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:
INSTITUTIONS AND SYSTEMS

1. CHOOSE A STARTING POINT.

Commit to pursue the new framework for alignment. Select one or more starting points that match the potential and capacity of the institution and which best serve students and the local economy. Each starting point represents a different approach toward the new framework. Beyond the starting point, adopt the entire framework to fully achieve alignment and realize benefits to students and more equitable outcomes.

REMOVING THE STRUCTURAL DIVIDE

How to achieve it:
Stakeholders come together over a sustained period to design a new integrated unit consisting of both non-credit and credit programs. Address policies, procedures, systems, software, job descriptions, administrative functions, and supporting infrastructure to effectively integrate departments and prepare pathways for students.

Resources:
Alignment principles, guide, model for change, and feedback survey Prince George's Community College

Example:
Harford Community College formed a committee to make recommendations on which non-credit and credit programs to bring together in a department, based on how the programs aligned to each other and how they aligned to the institution's goals. The college then had open forums with leadership and stakeholders to consider recommendations and implementation.

DEVELOPING BRIDGE TOOLS TO AWARD CREDIT

How to achieve it:
Bridge tools connect the two sides of pathways between non-credit and credit programs. Select tools that make the process as automatic as possible, such as articulation and equivalency agreements and default CPL, over processes that can increase time, cost, and barriers to students, such as additional assessments. Make articulation and equivalency

agreements clear, relevant, and easy to use. Build in a process for regular review and updates to the tools.

Resources:
Equivalency agreement guidelines, template, and sample equivalency agreement, Salt Lake Community College
Gold-standard career pathways statewide articulation agreement, Florida Department of Education
Certification crosswalk, Ivy Tech Community College
One-Year Option, Ohio Technical Centers

MAKING INDUSTRY-FOCUSED PROGRAMS CREDIT-BASED

How to Achieve It:
Prioritize pursuing accreditation. Prepare by aligning course and program learning objectives and outcomes. Understand accreditation requirements and prepare for what additional modifications will be needed to gain accreditation.

Resources:
Workforce, business & industry, & other special topics administrative guide, Kentucky Community and Technical College System

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REORIENTING FOR DEMAND-DRIVEN PATHWAYS

How to Achieve It:
Restructure programs, services, and the overall division to be more aligned with business. Invest in what matters, whether it is data tools, systems, cutting-edge training space, or a new level of functionality.

Resources:
Centers of Excellence, Cuyahoga Community College
The Ascend Institute, Dallas College
MCC to update curriculum to emphasize jobs of the future, Monroe Community College

2. ARTICULATE THE VISION.

Make the case and lead the way. Indicate the priority of the vision by embedding it in strategic planning documents, regularly speaking to it, and connecting it to other core areas and initiatives across the institution or system. Acknowledge this will be a learning process and plans may change along the way. Encourage adaptability and sharing lessons learned. Create the enabling conditions to realize the vision.

Resources:
Strategic plan, workforce strategies, Salt Lake Community College
Strategic plan, onramps to pathways (p.2), Austin Community College

3. ENGAGE STAKEHOLDERS.

Bring all stakeholders to the table, including faculty, administrators, staff, and students. Assign a team to guide the process. Stakeholders are essential to support the vision, implement plans, and consistently work toward the desired outcome.

Leaders from multiple institutions repeatedly noted the need for regular, ongoing communication, trust-building, and ensuring stakeholders understand the purpose and potential impact. Clayton Railey, executive vice president and provost of Prince George's Community College, also recommends having a sense of urgency, setting deadlines to meet goals, identifying areas of responsibility, and holding stakeholders accountable. Be prepared to address how the prospect of change may invoke a potential perceived threat, particularly to stakeholders overseeing relevant programs.

Launch events and other broad stakeholder engagements can deepen understanding and commitment to the work. Training for faculty, advisors, and other student-facing staff can offer guidance on how to promote pathways, bridge tools, and funding options. Annual or semi-annual meetings for faculty and administrators to review curricular changes and data on emerging industry demand is essential to maintain strong and relevant pathways.

4. TACKLE THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM – CULTURE.

Achieving alignment requires a major cultural shift within the institution or system. Culture is not easy to change. This is where leaders at all levels will need to focus their efforts.

Start by bringing stakeholders together to reflect on the institution's existing culture and identify what cultural changes must occur. Encourage honest conversations. Address the difficult topics of hierarchical systems and professional bias that hampers the ability to be student-centric. Dispel misconceptions that pursuing alignment will reduce the quality of the curriculum. Challenge beliefs that not all students deserve access to pathways. Speak directly to unjust systems and racist policies and structures.

Changing culture requires time and sustained investment. Dedicate resources to ongoing professional development and support activities that create space for critical faculty to faculty conversations in safe settings. Give time for bridge-building. Foster relationships, partnerships, and shared goals.

5. UNDERSTAND THE DATA.

It is necessary to evaluate and apply learnings from internal data on student outcomes and external labor market data.

For internal data, collect and analyze student enrollment, progression, and outcomes in both non-credit and credit programs. Disaggregate data by key sub-populations to inform decisions that will better serve students and improve pathways. Identify inequities and barriers. "It is great to analyze the data to see who you're serving, but is even more important to flip the data and look at who you are not serving," notes René Cintrón, Chief Education and Training Officer, Louisiana Community and Technical College System.

Be prepared to tackle issues related to student data not easily flowing between non-credit and credit programs. This can be due to software platforms not aligning, as well as definitions of completion, structure of courses, and calendar terms not aligning. This is an area for continued research and improvement.

For external data, maintain a focus on what is happening in the local and regional economy. Regularly collect and analyze labor market data. Secure data services and data tools that are available for this purpose. Apply labor market data to identify and structure high-demand, high-wage pathways, update curriculum, and guide students. This external focus will position the institution and system to best serve the labor market and remain competitive as an educational and training provider.

Resources:
Labor market information, Monroe Community College
Labor Market Intelligence Center, Dallas College

6. ALIGN STUDENT SERVICES AND ADMINISTRATIVE OPERATIONS.

All institutions who participated in this research shared that adapting back-end infrastructure was a monumental task. They encouraged institutions to start from day one to plan for the system and process implications of this change.

Bring all relevant and potentially relevant offices and stakeholders into the planning process from the beginning. Develop agreed-on guidelines to inform the alignment and ensure all participants are working together with a shared understanding and shared goals. Address and modify processes and policies that will impact this work. Consider conducting a policy audit to identify existing policies that may cause unnecessary barriers to the alignment and pathway development. Know that different operating systems, such as student information systems, registration systems, and others, are not set up to align or integrate across non-credit and credit programs. Address this challenge early and expect it to require significant attention and investment.

Aim for a "one door" student services experience to provide the same level of support, as much as possible, from enrollment to financial aid resources to pathway guidance. For instance, the Economic and Workforce Development Center at Monroe Community College has taken over Career Services for the full institution in order to provide all students with the same access to advising on career options and pathways, relevant labor market data on wages and occupational demand, and support in transitioning to careers. Advising was a primary area where all institutions indicated they needed to cross-train their advisors or prepare their advisors to advise across non-credit and credit programs.

7. IDENTIFY INITIAL PATHWAYS.

Start with the most in-demand pathways based on student and employer needs. Additionally, focus on departments with certificates and degrees that make the most sense to align, as this is the low-hanging fruit that can quickly lead to the desired outcome. Do not stop there; continue to develop pathways between all industry-focused non-credit and credit programs.

Resources, Sample Program Pathways to Degrees:
Commercial food certificate to culinary arts degree, Salt Lake Community College
2020 list of equivalency agreements, Salt Lake Community College
Precision machining certificate to precision machining degree, Monroe Community College
Industrial maintenance technology certificate to industrial maintenance technology degree, Jefferson Community College, KCTCS
Welding technology certificates to welding technology degree, Hopkinsville Community College, KCTCS

8. MAKE IT KNOWN.

Promote pathways through prominent and consistent communications, marketing, and advising. Share pathways with students, employers, and the broader community. Incentivize usage. Train faculty, advisors, and other stakeholders within the institution on the pathways and encourage them to serve as pathway advocates.