

Action Guide

Enabling Conditions

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PURPOSEFUL PATHWAYS



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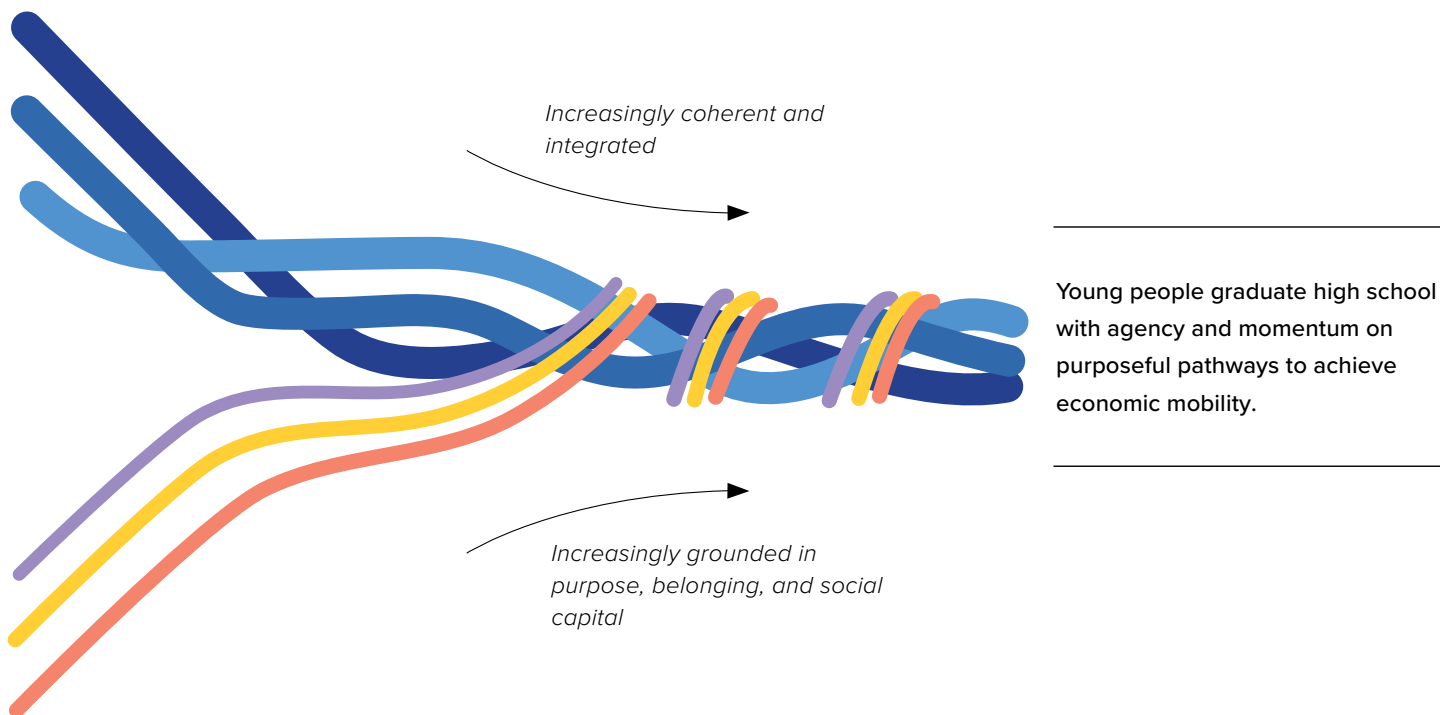
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Resource overview

Since March 2025, the Commission on Purposeful Pathways—with support from the Gates Foundation and led by Education First—has brought together 21 national experts and three young adult commissioners to envision and advocate for a future where every young person is equipped not only for a job but also for a fulfilling life, meaningful career, and economic mobility.

The Commission’s full report, [A Launchpad for Life: A Vision for Purposeful Pathways for All Students](#), introduces a conceptual framework and a call to action for the field to implement what are defined as purposeful pathways.

Our vision: All students should experience high-quality advising, accelerated coursework, and career-connected learning that cultivate purpose, belonging, and social capital—ensuring that they graduate high school with agency and momentum on purposeful pathways toward economic mobility.



PROGRAMMATIC EXPERIENCES

- High-Quality Advising
- Accelerated Coursework Sequences
- Career-Connected Learning

CULTIVATION OF AGENCY

- Purpose
- Belonging
- Social Capital

Introduction to enabling conditions

This action guide was developed to help regions and states realize the vision for purposeful pathways. The Commission created two additional guides that explore high-impact practices and measurement.

Together, these resources provide tangible examples and multiple entry points for leaders to make progress on the recommendations included in the report,

A Launchpad for Life:

- Provide *all* students with purposeful pathways.
- Hardwire purpose, belonging, and social capital into every pathway.
- Move the goalposts beyond the high school diploma to economic mobility.
- Make student transitions a shared responsibility.

Undergirding each of these recommendations are some initial, actionable steps—as well as a commitment to changing how systems collaborate to ensure that pathways are responsive to what young people, employers, and their communities need. **To drive this change, regions and states must adopt certain enabling conditions, which are the combination of policies, practices, systems, and structures that create positive change on a large scale.**

To identify the enabling conditions for purposeful pathways, the Commission studied regions and states that successfully implemented many elements of purposeful pathways at scale. The Commission then identified common themes in how regions and states planned, organized, and funded their efforts. This guide summarizes those findings and includes links to replicable examples, an outline of common implementation phases, and a self-assessment.

The target audience for this resource are **members of pathmaking teams**, which include **cross-sector leaders** from K-12 education, postsecondary education, workforce, and intermediary organizations who are working at a regional or state level to develop or expand purposeful pathways. This guide will be most effective when shared with the entire pathmaking team.

Pathmaking teams are cross-sector partnerships, ideally backed by governance structures, that empower actors in K-12, higher education, workforce, and intermediary organizations to design, implement, assess, and scale purposeful pathways. Pathmaking teams should be composed of mid-level leaders—senior enough to direct teams and make decisions but close enough to the work that it remains a central part of their responsibilities and they are knowledgeable about its progress. They are championed by executive leaders who can build alignment and bring visibility to their work.

Pathways intermediaries play a pivotal role **as members of pathmaking teams** by knitting K-12, postsecondary, and workforce systems together. Their work is an indispensable part of building capacity at the local and state levels, creating reporting and accountability infrastructure through data-sharing agreements and helping structure internships and apprenticeship programs that connect students to employers. Intermediaries should be thought of as a *function* rather than a specific *organization type*. [Research has shown](#) that various organization types, from independent nonprofits to colleges, schools, or chambers of commerce, can all play this role well.

This action guide is for regions and states at all stages of development. Regardless of the starting point, every region or state can follow the advice offered here to improve the quality and scale of its purposeful pathways. Implementing the enabling conditions described here is challenging work, and it is never as straightforward as

following a technical checklist. Successful implementation involves complex interpersonal work with partners across K-12 education, postsecondary education, and the workforce. Leaders will also need to adjust these recommendations for their local context.

Shifts supported by this action guide





Photo by Allison Shelley/Complete College Photo Library

How to use this action guide

This action guide is organized into the following sections:




- **Enabling conditions cheat sheet:** a two-page summary of the main ideas in this action guide. Cross-sector teams can use this as a quick reference to understand the enabling conditions and the key steps in implementing them.
- **Enabling conditions details:** additional details on all the enabling conditions, including one-page summaries of each, with notes about implementation and links to examples or resources.
- **Implementation phases:** a one-page summary of the common phases of implementing purposeful pathways. This involves advice for navigating the unique challenges across each phase.
- **Self-assessment:** a checklist teams can use to identify their current implementation phase and determine which enabling conditions they should prioritize.

Enabling conditions cheat sheet

The enabling conditions for purposeful pathways are summarized below with four key steps listed in approximate order of implementation. These steps provide a general roadmap for regions and states to develop the enabling conditions.

The next section (pages 8-12) provides more details on all the enabling conditions, including implementation notes and links to replicable examples.

| Enabling condition | Key steps |
|--|--|
| <div data-bbox="245 678 326 764" data-label="Image"> </div> <div data-bbox="175 816 402 884" data-label="Section-Header"> <h2>1. VISION AND PLAN</h2> </div> <hr/> <div data-bbox="131 951 435 1010" data-label="Text"> <p>Articulate a clear vision and plan for purposeful pathways.</p> </div> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 1a. Convene key decisionmakers from government, K-12, postsecondary, workforce, and community-based organizations to support purposeful pathways. Identify a top executive leader to serve as a champion of the work to move it forward. ■ 1b. Publish a document that describes a common vision for purposeful pathways in the community that spans K-12, postsecondary, and workforce and integrates all purposeful pathways components. (Learn more in Chapter 2 of A Launchpad for Life.) ■ 1c. Develop a concrete action plan that includes specific goals, outcomes, metrics, timelines, and actionable steps with assigned owners. ■ 1d. Ensure the action plan builds upon and connects preexisting plans that have associated systems and implementation structures (e.g., required state plans or organizational strategic plans). |
| <div data-bbox="240 1411 331 1493" data-label="Image"> </div> <div data-bbox="142 1530 409 1598" data-label="Section-Header"> <h2>2. GOVERNANCE AND STAFFING</h2> </div> <hr/> <div data-bbox="131 1665 453 1755" data-label="Text"> <p>Establish a pathmaking team that includes cross-sector staff backed by governance structures.</p> </div> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 2a. Convene a pathmaking team that has recognized authority to implement the action plan. This team can make decisions and implement programs across the traditional boundaries of K-12, postsecondary, and workforce. ■ 2b. Identify a strong organization that can serve in an intermediary role to support the pathmaking team, convene key stakeholders, make connections across systems, and scale effective best practices. ■ 2c. Invest in human capital and training needed to implement the action plan, from the classroom to the system level. This includes upskilling current staff and creating talent pipelines for new staff. ■ 2d. Formalize joint governance structures spanning K-12, postsecondary, and workforce that can make decisions across and at the intersections among these three systems. |

| Enabling condition | Key steps |
|--|---|
|  <h3 data-bbox="155 457 435 525">3. DATA AND ACCOUNTABILITY</h3> <hr data-bbox="136 564 449 569"/> <p data-bbox="136 590 461 709">Create shared data and accountability systems that measure and incentivize progress toward a common vision across partners.</p> | <ul data-bbox="607 304 1409 720" style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 3a. Identify priority metrics related to the intersection of education and workforce that are shared across all accountability and reporting systems. (Learn more in the Measurement Action Guide). ■ 3b. Develop public and accessible dashboards that are regularly updated to track progress on metrics. Include disaggregations for student subpopulations. ■ 3c. Develop accountability systems that incentivize high-quality implementation and the continuous improvement of purposeful pathways. ■ 3d. Use longitudinal data systems that connect K-12, postsecondary, and workforce data to make decisions. |
|  <h3 data-bbox="201 1102 386 1134">4. FUNDING</h3> <hr data-bbox="136 1176 449 1180"/> <p data-bbox="136 1201 422 1289">Increase, align, and braid funding to reduce barriers and accelerate progress.</p> | <ul data-bbox="607 949 1442 1331" style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 4a. Identify multiple funding sources and braid funding to map “horizontally” (across K-12, postsecondary, and workforce) and “vertically” (across federal, state, and local programs) to implement the action plan. ■ 4b. Create new funding sources that build upon state and federal grant programs to overcome barriers to students’ participation. ■ 4c. Develop flexible funding sources that are responsive to the priorities the pathmaking team or intermediary identifies. ■ 4d. Align funding sources with the action plan’s metrics and accountability systems to incentivize improved student outcomes. |
|  <h3 data-bbox="188 1642 402 1709">5. COHERENT POLICIES</h3> <hr data-bbox="136 1751 449 1755"/> <p data-bbox="136 1776 457 1896">Create coherent policies that remove barriers, break down silos, and ensure equitable access to purposeful pathways.</p> | <ul data-bbox="607 1524 1435 1902" style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 5a. Implement a communication strategy to help students and families navigate the transitions among K-12, postsecondary, and the workforce. ■ 5b. Institute policies that better integrate advising, accelerated coursework sequences, and career-connected learning. ■ 5c. Institute strategies and structures to help students cultivate social capital, belonging, and purpose. ■ 5d. Facilitate the transfer and recognition of credits/credentials earned in high school by accredited postsecondary institutions and workforce organizations. |



1. VISION AND PLAN

What it is:

Regions and states articulate a clear vision and plan for purposeful pathways.

Why it matters:

This provides a common vision and playbook that all parties can rally around and clarifies shared expectations among partners.

Key steps

1a. Convene key decisionmakers from government, K-12, postsecondary, employers, and community-based organizations to support purposeful pathways. Identify a top executive leader to serve as a champion of the work to move it forward.

- **Implementation notes:** Ensure the initial group of decisionmakers represents all sectors. (A common setback to implementation is excluding workforce leaders from vision-setting conversations.) The executive “champion” could be any leader with significant formal and informal authority: a superintendent, community college president, workforce board director, nonprofit leader, etc. Regardless of their own sector, a key skill of this champion is the ability to identify active champions in other sectors.
- **Example:** This [Aspen Institute report](#) describes how the president of Northwest Iowa Community College used his position to create opportunities for collaboration among his region’s biggest institutions (see p. 24).

1b. Publish a document that describes a **common vision** for purposeful pathways in the community that spans K-12, postsecondary, and workforce and integrates all purposeful pathways components. (Learn more in Chapter 2 of [A Launchpad for Life](#).)

- **Implementation notes:** The power of this vision comes from its holistic approach. It looks at the education and workforce needs of the community as a whole, ignoring the institutional divisions among K-12, postsecondary, and workforce. It should also align with the recommendations in Chapter 3 of the Commission’s report—to **provide all students with purposeful pathways; hardwire purpose, belonging, and social capital into every pathway; move the goalposts beyond high school graduation to economic mobility; and make student transitions a shared responsibility.** The decisionmakers should endorse this common vision, which can be as detailed as a strategic plan or as simple as a one-page joint statement identifying common goals.
- **Examples:** [Delaware’s Pathways Strategic Plan](#) includes K-12, higher education, workforce agencies, and employers. [Arkansas’s Workforce Strategy](#) frames workforce development as including education systems.

1c. Develop a concrete **action plan** that includes specific goals, outcomes, metrics, timelines, and actionable steps with assigned owners.

- **Implementation notes:** Translate the vision document into something specific enough to guide the daily work of teams across the relevant institutions. The action plan should include both student-centered outcome goals and short-term performance indicators to track implementation progress and support continuous improvement. The Commission’s [Measurement Action Guide](#), offers considerations and potential metrics to support this work.
- **Examples:** [Chicago Roadmap](#) is a city-level joint plan for Chicago Public Schools and City Colleges of Chicago. Rhode Island’s [PrepareRI Action Plan](#) is a state-level action plan with a detailed list of work streams and owners across multiple agencies.

1d. Ensure the action plan builds upon and **connects preexisting plans** that have associated systems and implementation structures (e.g., required state plans or organizational strategic plans).

- **Implementation notes:** The plan will be more powerful when it redirects existing plans, systems, and resources, such as those associated with strategic plans (of K-12, postsecondary, or workforce organizations) or required state plans (such as Perkins Career and Technical Education [CTE], Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act [WIOA] plans, etc.)
- **Examples:** [Colorado’s Secondary, Postsecondary, and Work-based Learning Task Force](#) created a cross-sector proposal for more coherent, connected, and coordinated pathways programs. The [Compton College 2035 Comprehensive Master Plan](#) connects multiple required planning documents for the community college into a single, aligned plan.



2. GOVERNANCE AND STAFFING

What it is:

Regions and states establish a pathmaking team that includes cross-sector staff backed by governance structures.

Why it matters:

The vision and plan for purposeful pathways will not lead to concrete change unless people and systems actively implement them.

Key steps

2a. Convene a **pathmaking team** that has recognized authority to implement the action plan. This team can make decisions and implement programs across the traditional boundaries of K-12, postsecondary, and workforce.

- **Implementation notes:** Pathmaking teams are typically composed of mid-level leaders: senior enough to direct teams and make decisions but close enough to the work that it remains a central part of their responsibilities and they are knowledgeable about its progress.
- **Examples:** At a state level, the Texas [Tri-Agency Workforce Initiative](#) creates cross-agency teams. At a regional level, the [Rural Schools Innovation Zone](#) enables collaboration across K-12 and postsecondary institutions in a rural area of Texas.

2b. Identify a strong organization that can serve in an **intermediary** role to support the pathmaking team, convene key stakeholders, make connections across systems, and scale effective best practices.

- **Implementation notes:** Intermediaries sit at the intersection of K-12, postsecondary, and workforce, providing the programmatic support for implementation. An intermediary provides a particular *function* but may take a variety of *forms*: local workforce board, community college, standalone nonprofit, philanthropy, etc.
- **Examples:** [ElevateEdAZ](#), a program of the Greater Phoenix Chamber Foundation, serves as an intermediary and partners with education, business, and community to prepare students for college and career in leading industries. The [McClure Foundation](#) in Vermont is a philanthropy that provides intermediary services. [Northern Virginia Community College](#) (NOVA) is a college that serves as a regional intermediary.

2c. Invest in the **human capital and training** needed to implement the action plan, from the classroom to the system level. This includes upskilling current staff and creating talent pipelines for new staff.

- **Implementation notes:** Current staff at the school, region, and state level will need training in purposeful pathways, which can be provided through professional learning sessions, webinars, and communities of practice. Regions and states should leverage existing structures and funding, when possible. Talent pipelines should also be built and incentivized. Such programs may include reducing the certification burden for industry professionals to teach CTE classes or fellowship and training programs for hard-to-fill positions.
- **Examples:** This [report from Jobs for the Future](#) (JFF) describes how Leeward Community College in Hawaii offers an Alternative Certification for CTE Licensure Program (see p. 22). [Rhode Island](#) made its CTE teacher licensure requirements more flexible for industry professionals that move to the classroom. Harvard's [Strategic Data Project](#) recruits and trains data fellows who are placed in districts and states to support data and accountability work.

2d. Formalize **joint governance structures** spanning K-12, postsecondary, and workforce that can make decisions across and at the intersections among these three systems.

- **Implementation notes:** Governance structures can start informally, but in the long-term, creating formal structures is often worth the time. Advocates from the community can help build support for these shifts.
- **Examples:** [Southwest Colorado Education Collaborative](#) is a rural collaborative made up of K-12, higher education, industry, and Tribal leaders. At a state level, Ohio created a joint Department of Education and Workforce via [a 2023 law](#). Massachusetts's K-12 and postsecondary boards created an Early College Joint Committee via [this resolution](#), and that committee's work has been supported by a nonprofit advocacy group, the [Massachusetts Alliance for Early College](#) (MA4EC). This [report](#) from the College in High School Alliance outlines effective joint governance structures for dual enrollment.



3. DATA AND ACCOUNTABILITY

What it is:

Regions and states create shared data and accountability systems that measure and incentivize progress toward a common vision.

Why it matters:

Data serve as the “nervous system” of any initiative and provide the information decisionmakers need to support continuous improvement and implementation of purposeful pathways. Accountability provides an incentive for system leaders and practitioners to align their work to these data and metrics.

Key steps

3a. Identify **priority metrics** related to the intersection of education and workforce that are shared across all accountability and reporting systems. The [Measurement Action Guide](#) offers a measurement framework and potential metrics.

- **Implementation notes:** Usage of shared definitions of key concepts (e.g., early career credentials of value) across sectors and institutions improve collaboration and provide a shared language for measurement.
- **Examples:** Colorado Succeeds identifies a set of “[Big Three](#)” common metrics to prioritize. ElevateEdAZ publishes a [report](#) that defines important cross-sector metrics, such as high-quality pathways and priority industry sectors. Advance CTE’s [credential of value report](#) summarizes state-level approaches to defining credentials of value. [Opportunity Insights’ Social Capital Atlas](#) includes measures of connectedness organized by high school.

3b. Develop public and accessible **dashboards** that are regularly updated to track progress on metrics. Include disaggregations for student subpopulations.

- **Implementation notes:** Data dashboards for purposeful pathways provide a central repository of the most important education and workforce information that leaders need to make decisions. Such dashboards are often created at a state level. Regions can start by using preexisting state dashboards and develop customized regional dashboards over time.
- **Examples:** [Massachusetts’s Early College Dashboard](#) tracks participation and outcomes in programs with accelerated course sequences. [Commit Partnership](#) in Texas and the [Washington Student Achievement Council](#) have multiple statewide pathways-related dashboards.

3c. Develop **accountability** systems that incentivize high-quality implementation and connect to support systems.

- **Implementation notes:** Accountability systems can be developed at a regional or state level. Many are built upon programs from the federal level: Perkins and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) for K-12; GEAR UP and Workforce Pell for postsecondary; and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) for workforce. These federal, state, and regional programs have associated accountability systems that, when integrated, provide strong and lasting incentives for cross-sector collaboration.
- **Examples:** [Texas’s HB 8](#) funds community colleges with a dynamic, performance-based model tied to specific outcomes including dual enrollment participation and completion of credentials of value. [Tennessee SCORE](#) outlines how to use Tennessee’s outcomes-based K-12 funding formula to incentivize preparing students for high-wage, high-growth careers.

3d. Use **longitudinal data systems** that connect K-12, postsecondary, and workforce data to make decisions.

- **Implementation notes:** Longitudinal data systems connect K-12, postsecondary, and workforce data to follow students’ trajectories from school to career. These systems provide powerful insights such as the wages earned by students who earn certain credentials. The U.S. Department of Education has been [funding](#) statewide longitudinal data systems (SLDSs) for years, although not every state has a well-developed system that regions can use. Communities without an SLDS can create regional data-sharing systems or extrapolate from other data sources.
- **Examples:** Kentucky’s [KY STATS](#) has a strong SLDS and publishes interactive reports that show, for example, the K-12, postsecondary, and workforce outcomes of CTE programs. The [Central Florida Education Ecosystem Database \(CFEED\)](#) is an example of a regional K-12/postsecondary longitudinal data system.



4. FUNDING

What it is:

Regions and states increase and braid funding to reduce barriers and incentivize progress.

Why it matters:

Education and workforce systems cannot change without the resources to do so. New, reimagined, and sustainable funding sources ensure that purposeful pathways can grow and endure.

Key steps

4a. Identify multiple funding sources and **braid funding** to map “horizontally” (across K-12, postsecondary, and workforce) and “vertically” (across federal, state, and local funding programs) to implement the action plan.

- **Implementation notes:** Key federal sources include Perkins, WIOA, ESSA Title IV, Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE), Higher Education Act (HEA), and Pell. Key state funds may include per-pupil funding, dual enrollment subsidies, promise scholarships, and workforce development funds.
- **Examples:** [Rural Alliance Zone 32](#) (RAZ-32) in Indiana provides braided funding for students to travel between high school, college, and career sites as part of its integrated pathway programs. Texas’s [SB1786 in 2025](#) includes statutory language directing state agencies to braid funds. Bellwether’s [Scaling Opportunity](#) playbook describes Delaware’s approach to braiding funds (p. 8). This [report](#) from Advance CTE provides details on specific funding sources that can be braided; [case studies from New America](#) detail how three regions plan and manage their braided funds.

4b. Create **new funding sources** that build upon state and federal grant programs to overcome barriers to students’ participation.

- **Implementation notes:** Purposeful pathways may require funding beyond baseline programmatic funding to build high-quality experiences for all students.
- **Examples:** [Measure N in Oakland, California](#), a district ballot initiative, increased recurring funding for integrated pathway programs. This [Community College Research \(CCRC\) report](#) summarizes how states fund dual enrollment aligned to purposeful pathways. This [College in High School Alliance report](#) outlines recommended state funding approaches.

4c. Develop **flexible funding sources** that are responsive to the priorities the pathmaking team or intermediary identifies.

- **Implementation notes:** Building systems that span K-12, postsecondary, and workforce often depends on flexible funding to address student needs beyond traditional formula funding.
- **Examples:** Washington’s [Regional Challenge Grant](#) funds cross-sector partnerships among K-12, higher education, workforce, and nonprofits. Indiana’s [Career Scholarship Account](#) program provides funding for career-connected learning that can be used for programs outside of traditional public schools.

4d. Align funding sources with the action plan’s metrics and accountability systems to **incentivize improved student outcomes**.

- **Implementation notes:** When accountability systems are tied to opportunities for increased funding, they often lead to large-scale change. “Carrots” often work better than “sticks”; that is, opportunities for increased funding often have fewer unintended consequences than incentives based on funding cuts (see accountability systems in [3c above](#)).
- **Examples:** The [Rural Pathway Excellence Partnership program](#) in Texas provides bonus funding for high schools whose graduates earn credentials of value within five years of graduation.



5. COHERENT POLICIES

What it is:

Regions and states create coherent policies that remove barriers, break down silos, and ensure equitable access to purposeful pathways.

Why it matters:

If policies are not connected and aligned, then advancing work at the intersection of K-12, postsecondary, and workforce will become prohibitively complicated and bureaucratic.

Key steps

5a. Implement a **communication strategy** to help students and families navigate the transitions between K-12, postsecondary, and the workforce.

- **Implementation notes:** Successful pathmaking teams partner with student and family advocacy groups to develop communications materials that use channels and language they understand best.
- **Examples:** Advance CTE's [Learning that Works Resource Center](#) contains a communications section with tools and resources for messaging specific to CTE and career-connected learning. The outreach chapter of the [DEEP Insights report from CCRC](#) includes strong examples of how colleges can creatively build awareness and trust with students and families.

5b. Institute policies that better integrate **advising, accelerated coursework sequences, and career-connected learning**.

- **Implementation notes:** These components of purposeful pathways are often managed by different teams or organizations but are most effective when integrated. See the Commission's [High-impact Practices Action Guide](#) for examples of practices that integrate these programmatic experiences.
- **Examples:** The [DEEP Framework](#) from CCRC, [NACEP National Standards](#), and CHSA [State Policy Roadmap](#) all support the implementation and delivery of high-quality dual enrollment, including layering advising and making connections between courses and careers. In Colorado, the [Arvada Chamber of Commerce](#) partners with local schools to support integration between what is taught in the classroom and what employers need. Rhode Island has a [school counseling framework](#) aligned to national standards and a resource hub to support implementation. The [PACE Framework](#) supports integrated career-connected learning and advising in Cleveland.

5c. Institute strategies and structures to help students cultivate **social capital, belonging, and purpose**.

- **Implementation notes:** Social capital, belonging, and purpose are essential features of purposeful pathways. Students bring a wide range of experiences, identities, and aspirations to their programs. To ensure students can fully leverage and expand their networks, sense of belonging, and clarity of purpose requires intentional and explicit focus. See the Commission's [High-Impact Practices Action Guide](#) for examples of practices that support students in the cultivation of agency.
- **Examples:** The Christensen Institute has a resource hub for [social capital](#), as does Education Strategy Group's (ESG) [Cultivating Connections](#) site. Motivate Lab's [Social Belonging Project](#) has resources on belonging. This [MDRC report](#) outlines district-level strategies for improving students' sense of belonging. Highline Public Schools in Washington incorporates specific strategies for belonging in its district [strategic plan](#).

5d. Facilitate the **transfer and recognition of credits and credentials** earned in high school by accredited postsecondary institutions and workforce organizations.

- **Implementation notes:** State and local policies can ensure that accelerated course sequences yield credits that are applied to a student's postsecondary course of study and credentials recognized by local colleges and employers. This provides students with a head start toward a credential and a career.
- **Examples:** The [Dallas Transfer Collaborative](#) is a partnership between colleges and schools to simplify credit transfers. [Indiana College Core](#) is a block of 30 credit hours guaranteed to transfer to public colleges statewide. [The Transfer Playbook from CCRC and The Aspen Institute](#) outlines concrete strategies to improve transfer student outcomes, with special attention to dual enrollment students.

Implementation phases

When regions and states implement pathways, their progress often follows a similar arc across three phases: Start, Scale, and Sustain. Cross-sector leaders can use the descriptions below—or the [self-assessment](#) on the next page—to identify the best next steps for their current stage of implementation.






While these phases outline a common implementation process, reality is often far more complicated and less linear than what is described below. Actual implementation in any region or state will vary depending on the local context. Regions or states beginning work on purposeful pathways may find themselves at any—or multiple—phases.

| Phase 1 – Start | Phase 2 – Scale | Phase 3 – Sustain |
|--|--|---|
| <p>This phase is mostly about two things: people and plans. Champions of purposeful pathways identify potential cross-sector partners and form a team. This team develops a clear vision, plan, and key metrics and communicates this plan to practitioners, students, and families. For advice on engaging students, see Pursuing Purpose: A Playbook for Meaningful Student Engagement—a companion resource developed by Big Picture Learning and young adult commissioners.</p> <p>Challenge: Team first or plan first?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The sequence matters less than engaging in multiple cycles of work on both. There are often many iterations of expanding the team, refining the plan based on feedback from new team members, identifying additional team members based on the revised plan, and so on. <p>Challenge: Bottom-up or top-down?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> An initiative needs both executive buy-in and grassroots support to be successful. It is often quicker to start with executive buy-in, but bottom-up initiatives often benefit from broader support. Even with strong executive support, a pathmaking team of mid- to senior-level leaders is needed for effective implementation. | <p>This phase is about expanding from promising pilots to large-scale programs that impact the entire region or state. Scaling often requires both leveraging existing systems and creating new ones that remove barriers to access.</p> <p>Challenge: Formal or informal?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ultimately, strong relationships and shared vision are the key drivers of effective cross-sector collaboration and should be prioritized before formalizing partnerships through MOUs or establishing permanent structures. Starting with informal structures when building new systems and policies allows leaders to experiment with different models for collaboration until they find the most effective one for their context. <p>Challenge: Renovation or new build?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Purposeful pathways require many new structures, but, when possible, it is often more time-effective to repurpose existing systems (organizations, funding, teams, data collections, etc.) than build new ones from scratch. | <p>This phase is about fortifying the new purposeful pathways system through permanent, sustainable, long-term structures. If this phase is successful, the education and workforce system in the region or state aligns with the vision of purposeful pathways, enjoys broad support, is not interrupted by leadership changes, and undergoes regular cycles of improvement.</p> <p>Challenge: Leadership Turnover</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> One strategy is to diversify by identifying multiple champions across organizations and implementation levels so any single leader's departure is survivable. At this latter phase, it may now be worth the effort to formalize structures that were previously left informal. <p>Challenge: Budget constraints</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustained initiatives require sustained funding. This means building durable political coalitions, seeding supportive advocacy organizations, and demonstrating a positive return on investment (ROI) for public and private dollars dedicated to the effort. |

Self assessment

The following form can be used to assess a region or state’s current adoption level of the enabling conditions. The rows will help assess progress on each enabling condition, and the columns will assess the implementation phase. This assessment will be most useful if filled out jointly by a cross-sector team from K-12, postsecondary, and workforce.

Directions: Place a check in the box for each key step the region or state has implemented. Reference the [descriptions](#) above for a short description of each step. When finished, add up the points across the rows and columns. Read how to interpret the score on the next page.

| Enabling Condition | Phase 1 - Start | Phase 2 - Scale | Phase 3 - Sustain | Totals: |
|--|--|--|---|---------------------|
|  <p>1. VISION AND PLAN</p> | <input type="checkbox"/> Convene decisionmakers (1a) <input type="checkbox"/> Publish common vision (1b) <input type="checkbox"/> Develop action plan (1c) | <input type="checkbox"/> Connect with preexisting plans (1d) | n/a | ____ /4 = ____ % |
|  <p>2. GOVERNANCE AND STAFFING</p> | <input type="checkbox"/> Convene pathmaking team (2a) <input type="checkbox"/> Identify intermediary (2b) | <input type="checkbox"/> Invest in human capital and training (2c) | <input type="checkbox"/> Formalize joint governance structures (2d) | ____ /4 = ____ % |
|  <p>3. DATA AND ACCOUNTABILITY</p> | <input type="checkbox"/> Identify priority metrics (3a) | <input type="checkbox"/> Develop dashboards (3b) <input type="checkbox"/> Develop accountability systems (3c) | <input type="checkbox"/> Leverage longitudinal data systems (3d) | ____ /4 = ____ % |
|  <p>4. FUNDING</p> | <input type="checkbox"/> Braid funding (4a) | <input type="checkbox"/> Create new funding sources (4b) <input type="checkbox"/> Develop flexible funding sources (4c) | <input type="checkbox"/> Incentivize outcomes (4d) | ____ /4 = ____ % |
|  <p>5. COHERENT POLICIES</p> | <input type="checkbox"/> Implement communications strategy (5a) | <input type="checkbox"/> Eliminate barriers to programmatic elements (5b) <input type="checkbox"/> Eliminate barriers to student agency elements (5c) | <input type="checkbox"/> Facilitate credit/credential transfer and recognition (5d) | ____ /4 = ____ % |
| Totals: | Total: ____ /8 = ____ % | Total: ____ /8 = ____ % | Total: ____ /8 = ____ % | ____ /4 = ____ % |

Interpreting the score

Row totals:

Assessing and prioritizing specific enabling conditions

Point totals across the rows will identify which enabling conditions are currently strongest and weakest in a region or state. That information will identify which enabling conditions to prioritize for improvement. After identifying specific enabling conditions to prioritize, reference the [Enabling Conditions Details](#) section for implementation advice and examples.

Column totals:

Identifying the community’s implementation phase

Point totals across the columns will identify the implementation phase. While many states or regions may have some checkboxes across many phases, leaders should consider themselves in the earliest phase that still has several unchecked boxes. After identifying the current implementation phase, reference the brief [Implementation phases](#) section for implementation advice.



Learn more about purposeful pathways

All high school students should have access to purposeful pathways—regardless of where they are getting started or where they want to go. Readers are encouraged to [explore the full Commission report and accompanying action guides](#) to learn more.

- *A Launchpad for Life*: introduces the vision for purposeful pathways, the evidence behind the programmatic experiences, and the cultivation of agency. The report also includes galvanizing recommendations for K-12, higher education, workforce, and intermediary leaders to implement and scale purposeful pathways in their communities.
- *High-Impact Practices Action Guide*: Introduces a set of high-impact practices that illustrate different approaches to integrate and build coherence across programmatic experiences and cultivation of agency.
- *Measurement Action Guide*: Introduces a measurement framework and key considerations for pathmaking teams to implement and continuously improve purposeful pathways.
- *Pursuing Purpose: A Playbook for Meaningful Student Engagement*: This resource, produced by Big Picture Learning and young adult commissioners, equips school and system leaders with strategies to co-design with youth to ensure pathways are relevant and responsive to students' needs.

Additional resources about enabling conditions

The following is a list of select outside publications regarding enabling conditions.

- [Unlocking Career Success playbooks](#): A series of brief “playbooks” summarizing key next steps, which are broken out by specific stakeholder groups (governors, workforce board leaders, etc.). These were initially published by the U.S. Department of Education and are now posted on All4Ed’s website.
- [Accelerate ED resources](#): Takeaways from a national community of practice for regional cross-sector partnerships. Accelerate ED is funded by the Gates Foundation and coordinated by ESG.
- [Pathways Matter](#): Resource hub from ExceInEd for state policymakers with a list of 20 [pathways policies](#) and [state-level analysis](#).

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Spencer Sherman, Sarina Sheth Noone, Kelly Kovacic Duran and Juan Jimenez.