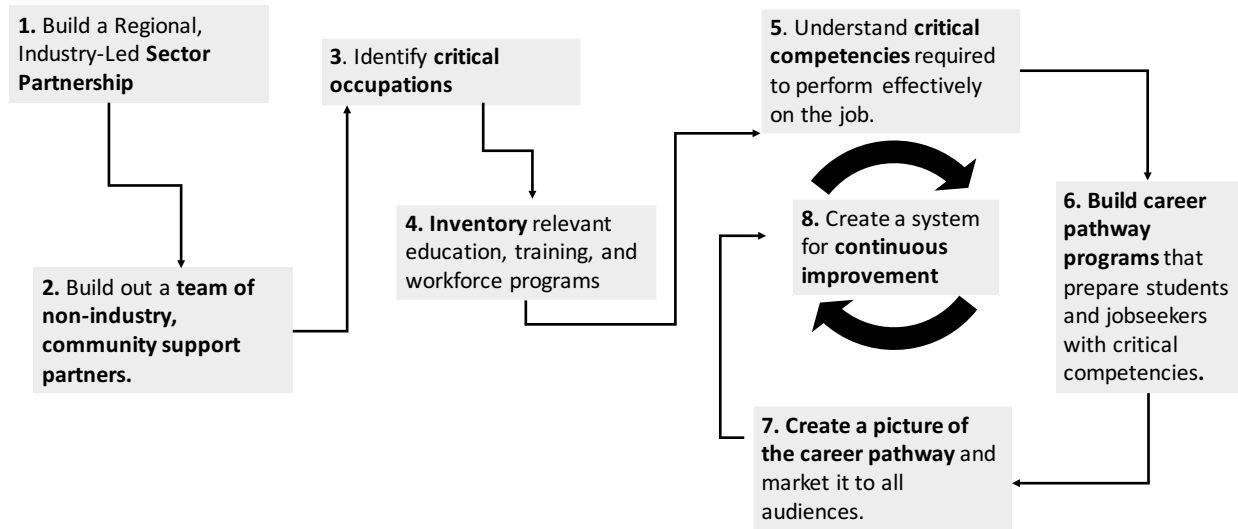


Building Industry-Driven Career Pathways Systems in Colorado



The Colorado Model: In Colorado, industry-driven career pathways ensure that education, training, and workforce systems stay deeply attuned and responsive to the needs of the labor market, preparing students and workers with the skills and credentials they need for jobs and careers.

- *What is a career pathway system?* A career pathway system aligns public partners and engages them in a continuous conversation that is led by industry to ensure that jobseekers and students move seamlessly through and among support programs, educational institutions, training opportunities, and work-based experiences to build skills and credentials that meet industry demand and prepare them for jobs and careers. In Colorado, a sector partnership is the vehicle for building industry-driven career pathway systems, providing a forum for productive and ongoing collaboration with industry and among workforce, education, training partners, and other community partners. The statewide career pathway system aligns career pathway programs and systems developed throughout high demand industries in each economic development region of the state.
- *What's the difference between a career pathway system and a career pathway program?* A career pathway program offers a clear sequence of stackable credits and credentials, combined with support services that enables students and jobseekers to secure industry-relevant skills, certifications, and credentials and advance to higher levels of education and employment in high demand occupations.¹ A career pathway system is made up of multiple career pathway programs that span educational institutions, workforce and support service partners. These programs are all oriented around a shared understanding of the needs of industry. Often times, tools like career pathway maps are used to talk with students and job seekers about how they can progress through education and training experiences to obtain employment that meets his or her goals. The WIOA definition of a career pathway refers to a program.
- *What are sector strategies and why do they matter for career pathway systems?* A sector partnership is as an industry-specific regional partnership led by business in partnership with public partners in economic development, education, workforce development and community

support partners. In Colorado, industry-led sector partnerships are the vehicle for aligning public partners with industries' needs in an effective, results-driven manner. They provide the “home” for career pathway systems-building, engaging industry leaders and public partners in a continuous dialogue to ensure that education and training systems respond to industry needs. Other sector strategies include industry-driven public-private partnerships that serve as effective “homes” for career pathway program and systems development.

Summary: Step-by-Step Guide to Building Regional Career Pathway Systems

1. **Build a regional, industry-led sector partnership** as the vehicle for productive engagement with industry leaders and the starting place for career pathways systems-building. Use the sector partnership—specifically, the education, talent or workforce committee—as the driver of career pathways systems-building efforts.
2. **Build out a career pathway support team of non-industry, partners** and prepare them with the right expectations. Non-industry public partners might include key decision makers in workforce development, secondary education, post-secondary education, human services, vocational rehabilitation, and other community partners. This includes what they will get from employers: real-time information on critical occupations and competencies as well as a willingness to partner in providing work-based learning and other training resources. It also includes a clear explanation of how they're expected to work together as workforce, education, and training systems to respond to industry demand.
3. **Identify critical occupations** based on labor market data and qualitative input from employers.
4. **Inventory relevant education, training, and workforce programs** that prepare students and workers for those occupations, mapping any existing linkages among those programs.
Role of public partners: Inventory and document all education, training and workforce programs that have a role to play in preparing students and jobseekers for the targeted industry. Take stock of any existing linkages among programs (e.g. articulation agreements or dual enrollment) and begin to identify opportunities for stronger linkages among programs. Recruit new support team members, drawing from those programs.
5. **Understand critical competencies required to perform effectively on the job.** Industry-defined competencies are the specific knowledge, skills and abilities that industry leaders have collectively identified as being critical to performing a specific occupation or group of occupations effectively. Based on these competencies, develop occupational descriptions that both inform employers' hiring practices as well as education and training partners in modifying curriculum and assessing students.
6. **Build career pathway programs that prepare students and jobseekers with critical, competencies.** Based on an understanding of what competencies are required to perform effectively and advance in the industry, build career pathway programs that prepare students and jobseekers with those critical competencies. This includes building linkages among programs and institutions, integrating support services into programs, and augmenting classroom training with work-based experiences throughout the pathway.
7. **Create a picture of the career pathway and market it to all audiences.**
8. **Create a system for continuous improvement.** Use the sector partnership as the place to continuously develop and update your career pathways system. This includes ongoing conversations with employers to identify and understand high-priority workforce needs as they evolve, and continued collaboration among public partners to develop and update a systems approach in response.