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## Career Pathways: A Definition

“Career pathways” is a term for a particular framework or process by which regions can better align publicly supported systems and programs to build a knowledge workforce. A career pathways system is a series of connected educational and training programs and support services that prepares and enables individuals, often while they are working, to secure a job and advance over time to successively higher levels of education and employment in a specific industry or occupational sector. No single organization can implement career pathways—the model is based upon partnerships.

### The Approach

Successful career pathways systems are built on trusting relationships and clear lines of communication among public and private partners. The steps for developing and implementing career pathways are described below. At all stages of the process, outreach is conducted to garner support and participation from stakeholders such as jobseekers, businesses, educational institutions, government agencies, and others. Note that the sequence in which these steps are undertaken will vary based upon the local context.

**Gap Analysis:** Convene education, workforce, economic development, employer, and labor groups to identify occupations of importance to local economies and map the requirements of entry and advancement at successive levels in each field. Conduct a gap analysis to assess how well existing education, workforce, and social services support worker access and advancement in the target fields, identifying challenges and weaknesses.

**Pathways Planning:** With input or guidance from business and industry, convene front-line staff from partner agencies, including education, workforce and social services, to modify existing programs and services and build new ones to eliminate barriers and create more seamless avenues to employment and advancement in each field.

**Implementation:** Operationalize recruiting, training, and placement systems. Often implementation of strategies takes place in stages where aspects of programs or policies are rolled out and beta-tested before broader implementation occurs.

**Continuous Improvement:** Systematically track education and labor market outcomes at each level, and continually modify programs and services to support advancement. Continue to evaluate program changes to ensure that they produce the desired improvements.

**Expand the Pathway:** Build on the pathways model to bring it to scale to serve larger numbers of students and employers. Adapt the approach for replication in other sectors of importance to the regional economy or to other populations of jobseekers.

Taken together, these steps represent a continuous improvement process that, if done correctly, will have a systemic and sustainable impact on the performance of the partner organizations.