

New Skills for Youth Phase One Snapshot: Washington, DC

While the District of Columbia (DC) entered New Skills for Youth (NSFY) with an established data collection and high-quality Career Technical Education (CTE) programs, the NSFY project team saw deep challenges around cross-sector relationships and systems alignment. Findings from an independent needs assessment informed efforts to build and leverage cross-sector committees with specific directives to address the broader need of scaling access to high-quality career pathways for all students.

Foundations for the Work

In Phase One of the NSFY grant, the DC team recognized the need to build and scale high-quality career pathways for students. In recent years, DC has implemented 14 NAF (formerly National Academy Foundation) academies, supported CTE programming at public high schools, and offered summer youth employment programs. While these programs may benefit the students they serve, leaders saw a greater need to reach all students.

The data analysis carried out during the grant period indicated that approximately 50 percent of DC students have access to at least one high-quality career pathway, but only about 4 percent of all DC students complete high-quality career pathways. As DC's proposal states, "[e]conomists project that by the year 2020, 76% of all jobs in Washington, DC will require some postsecondary education,

whether academic or technical." This projection poses a great challenge because while many students are prepared for education after high school, a lot of their peers are not. Additionally, many DC residents who hold bachelor's degrees are not graduates of public high schools in DC and have moved to DC to work for the federal government or other local organizations. This influx of potential employees results in an extremely competitive job market for local residents.

Work During Phase One

DC's two primary goals when entering NSFY were (1) to increase the number of DC youth who successfully complete a high-quality career pathway leading to a postsecondary degree and/or industry credential with labor market value in DC, paying particular attention to youth from traditionally under-served populations, and (2) to strategically improve

Phase One of JPMorgan Chase & Co.'s New Skills for Youth grant extended from May to October 2016. With bold visions for improving career readiness in K-12 education, each Phase One state spent the grant period performing a diagnostic assessment of its career preparation system and preparing for implementation of a new action plan. This snapshot describes Washington, DC's experience and progress in Phase One, including promising practices and innovations.

collaboration among agencies and organizations to transform the overall design and delivery of career readiness policies and programming.

The team knew that to achieve the first goal it had to begin with the second. DC has a unique governance structure. The District's state education agency is the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), which shares responsibility for public schools with the Deputy Mayor for Education, local education agencies including the District of Columbia Public Schools and public charter schools, the Public Charter School Board, and the State Board of Education. Due to the education agencies' required alignment, deliberate coordination among agencies and stakeholders was a priority during the grant period.

Assessing the Current System

An external reviewer conducted a needs assessment for DC, which included an analysis of data and structures related to career readiness. The needs assessment highlighted the wide availability of DC career readiness data and its comprehensive collection. DC collects data on students' career readiness indicators, including the numbers and percentages of all students who participate in and complete career pathways; earn industry-recognized credentials in high-skill, high-demand sectors; and enroll in postsecondary education, both during high school through

dual enrollment and after high school. However, data collection and usage differ across secondary and postsecondary systems.

Additionally, the OSSE CTE office reviews CTE students' data annually and includes them in federal CTE accountability reporting. However, the feedback loop with schools is incomplete, and data have not uniformly penetrated into secondary systems. The external reviewer recommended sharing and using these data more widely and effectively, including sharing them with teachers, parents and the community as appropriate.

In the needs assessment, the reviewer recommended improving employer engagement by increasing employers' leadership role, particularly in the use of labor market information, and establishing comprehensive career advisement systems in middle and high schools. The career advisement systems would have students update their individual graduation plans annually and ensure teachers' and counselors' participation in and access to students' plans. The reviewer also suggested improving inter-agency collaboration, reflecting a main focus of DC's grant efforts.

Based on the needs assessment and the reviewer's recommendations, the DC team developed a long-term plan focused on student access to high-quality career education programs, consistent educator professional development and data-driven

Goals:

- Increase the number of DC youth who successfully complete a high-quality career pathway leading to a postsecondary degree and/or industry credential with labor market value in DC, paying particular attention to youth from traditionally under-served populations; and
- Strategically improve collaboration among agencies and organizations to transform the overall design and delivery of career readiness policies and programming.

decisionmaking by policymakers. The plan includes developing a process that allows teachers to access the career readiness indicator data, strengthening dual enrollment by supporting curricular alignment between secondary and postsecondary systems, and developing informational resources for parents and students that outline the benefits and opportunities of dual enrollment.

Building Relationships

The long-term plan includes continued efforts for improving collaboration, which center on convening stakeholders and strengthening their relationships across agencies and among other stakeholders.

For its early work, the DC team developed in summer 2016 four committees, which focused on data, funding, planning and research. The committees began with 37 partners and ended with 47 organizational and agency partners. These partners represented secondary education, postsecondary education, business and workforce development. While the committee meetings focused on achieving different aspects of the work, they also helped create connections that did not exist before, further informing the committees' efforts.

The data committee aligned data collection tools and definitions from various agencies and sources. Representing both secondary and postsecondary education, stakeholders in this committee set priorities for data collection and use and agreed to a common set of tools and definitions. During the grant period, the DC team used the common definitions to conduct an analysis and inform its planning. This work positioned DC to act on the needs assessment recommendation to strengthen the use of career indicators that were already being

collected and shared. A common set of tools and definitions will help DC expand career indicator data awareness and literacy and allow administrators to use the information to inform decisions.

The research committee was responsible for considering strategies to improve the rigor and quality of career pathways. Among other topics, it specifically focused on expanding access to student internships. For example, it

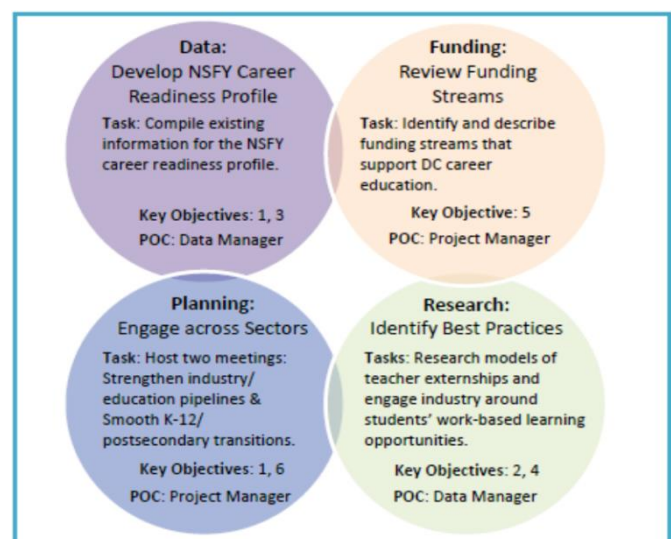


Figure 1. NSFY cross-sector committees

secured stakeholders' commitment to produce an online portal with a single entry point that will streamline access to information on high-quality internships for all students and employers.

Looking Ahead

Using the outcomes of the needs assessment and the established committee structures, the DC team is focused on achieving the goals outlined in its long-term plan. The team plans to build on agencies' and stakeholders' relationships and collaboration to increase student access to and success in high-quality career pathways across DC.