



ATTAINING COLLEGE EXCELLENCE AND EQUITY

Since taking office, the Biden-Harris Administration and the U.S. Department of Education (Department) have been committed to a new vision of college excellence—one that uplifts inclusivity, equity, and excellence, rather than exclusivity and privilege.

The [Raise the Bar: Attaining College Excellence and Equity initiative](#) reflects the Department's commitment to ensuring that students of all backgrounds, ages, disability statuses, and income levels can succeed in any postsecondary pathway. This initiative is focused on supporting institutions and states to implement key evidence-based strategies that address critical loss points along students' postsecondary journeys, including data-driven improvement, holistic advising and wraparound services, credit mobility and transfer support, and career pathways. This resource guide is focused on transforming college-to-career pathways to ensure that all students can earn credentials of value.



Key Focus Area: Career Pathways

As our nation continues to face rapid shifts in the labor market, aligning postsecondary education with employment needs is critical to expanding opportunities for economic mobility and building a competitive workforce for the future. By 2031, over 70 percent of jobs are expected to require education and training beyond high school.¹ To meet this growing need and to equip Americans with the skills and training to secure a meaningful career and life-sustaining wage, we need

to better align our education and workforce systems to create equitable and innovative pathways.

Postsecondary institutions cannot build these pathways alone. Industry partners are central to developing new and innovative career-connected pathways that help pair classroom learning with real-world professional experience. To transform career-connected pathways in postsecondary education, institutions and industry partners need to consider:



1.

**CONNECTING
COURSEWORK AND
CREDENTIALS TO
CUTTING-EDGE
CAREER COMPETENCIES
AND SKILLS**



2.

**USING DATA AND
TECHNOLOGY TO
ALIGN CREDENTIALS
AND COUNSELING TO
WORKFORCE NEEDS**



3.

**REDESIGNING WORK-
BASED LEARNING
EXPERIENCES FOR
TODAY'S STUDENTS**



4.

**BUILDING INDUSTRY-
SPECIFIC PATHWAYS
TO ADDRESS CRITICAL
WORKFORCE
SHORTAGES**

1. <https://cew.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/Projections2031-National-Report.pdf>



1. CONNECTING COURSEWORK AND CREDENTIALS TO CUTTING-EDGE CAREER COMPETENCIES AND SKILLS

Institutions can implement strategies to connect coursework and credentials to career competencies and skills such as stackable credentials, competency-based assessment, and career-aligned pathways for high-demand industries. These resources can help institutions align curricula with industry standards, integrate real-world skills assessment, and collaborate with employers to ensure credentials meet workforce needs:

- *Competencies for a Career-Ready Workforce* by National Association of Colleges and Employers (2024). https://www.nacweb.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/2024/resources/nace-career-readiness-competencies-revised-apr-2024.pdf?sfvrsn=1e695024_6
- *Incremental Credentialing Framework* by Credentials As You Go (2023). <https://credentialasyougo.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Incremental-Credentialing-Framework-Playbook-Update-9.22.23.pdf>
- *The Career-Ready Graduate: What Employers Say About the Difference College Makes* by American Association of Colleges and Universities (2023). <https://dgm81phhvh63.cloudfront.net/content/user-photos/Research/PDFs/AACU-2023-Employer-Report.pdf>



2. USING DATA AND TECHNOLOGY TO ALIGN CREDENTIALS AND COUNSELING TO WORKFORCE NEEDS

Some institutions are using labor market data to inform program offerings, implementing skills mapping, and utilizing digital platforms to connect students with career opportunities. Institutions can also consider integrating data-informed advising systems, training counselors on career trends, and building partnerships with industry.

- *Making Sense of the Roadmap: A State Roadmap and Action Guide for Transparency* by Credential Engine (2020). <https://credentialengine.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/State-Roadmap-and-Action-Guide.pdf>
- *What Now? A Vision to Transform State Data Systems to Inform People's Pathways Through Education and the Workforce* by the Data Quality Campaign (2023). https://dataqualitycampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/DQC-What-Now_A-Vision-to-Transform-State-Data-Systems.pdf
- *Building a Skills-Based Talent Marketplace: Verifiable Credentials Wallets for Learning and Employment* by Jobs for the Future (2022). <https://info.iff.org/hubfs/Digital%20Wallet%20Market%20Scan/Market-Scan-Digital-Wallet-040122-vF.pdf>



3. REDESIGNING WORK-BASED LEARNING EXPERIENCES FOR TODAY'S STUDENTS

Today's students face various challenges when trying to engage in work-based learning opportunities. Institutions can redesign work-based learning to offer paid, structured opportunities that align with students' career goals. These resources can help institutions develop quality internship, apprenticeship, and other work-based learning programs, including leveraging federal work study positions.

- *Designing and Implementing Work-Based Learning: A Call to Action for CHROs* by Northeastern University's Center for the Future of Higher Education & Talent Strategy (2019). https://www.bhef.com/sites/default/files/BHEF_2019_Work_Based_Learning.pdf
- *Expanding and Improving Work-Based Learning in Community Colleges* by the Urban Institute (2020). <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/101781/expanding20and20improving20work-based20learn20in20community20colleges.pdf>
- *Work-Based Learning Framework* by Jobs for the Future (2018). https://www.iff.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/WBL_Continuum-06-30-20.pdf



4. BUILDING INDUSTRY-SPECIFIC PATHWAYS TO ADDRESS CRITICAL WORKFORCE SHORTAGES

To address shortages, institutions need to explore innovative solutions that create sector-specific training programs, align curricula with industry requirements, and foster partnerships with employers to expand workforce training. These strategies can help forge pathways that are responsive to labor market demands while improving career readiness among students.

- *Workforce Fund Impact Report* by Achieve Partners (2022). <https://www.achievethepartners.com/assets/2022-impact-report-achieve-workforce-i.pdf>
- *Tools for Building an Equitable Infrastructure Workforce* by U.S. Department of Labor (2023). https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/WB/media/508_WB_Issuebrief-Equity-Module_10022023.pdf
- *Building the Future Workforce: A State Playbook to Shape a New Age in Federal Infrastructure* by National Skills Coalition (2023). https://nationalskillscoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/NSC_infrastructurePlaybook_webFINAL.pdf