

The Alliance for Quality Career Pathways Approach: Developing Criteria and Metrics for Quality Career Pathways

A Working Paper



FEBRUARY 2013 | THE ALLIANCE FOR QUALITY CAREER PATHWAYS

Introduction

The *Alliance for Quality Career Pathways* is a two-year, state-driven, CLASP-led effort to identify criteria that define high quality career pathway systems and a set of shared performance metrics for measuring and managing their success. CLASP will work with 10 states that are leading the nation in experience with developing and taking to scale career pathways, using a consensus process, to create this framework of criteria and metrics. These leading states participating in the Alliance are Arkansas, California, Illinois, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Oregon, Virginia, Washington, and Wisconsin.

The goal of the Alliance is to help policymakers and practitioners build on existing career pathway innovations that provide employers with the skilled workers they need and offer educational and economic opportunities and credentials for low-income workers. The Alliance recognizes that there are many different types of career pathways for different types of individuals seeking education and training. For purposes of developing its framework, the Alliance defines a **career pathway** as a well-articulated sequence of quality education and training offerings and supportive services that enable educationally underprepared youth and adults to advance over time to successively higher levels of education and employment in a given industry sector or occupation.¹ The career pathway approach reorients existing education and workforce services from a myriad of disconnected programs to a structure that focuses on the individuals in need of education and training and their career paths, and it provides clear transitions, strong supports, and other elements critical to the success of participants. It is not simply a new model; it is a new way of doing business.

The shared framework developed by the Alliance for Quality Career Pathways is intended to provide a common understanding of what high-quality career pathways look like, regardless of the targeted industry, occupation, or credentials; the focus population; or the design of the career pathway. The framework will include:

- Criteria that define high-quality career pathway systems and programs;
- Quality indicators that signal how well the career pathway systems and programs are functioning to support the achievement of desired participant outcomes;
- Interim participant outcome metrics that signal progress toward achieving desired longer-term outcomes; and
- Shared performance metrics across education, training, employment, and other public, private, and philanthropic systems involved in the career pathway.

This project is funded with the generous support of the Joyce Foundation and the Irvine Foundation.

With this framework, state and local partnerships adopting the career pathway approach—within and beyond the ten Alliance states—can improve and strengthen their career pathway systems; thereby, providing seamless career paths that transcend the disconnects and provide essential supports for educationally underprepared youth and adults 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 will be instrumental in the continued growth and scaling of career pathways. The framework can be used to help existing career pathway partnerships ratchet up quality, help accelerate the development of new career pathway efforts, and inform evaluation efforts in the career pathways field.

In this paper, we provide an overview of the Alliance for Quality Career Pathways approach and describe the concept and characteristics of the framework. In Section I, we propose a comprehensive definition of the career pathways approach in our **conceptual model of career pathway systems and programs**. This model will serve as the foundation for the Alliance’s framework of quality criteria and shared performance metrics. This conceptual model represents the Alliance’s shared understanding of career pathway systems and programs and is informed by:

- CLASP’s review of existing research and literature on career pathways;
- Extensive reviews by, and conversations with, several members of partner agencies and organizations in Alliance states and members of the Alliance’s National Advisory Group;²
- Communications with the researchers and project director of the Innovative Strategies for Increasing Self-Sufficiency (ISIS) project; and
- Feedback from participants at a national workforce education conference.³

This conceptual model seeks to strike a balance between being deeply rooted in the reality of the current career pathway efforts and aspiring to move the field to the next level of development. CLASP and the Alliance states anticipate that the field will continue to evolve and advance as we undertake this work, as will the Alliance framework. Our conceptual model is a work in progress until the Alliance concludes its activities in 2014.

In Section II, we provide a discussion of the four components of the framework for high-quality career pathways and how these components can be used for continuous improvement and performance measurement.

Section I: The Career Pathway Approach: A Model for Systems and Programs

Postsecondary credentials increasingly offer an avenue out of poverty and a lifetime of low-wage work for educationally under-prepared youth and adults. However, the nation’s education and workforce development systems have not been designed to provide all workers with a seamless path to earning these credentials. Despite all good intentions, this too often results in shortcomings that can block the road to educational and economic success for low-income workers.

First, often there are many disconnects in education and training delivery systems. The education and training pathway is disjointed: adult education is often housed in a state’s K-12 agency, where it is administratively disconnected from the higher education system. Both adult education and college developmental education are often disconnected from workforce education services. These disconnects can make it more difficult for students to progress from one level of education to the next or to transfer from one educational system to another.⁴ In addition, traditional programs often are disconnected from employers and their workforce needs.

Second, in many cases, today’s education and workforce development systems lack structures to help students navigate the disconnects, access critical support services, and gain the “college knowledge” necessary for success in postsecondary education. Although lower-skilled individuals typically can benefit from the help of multiple agencies in addition to those providing education and training (e.g., for support services), these agencies and their services generally are disconnected from one another and from education and workforce systems.⁵ In particular, many traditional higher education programs are not designed to serve first-generation and nontraditional students.

Third, basic skills education is an essential starting point for educationally underprepared youth and adults, but its traditional, drawn-out sequential structure typically spans several years, and lower-skilled students face the costs of tuition, fees, and forgone wages and work experience. Additionally, traditional basic skills instruction typically does not contextualize instruction or make connections to the world of work. Therefore, students facing economic pressure to work and support their families may not see the relevance of the education and discontinue it before making headway toward earning credentials and securing better jobs.

Adopting a Career Pathway Approach

Adopting the **career pathway approach** means redesigning the delivery of education, training, and employment services to be much more integrated, aligned, and participant-centered. In tight fiscal environments, it can be financially prudent for partners at the state and local levels to commit to supporting a shared strategy, rather than for them to implement separate—or even competing—approaches. Institutions must transform the way they design and deliver education and services and how they interact with partners. Adoption of a career pathway approach should radically deepen the collaboration and coordination among agencies, institutions, and organizations at each level and improve their individual and collective capacity to meet workforce needs and open doors of opportunity for low-income, lower-skilled individuals.

The career pathway approach has been adopted by partnerships in both local and regional areas and at the state level. Below, we describe Local/Regional Career Pathway Systems—including the Career Pathway programs that comprise these systems—and State Career Pathway Systems, which provide the supportive policy environment for local/regional systems.

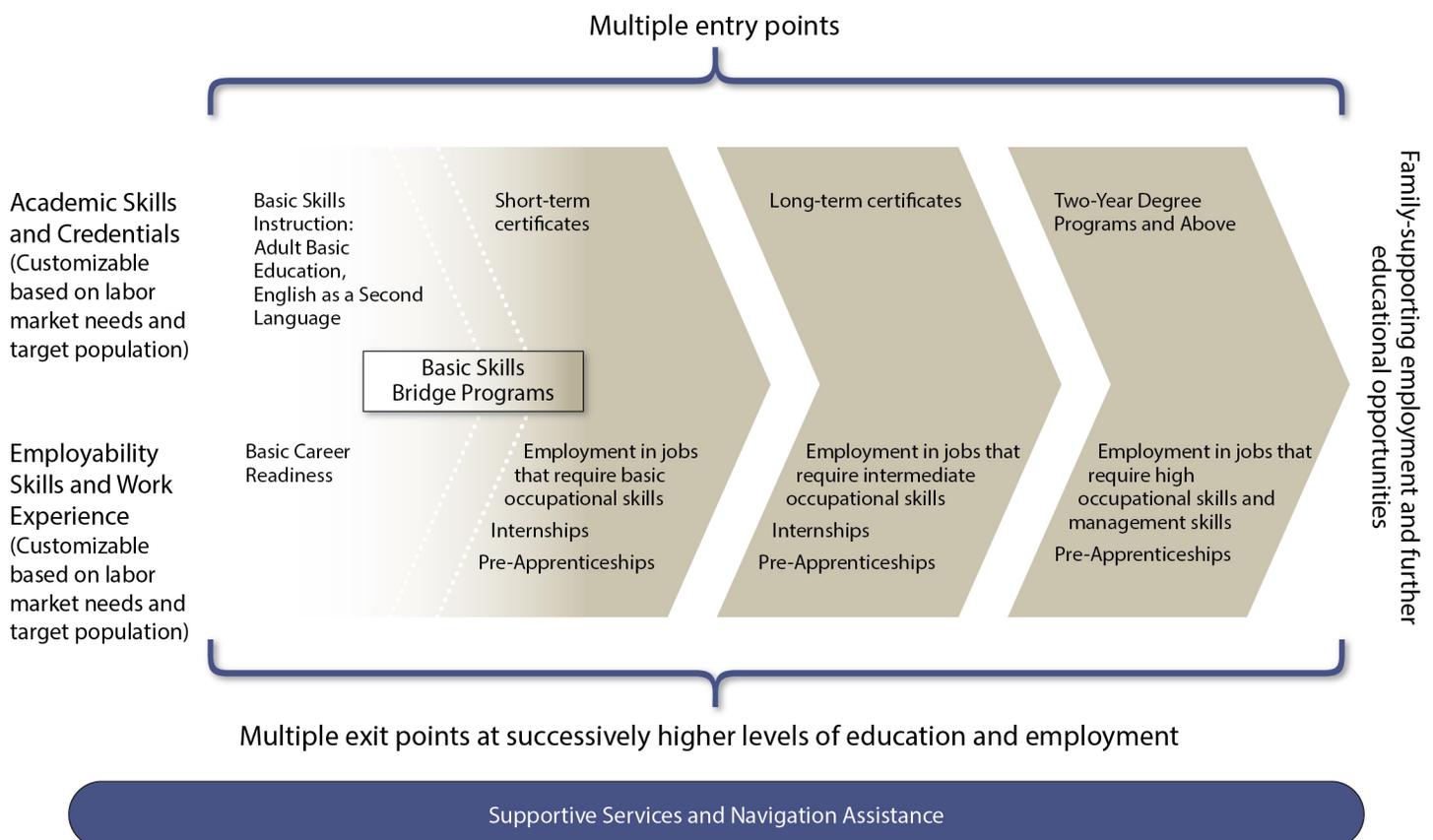
LOCAL/REGIONAL CAREER PATHWAY SYSTEMS

A **local/regional career pathway system** is a partnership among local and/or regional agencies, organizations, institutions, and employers/industry that has adopted an integrative, transformative career pathways approach.⁶ As illustrated in Figure 1, the system is comprised of the following structural elements that make up the career pathway:

- A **well-articulated sequence of education and training** offerings;
- **Multiple entry points** that accommodate participants entering at differing skill levels (including adults and out-of-school youth with very low basic skills);
- **Multiple exit points** at successively higher levels of education and employment that are aligned with marketable, stackable, “credible” credentials; and
- **Supportive services and navigation assistance** for participants in the pathways.

Ideally, a career pathway that focuses on educationally underprepared adults and youth starts with basic skill “bridge” programs.⁷ They provide seamless transitions for participants to earn marketable credentials in demand-driven fields that bear or articulate to postsecondary credit (i.e. are “credible”) and accumulate to higher credentials (i.e., are “stackable”).⁸ The pathway should lead to employment paying self-sufficient or family-supporting earnings and offering opportunities for advancement. (More robust career pathway systems may include stackable credentials that provide wages well beyond self-sufficiency.) The specific credentials included and the length of career pathway will vary based on the industry or occupation.

FIGURE 1. Structural Elements of a Local/Regional Career Pathway System



In addition to these structural elements, a local/regional career pathway system is managed by a partnership that has adopted these **guiding principles**:

- **Adopt and articulate a shared vision:** Partners adopt a shared vision of the career pathway system and a governance structure (formal or informal) that clearly delineates each partner's roles and responsibilities (e.g., through a memorandum of understanding).
- **Demonstrate leadership and commitment to institutionalizing career pathways:** Partners demonstrate collaborative leadership and a commitment to building, sustaining, and scaling up career pathways. This approach becomes the way they do business on a regular basis.
- **Ensure that career pathways are demand-driven, focus on sectors/occupations, and deeply engage employers:** The career pathway system is responsive to the specific, dynamic contexts of the regional labor market and significantly engages multiple employers within a sector or occupational area in an interactive, ongoing working relationship (through sector strategies where applicable).
- **Align policies, measures, and funding:** Partners align related policies, performance and accountability measures, and funding for career pathways, including through the use of aligned and braided funding across funding streams.
- **Use and promote data and continuous improvement strategies:** Partners are data-driven and focus on continuously improving efforts by measuring participants' interim and ultimate outcomes as well as process indicators.
- **Support professional development:** Partners support robust and ongoing professional development for career pathways practitioners and administrators.

A local/regional career pathway system is an extensive undertaking that almost always encompasses more than a single partnership or program. Usually, a series of career pathway programs are linked together to form a local/regional system. **Career pathway programs** are the building blocks of career pathways, represented by the key structural elements described above. They *blend* a set of interventions in a specific industry or occupation and *are aligned* in a longer-term career pathway leading to marketable, stackable, "credible" credentials. A comprehensive career pathway *program* might well be a full career *pathway*. However, most are shorter, aligned segments of a longer career pathway.

Career pathway programs are comprised of the following interventions:

- Learner-centered approaches to instruction and occupational training, including contextualization, dual enrollment, acceleration, and prior learning assessment;
- Appropriate and meaningful assessment of participants' skills and needs (including accessibility needs for participants with disabilities);
- Supportive services, including academic supports (e.g., tutoring and advising); nonacademic supports (e.g., child care, transportation, and financial assistance); career exploration; and, navigation assistance through the career pathway program and, ideally, into retained employment; and
- Quality work experiences, including job placement assistance and, ideally, quality sector/occupation-specific pre-employment work experiences (e.g., internships, apprenticeships).

The unique added value of the career pathway approach is the tight congruence of these interventions and the deep level of service and assistance to participants. When these building-block programs are linked and aligned into a career pathway, and when that pathway is nourished and sustained by a partnership adhering to the guiding principles,

the result is a career pathway system. Done well, the value of a career pathway system as a whole is greater than the sum of its parts. To build a strong workforce and contribute to a healthy regional economy, partnerships should aim to build comprehensive career pathways and systems and not be satisfied with simply providing short-term career pathway programs. (For an example of how the Alliance conceptual model maps against a mature local healthcare career pathway that has adopted the structural elements and guiding principles, see the case study of Instituto del Progreso Latino's *Carreras en Salud* in the Appendix.)

The most comprehensive career pathway systems encompass a variety of career pathways that span different industry or occupational sectors and are offered through multiple agencies and funding streams. A comprehensive system would include traditional academic high school-to-college career pathways; secondary and postsecondary career and technical education career pathways; apprenticeships; career pathways for educationally underprepared adults and youth; and, career pathways for dislocated workers. A career pathway system does not seek to replace any of these pathways, some of which may already exist; rather, it connects and enhances them and develops new ones for populations and industries that could benefit from a career pathway approach.

STATE CAREER PATHWAY SYSTEMS

A **state career pathway system** is a partnership of state-level agencies, organizations, and employers/industry that provides leadership and a supportive policy environment for local/regional career pathway systems and programs and that promotes the quality, scale, and sustainability of career pathways. Partners at the state level may include the state workforce agency, adult basic education, postsecondary education, economic development, and human services. (For more information, see the *Six Key Elements of Career Pathways* developed by the U.S. Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, and Labor.) Partnerships also should consider including agencies focusing on youth, people with disabilities, and those in the corrections system.

The system and its partners follow similar guiding principles to the local/regional system, but with key differences. For example, at the state level, governors, legislators, and state agency heads can be important stakeholders who can demonstrate leadership and commitment to institutionalizing career pathways. Under the guiding principle of “demand-driven, sector/occupational based, and employer engagement,” the roles of the state partnership are to ensure that local/regional career pathways are responsive to specific and dynamic regional labor market contexts, and to significantly engage multiple employers in an interactive, ongoing relationship, ideally through a connection to any state sector strategy.

The state system partnership should align related policies and performance measures and braid funding at the state level. In addition, it should develop statewide policies that specifically support career pathways. Policies and measures should be aligned both *horizontally* across agencies and *vertically* within each agency among state, regional, and local levels of government. Finally, the state system should include professional development opportunities for local/regional staff and state-level staff involved in career pathways.

States may be at different stages of system development. For example, in some states, a local area or region may have developed a robust career pathway system with multiple career pathways in the absence of a state system. In other states, highly visionary and committed state leaders may be leading the way and helping local areas and regions develop career pathway systems. In still other states, the two levels may be emerging together, albeit at different paces given funding opportunities and leadership. (For examples of emerging state pathway systems, see Box 1.)

Figure 2 illustrates the conceptual model of state career pathway systems and local/regional career pathway systems and programs.

BOX 1: Examples of Emerging State Career Pathway Systems in Two Alliance States

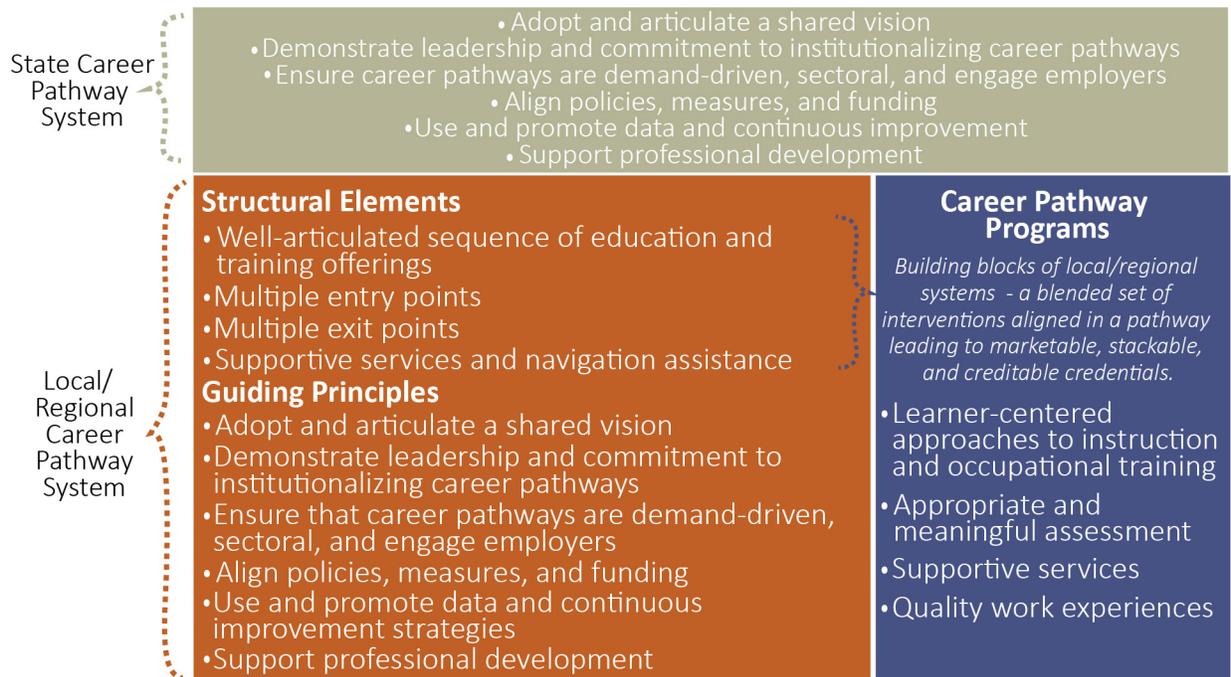
VIRGINIA'S CAREER PATHWAYS

This interagency effort developed out of a Governor's Task Force in 2008 that brought together leaders from the Office of the Governor, the Department of Labor and Industry, the State Council of Higher Education, the Virginia Community College System, the Virginia Department of Education, the Virginia Economic Development Partnership, and other state agencies. This task force created a set of coordinated strategies for building a statewide workforce development and education pathway. The principal purpose was to develop a workforce customized to the needs of industry and responsive to regional labor market demand. Through a combination of state, federal, and private investments, Virginia is expanding upon this work to create industry-specific career pathways that extend from middle school through retirement age in each region of the state. These activities include scaling up the promising PluggedInVA model, which combines basic skills instruction and GED preparation with industry certifications and for-credit college coursework. Participants graduate with a GED, an industry certification, a Career Readiness Certificate, a digital literacy certificate, at least 12 community college credits, and experiences with local employers. Virginia's progress in career pathways is suggested by the Governor's inclusion of both proposed legislation and budget amendment in his workforce package presented for consideration in Virginia's 2013 General Assembly and by the creation of a new Director of Education and Workforce Development who acts as a liaison between the Secretariats of Education and Commerce and Trade.

MINNESOTA'S FASTTRAC ADULT CAREER PATHWAY INITIATIVE

This initiative is a statewide career pathway system designed to assist workers with very low skills. Minnesota FastTRAC is based on a career pathway approach and provides bridge programs to help educationally underprepared adults increase their foundational and occupational skills and acquire industry-recognized credentials and employment. Initiated in 2007 through the Joyce Foundation's Shifting Gears initiative, the Minnesota FastTRAC career pathway bridge model is supported by cross-system collaboration among public and private workforce development, adult education, and career and technical education to focus on the needs of low-skill adult learners. The goal is to make Minnesota FastTRAC bridge programming a standard Adult Basic Education (ABE) offering and have ABE integrated instruction available at every Minnesota state college. Minnesota FastTRAC has gained significant traction among high-level state leadership: The Governor's Workforce Development Council supported its statewide expansion, and the governor proposed new, dedicated funding for the initiative in 2012 (although the state legislature did not pass it). Career pathway leaders in the state are considering how to build upon the nationally recognized Minnesota FastTRAC state career pathway bridge system to include and link to new and existing career pathways in postsecondary and workforce training. The first recommendation in *The Most Competitive Workforce in the World*, the Governor's Workforce Development Council 2013 report to the state legislature, is to create a state career pathway system and funding stream that can help boost postsecondary educational attainment in high-growth, high-demand occupations, especially for low-wage and low-skill adults

FIGURE 2. Conceptual Model of State Career Pathway Systems and Local/Regional Career Pathway Systems and Programs



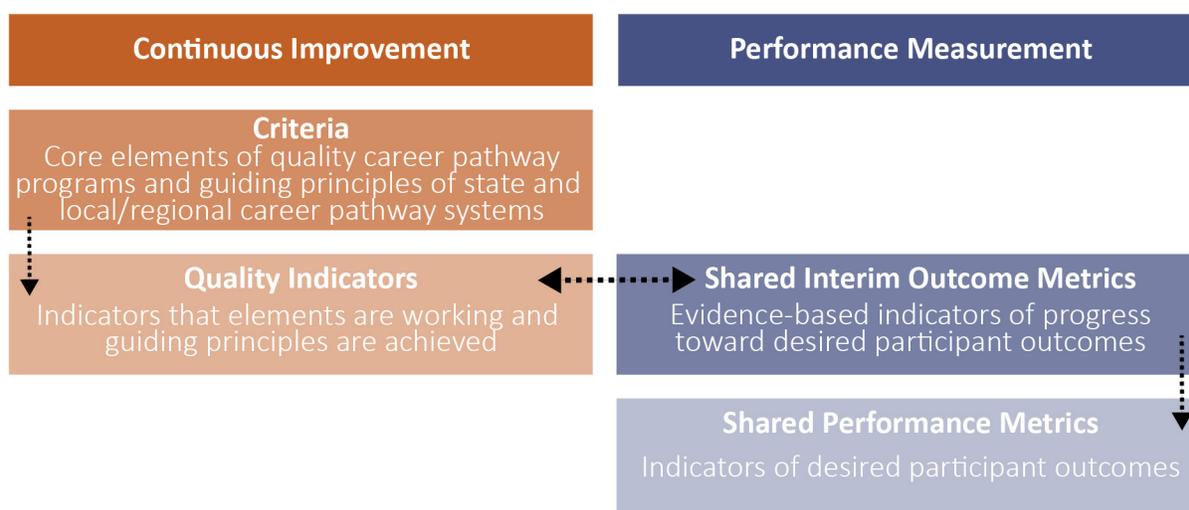
Section II: The Alliance Framework for High-Quality Career Pathways

During this two-year initiative, CLASP and the Alliance states will use a consensus process to develop a framework of quality criteria and shared performance metrics for measuring and managing high-quality state and local/regional career pathway systems and career pathway programs. The framework will be comprised of four components:

1. *Criteria* for defining high-quality systems and programs;
2. *Quality indicators* for all criteria that signal how well the systems and programs are functioning to support the achievement of desired participant outcomes;
3. *Interim participant outcome metrics* that indicate progress toward achieving desired longer-term outcomes; and
4. *Performance outcome metrics* that are shared across education, training, employment, and other public, private, and philanthropic systems involved in the career pathway system.

The framework has a variety of uses. The first two components (criteria and quality indicators) will be developed for continuous improvement purposes, while the second two components (shared interim outcome metrics and shared performance metrics) will identify useful metrics for shared performance measurement (see Figure 3).

FIGURE 3. Four Components of the Alliance Framework of High-Quality Career Pathway Systems and Programs



To help states and localities use and apply the framework, CLASP will develop a self-assessment tool, based on the content of the framework, that enables state and local/regional stakeholders to assess the quality of their career pathway systems and programs or, for emerging career pathway states, help build a quality effort from the start. States and local regions also may choose to use the framework and self-assessment tool to foster a shared approach to quality improvement or performance accountability for career pathway systems and programs.

Framework Components for Continuous Improvement

The framework will include criteria of high-quality career pathway systems for each of the structural elements and guiding principles. Each criterion will include one or more indicators that state and local partnerships can use to determine if their programs, pathways, and systems are meeting the criteria. To preserve the inherent value of career pathway systems in tailoring services to the needs of different populations, industries, and local circumstances, the criteria and indicators will not presume specific programming; prescribe roles for education, training, employment or other partners (e.g., adult education, career and technical education, the workforce system, community colleges, community-based organizations); or, target populations or industry/occupational sectors. In other words, the quality criteria and indicators will focus on *what* should be done rather than *how* or *by whom*. The components in the continuous improvement section of the framework are the following:

- **Criteria for Quality Career Pathway Systems and Programs.** The *criteria* will describe the structural elements and guiding principles of career pathway systems and programs that show promise in contributing to the achievement of desired participant outcomes. The criteria will draw on available research-based evidence of promising and effective practices (and, where evidence is lacking, will require informed professional judgment).⁹
- **Quality Indicators.** The framework will include measurable *quality indicators* for all criteria to assess how well specific strategies and services are functioning to contribute to participant progress toward desired outcomes. The companion background paper, *A Framework for Measuring Career Pathways Innovation*, describes the types of metrics that will inform the quality indicators (i.e., they include the characteristics and design features of pathway systems, participant characteristics, and implementation metrics such as enrollments, numbers of programs, and funding levels).

A useful model of quality indicators for career pathways spanning high school and postsecondary education can be found in the Linked Learning initiative funded by the Irvine Foundation. ConnectEd has developed a framework of 40 quality criteria the schools and districts can use to ensure their pathways are of high quality (see *The Rubric for Linked Learning Pathway Quality Review and Continuous Improvement*). The Alliance for Quality Career Pathways can learn a great deal about quality indicators, career pathway systems, and scaling from the Linked Learning initiative.

See Box 2 for examples of criteria and quality indicators. Note that the simple illustrations provided here are not indicative of the draft framework, which is currently being developed.

Framework Components for Performance Measurement

The second section of the framework will include metrics designed for shared performance measurement purposes. These metrics are the following:

- **Shared Interim Outcome Metrics.** To the extent there is adequate evidence, the Alliance will identify interim participant outcome measures that data analyses have shown to be predictive of participants' future success in achieving the intended longer-term participant outcomes. The types of metrics that could be part of this component include "transition metrics" that follow participants across education and training funding sources and settings as well as interim education and training outcomes for participants (e.g., postsecondary enrollment, course completions, skill level attainment, attainment of stackable credentials, persistence). The Alliance states will consider whether any of the quality indicators for continuous improvement purposes also should be considered as interim outcome

measures for shared performance measurement purposes (this relationship is depicted in Figure 3 by the dotted line arrow).

BOX 2: Illustrative Examples of Criteria and Quality Indicators

The final framework will include criteria and quality indicators of high-quality career pathway systems for each of the core elements and overarching principles of career pathway systems. Illustrations of each are shown below.

Structural Element: *Supportive services, including academic supports (e.g., tutoring, advising); nonacademic supports (e.g., child care, transportation, financial assistance); career exploration; and navigation assistance through the career pathways program and, ideally, into retained employment.*

Criterion: Program staff and/or Instructors work with students to identify career goals.

- **Quality Indicator:** Students have identified a career goal.

Criterion: Program staff and/or Instructors work with students to identify potential personal and financial barriers to persistence and success.

- **Quality Indicator:** Students have resolved potential barriers to persistence and success.

Criterion: Programs have adopted a clear referral method and procedures for referring students to supportive services.

- **Quality Indicator:** Program staff is knowledgeable about existing referral policies and use them to ensure students are referred to appropriate supportive services.

Criterion: There is a systemic, transparent method by which students are referred to and can access supportive services within an institution or through partners, such as community-based organizations.

- **Quality Indicator:** Students have used necessary supportive services to ensure persistence in the program.

It is important to identify appropriate interim outcome measures because the performance outcomes expected of high-quality career pathway systems and programs are higher than many workforce development and adult education programs can produce in terms of both the quality of jobs targeted and the level of educational attainment and credentials sought. Interim outcome measures will recognize the accomplishments of career pathway partners in helping participants expeditiously achieve major milestones as they progress toward the higher outcomes, while being cognizant of the increased challenge in achieving these outcomes, especially with learners who initially function at low levels of literacy and English language proficiency.

- **Shared Performance Outcome Metrics.** The Alliance will identify shared performance metrics for assessing career pathways outcomes for the purposes of shared performance measurement or accountability. The types of metrics that will be considered include education and training outcomes associated with a career pathway—not just a career pathway program (e.g., completion of programs and the earning of a diploma, degree, or other credentials of value in the labor market). Critical labor market outcomes will include obtaining employment (including in a training-related industry or occupation), employment retention, and earnings.

The metrics part of the Alliance framework will include measures that can be used by local/regional career pathway systems and programs as well as by state career pathway systems. The Alliance companion paper, *A Framework for Measuring Career Pathways Innovation*, analyzes the types of measures that can be used in career pathway systems and programs and the various ways in which they can be used (e.g., for continuous improvement, accountability). That paper provides background that will inform the Alliance’s development of the framework’s shared performance metrics component and can be found on the Alliance’s website: www.clasp.org/careerpathways.

Next Steps

The conceptual model and overview proposed in this working paper and the companion paper will serve as a foundation for the subsequent development of the framework of quality criteria and shared performance metrics for quality career pathway systems and programs. As a working paper, this document will be revised and updated as we refine the conceptual model based on what we learn from developing and reviewing the framework. CLASP and the Alliance will release a “beta” framework in spring 2013, which Alliance states will review and field test in the summer and fall of 2013. CLASP will incorporate feedback from this process as well as from the National Advisory Group and release Version 1.0 of the framework in spring 2014. The development of the framework is an open process, and we welcome comments on this paper and subsequent products.

Appendix: Illustration of Structural Elements and Guiding Principles in Action: Carreras en Salud

Carreras en Salud (Careers in Health) is a comprehensive career pathway in Chicago designed for lower-skilled Latino adults seeking careers in healthcare.¹⁰ *Carreras* was initiated by two Chicago community-based organizations - Instituto del Progreso Latino (Instituto) and Association House - and Wilber Wright College (one of the City Colleges of Chicago). Instituto and Association House are affiliates of National Council of La Raza, a national Latino advocacy organization that worked with them at the outset. Although *Carreras* is a single - albeit extensive - career pathway, it includes all of the structural elements of a local/regional career pathway system and exhibits at least some level of adherence to all of the guiding principles. The table below maps *Carreras* against the Alliance conceptual model to illustrate a comprehensive career pathway made of several linked and aligned career pathway programs. This example also shows how a comprehensive pathway can potentially be considered a local career pathway *system*. It is presented here as an illustration of a career pathway (not all program elements and activities are included).

Structural Elements and Career Pathway Programs	
Well-articulated sequence of education and training offerings	The <i>Carreras</i> pathway has four linked and aligned programs: two pre-college bridge programs and two college-level degree programs. Figure 8 in <i>How to Build Bridge Programs That Fit into a Career Pathway: A Step-by-Step Guide Based on the Carreras en Salud Program in Chicago</i> is a visual of this comprehensive career pathway. Instituto provides adult and English education in the bridge programs. <i>Carreras</i> tracks and has high rates of program retention, progression, and advancement through the career pathway. Its career pathway programs include: contextualized “bridge” program instruction (the two bridge programs only), assessments of skills and support service needs, supportive services, and quality work experiences.
Multiple entry points	The lowest skill level at which a participant can enter the pathway is English language grade level 6; the pathway has six additional entry points for students at different skill levels.
Multiple exit points	The <i>Carreras</i> career pathway has four credentialed exit points aligned with the four programs (in ascending order): Certified Nursing Assistant; Patient Care Technician; Licensed Practical Nurse; and Registered Nurse. The last two are college-credit programs. Recently, <i>Carreras</i> has expanded to include a new pathway program track for students to become Certified Medical Assistants (health and informatics) instead of entering the nursing pathway through the CNA route. This expands options for students and evolves this comprehensive pathway closer to a career pathway system consisting of multiple pathways. Skills and credits earned at lower levels articulate to upper levels (e.g., the CNA certification provides one college credit that articulates to the pre-LPN bridge program, which provides the student with 40 credit hours applicable toward the LPN program).
Supportive services and navigation assistance	Association House identifies and helps participants address nonacademic barriers to educational and employment success (e.g., family problems, lack of work experience, personal issues). The program offers free child care while students are in class. Students have access to academic tutoring and must participate in career counseling (e.g., skills inventory, career plan development, resume writing). Instituto’s Center for Working Families provides additional support services.

Guiding Principles	
Adopt and articulate a shared vision	Instituto and Association House are the convening partners. Other key organizational partners include Wilbur Wright College and its Humboldt Park Vocational and Education Center. NCLR helped fund and promote the program. The partners have a shared vision of the career pathway and execute memoranda of understanding regarding partners' roles, rights, and obligations, including project management roles, data-sharing agreements, and students' right to confidentiality. A program manual details program procedures (e.g., recruiting, enrolling students) and includes all forms for applicants, as well as an internal reporting template and minutes and agendas of monthly meetings. Additionally, partners consciously promote the project as a collaboration of multiple organizations rather than as one organization's project, and they have a shared PowerPoint presentation and a media policy.
Demonstrate leadership and commitment to institution-izing career pathways	Key partners made a commitment to <i>Carreras</i> for the long-term and not simply through one grant period. A key ingredient to maintaining stability has been thorough and regular communication among partners. Each of the key partners has had a consistent representative on the program management team for at least five years. The partners committed to funding a program coordinator for the project. The position was initially part time, but it became full time when funds became available.
Ensure that career pathways are demand-driven, focus on sectors and occupations, and deeply engage employers	<i>Carreras</i> began with a labor market analysis that identified health care as a demand sector offering well-paying career path opportunities, including ones those for sub-baccalaureate credential holders. Key employer partners include Metropolitan Chicago Healthcare Council (MCHC has over 49 hospital members), Casa Central, the Chicago Department of Health, the Erie Family Health Center, the Hispanic Nurses Association, Lakeshore Health Center, Mercy Hospital and Medical Center, St. Elizabeth Hospital, St. Joseph Home of Chicago, and Swedish Covenant Hospital. MCHC has played a key role by helping <i>Carreras</i> access multiple employer partners as a group and individually. Employers have played several roles, such as providing job and industry data, reviewing curricula, and offering workplace learning and employment. Employers are frequently involved in various aspects of the initiative. <i>Carreras</i> is linked to the Illinois Critical Skills Shortage Initiative (a sector initiative).
Align policies, measures, and funding	Any of the key partners can be a fiscal agent for grants supporting the project, depending on the type of funds and funder requirements. Partners collaborate to write proposals. They have leveraged multiple sources of funding, including the Workforce Investment Act, the Illinois Department of Human Services, the Aspen Institute, and the U.S. Department of Education.
Use and promote data	With support from the Aspen Institute, <i>Carreras</i> built a data collection system to track enrollments, retention and progress, and success (graduation, licensing and certification, and job placement).
Professional development	The partners consciously hire instructors who understand nontraditional students and how to contextualize curricula for them. <i>Carreras</i> provides ongoing professional development and conducts frequent reviews and discussions of its curriculum.

Sources: How to Build Bridge Programs That Fit into a Career Pathway: A Step-by-Step Guide Based on the Carreras en Salud Program in Chicago by Dr. Ricardo A. Estrada with contributions by Tom DuBois, Instituto del Progreso Latino, 2010; and Creating a Successful Bridge Program: A “How To” Guide by the Illinois Community College Board and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Development, 2012.

Endnotes

- 1 Adapted from the Oregon Career Pathways definition; see <http://www.worksourceoregon.org/index.php/career-pathways/128-what-are-career-pathways>.
- 2 The members of the National Advisory Group are Ann Randazzo (Center for Energy Workforce Development), Bob Sheets (private consultant), Brandon Roberts (Working Poor Families Project), Deborah Mills (Center for Occupational Research and Development), Debra Bragg (Office of Community College Research and Leadership), Eric Seleznow (National Skills Coalition), Gary Hoachlander (ConnectEd California), Israel Mendoza (private consultant), Judy Alamprese (Abt Associates), Julian Alssid (Workforce Strategy Center), 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 Clagett (Jobs for the Future), and Nan Poppe (Completion by Design). Special thanks to Julian Alssid and Melissa Goldberg of the Workforce Strategy Center, Mary Clagett, Karen Gardiner, Nan Poppe, Brandon Roberts, Audrey Theis, and Mala Thakur for providing extensive feedback on versions of this paper.
- 3 CLASP staff presented a version of the conceptual model in a workshop at the National Council for Workforce Education in October 2012 and received instructive feedback. Also, two recent publications have been particularly helpful: (1) Career Pathways as a Framework for Program Design and Evaluation: A Working Paper from the Innovative Strategies for Increasing Self-Sufficiency (ISIS) Project by David Fein of Abt Associates, Inc., which informed our understanding of the core elements of career pathway programs and the difference between career pathway “programs” and “systems”; and (2) the Six Key Elements of Career Pathways developed by the U.S. Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, and Labor, which provided a framework of key steps for developing career pathways and that influenced the guiding principles in the Alliance conceptual model.
- 4 Marcie Foster, Julie Strawn, and Amy Ellen Duke-Benfield, *Beyond Basic Skills: State Strategies to Connect Low-Skilled Students to an Employer-Valued Postsecondary Education*, CLASP, March 2011.
- 5 Julie Strawn, *Policies to Promote Adult Education and Postsecondary Alignment: Paper Prepared for the National Commission on Adult Literacy*, CLASP, October 2007.
- 6 Partners at the local/regional level may include Workforce Investment Boards and local workforce development agencies, community colleges and other postsecondary education providers, adult basic education providers, TANF providers and human service agencies, economic development agencies, community-based organizations, and business representatives. See the *Six Key Elements of Career Pathways* developed by the U.S. Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, and Labor.
- 7 Career pathway bridge programs or instruction are an extension of the career pathway concept, designed specifically for adults and youth with lower education and skill levels as a first step articulated with the academic and technical content of the next step of the pathway. Through new curricula, innovative delivery modes, and joint planning and instruction, this model helps bridge the skills gap that can prevent individuals with limited basic skills from entering and succeeding in postsecondary education. Well-designed career pathway bridges incorporate most of the elements of career pathways, such as support services and a strong role for employers. In addition, because they are an on ramp for lower-skilled individuals, bridges combine basic skills with career-technical content, and they contextualize basic skills and English language to the knowledge and skills needed in specific occupations. Career pathway bridges may also employ integrated instruction (team teaching) or dual enrollment in basic skills and career-technical education courses.
- 8 The U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration defines a stackable credential as follows: “A credential is considered stackable when it is part of a sequence of credentials that can be accumulated over time to build up an individual’s qualifications and help [him or her] to move along a career pathway or up a career ladder to different and potentially higher-paying jobs. For example, one can stack a high school diploma, an associate’s degree, and then typically obtain two more years of appropriate postsecondary education to obtain a bachelor’s degree. An individual can also stack an interim career/work readiness or pre-apprenticeship certificate, then complete an apprenticeship, and later earn a degree or advanced certification.” See the Training and Employment Guidance Letter No. 15-10, issued on December 15, 2010.

Endnotes (Continued)

- ⁹ Including research from the Workforce Strategy Center; ConnectEd's Rubric for Linked Learning Pathway Certification; the U.S. Departments of Labor, Education, and Health and Human Services' Six Key Elements of Career Pathways; the National Council for Workforce Education; and Jobs for the Future, among others.
- ¹⁰ The Carreras pathway includes three "ladders": an academic skills ladder, a technical career ladder, and a social skills ladder. All three are essential to participants' successful outcomes. Also Carreras uses the term "bridge" to define what the Alliance has defined as "career pathway programs."