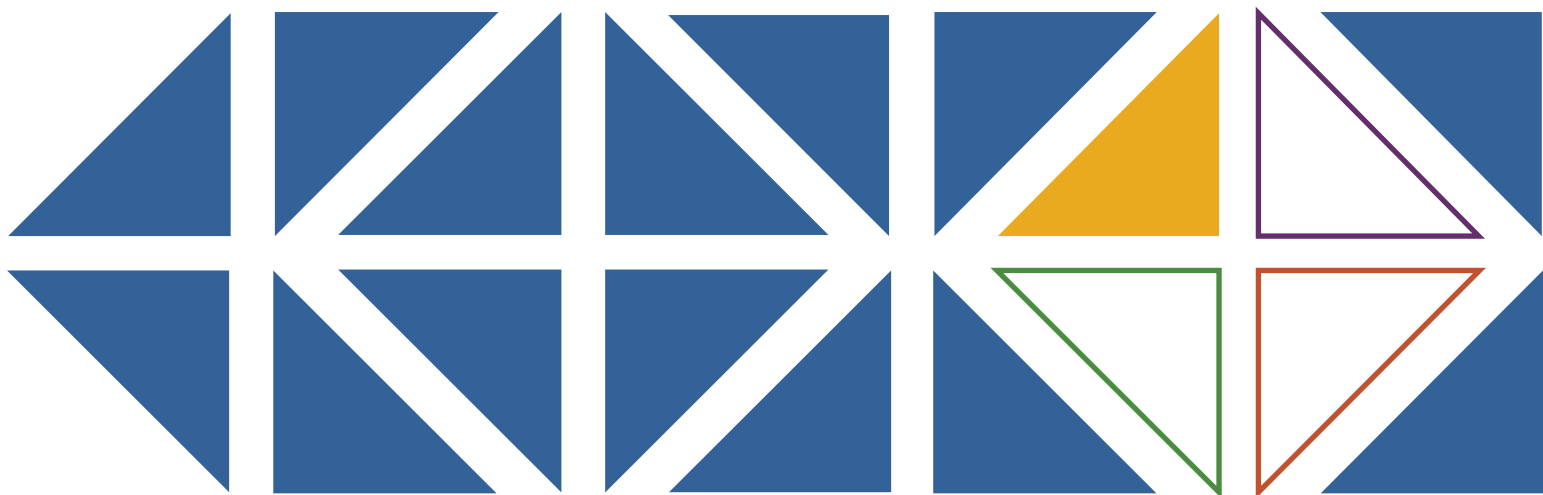# Designing a Career Pathways System
A Framework for State Education Agencies

Chapter 1
**Identifying and Engaging Key Stakeholders and
Defining Goals of the Career Pathways System**

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE
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Designing a Career Pathways System:
A Framework for State Education Agencies

CHAPTER 1: IDENTIFYING AND ENGAGING KEY STAKEHOLDERS AND DEFINING GOALS OF THE CAREER PATHWAYS SYSTEM

Facilitator's Guide

February 2016

Overview of the Facilitator's Guide

Across the nation, state leaders are exploring ways to better connect academic learning with career aspirations and workforce needs. One promising strategy is a career pathways system, a coordinated system of programs and services that support and guide an individual in the transition from education to the workforce. Historically in a workforce development strategy, education stakeholders are increasingly looking to career pathways as a way to improve student outcomes and to help set graduates on a path for success after high school. This *Facilitator's Guide*, developed by the College and Career Readiness and Success Center (CCRS Center), is designed to provide state education agency (SEA) staff with a process and resources for designing or strengthening a career pathways system in collaboration with other vested state stakeholders.

The U.S. Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, and Labor define a career pathway as a "series of connected education and training strategies and support services that enable individuals to secure industry-relevant certification and obtain employment within an occupational area and to advance to higher levels of future education and employment in that area." Career pathways can be part of a comprehensive system to support students' college and career readiness. Career exploration programs and courses are appropriate for students at all levels, especially elementary and middle school students. Because choosing a career pathway requires mature decision making, career pathway courses are most appropriate for students at the high school level.

WHY SEAs?

New data continue to expand our understanding of the inextricable link between education and employment. The endgame for K–12 stakeholders is no longer high school graduation. Instead, necessity demands a longer range view that includes preparing all students for a successful career. The SEA plays several roles in understanding and supporting these career and life goals:

▶ Establishing college- and career-ready goals for all students

▶ Determining the college and career readiness standards that outline the skills needed for career readiness

▶ Providing the sequence of activities that students can engage in that provide the building blocks for career readiness, including career exploration programs, extracurricular activities, work-based learning opportunities, and so on

▶ Facilitating collaborative partnerships with the Department of Labor/Workforce and securing business investments

OBJECTIVE OF THE GUIDE

The *Facilitator's Guide* is written for the project lead, the individual within the SEA who will guide a group of committed partners—from secondary and postsecondary education, labor, policymakers, and business and industry—through the process of designing and implementing a career pathways system. The *Facilitator's Guide* provides guidance from the beginning stages of stakeholder identification and information gathering, through the design of a pathways system, and into continuous improvement and sustainability planning. For states already in the process of designing or implementing career pathways, the *Facilitator's Guide* can help enhance or refine efforts underway.

The *Facilitator's Guide* offers an overview of the key elements of a pathways system, along with guidance on a process for designing a system tailored to a state's individual needs and priorities. The *Facilitator's Guide* is organized into four customizable chapters. Each chapter includes the following:

▶ Important context or information for the facilitator to know and understand

▶ Facilitation tips

▶ Slide presentation with facilitation notes

▶ Resources

The resources and tools found in the *Facilitator's Guide* do not promote any particular career pathways model or initiative, or address teaching and learning strategies or curriculum resources.

The *Facilitator's Guide* includes chapter objectives, facilitation tips, and activities for each session. There are two types of activities included in this guide:

▶ Planning activities, which involve the facilitator and (if applicable) other supporting staff

▶ Group activities, which involve a larger group of stakeholders engaged in the work

Each activity includes information and considerations for both internal planning and group activities.

Chapter 1 at a Glance

The goal of this chapter is to identify and engage key stakeholders and define the goals of a career pathways system. Table 1 provides a high-level overview of the objectives, planning and preparation tasks, activities, and related resources for Chapter 1.

Table 1. Identifying and Engaging Key Stakeholders and Defining Goals of the Career Pathways System

Objectives	Planning and Preparation Tasks	Group Activities	Handouts
1. Identify key stakeholders representing the K–12, postsecondary and workforce sectors as well as state-level employer associations.	▪ Identify stakeholders for participation in the career pathways system planning process.	▪ None	▪ Handout 1A: Identifying Stakeholders
2. Clarify roles and responsibilities of stakeholders in designing a state career pathways system.	▪ Assign stakeholders roles and responsibilities.	▪ Confirm stakeholder commitment to the project and their role.	▪ Slides 6–12
3. Engage key stakeholders in the career pathways system planning discussion.	▪ Engage stakeholders through communication and outreach.	▪ None	▪ None
4. Build stakeholder knowledge for a career pathways system.	▪ Plan the kickoff meeting.	▪ Share individual beliefs about a career pathways system. ▪ Define career pathways.	▪ Handout 1B: Career Pathways System 101 ▪ Handout 1C: Existing Definitions of a Career Pathways System ▪ Slides 13–17
5. Define goals of the career pathways system.	▪ None	▪ Prioritize career pathways elements.	▪ Slides 18–28

OBJECTIVES

Chapter 1 focuses on identifying key stakeholders, defining roles and responsibilities, and determining goals of the career pathways system. Designing a career pathways system should include a variety of stakeholders, including decision makers, state agency staff, business and industry representatives, external consultants, and subject-matter experts. These stakeholders will inform and lead the development and implementation of the career pathways system.

There are five objectives for this chapter:

▶ **Objective 1:** Identify key stakeholders representing the K–12, postsecondary, and workforce sectors.

▶ **Objective 2:** Engage key stakeholders in the career pathways system planning discussion.

▶ **Objective 3:** Clarify roles and responsibilities of stakeholders in designing a state career pathways system.

▶ **Objective 4:** Build stakeholder knowledge for a career pathways system.

▶ **Objective 5:** Define goals of the career pathways system.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION ACTIVITIES

Identify Stakeholders for Participation in the Career Pathways System Planning Process

A number of agencies, systems, and stakeholders are involved in career readiness work. To design and implement a career pathways system, the facilitator would benefit from taking a comprehensive and inclusive approach. The first step is to assemble a team that represents diverse perspectives, experiences, and interests. Table 2 illustrates six categories of stakeholder groups that can play a vital role in designing and implementing an effective career pathways system. These groups will likely vary based on each state's governance structure.

Table 2. Stakeholder Types and Examples of Stakeholder Groups

Stakeholder Category	Selected Stakeholder Group
K–12	■ State Board of Education ■ SEA ■ Local education agencies (LEAs) ■ Schools
Postsecondary	■ State-level coordinating board, agency, or commission ■ Representation from public and private four-year institutions ■ Representation from community or technical colleges
Career and Technical Education (CTE)	■ State and local CTE policy governing bodies over CTE policy ■ CTE teacher professional organizations (Association for Career and Technical Education, Association of Career and College Readiness Organizations, etc.) ■ Apprenticeship state board representation
Adult Education	■ Representation from adult education ■ State-level professional organizations

Stakeholder Category	Selected Stakeholder Group
Business / Industry / Workforce	■ State administrative agencies representing economic or workforce development and labor ■ State Workforce Investment Board ■ State chamber of commerce or business roundtable ■ Statewide industry and trade associations ■ Representatives from a range of businesses and industries ■ One Stop Career Center representatives
Policymaker / Legislative	■ Governor/legislative representative ■ State, county, and local government officials ■ State, county, and local legislature officials
Individuals / Community Members	■ Students ■ Parents ■ Community-based organizations

Using **Handout 1A: Identifying Stakeholders**, the facilitator will identify the agencies, organizations, and representatives from each stakeholder group who should be involved in the project. Part 1 of **Handout 1A: Identifying Stakeholders** can be used to generate a list of potential stakeholders. As part of completing the handout, the facilitator should ensure that individuals who represent decision-making authority as well as individuals who will be tasked with doing work are included.

When identifying stakeholders, consider the following:

▶ Representation from all government offices and state programs, especially those programs that serve particular student groups, including English language learners, students with disabilities, and youth re-entering school from secure placement

▶ Representation from the major employers in the region, including key businesses and labor organizations

▶ Stakeholders who have demonstrated experience in their sector and with the ability to commit the time necessary to fulfill their role as well as the community or political leaders who may be best positioned to advocate for a career pathways system with and across the stakeholder groups they represent

▶ The level of collaboration and communication necessary for this project to be successful, for example, the state CTE agency may be located within the SEA or may be a separate entity, which may affect how these offices work together

The facilitator should review the considerations for identifying stakeholders and a sample list of public and private stakeholders involved in career pathways initiatives in **Handout 1A: Identifying Stakeholders.**

Assign Stakeholder Roles and Responsibilities

To design a career pathways system, the facilitator will need to secure a number of resources, both human and financial. Participating stakeholders need the knowledge, skills, and experience to build, scale, and sustain a career pathways system as well as a vested interest. After identifying which agencies, organizations, and stakeholders the facilitator wants to invite to participate, the facilitator should think about what role each stakeholder will play and when in the development process those stakeholders will be most engaged. Some stakeholders may play a critical role at the beginning of the initiative, such as the initial design of the system, while other stakeholders may play a critical role later, such as the development of implementation resources. Exhibit 1 and Table 3 identify key roles that stakeholders need to play for the initiative to be successful.
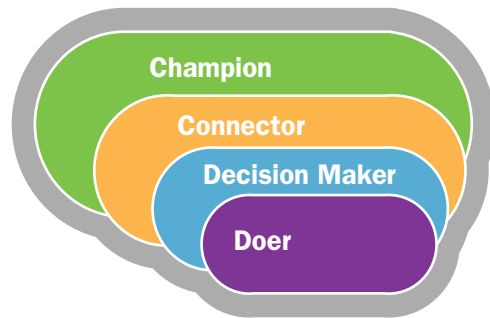
Exhibit 1. Key Stakeholder Roles

Table 3. Key Roles for Stakeholders

Role	Responsibilities	Number or Type of Stakeholders
Champion	▪ Advocate for a statewide career pathways system to their network. ▪ Leverage position, connections, or relationships to build buy-in for the initiative. ▪ Share information with broader stakeholders. ▪ Represent stakeholders at all levels, such as teachers, program administrators and policy advisors.	Everyone should be a champion in some capacity, as everyone has a responsibility to advocate for the initiative. However, there should be key individuals who have influence and visibility to secure resources and political will to move the career pathways work forward. It is understood that these champions may not have time to do all of the career pathways work, so champions may designate staff to complete the work.
Connector	▪ Make connections between people and initiatives. ▪ Leverage and identify resources. ▪ Share information with stakeholders.	There should be a few key people involved who can make connections with other work or resources across the state.

Role	Responsibilities	Number or Type of Stakeholders
Decision maker	■ Review materials at key points. ■ Make critical decisions and approve materials. ■ Contribute to the work as an expert. ■ Advise others on approach and next steps. ■ Provide initial considerations or insights for the work. ■ Review materials at key points.	Decision makers should be experts who are able to set the vision and direction of the work. There should be at least one decision maker from each sector to be included in the career pathways system. Decision makers also may be champions with influence and visibility. Decision makers should bring members of their staff who can serve as doers.
Doer	■ Lead and complete major pieces of the work. ■ Gather critical information. ■ Keep activities and projects moving forward.	There should be a few stakeholders from each sector who are responsible for doing the majority of the work during the course of the initiative.

After the facilitator has identified the role each stakeholder is best suited to take, consider what stage of the design and implementation process in which each stakeholder should be involved:

▶ *Process and Logistics:* Managing the work during the course of the initiative and gathering key information for specific activities

▶ *Policy Development:* Analyzing information and drafting state policies or guidance

▶ *Capacity Building:* Providing support for implementation

▶ *Evaluation:* Assessing the potential and actual impact of the work on an ongoing basis

Please note that in some cases, SEAs may choose to implement a career pathways system without implementing new policies. SEAs may consider implementing career pathways programs before beginning the policy process to first focus on generating political support or refine the system needs.

Table 4 provides examples of the common responsibilities for designing and implementing a career pathways system at each stage of the process.

Table 4. Example Responsibilities for Each Stage of the Process

Stage of the Process	Responsibilities
Process and Logistics	■ Lead the coordination and collaboration across state agencies and stakeholders. ■ Identify a common vision, mission, and goals. ■ Develop a budget and secure human and fiscal resources for the initiative. ■ Facilitate meetings and document the discussion. ■ Assign tasks to be carried out during the initiative and track progress and results. ■ Gather information, analyze, summarize, and report to stakeholders. ■ Communicate with stakeholders, the public, and media during the various stages of the initiative.

Policy	■ Contribute to draft policies and guidance.
	■ Ensure that state policy is aligned.
	■ Remove barriers where misalignment occurs and create opportunities for a career pathways system.
Capacity Building	■ Gather and help maintain support from education, business, and industry leaders across the state.
	■ Establish mechanisms for ongoing communication between stakeholders.
	■ Leverage information from other state models and input from experts over time.
Evaluation	■ Develop an evaluation to determine the effectiveness and efficacy of the career pathways system.
	■ Develop a continuous feedback loop to revise and strengthen the system.
	■ Participate in ongoing work to refine the career pathways system.

Using Part 2 of **Handout 1A: Identifying Stakeholders**, the facilitator should indicate which stakeholders would best serve in the roles and responsibilities and identify the parts of the initiative in which they will be the most involved (i.e., Process and Logistics, Policy, and Evaluation). This step will help the facilitator plan needed resources and identify knowledge and capacity gaps. The final step is to reach out to the selected stakeholders and invite them to the Stakeholder Kickoff Meeting.

Engage Stakeholders Through Outreach and Communication

After developing a comprehensive list of stakeholders, the facilitator must reach out to those staff or agencies to confirm their participation in the work. This step requires the facilitator to identify key contacts and contact information, and to determine appropriate messaging for the communication. As the facilitator begins the stakeholder engagement process, information that would be useful to include in communication includes the following:

▶ Rationale for the development and implementation of the career pathways system

▶ The role and key responsibilities the stakeholder will be asked to fulfill as part of the development and implementation work

▶ Justification for the importance of this work and the need for engagement; also, a description of the benefit of engaging in this work specific to the stakeholder and the work the stakeholder does

▶ Identification of any incentives or supports the stakeholder will receive based on the stakeholder's participation in the working group

▶ Important dates for the stakeholder, as far out as the facilitator can plan; these dates include in-person meetings as well as deadlines for different aspects of the work

Planning the Kickoff Meeting

Once the facilitator has recruited sufficient stakeholder representation, they should begin planning the first in-person meeting. This meeting has several intended outcomes, including confirmation of stakeholder participation and agreement of their role, providing key career pathways information to stakeholders, and defining broad goals of the system.

Prior to the meeting, the facilitator will need to secure several logistical items that will ensure the meeting will be successful. Some of these items include the following:

▶ Agenda and accompanying background material

▶ Confirmed presenters

▶ Customized CCRS Center slide presentation

▶ Meeting space

▶ Food and beverages

▶ Required audio and visual equipment

▶ Presenter materials (flip charts, sticky notes)

▶ Copies

FACILITATION ACTIVITIES

After the facilitator has recruited stakeholders, the next phase includes a kickoff meeting that will engage the group in the development and implementation of the career pathways system. During the kickoff meeting, participants will review their role in the project, learn about career pathways systems, and define their goals for the system.

Confirm Stakeholder Commitment and Role for the Project (Slides 6–12)

▶ Prior to the meeting, the facilitator:

■ Recruited various stakeholders from different sectors and contemplated the role each would play.

■ Shared information about the intended purpose of the work, the stakeholder role, and the level of engagement required.

▶ During the meeting, the facilitator:

■ Reviews the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders.

■ Gains acceptance of participants' roles.

Note: The degree of confirmation needed will vary based on the state, with some states requiring verbal confirmation and others requiring written confirmation. The facilitator should determine what the appropriate materials should be for this step of the work.

Share Individual Beliefs of a Career Pathways System (Slides 13–17)

▶ During the meeting, the facilitator:

- Provides stakeholders with a broad understanding of the impact of a career pathways system on jobs, students, and the economy.

- Helps stakeholders reach a general understanding of how a career pathways system can support overarching goals of the state.

- Shares **Handout 1B: Career Pathways System 101.**

- Engages stakeholders in a discussion focused on their organizational interests and priorities for a career pathways system; stakeholders will discuss why a career pathways system is important and a priority to them and their agency.

> If the stakeholder group is not an established committee, then the facilitator may need to establish will and buy-in from the group. This activity may need to be modified to take place during a couple of meetings. If trying to solicit buy-in from stakeholders, the facilitator will need to build trust, understanding, and commitment to the work. Ultimately, the goal is deep institutional commitment that is not subject to the whims of an individual or politics.

- Gives stakeholders two to three minutes to reflect on the question before they respond.

Note: The purpose of this activity is to help build a shared vision and establish common goals for career pathways among stakeholders and provide insights into possible disagreements or misunderstandings in the group. Throughout the discussion, the facilitator should capture stakeholder responses on a flip chart. While taking notes, the facilitator should listen for connections among priorities, expected outcomes, and the roles of the stakeholders.

Defining Career Pathways Goals (Slides 18–25)

▶ After the stakeholders have articulated their priorities and expectations for a career pathways system, the facilitator:

- Helps build knowledge by asking stakeholders to reflect on their current understanding of a career pathways system; in this activity, stakeholders will write out key elements of a career pathways system.

- Shares **Handout 1C: Existing Definitions of a Career Pathways System** and presents existing definitions of career pathways.

- If stakeholders seem to have a deep understanding of what is needed to develop a career pathways system, it might not be necessary to go through each definition in detail. If, however, stakeholders seem to struggle identifying key elements or if there is disagreement about the elements between stakeholders, the facilitator can use the definitions to bring the group toward a shared, accepted understanding.

Note: The purpose of this reflection is to provide the facilitator with some information about the level of experience the stakeholders have with career pathways.

Prioritize Career Pathways Elements (Slides 26–28)

▶ During the meeting, the facilitator:

- Shares **Handout 1C: Existing Definitions of a Career Pathways System.**

- Divides the stakeholders into small groups to review **Handout 1C: Existing Definitions of a Career Pathways System** and identify which elements are a priority and rationale for their importance.

- Leads a large-group discussion after the groups have time to review during which the facilitator will ask groups to share their decisions and capture that information on chart paper. As groups share their information, the facilitator will want to note how frequently specific elements are captured so that the groups understand what the priority elements are. Table 5 displays a sample of what this work might look like.

Note: As the facilitator captures work across the groups, it is important to cross-reference the priorities and expected outcomes identified during the individual priorities discussion.

Table 5. Sample Prioritized Career Pathways Elements

Priority Element	Tally of Importance
Continuum of workplace learning opportunities	X X X X
Nonduplicative assessments	X X X X X X
Multiple entry and exit points	X X
Align policies and programs	X X X X X X

Chapter 1 Summary and Desired Outcomes

By the end of this chapter, the facilitator has convened a diverse group of stakeholders with the influence, expertise, and capacity to work collaboratively to design a career pathways system. The facilitator has shared information about the career pathways system, and stakeholders have committed support (e.g., time or political support) to the work. Finally, the group agreed on priority elements in the career pathways system.

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