

# Guide to Building a Broad-Based Coalition

Supporting the Development and Sustainability of a System of Pathways

As communities across California commit to developing systems of high school pathways that will engage students in school and prepare them to succeed in postsecondary opportunities and contribute to a vital regional economy, many are realizing the importance of providing *broad-based support* for this work.

Students need a choice of pathways focused on various industry themes—which requires districts to offer systems of pathways. This is challenging work and takes many years of dedicated attention by a host of partners. Whether planned and implemented quickly or gradually, the time it takes to develop a system of pathways sometimes extends beyond the tenure of a superintendent or the election cycle of school board members. Thus, it is critical that key stakeholders form a Broad-Based Coalition to maintain the vision, dedicate resources to realize that vision, and share the accountability for results. After all, building a system of pathways relies on the expertise, influence, staff support, and contributions of a full range of partners.

This *Guide* is intended to help communities conceptualize and form a Broad-Based Coalition that will mature over time and ultimately assume primary responsibility for sustaining a system of high quality pathways. Of course, each community will approach this work differently and adapt features of the Broad-Based Coalition to meet its unique values, interests, and needs.



## STEP 1: GETTING STARTED

There is no one right place to start to form a Broad-Based Coalition, but each community should examine existing building blocks so that they do not have to start from square one. Answering the following questions will help lead the community to some logical next steps.

**LEAD AGENCY:** Is there an influential and respected organization (other than the school district) that is committed to building a system of pathways and willing to join the school district and take a lead role to form a coalition? Examples of organizations include the chamber of commerce,<sup>1</sup> an educational foundation, a community-based organization, the mayor’s office, or a postsecondary institution. If not, the school district may serve initially as the sole lead agency.

**EXISTING STRUCTURE:** Is there a group of stakeholders with interests related to pathways that convenes somewhat regularly and could serve as a foundation to establish a more formal Broad-Based Coalition? Examples may include a P-16 council, a business-education alliance, a chamber of commerce education committee, a youth council (of the Workforce Investment Board), or a mayor’s round table on youth. If no existing cross-agency group seems to serve as a viable foundation, a lead agency may have to begin recruiting from scratch. No matter the genesis of the group, an objective must be to evolve the Broad-Based Coalition beyond this initial structure and become an entity unto itself.

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<sup>1</sup> Ford NGL indicates that historical precedent has elevated business-related organizations to be better situated to handle this lead agency task.

## 2

**STEP 2: RECRUITING INITIAL MEMBERS**

Ideally, the Broad-Based Coalition eventually includes a cross-section of organizations representing most, if not all of the stakeholder groups listed below. Yet, it is reasonable to start with a core group of representatives from key organizations, as long as the group shares a common vision and plan for what the Broad-Based Coalition will become.

- K–12 education
- Postsecondary education and training institutions, including apprenticeships
- Corporations
- Business organizations and industry associations
- Labor unions
- Mayor’s office and other city, civic, and service organizations
- Community-based organizations, including community and/or family foundations
- Faith-based organizations
- Parent, student, and advocacy groups
- Workforce and economic development entities

Recruitment strategies will depend on the level of contacts currently championing the pathways approach. For example, a superintendent, mayor, or corporate CEO may be able to recruit other organizational heads who may commit their entire organization. But, if the champions of a pathways approach are not chief executives or are unable to get the attention of high-level leaders, recruitment must begin with interested individuals and progress to getting the attention of chief executives who are able to commit their organizations.

## 3

**STEP 3: DEFINING THE COALITION**

Each community will need to define the Broad-Based Coalition in a way that is consistent with their community goals and expectations. The following serves as a starting point for customization.

A Broad-Based Coalition consists of local and regional organizations that share:

- **Common vision** for improving educational opportunities for our youth, leading to greater economic vitality of the community;
- **Commitment** to expanding quality pathways as a primary strategy for improving district high schools and student outcomes;
- **Responsibility** for designing, implementing, and sustaining high quality pathways and the systems that support them; and
- **Accountability** for results—students graduating from high school ready for both postsecondary options and career opportunities.

## 4

**STEP 4: CLARIFYING FUNCTIONS**

Each community will determine appropriate functions for its Broad-Based Coalition. Below is a list of sample functions.

- **Link education and economic development.** The coalition should pay attention to the economic and workforce development needs of the region and ensure that pathways support sustainable workforce competitiveness and community prosperity through transforming teaching and learning, redesigning high schools, and sustaining change through business and civic leadership.
- **Create the political will.** The coalition should take responsibility for establishing and maintaining the political will to stay the course during a period of five, ten, or more years necessary to implement effectively and fully a system of high quality pathways.
- **Share a common vision.** The coalition should carry a shared vision of the larger community that youth deserve an education that prepares them for both college and career—not just one or the other—and that a pathways approach has been demonstrated through research to improve attendance and engagement, reduce high school dropout rates, raise student achievement, increase high school completion and postsecondary transition, and boost students' earning power after high school.
- **Advocate and raise awareness.** Members of the coalition should persistently and passionately advocate for youth, pathways, and the district and community systems that support them. Coalition members make it an ongoing priority to raise awareness and engage stakeholders in active support of a pathways approach. Coalition members should use consistent messages to advocate and build awareness.
- **Participate in planning.** Coalition members should play an active role in conducting an in-depth needs and capacity assessment that leads to a detailed multi-year implementation plan designed to guide the work of the school district and its many partners to implement a system of high quality pathways.
- **Share responsibility for implementation.** Coalition members should share responsibility for the effective implementation of a system of pathways. Roles and responsibilities understandably differ from one stakeholder group to another (see Step 5), but should be guided by the multi-year implementation plan.
- **Share accountability.** The coalition should establish mechanisms to hold itself accountable for results. This may include maintaining a commitment to continual improvement; establishing, measuring, and reporting on progress measures, benchmarks, and/or outcomes; contracting with an evaluation firm; and/or other methods of gathering evidence and demonstrating that intended outcomes are being met.
- **Establish a foundation for work-based learning.** The coalition should help build the infrastructure for a robust work-based learning system that provides all pathway students with a progression of learning opportunities—in school, the community, and the workplace—that intentionally bring relevance to the curriculum and develop workplace competencies.

- **Align efforts.** The coalition should consciously and consistently ensure that the multi-year implementation plan for a system of pathways aligns with strategic plans, initiatives, and projects of the city, county, regional industry associations, business organizations, postsecondary institutions, economic development organizations, community groups, and others.
- **Allocate resources.** The coalition should assist with identifying, pursuing, and securing external funding sources that support pathways and strengthen connections between pathways and business/industry and the community at large.

## 5

### **STEP 5: DETERMINING ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES FOR STAKEHOLDER GROUPS**

Although all coalition member organizations may share a commitment to improving educational outcomes and regional economic vitality, each stakeholder group contributes different knowledge, interests, contacts, perspectives, and areas of expertise. Due to the diversity of membership, organizations will play varied roles and assume responsibilities that cater to their strengths. Below are sample roles and responsibilities for coalition members.

#### **Business and Industry Partners**

1. Play a central role in shaping the Linked Learning implementation plan and framing the scope, trajectory and process for building a system of pathways.
2. Provide input to establish an infrastructure for a system of work-based learning opportunities for pathway students;
3. Offer assistance on using data to measure outcomes;
4. Participate in industry-specific advisory boards;
5. Advise teachers on project design;
6. Help ensure that technical courses remain aligned with industry standards;
7. Provide work-based learning opportunities for students;
8. Coordinate industry-based fund development to support related pathways; and
9. Promote the Linked Learning vision to policymakers.

#### **Chamber of Commerce and Industry Associations**

1. Advocate for pathways in the community and with policymakers;
2. Convene and recruit business partners (i.e., members) to participate;
3. Help coordinate events that require participation of many business partners—e.g., career fairs; and
4. Recognize and/or reward business organizations that contribute most significantly to pathway success.

### **Mayor's Office/Civic Organizations**

1. Advocate for pathways in the community and with policymakers;
2. Ensure city priorities reflect education goals promoted by a pathways approach;
3. Leverage philanthropic support for pathway expansion;
4. Promote regional transportation policies that facilitate student access to their pathway of choice;
5. Initiate and/or support bond measures and other funding strategies that support pathways;
6. Maximize workforce investment efforts; and
7. Recognize and/or reward civic and community organizations that contribute most significantly to pathway success.

### **Colleges, Universities, and Apprenticeship Programs**

1. Develop partnerships with school district that, as appropriate and available
  - a. Offers pathway students access to dual enrollment opportunities accompanied by support services;
  - b. Articulates advanced pathway courses;
  - c. Encourages and/or expects faculty to collaborate with high school pathway teachers on curriculum development and professional development opportunities;
  - d. Guarantees admissions to pathway graduates; and
  - e. Shares facilities and equipment.

### **Workforce Boards**

1. Collaborate on fund development efforts to support pathways and broader workforce goals; and
2. Share and/or grant access to support services for pathway students—e.g., career guidance, counseling, child care, subsidized public transportation, and job placement.

### **Economic Development Agencies**

1. Provide economic trend data to school district;
2. Help align industry growth and pathway sector selection; and
3. Consider creative fund development strategies to support pathways.

### **Labor Unions**

1. Advocate for pathways among membership;
2. Promote policies that support effective pathway development, expansion, and sustainability; and
3. Create pre-apprenticeship programs and/or share training facilities with pathways in like industries.

### **Community-based Organizations**

1. Build awareness about the promise of pathways to better prepare youth for their futures;
2. Create the political will to establish and sustain high quality pathways;
3. Initiate and/or promote fund development efforts that support pathways; and
4. Work with districts/schools to establish pathway themes that are supported by the community.

### **Faith-based Organizations**

1. Build awareness about the promise of pathways to better prepare youth for their futures;
2. Engage parents to support pathways;
3. Engage their congregations to support work-based learning experiences for community youth;
4. Help coordinate and provide support services for pathway students.

### **Parent Groups**

1. Build awareness about the promise of pathways to better prepare youth for their futures;
2. Support fund development efforts that benefit pathways;
3. Advocate for equitable student access to pathways and transportation policies to support access;
4. Work with districts/schools to establish pathway themes that are supported by the community; and
5. Monitor pathway quality and access.

### **Student Groups**

1. Build awareness about and spread enthusiasm for pathways that better prepare youth for their futures;
2. Provide industry-specific leadership opportunities—e.g., FBLA, HOSA, FFA, DECA; and
3. Represent a student voice on community, district, and site leadership teams.

## 6

**STEP 6: FORMALIZING THE COALITION**

To effectively perform the functions listed above, a Broad-Based Coalition should formalize its functions and operate as an established organization that includes:

**Clear Definition**—Leadership should clearly define the Coalition’s membership, roles and responsibilities, vision, and structure.

**Designated Leaders**—Leadership may be shared by members of an executive committee, either on a rotating basis or co-chair arrangement. It is not recommended that the Superintendent serve as a sole chair.

**Formal Structure**—Structure may include an executive committee made up of the chief executives from key stakeholders, several task- or function-focused committees or task forces whose work is directly tied to the multi-year implementation plan, and established reporting mechanisms.

**Regular Meetings**—The Broad-Based Coalition should convene semi-annually or quarterly. The executive committee and other committees or task forces would likely meet more frequently.

**Organizational Commitment**—The Broad-Based Coalition cannot depend solely on the involvement and commitment of a limited number of individuals from each partner organization. Individuals may change jobs, retire, or have a shift in life circumstances that limit involvement. Organizational commitments guarantee ongoing support in a systemic way. It may require orientation, mentoring, or training of organizational representatives so that they are capable of taking on key roles, but the commitment is more likely to be sustained. The process of recruiting and retaining partners often is eased by establishing and communicating a clear set of obligations from the beginning.

**Master Plan**—Although the school district may have developed a multi-year implementation plan for designing and implementing a system of high quality pathways, the coalition should also establish its own plan that supports the district plan. The Ford Motor Company Fund’s Next Generation Communities has developed a thoughtful and tested process for doing so.