



**Empire State
Development**



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Guided Career Pathways

A Resource for OSWD Stakeholders

INTRODUCTION

Focus and aims of this document

This resource is designed to provide practical insights and recommendations to stakeholders of the Office of Strategic Workforce Development (OSWD), including training providers, government agencies, and current and future grantees, on the implementation of Guided Career Pathways in their workforce programming and partnerships. Guided Career Pathways offer a dynamic framework that emphasizes alignment between education and employment outcomes, providing learners with structured support and rapid reskilling opportunities to meet the evolving demands of the labor market. With a focus on **workforce alignment**, **economic mobility**, and **equity**, Guided Career Pathways aim to ensure economic self-sufficiency for all learners, particularly populations that have historically been marginalized by workforce and economic systems.

By integrating Guided Career Pathways, OSWD stakeholders can empower individuals to navigate successful career paths, acquire in-demand skills, and secure quality jobs, fostering economic mobility, equitable access to opportunity, and the development of a skilled and empowered workforce.

How to use this document

We designed this resource for ease of use and maximum impact. The document is organized around three key strategies OSWD stakeholders can implement to integrate career pathways into workforce training programs. Each strategy is then followed by specific actions or elements stakeholders can prioritize to implement the strategy effectively. These strategies and practices are often interconnected and reinforce each other, and they should be adapted to each organization's specific needs and context. To get the most out of this document, we recommend the following:

- Read each section thoroughly to understand the strategy and the specific actions recommended.
- Consider which strategies and actions are most relevant to your organization's goals and priorities.
- Determine which partners are needed to support a career pathway model and seek opportunities to develop and deepen these relationships.
- Incorporate the recommended strategies and actions into your programming and funding applications.
- Regularly evaluate progress and adjust strategies and actions as needed to achieve your goals.

FOUR KEY STRATEGIES

- i. **Design training curriculum to create clear pathways to employment with opportunities for ongoing skill development and upward mobility.** For the benefit of employers and workers alike, it is essential to develop training programs that not only lead to employment but also offer continuous skills development and upward mobility potential. To achieve this, it is crucial to align these programs with the specific needs of regional labor markets, ensuring that the skills and credentials acquired by participants are in high demand. By creating clear and well-defined career pathways, individuals can intentionally pursue quality jobs with the potential for long-term career advancement and economic stability. To design effective pathways that promote ongoing economic mobility, stakeholders can take the following actions:
 - Consult New York State Department of Labor [Occupational and Industry Data](#), as well as OSWD’s seven statewide target industries to gain insight into in-demand sectors and roles. These industries drive New York State’s economic growth, employing 1.2 million New Yorkers in quality jobs with pathways to mobility.
 - Seek feedback from local employers on skills and credentials needed to succeed in their companies, engaging them in the design of pathways that offer a series of stackable credentials or certifications that hold labor market value.
 - Establish accessible “on-ramps” to career pathways by fostering collaborations with institutions and programs that provide adult education, K-12 and postsecondary education, community services, and other workforce training initiatives.
 - Integrate work-based learning experiences into career pathways, allowing learners to earn while they learn, and graduate equipped with essential workplace experience.

- ii. **Help learners establish their pathways, build on prior experience, explore career options, and connect with work.** By providing navigational supports during the onboarding process, particularly to learners facing systemic barriers, pathway programs can help participants explore a wide range of career options and develop a deeper understanding of their own aspirations, skills, and goals. By leveraging prior learning to identify and pursue short-term credentials of value, learners can quickly gain marketable skills and enter the workforce. These short-term credentials can serve as stepping stones that can be stacked with longer-term training goals, creating pathways to mobility that “stick.” To seamlessly integrate and maximize learners’ prior and future learning, stakeholders can take the following actions:
 - Provide personalized career navigation and advising services to program participants, helping learners select a career pathway based on their existing skills and career goals.

- Establish a transparent system for assessing prior learning and providing prior learning credits where appropriate, ensuring that previous education, training, and experiences are applied to program participants' educational journey.
- Build partnerships with community-based organizations to provide additional support and resources to learners facing systemic barriers to ensure equitable access to training and advancement opportunities.

iii. **Help learners “stay the path” to achieve their employment and educational goals, while designing programs with flexibility to accommodate learners at any stage.**

Training programs can help participants persist toward their education and employment goals by expanding supportive services and building flexibility into educational pathways. When personal, family, and systemic barriers interrupt participants' career journeys, it is essential for training programs to build reengagement strategies that can accommodate participants' needs and support their continued progress. Training programs can consider collaborating with transfer partners, workforce development boards, and community-based organizations to provide wraparound supports for participants and their families. To support learners in persisting and reentering their career pathway, stakeholders can take the following actions:

- Develop partnerships with community-based organizations to connect participants to public benefits, emergency grants, tuition assistance, childcare resources, transportation assistance, mental health resources, and housing or food assistance. By leveraging these partnerships, participants can receive holistic support that addresses their various needs, enabling them to focus on their education and career goals.
- Establish data-sharing agreements with partner organizations to facilitate more seamless, streamlined support for participants. Sharing relevant information and tracking outcomes can help identify areas for improvement and enable coordinated efforts to provide supportive services.
- Offer flexible training delivery models, including self-paced, online, and competency-based learning. By providing participants with control over their learning pace and the flexibility to adjust their training or work schedules based on their life circumstances, programs can accommodate their individual needs and promote better education and employment outcomes.

iv. **Establish skills-based learning outcomes to assess participants' progress in both training and workplace settings.** The foundation of a career pathway lies in equipping learners with the necessary skills for workplace success. An integral aspect of this is the integration of work-based learning opportunities, which provide participants with practical industry experience to apply and test their skills in real-world settings. To ensure the effectiveness of workforce training programs, it is crucial to not only measure the skills

acquired through workplace experiences, but also transition from traditional time-based models to competency-based education approaches. By shifting the focus from training hours to the demonstration of actual knowledge and skills, training providers can better align their offerings with employer demand. To develop outcomes-oriented programs that meet the needs of both employers and learners, stakeholder can take the following actions:

- Implement competency-based assessments (e.g., portfolios, performance tasks, etc.) to gauge participants' readiness for employment by providing tangible evidence of their acquired knowledge and skills. This approach offers a comprehensive evaluation aligned with employer expectations, ensuring practical application of participants' abilities.
- Leverage work-based learning experiences as a platform for learners to apply their knowledge to on-the-job competencies and functions. These experiences not only enhance learners' development and learning, but also offer a valuable opportunity for training programs to assess outcomes.
- Develop a transparent system for assessing and validating the skills acquired through work-based learning. This system should include clear criteria and guidelines to evaluate participant performance in collaboration with participating employer(s), ensuring consistency, accuracy, and equity in assessing their capabilities.

CONCLUSION

By integrating these strategies into programming and partnerships, stakeholders can create transformative educational and training experiences, empowering learners to pursue quality jobs with long-term advancement opportunities. These strategies help ensure that learners are equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills, and support to navigate their educational and career journeys successfully. With a focus on career exploration, prior learning recognition, supportive services, work-based learning, and a competency-driven approach, learners are prepared, supported, and equipped to thrive in today's dynamic labor market. Through collaborative efforts, our workforce ecosystem can build an economy where individuals from all backgrounds have equitable access to pathways to success.

RESOURCES

- i. Guided Career Pathways Framework:
 - Jobs for the Future, Guided Career Pathways: <https://info.jff.org/guided-career-pathways-framework>
- ii. OSWD Target Industries
 - Empire State Development, OSWD, Year One Progress Report: <https://esd.ny.gov/sites/default/files/NYS-Workforce-Development-Year-One-Progress-Report-Digital-04262023.pdf>
- iii. Credit for Prior Learning:
 - CAEL, The Four Stages of Building an Effective and Inclusive CPL Program: https://www.cael.org/hubfs/2022-CPL-PLA/CPL_WhitePaper.pdf
- iv. Student Support:
 - Education Commission of the States, Community College Approaches to Student Supports: <https://www.ecs.org/wp-content/uploads/Community-College-Approaches-to-Student-Supports.pdf>
- v. Competency-Based Education (CBE):
 - Jobs for the Future, Next Generation CBE: <https://www.jff.org/resources/next-generation-cbe-designing-competency-based-education-underprepared-college-learners/>
- vi. Work-Based Learning:
 - Jobs for the Future, Promising Trends and Challenges in Work-Based Learning: <https://www.jff.org/points-of-view/promising-trends-and-challenges-work-based-learning-market-scan-organizations-and-tools/>