

Minnesota's Response: Request for Information on Career Pathways from DOL, ED, HHS

Response from Minnesota's [Department of Employment and Economic Development \(DEED\)](#), [Department of Education \(MDE\)](#), [Department of Human Services \(DHS\)](#), [Governor's Workforce Development Council \(GWDC\)](#) (state Workforce Investment Board), [Minnesota Workforce Council Association \(MWCA\)](#), [Minnesota State Colleges and Universities \(MNSCU\)](#); MN operates an expanded TANF program named the [Minnesota Family Investment Program \(MFIP\)](#); MN's One Stop Centers/American Job Centers are called "WorkForce Centers".

Q1: TAGS: Holistic; Innovation; Adult Basic Education ABE; Career and Technical Education CTE; Workforce Development; Wrap Around Services; Integrated Education and Training; Sector Strategies Shared

Vision: A Career Pathways (CP) system supports a network of programs and education/training with an overarching structure that facilitates synergies, collaboration, the alignment of resources and policies, and communities of learning and practice. The goal is to support individuals as they develop skills, earn credentials, and obtain and retain long-term employment in high-demand occupations at family sustaining wages. CPs incorporate individualized career and employment barrier resolution through counseling/navigation, stackable training and wrap-around supportive services. Recently, the GWDC developed and approved a broad and inclusive shared vision of CP as a starting point for further development of a statewide CP system. The shared vision focuses on four main characteristics: responsive to the local labor market; attuned to the need of participants holistically; sequenced, stackable, connected upward movement; and continual improvement and evolution through use of data. **Informing frameworks:**

- [Department of Labor \(DOL\) ETA Toolkit](#), [Career Pathways Institute](#), and [Six Key Elements](#);
- *Adult CP Training and Support Center* – technical assistance (TA);
- [Advancing Career and Technical Education in State and Local CP Systems](#) - builds cross agency partnerships, engages employers, uses data to improve with local partners;
- *Perkins Consortia model for secondary and postsecondary collaboration*;

- *Programs of Study* – implements aligned curricula that begin at high school, continue through college programs to meet regional workforce needs in 26 local consortia;
- [*Health Professional Opportunity Grants*](#) – stackable credential model in health care sector;
- [*TAACCCT*](#) – evolving guidance in grant solicitations; *Jobs for the Future* toolkits;
- [*OCTAE Ready for College Fund*](#) – advancing understanding of transition services,
- [*DOL Workforce Innovation Fund*](#) – advancing common agenda and shared measurement;
- [*Alliance for Quality Career Pathways \(AQCP\)*](#) – Ten states are building common framework.

A specific program that has informed MN is the [*MN FastTRAC Adult CPs \(Joyce Foundation’s Shifting Gears Initiative\)*](#). Other states: VA, IN, CO, CA, KS, NE, MA, OR, WA, MD.

<p>Q2: TAGS: Innovation; Articulation; Collaboration; Credentials; Employer Engagement; Alignment; Partnerships; Professional Development</p>
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FACTORS THAT FACILITATE: CP in MN has excelled due to a shared collaborative spirit among government agencies, local program providers, chief local elected officials, LWIBs, businesses and nonprofit organizations. These entities have overcome structural programmatic impediments and achieved long-lasting outcomes. Programmatic responsiveness is vital to meeting the particular needs of any population as CP participants often have multiple barriers.

- Federal: ED/DOL/HHS Joint Letter, TEGL 15-10 Credential Resource Guide, any existing flexibility in reporting (“rolling up” TANF Work Participation Rate (WPR));
- State: Gubernatorial leadership (GWDC); state agency leadership; employer champions; existing well-developed short-term credential programs in the public postsecondary system; articulated certification systems for ABE/ESL/secondary; Technical Skill Assessment Project with common core competencies, state-approved skill assessments and curriculum blueprints.
- Local/regional: long-standing relationships, collaboration to meet regional economic development; WIBs and WorkForce centers, grant activities, CTE consortia.

FACTORS THAT CREATE DIFFICULTY: Established systems struggle to shift operations and processes beyond traditional models; CPs are hard to embed at the state agency level.

- Lack of a common definition, resulting in tension created by calling all training a ‘CP’;
- Lack of common participant outcome metrics, along with lack of consistent timeframes leads to multiple (and often duplicative) requirements in use and reporting of braided funding streams, thereby making program agility and responsiveness difficult;
- Lack of clearly defined employer demand; Employer articulation of training needs is essential because it reaches a larger policy audience and increases support for CP systems;
- Short-term program requirements that emphasize process related activities versus the development of employability enhancing outcomes; and
- Lack of training capacity and/or expensive capital costs for education institutions.

Q3: TAGS: Adult Basic Education (ABE); Career and Technical Education (CTE); Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Adult; Integrated; Temporary Assistance to needy Families (TANF) Recipients); Trade-Adjusted Workers; Dual Enrollment

Federal: WIA Title 1B Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth, WIA Incentive (formerly 10 percent Governor’s reserve and performance-based incentive award funding); Wagner Peysner; TANF; TAAACT Grants, Workforce Innovation Fund, Perkins CTE funds, CDBG, DOL Grants, Pell Grants and student loans, ABE (WIA Title II), Vocational Rehabilitation Services (WIA IV); and SNAP (Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program) employment and training dollars;

State: [MN Adult Workforce Development Competitive Grant Program \(AWDP\)](#); MN Workforce Development Fund (WDF) including [Job Skills Partnership](#) low-income worker grants; [FastTRAC](#) programming authorized by legislature using general and WDF monies;

Local: Shifting Gears Initiative funding from the Joyce Foundation, Blandin Foundation, McKnight Foundation, United Way, and any federal/state funds leveraged.

FACTORS THAT FACILITATE:

- Regional administrative assertion to “do CPs” with WIA funds under existing legislation;
- Philanthropic investment asking for leveraged use of public funds;
- federal competitive funds asking for leveraged use of multiple system funds;
- LWIB commitment to CPs; and well-established financial oversight protocols.

FACTORS THAT IMPEDE:

- Reporting on federal/state funds braided together in a competitive funding scenario – one grant to a local partnership may contain funds (e.g., WIA Incentive, TANF Innovation, WIA II, III, or IV, and state ABE) that have different end dates and must be tracked back to the source, requiring separate grant numbers for each stream, which creates a duplication of financial processes and a disincentive for locals to participate in the process;
- At the local level, deciding on mutually reinforcing activities rather than duplicative efforts and agreeing to shared definitions/language and performance metrics can be problematic.

Q4: TAGS: Employer Engagement; Partnerships; Integrated; Wrap Around Services; Articulation; Collaboration; Alignment
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Businesses/employers and industry associations drive the occupations upon which partners design their CP programs, articulate need and help to design, and hire working learners and/or graduates. Concerns from employers: lack of work readiness and lack of agility in education.

Education providers offer credential attainment to prepare participants for employment entry and advancement. Program advisory committees with business and industry representatives and secondary, college and university partners enhance collaboration and shared resources.

Education partners struggle with reconciling the length and integrity of educational programs with employers’ changing needs, which are further challenged by participants’ urgent barriers.

Workforce development agencies and WorkForce Centers, local WIBs recruit/co-enroll CP program participants (often from WIA), support individuals' work readiness, help navigate, connect efforts to LMI, provide comprehensive assessments of skills and interests; find the right educational institution, assist with job placement/retention, foster linkages with local employers, and manage data. Challenge: process-related tracking and performance measures.

Community based organizations (CBOs) and human service providers recruit from specific communities as well as human service programs and provide support services. Challenge: dwindling resources, lack of dedicated funding streams, and diverse eligibility criteria.

Philanthropic organizations support partner organizations with flexible funding that supports innovation, recruit, provide TA to partners and advocate for system resources.

State, regional, local and/or tribal government agencies offer TA, shared sector strategies, professional development, connect to economic development partners, LMI, monitoring, evaluation, and leadership to make policy changes at the state and federal levels.

Labor unions provide program review, skills training, apprenticeship, and certifications.

Q5: TAGS: Sector Strategies Shared; Holistic; Employer Engagement; Competency Models; Long-term Unemployed; Alignment; Workforce Development

This is MN's most significant area for growth: defining a cohesive statewide economic development strategy and aligning CP systems therein. The [MN Energy Consortium](#) is an example of a statewide partnership that addresses workforce development specific to energy; the Southwest Energy Collaborative does the same at a local level. These efforts have made strides toward solidifying regional economic strategies and bringing education and workforce development partners to the table. The [National Governors Association \(NGA\) State Sector Strategies Coming of Age report](#) illustrates CP systems' connection with industry clusters.

Q6: TAGS: Employer Engagement; Partnerships; Collaboration; Innovation; Articulation

Traditional Labor Market Information (LMI): Is leveraged in planning efforts by way of the [Occupations in Demand tool](#), provided by the state LMI office; one effort modified the tool to include the graduation rate in a given field for comparison. TANF/MFIP Innovation Grants also require applicants to identify “in demand occupations” through the use of LMI.

Local Unified Plans (LUP): DEED asks local areas to base workforce development efforts in LMI, and to reflect this in the annually updated LUP. It also asks what their capacity is for implementing a CP system, CP services, and strategy for increasing credential attainment

Local Area Feedback: Due to the lag in traditional LMI, concerted efforts for feedback are vital to address micro labor market bursts, such as hiring campaigns or large layoffs in an area. MN maintains this communication through Business Services Representatives, Advisory Councils, Pathways to Postsecondary Summits, WIBs (specifically members who represent private industry), *World’s Best Workforce* strategic planning, local Chambers of Commerce, new/specialized technology. **Specific efforts** that have incorporated LMI into CP efforts are the [Skills@Work](#) effort through MN’s statewide WIB, the [Itasca Project](#), Workforce Assessments in industry sectors, [Employer Speaks](#), MnSCU’s [Charting the Future](#), and [CareerOneStop.org](#). Additional strategies include state legislation requiring LMI in educational planning, [GPS Lifepan](#), Minnesota Career Information System, a newly released tool through the WDQI which reveals employment trends by educational program and Real Time LMI by MnSCU and MDE.

<p>Q7: TAGS: TANF Recipients; Low-skilled Adults; Low-income Adults; Low-income Youth; Incarcerated Individuals; Veterans; Wrap Around Services; Individuals with Disabilities</p>

To make CP systems accessible to diverse populations including those listed in metadata tags, services must be wrap-around, tailored, strategic, and longer-term. In all circumstances, the case manager, counselor, and/or navigator assists participants with career and employment planning,

coordinates support/wrap-around services, understands training schedules and public assistance. To be more accessible and inclusive, CPs must engage a more comprehensive array of partners.

Q8: TAGS: Incarcerated individuals; LEP/ELL/ESL; Long-term Unemployed; Immigrants; Out-of-School Youth; Veterans; Individuals with Disabilities

Incarcerated individuals and reentry populations *Challenges:* Limited access to educational programming, lack of basic skills/occupational training to inspire low-skill adults and youth.

Recommendation: Convert high school equivalency programs in institutional settings to integrated ABE with postsecondary credential attainment; build employer support within sector.

ELL/ESL/LEP Learners *Challenges:* Low level ESL learners cannot access credit bearing credential programs *Recommendation:* Incent more pre-postsecondary credentialing programs (e.g., boilers license, roofing, CDL, health aide) in ESL context, raising occupational skills.

Adults and out-of-school youth without high school diploma or equivalent *Challenges:*

These students struggle to access postsecondary courses; ABE and dropout programs focus narrowly on high school equivalency attainment and fail to transition large numbers of learners to continued CP education; *Recommendation:* Allow ABE/postsecondary students to use Pell Grants through CPs; build CP programs that award HS equivalency in postsecondary study;

Veterans *Challenges:* Difficulty translating skills from time in service to civilian roles; older Veterans face an increasing level of unemployment, and often require some remedial training in some basic areas such as math and writing before they will be successful in a formal training program. *Recommendation:* Use CP navigation supports to ease transition for these working learners; bring veteran advocacy groups into CP partnerships; offer tutors to assist Veterans in the classroom; offer the NCRC to demonstrate efficacy and competence in workplace skills.

Q9: TAGS: Alignment; Apprenticeship; Sector Strategies Shared; Innovation; Employer Engagement; Collaboration; Partnerships; Veterans

Industry regulation can facilitate credentials stackability/portability through requiring credentials that are standardized and, therefore, portable. This standardization is difficult to achieve in rapidly evolving or minimally regulated sectors (IT). **Challenge:** Transferring veterans' experience to credentials and civilian occupations. MN is using TA grant from [NGA Policy Academy](#) to align credentialing for peace officers, EMTs, and LPNs. **Promising practices:** MN AWDP, wherein many CBO grantees have chosen to work with the [MN Office of Higher Education](#) and industry associations to offer training through their organizations, which has made credentialed training shorter and more accessible to participants in this program. Example of aligning industry-recognized credentials into a successful CP system: [MN's Advanced Manufacturing Workforce Pilot](#), which addresses skills gap in manufacturing through a demand driven CP involving apprenticeships and third party credentialing by industry associations.

CHALLENGES: *Institutional processes and policies like academic review are long and labored; *Incumbent workers are still largely served through customized training which results in completion without the backbone of portability or stackability and is especially difficult with emerging credentials being introduced by industry and not taken up by academic institutions. Restrictive training rules further impede services to incumbent workers; *CBOs have built parallel, separate and not quite equal, credentialing systems to serve their participants who cannot access/succeed in traditional systems, but these credentials do not "count" when the participant tries to go further up the career ladder; *Demonstrating to clients that short-term investments/sacrifices pay off in longer term benefits. *Providers need resources for all supports.

Q10: TAGS: Integrated; Alignment; Credentials; Certificates
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To measure outcomes and evaluate the strength of CPs, workforce service providers collect information on demographics and services received. This is matched with quarterly wage detail

data on the individual's earnings, occupation, public benefits usage, and incarceration history, which is added to management information systems (MIS). Tracking a journey from basic remedial education, postsecondary credentialing to employment and retention, requires coordination and data sharing agreements shared MIS including those with ABE and MnSCU. Ongoing efforts to evaluate programs include:

- **AQCP 1.0 Framework** includes a CPs System Self-Assessment Tool, which some local partners have piloted as a measure partnership efforts and plan for continuous improvement;
- **[Workforce One](#) (WF1) ID:** DEED and DHS are working on a process for case managers to identify individuals who are on a CP in WF1, the agencies' MIS, which is important when there is no single funding stream attached and encourages system-wide flexibility;
- **Net Impact Evaluation:** The GWDC and DEED are currently completing a pilot *net impact* evaluation using CP program data to analyze and understand the impacts on participants relative to control groups of similar non-participants from other administrative datasets.

Q11: TAGS: Credentials; Alignment; Articulation
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Differing performance measures across funding streams make accurately measuring performance in CPs, where participants straddle multiple datasets, difficult. CPs tend to include those who were working at the time of program enrollment in all performance measures, which is not the case for WIA 1B. CP programs also track longer-term job retention and change in earnings, unlike WIA. The TANF WPR creates disincentives for CP programs. CP metrics should follow participants across organizations/institutions, making results of the CP visible. CP is not a discrete activity; outcomes are “rolled up” to the organizational/institutional levels; CP results are invisible. Measuring contributions of various funding sources and partners is important, but so is a cross-system view of results for shared accountability and CP system improvement.

Q12: TAGS: Integrated Education and Training; Sector Strategies Shared; Partnerships; Integrated Education and Training; Adult Basic Education ABE; Career and Technical Education CTE; Employer Engagement; Partnerships

- a) **Legislation, statutes, and/or regulations:**
- i. Allow administrative flexibility with the TANF WPR. Specifically, allow CP program participation to “count” as a WPR activity without impacting 30 percent education cap that largely serves in-school youth and TANF recipients; and
 - ii. Permit longer-term and more flexible program practices to achieve long-term outcomes.
 - iii. Expanded eligibility for financial aid (such as Pell Grants) to training programs that are chunked, credential-focused, stackable, articulated, and scaffolded;
 - iv. Consider CPs that may connect with entrepreneurial activities.
- b) **TA Activities:** Provide TA to states that mirror the federal cross agency CP leadership team.
- c) **Funding Strategies:** MUST be sustainable, flexible, and timely; One-time funding less helpful.
- d) **Research and Evaluation Activities:** Require comparative evaluation efforts that demonstrate the efficacy of CP in remediating basic skills deficiencies, skill training acquisition and placement into long-term employment. Coordinate these performance goals with all evaluation initiatives to assess the impact of receiving services under a CP program as compared to non-CP. Implement policies and procedures that ease data sharing among state agencies.

Q13: TAGS: Sector Strategies Shared; Partnerships; Employer Engagement; Partnerships

Strategies: Specify and publicize career advancement and educational opportunities for current employees to return to school to advance (e.g. RN AD nurses → BSN/BAN → Nurse Practitioners, etc.). Tap into community colleges. *Challenge:* Pipeline does not begin early enough or end late enough; community college students should start working in entry level jobs while in school; current employees should continue education (e.g. incumbent worker training).