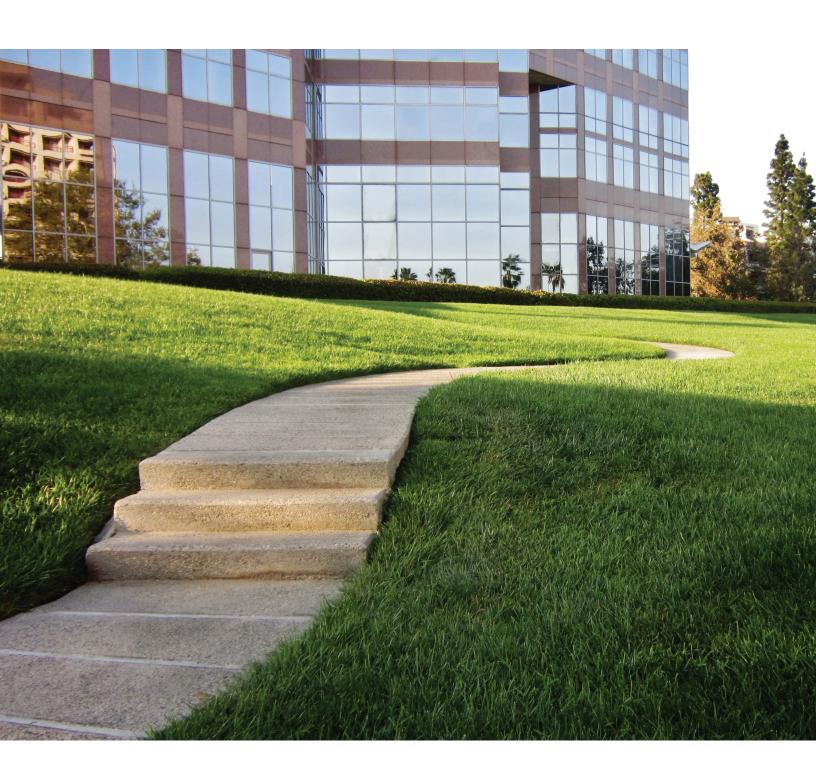# CAREER PATHWAYS

Approaches for the Delivery of Education, Training, Employment, and Human Services

Summary of Responses to a Request for Information

February 2015

U.S. Department of Education

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February 2015

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Background

The Departments of Education (ED), Health and Human Services (HHS), and Labor (DOL) are taking steps to support further development of high-quality career pathways systems. In April 2014, they issued a joint [Request for Information](#) (RFI) to solicit information and recommendations about career pathways systems from stakeholders in the public and private sectors. The comment period closed on June 9, 2014.[1]

According to the RFI, essential components of a career pathways system include:

- Alignment of secondary, postsecondary, and workforce development systems

- Rigorous, sequential, connected, and efficient coursework that links basic education and skills training and integrates education and training

- Multiple entry and exit points

- Comprehensive support services, such as career counseling, childcare, and transportation

- Financial supports or flexibility to accommodate labor market demands in order to allow individuals to meet their ongoing financial needs and obligations

- Active engagement of business in targeted industry sectors that are important to local, regional, and/or state economies

- Curriculum and instructional strategies that make work a central context for learning and developing work readiness skills (i.e., contextualized learning)

- Implementation of strategies that accelerate the educational and career advancement of participants (e.g., credit for prior learning)

- Organized services to meet the particular needs of adults (e.g., accommodating work schedules)

- A focus on secondary and postsecondary industry-recognized credentials, sector-specific employment, and advancement over time in education and employment within that sector

- A collaborative partnership among workforce, education, human service agencies, business, and other community stakeholders to manage the system.

RFI Content

The RFI describes recent efforts by ED, HHS and DOL to improve alignment of the agencies' respective relevant funding streams, including creation of an Interagency Working Group (IWG). An IWG subcommittee developed the RFI questions (Appendix A). The RFI solicits descriptions of existing career pathways systems, roles and responsibilities of career pathways partners, connections to economic development strategies, how pathways systems are funded, how participant outcomes are measured, and how providers ensure that pathways stay current with labor market trends. Other questions focus on serving diverse populations, building and offering industry-recognized credentials, and factors that facilitate or impede implementation of career pathways. In addition, the RFI requests recommendations for ways government (at all levels) can support development of career pathways systems.

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[1]   It should be noted that the RFI submission period ended prior to enactment of the [Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)](#) and release of [Ready to Work: Job-Driven Training and American Opportunity](#). *WIOA* focuses on (1) helping job seekers access employment, education, training, and support services to succeed in the labor market and (2) matching employers with the skilled workers they need to compete in the global economy. The *Ready to Work* report and *WIOA* address many of the barriers respondents reported and/or policy reforms they requested.

Responses and Analysis

Responses were received from a diverse group of 141 respondents (see figure) from across the nation. RFI responses are available at Regulations.gov.[2]

An analysis of responses was conducted to deepen the three Departments' shared vision and understanding of career pathways systems and to inform federal policy development, strategic investments, and technical assistance activities. Staff members from ED, HHS, and DOL reviewed a diverse sample of about 10 percent of the comments received and built consensus on emerging topics and themes. Based on this initial review, a system of codes was established, and subsequently an ED contractor conducted an analysis of the complete set of responses.

This report summarizes respondent-identified facilitators and barriers to career pathways development and implementation as well as promising practices. In addition, respondent recommendations for what federal, state, tribal, and local agencies can do to support the successful development of career pathways systems are highlighted.[3] The report concludes with an overview of key opportunities to advance some of the major recommendations in light of recent developments such as the passage of *WIOA*.

Respondent Types

Workforce Investment Boards 4%
Business 4%
State Agencies 13%
Labor Unions 5%
Nonprofits 27%
Institutions of Higher Learning 15%
Individuals 32%

Facilitators and Barriers

Respondents provided feedback about facilitators and obstacles to career pathways systems development. The RFI includes an overarching question about facilitators and barriers (Question 2) as well as specific questions about facilitators and barriers related to funding (Question 3), partnerships (Question 4), credentials (Question 9), and performance measures (Question 11). This section of the report summarizes respondent feedback to these facilitator and barrier questions.

Facilitators

Respondents described a variety of approaches and key factors that contribute to the success of career pathways systems development and implementation. These facilitators include collaborations and partnerships; compatibility and integrated data sharing; dedicated coordination and communication resources; support from leadership; integrated support services; technical assistance; and employer engagement. Multiple respondents described the facilitators summarized below.

Collaborations and Partnerships. Numerous respondents pointed to the value of interagency partnerships and collaborations among education, training, and human services programs at the local, state, and federal levels. Several respondents reported that a shared collaborative spirit among state agencies and at the local level (e.g., program providers, elected officials, workforce investment boards [WIBs], businesses, and nonprofits) helped them overcome programmatic structural impediments and achieve long-lasting outcomes. More specifically, several respondents reported that close partnerships, in conjunction with well-informed staff who

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2   See docket number ED-2014-OVAE-0044.

3   The opinions and recommendations included in this report are those of the respondents and do not necessarily represent positions or policies of DOL, ED, or HHS. No official agency endorsement of these statements and recommendations should be inferred.

understand what funding sources can be leveraged for which purpose, have enabled them to braid funding to support career pathways systems. In addition, these respondents noted that other pathways partnerships had provided helpful guidance and examples about braiding funds.

In addition to touting the value of partnerships, many respondents reported specific keys to successful career pathways partnerships (RFI Question 4). These include clearly documented roles and responsibilities as well as commitment to the common goal and the partnership. A few respondents commented on the importance of allowing for regional variation when forming partnerships. They reported that local expertise is key: locals know best how to implement programs in their environments and economies.

Compatibility and Data Sharing. Many respondents reported the benefits of establishing common or compatible definitions, frameworks, and performance measures across education, training, and human services programs. Several respondents emphasized the value of integrated data systems; they noted that states with high-quality statewide data systems and a history of sharing data across agencies are well positioned to support career pathways system development.

Dedicated Coordination and Communication Resources. Many respondents noted that state and regional interagency collaborations are most effective when communication and services are coordinated across systems by a single, federally monitored organization. They stated that a centralized coordinating body can help organizations come together around a shared mission, eliminating silos and facilitating system alignment.

Several respondents specified that a state agency should play this role and reported that several states have full-time personnel assigned to coordinate career pathways work. Other respondents reported that they assign this role to the state WIB or technical college system leadership.

At the local level, several respondents reported that having a pathways coordinator—dedicated postsecondary position for coordinating career pathways—has had a substantial positive impact on pathways programs. One respondent reported that creating the coordinator position has led to increased statewide awareness of and participation in career pathways.

Regardless of where this coordination occurs—federal agency, state, or local program—a few respondents stressed the importance of dedicating resources to support coordination and communication activities, which facilitates service integration and system development.

Support from Leadership. Several respondents reported that strong support, commitment, and investment from leadership—state leadership, local WIBs, and employer champions—can be the driving forces behind progress in career pathways systems. Leadership support has been critical for setting state priorities, leveraging resources in support of those priorities, and encouraging collaboration between state agencies.

Integrated Support Services. According to numerous respondents, many individuals need career guidance, case management, and support services to participate successfully in career pathways programs. They described comprehensive screening and assessment practices to identify transportation, childcare, and other support service needs. Respondents also described a range of navigator models: from navigators who focus on helping career pathways participants access support services they need to sector-focused navigators who have specific industry expertise (i.e., knowledge about the occupations, pathways, and employment opportunities within that industry).

Technical Assistance. Nearly a dozen respondents reported that technical assistance delivered by DOL, ED, and HHS as well as nonprofits and advocacy organizations has been helpful in building career pathways systems. Others reported that technical assistance has helped them braid funding to support these systems. They emphasized the value of building blocks such as national initiatives, frameworks, coaching/sharing of

best practices/models, peer meetings, and analysis/use of data. They also noted the importance of technical assistance efforts that clarify regulations.

Employer Engagement. Numerous respondents reported that career pathways systems require active involvement of employers and other local or regional stakeholders who have industry connections, including industry-sector intermediaries (i.e., organizations that work with a set of companies within a particular industry sector such as health care or that have a common occupational need). Several reported that employer/sector partnerships help ensure that career pathways systems are demand-driven, preparing workers for jobs that are available in their local or regional areas. They listed a variety of ways employer partners contribute: identifying labor market need, aiding in curriculum design, and establishing formal or industry skill standards and industry certifications.

Barriers

Respondents described a variety of obstacles that impede successful development and implementation of career pathways systems. They reported barriers related to credentials; federal policies and regulations; performance and outcome measures; articulation between education systems and providers; funding limitations; and the need to stay current with labor market trends. Multiple respondents described the barriers summarized below.

Credentials. Many respondents described obstacles to transferability and recognition of stackable, portable, industry-recognized credentials. These include an absence of industry agreement on a common set of credentials in many sectors, such as health care. Several respondents noted that this barrier is a particular problem for incumbent workers who participate in highly customized training programs that do not result in recognized, marketable credentials.

Federal Policies and Regulations. Numerous respondents listed ways in which federal policies and regulations create roadblocks to success of career pathways systems. These include length of training limits, work participation requirements, performance and outcome measures, and reporting requirements. For example, work participation requirements and a 12-month vocational education limit are particularly challenging for recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Another respondent noted that there is a common misconception that services funded by *Workforce Investment Act (WIA)* Title I were limited to one year.

Performance and Outcome Measures. More than a dozen respondents listed barriers related to performance and outcome measures, primarily burdensome reporting requirements. They reported that funding mechanisms with incompatible eligibility requirements and outcome measures can impede partnerships.

For a major delivery platform like career pathways, partners often must track outcomes for multiple federal programs and agencies (e.g., DOL, ED, HHS, the Departments of Housing and Urban Development [HUD] and Justice) and state and local funders such as the Mental Health and Recovery Board, Developmental Disabilities Services Board, and Department of Vocational Rehabilitation. Each source has its own terminology, eligibility requirements, timeframes, and outcome measures. This adds up to a large administrative burden in staff time, training, and technology.

Several respondents indicated that complex reporting requirements have a negative impact on data quality. A few other respondents noted that requested outcomes or data point measures sometimes fail to measure or undervalue meaningful results. They reported a disconnect between program-level performance data required by funding sources and student-level outcomes data that are of greatest interest to providers and to students themselves.

Some reporting requirements act as disincentives to serving populations in need. For example, programs with performance measures solely focused on entry-level job placement discourage providers from serving low-skilled incumbent workers who need training to advance in their careers.

One respondent noted that disparate measures of performance also inhibit comparisons of outcomes across various programs.

Lack of Articulation. More than a dozen respondents pointed to a lack of articulation between credit- and non-credit-bearing pathways; some institutions fail to include non-credit coursework on transcripts, and in some states, funding structures have led to high costs for non-credit offerings.

The integration of two- and four-year college systems must be dramatically improved, according to several respondents. Too many students with credentials from community colleges are asked to repeat coursework when they pursue baccalaureate degrees.

Funding. Several respondents reported that budget cuts to community colleges, career and technical education (CTE), and other state providers have eroded student services and supports.

Staying Current with Labor Market Trends. Ensuring that pathways are designed to meet real industry demand is challenging, according to a few respondents. Federal and state labor statistics often lag, delaying identification of significant trends. College-level curriculum approval processes are time-consuming, slowing efforts to update degree programs to better reflect current industry needs.

Respondent Recommendations

Respondents offered recommendations to capitalize on facilitators and address challenges identified elsewhere in their responses. Recommendations are presented in descending order of frequency by topic: Serve Diverse Populations, Increase Funding, Provide Technical Assistance, Provide Greater Flexibility, Support Additional Research, and Improve Performance and Outcome Measures.

Serve Diverse Populations

More respondents addressed RFI Question 8 about underserved or hard-to-serve populations (see Appendix A) than any other question in the RFI. Populations of interest (in descending order of frequency) included English language learners; low-skilled youth and adults; immigrants; individuals with disabilities; out-of-school/disconnected youth; justice-involved populations; incumbent workers; rural residents; veterans; Native Americans; lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth and adults; women and girls; and senior citizens. Respondents offered the following tactics and policy reforms to address challenges related to reaching hard-to-serve populations:

- Ensure that career pathways systems have entry-level "rungs" and supports that are accessible to low-skilled adults and adult English language learners.

- Reduce training time by providing contextualized training that integrates adult basic education (ABE) and English language learning with occupational skills; offer shorter-term training opportunities; offer training during nontraditional school hours; and take advantage of technology such as online, modularized programs to deliver training. These approaches are helpful particularly for low-income, employed individuals.

- Offer options to help internationally trained individuals and others obtain "last mile" credits; that is, the last few credits they need to demonstrate subject mastery or eligibility to sit for a licensing examination. Provide incentives for higher education career pathways partners to offer "last mile" course options.

- Engage a broader array of partners in career pathways design and execution, including organizations and individuals who represent these populations (e.g., ex-offender peer mentors for justice-involved populations) as well as those who bring relevant expertise in education, training, employment, health, and human services.

- Make training more affordable for student participants. Seek restoration of the ability-to- benefit provision that enabled students without a high school credential to qualify for Pell Grants. Allow students to use Pell Grant funds for up to 18 semesters, for summer classes, and for more short-term training programs and competency-based education programs. Provide additional guidance on the eligibility of direct assessment programs for student financial aid under Title IV of the *Higher Education Act (HEA)*.

- Offer formal policy guidance to clarify eligibility requirements for federally funded workforce and training programs. In particular, affirm eligibility of special populations (particularly immigrants) to participate.

- Require funded programs to demonstrate how they will ensure access for members of hard-to-serve populations in their catchment areas.

- Reduce or eliminate disincentives for training providers to work with hard-to-serve populations. For example, use regression models that adjust performance levels to account for hard-to-serve individuals and adopt interim outcome measures that signal basic skills gains or progress toward long-term employment or educational outcomes.

- Strengthen connections between school systems, human service programs, and youth-serving programs to better serve transition-age youth, including youth aging out of foster care and youth with disabilities.

Increase Funding

Respondents offered the following recommendations related to increased funding:

- Make grants, including discretionary and demonstration and pilot funding, available to states to support systemic efforts to scale career pathways programs that integrate adult education and skills training.

- Create "Skill-Up Zones," federal place-based initiatives (such as Promise Zones and Choice Neighborhoods) that target specific communities to better align with basic skills education. Reward cities that demonstrate meaningful coordination of ABE, workforce development, and community/economic development activities with a focus on low-income populations.

- Make employers and employer-labor partnerships eligible for public training funds.

- Establish a common set of fiscal guidelines to facilitate braiding of funds. Federal agencies, including DOL, ED, HHS, HUD, and the Department of Commerce, should develop coordinated waivers to enable state and local grant recipients to braid funding streams for programs that integrate employment-focused basic skills education and community and economic development efforts that serve those hardest to employ.

Provide Technical Assistance

Respondents recommended providing the following types of technical assistance:

- Clarify how CTE "programs of study" relate to career pathways, which is a point of confusion for some members of the CTE community.

- Continue to offer technical assistance to states to help facilitate career pathways partnerships (i.e., articulation agreements, braiding of funding streams, and development of partnerships across agencies).

- Issue guidance to states affirmatively encouraging American Job Centers (formerly known as One Stop Centers) to provide long-term supports for low-skilled individuals, particularly in the context of clearly articulated career pathways.

Provide Greater Flexibility

Respondents made the following recommendations related to providing greater flexibility:

- Give states and localities greater flexibility in the administration of education, training, and human services programs through waivers or other means.

- Allow states to blend funding from TANF, *WIA*, and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

- Grant states and localities greater flexibility to serve youth within cohorts without applying strict age restrictions.

- Obtain congressional authority to establish performance partnership pilots for career pathways that can be modeled on the Performance Partnerships for Disconnected Youth authority that was enacted in the FY 2014 *Consolidated Appropriations Act*.

- Expand allowable uses and eligible entities for funds from 529 Education Savings Plans to include pre-apprenticeship, apprenticeship, and training with community-based organizations as well as to secure work supports such as childcare or transportation.

Support Additional Research

Respondents made the following recommendations related to supporting additional research:

- Invest in building evidence to support development, implementation, evaluation, and improvement of career pathways systems.

- Support research on how to effectively serve individuals with disabilities and other populations with complex needs; include impact on special populations in career pathways program evaluations. Document the nature and extent of barriers these populations face.

- Examine the predictive value of interim metrics (e.g., how well course completion predicts the likelihood that career pathways participants earn credentials and make gains in the labor market).

- Study the impact of paid internships on long-term job retention and wages.

- Establish a baseline for non-credit workforce training so that it can be benchmarked.

- Create and maintain a comprehensive, searchable, interactive national repository of career pathways literature, including research, studies, evaluation, and case studies.

- Evaluate the return on investment for individual credentials.

Improve Performance and Outcome Measures

Respondents made the following recommendations related to performance and outcome measures:

- Develop and implement a shared measurement system with common performance metrics throughout all major pieces of federal education and workforce legislation such as the *Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act* and the Department of Agriculture's SNAP Employment and Training Program.

- Develop concrete measurement systems to capture difficult-to-quantify outcomes of career pathways, such as increased soft skills and employer engagement in sector skills approaches.

- Expand outcome measures within *WIA* Titles I and II to include interim or progress measures, thereby enabling programs to get credit for helping to increase skills or employability of participants.

Other Recommendations

Respondents also offered the following recommendations:

- Continue fostering and setting clear expectations for career pathways partnerships.

- Broadly define partnerships to include any forum that brings together two or more agencies that have responsibility for workforce development or education and are collaborating toward achieving common goals.

- To ensure that credentials mean something to the employee and the employer, adopt standards such as the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) ISO Standard 17024 for personnel certifications and ANSI/ASTM E2659-09 Standard Practice for Certificate Programs as the clearinghouse for funding efforts.

- Support risk management initiatives to help overcome employer reluctance—due to liability issues—to offer worksite opportunities to career pathways participants.

- Continue supporting development of integrated, cross-agency data systems.

- Take steps to improve access to education, employment, and wage data across programs, including access to unemployment insurance wage records.

- Ensure that labor market information and information about education and training options and their links to employment opportunities are accessible to prospective pathway participants and to those who plan and implement career pathways programs.

- Require community college terminal degree programs to document labor market demand, employer engagement, and job outcomes for graduates.

Promising Practices/Success Stories

Respondents highlighted a number of emerging and promising approaches, policies, and other practices.

Approaches

Apprenticeship and Pre-apprenticeship. Some respondents hailed apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship as effective approaches to career pathways development and encouraged agencies to support the expansion of apprenticeship into industries in which it is less commonly used.

Accelerator Programs. Several respondents described a variety of accelerator program approaches that offer students faster options for obtaining college credits or credentials. These include bridge programs, vocational English as a second language, credit for prior learning, and dual enrollment programs in which students enroll in postsecondary instruction and receive both postsecondary and secondary credit. Other accelerator programs follow an integrated learning model that allows adults to bypass remediation.

Communities of Practice. Several respondents reported on the benefits of establishing communities of practice. For example, one network convenes quarterly workshops and webinars where national experts and grantees share promising practices and engage in troubleshooting. Activities focus on providing practical insights into real-world issues providers are most likely to encounter.

Expanded Labor Market Information Services. Several respondents touted the value of real-time labor market information reports obtained from commercial service providers. Data include current information on hiring trends, common employers, in-demand skills, and sample job descriptions. Service providers also meet with employers and research labor market data to identify information for emerging sectors.

Policies

Screening, Placement, and Assessment. More than a dozen respondents described career pathways programs that use prior learning assessments so that workers can receive credit at postsecondary education institutions for knowledge and skills learned on the job.

Comprehensive screening and assessment practices that identify hidden or undiagnosed disabilities were mentioned by several respondents as essential parts of effective career pathways programs.

Financial Aid. Respondents reported that five states—Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois, Texas, and Washington— have increased need-based financial aid to support participation in career pathways and bridge programs by nontraditional students such as part-time and adult students, who often are excluded from need-based aid.

Other Practices

Respondents in New York, Ohio, and Rhode Island reported that granting access to state unemployment insurance wage data on participants and completers has informed the identification of in-demand certifications and skill needs of employers. Also, adding the attainment of industry credentials to a state accountability system has increased awareness of the value and importance of these credentials and incented schools to encourage students to earn them.

State and Local/Regional Programs

Respondents described more than 70 state career pathways programs and initiatives in addition to formal, informal, or unofficial networks and collaboratives. The most frequently mentioned were general career pathways programs. Programs with navigators or pathway coordinators also were mentioned as well as collaboratives, industry-specific programs, accelerator programs, and incentive programs that reward school districts for every student who graduates with an industry-recognized credential. State programs address a variety of learners, including disconnected youth, individuals with disabilities, foreign-trained professionals, and English language learners.

Respondents identified more than 50 local/regional career pathways programs, initiatives, and collaboratives. These programs often involve partnerships among community colleges, employers, and WIBs. Several sector-specific programs were cited as being successful.

Conclusion and Opportunities

While America's businesses have created nearly 11 million jobs over the past five years—the longest streak of uninterrupted private-sector job growth in our country's history—we need to do more to train Americans with the skills they need and connect them with businesses that are looking for skilled workers. And, the repetition of key themes throughout the RFI responses draws attention to a number of areas respondents urged the federal agencies to address. Since the RFI response period closed in June 2014, significant progress has occurred to support the development of career pathways systems and advance many of the RFI recommendations to serve diverse populations, increase funding, provide technical assistance, provide greater flexibility, and support additional research.

Service to Diverse Populations

In a huge step toward serving diverse populations through career pathways, Congress passed *WIOA* in July 2014 and restored the ability-to-benefit (ATB) provision in the *HEA* in December 2014 through the 2015 *Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act*. In addition, the administration released the *Ready to Work* report. Overdue for reauthorization since 1998, *WIOA* is designed to help job seekers access employment, education, training, and support services to succeed in the labor market and to match employers with the skilled workers they need to compete in the global economy. In addition to a number of key changes from the previous version of the law, *WIOA* emphasizes the use of career pathways and sector partnerships to increase employment and accelerate advancement in in-demand industries and occupations. Conversely, restoration of the ATB provision will enable students who lack a high school diploma or equivalent and who enroll in a career pathways program to receive student aid by passing an exam or successfully completing six credit hours. This change will help many students, including those who are low income, to access key funding necessary to enter and complete a career pathways program. Released on the same day that *WIOA* was signed into law, the *Ready to Work* report highlights successful job-driven strategies aimed at training Americans with the skills that employers need and matching them to good jobs that need to be filled right now. The report includes 50 executive actions the administration and key federal agencies have committed to in order to create more opportunities for job seekers and workers.

Increased Funding

Despite a tough fiscal climate, financial resources were or will soon be deployed through DOL's Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) program and its American Apprenticeship grants. The TAACCCT grants will provide community colleges and other eligible institutions of higher education with funds to partner with employers to expand and improve their ability to deliver education and career training programs that will help job seekers get the skills they need for in-demand jobs in industries like information technology, health care, energy, and advanced manufacturing. In the latest and final round of TAACCCT funding, DOL Secretary Thomas E. Perez and ED Secretary Arne Duncan awarded $450 million this past September to help 270 community colleges across the country. In addition, Secretary Perez announced a $100 million funding opportunity for American Apprenticeship grants in December 2014. Building on *WIOA*, which promotes the use of registered apprenticeships as a way to provide workers with career pathway experiences that enable them to earn while they learn, this funding opportunity is the single largest federal investment in apprenticeship history and will serve as a catalyst to "sale and scale" the apprenticeship model as an innovative workforce strategy across a variety of industries. The application period for these grants closes on April 30, 2015.[4]

Technical Assistance

On the technical assistance front, DOL, ED, HHS, and a host of other federal agencies are working together to better coordinate the support for career pathways systems development. DOL currently is revising the Career Pathways Toolkit to reflect the latest and best thinking on career pathways since the first version of the Toolkit was published in September 2011. The Toolkit builds upon a Six Key Elements Framework, highlights promising practices, and provides tools designed to support visioning and strategic planning for state career pathway systems. The revised toolkit will reflect the career pathways language and thinking from *WIOA* and the *Ready to Work* report. In addition, ED continues to build its "Career Pathways Exchange" network that consolidates and distributes career pathways-related resources, events, and information from federal and state agencies and partner organizations. Subscribers can elect to receive email digests on their topics of interest,

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[4]   For more details about the American Apprenticeship grants, visit http://www.dol.gov/apprenticeship/grants.htm.

including Building Cross-Agency Partnerships, Identifying Industry Sectors and Engaging Employers, Designing Education and Training Programs, Identifying Funding Needs and Sources, Aligning Policies and Programs, and Measuring System Change and Performance.

Greater Flexibility

While greater flexibility across the various funding streams that support career pathways systems will take many years to achieve, some progress has been made through the Performance Partnership Pilots (P3) that were announced in November 2014. Authorized by the 2014 *Consolidated Appropriations Act*, these grants will enable up to ten pilot sites to test innovative, outcome-focused strategies to achieve significant improvements in educational, employment, and other key outcomes for disconnected youth using new flexibility to blend existing federal funds and to seek waivers of associated program requirements. P3 pilots also will receive startup grants to support ongoing planning, streamlined governance, strengthened data infrastructure, improved coordination, and related activities to help pilots improve outcomes for disconnected youth. The application period for this opportunity closes on March 4, 2015.[5]

Support for Research

Finally, various agencies recently have begun to devise a plan for research and evaluation activities. DOL currently is reviewing career pathways evaluations across the federal government to identify the research questions being addressed. Once this review is complete, DOL hopes to identify areas where further research and evaluation of career pathways are needed. At HHS, current research plans call for short- and intermediate-term outcomes from the Health Profession Opportunity Grant (HPOG) Impact Evaluation and Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education (PACE) evaluations, as well as reports on the implementation and costs/benefits of career pathways programs. In the future, HHS will address gaps in the current body of research by undertaking new research and evaluation activities related to the second round of HPOG grantees. In collaboration with DOL, HHS also will assist in the development and execution of research and evaluation activities related to career pathways as part of *WIOA*.

Moving Forward

In the months ahead, the administration will continue to work with business and union leaders, school administrators, higher education, workforce experts, and state and local elected officials to implement recommendations from the *Ready to Work* report as well as the RFI to replicate successful training strategies in communities throughout the United States. In addition, the administration will engage private organizations, including workforce intermediaries, with career pathways subject knowledge and collaborate on creating public/private resources that represent the "best of career pathways" for dissemination to the field. Collectively, *WIOA*, the executive actions in the *Ready to Work* report, and the other endeavors described above include significant changes that lay the foundation for the transformation of career pathways in our country so that every American can pursue a path to a middle-class job, career, and life.

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[5] For more details about P3, visit https://www.federalregister.gov/articles/2014/11/24/2014-27775/applications-for-new-awards-performance-partnership-pilots.

Appendix: Questions from the Request for Information

1. Using the list of key components of career pathways discussed in the Background section of this RFI as a general guideline, please describe any Federal, State, or local policies, frameworks, or initiatives of which you are aware that have been used to support the development of career pathways systems.

2. What factors, in your opinion, have facilitated the implementation of career pathways systems at the State or local level (e.g., the use of key resources or technical assistance tools)? What factors have made career pathways systems difficult to implement and/or replicate on a large scale?

3. What Federal, State, or local governmental and non-governmental funding streams are you aware of that have been used to support career pathways initiatives? If applicable, to what extent is your State or local area aligning or braiding funding from across different funding streams to support career pathways? Please describe facilitators and/or challenges to aligning and braiding funding. If you are not aligning and/or braiding funding, please describe any specific barriers.

4. For your career pathways system, please describe the roles and responsibilities of each of the following partners with whom you work (please answer only for those that are applicable). What factors facilitate and/or create obstacles to successful partnership efforts?

   a. Businesses/employers and industry associations

   b. Education providers (e.g., K–12 education, special education, institutions of higher education including but not limited to community and technical colleges, and/or other training providers)

   c. Workforce development agencies (e.g., Workforce Investment Boards and American Job Centers)

   d. Community-based organizations and human service providers that address barriers to employment (e.g., cash assistance/TANF, childcare, transportation, housing, food assistance/SNAP, etc.)

   e. Philanthropic organizations/intermediaries

   f. State, regional, local, and/or tribal government agencies

   g. Other (please describe)

5. Is your career pathways system connected to a State, regional, local, or tribal economic development strategy? If so, how?

6. How do you ensure that your career pathways system is staying current with labor market trends, particularly current demand, to respond to the need for particular skills and credentials in emerging industry sectors?

7. How can career pathways systems be made accessible to diverse populations and responsive to their needs beyond education and training (e.g., support services such as childcare, transportation, housing, etc.)? We are particularly, but not exclusively, interested in learning about efforts to serve low-income youth and adults, low-skilled youth and adults, out-of-school youth, individuals with disabilities, TANF recipients, tribal communities, English language learners, immigrants, rural populations, veterans, currently and formerly incarcerated individuals, dislocated workers, and trade-affected workers.

8. Which populations would you like to serve, but are unable to serve or face special challenges in serving? What are the barriers to serving these particular populations and what are the strategies, recommendations, or lessons learned that can be used to achieve positive outcomes in serving these populations?

9. What are the challenges and/or facilitators to building and/or offering stackable and portable, industry-recognized credentials? How can these industry-recognized credentials be incorporated into and/or aligned in a successful career pathways system?

10. How are participants' outcomes measured, and to what extent are the data used to monitor and improve the strength of your career pathways system? Please indicate if there are any other data points or ongoing evaluation efforts used to improve the strength of your career pathways system.

11. How do performance measures associated with specific Federal funding statutes/streams (i.e., WIA, Perkins, TANF, etc.) facilitate or impede the tracking of participant outcomes?

12. Do you have any suggestions for how Federal, State, regional, tribal, and local governments could support the development of high-quality career pathways systems and/or address gaps in current efforts? If so, please describe the specific changes that would be necessary in each of the following categories (please answer only for those that are applicable):

   a. Legislation, statutes, and/or regulations; for example,

      (i)   Administrative flexibility (i.e., waivers on use of funds or program eligibility)

      (ii) Expanded eligibility for financial aid and/or other support services

      (iii) Changes to performance measurement and program accountability rules

   b. Technical assistance activities and/or non-regulatory guidance;

   c. Funding strategies;

   d. Research and evaluation activities;

   e. Other proposed changes.

13. For business and industry respondents only, please indicate what successes and/or challenges you have faced at local, State, regional, and/or national levels when developing a pipeline of workers. What strategies would you suggest to sustain the successes and/or mitigate the challenges?