

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS TOOLKIT

THE CHALLENGE

Communities across the country face a major challenge: disconnect between their education systems and the needs of the workforce. While employers struggle to find qualified, highly skilled talent, many individuals (particularly those from historically underserved and other high-priority populations) face barriers that prevent them from earning credentials or degrees and accessing sustaining career paths.

The Pathways to Success model provides a proven, community-driven approach that connects education, workforce, and support services into a seamless system. Its purpose is simple yet powerful: remove barriers that prevent motivated individuals from accessing education-to-employment opportunities and create clear pathways to thriving-wage careers. When these strategies work in concert, they transform fragmented efforts into a sustainable ecosystem that benefits individuals, families, employers, and entire regions. Communities can also use these strategies to align with federal Workforce Pell Grant eligibility requirements.

THE PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS FRAMEWORK

The toolkit provides a five-part strategy for building integrated, learner-centered systems that align education and the workforce to drive measurable outcomes, based on evidence.

ALIGNING SHARED GOALS FOR SUCCESS

This section of the toolkit is designed to help organizations identify and align their shared goals with those of other institutions in their communities, fostering strategic partnerships rooted in mutual accountability.

LEVERAGING RESOURCES AND FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Success depends not only on program delivery but on leveraging existing resources. Community colleges and workforce organizations must move beyond direct services to optimize diverse funding streams and partnerships that remove learner barriers and expand reach. This section introduces the mindset and infrastructure needed.

CREATING TAILORED EDUCATION TRAINING PROGRAMS & INTEGRATED EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROGRAMS

Expanding opportunity and driving regional economic growth requires education and workforce programs intentionally aligned with local industry needs and learner aspirations. When training pathways lack employer or student input, they often become fragmented, leaving labor gaps and limiting mobility. This section offers strategies to change that.

EXPANDING COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

This section of the toolkit is designed to help organizations thoughtfully expand their outreach efforts by identifying new audiences, deepening trust, and tailoring engagement strategies to local contexts. By leveraging data-informed approaches, elevating community voices, and fostering authentic relationships, organizations can extend their reach while strengthening the quality of their connections.

ENHANCING CAREER PATHWAYS WITH INTEGRATED SUPPORT SERVICES

Effective career pathways require more than academic and technical training – they demand a comprehensive approach that removes barriers to participation and success. This section focuses on integrating support services to create inclusive, learner-centered systems that meet diverse community needs.

When these strategies work in concert, they transform fragmented efforts into a sustainable ecosystem that benefits individuals, families, employers, and entire communities.

THE RESULTS

More than 6,000 individuals participated in the *Pathways to Success* effort and documented the following outcomes over two years. Among the successes:

- Improvement in ACT® WorkKeys® National Career Readiness Certificate™ (NCRC®) scores for **34% of participants**.
- A **126% increase** in persistence among program participants.
- Enrollment of **6,060 additional underserved and high-priority population learners**.
- **87% of student participants** attained a stackable credential.
- **98% of participants** continued their education after earning a short-term credential.

WHY USE THIS TOOLKIT

The *Pathways to Success* Toolkit directly addresses career seekers' barriers (finding time, space, and funds to build skills) by encouraging communities to develop support for motivated individuals to access education-to-employment opportunities. The *Pathways to Success* Toolkit is more than a set of strategies. It provides step-by-step guidance, ready-to-use tools, and practical activities that suggest strategies community leaders can use to connect partners, strengthen collaboration, and create an ecosystem that ensures all individuals have access to education leading to meaningful employment.

The *Pathways to Success* Toolkit produces outcomes aligned with key Workforce Pell performance standards, strengthening institutional capacity to design programs that meet federal accountability expectations while advancing equitable access to education-to-employment pathways.

At its core, this toolkit bridges the gap between:

- **Community service organizations**, which provide case management and wraparound supports.
- **Educational programs**, which prepare individuals for high-demand careers.
- **Business and industry partners**, who ensure training aligns with workforce needs.

A defining strength of this toolkit is the seamless connection between K-12 education, postsecondary institutions, and employers. By introducing career awareness and skills-building early — while also providing clear, supported transitions into college, apprenticeships, and employment — this approach creates a steady talent pipeline for long-term career success.

HOW TO USE THE TOOLKIT

Pathways to Success serves as both a comprehensive roadmap and a hands-on resource library. You can explore it cover to cover to understand the full model or jump straight to the sections and tools that best support your current goals.

How It's Organized: Each of the five major sections focuses on a key component of building career-connected pathways. Each section includes:

- **Overview** – What it is and why it matters.
- **Tools** – Step-by-step guides, templates and checklists you can adapt.
- **Case Studies & Spotlights** – Real-world examples of successful implementation.
- **Calls to Action** – Clear next steps to move from planning to measurable impact.

Getting Started: The toolkit provides an end-to-end model for building a connected workforce ecosystem. The steps include:

- **Identify Your Starting Point** – Review the Table of Contents and select a focus area that aligns with your immediate goals.
- **Use the Tools** – Download, print, or share templates, for team workshops, planning sessions, or grant proposals.
- **Learn from Examples** – Explore case studies and community spotlights to see proven strategies in action.
- **Track and Share Progress** – Utilize built-in metrics and dashboards to measure outcomes and celebrate milestones.
- **Revisit and Refine** – As partnerships, funding, and opportunities evolve, update your toolkit to reflect your community's growth.

CONCLUSION

The *Pathways to Success* Toolkit is more than a guide — it's an invitation to collaborate. By aligning goals, leveraging resources, and centering the needs of learners, your community can create clear, supported pathways that lead to education, employment, and economic mobility.

Together, we can build pathways to success that truly work — for everyone.

DEVELOPED IN COLLABORATION WITH METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE AND THE COLLEGE OF SOUTHERN NEVADA.

act.org/PathwaysToSuccess

