**Overview**

All states participating in the Career Readiness Initiative (CRI) have demonstrated a deep commitment to transforming their systems of career preparation through cross-sector partnerships aimed at achieving six key objectives, each of which is clearly defined in the pages below. To accomplish this, states will undertake an intensive diagnostic assessment of their current career preparation system to identify strengths and gaps that will inform a comprehensive, three-year career readiness action plan. This analysis must examine states’ relevant policies, funding mechanisms, delivery systems, and infrastructure and uncover evidence to support its conclusions.

**Purpose of this CRI Needs Assessment Resource**

To help states effectively prepare for this intensive assessment, the national project partners – CCSSO, ESG, and Advance CTE – have developed this tool that unpacks the content expectations for the work. ***It is intended to help the experts who will lead states’ analyses by offering parameters for their scope of work***. Those experts are able to use this tool in whole, in part, or choose another approach altogether. But no matter the methodology they select, their findings must be expressed in a way that clearly identifies how their states measure up against the criteria described below.

It is important to note that states are at different starting points in this work. Several have completed rigorous assessments at the hands of strong partners like SREB and JFF. Others reflected on the status of several of the key objectives as part of the early work of the CRI. For others, delving into this examination will be a new challenge altogether. ***All states should review the content expectations below, determine which areas within their system have not already been adequately assessed, and design a strategy for examining those outstanding areas***.

**Understanding the Components of this Needs Assessment Resource**

The six key objectives of this work (i.e. three from the original CRI and three that are new) have been unpacked below into specific targeted outcomes that each state will endeavor to reach. Those outcomes are further defined through “supporting criteria” that will help states both assess the current status of their policies and practices, and think more clearly and specifically about what they seek to accomplish through the work ahead. For each of the targeted outcomes, states may use the supporting criteria to assess their policies and practices using a 1-4 rating scale:

* **1 = Limited Progress**: This outcome is not yet a priority within the state. There is very little activity and no significant effort to address this outcome yet.
* **2 = Emerging Practice**: This outcome is becoming a priority for the state. Early work has been done within the state to lay a foundation to reach this outcome.
* **3 =Established Practice**: This outcome is a priority for the state. Policies have been adopted and work is being implemented across the state that can be strengthened and scaled.
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Below the rating scale, space has been provided for states to describe evidence for their ratings, identify key challenges and gaps (chosen from the supporting criteria) they will prioritize in their career readiness action plans, and specify the different capacity they bring to the work through cross-sector partnerships, policies, and various resources available to them. States can of course add more pages as necessary to provide complete information in those categories. Coaches assigned to state teams will help states design and execute their needs assessment plans to paint a clear, reliable picture of the strengths and gaps of states’ career preparation systems.

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| **Key Objective 1: Employer Engagement**  Establish employer-driven processes informed by real-time, projected, and other labor market information (LMI) to determine high-skill, high-demand industry sectors with which career pathways and their associated credentials must be aligned. | | | | | | |
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| **Targeted Outcomes**  1a. **Identifying high-skill, high-demand sectors:** The state and employer community create a structured and dynamic process that uses current and projected LMI to identify high-skill, high-demand sectors and occupations where career pathways should be prioritized and scaled.  1b. **Aligning skills and competencies with labor market:** Formalize and sustain an employer-led, sector-based process to identify the academic knowledge, technical and employability skills required by each priority sector to ensure career pathways and programs are aligned with industry needs.  1c. **Dynamic review process:** Create and support a cross-sector process and feedback loop to review the impact of career pathways to inform their continuous improvement. | | **Supporting Criteria**  *(Please circle or highlight the criteria below that represent gap areas on which the state needs to work.)*  **Targeted outcome 1a: Identifying high-skill, high-demand sectors**   1. A formalized statewide structure or process is in place that regularly convenes the K-12, postsecondary education, employer and workforce development communities to review labor market information and establish priorities for career pathways. 2. The structure or process is established in law or through an inter-governmental agreement to be sustained across leadership transitions. 3. The structure or process uses reliable LMI to inform classification of industries that are high-skill, high-demand. 4. It identifies statewide priorities for in-demand pathways and credentials while allowing for regional differentiation based on local economic needs. 5. The results of the process are used to inform state policy around access to career pathways, program approval, and funding such that programs that lead to credentials in high-skill, high-demand industries get prioritized.   **Targeted outcome 1b: Aligning skills and competencies with the labor market**   1. Employers lead a process in specific industries and/or regions in the state through which they identify the academic knowledge, technical skills, and employability skills needed for all students in each priority sector/pathway. 2. Those successful examples are being used as models for scaling and replication across the state. 3. The skills and competencies have been embedded in pathways that begin in secondary school. 4. The skills and competencies are being validated by employers through a formal process that’s recognized and respected by business and industry.   **Targeted Outcome 1c: Dynamic review process**   1. Current/projected labor market needs are continually assessed; adjustments are made to the classification of industries as high-skill, high-demand. 2. New policies are adopted and existing policies and internal structures are adjusted to remove barriers and facilitate the successful development and implementation of state career pathways that culminate in meaningful credentials. 3. There is an inter-governmental process, agreement, or structure that facilitates the review and publication of data, especially related to career pathway participants’ progress and success in earning credentials with labor market value. 4. A consistent set of shared measures is used to determine the impact of its pathways on labor market outcomes. | | | | |

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| **Evidence for Ratings Above:** | | | | | | | | **Key Challenges and Gaps for Objective 1:**  *(e.g. We have a process for using LMI to identify high-skill, high-demand sectors, but it is not employer-led.)* | | | | | | | | | **Capacity of the State to Deliver** | | | | | |
| **Key Objective 2: Rigor and Quality in Career Pathways for ALL Students**  Use policy and funding levers to improve the quality and rigor of career pathways - including scaling down or phasing out those that don’t lead to credentials with labor market value - and make those pathways widely available to and accessed by all students in all secondary settings, especially in underserved populations | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
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| **Targeted Outcomes**  2a. **Quality and rigor in pathways:** Policies and processes are in place to ensure all career pathways endorsed by the state develop the core academic knowledge, technical skills, and employability skills students need to be successful in college and the 21st century work place.  2b. **Equity and access in rigorous pathways:** Policy and funding levers to expand and equalize access to high-quality career pathways for **all** students are in place and fully utilized. | | | | **Supporting Criteria**  *(Please circle or highlight the criteria below that represent gap areas on which the state needs to work.)*  **Targeted outcome 2a: Quality and rigor in pathways**   1. All course/pathway standards include the academic knowledge, technical skills, and employability skills identified by employers as necessary for entry-level success in current and projected high-skill, high-demand sectors. 2. All career pathways begin broadly, focusing on career awareness and exposure; progress to more occupationally-specific courses; and offer multiple entry and exit points to enable students to change paths as their interests and goals evolve. 3. State policies and incentives help districts and schools recruit industry professionals with sought-after technical knowledge and skills and demonstrated teaching ability. 4. The state removes policy barriers and streamlines certification procedures to make teaching more attractive to such candidates. 5. Professional development opportunities and incentives enable core academic and career-technical teachers to earn credentials in high-skill, high-demand fields and strengthen their instructional practices in related pathways. 6. Secondary and postsecondary program approval criteria are leveraged to establish and maintain career pathway quality, instructional rigor, and connection with priority industry needs. 7. In the past three years, the state has discontinued career pathways that fail to meet minimum standards for quality, rigor, and cross-education alignment, or that do not demonstrate a connection to priority industry needs.   **Targeted outcome 2b: Equity and access in pathways**   1. A range of high quality delivery models are offered throughout the state so that high-quality, rigorous pathways are widely available to **all** students in **all** secondary settings. 2. Policies and strategies to ensure that access to and completion of pathways programs is equitable across student subpopulations, (e.g. by gender, race/ethnicity, SES, and geographic area) are in place. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

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| **Evidence for Ratings Above:** | | | | | | **Key Challenges and Gaps for Objective 2:**  *(e.g. We use program approval criteria for new programs but do not use such criteria to retire programs that don’t meet standards.)* | | | | | | **Capacity of the State to Deliver** | | | | |

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| **Key Objective 3: Career-Focused Accountability Systems**  Incorporate robust career-focused indicators in state K-12 accountability systems that measure and value successful completion of high-quality career pathways, attainment of credentials with labor market value, participation in work-based learning, and enrollment in postsecondary education or apprenticeships. | | | | | | |
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| **Targeted Outcomes**  **3a. Career-focused indicators publicly reported:** The state collects and publicly reports a robust set of career-focused indicators that measure and value student access and equity within career pathways.  **3b. Career-focused indicators have accountability weight:** The state has incorporated a robust set of career-focused indicators into its K-12 accountability system that count towards school and district accountability metrics.  **3c.** **Student recognitions and incentives for developing and demonstrating career readiness:** Secondary students are recognized and rewarded for developing and demonstrating career readiness. | | **Supporting Criteria**  *(Please circle or highlight the criteria below that represent gap areas on which the state needs to work.)*  **Targeted outcome 3a: Career-focused indicators**   1. The state collects and reports meaningful career-focused indicators as described in the NSFY Grant Guidelines:  * The number and percentage of **all** students with access to career pathways in high-skill, high-demand sectors (analyzed by subgroup) * The number and percentage of **all** students who complete career pathways in high-skill, high-demand sectors (analyzed by subgroup) * Number and percent of **all** students who earn college credit that transfers to a higher education institution (analyzed by subgroup) * Number and percentage of **all** students who earn industry-recognized credentials in high-skill, high-demand sectors (analyzed by subgroup) * Number and percentage of **all** graduates who secure employment in high-skill, high-demand sectors within 12 months after high school graduation (analyzed by subgroup)  1. The state reviews its collection of career-focused indicators annually to ensure equitable treatment of different student populations.   **Targeted outcome 3b: Indicators have weight**   1. At least one of the publicly-reported career-focused indicators is included in the state’s accountability system used to measure school improvement, in addition to other state-defined career-ready indicators. 2. Postsecondary educators, employers, workforce development leaders, and other key stakeholders provide input on the indicators used to assess students’ career readiness to ensure that they are aligned with the needs of the postsecondary communities.   **Targeted outcome 3c: Student recognitions and incentives for developing and demonstrating career readiness**   1. A range of opportunities for students to demonstrate career readiness is in place– such as industry-recognized credentials, work-based learning, and CTE endorsements - that count for academic credit. 2. Diploma endorsements are offered that provide extra recognition to students for fulfilling the requirements of high-skill, high-demand career pathways, including earning credentials of value. 3. The state’s graduation rule requires students’ demonstration of career readiness. | | | | |

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| **Evidence for Ratings Above:** | | | | | | | | **Key Challenges and Gaps for Objective 3:**  *(e.g. We collect/analyze several career readiness indicators but do not include them in our accountability system.)* | | | | | | | | | **Capacity of the State to Deliver** | | | | | |
| **Key Objective 4: Scaled Pathways that Culminate in Credentials of Value**  Working with local districts, scale career pathways that span secondary and postsecondary systems, offer focused career guidance and advisement, blend rigorous and engaging core academic and career-technical instruction, include high-quality work-based learning experiences, and culminate in postsecondary or industry credentials of value | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
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| **Targeted Outcomes**  4a. **Scale high-quality career pathways:** Develop and execute strategies to scale career pathways that connect students to postsecondary education and career opportunities in high-skill, high-demand sectors.  4b. **Expand career guidance systems and work-based learning opportunities:** Ensure that evidence-based career advisement systems and demand-driven work-based learning opportunities are integral components of career pathways that connect classroom learning with the work place.  4c. **Credentials have value:** Adopt and operationalize policies that require career pathways to culminate in postsecondary degrees or validated credentials with labor market value. | | | | **Supporting Criteria**  *(Please circle or highlight the criteria below that represent gap areas on which the state needs to work.)*  **Targeted outcome 4a: Scale high-quality pathways**   1. A wide range of secondary settings – i.e. comprehensive high schools, career academies, technology centers, higher education institutions – is utilized effectively and efficiently to offer pathways in high-skill, high-demand sectors to **all** secondary students, but especially in underserved communities. 2. Virtual coursework opportunities are offered to students throughout the state, but especially in rural communities, to provide rigorous, integrated academic and technical instruction as part of a career pathway experience in high-skill, high-demand sectors. 3. Funding and program approval processes are used to scale up pathways in high-skill, high-demand sectors. 4. Funding and program approval processes are used to scale down or phase out pathways that don’t lead to credentials of value.   **Targeted outcome 4b: Expand work-based learning and career guidance systems**   1. Evidence-based, scalable career advisement models have taken root in regions across the state to help **all** students - beginning in middle school - make sound, well-informed decisions about course and pathway participation. 2. On-site and virtual/simulated work-based learning experiences are an integral component of pathways aligned with high-skill, high-demand industry sector needs for **all** students. 3. Work-based learning opportunities progress from awareness and exploration to preparation and training to give students insight into the range of careers available and associated entry requirements to help make informed choices about long-term goals. 4. Work-based learning experiences include authentic assessments of the experience by employers. 5. There is strong alignment between work-based learning opportunities, secondary curriculum, and prioritized industry sector needs.   **Targeted outcome 4c: Credentials have value**   1. A cross-sector process led by employers is established and used to identify industry credentials with labor market value attained through pathways. 2. Pathway completers earn postsecondary degrees and industry-recognized credentials that are “stackable” and articulate to progressively higher-level credentials, certifications, or degrees. 3. Secondary students have access to college coursework (dual enrollment) as part of pathways to earn credit toward degrees with labor market value. 4. Systemic articulation agreements between secondary and postsecondary are in place to award credit to high school students who complete college coursework in priority sectors. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

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| **Evidence for Ratings Above:** | | | | | | | | | **Key Challenges and Gaps for Objective 4:**  *(e.g. We have identified an evidence-based, scalable career advisement model but have not developed a scaling strategy.)* | | | | | | | | **Capacity of the State to Deliver** | | | | | |
| **Key Objective 5: Align State and Federal Funding Streams**  Reorganize and intentionally align state and federal funding streams from education, workforce development, and economic development sources to effectively deliver career-focused programs to all students. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
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| **Targeted Outcomes**  5a. **Asset Mapping**: All federal, state, and private funding streams are inventoried to find opportunities to better align the state’s education and training pipeline in response to the needs of its labor market.  5b. **Braided Funding**: Funding streams are effectively braided at state, regional, and local levels to fully leverage all relevant funding opportunities to implement integrated career pathways. | | | | **Supporting Criteria**  *(Please circle or highlight the criteria below that represent gap areas on which the state needs to work.)*  **Targeted outcome 5a:**   1. A comprehensive cataloging of all funding sources (federal, state, private) that can be utilized for education, career training, and workforce development purposes – i.e. asset mapping – has been completed. 2. The results of that mapping are used as a tool to determine overlaps and gaps in state systems with a special focus on identifying areas with inequitable student access. 3. A plan has been developed and implemented to address overlaps and gaps to better align the state system and more effectively prepare **all** secondary students for postsecondary success in high-skill, high-demand sectors.   **Targeted outcome 5b:**   1. Federal, state, and private funding sources are aligned and leveraged to support the development, implementation, and on-going improvement of high-quality career pathways. 2. Funding streams are braided not only to strengthen the quality of career pathways but also to increase student access to those pathways. 3. Barriers to braiding all funding sources have been identified, and strategies are in place to overcome them. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

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| **Evidence for Ratings Above:** | | | | | | **Key Challenges and Gaps for Objective 5:**  *(e.g. We have catalogued all relevant funding sources, but we have not developed a corresponding alignment strategy.)* | | | | | | **Capacity of the State to Deliver** | | | | |

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| **Key Objective 6: Ensure Cross-Institutional Alignment**  Foster greater collaboration between K-12 and postsecondary systems to adopt policies and processes in schools, technology centers, academies, and institutions of higher education to ensure cross-institutional alignment of programs and pathways that smooth transitions for students and minimize institutional barriers. | | | | | | |
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| **Targeted Outcomes**  6a. **Mapping the career preparation delivery system:** All parts of the delivery system – comprehensive high schools, technology centers, career academies, postsecondary institutions – are mapped to identify redundancies, inefficiencies, and misalignments, as well as best practices.  6b. **Aligning the career preparation delivery system:** The various components of the delivery system are aligned and function synergistically to provide a seamless pathway to career preparation. | | **Supporting Criteria**  *(Please circle or highlight the criteria below that represent gap areas on which the state needs to work.)*  **Targeted outcome 6a:**   1. There is an overall vision for the delivery system that is tightly aligned with current and projected needs of the labor market in high-skill, high-demand industry sectors. 2. The various components of the state’s career preparation delivery system have been identified and mapped to determine gaps and overlaps in state career pathways offerings in **all** parts of the state for **all** students. 3. Student demographic information and disaggregated outcome data are analyzed to determine the effectiveness of each part of the state’s career preparation system in serving **all** students. 4. Best practices are identified and plans are in place to replicate and scale them across the state.   **Targeted outcome 6b:**   1. The map of the career preparation delivery system has been used to align disparate parts of the system and enable the system to function effectively and efficiently so that **all** students have access to high-quality career pathways. 2. There is a continuous improvement plan in place that includes on-going analysis of all the disparate parts of the delivery system to ensure that they function synergistically to better prepare secondary students for employment opportunities in high-skill, high-demand sectors. | | | | |

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| **Evidence for Ratings Above:** | | | | | | **Key Challenges and Gaps for Objective 6:**  *(e.g. We have an overall vision for our delivery system, but we have not mapped or aligned the various parts of it.)* | | | | | | **Capacity of the State to Deliver** | | | | |