



EXPERIENTIAL WORK-BASED LEARNING IN CAREER PATHWAYS: A Guide to Implementing, Maintaining and Sustaining High-Quality Opportunities

Experiential Work-Based Learning in High-Quality Career Pathways

As the world of work continues to evolve, high-quality career pathways integrating experiential work-based learning (EWBL) are becoming increasingly critical. EWBL provides learners with practical, real-world experiences that bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and its application to in-demand careers. These experiences prepare learners to enter high-demand careers and earn family-sustaining wages.

Introductory experiences such as career fairs and guest speakers provide exposure to careers; however, career development thrives through EWBL opportunities embedded within high-quality, equitable career pathways. EWBL disrupts the linear model by offering dynamic experiences for learners to gain the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in the workforce. Equitable EWBL programs are high quality and are crucial for ensuring that all learners have

the opportunity to thrive. Without equity, these valuable experiences become exclusive, perpetuating existing disparities in career opportunities.

Recognizing the critical importance of EWBL and the need to enhance support systems, Advance CTE and Education Strategy Group established a shared solutions work group in 2024 focused on EWBL in career pathways. This collaborative effort brought together representatives from state education agencies, intermediary organizations and national non-profits to develop strategies for expanding and improving EWBL opportunities.

This resource identifies core components of high-quality EWBL programs within career pathways and explores promising practices for implementing, maintaining and strengthening these opportunities for learners across the secondary and postsecondary levels.



The Landscape of EWBL in Career Pathways

Often, real-world work exposure for learners within career pathways is considered a linear continuum. Learners are introduced to the world of work in various ways, such as guest speakers and worksite tours. Gradually, the intensity and duration of the experiences increase, supporting exploration, preparation and training for the workforce. While a continuum is a helpful graphic to organize the change in experiences and models on paper, learners' paths to fulfilling career opportunities are not always linear.

WORK-BASED LEARNING CONTINUUM

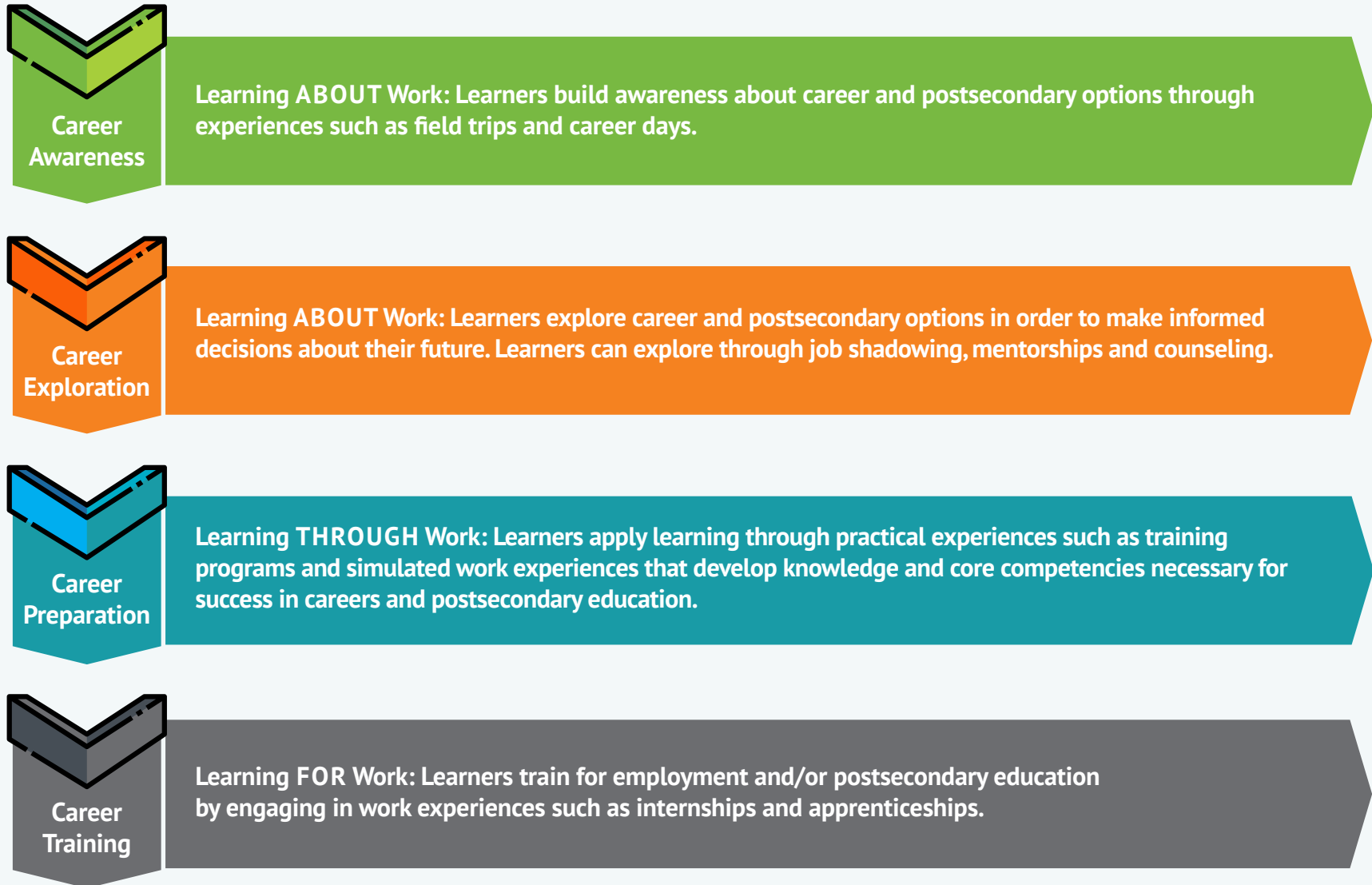
The [Framework for States to Increase Access to and Success in Work-Based Learning](#) offers a roadmap for states to expand equitable opportunities for all learners. Central to this framework is a continuum of work-based learning experiences, progressing from career awareness to career training.

The continuum is composed of three phases:

- **Learning ABOUT Work:** Learners explore career options, develop durable skills and build foundational knowledge through activities such as job shadowing, career exploration and industry tours.
- **Learning THROUGH Work:** Learners deepen their understanding of specific occupations through experiences such as internships, co-op programs and simulated work environments.
- **Learning FOR Work:** Learners gain advanced skills and industry credentials through apprenticeships, on-the-job training and work-based certifications.

While these phases provide a structured progression, recognizing that the journey to career success is often non-linear is essential. High-quality career pathways incorporate multiple entry and exit points, allowing learners to customize their experiences based on individual needs, interests and goals. By offering flexibility and support, states can create systems that empower all learners to reach their full potential.

FIGURE 1: WORK-BASED LEARNING CONTINUUM

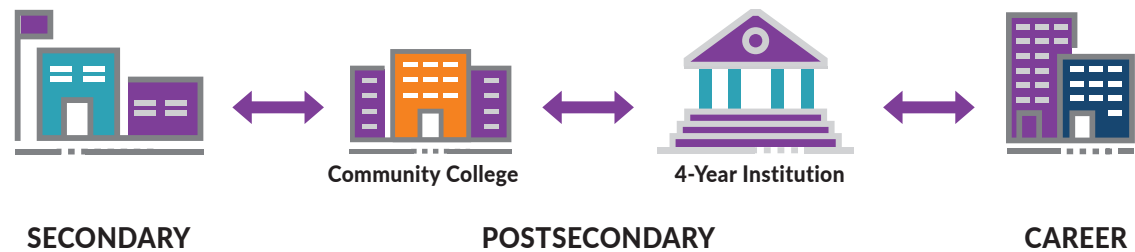


Adapted from ConnectEd

Defining Key Concepts

CAREER PATHWAYS

These structured frameworks link academic coursework, industry-aligned skills and real-world experiences across secondary, postsecondary and workforce settings. Career pathways provide learners with a clear and adaptable roadmap to achieve their career goals. By aligning education and employment opportunities, career pathways ensure that learners develop the competencies demanded by evolving industries, fostering economic growth and individual success.



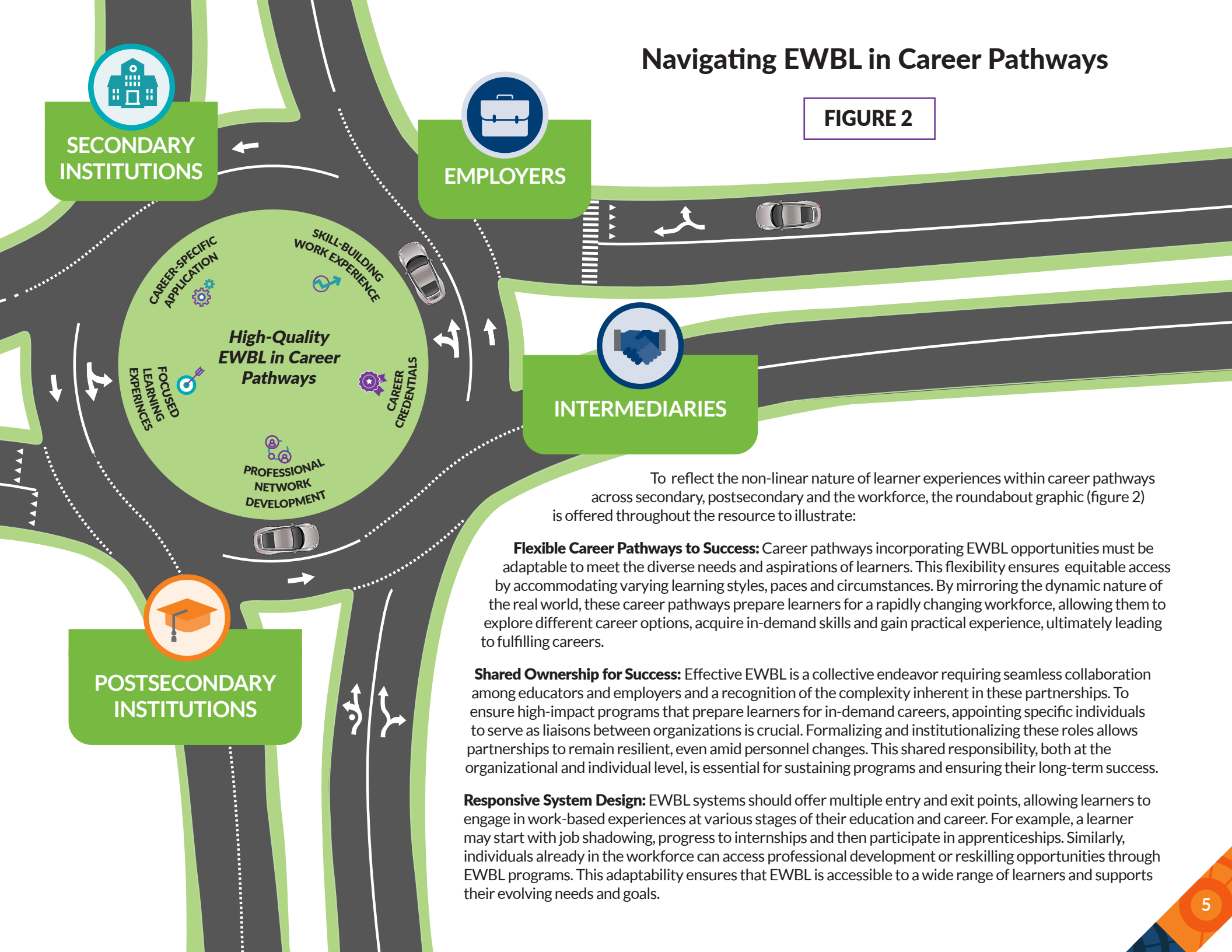
EXPERIENTIAL WORK-BASED LEARNING

EWBL is more than just observation. It encompasses extended hands-on learning experiences (lasting weeks, months, semesters or a year) in which learners actively engage in tasks, contribute to projects and develop valuable skills under professional guidance from instructors and industry experts, all within the context of chosen career pathways. These experiences integrate academic knowledge with real-world work in specific career fields, fostering a deeper understanding of the industry and the skills needed for success. While various examples of EWBL exist, the following modes of delivery are prioritized within high-quality career pathways:

School-Based Enterprises	Internships	Apprenticeships
School-Based Enterprises (SBEs), like DECA's School-Based Enterprise program , are learner-run businesses operating in a real market environment, offering products or services. These SBEs within career pathways provide a valuable platform for practical learning in areas such as marketing, finance and business operations that are directly relevant to learners' chosen career paths.	These structured learning experiences allow learners to gain practical experience in their chosen career field. Internships within career pathways provide hands-on work under close supervision, allowing learners to develop relevant skills and explore potential career paths.	These programs combine classroom instruction with on-the-job training under the guidance of experienced professionals. Apprentices gain industry-specific skills and knowledge while earning wages, positioning them for successful careers within a particular career pathway.

Navigating EWBL in Career Pathways

FIGURE 2



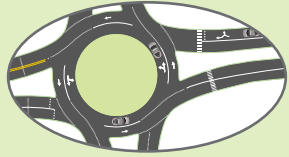
To reflect the non-linear nature of learner experiences within career pathways across secondary, postsecondary and the workforce, the roundabout graphic (figure 2) is offered throughout the resource to illustrate:

Flexible Career Pathways to Success: Career pathways incorporating EWBL opportunities must be adaptable to meet the diverse needs and aspirations of learners. This flexibility ensures equitable access by accommodating varying learning styles, paces and circumstances. By mirroring the dynamic nature of the real world, these career pathways prepare learners for a rapidly changing workforce, allowing them to explore different career options, acquire in-demand skills and gain practical experience, ultimately leading to fulfilling careers.

Shared Ownership for Success: Effective EWBL is a collective endeavor requiring seamless collaboration among educators and employers and a recognition of the complexity inherent in these partnerships. To ensure high-impact programs that prepare learners for in-demand careers, appointing specific individuals to serve as liaisons between organizations is crucial. Formalizing and institutionalizing these roles allows partnerships to remain resilient, even amid personnel changes. This shared responsibility, both at the organizational and individual level, is essential for sustaining programs and ensuring their long-term success.

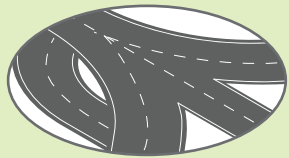
Responsive System Design: EWBL systems should offer multiple entry and exit points, allowing learners to engage in work-based experiences at various stages of their education and career. For example, a learner may start with job shadowing, progress to internships and then participate in apprenticeships. Similarly, individuals already in the workforce can access professional development or reskilling opportunities through EWBL programs. This adaptability ensures that EWBL is accessible to a wide range of learners and supports their evolving needs and goals.

HOW TO NAVIGATE THE ROUNDABOUT



Enabling Conditions for Equitable EWBL

A set of essential elements that creates an optimal environment for the successful implementation and scaling of EWBL opportunities within career pathways. These conditions are crucial for supporting equitable learner success and workforce development. Not only do critical partners collaborate to align with these five elements of high-quality EWBL experiences, but these elements also serve as valuable career preparation currency that learners carry forward, regardless of the path they choose.



Career Pathways

Dynamic routes that guide learners through interconnected experiences, bridging education and employment. These career pathways offer multiple entry and exit points, allowing individuals to explore various options, gain in-demand skills and ultimately achieve their career goals.



Seamless Advising

Continuous and coordinated support that guides learners along their career pathways. It involves providing timely information, resources and mentorship to help learners make informed decisions and navigate their educational and professional journeys.



On and Off Ramps

Flexible entry and exit points within career pathways that allow learners to seamlessly transition into and out of EWBL experiences. These points accommodate diverse learner needs, empowering individuals to explore different opportunities and return to their career pathways as their goals evolve.

To support the expansion and acceleration of high-quality and equitable career pathways, JPMorgan Chase launched the [New Skills ready network](#), a national initiative consisting of six sites, each composed of state, regional and local partners. The initiative draws on cross-sector partnerships to facilitate systems-change work, including designing, implementing and scaling real-world work experiences to ensure that learners of all levels can access the most beneficial opportunities to actualize their career goals.

How EWBL Prepares Learners, Supports Business and Industry and Empowers Regions and States to Meet Labor Demands



PREPARING LEARNERS

PREPARING LEARNERS

High-quality EWBL programs within career pathways, such as internships and apprenticeships, are proven to significantly benefit learners through increased employment rates and short-term and lifetime earnings.¹

SUPPORTING BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY

SUPPORTING BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY

In today's competitive landscape, employers actively seek skilled candidates with relevant work experience. EWBL programs within career pathways provide that crucial advantage for learners. Research shows internships are a differentiator when employers are deciding between two equally qualified candidates.² Additionally, more than 90 percent of employers prefer candidates with prior experience.³

EMPOWERING REGIONS AND STATES

EMPOWERING REGIONS AND STATES

States that prioritize and invest in robust EWBL infrastructure are poised to reap significant economic and workforce development benefits. By providing localities with the necessary resources, expertise and guidance, states can catalyze the expansion of high-quality EWBL programs within career pathways. As the nation grapples with a persistent labor shortage, cultivating a skilled workforce through strategic EWBL initiatives is imperative. By empowering regions to develop and implement effective programs, states can position themselves as leaders in talent development and economic growth.

Foundational Elements for EWBL

EWBL is a cornerstone of high-quality career pathways. These opportunities integrate classroom learning with real-world work experiences, fostering meaningful interactions between learners and employers. The experiences ensure that learners develop the specific skill sets needed in their chosen career paths, addressing current workforce demands. While various EWBL programs and opportunities may differ in their delivery, the following are essential elements of high-quality EWBL opportunities within career pathways:

Core Components of High-Quality EWBL Opportunities



Career-Specific Application: Learners directly apply classroom knowledge, aligned with industry standards, to solve problems and complete tasks that are relevant to their chosen career pathways.



Career-Valuable Credentials: Learners earn verifiable credentials (credits, certifications, etc.) that document their learning, competency and experience and that are valued explicitly by employers in their chosen career pathways.



Focused Learning Experiences: Learners engage in well-structured opportunities that directly address their career goals and learning objectives within their chosen career pathways.



Professional Network Development: Learners receive ongoing support and guidance from mentors in their chosen career pathways. These connections provide valuable industry exposure, networking opportunities and potential career advancement.



Skill-Building Work Experience: Learners participate in EWBL opportunities that provide hands-on experience and develop essential skills for success in their chosen career pathways.



These core components can be implemented by leveraging policy and practice recommendations that create the conditions for EWBL to thrive. **Indiana** is making strides toward expanding learning experiences that build real-world skills by enacting legislation that expands EWBL in high schools, such as apprenticeships and internships, and implementing career scholarship accounts (CSAs).⁴ CSAs allow learners to receive \$5,000 for apprenticeships, career-related coursework or certification. The state also has legislation to expand options for CSAs and provide more time for learners to submit the necessary materials to qualify for the funds.



Critical Partners in the EWBL Landscape

Robust and meaningful EWBL opportunities for learners in career pathways require dynamic, collaborative and cross-sector partner relationships. A well-designed EWBL system will include the following partners in the development, design, implementation and continuous improvement of high-quality real-world work experiences:



The Foundation for Building a Skilled Workforce

ROLES

K–12 and secondary institutions serve as the keystone of high-quality career pathways. At these institutions, learners experience critical phases that prepare them for and support their experiences navigating EWBL opportunities. Secondary institutions play a crucial role in:

- **Clearly communicating** the value proposition of EWBL to learners, families and the entire school community.
- **Facilitating successful learner placement** in relevant EWBL experiences that align with individual interests and skill sets, acting as a navigation system for each learner’s journey.
- **Fostering partnerships with businesses** and informing industry partners about successful work with learners to ensure a high-quality, meaningful and valuable experience for all participants.
- **Shaping the program design** and curriculum to guarantee strong learning outcomes and offer supports as needed.

NEEDS

For K–12 and secondary partners to effectively support the EWBL landscape, they require intentional support from partnerships in the career pathways system, including local and state-level Career Technical Education (CTE) and career pathways leaders. Key areas in which support and collaboration can be most impactful include:

- **Easy-to-use communication tools** to promote EWBL effectively. In 2021, New America’s [Partnership to Advance Youth Apprenticeship](#) led a series of discussions to learn why some skilled trades have been hesitant to embrace real-world work experiences such as youth apprenticeship programs. The discussions revealed the top contributing factor to be misaligned expectations among partners.⁵ Common vocabulary that articulates goals and needs across partners can be developed through clear policies, definitions and frameworks to effectively promote and inform partners of this important work.
- **High-quality employer partners** with offerings that seamlessly connect with the existing curriculum. High-quality EWBL relies on partnerships with employers offering experiences that directly connect to the existing curriculum. These partnerships enable high-quality EWBL opportunities that benefit both learners and employers; learners gain valuable currency such as credits, certifications, credentials or licenses that advance their career pathways, while employers foster a robust talent pool to meet labor demands. To ensure clear communication of these achievements, secondary institutions should collaborate with employers to identify specific skills and competencies gained through EWBL and credits, certifications, etc. received by the learner. This transparency showcases learner growth and allows employers to confidently assess their skills and experience. The *New Skills ready network* Boston, **Massachusetts**, site [leverages the city’s existing assets](#) — such as the [Mayor of Boston’s Summer Youth Jobs](#) program and Boston’s workforce development board, the [Boston Private Industry Council](#) (PIC) — to increase EWBL opportunities for learners. The PIC serves as an intermediary in the landscape and effectively connects Boston Public Schools, higher education institutions, businesses, government agencies and community organizations to create workforce development solutions.



Building on the Foundation

ROLES

Postsecondary institutions serve as the bridge between the strong foundation laid by K–12 and secondary education and the demands of the workforce. They play a crucial role in:

- **Aligning curriculum for seamless workforce entry** by ensuring that the curriculum reflects current needs and translating classroom learning into real-world work experiences. This work includes aligning learning objectives with expectations for EWBL placements, which supports smooth transitions for learners entering the workforce.
- **Elevating promising practices, strategies and approaches** to support learners in EWBL opportunities within career pathways with specific attention to equity, inclusion and belonging.
- **Empowering employers to support EWBL success** by equipping them to mentor EWBL participants on their journeys effectively. This work includes offering guidance on EWBL participation, mentoring and even establishing processes to support continued EWBL partnerships and opportunities for learners.

NEEDS

To maximize the effectiveness of postsecondary partnerships in EWBL opportunities within career pathways, these partners should be supported with the following:

- **Comprehensive resources that clearly define EWBL** within career pathways and components within these experiences that should be true for both learners and employers. Resources should include what EWBL is and, if possible, what it is *not*. The **Florida** Career & Adult Education agency provides a [Work-Based Learning Toolkit](#). Within the toolkit, the [Work-Based Learning Manual](#) articulates federal and state policies and regulations as well as a list of “musts and mayas” for real-world work experiences.⁶ Local leaders can further strengthen this practice by adopting a toolkit that is specific to the region or area.
- **Frequent touch points with partners across the system** to comprehensively monitor learner progress, take stock of employer satisfaction, brainstorm opportunities, meet learners’ needs and remedy challenges. The *New Skills ready network’s* site lead model exemplifies the importance of centralized coordination and support. By facilitating cross-sector collaboration and continuous improvement, lead organizations can significantly enhance the impact of EWBL initiatives.
- **Partnership agreements across participants** that ensure that the political landscape creates the conditions for successful EWBL within career pathways. These agreements, such as articulation agreements or memoranda of understanding, can leverage state and local policies to create a supportive political landscape. Collaboration with postsecondary partners should focus on data sharing, tracking learner outcomes and identifying promising practices that are specific to the context. This collaborative approach will elevate the overall effectiveness of EWBL within career pathways. This [example learning agreement](#) from **Ohio** is an editable template designed to address requirements for real-world work experiences.⁷ The template is designed to be tailored or customized to reflect local program design and policies.



Shaping the Workforce

Beyond the educational foundation, employers and intermediaries are vital partners in ensuring that career pathways effectively bridge the gap between education and the workforce. They bring a real-world perspective, identify current and future skill needs and shape the practical application of what is learned in the classroom.

INTERMEDIARIES

- **Connecting regional partners** — employers, schools, CTE centers and postsecondary institutions — to establish a strong and collaborative network.
- **Demonstrating the return on investment** for partners through compelling case studies showcasing EWBL's value to all involved.
- **Developing a network for learners** engaged in EWBL programs to foster a sense of community and information exchange to prevent silos.
- **Facilitating program alignment** across K-12 and postsecondary partners, guaranteeing smooth transitions between educational stages.
- **Providing in-depth knowledge** of the key partners involved in EWBL programs, ensuring that everyone is aligned.
- **Providing resources** to overcome common roadblocks and barriers hindering successful EWBL implementation.

EMPLOYERS

- **Building and developing learners'** skills, confidence and expertise.
- **Championing EWBL initiatives** through advocacy for policies and funding that support high-quality, equitable opportunities for learners.
- **Concretizing and clarifying the skills, knowledge and abilities** learners need to have to succeed in specific careers, as employers are the ultimate receivers of talent.
- **Contributing expertise in workforce and educational institutions,** including offering guidance to navigate the complexities of the EWBL landscape.
- **Creating equitable opportunities** for learners that develop essential skills and provide career exposure.
- **Mentoring and coaching** learners as they develop and grow.



Shaping the Workforce

NEEDS

These integral partners are linchpins in the EWBL space: Intermediaries offer additional capacity, while employers are the experts in their chosen fields. Maintaining the collaboration of these partners requires the following intentional supports and resources:

- **Access to comprehensive career pathways resources** to effectively support high-quality EWBL opportunities. Intermediaries require these resources to support their role in providing technical assistance and training to educators and businesses. Comprehensive resources enable intermediaries to identify promising practices and build the capacity of their partners. Employers benefit from access to career pathways and EWBL resources to better understand the skills and knowledge that learners are acquiring through their education. This knowledge can help employers design more relevant and impactful EWBL experiences.
- **A thorough understanding of youth labor laws** to ensure learner safety and program compliance. Intermediaries should have a thorough understanding of youth labor laws to protect learners and comply with requirements. This knowledge is essential for developing guidelines, providing training and supporting partner organizations. Employers need to be aware of youth labor laws to create safe and compliant work environments. Understanding these regulations is crucial for avoiding potential liabilities.
- **Information on navigating regulations and funding sources** to keep the EWBL opportunities well maintained and financially sustainable. Intermediaries require knowledge of regulations and funding sources to navigate the landscape of EWBL. This information is essential for securing funding, building partnerships and ensuring program sustainability. Employers benefit from understanding available funding opportunities and regulations to support their participation in EWBL. This knowledge can help employers leverage resources and maximize the impact of their involvement.

Texas' Regional Convener Initiative – A Promising Practice for Connecting Partners

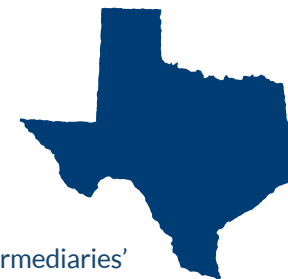
Texas' Regional Convener Initiative is an innovative strategy designed to create and support regional intermediaries throughout the state. Each of Texas' 28 Workforce Development Areas (WDA) is incentivized to designate a Tri-Agency Regional Convener. These conveners play a critical role in leading the development, implementation and monitoring of career pathways that align with targeted industries in their respective regions:

Regional Leadership: Each WDA designates a regional convener to oversee career and education pathway strategies.

Quality Standards: A formal designation process ensures that conveners meet specific standards, providing quality control across the state.

Collaboration Hub: Conveners connect employers, educational institutions, and workforce partners to create seamless, high-quality pathways for learners.

The Regional Convener Initiative offers a model of how intermediaries can elevate workforce development through structured, regionally tailored strategies. By investing in intermediaries' understanding of local industry needs and educational resources, Texas ensures more coherent, targeted career pathways that directly address employer demands.



Empowering Learners: Co-Creating Career Pathways

High-quality career pathways are built for and **with** learners. Throughout the entire process – design, development, implementation and evaluation – learners should be active partners. Learners are the navigators on their career pathways and EWBL journey, and their voices should be central to every step of the process. By actively incorporating learner feedback and input, leaders can continuously improve programs and opportunities. This process ensures that learners feel heard, supported and empowered to co-create their learning and career development experiences. When learners feel ownership over their education, their growth and development flourish.

The Denver, Colorado, project team for the *New Skills ready network* demonstrates the power of learner leadership by hosting a *Learner Voice Symposium*. *The Attainment Network* provides a platform for learners to share their insights and inform career pathway improvements. By prioritizing learner input, the project team is building a more responsive and relevant career pathways system that equips individuals with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in the workforce.

The following resources equip leaders of all levels to leverage learner voice to strengthen EWBL in career pathways:

- [Elevating Family Voice in Career Pathways](#)
- [With Learners, Not For Learners: A Toolkit for Elevating Learner Voice in CTE](#)



Promising Practices, Strategies, and Actions to Support EWBL

Across state and local levels, career pathways system leaders have a critical role in ensuring that all learners have equitable access to high-quality real-world work experiences aligned with their chosen career paths. This guide serves as a roadmap, outlining promising practices and actionable strategies for implementing, maintaining and strengthening EWBL opportunities within career pathways. The framework fosters connections between and across critical partners, highlighting how their collaboration drives systemic change and empowers learners on their career journeys.

Levels of EWBL Implementation

PLANNING

This section explores key strategies for planning and launching effective EWBL programs. It identifies steps for building partnerships with employers, creating robust work-based learning experiences and ensuring equitable access for all learners.

MAINTAINING

In this section the focus shifts to strategies for sustaining successful EWBL programs. It addresses promising approaches for ongoing program evaluation, continuous improvement and securing resources to ensure sustainability.

STRENGTHENING

Building upon a strong foundation, this section dives into strategies for expanding and enhancing existing EWBL programs. It explores approaches to deepen employer engagement, diversify work-based learning experiences and better support learner success throughout their career pathways and EWBL experiences.

Planning EWBL Within Career Pathways: A Collaborative Approach

Launching successful EWBL programs requires a collaborative effort across the career pathways system. This section outlines key strategies for establishing a solid foundation and explores the specific roles of critical partners: secondary institutions, postsecondary institutions, employers and intermediaries.

Within any context, the following foundational strategies should be considered when planning high-quality EWBL in career pathways:

Collaborate Across the System: Effective EWBL programs rely on strong collaboration among all partners. Regular communication, joint planning meetings and shared data systems are crucial.

Conduct a Needs Assessment: Assess the needs of learners, employers and the local workforce system. This work includes identifying existing skills gaps, available work placements and potential challenges.

Establish a Shared Vision: Leaders from secondary and postsecondary institutions, employers and intermediaries should collaborate to define a clear vision for EWBL programs within career pathways. This vision should emphasize equity, quality work experiences and alignment with industry needs.

Develop a Framework: Create a structured framework for EWBL programs, outlining the types of work experiences offered, eligibility criteria, mentorship opportunities and assessment methods.

Align Curriculum: Align secondary and postsecondary curriculum with industry standards and the competencies required to successfully complete EWBL experiences.



PLANNING EWBL WITHIN CAREER PATHWAYS



Secondary

- **Develop Career Pathways:** Collaborate with postsecondary institutions and employers to design career pathways that incorporate high-quality EWBL experiences.
- **Integrate Career Exploration:** Integrate career exploration activities into curriculum to help learners identify potential career paths and assess their fit for EWBL opportunities.
- **Manage Data Collection and Evaluation:** Collect data on participation, program outcomes and employer satisfaction to inform continuous improvement.
- **Provide Mentorship and Support:** Provide mentorship and ongoing support to learners throughout their EWBL experience, fostering a positive learning environment.
- **Support Learner Preparation:** Equip learners with the essential skills and knowledge needed to succeed in EWBL experiences such as communication, teamwork, professionalism and other durable skills.



Postsecondary

- **Acknowledge and Award Credit:** Develop a system for awarding academic credit or other forms of recognition for successful completion of EWBL experiences.
- **Foster Industry Connections:** Leverage existing industry relationships and actively seek new partnerships to develop work-based learning opportunities for learners.
- **Invest in Faculty Development:** Provide training and support for faculty to effectively integrate EWBL experiences into curriculum and supervise learners during placements.
- **Support Program Development:** Partner with secondary institutions and employers to develop and implement EWBL programs aligned with career pathways.



Employers and Intermediaries

- **Collect and Provide Feedback and Evaluation:** Provide feedback on performance and program effectiveness to inform continuous improvement.
- **Demonstrate Financial Investment:** Consider financial contributions to support program development, transportation or stipends for work-based learning experiences.
- **Identify Worksite Development:** Identify and develop high-quality work placements that provide learners with relevant and challenging experiences aligned with career pathways.
- **Lead Supervision and Mentorship:** Provide designated supervisors or mentors to guide and support learners during their work placements, offering feedback and opportunities for growth.

Maintaining EWBL Within Career Pathways: Ensuring Sustainability

Building upon a strong foundation is essential for ensuring the longevity and effectiveness of EWBL programs. This section explores key strategies for maintaining successful programs and highlights the ongoing contributions of critical partners: secondary institutions, postsecondary institutions, employers and intermediaries. Across all partners and contexts, the following are promising approaches to ensure sustainable, robust EWBL opportunities within career pathways:

Action Plan for Continuous Improvement: Based on evaluation findings, continuously improve EWBL opportunities by refining curriculum, strengthening mentorship opportunities and expanding work placement options.

Bolster Communication and Marketing: Effectively communicate the value and benefits of EWBL programs to partners, including potential participants, employers and policymakers. Use various communication channels to raise awareness and garner support.

Engage in Program Evaluation: Conduct regular program evaluations to assess learning outcomes, employer satisfaction and overall program effectiveness. Use data to identify areas for improvement and inform ongoing program development.

Nurture Existing Partnerships: Cultivate strong and ongoing partnerships with employers and community organizations. Regularly engage with partners to discuss program needs, explore new work-based learning opportunities and identify potential challenges.

Refine Resources: Secure sustainable funding sources to support program costs, including staff development, learner supports and transportation. Explore grant opportunities, [braiding funding](#), partnerships with local businesses and fundraising initiatives.





Across each critical partner in the EWBL system, the following are opportunities to maintain high-quality EWBL within career pathways:

MAINTAINING EWBL WITHIN CAREER PATHWAYS



Secondary

- **Assess the congruence between pre- and post-EWBL** curriculum, classroom activities and real-world work experiences to optimize learner outcomes. By aligning classroom learning with on-the-job experiences, learners gain a deeper understanding of their chosen career paths, enhancing their preparedness for the workforce. Due to the dynamic world of work, this process ensures that what students learn in the classroom directly applies to their work environment. It bridges the gap between theory and practice, making education more relevant and effective.
- **Evaluate learner access and progression through EWBL** stages to identify barriers, support needs and system misalignments. These insights will inform targeted improvements to meet learner and employer needs. Identifying these opportunities can be informed by learners themselves by leveraging their feedback and input on program improvements.
- **Expand learner networks** through diverse EWBL experiences to foster mentorship, collaboration and career exploration across industries. By connecting learners with professionals from various fields, learners gain broader perspectives, identify potential career paths and build essential skills. Cross-sector mentorship, collaborative projects and industry networking events are promising approaches to support network cultivation.



Postsecondary

- **Diversify real-world work experiences** to meet learners' interests and needs. Partners across the system can work collaboratively to ensure access to opportunities regardless of a learner's locality by including virtual and hybrid opportunities for work, when appropriate for the field, learner and employer. This added layer of flexibility can expand opportunities for learners within and across a range of career pathways.
- **Empower learner advocacy** by equipping learners with the communication skills to articulate their EWBL experiences and impact on their career development.
- **Leverage learner voice** to ensure that EWBL opportunities are providing learners with meaningful, high-quality experiences aligned with their career goals. Learner engagements such as focus groups, interviews or even learner-led conferences such as **Wisconsin's WISCore** provide the opportunity for learners to share their lived experiences and proactively shape their future educational experiences.



Employers and Intermediaries

- **Drive innovation in EWBL** to address evolving workforce demands. As industry leaders, employers should share emerging models and insights with partners.
- **Position EWBL participants as a dynamic talent pool** by aligning EWBL opportunities with industry demands so employers and intermediaries can cultivate a robust pipeline of skilled workers. With ongoing support, participants will graduate work ready and prepared to excel in their careers.
- **Take stock and report the benefits** for all partners. As success emerges from the EWBL opportunities, these stories should be elevated as proof of concept to embolden other leaders to engage and support diverse, high-quality EWBL opportunities for learners.

Strengthening EWBL Within Career Pathways: Expanding Opportunities and Impact

Building upon the strong foundation and commitment to continuous improvement outlined in the previous sections, this section explores strategies for strengthening EWBL programs within career pathways. It delves into innovative approaches to deepen employer engagement, diversify work-based learning experiences and further support learners' success throughout their career journeys. Regardless of partner or level, the following promising approaches are foundational to strengthening EWBL opportunities within career pathways:

Center Data-Driven Decisionmaking: Use program data to inform decisions about program expansion, development of new career pathways and identification of high-demand skills within the local workforce. Setting goals using Advance CTE's [Achieving Inclusive CTE Goal-Setting Tool](#) is a great way to begin the process of exploring opportunities and cultivating greater inclusivity across career pathways and EWBL opportunities.

Deepen Employer Engagement: Develop tiered partnership models that offer various levels of employer involvement, from providing work placements to co-developing curriculum and serving on advisory boards.

Empower Learner Ownership: Empower learners to take ownership of their EWBL experiences by involving them in selecting work placements, setting learning goals and reflecting on their progress.

Leverage Technology Integration: Leverage technology to enhance work-based learning experiences. Use online learning platforms to provide supplemental resources, facilitate communication between mentors and learners and track learner progress.

Scale Impact: As EWBL opportunities within career pathways create proof points, leverage those proof points to scale opportunities to ensure greater access to real-world work opportunities. Leverage successful EWBL models to expand access and participation.



● Across each critical partner in the EWBL system, the following are recommendations to strengthen EWBL within career pathways:

STRENGTHENING EWBL WITHIN CAREER PATHWAYS



Secondary

- **Extend career guidance and support beyond high school** to support lifelong learner journeys. Leverage alumni as mentors to guide current learners in navigating postsecondary options and career pathways.
- **Streamline secondary-to-postsecondary EWBL transitions.** Enhance learner support through both coordinated advising that is seamless from secondary to postsecondary and employer partnerships as the learners' EWBL experiences evolve.



Postsecondary

- **Invest in specialists to enhance analysis of EWBL's** impact on learner outcomes and curriculum alignment. This added capacity can strengthen accountability, optimize resource allocation and identify emerging trends in the short and long terms.
- **Pilot innovative EWBL models** to align learner outcomes with workforce demands. As the nexus of education and industry, postsecondary institutions are uniquely positioned to develop talent hubs that can both inform and connect critical partners in the landscape.



Employers and Intermediaries

- **Provide opportunities for mentorship beyond the work** placement itself, fostering ongoing relationships between mentors and learners to support long-term career development.
- **Champion innovative approaches to EWBL program design** by facilitating knowledge sharing among partners and fostering collaboration on new initiatives. Advocate for policies and funding that support the expansion and sustainability of EWBL programs.

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¹ Ross, M., Kazis, R., Bateman, N., & Stateler, L. (2020, November). Work-based learning can advance equity and opportunity for America's young people. *Metropolitan Policy Program at Brookings*. https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/20201120_BrookingsMetro_Work-based-learning_Final_Report.pdf

² *Jobs for the Future*. (2021, October 19). Pathways to prosperity levers: Work-based learning. <https://www.jff.org/idea/framework/work-based-learning/>

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ H.B. 1002, *Indiana General Assembly* (2023). <https://iga.in.gov/legislative/2023/bills/house/1002/details>

⁵ Prebil, M., & White, T. (2023, April 19). Improving communications to develop work-based learning programs in the skilled trades. *New America*. <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/briefs/laying-a-foundation-for-successful-communication-work-based-learning-in-the-skilled-trades/>

⁶ Florida Department of Education. (n.d.). Career & adult education: Work-based learning. <https://www.fldoe.org/academics/career-adult-edu/work-based-learning.stm>

⁷ Ohio Department of Education. (2020). Work-based learning agreement.

<https://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/Career-Tech/Career-Connections/Work-Based-Learning/Work-Based-Learning-for-Schools-and-Educators/NEW-Work-Based-Learning-Agreement-10-15-2020.docx.aspx?lang=en-US>