

National Dialogue on Career Pathways

On Oct. 10, the departments of Education, Labor (DOL) and Transportation, and the National Governor's Association jointly sponsored the National Dialogue on Career Pathways. The daylong event highlighted growing federal and state commitments to the development of career pathway systems that help youths and adults acquire marketable skills and industry-recognized credentials. These efforts include better aligning education, training and employment, and providing human and social services among public agencies and in collaboration with employers. The event brought together, for the first time, the full array of stakeholders in the career pathways arena—local, state and federal policymakers; employers, industry associations and philanthropic organizations; secondary and postsecondary institutions; the public workforce system; and human services agencies—to identify strategies for coordinating and scaling up career pathways.

Career pathway approaches emerged out of the farsighted efforts of leaders at the state and local levels who sought to meet head on the challenge of looming skill gaps and declining educational attainment rates. These pioneers built innovative programs that articulated the necessary education, career and academic advising, and supportive services needed to enter and progress in a career. Many of these innovations were designed, funded and evaluated with the help of philanthropic organizations committed to improving education and employment outcomes for historically vulnerable populations.

Over the past few years, several federal agencies have been integrating career pathway design elements into their discretionary grant and formula funding programs. Examples include ED's [Designing Instruction for Career Pathways](#), DOL's [TAACCCT](#) grants that build the capacity of community colleges to serve adult learners, and the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) [Health Profession Opportunity Grants](#) designed to enable low-skilled, low-income individuals to enter and advance in a health care career.

In an effort to support wider adoption of these models, ED, DOL and HHS issued a joint [letter](#) in April 2012, encouraging states and local areas to adopt career pathway approaches to providing education, training and employment services. Since that time, leaders and staff from all three agencies have continued to explore opportunities to better align their programs with each other and work with their clients to do the same at the state or local levels. Agency leaders have also been in communication with philanthropic leaders about how to evaluate and, where appropriate, scale up innovative approaches.

The National Dialogue expanded on the commitment expressed in the joint letter and included participation from the U.S. departments of Transportation, Agriculture and Energy, each of which is exploring how career pathway approaches can enrich its efforts to build a skilled workforce in industry sectors undergoing rapid change. The meeting included two panels of seasoned practitioners who have established successful career pathway programs and systems. It also included facilitated group discussions on strategies for coordinating and scaling up career pathways at the state level. The meeting concluded with commitments from the federal sponsors, the National Governor's Association, Jobs for the Future, and the Irvine and Joyce foundations to continue collaborating and sharing information on strategies for strengthening career pathways for learners and workers of all ages.

Employability Skills

Many policymakers, educators and employers are interested in employability skills as a critical component of preparing young people and adults both for the workforce and postsecondary education. But just what are employability skills? OVAE convened a working group to explore the range of definitions in use in the education, workforce development and business communities. MPR Associates, as part of the Support for States' Employability Standards in Career and Technical Education (CTE) and Adult Education project, worked with the group to compile an inventory of definitions, assessments and resources already in use.

From this inventory MPR highlighted the commonalities across definitions and categorized them into three main topics: applied knowledge, workplace skills and effective relationships. MPR also developed a framework, represented below, with these three main areas at its core. For more information about the skills required for employment, the elements in each category of this framework can be easily navigated on the recently launched Employability Skills Framework website at <http://cte.ed.gov/employabilityskills>.



The interactive website allows users to compare training models, create a customized assessment comparison worksheet and view practical examples of employability skills as they consider the best approach for their instructional environment. The site also includes a library of other federal resources and links to research on the topic. The Employability Skills Framework was developed by MPR under contract to OVAE. The framework and archives of its development may be accessed through the Perkins Collaborative Resource Network by clicking "I agree" at <http://cte.ed.gov/nationalinitiatives/employability.cfm>.