

GETTING STARTED

Institutions, systems, states, and stakeholders, whether new to this work or continuing to the next phase, can align and integrate colleges' non-credit and credit programs by adopting the core principles below and following the getting started guides for implementation. The ideal for change is driven by leadership, articulating a vision and coalescing all of the relevant units to advance the integration. Yet it is also possible for enterprising change agents to embrace and advance to take the first steps toward this student-centered improvement by engaging like-minded collaborators.

CORE PRINCIPLES

A set of core principles guides the work. These principles are the foundation for developing a new way forward. They are represented in every aspect of the new framework and in the starting point case studies and examples to achieve the framework.

Be student-centric. Make students the starting point and continued focal point. Ask what is needed to best serve all students and ensure they thrive and complete. Build for equity and opportunity. Address the systems, policies, and processes that create barriers for students on this pathway. Ask whether any students are being left out or underserved. When challenging traditional structures and long held beliefs, “make sure all stakeholders understand that it is not about them, that it really is only about the students,” advised Karen Burcks, Academic and Career Advisor at Prince George’s Community College. At the state level, being student-centric translates into prioritizing equity in how the policies are developed and how the strategies are implemented. States also seek better ways to serve populations on the margins who have traditionally not been well-served. Being student-centric necessitates a significant cultural transformation and a commitment to a set of values that enables stakeholders to see their work and roles from a new or slightly altered perspective.

Be labor market-driven. Be attuned, through detailed labor market analysis, to the current and projected future needs of the regional and state economy. Authentically engage employers to continually validate and supplement labor market analytics. Create pathways that will respond to these needs. Educate employers on the value of these pathways. “Working with employers early on is the key to integrating non-credit and credit,” stated Roy Bond, Executive Director, Workforce Operations for Dallas College, as, “employers help develop the pathway and ensure that there is higher level learning beyond the first job.” Focus on high-demand and high-wage fields. Determine how to pivot to better meet economic needs. Go further in how the data is used and applied. At Monroe Community College, “we know what each program is worth in terms of both wage data for the individual and the impact of a new worker created for the economy,” stated Todd Oldham, Vice President for Economic and Workforce Development and CTE. “Because of that knowledge, we’ve hired an education-to-employment manager to better link students to employment opportunities aligned to their training.”

Build for innovation. Re-envision what is possible. Foster new opportunities utilizing leading evidence-based practices. “Be willing to blow up the model again and again and be flexible in the same way that business and industry are,” recommended Larry Ferguson, President of Ashland Community and Technical College. This is where transformational leadership is essential. Be bold and act with urgency. “Disruptive innovation shocks the system. It forces you to figure things out quickly,” noted Christine Barrow, Dean of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics, Prince George’s Community College. Be willing to think outside of traditional structures to meet existing and future demand. A few examples of this include the Ascend Institute at Dallas College, which will serve as a one-stop for employers wanting to work with the district; the new Business Solutions venture at PGCC, which will take a consultative approach to innovate and quickly respond to industry needs; and the Future of Work Center at Monroe Community College, which will provide flexible space that can be rapidly retooled for new forms of training with industry partners. For states, this is about supporting innovation at the institutional and system levels through the removal of barriers, infusion of new capacity and resources, enabling additional flexibility.



GETTING STARTED GUIDE: ADMINISTRATORS, FACULTY, AND STAFF

1. START WHERE YOU ARE.

While some of the case studies and examples highlighted here came from the top, others started at the individual faculty, administrator, and departmental level. Whatever your role, find ways to begin this work. Share the new framework for alignment and resources here with colleagues and supervisors. Begin the conversation about how this applies to your institution and the most relevant ways to engage alignment. Use case studies and examples that resonate. Start with the areas of greatest need and opportunity. Apply the core principles—being student-centric, labor market driven, and innovative—to guide efforts.

2. BE A VOICE FOR STUDENTS.

An important part of alignment is increasing awareness of the different experience, resources, and support that students in non-credit programs have from students in credit programs. Foster this awareness. Be the person who regularly surfaces these issues in meetings. Start to change the discussion from primarily centered on students in credit programs to a more inclusive discussion that considers all students.

3. MAKE CONNECTIONS.

Build relationships with faculty, staff, and administrators across other programs, departments, and areas of the institution or system. Identify opportunities to collaborate. Use these relationships and collaboration to make the case to departmental and institutional leadership for expanded connections across the institution.

4. CREATE ALIGNMENT IN YOUR AREA.

Start with what is available. 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 to articulation or equivalency agreements. It could be enhancing the process for program review and assessment. It could be mapping programs to careers and wages and showing additional career options for students who furthered their education between the non-credit and credit

programs. It could be using program-level accreditation as a lever for alignment or addressing places where program-level accreditation may contribute to barriers.

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. Share data with colleagues, supervisors, and institutional leaders. Use the data to make the case for expanded alignment, improved collaboration and communication, greater participatory governance, and increased pathways between non-credit and credit programs.

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. Mention it while advising or in the classroom. Educate employers about the value and relevance of these pathways to them. Be an advocate for increased visibility and marketing of the pathways within your institution. Be a constant champion for these pathways with colleagues and administrators. Encourage others to build and expand alignment. Work with departmental and institutional leadership to begin to translate alignment and integration practices into broader policy and systems change.