

How Programs Can Better Support Career Advancement

Opportunities for Policymakers, Funders, and Practitioners to Develop and Implement Effective Career Pathway Programs

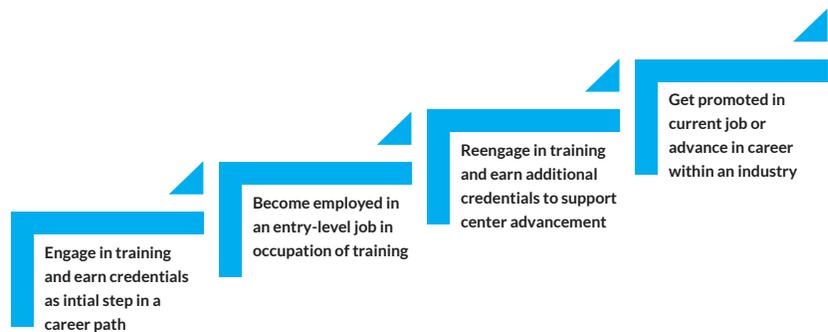
What can policymakers, funders, and practitioners do to develop and implement career pathway programs that support advancement?

- Connect short-term certificate or noncredit education and training programs through transfer and articulation agreements.
- Create learning environments that help adult learners accelerate and complete programs.
- Develop and use assessments that provide credit for prior learning or work experience and identify specific academic skill needs.
- Develop industry partnerships that bring employers together with organizations within the local workforce system.
- Ensure that soft-skills training is part of any education or training program.

In today’s economy, Americans with little to no postsecondary education and training may languish in low-skill, low-wage jobs with few options to advance to higher-paying, more-secure jobs. What can policymakers, funders, and practitioners do to help people advance to “middle skill” jobs?

Figure 1 shows how people ideally progress along a career pathway—a model that supports postsecondary and job advancement to improve career opportunities for adults and youth.

FIGURE 1
How Individuals Ideally Progress along a Career Pathway



Sources: Lauren Eyster and Semhar Gebrekristos, “Fulfilling the Promise of Career Support Pathways: Strategies that Support Career Advancement” (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2018).

CHALLENGES

Education and training programs, particularly those that do not offer credit for coursework, may not connect to more advanced programs, especially across different organizations and institutions.

Organizations and educational institutions often lack resources to address the needs of adult learners who may also have work and family commitments.

Assessments for postsecondary education and training may not capture the knowledge, skills and abilities of nontraditional students, placing them in courses that set them back.

Businesses may not know how to engage with or who to engage with in their local workforce system to help their employees upgrade their skills. They also may not build advancement strategies into their human resources practices.

Individuals may lack “soft” skills that can enhance their employability and workplace success.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROGRAMS

Connect short-term certificate or noncredit education and training programs through transfer and articulation agreements. This may require collaboration across two- and four-year postsecondary institutions and other training providers that are not part of the higher education system. These programs should also be embedded within an articulated career pathway so that next steps are understood and accessible to students who complete these programs

Create learning environments that help adult learners accelerate their education and training and complete programs. Strategies include modularized, self-paced courses, online or hybrid learning, competency-based learning, prior learning assessments, and enhanced student support services.

Develop and use assessments that provide credit for prior learning or work experience and identify specific academic skill needs that targeted, short-term instruction can address. This allows adult students to progress more quickly in their coursework and reduces the need to take developmental or remedial courses before enrolling in technical coursework.

Develop industry partnerships that bring employers together with organizations within the local workforce system to develop strategies to address employers’ skill needs and change employer practices for hiring, training, and promoting employees. Industry partnerships may also help organizations in the local workforce system better understand these employers’ “pain points” and offer new ways employers can support their employees’ career growth while maximizing their bottom line.

Devote or leverage resources to ensure that soft-skills training is part of any education or training program. These skills, which include collaboration, critical thinking, and digital literacy, can be taught and practiced through workshops, career coaching, and on-the-job experience. Education and training programs could partner with the public workforce system or other community-based organizations to offer soft-skills training to students.

For more information, please visit www.urban.org/workforce.