



What is the “Pathways Model?”

The Pathways Model is an *integrated, institution-wide* approach to student success based on intentionally designed, clear, coherent and structured educational experiences, informed by available evidence, that guide each student effectively and efficiently from her/his point of entry through to attainment of high-quality postsecondary credentials and careers with value in the labor market.

Central to the pathways model are clear, educationally coherent program maps—which include specific course sequences, progress milestones, and program learning outcomes—that are aligned to what will be expected of students upon program completion in the workforce and in education at the next level in a given field. Students are helped from the start to explore academic and career options, choose a program of study, and develop a plan based on the program maps. These plans simplify student decision-making, and they enable colleges to provide predictable schedules, frequent feedback, and targeted support as needed to help students stay on track and complete their programs more efficiently. They also facilitate efforts by faculty to ensure that students are building the skills across their programs that they will need to succeed in employment and further education.

Guided Pathways Essential Practices

The four dimensions of the Pathways Model, together with essential practices under each, are the following:

1. *Clarify paths to student end goals*
 - a) Simplify students’ choices with default **program maps** developed by faculty and advisors that show students a clear pathway to completion, further education and employment in fields of importance to the region.
 - b) Establish **transfer pathways** through alignment of pathway courses and expected learning outcomes with transfer institutions, to optimize applicability of community college credits to university majors.
2. *Help students choose and enter a pathway*
 - a) Bridge **K12 to higher education** by assuring early remediation in the final year of high school through the application of courseware technology in strong K12/higher ed partnerships, such as the TN SAILS model.
 - b) Redesign traditional remediation as an **“on-ramp” to a program of study**, which helps students explore academic and career options from the beginning of their college experience, aligns math and other foundation skills coursework with a student’s program of study, and integrates and contextualizes instruction to build academic and non-academic foundation skills throughout the college-level curriculum, particularly in program “gateway” courses.

- c) Provide **accelerated remediation** to help *very poorly prepared* students succeed in college-level courses as soon as possible.

3. Help students stay on path

- a) Support students through a strong **advising** process, embedded and ongoing in the pathway experience and supported by appropriate technology, to help students make informed choices, strengthen clarity about transfer and career opportunities at the end of their chosen college path, ensure they develop an academic plan with predictable schedules, monitor their progress, and intervene when they go off track.
- b) Embed **academic and non-academic supports** throughout students' programs to promote student learning and persistence.

4. Ensure that students are learning

- a) Establish program-level **learning outcomes** aligned with the requirements for success in employment and further education in a given field and apply the results of learning outcomes assessment to improve the effectiveness of instruction across programs.
- b) Integrate **group projects, internships, and other applied learning experiences** to enhance instruction and student success in courses across programs of study.
- c) Ensure incorporation of **effective teaching practice** throughout the pathways.

Essential Capacities for Guided Pathways Reforms

Research and experience in the field indicate that the following capacities are essential for motivating and supporting higher education institutions and systems to undertake the broad-scale institutional reforms involved in implementing guided pathways effectively and at scale.

- **Leadership** demonstrating skills for managing and sustaining large-scale transformational change.
- Broad and authentic **engagement** of college faculty and staff—particularly advisors—in the design, implementation, evaluation, and ongoing improvement of pathways for students.
- **Institutional will and capacity to use data and evidence** to design academic and career pathways, monitor student progress, and implement needed improvements over time.
- **Technological tools and infrastructure** appropriate to support student progress through guided pathways.
- Commitment to the level of **strategically targeted professional development** that will be required to design and implement pathways at scale.
- **Policy conditions** established at the state, governing board, system, and institutional level that provide incentives, structures and supports for pathway design and implementation at scale while removing barriers.
- A **continuing action research agenda** that examines the efficacy of guided pathways and develops practical knowledge and tools to support effective implementation at scale.



AACC Pathways 2.0 Project Description

Building Capacity For Reform at Scale In The Community College Field

A decade of intensive focus on improving student success in community colleges has produced notable effects: a dramatic increase in awareness of the challenges and in commitment to college completion as a critical goal; a sea change in the use of data to assess and monitor student success and institutional performance; a growing body of evidence regarding effective educational practice in community colleges; and increasing numbers of institutions that are putting that knowledge into practice and demonstrating encouraging results. These promising developments can be attributed to the unprecedented efforts of a collection of philanthropies, national organizations, state systems, and institutions that have worked both collectively and individually to investigate practice, implement change, and produce results.

Now, there is a striking convergence of research and lessons of experience, as these people and their organizations have come to the shared understanding that progress, while evident in some places, is too slow; that the favored solutions of the past decade, while often necessary components of change, do not adequately address the magnitude of the challenges community colleges and their students face; and that typically, the changes thus far achieved have not been fundamental enough—and certainly not scaled enough—to achieve the improvements in completion of college credentials with strong labor market value, especially among low-income students and students of color, that are necessary to *reclaim the American Dream*.

Recognizing these realities—and affirming the critical role of America’s community colleges, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) has undertaken, with initial funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, a national project focused on building capacity for community colleges to design and implement *structured academic and career pathways* for all of their students.

Building on emerging research and experience in the field, the project reflects AACC’s commitment to follow through strategically on recommendations set forth in the 2012 report of the 21st-Century Commission on the Future of Community Colleges, *Reclaiming the American Dream*, and the 2014 implementation guide, *Empowering Community Colleges to Build the Nation’s Future*.

From Pathways 1.0 to Pathways 2.0

In the initial phase of the Pathways Project, launched in late Summer 2015, AACC worked with its national partners (below) and a competitively selected group of 30 community colleges to design and execute a series of six pathways institutes. In response to expressed need in the field, AACC committed to the 2017 launch of Pathways 2.0. In accord with commitments made to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, this second phase is based on a full fee-for-service model. Participating colleges thus commit to payment of annual fees over the three-year period of their participation. In addition, this second phase of Pathways work affords the opportunity to improve the model, based on feedback and experience. (See below.)

National Partners

In this second phase of pathways work, AACC continues its collaboration with key national partners: **Achieving the Dream, Inc.**, **Aspen Institute**, the **Center for Community College Student Engagement**, the **Community College Research Center**, **Jobs for the Future**, the **National Center for Inquiry and Improvement**, and **Public Agenda**.

COLLEGE SERVICES AND SUPPORTS IN PATHWAYS 2.0

The Pathways Institute Series

The project includes a model series of institutes, each 2.5 days in length and each engaging five-person teams of varying composition from a competitively selected group of colleges. The three institutes incorporated in the Pathways 2.0 model will support participating community colleges in work to design and implement clear, structured student pathways to high-quality credentials that are aligned both to university transfer and to jobs with value in the labor market. Designated college teams will attend three institutes scheduled over the three years of the project—2017, 2018, and 2019. Each event will focus on critical aspects of institutional change and pathway design/implementation; each will require advance work by the colleges, and each will result in products developed by the participating college teams, including action plans and assessment of needs for technical assistance. The institute format combines discussions with experts, coaching, and facilitated discussion/planning sessions for college teams.

Customized Technical Assistance: College Site Visits

In response to feedback from colleges—both those involved in Pathways 1.0 and others that aspire to be involved in subsequent work—the Pathways 2.0 project will involve college participation in three rather than six institutes and will augment those learning experiences with three customized two-day on-site technical assistance visits to the college campus. The focus and desired outcomes of the onsite technical assistance will be determined through consultation between project leaders/partners and college leaders, so that the work is fully aligned with college needs and adds momentum to the design and implementation of guided pathways at scale for the college's students.

One-Day Institutes in Conjunction with AACC Conventions in 2018 and 2019

A third component of the redesigned model for Pathways 2.0 will be two focused one-day institutes conducted in conjunction with AACC's annual convention. These hands-on events will focus primarily on issues associated with leadership for large-scale institutional change, but will remain flexible enough to address challenges that emerge through participant colleges' work on pathways reforms.

In sum, Pathways 2.0 is a model revised in response to college feedback, retaining the value of institutes that bring colleges together, while also achieving both an increased level of customization to the needs of individual colleges and reduced travel costs associated with the project.

College Participation

Pathways 2.0 involves, through a competitive application process, AACC member *colleges that demonstrate serious commitment to transformational work at scale* to improve college completion and equity in student outcomes. Colleges receive no direct funding—and in fact, as noted above, pay an annual participation fee; but most on-site costs of institute participation

(i.e., materials, coaching, hotel rooms, refreshment breaks, and most meals) are covered by the project budget. The college is responsible for travel expenses for a 5-person team, including airfare, ground transportation, parking, and non-institute meals. College CEOs are expected to participate fully in all project events.

Implementation Planning, Momentum Data and Progress Monitoring

Pathways 2.0 includes the development of a project work plan, based on each college's relevant work to date and incorporating on-site technical assistance to address high-priority tasks in the process of designing and implementing guided pathways for all students. College teams will develop the plan in consultation with project leaders/partners and pathways coaches.

As part of the work with participating institutions, the project aims to emphasize use of a small set of data points that serve as strong indicators of student momentum. In addition, an inventory developed by the Community College Research Center will be used to establish baseline status and then to assess periodically each college's progress on implementation of essential features of guided pathways reforms.



PATHWAYS PARTNERS





Guided Pathways: Planning, Implementation, Evaluation

Creating guided pathways requires managing and sustaining large-scale transformational change. The work begins with thorough planning, continues through consistent implementation, and depends on ongoing evaluation. **The goals are to improve rates of college completion, transfer, and attainment of jobs with value in the labor market — and to achieve equity in those outcomes.**

PLANNING

ESSENTIAL CONDITIONS

Make sure the following conditions are in place – prepared, mobilized, and adequately resourced – to support the college's large-scale transformational change:

- Strong change leadership throughout the institution
- Faculty and staff engagement
- Commitment to using data
- Capacity to use data
- Technology infrastructure
- Professional development
- Favorable policy (state, system, and institutional levels) and board support
- Commitment to student success and equity

PREPARATION/AWARENESS

Understand where you are, prepare for change, and build awareness by:

- Engaging stakeholders and making the case for change
- Establishing a baseline for key performance indicators
- Building partnerships with K-12, universities, and employers
- Developing flowcharts of how students choose, enter, and complete programs
- Developing an implementation plan with roles and deadlines

SUSTAINABILITY

Commit to pathways for the long term and make sure they are implemented for all students by:

- Determining barriers to sustainability (state, system, and institutional levels)
- Redefining the roles of faculty, staff, and administrators as needed
- Identifying needs for professional development and technical assistance
- Revamping technology to support the redesigned student experience
- Reallocating resources as needed
- Continuing to engage key stakeholders, especially students
- Integrating pathways into hiring and evaluation practices

IMPLEMENTATION

CLARIFY THE PATHS

Map all programs to transfer and career and include these features:

- Detailed information on target career and transfer outcomes
- Course sequences, critical courses, embedded credentials, and progress milestones
- Math and other core coursework aligned to each program of study

HELP STUDENTS GET ON A PATH

Require these supports to make sure students get the best start:

- Use of multiple measures to assess students' needs
- First-year experiences to help students explore the field and choose a major
- Full program plans based on required career/transfer exploration
- Contextualized, integrated academic support to help students pass program gateway courses
- K-12 partnerships focused on career/college program exploration

HELP STUDENTS STAY ON THEIR PATH

Keep students on track with these supports:

- Ongoing, intrusive advising
- Systems for students to easily track their progress
- Systems/procedures to identify students at risk and provide needed supports
- A structure to redirect students who are not progressing in a program to a more viable path

ENSURE STUDENTS ARE LEARNING

Use these practices to assess and enrich student learning:

- Program-specific learning outcomes
- Project-based, collaborative learning
- Applied learning experiences
- Inescapable student engagement
- Faculty-led improvement of teaching practices
- Systems/procedures for the college and students to track mastery of learning outcomes that lead to credentials, transfer, and/or employment

EARLY OUTCOMES

Measure key performance indicators, including:

- Number of college credits earned in first term
- Number of college credits earned in first year
- Completion of gateway math and English courses in the student's first year
- Number of college credits earned in the program of study in first year
 - Persistence from term 1 to term 2
 - Rates of college-level course completion in students' first academic year
 - Equity in outcomes

Revisit conditions, sustainability, and implementation. Continuously improve pathways by building on elements that work and adjusting or discarding elements that are not serving all students well.

EVALUATION