

New Skills for Youth Phase One Snapshot: Tennessee

Tennessee entered the Phase One New Skills for Youth (NSFY) planning and early implementation grant in the midst of a multi-year and multi-faceted workforce and economic development initiative called the Drive to 55 campaign. As such, the state was able to use the opportunity under NSFY to build on and accelerate work already under way. During the six-month Phase One grant, Tennessee finished asset mapping regional career preparation systems in the state, supporting the creation of an action plan to expand equitable access to quality career pathways statewide. During Phase One, Tennessee executed a cross-institutional data-sharing memorandum of understanding (MOU) and developed a plan that leverages its data to streamline career pathways, drives continuous improvement at the local level and targets closing equity gaps.

Foundations for the Work

Tennessee already had efforts under way to transform its career readiness system in the years leading up to Phase One of the NSFY initiative. Governor Bill Haslam's [Drive to 55](#) campaign, which was launched in 2013 with the aim of increasing postsecondary credential attainment to 55 percent of Tennesseans by 2025, is the north star that guides Tennessee's education and workforce development agenda. Under the banner of Drive to 55, the state launched several initiatives to streamline pathways into postsecondary training and high-demand, high-skill careers. A statewide collaborative infrastructure called Pathways Tennessee was created to assist in the design and delivery of high-quality education-to-

career learning pathways. Today, Pathways TN includes a network of intermediaries in nine geographic and economic "labor-shed" regions that engage students, educators and businesses to deliver quality career learning experiences linked to priority economic needs in each region. The network is led by a state-level leadership team with representation from the Governor's Office, higher education, K-12, labor, economic development, business and industry and more. The leadership team promotes a unified agenda across all of the labor-shed regions.

Another significant accomplishment under Drive to 55 was an effort, launched in 2013 by the Division of College, Career and Technical Education, to review, streamline, and phase

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 Tennessee's experience and progress in Phase One, including promising practices and innovations.

out courses and programs of study. This project resulted in the state retiring more than 139 programs that were not relevant or aligned with quality career pathways. Soon after, the Division launched a statewide initiative to build, measure and scale [high-quality work-based learning opportunities](#) along a continuum of exploratory and immersive experiences.

Work During Phase One

Leveraging Pathways TN to Set Goals for Phase One

Tennessee used the Phase One NSFY investment not only to execute its needs assessment and develop a derivative action plan, as required by the grant, but also to launch the next stage of its Pathways TN work. While the state had already asset mapped six out of the nine labor-shed regions in the state through Pathways TN, work still remained. Tennessee aimed to complete asset mapping in the remaining three regions, which had proven to be more challenging given the state’s rural geography. Additionally, the state Pathways TN leadership team identified gaps in the state’s longitudinal data system prior to the start of Phase One and directed part of its planning efforts toward strengthening its ability to collect and analyze student outcomes data. As a parallel objective, the Pathways TN leadership team aimed to leverage data to build a continuous improvement system that

would create feedback loops and guide policy and programmatic revisions and improvement.

Tennessee’s Theory of Change for Transforming Career Readiness

An external firm conducted a statewide assessment of Tennessee’s career readiness system to identify opportunities to strengthen or develop it. Among Tennessee’s strengths were its capacity to implement system-wide change, the work already under way to streamline and improve the quality of K-16 career pathways, and efforts to strengthen the state data collection system through inter-agency MOUs and partnerships with credentialing organizations. The needs assessment also highlighted opportunities for Tennessee to build upon this foundation by extending its ability to collect, analyze and report student outcomes data and by targeting efforts to close equity gaps that were uncovered in the needs assessment. Using this needs assessment as a guide, Tennessee developed its career readiness action plan, which is based on the state’s theory of change and includes six strands:

- Employer Engagement: Employers must be active partners in career pathways.
- Equitable Access: All students must be able to access high-quality career pathways.
- Eliminate Barriers: Agency requirements should not create barriers for students.

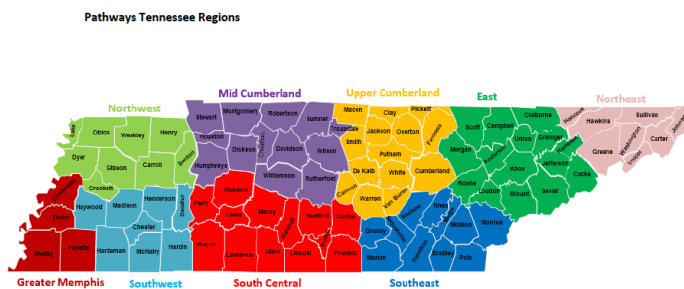


Figure 1: The Pathways TN network is divided into nine geographic and economic “labor-shed” regions.

- **Effective Use of Data:** Timely and accurate data drive strategic planning and decisionmaking.
- **K-16 Plan:** All students will have a K-16 plan that culminates in a credential valued by employers.
- **Shared Strategies:** Agencies will co-create career pathways priorities that guide strategic plans and funding opportunities.

The Phase One needs assessment generated a sense of urgency in Tennessee, helping coalesce the state's work around a single goal: *Ensure that all students are provided equitable access to high-quality, vertically aligned K-16 learning pathways that are reflective of, and linked to, local, regional and state economic and labor market needs, leading to the promotion of a workforce that is well educated and well skilled in their chosen fields.*

Early Successes through NSFY

One of the most notable outcomes from Tennessee's six-month Phase One grant was the completion of regional career pathways asset mapping for the three remaining laborshed regions in the state. Through the asset mapping process, Tennessee undertook the labor-intensive task of interviewing cross-sector stakeholders in each region and examining labor market and economic data to determine the viability of existing career pathway initiatives. Moving forward, this success will enable the state to scale its learning pathways model statewide — and continue to phase out low-quality courses and programs of study as well — in a way that is appropriate and relevant within regional contexts.

Although data capacity was one of the gaps the Pathways TN leadership team and the needs assessment identified, Tennessee made significant progress under Phase One to strengthen its existing data systems. During the six-month Phase One grant period, Tennessee executed a cross-agency data-sharing MOU to help streamline secondary-to-postsecondary pathways and increase the recognition of industry credentials for secondary students. The MOU, which includes signatories from the Department of Education, the Board of Regents, and the Tennessee College of Applied Technology system, allows the transfer of state-approved industry-recognized credentials for postsecondary credits. This achievement is coupled with ongoing efforts to match student data with certifying agencies, thus enabling the state to reliably monitor the number of students earning industry-recognized credentials and better track progress toward the Drive to 55 attainment goal. Previously, credential attainment data were self-reported at the local level.

Keeping with its focus on continuous improvement outlined in the Phase One plan, Tennessee also developed tools and frameworks for driving progress and quality in career pathway implementation. The state developed a Site Observation Tool to assess program quality at the regional level and a Pathways Documentation Tool to examine the scope and quality of career pathways programs at the high school level. During the Phase One grant period, Tennessee made both tools available to the Pathways TN network and held a statewide convening to train regional stakeholders on the use of the tools. These tools are part of a larger continuous improvement framework that will drive

ongoing regional evaluation activities in the future.

Looking Ahead

Moving forward, the Pathways TN state leadership team plans to build on these efforts to expand access to quality career pathways to all students in the state. Tennessee plans to achieve this goal through a number of strategies, including driving continuous improvement through strategic use of data; increasing employer engagement, particularly around work-based learning; and targeting efforts to reach under-served students.

Building on its early success executing a cross-institutional data-sharing MOU, Tennessee will continue refining its data collection methodologies within the state P-20/workforce longitudinal database and produce a data dashboard to help drive state and regional strategic planning. Tennessee also plans to integrate career readiness indicators into its statewide accountability system.

One of the ways Tennessee aspires to increase work-based learning opportunities is through state legislation that will incentivize employers to offer work-based learning experiences in partnership with Pathways TN intermediaries. Based on research that will be conducted over the next year, the Legislature plans to introduce legislation during the 2018 session. Further, the state will leverage the regional Pathways TN network to expand access to high-quality career pathways, focusing its communications and expansion efforts on under-served students who were identified in the state's Phase One data analysis.

Although Governor Bill Haslam is term limited and will leave office in 2018, the Drive to 55 campaign has solidified cross-sector commitment statewide and helped build momentum around Tennessee's career readiness work that will likely contribute to a seamless transition. Further, a succession plan is under way that will promote continuity across administrations. Another sustainability strategy that is in the early stages is the braiding of resources from various funding streams.

Tennessee's Goal: Ensure that all students are provided equitable access to high-quality, vertically aligned K-16 learning pathways that are reflective of, and linked to, local, regional and state economic and labor market needs, leading to the promotion of a workforce that is well educated and well skilled in their chosen fields.