

Alliance for Quality Career Pathways Beta Framework Executive Summary September 2013



Alliance for Quality
Career Pathways

a project of CLASP

[The Alliance for Quality Career Pathways](#) is a two-year (2012-2014), state-driven, CLASP-led initiative funded by the Joyce Foundation and James Irvine Foundation to identify criteria and indicators that define high-quality career pathway systems and a set of shared performance metrics for measuring and managing their success. The Alliance includes ten states that are leading the nation in experience with developing and taking to scale career pathways and that have volunteered to work together to develop the Alliance framework: **Arkansas, California, Illinois, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Oregon, Virginia, Washington, and Wisconsin.**¹

The framework developed by the Alliance for Quality Career Pathways is intended to provide a common understanding of high-quality career pathway systems and programs, regardless of the targeted industry, occupation, or credentials; the targeted population; or the design of the career pathways or programs. State and local/regional partnerships adopting the career pathway approach—within and beyond the ten Alliance states—can use the Alliance framework to build and strengthen their career pathway systems. This will enable them to provide seamless career paths that transcend the disconnects in the current system and provide essential supports for youths and adults—including those with limited education, English, skills, and/or work experiences—to build their skills, earn credentials of value, and access jobs and careers that support themselves and their families.

Our vision is that the Alliance framework of outcome-based career pathway metrics and system criteria and indicators will be instrumental in the continued growth and scaling of the career pathways field. It can be used to help existing career pathway systems ratchet up quality, help accelerate the development of new career pathway systems, and inform evaluation efforts of career pathway systems. The framework is designed to strike a balance between being deeply rooted in the reality of current career pathway efforts and aspiring to move the field to the next level of development.

This executive summary provides a high-level overview of the Alliance “Beta” Framework, which the Alliance developed for review and field-testing through December 2013. CLASP and the Alliance partners will incorporate feedback and release “Version 1.0” of the framework in spring 2014 along with a companion self-assessment tool. For more information and to download a copy of the beta framework, please visit [The Alliance for Quality Career Pathways](#) webpage.

Quick Take:

Alliance for Quality Career Pathways

- 10-state alliance led by CLASP
- Career pathways connect education, training, support services and work to help individuals with career and economic advancement and to help employers fill workforce skill gaps
- Framework for career pathway partners in states and regions to build new quality career pathway systems and to strengthen existing ones
- Two parts:
 - Page 6: Shared interim and outcome metrics for performance measurement and continuous improvement
 - Pages 7-8: Criteria and indicators for quality career pathways, systems, and programs
- “Beta” version under review now; final Version 1.0 available spring 2014

¹ The Alliance also includes a National Advisory Group of national experts including Ann Randazzo (Center for Energy Workforce Development), Bob Sheets (private consultant), Brandon Roberts (Working Poor Families Project), Darlene Miller (National Council for Workforce Education), Deborah Mills (Center for Occupational Research and Development), Debra Bragg (Office of Community College Research and Leadership), Gary Hoachlander (ConnectEd California), Israel Mendoza (private consultant), Judy Alamprese (Abt Associates), Karen Gardiner (Abt Associates), Kim Green (National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education Consortium), Lennox McLendon (National Council of State Directors for Adult Education), Mala Thakur (National Youth Employment Coalition), Mary Claggett (Jobs for the Future), and Nan Poppe (Completion by Design).

DEFINITIONS

Career pathways (working definition²) is an approach to connecting progressive levels of basic skills and postsecondary education, training, and supportive services in specific sectors or cross-sector occupations in a way that optimizes the progress and success of individuals—including those with limited education, English, skills, and/or work experience—in securing marketable credentials, family-supporting employment, and further education and employment opportunities. Career pathways help employers meet their workforce needs and help states and communities strengthen their workforces and economies.

The career pathway approach is embodied in a **local/regional career pathway system**, which is the supportive policy, funding, and data “infrastructure” built and maintained by a partnership of local and/or regional agencies, organizations, institutions, and employers/industries that is committed to building, scaling, and sustaining demand-driven career pathways and to following key guiding principles of career pathway systems (see figure 2 below). The system is comprised of **specific sector or cross-sector occupational career pathways** that consist of: (1) well-connected education and training offerings; (2) multiple entry points that accommodate participants entering at differing education and skill levels (including career pathway “bridge” programs to help those with limited education, English, skills, and work experiences access career pathway programs); and (3) multiple exit points at successively higher levels of family-supporting employment and aligned with subsequent educational entry points.

Each career pathway enables a participant—no matter his or her entry point—to earn marketable credentials and access employment at or above family-supporting wages. Local/regional career pathways often consist of multiple aligned career pathway programs (see figure 1). Career pathway systems are inclusive of career pathways and programs.

Career pathway programs are the building blocks of career pathways; they blend a set of programmatic elements in a specific sector or cross-sector occupational area and align them in a career pathway leading to marketable credentials. Career pathway programs are comprised of: (1) participant-focused approaches to instruction and occupational training; (2) appropriate and meaningful assessment of participants’ skills and needs; (3) supportive services and career navigation assistance for participants in the pathways (including early and ongoing career awareness and exploration and intensive support services for high-need populations); and (4) direct connections to employment that include quality work experiences and employment services.

Career pathway programs for youth also blend in youth development principles. Career pathway programs vary regarding the extent of the education and training and the number of credentials a participant can earn. If the end point of a particular career pathway program does not enable a participant to earn a credential(s) that qualifies him or her for employment at or above family-supporting wages, that program aligns with and connects to a subsequent career pathway program that is designed to meet this goal.

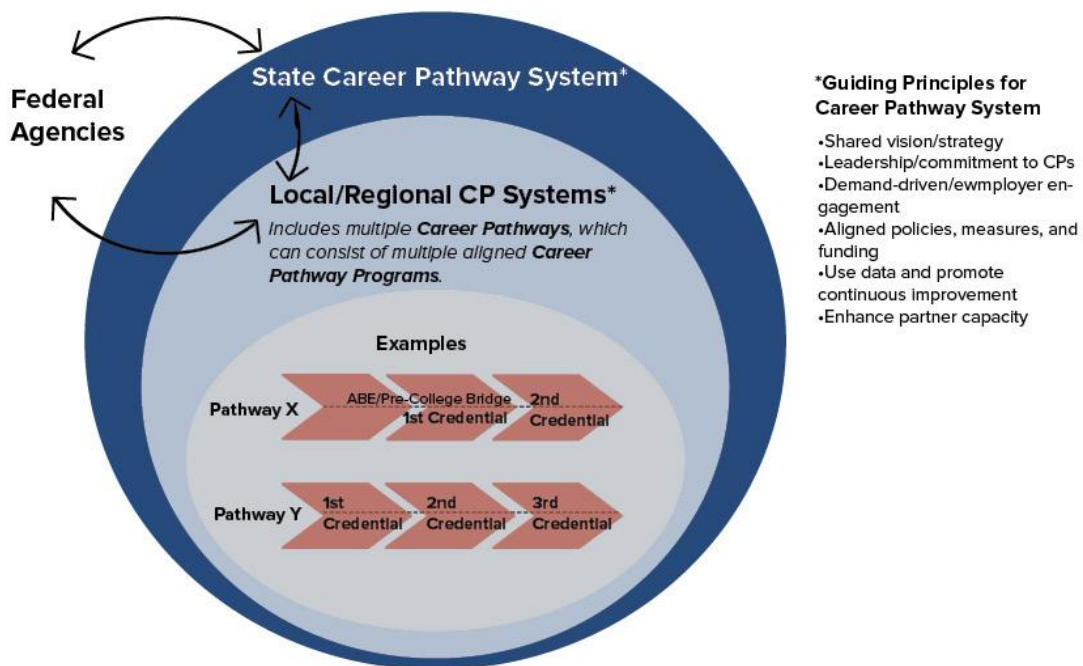
Local/regional career pathway systems work best when they are supported by a **state career pathway system**, which is the supportive policy, funding, and data “infrastructure” built and maintained by a partnership of state-level agencies, organizations, and employers/industries that provides leadership, supportive and aligned policies, and resources for state and local/regional demand-driven career pathway systems and that promotes the quality, scale, and sustainability of career pathways. The partnership follows key guiding principles in building and implementing the career pathway system (see figure 2 below). There is a feedback loop between the state career pathway system and the local/regional systems – as well as the relevant federal agencies - such that each is learning from the other and that each system is mutually reinforcing of the other.

² This is a hybrid of the previous AQCP working definition (based on the oft-used Oregon definition), the definition from the federal joint guidance letter on career pathways (April 4, 2012), and feedback from the AQCP partners.

Figure 1: Local/Regional Career Pathway and Programs



Figure 2: Career Pathway Systems



CAREER PATHWAY BETA METRICS

The purpose of the Alliance metrics is to provide a shared set of outcome metrics that can be used jointly by partners to measure career pathway participant progress and success and to use for continuous improvement of career pathways and programs. Development of this shared set of outcome metrics begins from the perspective of the career pathway and the participants rather than from the perspective of a particular program, institution, or funding stream.

The Alliance beta metrics include interim outcomes, education and training outcomes expected from specific career pathways, and labor market outcomes. The inclusion of all three types of outcomes in one shared set of metrics is intended to reduce disincentives to serving participants with lower education and skill levels; it also promotes a focus on the progression of participants in education, training and employment over time versus the focus of current performance measures on shorter-term outcomes. Operating under a set of career pathway-spanning metrics can help career pathway partnerships assess the success of their pathways – and the linked and aligned programs within those pathways – and engage in continuous improvement efforts. Additionally, a shared set of career pathway metrics used jointly by partners provides a “common language” across a variety of basic skills, workforce, postsecondary, and employment programs, which provides a more coherent understanding of regional workforce development for public and non-profit partners, and, just as importantly, for employers.

The Alliance career pathway metrics should be used in conjunction with the criteria and indicators discussed below. These metrics provide the content for criterion #4 under high-quality state career pathway systems and for criterion #6 under local/regional career pathway systems.

When establishing and using a shared set of career pathway metrics, partnerships will need to make three key decisions:

1. To whom should the career pathway metrics apply; in other words, who is a career pathway participant?
2. How should the partnership use the metrics? Are they appropriate for continuous improvement and/or performance accountability? Should the metrics be a common set of measures that partners use separately or should they be used to pool accountability for the partners as a group?
3. Which metrics are most appropriate for which career pathways?

WHO IS A CAREER PATHWAY PARTICIPANT?

To help answer the first question, the Alliance proposes the following three definitions for use with career pathway metrics:

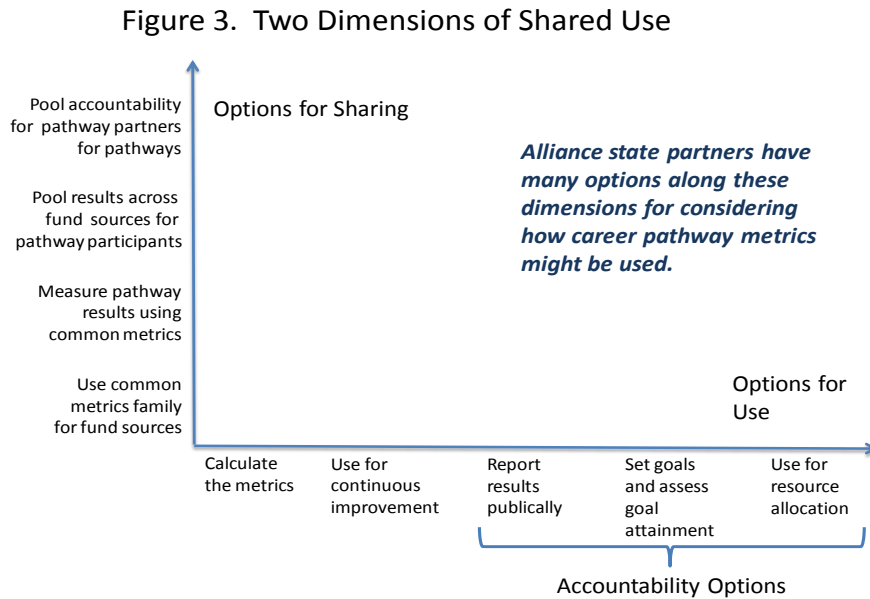
Career pathway participant: *An individual who is associated with a specific career pathway either by a formal declaration of intent or by enrolling in specific courses, activities, or services (or combinations thereof) that have been designated as formal entry points for a career pathway.*

Career pathway exiter: *A career pathway participant has exited career pathway courses and services and has not re-enrolled in pathway coursework, services, or activities. Career pathway exiters include those who attained specific credentials or interim outcomes prior to exit, as well as those who did not.*

Career pathway completer: *A career pathway exiter who attained one or more pathway education and training outcomes prior to exit, including licensure, credential, certificate, or degree.*

HOW SHOULD THE PARTNERSHIP USE THE CAREER PATHWAY METRICS?

To assist in answering the second question, the Alliance partners are exploring how career pathway metrics could support shared uses across funding streams and program settings that support career pathways using the typology shown in figure 3.



WHICH METRICS ARE MOST APPROPRIATE FOR WHICH CAREER PATHWAYS?

To assist in answering the third question, the Alliance partners are reviewing and field-testing the beta metrics listed below. From this menu of metrics, career pathway partners map those most appropriate for each career pathway in their local/regional system. Linked and aligned programs making up more extensive career pathways may take responsibility for certain subsets of metrics; however, all of the metrics in a career pathway are to be mapped as one whole. The review and field-testing will reveal if these are appropriate metrics and definitions, what may need to be changed, and what may be missing. CLASP and the Alliance partners will update the metrics for the release of Version 1.0 in spring 2014.

ALLIANCE BETA METRICS FOR CAREER PATHWAY MEASUREMENT

This is a menu of career pathway metrics from which partners will select based on specific career pathways; not all of these metrics are applicable to all career pathways.³

“A” group: Interim education and training outcomes: Interim education and training outcomes identify important progress steps, or “momentum points,” along a career pathway that are attained prior to the overall results for the pathway, and that are associated with eventual success on the pathway. Generally, these metrics support continuous improvement rather than accountability.

- A.1. Educational level gains (using Adult Education NRS levels or equivalent)
- A.2. High school diploma or equivalency attainment
- A.3. Developmental/remedial education completion
- A.4. College-level pathway course completion
- A.5. Employability credential attainment
- A.6. College-level math or English course completion
- A.7. Retention in pathway coursework
- A.8. Pathway credit accumulation 1 (12 semester college credits or 15 quarter credits in pathway)
- A.9. Pathway credit accumulation 2 (24 semester college credits or 30 quarter credits in pathway)

“B” group: Pathway education and training outcomes. These metrics encompass the primary educational and training results *for the pathway*. They comprise several types of outcomes, including licenses and industry credentials, certificates, and degrees. Application of these metrics to a particular career pathway would require that the specific licenses, certifications, credentials, and degrees that are available for pathway participants could be identified, so that pathway participants who obtain one or more of these outcomes can be included in the applicable metrics.

- B.1. Pathway license, industry certification, or apprenticeship certificate attainment
- B.2. Pathway certificate attainment
- B.3. Pathway Associate degree attainment
- B.4. Pathway Associate degree attainment or transfer to a 2 or 4 year institution
- B.5. Pathway credential attainment

“C” group: Labor market outcomes. Labor market outcome metrics encompass the primary labor market outcomes for the career pathway. They measure the progression in employment and earnings over time for pathway participants. Taken together, these metrics are an attempt to gauge the extent to which career pathways help career pathway participants secure “family-supporting employment and further education and training opportunities,” per the Alliance definition of career pathways.

- C.1. Employment at exit (first full quarter after pathway exit)
- C.2. Initial employment retention (second and third full quarter after pathway exit)
- C.3. Employment in targeted industry sector (first, second, or third full quarter after pathway exit)
- C.4. Subsequent employment retention (those employed in the second and third full quarter after pathway exit who are also employed in the sixth and seventh full quarters following exit)
- C.5. Initial earnings (of those employed in the second and third full quarters following exit)
- C.6. Initial earnings gain/loss (comparing the second and third quarters following completion with the second and third quarters prior to pathway entry)
- C.7. Subsequent earnings (sixth and seventh full quarters following exit)

³ Metrics definitions and Alliance partner comments can be found in the full Alliance for Quality Career Pathways Beta Framework.

BETA CRITERIA AND INDICATORS FOR HIGH-QUALITY CAREER PATHWAY SYSTEMS

The Alliance has identified four criteria for high-quality state career pathway systems and six criteria for high-quality local/regional career pathway systems that position these systems to achieve desired outcomes. The criteria are listed below with a summary of the indicators under each criterion. See the full version of the Alliance for Quality Career Pathways Beta Framework for specific indicators.

STATE CAREER PATHWAY SYSTEM

1. **Commit to a Shared Vision and Strategy:** State-level partners—in conjunction with local/regional partners—are committed to a shared vision of demand-driven career pathways and to a strategy for building, scaling, and sustaining state and local/regional career pathway systems.
 - ❖ **Summary of indicators:** the system includes key partners that provide critical functions in the career pathway system; that commit themselves to carrying out specific roles and responsibilities in a shared strategy; that adjust state policies to better support career pathways; and that participate in a communications feedback loop with both federal and local/regional partners. Employer partners at the state level promote and support career pathways.
2. **Provide Resources:** State-level partners identify and provide resources to build, scale, and sustain state and local/regional career pathway systems.
 - ❖ **Summary of indicators:** partners leverage federal, state, and philanthropic funds to support both the state and local/regional career pathway systems.
3. **Implement Supportive State Policies:** State-level partners implement supportive policies to build, scale, and sustain state and local/regional career pathway systems.
 - ❖ **Summary of indicators:** partners adopt shared definitions of career pathways and related concepts and embed them into supportive policies; partners provide specific and consistent guidance on cross-system alignment and funding to support career pathways. Partners adopt policies that facilitate credit recognition and transfer and that support a consistent credentialing system.
4. **Use Data and Shared Measures:** State-level partners use data to demonstrate and improve career pathway participant outcomes.
 - ❖ **Summary of indicators:** partners produce cross-agency data and report on shared measures of participant progress and success, including interim, training, education, and labor market outcomes (see Alliance career pathway beta metrics). Partners support local/regional use of data and evaluate performance of both state and local/regional systems. Partners use data to inform policy changes.

LOCAL/REGIONAL CAREER PATHWAY SYSTEM

1. **Commit to a Shared Vision and Strategy:** Local/regional partners—in conjunction with state partners—are committed to a shared vision of demand-driven career pathways and to a strategy for building, scaling, and sustaining a local/regional career pathway system.
 - ❖ **Summary of indicators:** the system is maintained by a partnership including employers, labor representatives, and key partners that provide critical functions in the system. They are committed to a shared vision and continuously and openly communicate with state partners regarding how to improve career pathway systems.
2. **Engage Employers:** Local/regional partners engage multiple employers and labor partners to support, shape, and utilize the local/regional career pathway system.
 - ❖ **Summary of indicators:** employer and labor partners jointly develop career pathways and programs with public and nonprofit partners and adopt policies and practices that support career pathway participant engagement and progression.
3. **Provide Resources:** Local/regional partners identify and provide resources to build, scale, and sustain the career pathway system.
 - ❖ **Summary of indicators:** partners leverage funds to support career pathways, programs, and the system. They ensure that practitioners have the knowledge, skills, and time as well as resources, tools, and infrastructure to implement a quality system.
4. **Implement Supportive Local/Regional Policies:** Local/regional partners implement supportive policies to build, scale, and sustain a local/regional career pathway system.
 - ❖ **Summary of indicators:** partners adopt shared definitions of career pathways and related concepts and build transparent pathways that have multiple on-ramps, multiple credentialed exit points, and services to keep participants engaged throughout the pathway. Partners adopt policies that support credit recognition, recognized credentials, and non-duplicative assessments.
5. **Adopt Evidence-Based Best Practices:** Local/regional partners adopt evidence-based best practices to optimize career pathway participant success.
 - ❖ **Summary of indicators:** partners build career pathways and aligned programs that include all four key elements: participant-focused instruction and service delivery; appropriate and useful assessment; supportive services; and quality work experiences.
6. **Use Data and Shared Measures:** Local/regional partners use data to demonstrate and improve career pathway participant outcomes.
 - ❖ **Summary of indicators:** partners use data to inform development of career pathways and professional development. Partners produce data and report on shared measures of participant progress and success, including interim, training, education, and labor market outcomes (see Alliance career pathway beta metrics). Partners use data and evaluation of the system to inform continuous improvement of processes and practices as well as policy changes.