



Education  
Strategy  
Group

# A More Unified Community College: Strategies and Resources to Align Non-Credit and Credit Programs

# Contributors to the Study

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Virginia Community College System

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# A Note on Language

**Non-credit programs:** Industry-focused technical training programs that lead to a certificate or certification of value.

**Degree programs:** Programs leading to an associate's or applied associate's degree regardless of whether the credits are offered through non-credit or academic departments. This is inclusive of standalone credit-bearing workforce credentials nested within degree programs.

**Pathways:** Having a clear route with identified steps from one program to the next.



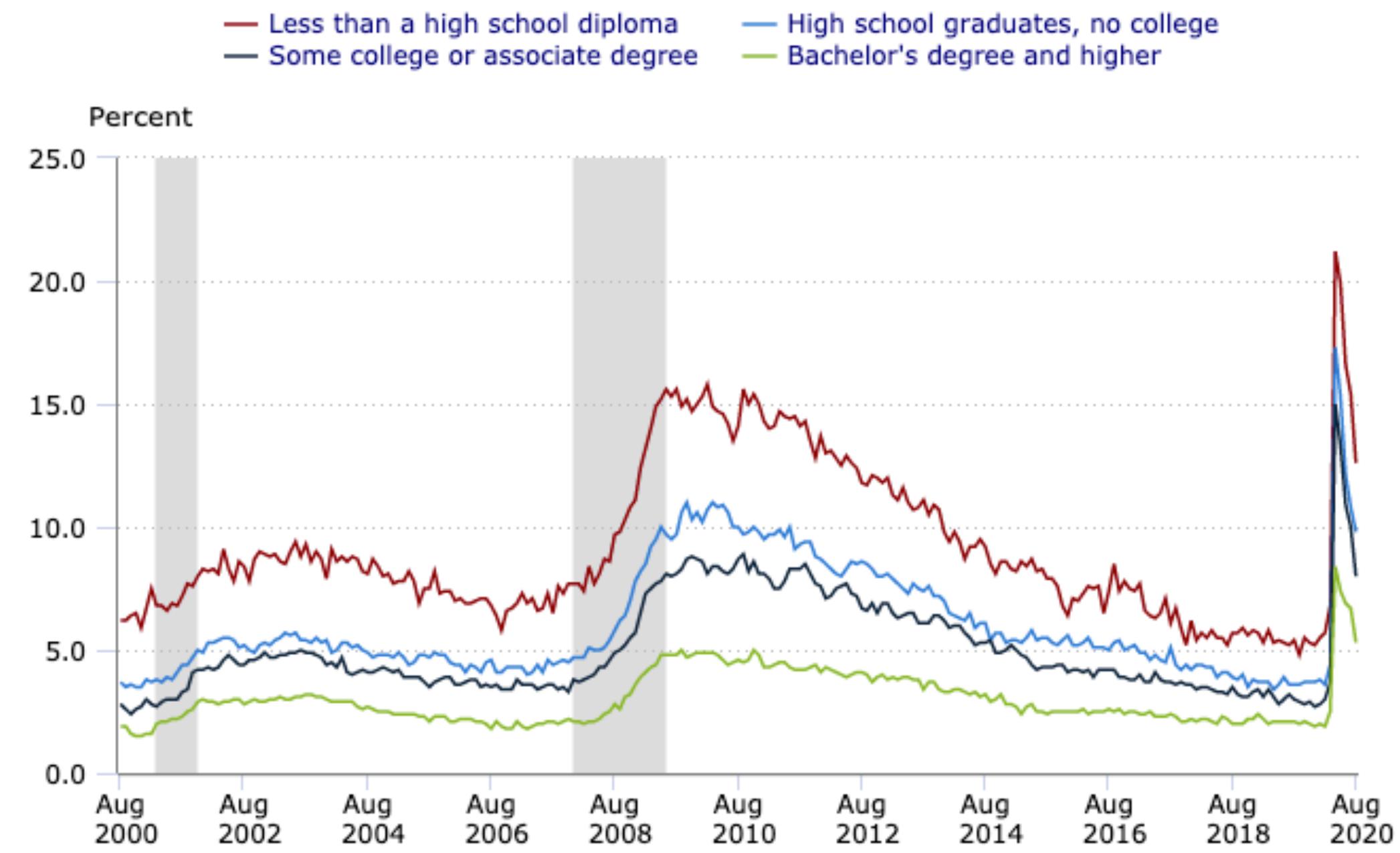
# The Rationale

# Millions of Americans are looking for work...

Short-term training programs can provide a timely solution for the high number of non-credentialed workers who have been displaced as a result of the coronavirus pandemic

Unemployment rates for persons 25 years and older by educational attainment, seasonally adjusted

Click and drag within the chart to zoom in on time periods



Hover over chart to view data.

Note: Shaded area represents recession, as determined by the National Bureau of Economic Research.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.



# ...but racial tracking is a serious risk.

Race/Ethnicity	Earnings of High School Educated Worker	Earnings of Certificate Holder	Certificate Premium Over High School (%)
<b>Women</b>			
All	\$24,020	\$27,864	16%
White	\$26,011	\$29,653	14%
African-American	\$22,421	\$24,887	11%
Asian and other	\$22,160	\$26,592	20%
Hispanic	\$19,086	\$26,911	41%
<b>Men</b>			
All	\$34,796	\$44,191	27%
White	\$39,107	\$47,320	21%
African-American	\$27,559	\$35,000	27%
Asian and other	\$30,966	\$38,398	24%
Hispanic	\$27,718	\$39,914	44%

Source: Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce

**African-American certificate holders receive the lowest wages and one of the smallest wage premiums**

**Heightened awareness of the impact of systemic racism has created greater urgency to ensure short-term, non-credit training is the not the end point for people of color.**

# The division between non-credit & credit **is severe** and obstructs pathways.

*Differences*

*Results*

Programmatic  
Differences

- Structure →
- Credit Designation →
- Value Determination →

Duplication

Stakeholder  
Differences

- Students/Student Experiences →
- Faculty & Staff →

Real &  
Perceived  
Stratification

Operational  
Differences

- Funding & Financial Aid →
- Student Services →
- Technology →

Inefficiencies



# A call for change.

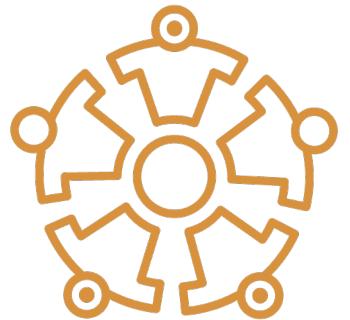


*Envision an institution that better prepares students with the skills and knowledge to succeed and continuously grow in their chosen field by allowing students from both workforce and degree programs to seamlessly interface and transition across the other.*



# A New Framework for Alignment

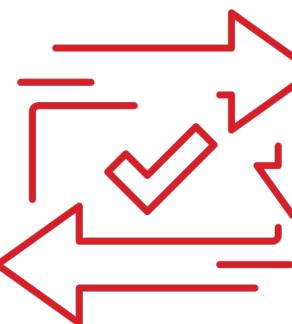
# A New Framework for Alignment & Integration



## 1 TREAT ALL STUDENTS AS STUDENTS

**Address the gaps in the student experience,** the resources, services and supports available to students in non-credit and credit programs, and even the language used and implied stratification.

## 2 BUILD PATHWAYS BETWEEN NON-CREDIT & CREDIT CREDENTIALS



Develop **on-ramps and connections** between programs, going both ways. Students must know what their **next steps** are to continue, **whether now or later**.



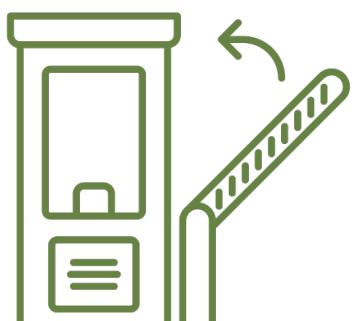
## 3 ALIGN DEPARTMENTS & GOVERNANCE

Bring together non-credit and degree programs under **joint leadership**. Integration should occur across curriculum, faculty and the administration.

## 4 MAKE PROGRAMS CREDIT-WORTHY OR CREDIT-BASED



Grant credit when students transition to degree programs through articulation, equivalency agreements, etc. or gain **accreditation for industry-focused programs**.



## 5 REMOVE BARRIERS TO TRANSITION

**Make transitioning easy, obvious, and clear** by addressing barriers such as funding, scheduling, etc.

# Starting Points to Implement the New Framework

# Starting Point #1: Remove the Structural Divide

## Approach

Create a new or merged division to encompass non-credit and credit departments. Facilitate pathway development and student progression between non-credit certificate and degree programs. Act as one unit through coordination, communication, and collaboration.

## Tools

Focus on the policies, procedures, systems, software, job descriptions, administrative functions, and supporting infrastructure required to align non-credit and credit departments.

## Tips

Transformational leadership is essential to guide change.

# Starting Point #1 : Remove the Structural Divide

## Case Study: The Division of Teaching, Learning, and Student Success



PRINCE GEORGE'S  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

- In 2018, Prince George's Community College (PGCC) created a new division called Teaching, Learning, and Student Success. The *Teaching, Learning, and Student Success* division brought together credit programs, non-credit programs, and student services.
- Guided pathways provided the initial impetus for alignment, while the prioritization of agility in the marketplace drove a deeper and broader approach to alignment efforts.
- PGCC had to address policy and operations at all levels to effect this alignment, which has been an enormous undertaking. The effort included examining how they collect data, how they register students, and how they structure position descriptions to incorporate alignment.

## Other Institutional & System Examples

- Louisiana Community & Technical College System, LA
- Austin Community College, TX
- Harford Community College, MD

# Starting Point #2 : Developing Bridge Tools to Award Credit

## Approach

Bridge tools are used to award credit for learning in industry-focused non-credit programs when students transition into credit programs. Non-credit and credit departments may retain their organizational distinctions.

## Tools

Bridge tools include equivalency agreements, articulation agreements, competency-based education (CBE), credit by exam or other PLA, or credit matrices.

## Tip

Select the bridge tool(s) that will make the transition process between non-credit and credit programs and credit awarding process as automatic as possible, without additional requirements placed on students.

# Starting Point #2: Developing Bridge Tools to Award Credit

## Case Study: Competency-based education and equivalency agreements



- From 2014-16, the School of Applied Technology and Technology Specialties moved 20 non-credit clock hour programs to a competency-based education (CBE) model in response to funded legislation that required affordable and flexible open terms to better
- The president empowered the administration to meet with faculty to begin developing pathways.
- The college developed internal equivalency agreements to grant credit for competencies, rather than courses.
- Equivalency agreements pertained to a full CBE program and required students to complete the CBE program in order to be eligible for credit.
- An institutional promise program covers any financial aid gap for students who transition.

## Other Institutional & System Examples

- Gold-standard articulation agreements, Florida Department of Education
- Certification crosswalk & stackable credentials, Ivy Tech Community College
- Credit for prior learning, Virginia Community College System

# Starting Point #3: Make Industry-Focused Programs Credit-Based

## Approach

The majority of industry-focused non-credit programs pursue accreditation to become credit-bearing and automatically count toward an associate's degree.

## Tools

Follow the accreditation process. Align curriculum and learning objectives and outcomes between workforce (formerly non-credit) programs and degree programs.

## Key

Have a “myth buster” or “accreditation guru” on the planning team to address questions and concerns over changes related to programs becoming credit-based.

# Starting Point #3: Make Non-credit Programs Credit-Based

## Case Study: Making non-credit programs credit-based



- When Keith Bird was appointed as chancellor of KCTCS in 1999, he made it a priority to develop a process to award credit for non-credit programs.
- Making non-credit workforce programs credit-bearing would also better align with state funding, which flowed more directly into credit-based programs.
- The system assigned a team of faculty and staff from workforce and academic programs to develop a common language definition and process guide to manage the transition to credit programming; faculty members in academic programs who taught workforce courses helped facilitate the change, as these faculty knew the content and quality of workforce offerings were the same as academic programs, simply taught in a different format.
- Now, when new training offerings are developed, faculty make a credit recommendation based on competencies already approved and can quickly gain credit approval.

## Other Institutional & System Examples

- Credit-based offerings for rural colleges, Rural Community College Alliance

# Starting Point #4: Reorient for Demand-Driven Pathways

## Approach

Design new aligned pathways for current and emerging industry demand. Some structural silos may remain. Pathways from non-credit programs are built into new programs and credential offerings.

## Tools

External drivers, rather than internal organization, determine pathways.

## Tips

Be adaptive, data-infused, and partnership-based.

# Starting Point #4: Reorient for Demand-Driven Pathways

## Case Study: Re-envisioning workforce development



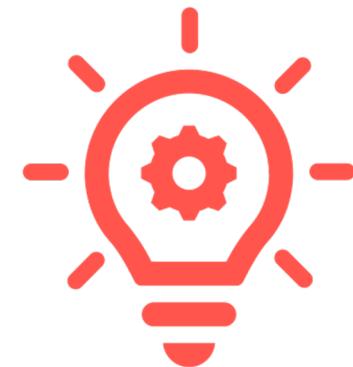
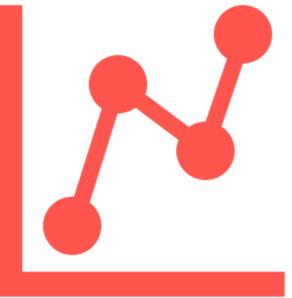
- In 2011, Monroe Community College (MCC) created the Economic and Workforce Development Center (EWDC) to reach more students across the region, better prepare students for employment, and create pathways toward degrees.
- Leadership reoriented the division around strategic grants development, labor market analysis, employer engagement, and flexible non-credit to credit offerings.
- Within the EWDC, non-credit and credit programs are managed separately, though students from both types of programs share courses and faculty may teach both types of courses.
- The EWDC provides a high-touch, case management approach to supporting students, which makes the next step on the pathway clear.

## Other Institutional & System Examples

- Centers for excellence, Cuyahoga Community College
- Labor market intelligence office, Dallas College

# Getting Started Guides

# Getting Started: Core Principles

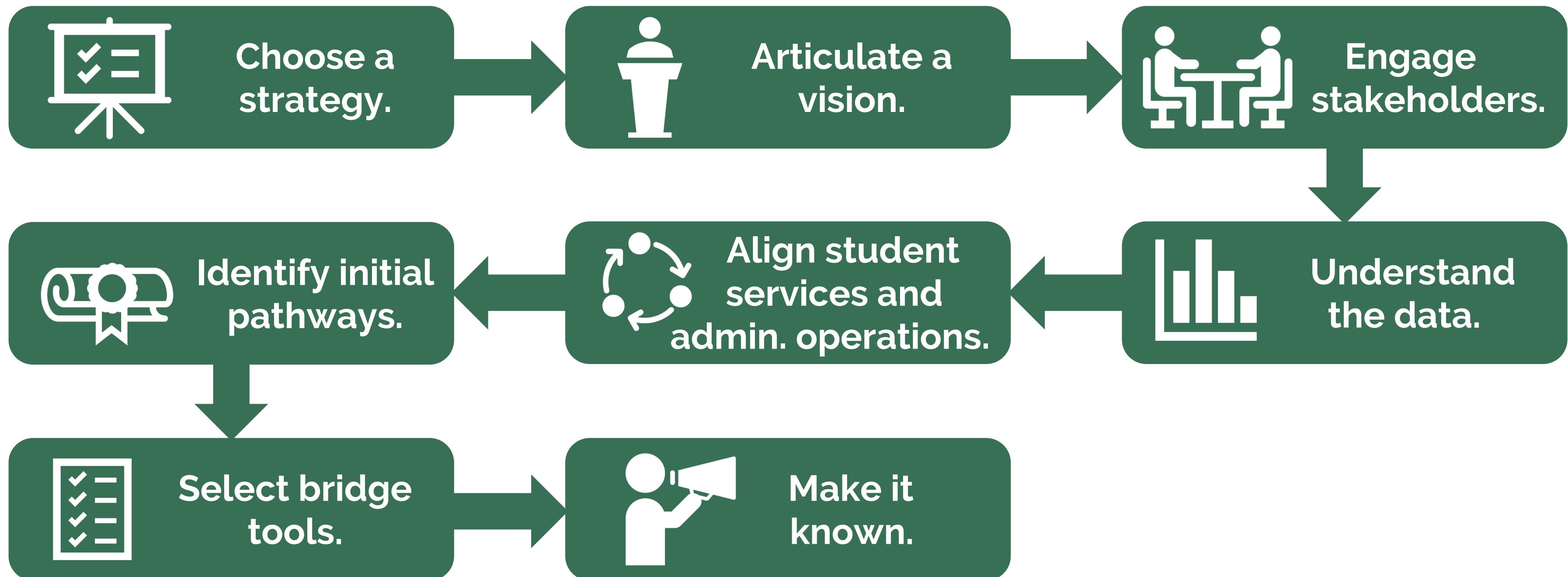


**Be student-centric:**  
Make students  
the focal point.  
**Build for equity and  
opportunity.**  
Address systems,  
policies, and processes  
that create barriers  
for students.

**Be labor market driven:**  
Collect and analyze  
labor market data  
on current and projected  
economic needs.  
Engage employers.  
Focus on high-demand  
and high wage fields.

**Build for innovation:**  
Re-envision  
what is possible.  
**Foster new opportunities**  
utilizing leading  
evidence-based practices.  
**Be bold and**  
act with urgency.

# Quick Start Guide for Institutions & Systems



# Quick Start Guide for Institutions & Systems

## 1. Choose a strategy.

Commit to the ideal model. Begin with a strategy that matches the potential and capacity of the institution.

## 2. Articulate a vision.

Make the case. Lead the way. Transformational leadership at each level helps realize the vision.

## 3. Engage stakeholders.

Assign a team to guide the process. Bring all stakeholders to the table.

## 4. Understand the data.

Evaluate internal data on student outcomes and external labor market data. Tackle issues of student data not easily flowing between workforce and degree programs.

# Quick Start Guide for Institutions & Systems

## 5. Align student services and administrative operations.

Address and modify processes and policies. Aim for a “one door” student experience.

## 6. Identify initial pathways.

Start with the most in-demand pathways and programs that are low-hanging fruit. Don’t stop there.

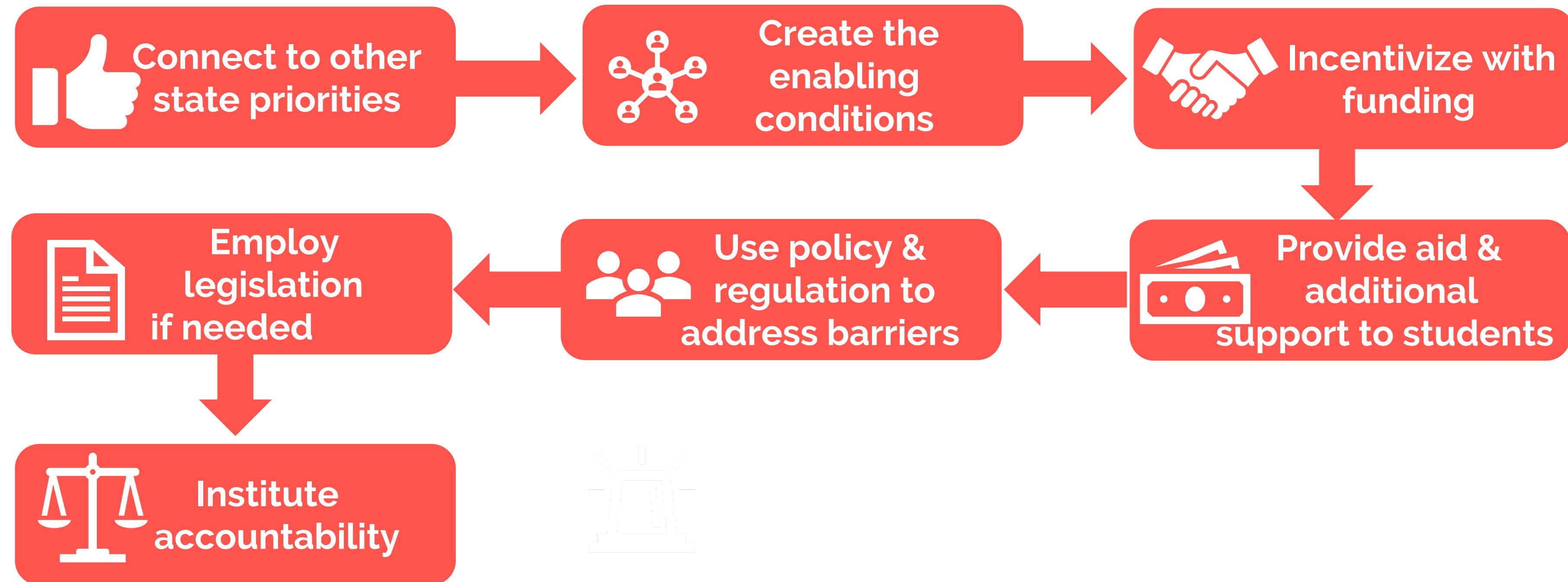
## 7. Select bridge tools.

Choose tools that make the process automatic, such as articulation and equivalency agreements and default CPL, over those that increase barriers, such as credit by exam.

## 8. Make it known.

Promote pathways through prominent and consistent communications, marketing, and advising.

# Quick Start Guide for States



# Quick Start Guide for States

## 1. Connect to other state priorities.

Utilize related state efforts and workgroups to gain a public commitment to this work.

## 2. Create the enabling conditions.

Support prioritization and implementation through communications and advocacy, convening, and facilitation of learning.

## 3. Incentivize with funding.

Align pathway elements to state funding streams.

## 4. Provide financial aid and additional supports to students.

Consider state scholarships, employer funding, and access to childcare, housing, transportation, employment, and food assistance.

# Quick Start Guide for States

## 5. Utilize policy and regulations to address barriers.

Start with a policy and regulation audit to identify existing barriers. Identify plan to remove barriers.

## 6. Employ legislation if needed.

While not a first course of action, lawmakers can engage funding and organizational structures that hamper change.

## 7. Institute accountability.

Data collection, analysis, and reporting are essential to urge this work forward and demonstrate results.

# Quick Start Guide for Stakeholders



# Quick Start Guide for Stakeholders

## 1. Start where you are.

Whatever your role, find ways to begin this work.

## 3. Make connections.

Build relationships with faculty, staff, and administrators across other programs, departments, and areas of the institution or system.

## 2. Be a voice for students.

Increase awareness of the different experience, resources, and support that students in non-credit programs have from students in credit programs.

## 4. Create alignment in your area.

Start small. This could be embedding a certificate into a degree program, initiating a conversation on a process to gain credit for non-credit programs, or suggesting ways to move beyond credit by exam.

# Quick Start Guide for Stakeholders

## 5. Collect and share data.

Collect data on these initial efforts, whether quantitative or qualitative. Understand what is and is not working and what needs to be modified.

## 6. Promote pathways.

Whether it is the alignment that you have created in your own area or existing pathways in your students, help make sure students know about these pathways.