



Breaking Barriers, Building Futures

Expanding Access to High-Quality Career Pathways

NEW SKILLS READY NETWORK PRIORITY AREAS

JPMorgan Chase identified four priority areas through which the six sites conduct most of their planning and implementation.

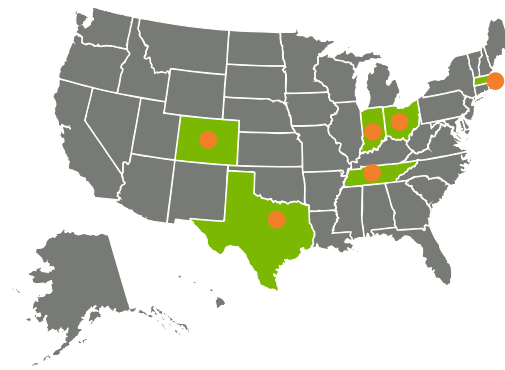
Strengthening the alignment and rigor of career pathways: *New Skills ready network* sites use policy and funding levers to improve the quality and rigor of career pathways – including scaling down or phasing out those that do not lead to credentials with labor market value – and make those career pathways widely available to and accessed by all learners in secondary settings, especially in under-served populations.

Designing, implementing and scaling real-world work experiences: Sites embed meaningful work-based learning opportunities within career pathways through sustained collaboration among employers and educators while also removing barriers to participation and success for learners. Improving access to good jobs by connecting learners to real-world work experiences will help fuel economic growth and set learners on the right path to long-term success in employment.

Building seamless transitions to support postsecondary success: Sites are building career pathways that enable learners to move up the career ladder by obtaining degrees and credentials of value. In practice, this work includes establishing partnerships and agreements among high schools, postsecondary institutions, employers and intermediary organizations to build aligned career pathways spanning grades 9-16 that increase learner attainment of degrees and credentials that lead to high-wage, high-skill, in-demand careers.

Closing equity gaps: Through the equity analysis sites are able to understand where gaps in access, enrollment, persistence and completion occur in available career pathways by population group. Using that foundational knowledge, sites work to remove barriers to meaningful career opportunities for historically disadvantaged populations and support effective transitions from school to work by aligning equitable policy and practice to scale proven career pathways programs that ensure equity and access.

To support and accelerate career pathways, JPMorgan Chase partnered with Advance CTE and Education Strategy Group to launch the *New Skills ready network* in 2020. The five-year initiative, part of JPMorgan Chase’s \$350 million global New Skills at Work program, aims to improve learner completion of high-quality career pathways. The six *New Skills ready network* sites are: Boston, Massachusetts; Columbus, Ohio; Dallas, Texas; Denver, Colorado; Indianapolis, Indiana; and Nashville, Tennessee.



NEW SKILLS READY NETWORK SITES:

- Boston, Massachusetts
- Columbus, Ohio
- Dallas, Texas
- Denver, Colorado
- Indianapolis, Indiana
- Nashville, Tennessee

This annual report identifies common trends across each site, including implementation steps built on progress from the first three years of the initiative, significant accomplishments and lessons learned through year four and shared priorities for the fifth and final year of the initiative. See [year four’s site snapshots](#) for more specific information about each site’s progress.



From the Ground Up: Building a Foundation for Equitable Career Pathways

The initiative's first year focused on building a solid foundation for success. Sites engaged in intensive planning and collaboration, identifying local needs, defining core elements of high-quality career pathways and selecting priority career pathways based on labor market information. This initial phase was crucial for establishing a shared vision, securing commitments from all partners and fostering trust-driven relationships.

Building upon the groundwork laid in year one, sites further refined their efforts to develop and implement equitable, high-quality, high-demand career pathways in year two. Sites across the network worked collaboratively and created shared definitions around work-based learning (WBL) within education institutions and across industries; strengthened alignment across local education agencies and postsecondary institutions through individualized career plans, career coaching and data-sharing agreements; and piloted innovative programs in WBL and career advising to test and refine approaches.

Year three of the *New Skills ready network* witnessed a significant scaling of the initiative's impact and solidifying of its achievements across the six participating sites. Project teams made noteworthy strides in four crucial areas: integrating high-quality WBL, facilitating seamless transitions, expanding equitable college and career advising and enhancing access to high-wage career pathways.

Across the six sites, the initiative's collective achievements paint a compelling picture of progress toward its mission. Fueled by a spirit of collaboration, these successes are driving systemic change within the career readiness landscape. Notably, the network has witnessed increased learner access to high-quality career pathways, fostered enhanced collaboration and alignment among partners and facilitated the development of shared definitions and frameworks for critical elements such as WBL. This collaborative approach has also expanded WBL opportunities and career exposure for learners, alongside improved college and career advising systems and resources. Additionally, pilot projects across the network have served as valuable demonstrations of promising practices for effective career pathway implementation.



These collective efforts offer a powerful testament to the transformative potential of collaboration in building a more robust and equitable career readiness system.

Recognizing the importance of continuous improvement, network partners identified several key areas for further development in supporting learners' equitable access to high-quality career pathways. These areas include exploring new in-demand career sectors to meet evolving industry needs. Additionally, ensuring the long-term sustainability and scalability of the network's work beyond year five remains a critical focus. Strengthening communication and engagement with families and broader communities is also paramount, as well as fostering awareness of and building support for career pathways. Finally, the network remains committed to continuously refining and evaluating its strategies, ensuring that they effectively drive equitable outcomes for all learners.

The *New Skills ready network's* journey offers insights for future career readiness efforts across the six sites and beyond. A central lesson learned is the transformative power of collaboration and shared ownership among partners to drive systemic change. Effective communication also emerged as a critical component, ensuring that all partners understand and support the initiative's value proposition. Furthermore, the network underscored the importance of incorporating the learner and family voice in career pathway development and implementation. Finally, consistent definitions and frameworks across partners and sectors were highlighted as critical in fostering collaboration and propelling progress.

New Skills ready network: 2020–21 to 2024–25

YEAR

1

Laying the Foundation

- Conducted intensive planning and collaboration
- Identified local needs
- Defined core elements of high-quality career pathways
- Selected priority career pathways based on labor market information

YEAR

2

Refining the Approach

- Created shared definitions around work-based learning (WBL) within education institutions and across industries
- Strengthened alignment across local education agencies and institutions of higher education through meaningful partnerships, resulting in data-sharing agreements
- Piloted innovative programs in WBL and career advising to test and refine approaches
- Built capacity to support seamless advising, including individualized career plans, career coaching and mentorship models

YEAR

3

Expanding Impact

- Integrated high-quality WBL into career pathways, providing learners with real-world experience and industry connections
- Facilitated seamless transitions between secondary and postsecondary institutions, ensuring that learners are well prepared for continued academic and career success
- Expanded access to coordinated, holistic and equitable college and career advising to support all learners in making informed decisions about their futures
- Improved access to and the quality of high-wage, high-demand career pathways that lead to family-sustaining careers

YEAR

4

Ensuring Sustainability

- Refined career pathway program delivery with strategic, data-driven decisionmaking, capacity building and continued collaboration
- Maintained a focus on ensuring that all learners have access to high-quality WBL experiences
- Bolstered career advising services and implemented strategies to smooth the transition from secondary to postsecondary and into careers
- Increased communication and awareness about career pathways to learners and families

LOOKING AHEAD

YEAR

5

Scaling for Systemic Change

- Implement strategies to guarantee career pathways' long-term availability and continued impact
- Leverage models from sites to replicate and scale high-quality career pathways in other contexts
- Continue to advocate for policies that support the development and implementation of high-quality career pathways
- Prioritize leveraging data, including learner outcomes, employer feedback and program data, to refine and continuously improve career pathways

Breaking Barriers Together: Year Four Focus on Collaborative Strategies

Over year four, thematic areas emerged as priorities for the six sites:

- 1 Expanding Access and Equity in Career Pathways:** Ensuring that all learners, regardless of background, have access to high-quality career pathways, including by increasing access to WBL opportunities, clearly communicating about career pathways and promoting awareness among families
- 2 Strengthening Career Pathway Design and Implementation:** Developing and structuring high-quality career pathways that align with industry needs, integrate WBL and build stackable credentials
- 3 Enhancing Learner Support and Transitions:** Supporting learners throughout their career pathways, including through effective career advising and fostering transitions into postsecondary and the workforce
- 4 Building a Strong Network and Infrastructure:** Building a solid foundation for career pathways sustainability with rich collaboration, ample opportunities for learners and tools to manage and develop career pathways and educators

PRIORITY 1

Expanding access and equity in career pathways

Equity is a cornerstone of a robust career pathways system. It ensures that all learners, irrespective of race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic background or disability, have the opportunity to explore and pursue high-quality career options. A compelling aspect of the *New Skills ready network* initiative is the emphasis on identifying and addressing equity gaps in career pathway participation. Throughout the initiative, sites have intentionally implemented equity frameworks within career pathways to ensure equitable access to high-quality opportunities. Throughout year four, sites deepened this work with a focus on sustainability.



The **Boston, Massachusetts**, project team prioritized creating equitable access to WBL for all learners beginning with operationalizing strategies to increase equitable engagement in WBL. The baseline will inform strategies to increase engagement in WBL, particularly for under-represented learners. During year four of the initiative, the team built on the progress of a citywide initiative: the Mayor of Boston's Youth Summer Jobs program. One of the site's critical partners, the Boston Private Industry Council (PIC), met and exceeded the mayor's targets for the summer program. The PIC also increased job opportunities for learners; piloted workforce training workshops; and convened industry-specific working groups to offer diversity, equity and inclusion training for all summer hiring partners.

Additionally, Boston Public Schools (BPS) and the PIC deepened their understanding of learner access to WBL opportunities in high-quality career pathways through comprehensive data analysis. Data points tracked include learner participation, career pathway entry points, internship placements, the availability of diverse career-connected learning opportunities, work readiness indicators and the quality of career exploration experiences. Finally, the PIC provides updated labor market information on priority industry sectors and in-demand skills. This comprehensive data analysis is leveraged to inform the district's career pathway strategy and ensure equitable access.



The **Columbus, Ohio**, project team prioritizes using culturally responsive methods to ensure equitable access to career pathways. Informed by focus groups with learners and families, they emphasize relevance and convenience in messaging about Career Technical Education (CTE) and postsecondary opportunities. This work includes using SchoolLinks for district-wide communication and equipping career and community resource coordinators to explain program value. Columbus State Community College uses culturally responsive messaging, such as virtual reality experiences, to address historical stigmas around manufacturing careers. The institution is also developing career exploration videos featuring diverse near-peer mentors to give learners a realistic vision of their future career paths. These efforts ensure that all learners know about and can benefit from career pathway opportunities.



The **Dallas, Texas**, project team champions the education career pathway, creating a two-fold benefit: providing aspiring educators with valuable experience while strengthening the local Dallas Independent School District (ISD) teacher pipeline. Through the Aspiring Teachers program, more than 100 educator-pathway learners tutored 280 third graders, significantly boosting their reading levels. This initiative supports future educators and addresses equity concerns by increasing access to quality reading instruction for elementary learners. The team plans to expand the program to connect more Dallas ISD learners with this valuable opportunity.



The **Denver, Colorado**, site prioritizes centering equity and learner voice in career pathway development by leveraging learner voice. The site's annual [Learner Voice Symposium](#) brings together educators, employers and policymakers to hear directly from learners about their experiences, their needs and what they seek in career pathways. This approach ensures that career pathways are designed to meet the needs of all learners, especially those from under-served backgrounds. The symposium also informs state-level policy by elevating learners' feedback and input to decision-makers. The Denver, Colorado, team aims to create a more equitable and prosperous career pathways system by including learners in designing and implementing high-quality career pathways.



The **Indianapolis, Indiana**, project team prioritizes equitable access to postsecondary success by building on past collaborations; they championed initiatives such as seamless admissions to Indiana University-Indianapolis (IU-I) for Indianapolis Public Schools learners and a dual admissions program with Ivy Tech, aiming to reduce barriers and create smoother transitions for learners, particularly those who might face equity challenges. Future efforts will ensure that all learners are aware of these opportunities and empowered to choose the path that best suits their goals.



The **Nashville, Tennessee**, project team prioritizes expanding access to high-quality WBL experiences for all learners, a critical factor in equitable career exploration. They have facilitated WBL opportunities in all district schools and leveraged learner testimonials to attract more employer partners. Recognizing transportation as a barrier, they conducted a study to identify access challenges and advocated for learner employment opportunities within the district. These efforts demonstrate a commitment to removing obstacles and ensuring that all learners benefit from WBL experiences.

PRIORITY 2

Strengthening career pathway design and implementation



The *New Skills ready network* centers on equipping learners with the knowledge, skills and experiences needed to thrive in the ever-evolving job market through high-quality career pathways. These career pathways, designed with industry needs in mind, provide a clear roadmap for career exploration and skill development and integrate valuable WBL opportunities and stackable credentials. Over year four of the initiative, the six sites strengthened career pathway design and implementation by addressing industry alignment, integrating WBL experiences and ensuring that learners are positioned for success in the workforce.




The **Boston, Massachusetts**, team strengthened their site's career pathway design and implementation by leveraging cross-sector stakeholders as partners in career pathways. Over the course of year four of the initiative, *New Skills Boston* higher education partners Bunker Hill Community College and the University of Massachusetts Boston worked collaboratively to create holistic support systems for learners and explore cross-institutional proposals to further ease the learner experience in high-quality career pathways. The institutions provided more robust support systems for learners including structured wraparound services, embedded tutor mentors and curriculum alignment with professional development for instructors. Additionally, the institutions are exploring a joint admissions proposal to create an even more seamless learner experience in career pathways by establishing structures for data sharing, seamless transcript processes, joint advising and the potential for simultaneous acceptance.



The **Columbus, Ohio**, project team prioritized strengthening career pathway design and implementation to align with local labor market needs. They ensured equitable access by opening career pathways to all Columbus City Schools learners through a lottery system. New programs such as the semiconductor fundamentals certificate at Columbus State were developed, which stacks to an associate degree. Collaboration among institutions led to aligned curricula in areas such as construction management and information technology. Future efforts will focus on enrolling learners, preparing them for program entry and providing professional development for educators.



The **Dallas, Texas**, team prioritized implementing their personalized career pathways management tool in year four. This tool facilitates data sharing between Dallas ISD and Dallas College, enabling administrators to better align staffing with course offerings and identify areas in which learners might need additional support transitioning to postsecondary education. While currently used by educators and administrators, future efforts will focus on a full roll-out to learners and families, empowering them to engage actively in the career pathway journey.


 The project team in **Indianapolis, Indiana**, prioritized scaling high-quality and equitable WBL opportunities. Initiatives such as Talent Bound and Modern Apprenticeship continued to expand, and House Bill 1002 established clear criteria for quality youth apprenticeships. Ascend Indiana's Modern Apprenticeship program is scaling cohorts across finance, life sciences and advanced manufacturing. IU-I's Sophomore Internship program, focused on diversifying interns and employer relationships, also grew, with 17 interns participating in the most recent cohort. These efforts ensure that learners, particularly those from under-served backgrounds, gain valuable work experience.


PRIORITY 3

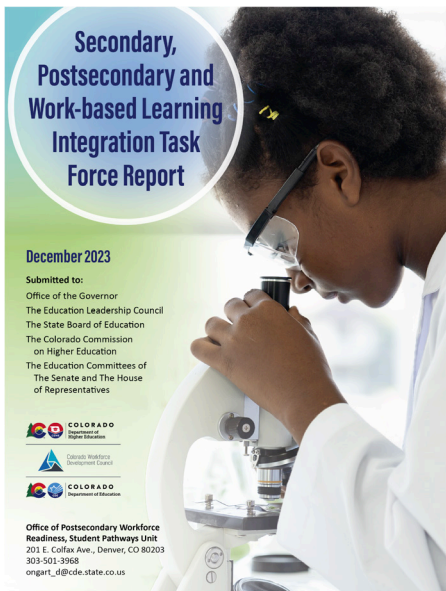
Enhancing learner support and transitions


Recognizing that a successful career pathway journey extends beyond initial course selection, the *New Skills ready network* prioritizes supporting learners throughout their exploration and development process. Throughout the initiative, sites across the network have enhanced learner support and transitions to and through high-quality career pathways. Sites have bolstered career advising services, implemented strategies to smooth the transition from secondary to postsecondary and facilitated connections to employment opportunities. The collective, strategic efforts ultimately ensure a well-rounded support system that empowers learners to thrive in their chosen career paths.





 The **Boston, Massachusetts**, team prioritized enhancing learner support and transitions by developing a framework for learner transitions and deepening coordinated advising across BPS. In year four, the team advanced their shared definition of seamless advising with one of the site's working groups developing a comprehensive framework with essential components of a smooth learner transition in career pathways. This framework now serves as a blueprint for actionable steps to mobilize partners citywide and ensure that the learner transition in high-quality career pathways is as seamless as possible. Additionally, BPS deepened the quality of college and career advising implementation across schools and community organizations. BPS intentionally engaged partners in training sessions on college and career advising for learners in high-quality career pathways. The district also worked with the PIC, the city's workforce development board, to strengthen collaboration across key players in advising: advisers, teachers and PIC career specialists. This collaboration ensured a shared understanding of each learner's academic progress, career aspirations and potential challenges.


 The **Columbus, Ohio**, team prioritized enhancing learner support and transitions by focusing on WBL and employer engagement. They hired an emerging talent manager to connect educators with employers. Roundtables with more than 75 top employers identified pilot projects, such as scaling project-based learning and creating more access to work experiences. An intake system is being developed to manage these partnerships, and the team will focus on expanding pilot programs and providing professional development for educators and employers in the final year of the initiative.



 The **Dallas, Texas**, team prioritized enhancing learner support and transitions by implementing a required career exploration course, Path to College and Career, for all seventh graders. This course and an industry-partnered career exploration showcase aim to prepare learners to make informed career pathway decisions by the end of eighth grade. Recognizing the importance of family involvement, they are also developing a curriculum companion guide for parents to support these conversations and empower families throughout the decisionmaking process.

 The **Denver, Colorado**, team prioritized enhancing learner support and transitions by improving communication about career pathways. They developed a user-friendly website with clear information for [DPS's College and Career Success](#) and the page features interactive [career exploration](#) tools, detailed information about [stackable credential pathways](#) and readily available resources in clear language. The team also partnered with community organizations for targeted outreach. Additionally, they invested in professional development for advisers to strengthen counseling and transition support. This effort equipped them with the latest tools and strategies to effectively guide learners throughout their chosen career pathways and to support a smooth transition to the workforce. Dedication to robust advising and transition support has positively affected individual learner journeys. While data collection is ongoing, initial findings show a rise in program completion rates.

 The **Indianapolis, Indiana**, team prioritized enhancing learner support and transitions by aligning career advising practices across partners. They developed a framework to ensure a consistent approach throughout all education levels. House Bill 1002 mandated career fairs and advising conversations for high school learners. The team leveraged existing resources such as Ivy Tech career coaches, who provide advising and assessments. IU-I's pilot program on proactive advising for first-year learners showed significant success and will be expanded. Despite challenges with state guidance, collaboration among partners remains a priority to ensure that learners benefit from valuable career advising services.

 The **Nashville, Tennessee**, team prioritized enhancing learner support and transitions by focusing on career advising to ease postsecondary transitions. They hired a dual enrollment coordinator to increase outreach and partnered with the Tennessee College of Applied Technology – Nashville (TCAT-Nashville) to offer early postsecondary opportunities to more than 300 learners. Additionally, they leveraged grant funding to staff a director of postsecondary partnerships and expand dual enrollment programs in information technology across four schools. This collaboration has led to increased participation from under-represented learners, and the team is committed to fostering these partnerships and developing long-term support systems beyond the grant period.

PRIORITY 4

Building a strong network and infrastructure

Sustainability is paramount for any successful initiative, and career pathways are no exception. The *New Skills ready network* prioritizes building a long-lasting infrastructure that empowers learners, educators and industry partners to navigate the ever-changing landscape of career preparation. As the initiative progresses, sites have fostered rich collaboration, expanded opportunities for learners and implemented tools to manage and develop career pathways and high-quality opportunities.



The **Boston, Massachusetts**, team prioritized building a strong network and infrastructure for career pathways by strengthening partnerships with cross-sector partners. Their collaboration with Bunker Hill Community College and the University of Massachusetts Boston exemplifies this focus.

Beyond expanding access to dual enrollment and course offerings, both institutions are working on solutions for maintaining resources and fostering a collaborative culture through initiatives such as the annual Seamless Advising Summit. This focus on collaboration ensures a solid network to support learners throughout their educational journeys.



The **Denver, Colorado**, team built a strong network and infrastructure for career pathways through two key initiatives. They collaborated with industry leaders to identify high-demand skills and build stackable credential pathways aligned with those needs. These pathways combine industry-recognized certificates, short-term training programs and associate degrees, allowing learners to build their skills progressively. They partnered with educational institutions to revise the curriculum and facilitate credit transfer, ensuring a seamless journey. Grant funding and local business partnerships helped address logistical hurdles and expand program access. The team's commitment to bolstering partnerships extends beyond industry — their participation in the [1215 Secondary, Postsecondary and Work-based Learning Integration Task Force](#) helped elevate the voices of learners, families and communities within the education-to-workforce system. Additionally, the Colorado Department of Higher Education Stackability Workgroups finalized a report on five industry areas that were critical in building high-quality career pathways.



The **Nashville, Tennessee**, team prioritized building a strong network and infrastructure for career pathways by focusing on career pathway visualization. They collaborated with postsecondary partners (TCAT-Nashville and Nashville State Community College) and Metro Nashville Public Schools to create clear, visually appealing career pathway maps for learners. These maps will support learners and equip school personnel with personalized tools for family engagement discussions about future career options. While challenges remain in visualizing the transition from two-year associate degrees to four-year bachelor's degrees, ongoing collaboration with Middle Tennessee State University is laying the groundwork for future expansion of opportunities at the four-year level. This focus on collaboration ensures a solid network to support learners as they navigate their career journeys.

Year Four: Cultivating Momentum, Building Sustainability

Leveraging the foundation established in the first three years, year four of the *New Skills ready network* saw significant progress toward solidifying program impact and ensuring long-term sustainability. Sites strategically applied lessons learned to refine their approaches and empower learners on their career pathways. A focus on collaboration, expanded learner opportunities and robust infrastructure development positions the network for continued success. Year four's learnings provide valuable insights for this initiative and national efforts:



Build a Strong Foundation: The *New Skills ready network* offers valuable insights for state and local CTE leaders embarking on career pathways development. A key takeaway is the importance of establishing a solid program foundation from the outset. This foundation includes implementing robust data collection systems for program evaluation, developing well-defined program frameworks to ensure consistency and creating transparent communication platforms for partner engagement. Additionally, the initiative underscores the need for long-term program sustainability. Leaders should proactively explore funding strategies beyond initial grants and cultivate strong partnerships with community organizations to secure ongoing resources and support networks. By prioritizing these foundational elements, CTE leaders can build career pathways programs poised for lasting impact and continued success.



Invest in Partner Capacity: Year four of the initiative revealed a critical challenge: ensuring that partners possess the knowledge and skills to support career pathways effectively. Sites invested in capacity building to support partners across the network. This work included providing educators with professional development on integrating industry standards, creating collaborative learning communities for educators to share promising practices and developing resources such as employer toolkits. By empowering educators, employers and other partners and fostering collaboration through these methods, programs can create a unified ecosystem that strengthens learner success and ensures program sustainability in the long run.



Center Collaboration: Across all sites, the importance of fostering cross-sector collaboration among educators, employers and community organizations emerged as a critical lesson learned. Siloed operations of educators, employers and community partners threaten program effectiveness. The solution lies in fostering cross-sector collaboration. This collaboration

can be achieved through employer advisory councils and industry mentorship programs. By working together, educators can ensure that their curriculum reflects real-world needs, employers can provide valuable real-world learning experiences and community organizations can expand program reach to historically under-represented learner populations. Ultimately, embracing collaboration creates a more unified ecosystem that strengthens career pathways for all learners.



Maximize Data-Driven Decisionmaking: Over year four, sites emphasized the importance of data-driven decisionmaking for career pathway improvement. Streamlined data collection allows educators to evaluate and refine their programs continuously based on real-time information. The pillars of the *New Skills ready network* can serve as a valuable framework for program assessment. By analyzing data through this lens, programs can identify areas for strengthening WBL integration, ensure that credentials align with industry needs and optimize the delivery of career development support. This data-driven approach allows programs to adapt and evolve, improving learner outcomes.



Prioritize Sustainability: Ensuring the long-term viability of career pathways programs emerged as a central theme in year four of the initiative, highlighting the importance of sustainability planning. This focus translates to developing a long-term vision that ensures program continuity beyond initial funding. Sites explored strategies for identifying sustainable funding sources, such as securing grants or integrating program components into existing funding streams. Sites also built, and continue to build, substantial partnerships with community organizations. These partnerships provide valuable resources, support networks and potential avenues for long-term financial backing. By prioritizing sustainability from the outset, programs can create a foundation for lasting impact and pave the way for continued learner success in career pathways.



LOOKING AHEAD

Building upon the successes of previous years, the *New Skills ready network* continues to propel sites toward the full implementation of robust career pathways. Year five focuses on expanding into new industry sectors aligned with high-wage career opportunities. A key priority remains ensuring equitable access to high-quality WBL experiences for all learners. Sustainability and scalability are also paramount, with sites implementing strategies to guarantee long-term program availability and continued impact. This focus will ensure that learners can access high-quality career pathways for years to come.



YEAR FOUR SNAPSHOTS



In year four, sites involved in the *New Skills ready network* expanded access to career pathways, strengthened collaboration, empowered stakeholders and implemented data-driven decisionmaking. By building upon its successes, embracing learning opportunities and fostering ongoing collaboration, the network aspires to create a lasting impact on future generations.

A summary annual report and individual snapshots for the sites are available at <https://careertech.org/resource-center/series/new-skills-ready-network>.

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