

District of Columbia  
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ADULT CAREER PATHWAYS



## Adult Career Pathways: Ideas for Action



*Ensuring All District Residents  
have Access to Sustainable  
Employment and Economic  
Independence through  
Integrated Education, Training,  
and Career Services*

**1/15/2020**



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The District of Columbia Workforce Investment Council (WIC) would like to acknowledge the partners, organizations, service providers, and individuals who contributed their time, expertise, and leadership towards the creation and refinement of this Adult Career Pathways Strategic Plan. The WIC would also like to thank Mayor Muriel Bowser and the DC Council for their leadership and attention to the expansion of opportunities for all District residents.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The District of Columbia is a vibrant, diverse city with a long history of acting as a catalyst for social change in the country. As the capital of our nation and the seat of the Federal government, the District is a community full of highly educated and talented residents. In the District, 57 percent of people 25 years or older have bachelors, masters, professional school or doctorate degrees, whereas the national average is 31 percent. This number is in stark contrast to the over 68,000 adults in the District who do not have a high school diploma or its equivalent. A 2014 report by DC Appleseed points out that an even higher number of residents lack the basic literacy, numeracy, problem-solving, and digital skills necessary to be successful in occupational training, educational, or workplace settings. The DC Council and other District leaders recognized this problem and in 2014 created an Adult Career Pathways Task Force to examine, plan, lead, and implement a career pathways system specifically for adults in the District. The Task Force, made up of workforce development and education leaders and experts in the District, views this as an extraordinary opportunity to impact the change in our community that is necessary to reach these 68,000-plus residents and connect them to pathways for opportunity.

The Adult Career Pathways Task Force published a strategic plan in 2015 as a tool to move our workforce development system, adult basic skills programs, and human service entities into a more cohesive community. This strategic plan has been updated in 2019 to reflect the new direction of the adult career pathways work in the District, and highlights revisions to the vision, mission, guiding principles, and focus areas of the plan. While the Adult Career Pathways Task Force is still providing guidance for and input on this work, this strategic plan puts partners' work around adult career pathways in the broader context of the District's workforce system as a whole, focusing on the vision and strategies for further implementation of pathways for adult residents. It is envisioned that this plan will serve as the broader direction and foundation for more detailed work plans and implementation plans, which will be developed in collaboration with District workforce system partners.

## Strategic Plan Thematic Areas

The Adult Career Pathways Strategic Plan includes goals and tactics that are organized around the following four thematic areas, which have been established as priorities for District workforce system partners:

- ★ Sector Partnership Expansion and Sector Strategy Implementation: Expansion of partnerships among industry representatives and District workforce system stakeholders and expanded utilization of labor market information and related data to drive the development and implementation of relevant strategies.
- ★ Pathway Performance Monitoring and Continuous Improvement: Advanced coordination of District workforce system partners around industry sector strategies and quality adult career pathways; regular review and assessment of sector and pathway strategies for relevance; and adjustment of education and training strategies to ensure relevance and quality.
- ★ Partner Alignment and Capacity Building: Continued focus on inter-agency alignment and coordination around industry sector partnerships, sector strategies, and adult career pathways; strengthened community outreach to ensure awareness of available resources; and supporting capacity building and technical assistance efforts for workforce system stakeholders.
- ★ Address Barriers to Employment along Sector Pathways: Development and implementation of strategies to address District residents' barriers to employment and career and educational advancement; implementation of expanded and longer-term supports and wrap-around services for District residents; collaboration with industry and employer representatives to address hiring and advancement barriers for District residents; and funding of evidence-based programs and practices that can assist District residents enter into and advance along career pathways.

# INTRODUCTION

## Adult Career Pathways Approach

Strong industry sector partnerships, and the sector strategies prioritized by those partnerships, are the foundation for career pathways.

Sector partnerships are sustained collaborations among multiple employers in targeted industry sectors, who provide input and direction on their pressing workforce needs and challenges. These partnerships

inform workforce, education, and service provider communities, who execute on strategies identified by industry partners to address needs and challenges. In many cases, career pathways are an example of a priority industry sector strategy pursued by sector partnerships.

A career pathways system is made up of connected networks of education and training programs that build upon one another to help a person enter and advance in his/her career in an industry. Pathways are business-defined, business-driven, and aligned to the skill needs of targeted industry sectors, and are explicitly focused on helping people more easily and quickly enter and advance in their careers and achieve long-term economic stability.

Defining features of career pathways include:

- ★ They connect and articulate the full range of K-12, adult education, post-secondary, and other education and training, with seamless transitions between “levels” and no “dead ends”;
- ★ They have multiple on- and off-ramps to make it easy for individuals to start, stop, and re-enter education and training;
- ★ They embed “stackable” industry-recognized credentials;
- ★ They make work a central context for learning, through on-the-job training, Registered Apprenticeship, work-based internships and mentorships, and other avenues;
- ★ They accelerate educational and career advancement through assessment of prior learning and experience, integrated “basic” education and technical training, and other strategies; and
- ★ They provide integrated supports like education and career coaching and advising and wrap-around services like childcare and transportation assistance, especially at education and career transition points.

Put simply, career pathways connect the career opportunities in an industry, entry-level to advanced, through integrated education, training, and related programming, to help individuals grow their skills, advance in an industry, and attain economic stability.

## Background

The DC WIC serves as the District’s state and local workforce board, which has oversight of federal workforce funding and programming. The WIC is a private sector-led board responsible for advising the Mayor, Council, and District government on the development, implementation, and continuous improvement of an integrated and effective workforce investment system. Members of the WIC include representatives from the private sector, local business representatives, government officials, organized labor, youth community groups, and organizations with workforce investment experience. The WIC convenes and leads system stakeholders to ensure workforce programs and initiatives align with business needs.

## History of the DC Adult Career Pathways Task Force

The DC Adult Career Pathways Task Force was established by Mayor’s order 2014-232 on October 9, 2014 with the stated purpose of developing and implementing a city-wide strategic plan to connect District-based adult basic skills programs with career pathways. Since its establishment, the WIC has managed the DC Adult Career Pathways Task Force and convened partners on a quarterly basis to provide guidance on the development of career pathways and other sector-based strategies. Since the publication of the original

Adult Career Pathways Strategic Plan, the WIC and the Task Force have worked to ensure workforce system alignment and establish pathways to the middle class for District residents. The process of updating the WIC's Adult Career Pathways Strategic Plan has provided an opportunity to build on the progress made in the implementation of the original plan.



## Adult Career Pathways Work to Date (WIC)

Since 2014, the WIC has led the DC Adult Career Pathways Task Force's efforts, which include:

- ★ Publication and implementation of the Adult Career Pathways Strategic Plan.
- ★ Alignment of partners in the adult career pathways system.
- ★ Mapping of services to determine capacity and availability of education and training programs relevant to adult career pathways.
- ★ Development of recommended participant outcomes and career pathway implementation measures.
- ★ Establishment of the Career Pathways Community of Practice to expand capacity of adult basic education and occupational training providers through training and professional development.
- ★ Administration of OSSE-WIC Grants to link sector-based initiatives with adult basic education training.
- ★ Development of industry-informed adult career pathways and sector strategies, including development of career pathway maps for the information technology and business administration, infrastructure and transportation, and security and law enforcement industries, in collaboration with industry leaders.

## Plan Development Process

The Workforce Investment Council began the effort of revising the existing strategic plan in 2018, with assistance from consultants from Maher & Maher, a change management and workforce development consulting firm. This document was developed through the following process:

- ★ **October 2018:** During the October meeting of the Adult Career Pathways Task Force, the WIC announced updates to the strategic plan were in process, and requested initial feedback on revised priorities, strategies, and focus areas. The WIC began working on a framework for the updated Strategic Plan.
- ★ **January 2019:** At the January meeting of the Task Force, the WIC provided an overview of the strategic planning process. Task Force members discussed the original plan's framework and potential updates. Strategies and action items for revisions to the strategic plan were scheduled for further development at the April Task Force meeting.
- ★ **April 2019:** During the April meeting of the Task Force, the WIC revisited proposed changes to the strategic plan that had been identified in previous meetings, and provided opportunity for feedback and further suggested changes. Task Force members worked in small groups to draft goals for the career pathways work, as well as tactics for reaching the goals. The Maher & Maher team began working on a draft strategic plan that incorporated this feedback from the Task Force members.
- ★ **July 2019:** Task Force members reviewed and provided feedback on the first draft of the revised strategic plan.
- ★ **August-September 2019:** The first draft of the strategic plan was revised based on feedback received from the Task Force and the WIC.
- ★ **October-January 2020:** The strategic plan was finalized.

# STRATEGIC PLAN

## Vision

*Ensuring that all District residents, in particular low-literacy learners, achieve sustainable employment and long-term economic stability through integrated education, training, and career services.*

## Mission

*The Adult Career Pathways mission is to ensure that every adult learner, particularly low-literacy learners, in the District obtains a job associated with a career pathway that enables them to advance in their career goals and achieve long-term economic security.*

## Guiding Principles

- ★ **Access and navigability:** Adult learners of all levels are able to access career pathways and make progress along each step of the pathway through easily navigable on- and off-ramps.
- ★ **System and partner alignment:** District government agencies and service providers align their programs, policies, operations, and funding to enable the creation of a career pathway system and sector career pathways.
- ★ **Industry and business leadership:** Each sector career pathway is industry-led and has strong direct connections to the labor market and partnerships with the business community.
- ★ **Quality programming and technical assistance:** Each career pathway program provides high quality academic and occupational programming supported by a strong system of technical assistance to pathway partners and professional development for adult educators and program staff.
- ★ **Integrated supports:** Career pathways include integrated wrap-around supports, such as childcare, transportation, housing, and mental health/substance abuse assistance, to assist learners with persisting and succeeding in educational and career advancement.
- ★ **Evaluation and continuous improvement:** Career pathway system partners create and evaluate measures of success for pathway system implementation and participant outcomes.

## Strategic Plan Focus Areas

- ★ Sector Partnership Implementation
- ★ Pathway Performance Monitoring and Continuous Improvement
- ★ Partner Alignment and Capacity Building
- ★ Address Barriers to Employment along Sector Pathways

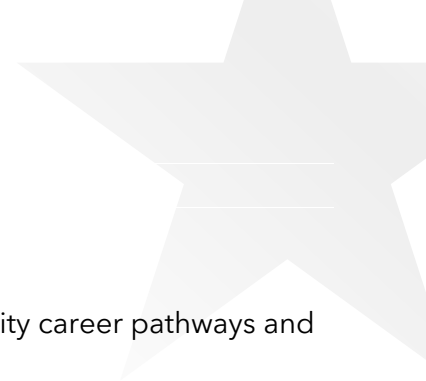


## Goals and Tactics

### ■ Focus Area 1:

#### Sector Partnership Expansion and Sector Strategy Implementation

1. In each of the District's six targeted industry sectors, formalize and expand industry sector partnerships among business partners, District agencies, education and training providers, and professional organizations.
  - 1.1. Identify, leverage, and integrate existing industry partnerships and sector strategy efforts.
  - 1.2. Identify and engage new partners to participate in sector partnerships and sector strategies development and implementation.
  - 1.3. Use formalized industry sector partnerships to regularly assess current and emerging workforce needs and design and implement sector-focused strategies to address those needs.
  - 1.4. Leverage sector partnerships to ensure adult basic education and technical skills training curricula support access to and opportunities in career pathways in the WIC's high-demand sectors.
  
2. Expand the WIC's capacity to use labor market information (LMI) and related data to stay abreast of industry and occupational trends, drive development and refinement of industry sector strategies, and assess progress against established goals and strategies.
  - 2.1. Establish the WIC as the convener of partners in the workforce system using data on needs and trends in targeted industry sectors to drive decision making.
  - 2.2. Using data, develop and implement policies, processes, and approaches to address employers' barriers to hiring District residents and thus increase opportunities for residents.
    - 2.2.1. Have the WIC research strategies and best practices for enhancing industry sector employers' engagement and participation around hiring and advancing District residents.
    - 2.2.2. Pursue opportunities for fostering alignment among WIOA Core Partners to mitigate barriers for sector employers and increase opportunity for District residents.
  - 2.3. Conduct regular data analysis to track current and emerging industry and occupational dynamics and trends.
  - 2.4. Use data/data analysis to establish metrics for the measurement of achievement against established sector strategies and position workforce system partners to adjust strategies to respond to changing needs.



## Focus Area 2:

### Pathway Performance Monitoring and Continuous Improvement

- 1.** Advance alignment and coordination of workforce system partners around quality career pathways and sector strategies as the shared “way of doing business”.
  - 1.1. Share information and resources such as the career pathway maps and a career pathways development “blueprint” guide to foster system partner alignment and collaboration around sector strategies and career pathways and support partners’ planning, decision-making, and investments around pathway and sector strategies.
- 2.** Engage sector partners to review career pathway maps and sector strategies on a periodic basis to ensure their continuing relevance to identified industry workforce and occupational needs.
  - 2.1. Keep pathway maps and strategies current based on gap analysis, partner feedback, industry changes, performance data (e.g. PMF, Perkins, WIOA), and other inputs.
    - 2.1.1. Develop and implement a formal review and feedback-gathering process among industry and other sector partners to assess the effectiveness of career pathway maps and strategies and alignment with industry needs over time.
    - 2.1.2. Adjust and update career pathway maps and strategies as needed for continuing relevance and impact based upon the results of the review and feedback-gathering process.
- 3.** Review and adjust education and training strategies as necessary to ensure consistency, quality, and relevance to industry career pathway needs over time.
  - 3.1. Work with system education and training partners to ensure that District residents can access programming for pathways in a “no wrong door” manner, regardless of their point of entry into the pathway or where in the workforce system they seek to access education and training.
  - 3.2. Compile and share sector and pathway best practices and successful approaches with workforce system partners for replication and scaling and to support continuous improvement and innovation in the system.



## Focus Area 3:

### Partner Alignment and Capacity Building

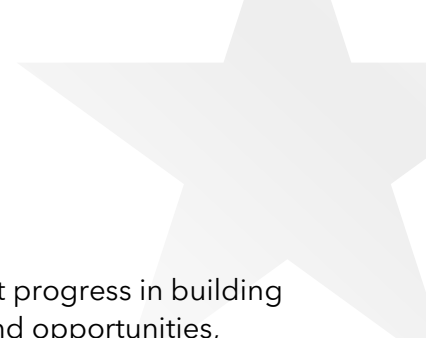
- 1.** Enhance inter-agency alignment to ensure that agency approaches to sector partnerships, sector strategies, and career pathways are fully coordinated and aligned with a systematic strategy.
  - 1.1.** Establish and implement a shared approach to sector partnerships, sector strategies, and career pathways across workforce system partners to support alignment of roles and activities.
    - 1.1.1.** Draw on best practices from other jurisdictions, as well as District-specific needs, in developing the shared approach.
    - 1.1.2.** Define each system partners' roles, strengths, and contributions in relation to the shared approach.
  - 1.2.** Develop shared definitions, goals, and metrics related to sector strategies and career pathways that are informed by data on industry and customer needs and program outcomes.
    - 1.2.1.** Convene a diverse stakeholder group (customers, agencies, clergy, providers, schools, etc.) to set goals and identify common terms (e.g. "high-demand" and "career pathway").
    - 1.2.2.** Create and implement a plan for regular reporting out on goals, progress, and outcomes to foster accountability and knowledge sharing.
- 2.** Strengthen community outreach on programs to ensure awareness among District residents of available workforce and career pathways resources.
  - 2.1.** Continue and expand the development and implementation of a coordinated communications strategy that is underway. Leverage the Data Vault and One-Stop Operator activities to support this strategy.
    - 2.1.1.** Complete needs assessment of customers' needs and barriers to program awareness and selection.
    - 2.1.2.** Expand ability of community-based partners to communicate messages and share information about available career pathway opportunities and related education, training, and other services (e.g. DPR, ANCs, and law enforcement).
- 3.** Continue and expand efforts to coordinate sector-focused partner initiatives and related communications to businesses in target sectors.
  - 3.1.** Ensure clear and consistent messaging and communications across partners.
  - 3.2.** Coordinate efforts across initiatives to minimize employer "fatigue" and maximize benefits to the businesses in target industry sectors.
- 4.** Strengthen workforce system partner program quality by expanding capacity around sector partnerships, sector strategies, and career pathways through a variety of technical assistance approaches and tools, including the Career Pathways Community of Practice.
  - 4.1.** Develop a common understanding of capacity building needs among workforce partners and implement strategies to address identified needs.
    - 4.1.1.** Conduct an assessment of the capacity-building needs of workforce system partners.
    - 4.1.2.** Develop and implement a set of high-impact capacity-building investments and activities related to sector partnerships and strategies and career pathways.



## Focus Area 4:

### Address Barriers to Employment along Sector Pathways

- 1.** Develop strategies to address barriers to employment.
  - 1.1. Document and share information about common employability and advancement challenges for District residents/populations.
  - 1.2. Leverage the Data Vault and other appropriate tools and strategies to maximize workforce systems partners' ability to assess District residents' barriers to employment, make helpful and customer-friendly referrals, and help residents get the services needed to address those barriers.
  - 1.3. Utilize sector partnerships to identify opportunities for low-income District workers, incumbent workers, and the "hard-to-employ".
  - 1.4. Align and enhance efforts among workforce system partners to share information about opportunities in career pathways and available services and resources with District residents.
  - 1.5. Promote partnerships between education and training providers and workforce organizations that work with low-income District workers, incumbent workers, and the "hard-to-employ."
  - 1.6. Increase integration of basic skills remediation with career-specific content.
  - 1.7. Design programs/curricula that are informed by best practices and expertise (e.g. poverty-informed, financial capabilities, integrated/contextualized instruction, etc.).
    - 1.7.1. Cultivate relationships with colleges and other experts to learn about evidence-based practices and ensure that funding is directed toward promising programs/strategies.
  - 1.8. Eliminate program redundancies.
- 2.** Provide enhanced, ongoing, and long-term support for the District's new and incumbent workers to assist them in advancing along career pathways. Implement strategies to ensure that the most vulnerable District residents receive the housing, childcare, transportation, public benefits/income support, and mental health/substance abuse services needed to access and advance along pathways.
- 3.** Work with employers in target industry sectors to address cultural/perception challenges that make them reluctant to hire certain District resident populations and to open up additional career opportunities for residents with barriers to employment.
- 4.** Fund evidence-based programs and practices shown to assist individuals, particularly those with barriers to employment, enter into and advance along career pathways.
  - 4.1. Identify best practices across country.
  - 4.2. Identify focus areas based on existing programs and other local models.
- 5.** Establish consistent and diversified funding from government and businesses that acknowledges best practices.
  - 5.1. Continue and expand efforts to diversify funding sources, e.g. District agencies releasing jointly funded, multi-agency RFP/RFAs.
  - 5.2. Engage key stakeholders in conversations about funding priorities, limitations, mandates, and innovative approaches to using local, private, and federal funding.



## CONCLUSION

Since 2015, District workforce and education system partners have made significant progress in building relationships with target industry representatives to understand workforce needs and opportunities, mapping career pathways that include a range of opportunities for District residents, and aligning workforce training and education to support career pathway access and advancement. These accomplishments provide a critical foundation and strong momentum for District partners' continuing and expanded efforts to support the implementation of industry-driven career pathways. This 2019 Adult Career Pathways Strategic Plan revision both builds off the progress made over the prior four years and emphasizes opportunities for further innovation and continuous improvement. Robust collaboration among District workforce and education organizations and with industry sector partners around the strategic plan vision and goals will ensure that adult career pathway strategies advance opportunity for DC residents and employers.