Each state received a \$100,000 grant to conduct career readiness needs assessments and develop action plans to expand career pathways for learners from March through October 2016.³ Then the independent advisory committee selected 10 states for Phase 2—Delaware, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Nevada, Ohio, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Tennessee, and Wisconsin. These states received \$2 million in funding from January 2017 through December 2019.⁴ They also were awarded additional grants to implement their action plans and serve as models for other states.

The Phase 2 states designed career pathways around three recommendations that had emerged from a task force of state chiefs, State Career Technical Education (CTE) Directors, and key national partners in 2014:

“[E]nlist the employer community as a lead partner in defining the career pathways and skills most essential in today’s economy; set a higher bar for the quality of career preparation programs, enabling all learners to earn a meaningful postsecondary degree or credential; and make career readiness matter to schools and learners by prioritizing it in accountability systems.”⁵

NSFY was one of the earliest and most impactful philanthropic investments in career pathways and career readiness in recent history and helped spark future investments and energy in the engaged states and beyond. The initiative served as an early indicator of the increasing attention given to career readiness nationally. The NSFY states can provide useful insight into questions around scale and sustainability given what they accomplished and what their systems look like today. As states and communities continue to prioritize career pathways policies and programs, it is useful to begin to unpack what strategies or decisions can ensure that those career pathways systems are built to last.

States were in different places during NSFY and sustained elements of the work in various ways, but Advance CTE identified state leaders who were willing to speak about successes relating to NSFY. This resource highlights how six states (**Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Ohio, Rhode Island, and Wisconsin**) have been able to sustain efforts originally supported by NSFY, with insight into key accomplishments during NSFY and what initiatives still exist. NSFY state leaders also shared recommendations they would offer other state leaders moving career pathways systems forward.

FROM NSFY TO NEW SKILLS READY NETWORK

Building on lessons learned from the NSFY investment and wanting to shift focus to a collective impact model as it evolved its broader New Skills at Work initiative, JPMorgan Chase, in partnership with Advance CTE and Education Strategy Group, launched the [New Skills ready network](#) in 2020.

While many of the priorities remain the same—high-quality career pathways, meaningful work-based learning, improved transitions between secondary and post-secondary systems and the closing of equity gaps—the *New Skills ready network* is different in a few key ways. It supports six sites, composed of both state and local leaders from school systems, higher education institutions, employers, and state agencies. In addition, the lead grantees are intermediary organizations, rather than state agencies, to help seed and coordinate the efforts. Finally, equity is even more centered in this work as the field has evolved to better understand how to identify and address barriers for underserved learners.

Overview of Career Pathways in States Before NSFY

Before the start of NSFY in 2016, states were in various stages of career pathways systems development and implementation. Many states, not just NSFY states, were facing common challenges such as a lack of alignment, lack of cohesive vision, and false distinction between “college readiness” and “career readiness.”

Specifically, states struggled with systems alignment and collaboration, which often resulted in leaders duplicating efforts. Some states had a fragmented vision for career pathways at the state or regional level. There were “pockets of excellence” in local areas but no statewide career pathways system. State leaders often discussed college readiness and career readiness separately rather than as a cohesive concept. Learners often had limited access to career pathways programming. For example, career pathways may have been offered only at select technical high schools rather than at comprehensive high schools, or high-wage, high-skill programs were not offered equitably across institutions.

Despite the challenges, states had foundational elements in place for a career readiness system, and the NSFY initiative provided flexibility to pilot, scale, and expand career pathways to address these challenges. It is also important to recognize that many of these challenges and issues are still present across the United States. This resource will help states understand some lasting legacies and highlight recommendations from state leaders from the NSFY initiative.

Lasting Legacy Highlights

Kentucky

- Improved training and support for CTE teachers
- Used labor market information
- Engaged industry partners
- Changed attitudes regarding regional approaches and asset mapping

State Highlights of Lasting Legacies

Over the nearly 4 years of NSFY, states implemented action plans, made adjustments to those plans, networked with other state leaders to build community, and provided support to local and regional partners to develop and scale high-quality career pathways. The flexibility of the NSFY investment allowed states to pilot new programs and models beyond traditional approaches. After NSFY ended, the world experienced the coronavirus pandemic. Many states lost momentum and had to reimagine ways to offer experiential learning, such as work-based learning. However, states were able to sustain and continue to make progress on a number of the key initiatives started during NSFY that are still present today. This section provides highlights of state initiatives and successful strategies started in NSFY that remain lasting legacies.

Kentucky

During NSFY, the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) collaborated with the Kentucky Center for Statistics (KYSTATS), the state entity responsible for collecting and distributing education and workforce data, to help provide data to employers looking to hire talent, expand operations, or relocate facilities to Kentucky. This long-standing partnership was in existence before NSFY, but after labor market information (LMI) was integrated in KYSTATS in 2017, KYSTATS became the primary data source governing LMI across the commonwealth. The addition of LMI allows Kentucky to be able to identify where career pathways are available at the secondary and postsecondary levels for specific types of jobs to better align to occupations in that region. All state-supported industry certifications and career pathways are now aligned with workforce demands based on LMI data.

Efforts launched during NSFY that have been sustained include improving training and support for CTE teachers, using LMI, engaging industry partners, and changing attitudes regarding regional approaches and asset mapping. KDE leveraged the flexibility of the NSFY investment to strengthen its [New Teachers Institute](#), a 24-month model for occupation-based CTE teachers pursuing professional teacher certification through KDE.⁶ The need for teacher support became apparent as the state focused on career pathway reform. Leaders have been pleased with teacher recruitment and retention from the program and the collaborative partnership among secondary and postsecondary partners at the state level.

Districts and industry partners also collaborate more since NSFY, which is increasing the relevance of career pathways in Kentucky. For example, program consultants who oversee the state-operated centers (i.e., area technical centers) collaborate with districts to ensure alignment between workforce needs and programming efforts. KDE is hoping to increase the number of these positions and work closely with all districts to look at workforce needs and programming from a regional perspective. KDE also has meetings with local school districts to determine program offerings, consider current opportunities, avoid duplication of programming, and make recommendations to schools about business and industry partners for programming efforts.

NSFY brought a change in attitude and culture in Kentucky regarding regional approaches and true asset mapping to CTE offerings. Considering what is needed in the community in regard to high-demand and high-wage offerings is now common practice, which has also been elevated and institutionalized in the commonwealth's Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (Perkins V) Comprehensive Local Needs Assessment (CLNA).⁷

Louisiana



In 2014, 2 years prior to NSFY, Louisiana created the [Jump Start initiative](#), an innovative CTE program designed to elevate and incentivize career pathways aligned with industry-recognized credentials and foster cross-agency collaboration.⁸ NSFY helped Louisiana streamline and fill gaps in the career pathways work, including communication approaches and learner access. This work was happening at the same time that the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) was trying to unveil the next iteration of Jump Start. The Louisiana State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education approved Jump Start 2.0 to begin 3 days before the state shut down due to the coronavirus pandemic in March 2020.

NSFY enabled LDOE to pursue cutting-edge entrepreneurial initiatives, such as wraparound supports, virtual work-based learning, career exploration, and other activities that would have taken a long time to be approved for state funding. For example, LDOE invested in ImBlaze, an online internship management solution, preventing the need for administrators to go through the standard budget and approval process. Another endeavor developed through NSFY was [Jump Start Summers](#), during which learners can get hands-on experiences at employer worksites along with classroom instruction in summer training sessions.⁹ LDOE had funding set aside for Jump Start Summers, but the program was a proof of concept pilot during NSFY.

Lasting Legacy Highlights



Louisiana

- Expanded Jump Start Summers
- Pursued cutting-edge entrepreneurial initiatives like wraparound supports, virtual work-based learning, and career exploration



Jump Start Summers offers opportunities for learners to take CTE classes they cannot fit in their schedule during the academic year, allowing for additional access to CTE curriculum. For example, learners taking a heavy academic load with Advanced Placement and dual enrollment classes may enroll in Jump Start Summers.

Jump Start Summers was expanded during NSFY and serves as a lasting legacy as many of the public geographic school systems participate in the program to this day. Partnerships with the Louisiana Workforce Commission were also strengthened during NSFY. This stronger relationship allows for a better understanding of the data needed for workforce trends and the designation of credentials as high wage and high demand.

Massachusetts

Some of the lasting legacies in Massachusetts are a comprehensive approach to pathways, the development of a common language around LMI, and district-level support and capacity building for pathways and career advisement. At the beginning of NSFY, approximately 20% of learners had access to high-quality career pathways, primarily through Chapter 74 vocational/technical programs, which are concentrated at full-day technical high schools but also exist at many comprehensive high schools. Many of these schools were at capacity and were not able to serve all interested learners. In 2017, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) was able to expand pathways beyond Chapter 74 through the [High Quality College and Career Pathways Initiative](#) consisting of Early College Pathways and Innovation Career Pathways.¹⁰

With support from two governors' administrations across two political parties, DESE broadened its career pathway options and achieved higher participation in all types of schools by recognizing the need to establish core elements of pathways programs, being able to adopt locally, and engaging partners for learners. DESE married the development of the new pathways with the expansion of My Career and Academic Plan (MyCAP) in a coordinated way.¹¹ DESE anticipates that by 2027, it will have achieved its original goal of 50% of high schools and learners having access to high-quality career pathways.

Before NSFY, K-12, higher education, and workforce partners were all using different vocabulary, language, and data for LMI. Massachusetts began establishing definitions, common vernacular, and data standardization to better align LMI, which are still in use today. Since NSFY, DESE also has focused on data collection and implemented a tracking mechanism that codes all career pathways in the state data system so leaders can evaluate demographic and learner success.

DESE has also been cognizant of providing support as a planning mechanism for pathways work in Gateway Cities, which are midsize urban centers across the commonwealth.¹² Gateway Cities often have high concentrations of learners who have not historically participated in postsecondary opportunities. State leaders are making a concerted effort to invite schools and districts in Gateway Cities to participate in pathways to broaden the base of learner participation. State leaders are also providing technical and coaching support for schools in Gateway Cities to better assist with learner recruitment, persistence, and success.

Lasting Legacy Highlights

Massachusetts

- Employed a comprehensive approach to pathways
- Developed a common language around LMI
- Offered district-level support and capacity building for pathways and career advisement

Ohio



Efforts launched in Ohio during NSFY that have been sustained include the fostering of cohesiveness among college and career readiness efforts in state programming and the strengthening of the state's commitment to equity, which continues to be a statewide focus. The Office of Graduate Success was developed at the state agency level to bridge the gap between college and career readiness and to design career pathways systems from a holistic perspective. Its mission is to serve as the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce's dedicated and focused link to postsecondary and work. A crucial step forward for Ohio was devoting full-time staff to work around access to early career, college, and military programming that will allow students to learn, through experience, what is required to be successful in life after high school. Similarly, NSFY was instrumental in bringing the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce and the Governor's Office of Workforce and Transformation together to work on various state projects, such as developing and implementing the [OhioMeansJobs-Readiness Seal](#)¹³ and codifying and promoting the [Framework to Issue Credit for Work-Based Learning](#).¹⁴ The OhioMeansJobs-Readiness Seal attainment numbers continue to increase, with 1.1% of graduating learners in 2018 having a seal compared to 6.9% of graduating learners in 2022.

In addition, counties across Ohio now have career coaches and career navigators who were hired out of workforce investment boards, and [SuccessBound](#) regional conferences are still being held, efforts first launched under NSFY.¹⁵ Attendees at the SuccessBound conferences can learn approaches and strategies to bring together business and education partners to engage learners about career pathways.

Ohio state leaders had many discussions during NSFY about accelerated career pathways and statewide articulation agreements to understand seamless transitions based on what was happening at secondary and postsecondary levels. In partnership with the Ohio Association of Community Colleges, Ohio was able to dramatically expand its [Career-Technical Assurance Guides](#) (CTAGs),

which award college credit at an Ohio public college or university for CTE coursework taken in high school or at a career technical institution (e.g., career center, vocational school, or Ohio Technical Center).¹⁶ Ohio created this system in 2005 to identify critical career technical competencies and embed career college credit opportunities in each career pathway. In fiscal year 2020, 43,617 learners met the enrollment and end-of-course assessment criteria for CTAGs.¹⁷ This work later became a foundational element for [Industry Recognized Credential Transfer Assurance Guides](#), which award college credit to anyone who holds one or more approved industry-recognized credentials.¹⁸

Collaboration among agencies during NSFY helped leaders be more successful with equity-oriented initiatives. The Ohio Department of Education (now called the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce) was using CTE data to illuminate equity gaps around the time of the reauthorization of Perkins V. In its Perkins V state plan, the Ohio Department of Education committed to identifying and closing equity gaps through the creation of the [Ohio Career-Technical Education Equity Labs](#),¹⁹ which help guide partners through a process of identifying gaps in learner access to programs, discussing root causes of those gaps, and creating action plans to address the gaps in a full-day workshop.²⁰ The Equity Labs spurred the Ohio Department of Education to bring career pathways into discussions about local equity issues.

Lasting Legacy Highlights



Ohio

- Fostered cohesive college and career readiness efforts
- Strengthened the state's commitment to equity, which continues to be a statewide focus

Rhode Island

Some of the lasting legacies of the Rhode Island NSFY work are employer engagement; the state's commitment to using data to address equity gaps; and the elevation of career education to learners, families, and key partners. Rhode Island launched [PrepareRI](#) in 2017, an umbrella organization uniting multiple state and local agencies for career pathways systems, including the Governor's Office, Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE), Governor's Workforce Board, Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner, and Rhode Island Commerce Corporation.²¹ The [PrepareRI Internship Program](#) places 300–500 high school juniors into paid internships each summer.²² The program is funded by the Governor's Workforce Board with support from The Partnership for Rhode Island and is managed by Skills for Rhode Island's Future. The number of interns participating in a PrepareRI summer high school internship program has increased from 162 in 2018 to 348 in 2023. Rhode Island is in the process of updating its state PrepareRI plan to align to the governor's 2030 plan, known as RI2030.²³

Rhode Island advocated for career pathways development to be grounded in an employer-led, demand-driven approach with employers providing information about the ever-changing skills needed in the workforce. For example, Rhode Island adopted an employer-led, demand-driven approach for existing and new CTE programs. The existing programs had to either adopt the updated standards or close (which several did). All new programs are required to meet the employer-led, demand-driven standards to receive RIDE approval. The structures state leaders built during NSFY to align programs to employer needs remain to this day.

During NSFY, RIDE started disaggregating data by program, reviewing inequities across programs, and using the information to strategize implementation support. RIDE also started equity grants through NSFY as a way for secondary

schools to address access, participation, or performance gaps among specific learner subgroups in specific CTE programs.²⁴ The equity grants, now funded through Perkins V reserve funds, are being used to prioritize activities such as root cause analyses, support for learners with Individualized Education Plans, and Universal Design for Learning in CTE classrooms in 2023.

Finally, NSFY allowed Rhode Island to elevate the importance of career education. Rhode Island saw increased interest in CTE and career pathways from learners and families. The number of RIDE approved CTE programs continue to grow (i.e., more than 192% since NSFY) with additional growth projected in the future. Career pathways are now in all but one geographic community, and leaders see increased learner and family demand for high-skill, high-growth CTE programs since NSFY. Rhode Island aligns its high-skill, high-growth CTE programs to the high-skill, high-growth sectors identified by the Governor's Workforce Board and Rhode Island Commerce, which oversees Rhode Island's economic development initiatives. State leaders see career education as a core part of K–12 work, and career education is included in school accountability efforts.

Lasting Legacy Highlights

Rhode Island

- Increased employer engagement
- Committed to using data to address equity gaps
- Elevated career education to learners, families, and key partners

Wisconsin



Efforts launched in Wisconsin during NSFY that have been sustained include [Regional Career Pathways \(RCPs\)](#) and assessment practices for RCP work.²⁵ During NSFY, Wisconsin stood up a regional systems approach to career pathways development, with a state-level employer education partnership group for each region and career pathway. Regions were encouraged to incorporate economic development corporations, technical college systems, system campuses, and workforce development organizations to support schools. School districts could also leverage the power of the regional collaborative in addition to their own resources to expand and elevate career pathway opportunities for learners.

Wisconsin piloted initiatives in four regions during NSFY, with each region having an RCP director. RCPs are now offered in all areas of the state through seven regions. RCP collaborative groups that bring together cooperative educational service agencies (CESAs),²⁶ employers, workforce and economic development organizations, higher education institutions, and districts are convened by each region to help with identifying, building, and sustaining RCPs in high schools. In Wisconsin, 12 CESAs provide professional development and support to school districts. One or more regional economic development organizations and one or more CESAs work collaboratively to provide leadership in coordination in each region. Wisconsin was able to provide support at the state level through NSFY to push career pathways out to regions for local adoption.



During 2022–23, 87% of school districts (334 out of 383) offered one or more RCPs, with a total of 1,365 adopted RCPs. Much like local career pathways, RCPs are required to include a sequence of CTE courses and at least two of the following elements: dual credit course, work-based learning program, industry-recognized credential, or Career Technical Student Organization. School districts benefit from adopting an RCP because the previously listed elements have been vetted by state and regional employers that are also ready to engage with and support the schools that adopt their RCP.

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) leveraged the CLNA process from the Perkins V implementation, which has brought intentionality to how the department looks at and approaches career pathways development, growth, and sustainability. DPI is piloting a process similar to the CLNA for RCPs that focuses on addressing equity gaps in work-based learning participation. The department has also established a process to update RCPs every 3 years to make sure school districts have up-to-date, employer-vetted information.

Ensuring high standards is critical as learners need to not only have access to career pathways but also be successful in completing career pathways and earning credentials. And the work is paying off. For example, in comparing the state work-based learning participation of CTE concentrators from the 2020–21 to the 2021–22 school year, Wisconsin saw an increase in overall participation (16.35% compared to 26.31%). The state also made progress in closing the three largest equity gaps in work-based learning participation among CTE concentrators. Participation among CTE concentrators from economically disadvantaged families rose from 13.95% percent to 21.85%, among Hispanic concentrators from 12.20% to 16.55%, and among Black concentrators from 7.11% to 7.54%.²⁷

Lasting Legacy Highlights



Wisconsin

- Expanded Regional Career Pathways (RCPs)
- Strengthened assessment practices for regional pathway work

MORE INFORMATION

More information about states and their progress made during the NSFY initiative can be found in the [New Skills for Youth snapshots](#).²⁸ RTI International also completed an evaluation of the impact of NSFY on the development and growth of career pathways in the 10 states selected for Phase 2. The researchers wrote an [executive summary](#)²⁹ and [web-based final report](#)³⁰ with the evaluation findings.

Recommendation for Sustaining Career Pathways for Long-term Success

NSFY gave states a platform, resources, and supports to transform their career readiness systems through piloting, developing, and strengthening opportunities for learners. The emphasis on career pathways and career readiness among youth continues to grow across states. In 2023, at least 34 governors mentioned workforce development as one of the top education-related priorities in their state of the state addresses, highlighting the importance of preparing learners for future workforce needs.³¹ In the past 5 years, state policymakers have enacted more than 300 policies across 46 states related to industry partnerships/work-based learning, industry-recognized credentials, and career pathways.³²



Advance CTE and Education Strategy Group are currently helping a cohort of state and local sites think through the sustainability and scaling of career pathways systems after the conclusion of JPMorgan Chase's current major career pathways initiative—[New Skills ready network](#).³³ Three states (Massachusetts, Ohio, and Tennessee) from NSFY are continuing career pathways initiatives at the local level in Boston, Columbus, and Nashville as part of the *New Skills ready network*. The *New Skills ready network* sites are working to improve learner completion of high-quality career pathways as part of a 5-year initiative launched by JPMorgan Chase, which will end in 2025.

At the same time, Advance CTE, Education Strategy Group, ExcelinEd, JFF, and New America are working with 11 states over two cohorts in another initiative focused on scale and sustainability—

[Launch: Equitable & Accelerated Pathways for All](#).³⁴

Within Launch, sites, composed of state and local partners, are building sustainability plans to address long-standing barriers and achieve scale in their career pathways efforts.



Build and Sustain Partnerships

Developing and improving high-quality career pathways requires cross-sector collaborations among secondary education, postsecondary education, and workforce systems. States formed partnerships with regional economic development organizations, chambers of commerce, industry groups, elected officials, boards of regents, business roundtables, and advisory groups from technical colleges during the initiative, many of which are still in existence today.



ACTION STEPS INCLUDE:

Form Partnerships With Intentionality

State leaders recommend that teams be intentional when forming partnerships for statewide career pathways and ensure that partners have fully bought into the career pathways vision. All leaders recommend that several organizations across business, industry, and economic development sectors be a part of statewide career pathways systems and that key players be identified early in the process. Ohio recommends situating a career pathways initiative in the agency that is least likely to experience turnover. The work should live at that agency, but the buy-in will still need to happen across all agencies and levels with strategic team composition at the core.

Kentucky leaders recommend recruiting team participants at the local and state levels and having early conversations about challenges while focusing on the statewide vision leaders hope to create. State leaders should also be strategic about their own capacity around building and maintaining partnerships. For example, trying to force or pull agencies, groups, or partners along is not the best use of time if they are resistant to the shared vision. Rather, leaders should spend time building and maintaining relationships with groups that believe in the shared statewide vision for career pathways systems.

Finally, state leaders note the importance of having conversations with key partners early and often in the process. Representation of voices is important, but partner buy-in, support, and investment are also needed. Leaders should leverage existing groups (e.g., cross-agency work groups or boards with cabinet representation) and shared messaging (e.g., shared talking points for the governor and state superintendent, references to core components, common vernacular, and tailored messaging for families) to build and maintain momentum for initiatives.

Align High-Level Leadership to Career Pathways

Many state leaders reference the importance of strong executive leadership with a clear vision to keep everyone aligned. State leaders advocate for having a champion, such as a governor or another high-profile leader, to message the importance of and create buy-in for career pathways. Ohio found it extremely helpful to have a lieutenant governor who was vocal about creating business and industry partnerships and bringing K-12 leaders into statewide discussions. Massachusetts has had very strong legislative and multi-governor support in part because of the visibility of partners emphasizing the importance of career pathways in the development of talent needed for the workforce and the collaboration of the Executive Office of Education and DESE on this initiative. The alignment of high-level leadership is a pivotal piece in ensuring that career pathways systems continue to move forward.



Build and Sustain Partnerships *(continued)*



Continue to Add New Employer and Industry Partnerships

State leaders recommend continuing to form new industry partnerships after a grant ends. Wisconsin's DPI has expanded regional employer partnerships every year since NSFY to better meet learner needs. The regional partnerships now include apprenticeship coordinators and individuals from the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development Division of Vocational Rehabilitation or other groups that work with special populations. The Ohio Department of Education and Workforce and the Ohio Department of Development created a new High School Tech Internship, an opportunity for Ohio employers to be reimbursed for hosting high school interns in technology-related roles.³⁵

Building upon the foundation formed in the beginning with the shared vision and continuing conversations with new employers will keep career pathway work at the forefront. Partnerships need to be relational and not transactional, particularly with business and industry partners as building longer term relationships takes time and energy.



Ensure That Routines and Structures Continue on a Consistent Basis

State leaders think agency and interagency contacts should continue to meet on a consistent basis. For example, Rhode Island formed the PrepareRI core team during NSFY. This core team still meets biweekly on shared goals to help support career pathways. Leaders from RIDE, the Governor's Workforce Board, and Rhode Island Commerce are part of the team.

Ohio created Workforce Tiger Team weekly meetings with the Ohio Department of Higher Education, Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, and Office of Workforce Transformation to discuss intersecting needs and how agencies can support each other. Ohio also now has quarterly meetings during which all state agencies come together to listen to three or four presentations on current key strategies. These meetings help to explain strategy, provide updates, assess progress, and move items toward state goals. Interagency relationships can reduce duplication of services and increase the efficacy of state resources in career pathways systems.

Creating routines and structures for agency/interagency collaboration can be especially helpful during leadership transitions of governors, commissioners, and directors. Having routines and structures in place that are sustainable is critical, especially for alignment work. The work then becomes an ongoing priority with outcomes that new leadership is willing to support going forward.



Leverage Partnerships for Other State Initiatives

State leaders recommend leveraging partnerships for other state initiatives. In Wisconsin, DPI and the Governor's Council on Workforce Investment (CWI) had only tangential relationships at the beginning of NSFY. As a result of the relationship forged during NSFY, DPI was able to provide more comprehensive input when CWI started its 2022–26 strategic plan. The plan now includes a specific objective with goals related to career pathways. In the past, the career pathways work focused more on the adult population, and NSFY helped evolve the work to include K–12 learners, which is also creating better alignment between Wisconsin's state Perkins V plan and its Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act plan. The relationships formed during NSFY contributed to additional future statewide collaborations.

Maintain Engagement With Local Leaders

Although NSFY took a statewide systems-level approach, leaders at the local level were ultimately the linchpin of the day-to-day implementation and execution of the initiative. They need to have not only updated information about the shared vision for career pathways but also the opportunity to provide feedback about the successes and challenges of the initiative. State leaders reiterate the importance of having continued conversations with districts, CTE leaders, and implementers involved in the daily operations because their voices are critical in designing and providing access to high-quality career pathways and understanding capacity issues. Strong statewide collaboration at the state level is needed with proper framing and support at the local level.



ACTION STEPS INCLUDE:

Ensure That Local Leaders Recognize the Long-Term Process of Career Pathways Systems

District leaders need to understand the long-term process involving grant funds and that the benefits and outcomes may not be immediate. Kentucky leaders share that although there will be setbacks along the process of sustaining career pathways, the statewide vision and goals should be kept at the forefront. Continuous improvement is necessary. In Massachusetts, DESE has a formal pathway designation process through which leaders must identify and confirm partners (e.g., industry, postsecondary, and workforce boards) with required formal memoranda of understanding so there are clear linkages between career pathways and partners. A shared vision creates a strong foundation, but team members need to continue to engage local CTE leaders to influence behavior and actions around career pathways initiatives.

Provide Technical Assistance to Build the Capacity of Local Leaders

State leaders also recognize that local leaders need one-on-one assistance to meet the demand for scaling career pathways and support the needs of local sites. In Massachusetts, DESE provides planning grants to help schools focus on pathways design and development for designation, providing deep technical support to and investment in communities of practice to share promising practices and champion success. The Massachusetts DESE contracts with a technical assistance provider to offer tiered support for initiation planning, renovation, and improvement stages along with professional learning communities and toolkits. For example, the [Innovation Career Pathways Community of Practice](#) is designed to meet the needs of an audience ranging from those in the initial stages of learning about Innovation Career Pathways to those that are members of the inaugural cohort.³⁶

The Massachusetts Executive Office of Education also launched a partnership with the Work-Based Learning Alliance to offer virtual project-based models that offer consistency in the quality of work-based learning experiences and serve learners statewide. Wisconsin developed 11 RCP templates for regions to adopt. States have invested and continue to invest in these capacity-building supports.



Incorporate Learner Voice Into Career Pathways Processes

One critical priority of career pathways systems in NSFY was ensuring equity and access for each learner. States focused on embedding equity components from other initiatives into career pathways to support all learners statewide. However, learner voice historically has been omitted during state discussions of career-related topics. Learners not only need access to career pathways, but they also need to be successful in completing career pathways and earning credentials. Their feedback is critical for the design, creation, and implementation of career pathways. Several state leaders highlight the importance of listening to learners and finding ways to incorporate learner voice into career pathways processes, resulting in useful ideas for future work.



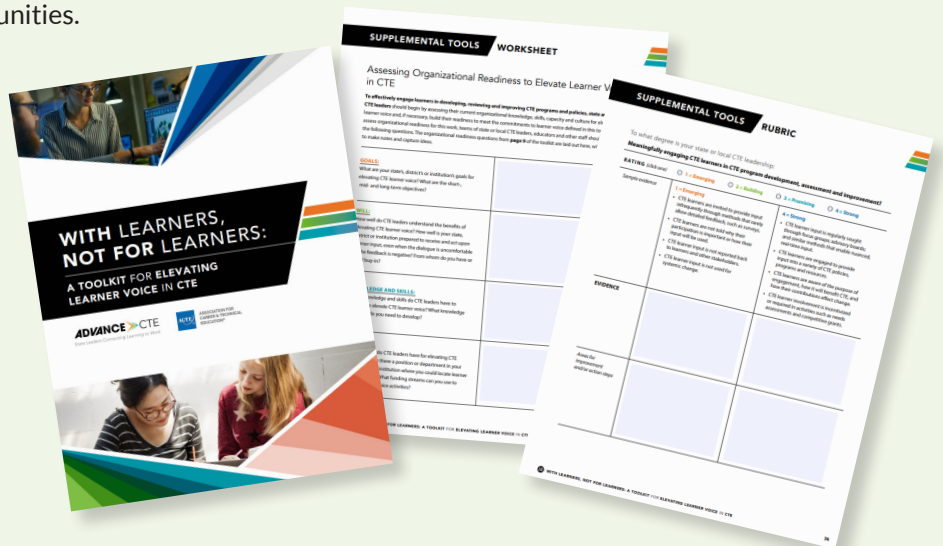
ACTION STEPS INCLUDE:

Capture Statewide Learner Data

State leaders recommend capturing statewide learner data. During NSFY, Wisconsin surveyed more than 4,000 high school learners and approximately 200 recent high school graduates as well as conducted a series of focus groups to find out what learners thought about career readiness activities in K–12 education.³⁷ Wisconsin saw the value of learner perspectives from its surveys and focus groups. Now Wisconsin offers technical assistance and creates resources and curriculum for teachers based on learner feedback. DPI and the Wisconsin Community and Technical College System are developing policies and procedures for engaging learners in their CLNAs and other opportunities.

Use Existing Learner Voice Resources

State leaders find that incorporating learners as key partners can help states better address learner needs and identify barriers to policies and practices. Advance CTE and the Association for Career and Technical Education developed a [Learner Voice Toolkit](#) to provide state and local CTE leaders with actionable resources, guidance, and tools to ensure that CTE learner voices are elevated and heard for the improvement of CTE policies and practices.³⁸ Education Strategy Group has also launched a line of work focused on learner social capital development in career pathways.³⁹



Identify New Funding Streams and Processes

States should consider identifying new funding streams, such as federal and state sources not previously used, to sustain career pathways initiatives after the financial investment of a major grant ends. State leaders leveraged Perkins V funding, incorporated initiatives into state budgets, secured private funding, and better aligned funding with program approval processes. Finding ways to [braid funding streams](#) from federal, state, and local sources can be a strategy to support equitable career pathways.⁴⁰



ACTION STEPS INCLUDE:

Leverage Existing Federal Funding Sources

State leaders should continue leveraging existing federal funding sources. Massachusetts, Ohio, Rhode Island, and Wisconsin use existing federal funding sources such as the state leadership and reserve funds through Perkins V to continue and expand career pathways initiatives. Ohio has started using funds through Title IV Federal Student Aid programs, which refer to financial aid programs for postsecondary learners authorized under Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965 for career advising and school counseling. State leaders had not considered those funding streams before NSFY.

Advocate for Line Items In State Budgets

State leaders can advocate for dedicated line item funding for career pathways to help sustain the work. For example, Louisiana has expanded state funding investments in CTE programs. Massachusetts now has separate line items in its state budget for Innovation Career Pathways, Early College programs, and afternoon activities for vocational programs, none of which were line items before NSFY. Legislators were instrumental in familiarizing themselves with what was happening in their districts and helping to champion the inclusion of line items in the state budget.

Secure Private Funding and Public Grants

State leaders should review philanthropic grant opportunities. Rhode Island was able to secure private funding and some public grants, such as the Rethinking Education Models grant, to launch the School Counseling Corps during the coronavirus pandemic.⁴¹ The goal of the corps was to ensure strong school counseling structures, which include career advising.

Better Align Funding With Program Approval Processes

State leaders can better align funding with program approval processes. To support learners, the Massachusetts DESE offers technology and equipment grants for schools. Schools can receive money as a complement to the designation program approval process via an implementation grant and 4 subsequent years of support funding. There is a check-in visit during the third year to see how schools are performing relative to five guiding principles. DESE also partners with schools to go through their designation process to ensure that what they are proposing for career pathways makes sense for their communities and is sustainable. In Kentucky, KDE develops questions to align funding requests with the approval of new programs. KDE asks districts if they have access to programs at the regional level in an effort to avoid duplication of programs. Rhode Island revamped its state CTE program approval process to better direct state funds to high-quality programs.



Navigate the Team Through the Change Management Process

Starting or sustaining paramount statewide initiatives with multiple agencies and partners is a major undertaking. States started NSFY with action plans but often had to pivot and make changes to respond to learner, industry, and partner needs. The challenge is maintaining momentum during turnover in organizations and educational systems, which is to be expected over a number of years. Leaders can help teams move through the change management process by providing them as much support as possible.



ACTION STEPS INCLUDE:

Offer Onboarding to New Members and Offboarding to Departing Members

State leaders encourage offering onboarding to new members and offboarding to departing members. State leaders should consider what introductory information to share when new members join the planning team. This information could include a sample agenda and guiding questions for team members to use during introductory conversations with new team members. Using onboarding videos of prerecorded information can save time, allowing for deeper conversations about the work. Leaders can talk with new members one on one after large meetings to answer questions and assess additional needs and support. A standardized offboarding template or checklist to review as members depart the team may also be helpful to have.

Create a Comprehensive Space for Documents and Materials

State leaders recommend creating a comprehensive space for documents and materials. Collaborative work across agencies and organizations requires managing information such as documents, materials, learnings, and agendas. There should be a shared folder, portal, or online space to store documents and materials. Clear standard operating procedures and links to documents should be easily accessible to planning team members. There may also be a repository of data and data requests to avoid duplication of data-pulling tasks. Teams can write white papers or summaries about promising practices to capture insights on a yearly basis.

Tailor Messaging for Each Partner Group

State leaders encourage tailoring messages for partner groups. Different partners will need tailored messages about upcoming changes. Leaders should message and communicate changes in a manner that helps team members understand how the change will benefit learners and the support that will be provided by the team leadership to help with the change management process.

Allow For Systems and Processes to Evolve Over Time

State leaders encourage teams to allow for systems and processes to evolve over time as new information is learned after implementation. Wisconsin leaders learned quickly that they needed RCPs to start at the state level because they were duplicating their efforts when they were beginning at the regional level. They also evolved the model to allow for different organizations within each region to serve as the lead (e.g., CESA, regional economic development organizations, and/or technical colleges). Wisconsin's DPI assesses its processes every year and continues to find ways to make the model more efficient and effective.

Build In Time for Transition Planning

State leaders reiterate that teams should consider transition planning early in the process. The work should not dissolve if one or two individuals leave the planning team. Just as there was an action plan to implement career pathways development, there should be an action plan for a transition strategy to continue work past grant completion.



Conclusion

The NSFY initiative provided an opportunity for states to pilot career pathways opportunities for learners. Although the NSFY initiative ended in 2019, the work did not end as states continued to pursue career pathways work at local and state levels. State leaders offered recommendations based on their experiences to help guide other leaders embarking on or sustaining high-quality career pathways and equitable access for learners. The commitment to developing career pathways requires a strategic vision focused on long-term success without the expectation of immediate outcomes.

Methodology

The information in this resource comes from a variety of sources. Advance CTE conducted interviews with past and present state leaders to gather data and identify themes, which served as the primary source of information for state updates and examples. A semi-structured protocol was designed to guide the interviews, which took place from August to October 2023. Advance CTE also reviewed the following historical documents: [NSFY snapshots](#),⁴² [NSFY Impact Summary](#),⁴³ and RTI International's [executive summary](#)⁴⁴ and [web-based final report](#).⁴⁵ State leaders reviewed their state examples and approved the accuracy of state-related content.

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