



Equitable Pathways Hypotheses Spotlights

AT A GLANCE

The Building Equitable Pathways hypotheses guide the development of pathways that equitably support all young people, especially youth of color and youth who are experiencing poverty, in building rewarding and successful futures. These spotlights show each hypothesis in action.

AUTHORS

Nancy Hoffman
Senior Advisor
JFF

Ankita Jhaveri
Senior Program Manager
JFF

Derek Niño
Associate Director
JFF

Kimberly Perrella
Communications Manager
JFF

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and JFF's partners in the Building Equitable Pathways initiative for your contributions to the development of this resource; we appreciate your commitment to creating a better future for all young people through college and career pathways: Boys & Girls Club of Greater Memphis, Brooklyn STEAM Center, Career Connect Washington, CareerWise Colorado, HERE to HERE, Rush Education and Career Hub, YouthForce NOLA, Equal Measure, Mission Minded, and Square Button.

About JFF

JFF is a national nonprofit that drives transformation in the American workforce and education systems. For more than 35 years, JFF has led the way in designing innovative and scalable solutions that create access to economic advancement for all. www.jff.org

About Building Equitable Pathways

This work, funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, aims to provide youth with the information and support they need to make informed choices for their futures—especially young people who have too often been denied access to these key resources. The goal is to dramatically increase the number of young people, ages 14 to 24, who are Black, Latinx, or experiencing poverty, who have the agency, social capital, skills, and credentials needed to thrive in the workforce and in life. A deep commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion stands at the heart of this initiative. www.jff.org/equitablepathways

Table of Contents

Introduction.....1

Hypothesis 1: K-12 Partnerships.....1

Hypothesis 2: Postsecondary Partnerships3

Hypothesis 3: Alignment with Labor Market Demands5

Hypothesis 4: Employer Partnerships.....8

Hypothesis 5: Sustainability10

Hypothesis 6: Policy12

Introduction

The six hypotheses listed below were created to guide the development of pathways that equitably support all young people, especially youth of color and youth who are experiencing poverty, in building rewarding and fruitful futures. The Building Equitable Pathways intermediary partners committed to testing the six hypotheses in their work. Though none of the intermediaries fully built out all six hypotheses during the first year of this work, each provides a useful example of how the hypotheses work in the real world.

Learn about each hypothesis and read spotlights that illustrate how the Building Equitable Pathways partners took on this work. The spotlights are intended to show theory in action and to support new intermediaries as they tackle the challenge of building equitable pathways that promote young people's college and career success.

Hypothesis 1: K-12 Partnerships

Strong Partnership and Alignment with Local K-12 Schools and Districts

Designs for equitable pathways begin in high school, when it is critical to introduce young people to a continuum of career-related experiences. Some intermediaries also work with middle schools to introduce youth to broad career options and professional culture.

Intermediaries support schools and districts to ensure that career-connected learning and work-based learning opportunities expose youth to career options that can have a lifetime of impact. Strong partnerships and alignment include work-based learning as a core component of career pathways with solid participation of youth who are Black, Latinx, or experiencing poverty, and no group is over- or underrepresented in a particular program or with a particular employer. Career pathways integrate rigorous core academics, career-focused learning, and work-based learning. Data systems track outcomes and use data for program evaluation and improvement.

Spotlight: Brooklyn STEAM Center, Brooklyn Navy Yard

In 2018, the Brooklyn Navy Yard began a partnership with the New York City Department of Education to launch the [Brooklyn STEAM Center](#). The Brooklyn STEAM Center provides high school students with career and technical training and connects them to internships with employers in related fields that have businesses in the Navy Yard. The Brooklyn STEAM Center

is an example of an intermediary that both coordinates pathways work behind the scenes and provides direct education programming to students. With this model, work-based learning, academic, and career-training experiences are all aligned and build upon one another in a way that helps students create paths to successful and meaningful futures.

The Brooklyn STEAM Center works with eight area high schools to serve approximately 300 students in grades 11 and 12. Ninety-three percent of participating students are Black or Latinx and 74 percent are eligible for free or reduced lunch. Every day for half a day, students hone their knowledge and skills through pathways in culinary arts, computer science, construction technology, design and engineering, and film/media. Students fulfill high school requirements while earning industry certifications and college credit. The program also helps students develop relationships in their fields of interest with employers at the Navy Yard that may hire them when they complete their programs.

To make this complex set of relationships work, the Brooklyn STEAM Center facilitates bimonthly meetings with the school partners to recruit new students, share information, and coordinate academic work, training, and work-based learning. They also collaborate on reviewing student progress data and share strategies to accelerate freshmen and sophomores through their core academics to make sure they can participate as juniors and seniors. The Brooklyn STEAM Center and its high school partners also work together to schedule students' classes to support their participation.

Spotlight: HERE to HERE

Since [HERE to HERE](#) was founded in 2017, the organization has brought together employers, K-12 and postsecondary educators, and community-based organizations with the goal of creating work-based learning experiences for young people in the Bronx and New York City. Most importantly, HERE to HERE makes youth voice a priority and keeps diversity, equity, and inclusion front and center. [The HERE to HERE Language Guide: A Resource for Using Asset-Based Language with Young People](#) is a good example of this priority in action.

HERE to HERE believes that work-based learning should be incorporated into every student's high school and postsecondary experience. But it is often challenging for high schools to develop and maintain connections with local employers. To support students, the majority of whom are Black and Latinx, in its 15 partner Bronx high schools, HERE to HERE works with high schools, community-based organizations, and local employers to place youth in work-based learning opportunities. By prioritizing placement opportunities, HERE to HERE supports high schools in connecting with employers and provides employers with an efficient "go to" organization for finding eligible young people.

Through its [Work-Based Learning Labs](#), HERE to HERE helps partners develop high-quality work-based learning experiences that lead to strong outcomes. HERE to HERE is also working with its partners to codify quality standards of practice in its Key Distinguishers for high schools, postsecondary programs, employers, and paid work experiences. For example, in response to the need to provide work-based learning opportunities remotely during the pandemic, HERE to HERE developed [Key Distinguishers for Virtual Paid Work Experiences](#). The Key Distinguishers also provide a framework to support high-quality work-based learning along dimensions of youth engagement, school staff and infrastructure, external partnerships, assessment, and accountability.

Hypothesis 2: Postsecondary Partnerships

Strong Partnership and Alignment with Local Postsecondary Institutions

Effective and equitable career pathways start at the secondary level and continue through higher education so that students earn certificates, credentials, and degrees that have value in their local labor market. Intermediaries work with postsecondary institutions to ensure this continuity. Students receive college credit for on-the-job experiences such as internships and apprenticeships. They also receive consistent career advising that aligns with work-based learning opportunities and pathways that they can access in the future. Intermediary and postsecondary partners have an effective plan for recruiting youth who are Black, Latinx, or experiencing poverty for work-based learning opportunities. Placement demographics closely reflect those of the ecosystem, with no group over- or underrepresented in a particular program or with a particular employer.

For in-depth guidance on partnerships with higher education, see [An Intermediary's Guide to Working with Postsecondary Partners](#) from JFF.

Spotlight: Brooklyn STEAM Center, Brooklyn Navy Yard

In its first two years of operation, the [Brooklyn STEAM Center](#) has worked with each student in its graduating class to enroll them in regional higher education institutions. Students also participate in a weekly Postsecondary Plans class that helps them map out steps and resources they will need for life beyond high school. This high-touch model of deep engagement led to all 96 students in the first graduating cohort going to college. The Brooklyn STEAM Center's current postsecondary partners include three public institutions—Brooklyn College, New York

City College of Technology, and Hudson Valley Community College—and three private institutions—Pratt Institute, St. Francis College, and New York University.

The Brooklyn STEAM Center was able to quickly build higher education partnerships because of the long history of collaboration between City University of New York (CUNY) and the New York City Department of Education. Through CUNY's [College Now](#) program, begun in 1984, over 22,000 students from 470 New York City high schools take CUNY college courses. Students can earn up to 15 college credits free of charge by the time they graduate high school. CUNY has also invested in early college high schools and P-Tech models. Thus, the Brooklyn STEAM Center did not have to negotiate postsecondary articulation agreements; they were in place for the majority of its pathways, and many of the Brooklyn STEAM Center's industry-recognized credentials were already articulated with local postsecondary institutions.

Since work-based learning is embedded in the curriculum, students receive credit for it and each student earns at least one industry-recognized credential. The Brooklyn STEAM Center's 30-person Advisory Council has also been an important factor in its success. Higher education faculty and administrators have leveraged their personal relationships at their institutions to open opportunities for Brooklyn STEAM Center students. The higher education representatives on the Advisory Council have also helped to inform pathways curriculum and school design so that student advisement is well-aligned with college preparation.

Spotlight: Rush Education and Career Hub, Rush University and Medical Center

The [Rush Education and Career Hub](#) (REACH) is housed within Rush University and Medical Center (Rush), so it is embedded in a postsecondary STEM ecosystem with rich resources. Rush and REACH have made a long-term commitment to addressing the health and well-being of the communities on Chicago's West Side, whose residents are primarily Black, Puerto Rican, and Mexican, many of whom are experiencing poverty. REACH serves both the communities as a whole and youth, ages 14 to 24, who live there. Thanks to long-time partnerships between the Chicago Public Schools and the City Colleges of Chicago to implement a number of STEM early colleges mean that collaborative structures and agreements support REACH's pathways work. Specifically, REACH has a longstanding relationship with Malcolm X College, one of the seven City Colleges, which is located close by, making it easy to facilitate and coordinate educational and career experiences.

REACH provides training in the following entry-level health care roles: community health worker, certified nursing assistant, and EKG technician, and is currently planning a certified phlebotomist program in partnership with Malcolm X College. Rush University's College of

Health Sciences has an articulation agreement with Malcolm X, and REACH supports the facilitation of an updated articulation. REACH also has strong relationships with the central offices of the City Colleges, so it can bring lessons learned to the system and help identify and troubleshoot problems to move partnership goals forward.

REACH works closely with Rush's human resource office to recruit and place youth in internships. REACH is also in a unique position regarding work-based learning for postsecondary credit; its parent organization acts as the main employer, offering paid internships to high school and college students in a variety of health-care programs, allowing them to earn credit for clinical experiences.

Hypothesis 3: Alignment with Labor Market Demands

Articulated Paths Aligned to Local Labor Market Demands

Intermediaries work with their K-12, postsecondary, and employer partners to align programming with local labor market demand using best-in-class, real-time, and traditional labor market information (LMI). Employers work with instructors to co-design high school and postsecondary programs to ensure that young people gain the skills and knowledge needed to succeed within their respective industries. The intermediary ensures that high school and postsecondary partners crosswalk their programs and codify agreements for articulation, credential granting, and transfer. Data systems track progress and monitor equity of access to in-demand careers for youth who are Black, Latinx, or experiencing poverty. Because LMI is a lagging indicator in the COVID-19 recovery, intermediaries and partners will need to monitor a wide range of data to accurately predict labor market openings.

Note: In the first year of this initiative, the Building Equitable Pathways intermediaries prioritized designing pathways aligned with labor market demand. Thus, we include four examples here, while there are fewer examples for other hypotheses in which the work is less developed.

Spotlight: Boys & Girls Club of Greater Memphis

[Boys & Girls Club of Greater Memphis](#) uses LMI to strategically align workforce program offerings with regional demand. For example, in response to an analysis of regional LMI, Boys & Girls Club of Greater Memphis is revising its thriving culinary arts program. The average yearly

pay for food service workers in the Memphis region is \$21,950. According to [MIT's Living Wage Calculator](#), this is below the salary required to afford necessities like food, clothing, shelter, child care, and transportation in the area. Through a review of LMI data, the organization discovered that there is growing demand for large-batch food preparers. The average yearly salary for this profession is \$37,610, closer to a living wage for Memphis. Currently, Boys & Girls Club of Greater Memphis is exploring how to map the skills and certifications that young people gain in its culinary program in order to develop a pathway into higher paying culinary careers. It is also reevaluating and readjusting other career pathways training it offers.

Spotlight: CareerWise Colorado

[CareerWise Colorado](#) calls youth apprenticeship an “options multiplier [and] an enhancement, [. . .] a fast track to a middle-class career, or both.” To make this statement a reality, CareerWise Colorado’s partner employers provide apprenticeships in 12 in-demand occupations. In an important sense, each occupation *must* be “in demand” and driven by the needs of the market; an employer will only offer apprenticeships if the company anticipates hiring newly trained workers for those roles in the near future.

CareerWise Colorado ensures that youth can gain the technical and professional skills required for specific jobs that are available in the broad career categories they offer. For example, the manufacturing apprenticeship focuses on mechanical engineering and quality control technicians; financial services apprenticeships focus on claims representative and staff accountant positions. Junior coder and IT support are two of the apprenticeships offered in IT. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, 70 percent of CareerWise Colorado apprentices were kept on by their companies, a testimony to the value of apprentices to their employers even when working remotely during an uncertain time.

Spotlight: HERE to HERE and CareerWise New York

For young people who want a more intensive work-based learning experience than an internship, [HERE to HERE](#) incubated a youth apprenticeship option. [CareerWise New York](#) is modeled after and partners with CareerWise Colorado. CareerWise New York connects high school students directly with employers in three-year, applied-learning experiences in IT, financial services, and business operations. More than 80 students are enrolled, with an additional 100 students starting in the fall of 2020. Over the course of the program, young people: 1) earn a high school diploma, 24 to 30 debt-free postsecondary credits through College Now, and industry-recognized credentials; 2) receive wages for their on-the-job training; and 3) gain valuable work experience and access to professional networks. CareerWise New York relies

on a robust data system that allows it to monitor progress and track recruitment, enrollment, and retention.

CareerWise New York makes tangible the ways in which educators and employers need to partner, brings key partners to the table, and crystalizes key policy issues. By investing in CareerWise New York, HERE to HERE intends to develop the frameworks and partnerships needed not just to expand youth apprenticeship but also to lay the groundwork for an effective youth talent development system—one that works for young people, employers, and New York's economy.

Spotlight: Rush Education and Career Hub, Rush University Medical Center

The [Rush Education and Career Hub](#) (REACH) is an employer-led intermediary housed within Rush University Medical Center (Rush). Rush is a healthcare-focused institution with a medical school and colleges of nursing and health science and has a long history of community engagement. REACH extends that commitment to the community by preparing the next generation of health care professionals. REACH used regional labor market analysis to select which health career pathway programs to develop from the many offerings at Rush. To keep their pathways up to date with labor market openings that provide good wages, REACH recently added app and software development and cybersecurity to their health informatics pathway. Expertise in health-related software is in high demand in many health care settings, so young people who trained at REACH are eagerly sought in the field.

REACH works closely with professionals in Rush's various departments, who serve as employers and mentors of REACH interns. REACH hosts and places around 100 interns a year, 95 percent of them within Rush. To ensure quality, internship supervisors participate in training workshops and young people have peer mentors as well. REACH also developed off-site internships in community clinics and a veterinary practice in order to expand the number of youth who can participate in internship experiences. REACH also hosts 10 health IT apprentices in a three-year program that starts in high school and continues when participants are in college with paid part-time work of up to 20 hours per week.

Hypothesis 4: Employer Partnerships

Strong Partnership and Alignment with the Local Employer Community to Advance Opportunities for Work-Based Learning

Partnerships with employers are critical to providing work-based learning opportunities that lead to high-skill, high-demand jobs and family-sustaining careers. Employers have an impact on all points along the pathway, from shaping K-12 curricula and course selection to training and then hiring qualified job candidates. To ensure quality work-based learning, employers' HR offices support the creation of a work environment that is welcoming for young people who are Black, Latinx, or experiencing poverty. Trained mentors reinforce and extend classroom learning. Educators and mentors collaborate to meet both youth and employer needs. An online platform links education and employer partners to speed up the sharing of information necessary for work-based learning placement and employer feedback about young people's performance and progress. The intermediary collects and analyzes feedback to help all partners improve work-based learning experiences.

Spotlight: YouthForce NOLA

[YouthForce NOLA](#) coordinates with employers, high schools, and community-based organizations to provide nearly 800 New Orleans high school students with paid work-readiness training and paid internships through 200 regional employers. YouthForce NOLA collaborates with other local organizations, such as Greater New Orleans, Inc., a regional economic development organization, and Junior Achievement of Greater New Orleans, to coordinate and centralize industry involvement and investment in work-based learning opportunities for youth. Young people gain real-world, work-based experience in the region's fast-growing, high-wage industries. Participants also benefit from virtual training in essential professional skills, business etiquette, financial and digital literacies, and workplace rights and responsibilities. YouthForce NOLA interns' stipends are made possible by the City of New Orleans.

Spotlight: CareerWise Colorado

[CareerWise Colorado](#) is an employer-facing and employer-driven intermediary. The organization has adapted the Swiss apprenticeship system to the business culture of the United States. In Switzerland, about 70 percent of 16-year-olds become apprentices. They spend two days a week at school and two to three days a week working and learning at an enterprise for three or four years. CareerWise Colorado trains and prepares young people for well-paying, entry-level positions in Colorado through apprenticeship. The program works with 120

employers and has created and launched more than 500 apprenticeships over four cohorts of high school students. CareerWise Colorado's apprentices are representative of its partner school districts.

When working with employers, CareerWise Colorado describes its value proposition as follows: "Finding qualified early-career talent is increasingly expensive, competitive, and time-consuming. CareerWise Colorado provides a talent solution for companies of all industries and sizes." It is important to note that while the organization has strong relationships with and recruits apprentices from multiple high schools, its goal is not to create career pathways; it aims to offer young people an option to fully combine school and work for students' 11th, 12th, and 13th years. In fact, in the 13th year, participants are full-time apprentices and may also take college courses related to their work, for which their employers pay. This distinction is significant and shapes the way that CareerWise Colorado serves as the connection between high schools and industry.

The organization supports its employer partners in training supervisors and mentors and works with the apprentices to prepare them for success in a professional work environment. CareerWise Colorado also developed a sophisticated online apprentice marketplace so employers can easily post available apprenticeships and young people can find those opportunities. Youth apprenticeship is expanding in the United States and CareerWise is in high demand as other sites—such as Indiana, the District of Columbia, and HERE to HERE in New York City—learn from CareerWise Colorado's experience and set up their own versions of youth apprenticeship.

Spotlight: Boys & Girls Club of Greater Memphis

Memphis is known as the "logistics capital of the northern hemisphere" because it is headquarters for FedEx and UPS, while other companies, including Williams Sonoma, Coca-Cola, Amazon, and Nike, have a major presence and distribute goods from the city. Memphis also has several major hospitals that serve not only southern Tennessee but the entire Mississippi Delta area.

While many employers prefer to recruit college interns, [Boys & Girls Club of Greater Memphis](#) has built relationships with several large companies that now offer paid work to high school seniors who trained with the organization. The organization's Juice Plus+ Technical Training Center trains opportunity youth ages 16 to 24 and helps them begin promising careers. Although entry-level roles in logistics offer wages of only \$12 per hour, Boys & Girls Club of Greater Memphis is responding to this challenge by offering training that leads to a certification in logistics, which allows young people to earn higher pay. The organization has piloted a hospital job shadow program with Methodist North Hospital, leveraging its relationship with the

president of Methodist North, who is a member of the nonprofit's board of directors. In addition to working with employers, Boys & Girls Club of Greater Memphis provides youth with certifications in logistics, automotive, culinary, welding, and IT. These credentials have strong reputations with employers in the region.

Spotlight: HERE to HERE

The HERE to HERE Business Council is a group of CEOs and chief human resources officers from leading NYC employers who come together around a shared commitment to youth talent development. The Business Council was launched in part to support business leaders in ensuring that their hiring practices, including job descriptions and credential requirements, are fully accessible to students from the City University of New York (CUNY) programs and local public high schools. The Business Council also examines business practices and represents employers' point of view to CUNY and the New York City Department of Education.

In August of 2020, The HERE to HERE Business Council was absorbed by the newly launched [NYC Jobs CEO Council](#) with CEOs from 27 of the largest employers in the New York area. This new results-oriented, CEO-led coalition will collaborate with educational institutions, community organizations, and nonprofits to hire skilled workers, meet employer needs, and connect New Yorkers—with a focus on Black, Latinx, and Asian communities and communities with lower incomes—with the skills they need for the workplace today and in the future. The member organizations aim to hire 100,000 traditionally underserved New Yorkers by 2030, including providing job opportunities and apprenticeships for 25,000 CUNY students.

HERE to HERE also helped found the employer-led, student-centered, [Bronx Private Industry Council](#) (PIC) “to develop a more prepared workforce and a deep base of local talent from which employers can recruit.” The Bronx PIC provides youth with paid opportunities to work with professionals to solve real-world business problems. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Bronx PIC is shifting from a dues-paying model to an advisory council.

Hypothesis 5: Sustainability

Sustainable Business Model

To have a lasting impact, an intermediary must be positioned to sustain itself. The intermediary takes advantage of opportunities for public and private grants and contracts but does not rely on them for long-term sustainability. While funding is a major component, sustainability is also the product of effective and efficient use of material resources, human capital, and a business model that includes shared costs and resource needs among partners. To ensure all partners sustain

their commitment and understand and appreciate the value the intermediary provides, the intermediary employs a communications strategy to reach families, community-based organizations, education partners, employers, and policymakers.

Spotlight: Career Connect Washington

In May 2017, Governor Jay Inslee of Washington State convened a task force to advocate for, design, and guide implementation of [Career Connect Washington](#), an initiative to launch the state's young people into in-demand careers. The Washington State Legislature enacted HB 2158, the Career Connect Washington law, and allocated \$35 million for its implementation. In 2020, the legislature increased this budget to meet demand among additional high schools, colleges, intermediaries, and employers.

Distribution of responsibilities for funding was built into the model: philanthropic dollars pay for the small group of leaders who guide implementation; employers pay student and apprentice wages; and public funds support the regional networks of intermediaries and education institutions implementing career pathways. A cross-agency group convenes regularly to ensure that efforts are coordinated and effective. To ensure that all stakeholders, especially funders, are well-informed about progress, Career Connect Washington's leadership employs a lobbyist, engages in grassroots communication, and ensures that youth success stories are featured in a wide range of media. The legislation requires an [annual report](#) to lawmakers, which includes plans for equity, budget, data and measurement, and marketing.

Career Connect Washington uses a model of distributed leadership and shared ownership to promote and scale its work. Career Connect Washington is not a legal entity but a convener and seeks to embed its functions within existing organizations over time. Some responsibilities have already moved to state agencies (e.g., grant administration, the endorsement process) and others will transfer to key partners in the future. While most program intermediaries are new and selected through a competitive grant process, the ecosystem includes both repurposed and new regional networks that serve as local conveners, bringing together key partners to identify workforce gaps and support program growth. Successful applicants agree to a set of principles and outcomes when funded. Each regional network manages its own fiscal responsibilities. Community colleges and four-year universities leverage existing relationships with employers to implement work-based learning systems; K-12 coordinators at each of the state's nine educational service districts reach out to schools. Registered Apprenticeships are an integral part of the Career Connect Washington ecosystem.

Spotlight: Rush Education and Career Hub, Rush University and Medical Center

The [Rush Education and Career Hub](#) (REACH) has a legacy of supporting Chicago's school communities. Since 1990, thousands of students from pre-kindergarten through grade 12 have participated in REACH's science and math enrichment experiences to build a best-in-class pipeline to STEM and health-care careers for underrepresented groups. REACH's services provide clear value within and for the community.

REACH is leveraging the communications component of Rush University Medical Center's strong business model to ensure partners understand and promote REACH's success. As an intermediary embedded within a university, REACH must distinguish itself from many other initiatives. REACH communicates with specific stakeholders to promote its work and model, sustain current partnerships, and attract new partners. It is also developing a strategy for research and evaluation to better inform and educate youth, families, community-based organizations, and K-12 and postsecondary education partners about its work and impact.

REACH also has a strong and visible presence in its community through collaboratives such as West Side United, a multi-stakeholder collaborative working to create strong, healthy, and vibrant neighborhoods on Chicago's West Side. Through its collaboration with West Side United, REACH's platforms, such as their website, social media accounts, and growing network of alumni, can extend educational and career training to even more young people.

Hypothesis 6: Policy

Policy Agenda and Supporting Strategy

Federal, state, and local policies play a major role in shaping pathways work. Policy can be enabling—such as Perkins V, a federal policy that supports career and technical education—or it can be restricting—like some labor laws and institutional policies. The intermediary recognizes the role of policy, makes use of existing policies, and advocates to close policy gaps that negatively impact youth who are Black, Latinx, or experiencing poverty. The intermediary uses its convening authority and voice to influence the field, mobilize stakeholders and resources, and advocate for the creation of effective policies.

To learn more about how intermediaries can play a strong role in shaping policy agendas, see JFF's report, [Intermediaries' Role in Policy to Develop and Scale Equitable Pathways](#).

Spotlight: YouthForce NOLA

[YouthForce NOLA](#) provides training in career pathways in the fields of business services, digital media and information technology, health sciences, and skilled crafts. The organization operates in a highly decentralized education ecosystem. An education reform effort launched in 2003 was accelerated after Hurricane Katrina devastated the city in 2005. As of 2018, nearly all schools are overseen by the local, elected Orleans Parish School Board; a few are directly overseen by the state education agency. As of 2020, nearly 100 percent of public schools in the city are public charter schools—either standalone or part of a charter management network. These autonomous schools offer families a wide range of choices. All schools function as their own local education agencies for accountability and funding purposes. This decentralization requires YouthForce NOLA to understand, leverage, and seek to influence local and state policies directly in ways that most intermediaries do not.

A prime example of this complexity are New Orleans data-sharing agreements. The YouthForce NOLA policy team has had to solve problems on its own because of a lapse in data sharing at the state's agencies for education and workforce. Students across the state are no longer identified by their Social Security numbers, a complication that impacts longitudinal tracking of participation, obscures the effectiveness of programs, and muddles the matching of high school and postsecondary program data. Policy regarding data sharing continues to evolve, which YouthForce NOLA is monitoring and responding to in real-time. A second example of work at the state policy level is the organization's revenue working group, which convenes to ensure that New Orleans schools obtain the maximum public funding for career and technical education.

YouthForce NOLA recognizes that its policy work is in its initial phase and is working to enhance policy knowledge and efficacy. The organization formed a team to analyze and interpret policy. It is also strategically partnering with organizations that are already active in policymaking and advocacy. For example, YouthForce NOLA's partnership with Greater New Orleans, Inc., a local regional economic development organization, has a history of influencing regional, state, and national policy.

Spotlight: Career Connect Washington

Among the first cohort of Building Equitable Pathways intermediaries, [Career Connect Washington](#) is the only statewide initiative created by a governor and funded by the legislature

through state policy. In May 2017, Governor Jay Inslee convened the Career Connect Washington Task Force, composed of leaders from the business, labor, government, nonprofit, and education sectors to improve the success of the state's young people in transitioning from high school to postsecondary education to the workforce. The task force concluded that while Washington had many excellent career connected learning programs, it lacked systemic supports to achieve the scale needed to have a transformative impact. It recommended an inclusive planning process to develop a statewide strategic plan, including policy recommendations to overcome the barriers to scale and quality.

Career Connect Washington uses its convening authority and voice to mobilize stakeholders and advocate for effective policies that address shortcomings and gaps in existing policies. Career Connect Washington is not closely associated with any one stakeholder group, allowing it to work well with all of them. The advisory team wrote the legislation and garnered support to have it signed into law. Along with the governor, who played a catalytic role, the legislation was championed by the independently elected superintendent of public instruction, the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, four-year public and private university leaders, the Departments of Employment Security and Labor & Industries, the state Workforce Board, and the senior level of the Washington Student Achievement Council.

The governor included funding for the Career Connect Washington plan in his budget, and in April 2019, the state legislature passed the Workforce Education Investment Act, allocating \$35 million and legislating a continuum of career-connected learning that begins in elementary school and continues through postsecondary (Career Explore, Prep, and Launch). In Washington State, policy and funding are intertwined so additional funding for Career Connect Washington is a vote of confidence in the policy in place. In the 2020 legislative session, Career Connect Washington was allocated additional funds.

The initiative has also received CARES Act funding to expand Career Launch, the paid internship and curriculum-aligned postsecondary pathways to a credential, degree, or a year's worth of college-level credit. The governor also allocated \$4 million of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act funding per year to expand Career Connect Washington pathways development through a competitive grant program. The seven philanthropic funders that have supported Career Connect Washington since 2018 have also remained engaged and have pledged sufficient resources to continue the work of the advisory team through 2022.