The California Career Pathways Trust
Application Analysis and Considerations for Future Funding

I. Overview

This analysis reflects the review of over 20 Career Pathways Trust applications – at both the $6 million and $15 million levels, including both funded and non-unfunded applications. Rather than focus on what any particular application did right or wrong, it provides:

- An overview of common features of applications
- Considerations and potential next steps to support the implementation of funded projects
- Considerations to guide planning and support for unfunded projects.
- Reflections on the application and its review, including considerations for how each might be strengthened to improve the quality of proposals and facilitate the review process.

As applications were provided directly by fiscal sponsors, the supplemental documents made available varied – some included budget narratives, reviewer scores, and comments. The majority of fiscal sponsors only provided proposal narratives. Despite these inconsistencies in the additional context provided, in general, narratives provided sufficient details of expenditure plans through the types of activities described. Also, despite a limited amount of information on scoring and reviewer comments, those provided offered insight into how reviewers approached the rubric, and can thus inform the preparation of reviewers for future funding opportunities.

Overall, the reflections and recommendations that follow are intended to support continuous improvement in three ways:

- Informing how applicants understand the Career Pathways Trust, and thus the scope of work that they propose and how they explain it to reviewers and potential partners.
- Contributing to future requests for applications (RFA), evaluative criteria, and scoring rubrics in order for them to best facilitate clear responses on the part of applicants, thus reinforcing application and project quality
- In contributing to the RFA, evaluative criteria, and scoring rubrics, also inform how reviewers understand the intents of the Career Pathways Trust, and how they can be provided with additional guidance to reduce discrepancies in the evaluation of applications, ensuring that funding is allocated to the strongest proposals possible.

II. Common Elements of Funded Regional Applications

While the proposals at the $15 and $6 million levels differ widely in the specific structure of their pathway systems, there are a number of common themes that can be gleaned from funded applications, many of which suggest the emergence of new statewide trends.

Vision and Leadership – Mutual Benefit and Coordination

Culture Shift. A significant theme of funded projects is the extent to which they suggest a new paradigm in their regions for education and workforce development. They describe the shortcomings of the status quo, and provide details of a strategy for reframing the ways in which students are educated and prepared to transition from middle school through to employment. Schools, colleges, workforce investment boards and employers are not operating in vacuums, but instead describe shared investments. Even for those applicants who have been involved in the AB 790 Linked Learning Pilot Program or the California Linked Learning District Initiative, they explain how their Career Pathways Trust application goes beyond the scope of work being implemented through those efforts. They link education, workforce and economic development needs through their governance models, suggesting more than an endorsement or undetermined investment from community organizations and employers.

Structure and Coordination of Consortia. Funded projects have defined a scope of practice, governance, and responsibility for their consortium. With most, one or multiple intermediary organizations have been identified to serve various convening needs and take greater responsibility for employer engagement. Distributive leadership is a key element of consortium governance, as evidenced in organizational maps, financial and in-kind commitments that rely on systemic, institutional collaboration to build college and career success strategies for regional benefit. Governance models include decision-making processes and delegate accountability to ensure progress toward achieving regional goals.

Interlocking, not Competing, Applications. A number of funded partnerships benefit from multiple awards, led by different consortium partners, that support different elements of their work, or to provide additional resources to specific partners. In some cases, this took the form of applications that focused on different sectors (*ex.* Long Beach CCD and Pasadena CCD, Los Angeles USD and Centinela Valley USD), but with others it provided funding for larger regional WBL infrastructure (*ex.* Contra Costa COE and Peralta CCD, Sacramento COE and Elk Grove USD) or specific funding for partners that needed more startup capital to effectively contribute to and participate in the regional partnership (*ex.* Konocti USD and Sonoma COE).

Charter Schools as Equal Partners. About half of all applications reviewed at the $15 million and $6 million levels reflect partnerships between charter schools and school districts. One of the most innovative $15 million projects is led by a charter school replicating its sector-specific educational model in multiple school districts and with multiple community colleges. In another application, a school that is part of a charter management organization (Da Vinci Science High School) is working with the state's largest school district (LAUSD) to share their unique strengths and resources with one another for common benefit.

College Partnerships. K-16 partnerships are such that several funded projects have committed to implement transition policies that have been successfully piloted in Long Beach through the Long Beach College Promise. The expansion of College Promise partnerships is a coordinated strategy around which CSU campuses and community colleges are demonstrating both deep commitments to the goals of the Career Pathways Trust, as well as the need for, and value of, more intentional partnership with high schools to ensure students enter college prepared to succeed. The expansion of early and middle college high school pathway programs as a means to support accelerated college program completion is another key strategy identified in funded proposals. Finally, the engagement of college and high school counselors, use of summer bridge programs, and other transition supports and strategies are not supplemental elements of pathways – are described as integral elements of the overall pathway experience for students.

Student-Centered Activities and Expenditures

Student Need, Site Buy-in. Project activities and outcomes suggest student-centered planning, and site staff and leadership appear to have bought into the goals and workplans outlined in plans. High school sites are determined, and college program partnerships are built through a combination of leadership support and site interest and capacity. Funded applicants emphasize resources and services provided to students, as well as policy development to facilitate educational and workforce transitions (such as apprenticeship development, work-based learning intermediary infrastructure, summer bridge and early college programs, etc.). This is in contrast to applications that appear to focus on professional development and travel costs for large numbers of staff, while being vague on the specific needs, how they were determined, or how this investment will directly impact student outcomes. Where this was the case, applications suggested that Career Pathways Trust grants would be funding existing activities, leaving it to be wondered if grant funds would supplement or supplant existing funding for existing work, especially with regional occupation programs and career pathways.

Understanding and Supporting Equity of Access, Enrollment, Opportunity and Success. Funded applicants explained what colleges and employers needed students to know and be able to do. They also identified specific academic, technical, and workplace skill challenges of their students. This suggests that school and college administrators know who their students are – they are more than demographics listed in a chart. They are individuals with diverse backgrounds, life experience and unique barriers to high school and postsecondary program application and access, as well as success in those programs. Diverse outreach and intervention strategies were identified to reflect these facts. Interventions in a number of funded proposals were not entirely the responsibility of high school counselors or teachers – there were roles for high schools, colleges, workforce investment boards, and other community partners to form a support network and reinforce one another through a common strategy that built upon the strengths of each entity. Strategies are distributed across the school year and summer in such a way as to reach students and families through multiple media, peer, and activity-based strategies, providing multiple points of contact between students, families, teachers, employers, and counselors, among others. Unfunded applications tended to more generically describe student barriers as "soft skill development", "computer skills" or "intensive math and English support", without as many specific

examples of what aspects of math or English, which computer programs, or which soft skills were particular challenges for students or stood out as areas of emphasis for employers and colleges. Generic needs are not readily actionable – specificity makes it easier to see and describe discrete activities that could be funded to improve student outcomes through a career pathway approach.

Vertical Counseling and Transition Supports. Most funded projects describe a vision for college and career counseling and program advising that reaches vertically from middle school through to college. Rather than mention that counseling will occur, and listing types of counseling, most funded applicants demonstrated a clear vision of the various roles and responsibilities of partners (LEA counselors, teachers, college staff, workforce investment board youth counselors, etc.) to provide coordinated services, information and engagement activities to youth and their families across a grade-appropriate continuum. These strategies included learning about and preparing for high school pathways in middle school, learning about and preparing for employment and college programs in high school, and strategies for addressing remediation, teaching financial aid literacy, and targeting other barriers to persistence and completion as identified by applicants. Counseling features as a central element of programs, and not as a supplemental support service. Where it has not occurred yet, plans are underway to provide training so that counselors at each level understand the value of pathways, and the unique needs of students enrolled in these programs, and are invested in contributing to solutions.

Parent Engagement. On the whole, funded projects communicate the need for diverse methods to inform and engage families. Family engagement is a prominent aspect of outreach, recruitment and ongoing supports. Changing how parents perceive the opportunities and capabilities of their children have significant impacts on how they reinforce students' own self-perception – most funded consortia acknowledge this and have, for the most part, outlined a series of activities and supports to inform parents and inform the impact they have on their children's futures.

Middle School Career Exploration. Early exposure to career opportunities and career pathways feature in almost every application. The coordination of activities – including industry and college exposure even at the middle school level –reflects an understanding among consortia partners of the value of early exploration to support students to make informed decisions and understand the expectations of high school and college pathways, as well as the workplace, aiding them in assessing and selecting pathways that are the best fit possible.

Supporting Non-Traditional Pathway Students. Almost every funded application proposed the development of programs and services to specifically address equity of access, participation and outcomes for non-traditional student populations. Students with disabilities, English language learners, and students in community day schools each have unique needs and barriers, and most applications propose specific supports and interventions to address their needs within the context of career pathways.

Needs Assessment and Asset Mapping. As suggested in some of the earlier points, the degree of specificity of programs, interventions and outreach strategies reflected in funded applications demonstrated that those applicants had already undertaken asset mapping and needs assessment of their own volition, without expecting to spend the first year of the grant cycle to figure it out as they went along. Existing programs were identified for scaling within a region, and models from other regions or states that would be replicated were also identified. Transition programming, and specific professional development and counseling needs were identified, as well as implementation plans. Policies that needed to be developed are either in process or have been identified and put on timelines for development and implementation. Prior completion of needs assessment and asset mapping meant that a fully-informed partnership let actual needs dictate their project proposal and funding request, rather than expecting the grant to fund planning-oriented versus implementation-oriented work.

Investment is Strategic and Systemic. Expenditures are focused on technical assistance, policy development and implementation, and other capacity-building investments. Where staffing is funded, it is limited, and significant matching funds are present from the outset. Alternatively, there is a steady transition from grant funding to local or regional funding over the life of the grant where long-term staffing is identified.

Braided Funding. Funded proposals utilize other funding streams to support the goals of the project both during the grant period and after grant funding is extinguished. Most proposals demonstrate significant 'up front' local matches – in time and money – from schools, colleges, workforce investment boards, employers, and other community partners. With school districts and county offices of education, this includes plans to already contribute local control funding formula appropriations, or to phase it in to support transitions from initial investments to long-term maintenance of project staffing and other needs. Many express a commitment to redirect general career technical education and regional occupation program funding towards career pathway (in many cases explicitly or implicitly through a Linked Learning-informed approach) as the primary strategy for career technical education delivery in a region. Where such pathways appear to be more established, projects propose to make career pathways the primary educational strategy for the region, or at least a more common option. Many projects are already drawing from matching funds for long- and short-term expenses, and grant funding is mainly directed towards capacity building expenses such as consultants to facilitate K-16 program and policy alignment.

Realistic Scope*.* In general, applications that were successfully funded did not try to promise dramatic outcomes or expansion of programs without first demonstrating a track record in career pathways partnerships and a significant number of existing, fully implemented pathways. Modest and sweeping proposals were both funded, suggesting an important role for self-awareness among applicants to be honest about their needs and capacity, and make a project proposal and funding request accordingly. Where pathways are well underway, the focus was more on regional infrastructure, work-based learning and overcoming programming and policy hurdles with postsecondary partners to create systems of

support for new pathways. Where fewer pathways are fully implemented, the focus of funded projects was on infrastructure to support their implementation rather than adding more pathways.

III. Funded Applications – Implications for the Field

Statewide and Regional Technical Assistance/Professional Development Needs. The role of state-level or supra-regional support and assistance should be considered as a means to overcome shared barriers in a coordinated manner. To this extent, project activities should be mapped and needs assessments should be performed in partnership with consortia to understand what their greatest risks or barriers to project success are. Where there is significant overlap between regions, it would be of benefit to coordinate appropriate supports at the statewide or supra-regional level (such as Southern California, Central Valley, and Northern California). This would help consortia to more effectively focus their funds towards needs that are unique to their region and ensure greater consistency in project success across the state.

Networks of Practice. The Career Pathways Trust has brought with it the rapid expansion of partnerships in three key entities at the state and local level – the California State University, California Community Colleges, and Workforce Investment Boards. It also brings with it a heightened awareness and interest from charter schools aspiring towards college and career pathway models. While there are examples of best practices among each, creating venues for cross-sharing and capacity building would be beneficial to shift practice consistently across the state. Such communities of practice could also provide a coordinated voice to drive institutional and state policy change, through the development of advocates and champions to inform practice and serve as   agents of change among their peers and with the legislature and administration. The CSU Linked Learning Summer Convening, or the District Leadership Institutes are examples of the sort of activities that can be expanded upon and built from to reach more stakeholders within and across areas of work.

Diversity of Practice and Quality Management. The Career Pathways Trust brings with it a wide range of projects and partnership models. Diversity of practice will inform our learning of what the defining characteristics of successful regional partnerships are, and which characteristics depend on the local context. While the collection of appropriate data will serve as a longitudinal resource to learn about non-negotiable and beneficial practices, in the short term, a common working definition of quality must be in place, and it must be sufficiently rigorous, while not discouraging those who are on the right path from aspiring towards continuous improvement. This is especially important when we consider that a large number of projects have identified Linked learning pathway certification as a central component of program development in the next 3-4 years. As Linked Learning certification is refined and applied in the future, it should provide a continuum of fidelity that is sensitive to local realities and allows for flexibility and clarity in attaining various levels of certification. What elements are non-negotiable based on current data and research, and what aspects can be realized by different means depending on local context and resources?

Data and Evaluation. Following on the previous point, to the extent that Linked Learning, partnership academies, and the career pathways approach more broadly, have been shown to lead to improved college, career and life outcomes for students, any data collection and evaluation of Career Pathways Trust grantees must go beyond simply collecting Cal-PASS Plus-reported data. While this will be useful for measuring project success, it must also be accompanied by qualitative assessments of how different projects are structured, and the roles of organization, governance, and activities in structuring outcomes. Expenditures, counseling structures, transition models, policies, messaging and outreach practices, innovative work-based learning models, and programs for English language learners and students with disabilities are examples of specific activities and decisions which the field can learn from moving forward. Why do specific choices work, and how are they impacted by geographic factors? What statewide policy implications can be drawn from effective practices or from persistent barriers?

College Promise Expansion. As several applications express an explicit intention to expand all or most aspects of the College Promise Partnership piloted by Long Beach USD, Long Beach City College, and CSU Long Beach, it would be worthwhile to look at any existing policy barriers to the expansion of such partnerships, and begin to look at how those partnerships can best build from current exemptions provided to the Long Beach partnership in the Education Code, and the extent to which such exemptions may or may not be necessary for those institutions involved.

K-16 Educator Workforce Development. Funded projects focus on the need to provide specialized professional development to current middle school, high school, and postsecondary educators and counselors, in order to increase and improve upon contextualized, integrated academic and technical instruction at each level. However, there is equally a need to focus on the pipeline of future teachers, counselors, and administrators that will be needed as well. While the development of district and regional coaches and ongoing professional development are two strategies, it will be important to develop stronger partnerships between districts and professional preparation programs such as those which utilize the Linked Learning lens, and forthcoming recognition of study, as part of their approach to training future teachers. With respect to college and university instructors, short- and long-term plans for the preparation of incoming faculty will be equally important for both effective partnership maintenance and for forthcoming developments in contextualized academic and career technical education learning communities and integrated career technical general education courses. The CSU is beginning to address these needs through its Linked Learning initiative – however, the Career Pathways Trust may place additional strain on current capacity.

IV. Common Qualities of Non-Funded Regional Applications

Beyond proposing to spend more money than was allowed for the first year, or lacking sufficient college partnerships, a number of more qualitative features were common in applications not selected for funding. Some of these were reflected in a handful of funded projects as well. Non-funded applications may have had strengths among those mentioned above for funded applications, but they seem to have encountered challenges in one or more of the components described below.

Coordination/Partnership

College Buy-in. Several school district or county office-led applications appeared to have rather weak commitments from colleges in their region. In these cases, narratives gave little detail about a coordinated workplan to achieve specific target, or build systemic policies to improve program transitions. This would suggest an ongoing need to develop college level leadership champions of career pathways that may advocate among their peers, as well as a need to work with districts and county offices on best practices for messaging and outreach to engage with college leadership to drive systemic collaboration.

Sector Focus. A number of proposals covered ten to fifteen sectors in their applications, rather than focusing on a couple of key sectors as did most funded applications – such as those identified as top priorities in a region through the Doing What Matters initiative. In such a case, it would be wise for applicants to focus on undertaking a project with quality, and creating strong templates and models within a few sectors, before expanding into others. Building from the strongest sectors and base of programs, an applicant should be realistic and build basic infrastructure, employer partnerships, and secondary-postsecondary policies in a handful of sectors before trying to expand into others. All fifteen industry sectors cannot be the top priority in all regions, nor are all sectors likely to have strong pathways across the board. An overly broad focus could give the impression that applicants were not able to perform asset mapping, or assess existing program capacity prior to application, or that they were attempting to supplement or supplant existing funding for regional occupation programs or existing career pathways without articulating sufficient enhancements, expansion or improvement to those programs and their K-14 and employer alignment.

Outreach and Recruitment Planning. Of those non-funded applications reviewed, many did not seem to articulate a strategy for outreach and equity. Often, this was reflected through an apparent difficulty in understanding the students to be served, and the specific barriers they encounter to access information, enroll in programs or persist in those programs. Without knowing their students, applicants cannot develop focused interventions and supports, nor can they convincingly argue that their proposal will have any positive impact on equity of access, opportunity, and outcomes.

Meaningful Outcomes and Year-to-Year Goals. Non-funded applications appeared particularly cautious with regards to expected outcomes they would be held accountable for. Few gave actual target numbers, and for the most part, the types of outcomes for the first year did not seem to require deep commitment from project partners, or $6-15 million to ensure their success. In part, this could reflect a

lack of sufficient pre-planning, needs analysis or asset mapping (as evidenced by applications that identified goals for the first year of funding that emphasized the completion of planning activities). Funded applicants had targets for such things as pathway enrollment and work-based learning participation growth, pathway dual enrollment course development, and intermediary organization institutionalization. They also already had implementation timelines for how work would occur over the course of the first year, and targets for the rest of the grant period. The pre-planning element may be indicative of challenges in building partnerships, and must be addressed regionally due to unique institutional cultures and leadership personalities. Peer-to-peer efforts may be one means to facilitate partnership development.

Budget and Expenditure

Supporting Existing Programs. Some non-funded applicants appeared to view the Career Pathways Trust as a resource to continue funding existing regional occupation programs, rather than build up them into a Linked Learning or other career pathways approach, establish a new, more sustainable and impactful regional structure, or improve significantly upon what currently exists. Others appear to have seen it as a way to share the spoils without being able to articulate or commit to a coordinated, regional vision. In the latter case, funded for multiple districts and colleges would be divided between them to work on a local level, defeating the purpose of a regional system. Some applicants with existing pathways proposed very modest expansions of pathways, while proposing to use funding to support current programs – without addressing the need to do so, or clarifying how it would support work that was currently underway, but unfunded.

Describing One's Track Record. This not only seemed to arise in non-funded proposals, but also in a number of those that were ultimately funded. While applicants may have had strong or promising track records in developing career pathways and improving postsecondary articulation, many focused on describing ongoing or past work done as part of the AB 790 Linked Learning Pilot Program or the SB 1070 Career Technical Pathways Program – doing so to the point that one might think they were already doing everything outlined in their Career Pathways Trust proposal. This could be due to a lack of clarity in distinguishing between what has been achieved and what remains a challenge, as well as distinguishing between what is already being funded and what has been undertaken without financial support.

Staffing Sustainability. Some applicants proposed allocating significant funding to staff – whether new or current –rather than reallocate existing resources and staffing to support work. When this was done in proposals, there was usually not a clear plan for maintaining staff and funding levels beyond grant funding. This could be construed as poor planning on the part of applicants, or as indicative of a lack of commitment from partners to be fully at the table and support staffing needs to realize projects.

Planning and Project Sustainability

Needs, Capacity, and Strategy. Among non-funded applications that were reviewed, the articulation of a clear strategy and action plan seemed to be a particular challenge. This would suggest the need for

planning grants – an option which is provided for in the education code for future funding – in order to convene partners and identify needs, existing resources, assets, and capacity, and thus develop a realistic, focused plan of action. To the extent that first-round applicants may reapply, significant consideration should be given to the coherence of the workplan, but more generally to the scope of their projects, structure of partnerships, and core purpose of their partnerships. Clarity and an ambitious, but realistic, reach could better orient partners (and help to effectively build those partnerships) and a workplan. Later in this document, specific areas of emphasis that could be addressed in future planning or implementation grants are provided, based upon the characteristics of both funded and unfunded applications that were reviewed.

V. Non-Funded Applications – Implications for Career Pathways Trust 2.0 and Beyond

Regional Occupation Programs. While most applicants who were funded in the first round of Career Pathways Trust grants propose or have already undertaken the integration of regional occupation programs and Linked Learning/career pathways as a unified strategy that will be funded by districts and county offices of education beyond maintenance of efforts requirements, a tension remains among those regional occupation programs that may have been attempting to supplement or supplant their current funding through the Career Pathways Trust and did not seem to reimagine or clearly articulate a new scope of work and responsibilities. Will these applicants accept the cultural shift happening in career technical education as they try again for funding, or will the gap between traditional regional occupation programs and Linked Learning, partnership academies, or other career pathways widen? What strategies can be used to address this discourse discrepancy to the benefit of all parties?

Building College Commitments. As deep engagement of partner colleges appeared to be a particular challenge in some regional applications led by school districts or county offices of education, an intentional focus on the postsecondary role should be an area of special attention. Several strategies can be implemented to address this challenge depending on the local context. Where there were competing visions, and perhaps competing applications, the impetus could be on coming together to have a structured, facilitated dialogue and create a mutual vision – not to get a 'sign off' on one another's applications or come to the table with a pre-formed idea of what is wanted or needed from partners. Where there is a more general challenge in gaining the attention of postsecondary or K-12 leadership, there could be roles for peer-to-peer outreach, site visits, and communities of practice in gaining the attention of leadership and providing an cognitive 'entry paths' through messaging and framing that 'speak the language' of those that need to be engaged.

Building Within Means, and According to Need. Those providing assistance and guidance to non-funded regional partnerships should consider capacity and needs assessments with regards to the appropriate scale and structure of future applications. Many may have overextended the scale of their application, without having strong partner commitments, or the ability to follow through on the regional implications of their proposals. Applicants could be advised to focus smaller (in sub-regions with a small

number of school districts and colleges), in order to build a strong model at the appropriate scale for the grant period. There is nothing to keep consortia from expanding during or after the grant period, but the focus of a project should be on quality, and should not be compromised for sake of quantity. That said, where the building blocks of a regional partnership model exist, regions should be clear in future applications and partnerships about whether they will commit to a regional vision and all that it entails, or whether they need to, in fact, focus on sub-regions. At least one application referred to itself as a regional model, but partnerships and program alignment were to occur in discrete sub-regional units only, contradicting the regional aims of the application.

Interlocking Applications. Especially where there are different levels of commitment between certain districts and colleges and emerging regional consortia, individual applicants or more localized consortia should not be discouraged from applying for smaller grants alongside their engagement in regional applications. Interlocking applications may help to increase the chances of furthering some level of work in region that has not received funding in the first round. If the region isn't ready, these smaller grants could help to build greater local support and capacity that can be scaled over time.

Planning Grants. Non-funded proposals suggested a need for deeper planning prior to submitting another grant request. Whether for new applicants or returning ones, planning grants should require a workplan to be in place and actionable by the end of their planning grant as a condition of readiness to submit a proposal for full funding. Planning grants that can guide applicants towards building strong projects, and thus strong proposals, could build around a collective regional vision and unified strategy that includes most, if not all, of the following:

- Description of target students and their families, and any relevant academic, social, linguistic, transportation, health or other barriers that significantly affect student outcomes, and clear interventions, supports, policy changes that will be employed to address these issues in connection with the proposed pathway programs.
- Multi-year outcomes that are not only related to student performance and participation, but also the project development process. Clear target numbers should be provided, and a plan should be articulated that makes these targets appear feasible and meaningful to the overall project goals. The number of employers in a partnership is not a sufficient indicator, as it doesn't reflect the depth of the partnership. The number of internships offered by employers is a more meaningful, impactful goal.
- Plans to work with existing grantees, or other non-funded applicants, to expand their regional approach and integrate efforts (whether through an integrated regional application, provision of peer mentorship, development of regional governance models, etc.)
- Partnership models that show clear contributions from all stakeholders, not just a few, and which reflect shared investments rather than shared interest to 'share the wealth'
- Agreement on the WBL sequences that will apply to all pathways within a sector. Commitment of industry partners to ensure this sequence is realized, through specific actions to be taken and

activities that will be provided at each grade level, as well assessment of current capacity and outstanding needs.

- Indication that the beginning stages of pathway (re)development and/or intermediary development are underway before the end of the planning period. The timeline of planning and implementation work should reflect this.
- Demonstrate outreach and recruitment equity through clear strategy, including a timeline of how different types of activities will play out over the school year, and how these activities account for special or under-represented populations (including women in traditionally male pathways or industries). This work should start from an analysis of current enrollment equity to build out a plan that targets disproportionate enrollment in an ambitious but achievable manner.
- Identify specific pathways that will be created at school sites, not just the sector of the pathway. Demonstrate the specific demand for specific pathways within a sector, their alignment with postsecondary programs and related employment opportunities. Demonstrate an assessment of current programs to be revamped or new ones to be created, and the buy-in of school sites as part of this effort.
- Address alignment to four-year universities. How do the CSU and UC play into partnership? Are they merely the receivers of a-g completers and/or transfer students from community colleges?
- How will postsecondary partners work to alter their programs? Explain how the project is not just a high school-focused proposal. Will postsecondary institutions be creating new certification or degree programs? Will they offer contextualized general education to align with pathways? Will dual enrollment play a significant role? How will college counselors play a greater role in supporting college application and enrollment?

VI. Considerations for Future Applications, Rubrics, and Review Processes

Based on those scores that were provided by fiscal sponsors, applicants were most strongly scored on a number of elements:

- **Section 1:** Statement of Need/Pathway Description
- **Section 2:** Target Population
    - Understanding of target population, and description of barriers, outreach strategies and recruitment activities
- **Section 3:** Career Pathways Program Planned Approach
    - Career Technical Student Organizations
- **Section 4:** Partnerships
    - Description of partnerships and the extent of business and post-secondary collaboration
- **Section 5:** Outcomes/Measures
    - Decision-making process
    - Data collection
- **Section 6:** Program Specialist and Strategy, and Sustainability Plan
- **Section 7:** Budget

Many of these elements were addressed above in the summaries of both funded and non-funded proposals. Moving forward it would suggest that these are components of the application where more guidance to applicants would be likely to improve how they develop their projects, and thus how they answer these questions. Guidance on the types of elements that reviewers are looking for is important to drive quality applications that actually reflect what is of value in regional alignment and capacity building. Having gone through the process once, we can learn from those elements that stood out as important and necessary in quality proposals and allow this learning to inform the next round of funding in a cycle of continuous learning and improvement.

Clarifying Applicant Expectations and Scoring Criteria

A useful example of how to structure the rubric, and application guidance, in a constructive way can be found in the scoring rubric for the CSU's Linked learning Pathways to the Baccalaureate. Without being prescriptive, it does provide a clearer idea of what differentiates strong, adequate and poor responses. An example that could be applied within the Career Pathways Trust would be in describing the target pathway. Currently, it requires applicants to "*describe the targeted career pathways that will be funded…* [and]*… provide information on the selection process and specific data used to identify the specific career pathways".* As it is clear that this was not specific enough for applicants and some scorers - a common issue was the fact that applicants spoke of the sector, not the pathways within it, and that some scorers rated applications well despite this omission – the request for applications and rubric for future Career Pathways Trust grants could clarify that applicants thoroughly describe the pathway(s)

within an industry sector (whether identified through DWM or CDE examples) and why/how those specific pathways are chosen. The application can provide examples, stating, for instance, that:

> "*Applicants should not only list industry sectors, such as Health or Information Technology, but also outline the specific pathways within those sectors (as identified in the Career Technical Education Model Curriculum Standards and/or the CA Community Colleges' Doing What Matters initiative). Examples include Patient Care (for Health Science and Medical Technology) and Software and Systems Development (for Information Technology and Communications)*".

A similar descriptive approach can be applied across all areas of the application and the scoring rubric where there were clear misunderstandings in expectations and/or inconsistencies in scoring and evaluation. Some reviewers seemed to understand the needs of applications, while others seemed to give higher scores because the proposal sounded interesting – not because of any clear strategy, partnership, or leadership ability that would suggest it meets the priorities of the Career Pathways Trust. Specificity and examples would overcome value-laden terminology (ex. "extensive partnerships", "active and integrated approach" or "thoroughly and convincingly describes") which leaves significant room for subjective interpretation by reviewers. Guidance and examples of what constitutes a "thorough description" or "extensive partnership" would overcome subjective bias among scorers, as well as guide applicants on what to do to develop a strong project and proposal.

Scoring Inconsistencies

While clarifications in the expectations and scoring, as outlined above, could improve project descriptions and planning, and thus scoring, the fact that gross inconsistencies in scoring occurred across some reviewers implies that there are additional actions which, going forward, could reduce the instances of less qualified applications being called to interviews, or even funded (especially in the case of those not requiring interviews).

Training and Preparation of Scorers. While the rubric and application itself can become more informative to guide applicants and scorers and help each understand what a strong application entails, the training of scorers could include (if not present in the RFA and scoring rubric)**,** clearer examples of what strong, adequate and poor responses include or 'look like' (refer to the CSU's Linked Learning Pathways to the Baccalaureate Scoring Rubric for examples).

Review the Review Process. While the review sheets provided opportunity for reviewers to justify their scores, some of the most inconsistent scores came from reviewers who provided no justifications or comments – or at least nothing informative (ex. "Interesting proposal" or "Adequately describes the development of program"). These scores were often marked higher than those of other reviewers, but occasionally they were significantly lower, suggesting a discrepancy in what reviewers were looking for and how they understood the process. As such, there could be some justification of scores required, however brief, to ensure that scorers are thinking about why they are giving strong scores. In addition, if significant discrepancies arise within the scoring of the same application, it should immediately raise a

red flag for a designated individual or review committee to look at the inconsistencies across applications as well as scoring justifications, to determine the appropriate course of action for the application.

AB 790/SB 1070. Applications called out the AB 790 Linked Learning Pilot Program and SB 1070 Career Technical Pathways Program often in discussing their current work on career pathways and K-14 alignment, as well as when discussing their track records more generally. Based on their comments, some reviewers seem to have taken this as evidence of ongoing work being done without need for additional Career Pathways Trust funding, and may have been skeptical as to what was new about proposals. In part, this is the burden of applicants to better distinguish current from proposed work, and persistent needs that require special funding to support. Reviewers could benefit from a briefing on these initiatives, since they are key efforts which have laid the groundwork for the Career Pathways Trust, and feature prominently in career pathways work across the state. Again, applicants will need to explain this fact, but reviewers can also be made aware of the context in advance to mitigate misinterpretation or penalization of applications for their track records. In future requests for applications, language could also be included that asks applicants to address their role in AB 790, SB 1070 or other statewide initiatives, and how the Career Pathways Trust request builds upon or expands work initiated through these efforts.

Weighting of Application Sections

Beyond preparing applicants and scorers with more guidance to prepare and evaluate proposals, there are a couple of general aspects of the application which may be worth reconsideration because of their potential for projecting implied biases or the confusion they seemed to create for reviewers in the first round of funding.

The Value of Understanding Student Populations. Looking at the general distribution of points in the rubric, it is noteworthy that only 5% of the overall score reflects Section II: "Target Group". As this analysis has emphasized, an important characteristic of applications has been the ability (or inability) of applicants to describe the student populations to be served. A higher proportional value for this section, as well as more specific expectations, would drive more student-centered planning, as applicants would be less likely to receive funding if they cannot demonstrate deep knowledge of student and family barriers, and subsequent support, access and other needs that must be implemented in order to ensure equity of opportunity, access, and outcomes.

Career Technical Student Organizations. Section III of the application, "Career Pathways Program Planned Approach" has the highest value of all sections, accounting for 30 percent of the overall score. While this reflects the importance of a clear program of study, integrated academics, student supports, transition supports, and student organizations, the balance within this section could be construed as problematic. Integrated courses, a clearly defined sequence of courses, and career technical student organizations are each worth 20% of the overall score in this section. While each is important, the varied elements of the work-based learning continuum, dual enrollment, transition services, counseling,

support services, professional development, and other components are all compacted together in two separate subsections together accounting for the remaining 40 percent of the section. Consideration of either (1) the inclusion of Career Technical Student Organizations within the lists of other opportunities and activities, or (2) a more general reorganization of priorities within the section may be worth considerating. Otherwise, the current structure values student leadership organizations (which are certainly important) as significantly more important than support services, postsecondary transition strategies, and work-based learning more broadly. While these components may be provided well through some Career Technical Student Organizations structures, it unfairly penalizes other applicants who may have alternate means to provide the same services, activities, and opportunities outside of a statewide or nationally-recognized Career Technical Student Organizations. This is despite the fact that this subsection of the application clearly states that applicants can identify how alternative strategies can be used to fulfill requirements. It seems that its presence as a separate element led reviewers to focus on CTSO at the expense of other means, with a number of reviewers giving low scores (1) despite alternative strategies being provided, (2) because one pathway type did not draw on a specific CTSO, or (3) because schools were being given freedom to determine which approach they would use with funds provided for the purpose. In this sense, the CTSO subsection ignored the principle of subsidiarity by dictating how applicants should structure their programs, through a combination of the explicit structure of the application and implicit manner in which it was interpreted by reviewers. If nothing more, it may be necessary to reframe this subsection to further clarify to reviewers that specific CTSO are not required per se, and to further emphasize the ability for alternative strategies to be employed, as it is the elements of CTSO and similar programs – not the organizations in and of themselves – which are critical in providing opportunities for students to develop valuable leadership skills.

VII. Additional Considerations

Additional Funding for Funded Projects. Will previous applicants who were funded in the first round be able to request additional funding in the second round of grants? Could partners ask for additional to fund work that supplements what was in original proposal? How would this work? Many were still in planning stages for some elements they hoped to include in their proposals, so they did not factor some projects into their proposal and subsequent funding request. What amounts would be feasible as supplemental grants? What special/minimum requirements would be attached beyond showing how a new request goes beyond the scope of the original request?

Student Success & Equity Plans. The 2014-15 budget placed priority for apprenticeship program development and regions with high dropout rates in the Career Pathways Trust, as well as requiring alignment to the Local Control and Accountability Plans of districts. Will a similar expectation be made of colleges pursuant to the forthcoming requirement for Student Success and Equity Plans for community colleges receiving funding through the Student Success and Support Program?

What Will Be Asked of Non-Funded Applicants the Second Time Around? Considering the goal of strengthening regional collaboration past applicants (or partners from a previous application now serving as fiscal sponsors) that went unfunded should be expected to address the degree of progress made on their initial proposal despite not being funded. The response to this question could inform scoring, to the extent that it reflects a consortium's intentions and commitment to the priorities of the Career Pathways Trust.

Should geography play a role in Round 2? Geographic factors, such as the remoteness of schools and subsequent challenges for business and postsecondary engagement, may influence the ability of some rural local education agencies to meet the objectives of the Career Pathways Trust. As such, how might rural applicants be provided 'reasonable accommodation' for certain elements of the application? How would this be determined? Could descriptions of alternate strategies be provided, such as distance learning, high-school based dual enrollment, virtual internships, etc.?

Should Statewide Activities Be Supported? The rapid expansion of pathway programs already occurring through the AB 790 Pilot Program will only accelerate through the Career Pathways Trust. This brings will it a number of local capacity implications, but also exacerbates statewide issues. To what extent can the second round of Career Pathways Trust funding be supportive of statewide activities? What specifications can be given to applicants in the RFA to help them develop a successful application that serves a statewide need? Would a multi-district consortium that transcends regions be problematic? Would it be acceptable as long as it clearly built upon and improved or expanded a pathway across the state? Would they be feasible through money set aside for statewide technical assistance?

VIII. Conclusion

The Career Pathways Trust has the potential to serve as a catalyst for new policies, programs, and partnerships that transform student preparation for postsecondary education and careers. The proposals of funded applicants suggest that this is already under way in many parts of the state. However, non-funded and funded applications both suggest that there are a number of challenges and opportunities which should remain at the front of our minds moving forward.

The suggestions included in this document see challenges as opportunities rather than deficits, and are intended to inform applicant guidance and proposal review, as well as inform how the field can best support implementation through regional and statewide strategies. With additional money to be made available for a second round of funding, it is equally vital to remain aware of the opportunities available for revising the application criteria and review process, as the structure these provide to applicants serves as the frame within which regional partners will define and develop their projects.