

# How Research Can Better Support Career Advancement

*Building Evidence that Can Help Practitioners, Funders, and Policymakers Develop More-Informed Strategies*

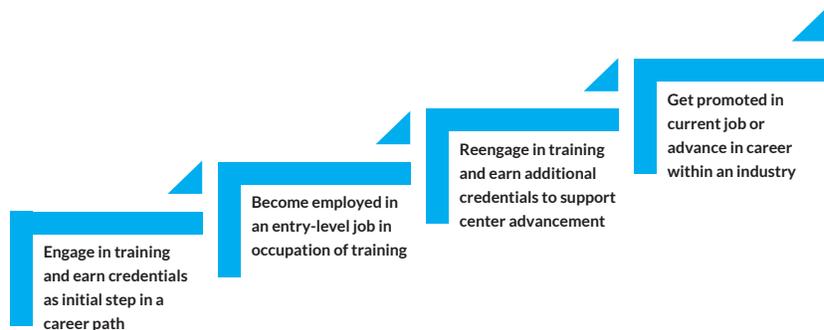
**What can policymakers, funders, and practitioners do to build more research capacity to address career advancement?**

- Study credential attainment along career pathways to understand how credentials build on one another (i.e., “stackable”) to support advancement.
- Allow for enough time in an evaluation for conducting longer follow-up of participants in career pathways programs.
- Encourage evaluators to include implementation and process studies within a larger evaluation of a career pathways model to document the program activities that support advancement and assess their implementation.
- Address barriers to linking longitudinal data that can inform career advancement strategies.
- Support research on employer practices in different industries and various practices (e.g., hiring, training).

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. How can research inform policymakers, funders, and practitioners as they develop strategies to help people advance to “middle skill” jobs?

Figure 1 shows how people ideally progress along a career pathway—a model, or 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

**Lack of information on how credentialing can support advancement**

**Lack of evidence of what strategies are effective for moving people beyond the first step on a career pathway**

**Lack of understanding of how promising career pathways programs work and can be successfully implemented**

**Data systems that are not linked to provide a rich longitudinal data on how people advance in school and work**

**“Black box” of employer practices that support or hinder career advancement**

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR RESEARCH

**Understand credentialing as a part of stronger career pathways.** Research can deepen our knowledge of how credentials build on one another (i.e., “stackable”) to support advancement as a part of career pathways. Policymakers, funders, and practitioners can ensure that programs clearly delineate the credentials earned at each step of a career pathway and that data systems tracking for career pathways initiatives capture completion of these credentials and the employment outcomes (e.g., new job in field of study, promotion in current job) to document advancement.

**Develop rigorous evidence for better policymaking and program decisionmaking.** Policymakers, funders, and practitioners should allow for enough time in an evaluation to examine effectiveness beyond the first step on a career pathway. Conducting longer follow-up of participants in career pathways programs would allow for researchers to track participants who continue in additional education and training and understand whether these steps lead to advancement in their career.

**Build knowledge on implementation of successful career advancement strategies for scaling and replication.** Policymakers, funders, and practitioners should encourage evaluators to include implementation and process studies within an evaluation of a career pathways model. Along with participant outcomes or impacts of career advancement strategies, evaluators can document the program activities that support advancement and assess their implementation. This information would help policymakers, funders, and practitioners understand how they could scale and replicate models in similar settings and test the model in other contexts.

**Create data systems that consistently link education and employment data on adults and youth.** Policymakers, funders, and practitioners should seek to address barriers to linking longitudinal data that can inform strategies that support advancement and ensure the privacy and protection of personal information. Steps to improve data systems include revising policies for allowing access to programs and researchers and providing sufficient resources and incentives for government to upgrade and link existing systems.

**Shed light on employer training and hiring practices to develop better policy and programs.** Policymakers, funders, and practitioners could support more research on employer human resources activities in different industries and on various practices (e.g., hiring, promotion, training). They could also support research that seeks to understand how employer practices can support or create barriers to advancement for current employees and provide case studies of employers that offer practices that create opportunity for potential hires and current employees.

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