



# A New National Approach to Career Navigation for Working Learners

Vickie Choitz, with Louis Soares and Rachel Pleasants March 2010



Center for American Progress



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# Introduction and summary

Americans are struggling to find decent work at decent pay, and their search for a good job is hampered by the nation's lack of quality, coordinated career development services. Most could benefit greatly from easily accessible assistance on how to plan, build, and navigate a career. Working learners are particularly vulnerable. They have no postsecondary credential that could help them advance, yet they cannot afford to stop working to attend an education or training program full time.

The wide-ranging stories that friends and relatives tell about how they landed their jobs brings the need for a more coherent and accessible career navigation system into sharper focus. A lucky few always knew what they wanted to do, could afford a quality college education, and found good jobs in their chosen fields. But many people bounce from job to job, unsure how to find a career that fits their abilities and interests or unable to pay for the education that will get them the work they want. Effective career navigation assists individuals in determining a career path, understanding the requirements for the jobs they seek, and accessing the education and training needed to achieve their goals.

Two anecdotes, based on interviews with workers across the country conducted for this paper, illustrate the variety of experiences with career navigation in the United States:

A young man who is the son of factory workers nearly dropped out of high school five years ago. While he did graduate, his basic academic skills were so low that he could not pass the military's entry exam, which eliminated a potentially promising career path that many of his peers had taken. Compounding his underdeveloped academic abilities was his complete ignorance about how to explore career options and make a choice—or where to turn for help. Since high school he has drifted from town to town, living with relatives, working odd jobs, and squandering the early work years that are essential to establishing a career. A couple of minor drug possession charges further weaken his prospects.

A young California woman knew soon after finishing high school that her minimum-wage, fast-food job wouldn't build her much of a future. But it took 15 years of part-time work, part-time school, and a lot of help to find her way to a family-sustaining career. It was only after seeing a flier in a welfare office that she enrolled in training that enabled her to move from being a medical assistant, to a lab technician, to a certified nursing assistant. Now she is working toward becoming a nurse.

These vignettes highlight several distinct problems people experience while seeking decent work at decent pay. But they share a fundamental theme: Each of these individuals could greatly benefit from easily accessible help on how to plan, build, and navigate a career. Both have suffered from the nation's lack of quality, coordinated career development services.

The California woman's story is particularly significant as an example of the nation's rapidly growing population of working learners—the focus of this report. These women and men, who usually are parents, must work and attend school at the same time. They do not have a postsecondary credential, but they cannot afford to drop out of the labor market and pursue education full time. By one estimate, 75 million working learners are trying to balance work, school, and family.<sup>1</sup>

President Barack Obama challenged all Americans to commit to at least one year of higher education or job training for their own sake and for the sake of the country's economy. But working learners will find it difficult if not impossible to achieve this goal without a detailed, sensible plan to follow. The vast majority will need professional help to identify the education that aligns with their skills and interests and that will enable them to secure jobs that pay family-supporting wages.

This paper details both the inadequacy of the career navigation assistance now available and why the United States needs a new approach. The first section describes the urgent need, which has been exacerbated by recent trends in the economy. The second section showcases promising models of career navigation that have emerged—created by community colleges, employers, labor unions, public workforce systems, and community-based organizations—but remain small boutique enterprises. The third section envisions a more robust national approach to career navigation services for working adults and explores both design principles and challenges. Finally, the paper recommends next steps and federal policy actions that would move us closer to achieving that vision.

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## Why the United States needs a national career navigation model

The United States lacks a coherent, planned career navigation system. Such a system was unnecessary when the primary prerequisites for many middle-class jobs were physical strength and endurance. But as the nation shifted to an economy based on information and knowledge, education and skills became the paths to success. And gaining that preparation for work is not easy.

Career navigation supports have emerged from a variety of sources but in highly uneven and disorganized ways. The assistance today is a hodgepodge of different types and intensities of guidance offered by different institutions and people with varying levels of qualifications. On top of all this, demand for career navigation services is strong and expected to grow.

In short, the United States needs a new national approach to career navigation for two major reasons:

- Ongoing economic volatility combined with the rising demand for highly skilled employees, make it more and more difficult for workers to reach wise decisions or succeed on their own.
- Employers need efficient ways to develop and access a highly skilled workforce to stay competitive.

Both these needs are increasing as the economy evolves from an industrial to a knowledge base.

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## Promising models of career navigation

Outstanding examples of effective programs for workers and learners at various stages in their careers exist within the assortment of career navigation assistance services in the United States. Promising models emerged from the range of entities typically providing career development assistance to working learners: community colleges, the public workforce system, community-based organizations, labor unions, and employers. Most, if not all, however, remain boutique programs for the time being, limited in scale and impact, and with minimal funding available to do more.

The promising career development programs described in this paper share distinct characteristics that contribute to their effectiveness. In each case the programs:

- Tailor services to local labor market trends, which enables the programs to provide the most relevant and useful career information
- Tailor services to individual clients' specific needs—covering a broad range of education and training levels
- Form local partnerships with community-based organizations, colleges, and employers

In many cases the programs also:

- Provide specialized training to staff to help them understand how to serve low-income, low-skilled populations most effectively
- Regularly track and review progress to ensure that they continue to meet client needs

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## A national framework

The United States must address the shortcomings in its current career navigation services, particularly for working learners. The nation needs an intentional, comprehensive approach that builds upon strengths in the field.

## Vision

A national approach to improving career navigation services would focus on ensuring that any worker, at any time in his or her career, could get information and resources for making smart career decisions. The assistance could be self-directed or guided by support from a professional depending on individual needs.

Further, the system would provide assessment tools to help people better understand their own strengths, weaknesses, skills, and interests. It would supply information about a broad range of career options, local labor market demand, education and skills required, and typical compensation. People could find information on specific local education and training programs, including course offerings, graduation rates, and financial aid.

Any individual could create an online career profile describing his or her education, training, credentials, work experience, and other relevant information. Each profile could include an individualized career navigation plan, which could be updated at any time and used consistently throughout the individual's working lifetime. Some aspects of the profile could be made available to potential employers.

More intensive services such as career coaching, advising, and comprehensive counseling also would be available depending on each person's needs. Working learners and job seekers could connect with others through social networking technology and receive peer support, advice, and encouragement. Up-to-date, career-relevant information could be accessed electronically.

## Key design principles

The following key design principles should frame a national conversation about how to expand the nation's career navigation services:

- Provide continuous and lifelong access to career navigation
- Increase capacity to meet national demand
- Provide high-quality service that conforms to appropriate common minimum standards
- Integrate multiple service providers, with each offering appropriate services for particular populations or clients
- Provide unbiased, objective assistance that is carefully tailored to individual needs
- Empower each individual with career navigation skills
- Provide efficient, streamlined services, fully utilizing technology for maximum scale

## Design questions

A number of choices and challenges come with scaling up career navigation services to meet national demand. The following questions cover the most important topics the United States must consider:

- What should be coordinated nationally and what should be left to regional or local variation?

- What is the appropriate balance between high-tech and high-touch face-to-face approaches to career guidance?
- Which services should be networked and decentralized and which should be more centrally governed and planned?
- To what extent can career navigation services be standardized and how much individualization is needed?

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## Recommendations for next steps

The federal government can and should play a significant role in meeting the need for a national approach to career navigation services. We recommend two steps:

- A national communications campaign to raise awareness of this pressing need
- Extensive research and development to better evaluate existing resources and test new and scaled-up models

### Communications campaign

- **Use the bully pulpit:** Build from President Obama's challenge to the nation that all Americans earn at least one year of higher education or job training, and capitalize on federal changes to unemployment insurance and Pell grant programs. The secretaries of Education, Labor, and Health and Human Services should build career navigation into their talking points regarding the administration's postsecondary education agenda. Further, the respective departments should incorporate ideas for a new national model of career navigation into program planning for a more robust education and workforce system and a higher-skilled workforce.
- **Seed a paradigm shift:** The federal government (Education, Labor, HHS, Commerce), in partnership with business, colleges, unions, and workforce programs, should support a national campaign to raise the awareness of workers, employers, and other stakeholders on the necessity and value of career development services across every person's working life.

### Research and development

- **Map it:** The Office of Vocational and Adult Education at the Department of Education and the Employment Training Administration at the Department of Labor should conduct a joint analysis and assessment of U.S. career development assistance services. Map assets and promising models and note gaps and weaknesses.
- **Develop national standards:** OVAE and ETA should work together to create national standards for all career navigation programs and the professionals who provide the services. Build from research on successful programs as well as on existing national and international models. Tie federal funding to the adoption of these standards and encourage foundations to do so as well.

- **Increase the amount of resources supporting career navigation:** The supply of affordable career navigation assistance falls far short of meeting what’s needed, especially in public and nonprofit systems. To help solve this problem the federal government could increase funding for career navigation services through the Workforce Investment Act and other current programs. And by providing matching funds or challenge grants it could provide incentives to state governments and local institutions, such as community colleges, to increase funding for career navigation assistance.
- **Scale up promising models:** Pilot large-scale demonstrations of promising models to test their effectiveness and assess their potential for national scale up.
- **Incubate new ideas:** Engage creative thinkers and pilot bold innovations, especially technology-based solutions. This is an underdeveloped area that could provide the

## Defining terms

The career development field’s lexicon can be confusing—even “career” has multiple definitions. A variety of terms is used to describe career navigation activities, some interchangeably.

This paper uses the following terms and definitions:

**Career:** The dictionary definition of a career is “an occupation undertaken for a significant period of a person’s life and with opportunities for progress.” Many career counseling organizations take the definition a step further, however. The National Career Development association defines career as “the sum total of one’s life experiences, including education, paid and unpaid work, and community, volunteer and family activities.”<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, the Canadian Standards and Guidelines for Career Development Practitioners defines career as “a lifestyle concept that involves the sequence of work, learning and leisure activities in which one engages throughout a lifetime. Careers are unique to each person and are dynamic; unfolding throughout life. Careers include how persons balance their paid and unpaid work and personal life roles.”<sup>3</sup> This paper will use the more comprehensive definitions supplied by the career development organizations.

**Career development:** The multiple factors—educational, sociological, economic, physical, and chance—that influence the nature and significance of work during an individual’s lifetime.<sup>4</sup> The Canadian standards

define career development as “the lifelong process of managing learning, work, leisure, and transitions in order to move toward a personally determined and evolving preferred future.”<sup>5</sup>

**Career navigation services:** Activities intended to help individuals of any age and at any point in their lives make educational, training, and occupational choices and manage their careers. Such services may be found in secondary schools, colleges, universities, training institutions, public employment services, the workplace, the volunteer or community sector, and the private sector. The activities may take place on an individual or group basis or be in person, on the phone, or via the Internet. Specific services may include the provision of career information, assessment and self-assessment tools, counseling interviews, career education programs, internships, work-search programs, and transition services.

**Career counseling:** Career counseling approaches the work from a clinical, psychological perspective and is more comprehensive than other types of career development services. It applies mental health, psychological, or human development principles.

A career counselor has a master’s degree in counseling, sometimes specifically in career counseling.<sup>6</sup> Career counselors must be licensed by the state in which they practice (except California, which does not have a licensing requirement). The term “career counselor” is often loosely used and not all

cost-effectiveness required to make the system comprehensive, universal, and lifelong. Launch a national competition that rewards research and development grants for promising models of career navigation innovation.

- **Pilot creative financing mechanisms:** “Micro-Pell Grants” and unemployment insurance are two of many creative vehicles for directing more funding toward career navigation for working learners.

The nation’s shortage of high-quality career development services is a problem whose solution is not yet clear. But this paper offers possible first steps for finding that solution. The authors aim to spur a long-overdue national conversation among policymakers, practitioners, and advocates on this critical topic—one that affects individuals, families, employers, communities, and the entire nation.

individuals who refer to themselves this way meet formal qualifications. High school guidance counselors and most college career counselors meet the definition, while “career counselors” in settings such as public workforce development centers and community-based organizations are more closely aligned with the qualifications of an “advisor” or “coach.”

**Career coaching:** Applying principles of quality coaching to encourage, motivate, or inspire individuals to engage in the activities necessary for career development. Career coaches do not engage in career development activities with the client. Rather, they encourage, ask questions of, and motivate clients to engage in the activities themselves. The International Coaching Federation, one of the nation’s top multifaceted coaching programs, defines coaching as “partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential.”<sup>7</sup>

Career coaching provides a lighter touch than career counseling. Certified career coaches earn a certificate through an accredited program such as the National Career Development Association. Most of these programs offer multiple levels of certification as well as certifications in subspecialties such as group coaching. There are few educational prerequisites to become a certified coach. Not all individuals with the title “career coach” are certified career coaches, either. Many career coaches

who work for promising models described in this report are more akin to career “advisors,” as defined below.

**Career advising:** Providing guidance, information, and assistance to an individual engaging in career development. This term is used by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, a national nonprofit leader in adult learning and workforce development that provides career advising services for companies. Unlike “career coaching” and “career counseling,” career advising is not grounded in a broader field of practice. It occupies a middle ground and is the most common level of assistance provided across many different types of organizations.

Career advisors often assess a client’s skills or interests, generally work with a client to develop an action plan, may provide specific information on education or training programs appropriate to the client’s goals, and may provide ongoing assistance for some duration. Most professionals providing this service in public agencies or community-based organizations have college degrees in a field related to education, training, or counseling, and have experience providing career advising assistance. All One-Stop WorkForce Center career counselors in Minnesota are required to have a Global Career Development Facilitator credential, which is now being offered to Career and Technical Education personnel at Minnesota state colleges and universities.

# Rationale for a national approach to career navigation

The United States typically treats career development and navigation as each individual's personal responsibility, aside from providing some guidance of varying quality in middle and secondary schools. Recent economic and societal trends, however, strengthen the case for why workers, employers, and the country would benefit from a robust, systemic national approach to providing career development services. Economic volatility and employers' evolving needs have turned career navigation and the ability to adapt to a dynamic employment landscape into beneficial and essential skills. Working learners, the focus of this paper, would especially benefit from more widely available career navigation support.

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## Why the United States needs a national approach to career navigation

The United States needs a national approach to career navigation for two major reasons:

- Ongoing economic volatility combined with the rising demand for highly skilled employees make it more and more difficult for workers to reach wise decisions or succeed on their own.
- Employers need efficient ways to develop and access a highly skilled workforce to stay competitive.

## Economic volatility squeezing low-skilled workers

The nation's economy is highly volatile, as the current recession reminds us. For employers and workers, warning signs point to trouble in the years ahead, even as the overall economy stabilizes.

According to Clair Brown, John Haltwinger, and Julia Lane in their recent book, *Economic Turbulence*, even before the recent downturn in any given quarter “about one in four job matches either begins or ends, one in thirteen jobs is created or destroyed, and one in twenty establishments closes or is born.”<sup>8</sup> Then-Congressional Budget Office Director Peter Orszag provided data confirming this ongoing unpredictability in 2007 testimony before the congressional Joint Economic Committee:

*Workers and households still experience substantial variability in their earning and income from year to year. . . . [B]etween 2001 and 2002, one in four workers saw his or her earnings increase by at least 25 percent, while one in five saw his or her earnings decline by at least 25 percent.<sup>9</sup>*

This turbulent economy in 2001 and 2002 translated into the most complicated and challenging job market of the postwar period, according to labor economist Paul Osterman, who made his comments before the 2008 recession eliminated millions of jobs and forced many workers to rethink their career options.<sup>10</sup>

While many workers used to stay in a single job for life, today's workers frequently change jobs and even careers. Longitudinal research from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that a sample of workers held 10.8 jobs in the 24 years after they turned 18.<sup>11</sup> The data, however, covered only the peak period of their working lives—the number of job changes likely will rise as they reach their 50s and 60s. While there are no longitudinal data on career changes, a group of college-educated professionals surveyed in New York City said they expect to have three or more careers during their lifetimes.<sup>12</sup>

Two key factors complicate Americans' working lives: the demise of larger companies and the emergence of rapidly growing small and midsize companies. The ranks of the Fortune 100 companies turned over twice between 1940 and 1980. But the ranking turned over five times between 1980 and 2004.<sup>13</sup> This means large blue-chip corporations are no longer a ticket to stable employment. Instead, today's "high-impact" companies—those with 20 percent revenue and employment growth for at least four years—are the economy's engines of job creation. High-impact companies with fewer than 500 employees created 58 percent of all new jobs between 1994 and 2006.<sup>14</sup> These companies now account for almost all private-sector employment and revenue growth in the economy.

For individuals, the problem with this development is that it is tremendously difficult to identify and track career opportunities in these emerging companies. The United States benefits from an estimated 375,000 companies of this kind, but many employ fewer than 20 people. Most have fewer than 100 employees.<sup>15</sup> By virtue of their size, they are simply hard to find.

What's more, the education and skill demands of the job market are growing. New technologies, new business practices, and demand for higher productivity require today's workers to learn more and learn faster than previous generations. Nearly half of all net jobs created between 2006 and 2016 will require postsecondary credentials, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.<sup>16</sup> This means that less-educated workers face even greater difficulties finding a job. According to Orszag, they suffer higher-than-average earnings volatility and are more likely to be unemployed.<sup>17</sup> Recent numbers show this to be the case: In December 2009, 15.3 percent of workers with less than a high school diploma were unem-

ployed, compared to 10.5 percent with a high school diploma, 9 percent with an associate's degree, and 5 percent with a bachelor's degree (in seasonally adjusted rates).<sup>18</sup>

Workers with lower educational attainment also have more frequent and longer spells of unemployment than do more highly educated workers. Bureau of Labor Statistics data reveal that workers with less than a high school diploma average 6.9 periods of unemployment between ages 18 and 42, compared to 3.8 unemployed periods for workers with a bachelor's degree or higher.<sup>19</sup> Workers who did not graduate from high school also were unemployed more than three times longer than workers with a bachelor's degree or higher. Workers with only a high school diploma spent more than twice the number of weeks unemployed annually than those with a bachelor's degree or higher.<sup>20</sup>

The job market's demand for higher skills is driving more individuals to enroll in college courses or degree programs. Unfortunately, far too few working learners who enter college actually earn a credential or a degree. Fewer than 60 percent of students entering four-year institutions earn bachelor's degrees, and barely one-fourth of community college students complete any degree within six years of entering college.<sup>21</sup> Every individual who enters college without earning a credential is investing public- and private-sector funding into failed education experiences.

Data suggest that a lack of assistance to help students understand financial aid programs, college courses, and institutional systems—added to a lack of academic preparation for college success—contribute to the high dropout rate.<sup>22</sup> Recent research from Public Agenda indicates that for many students, especially those who end up dropping out of college, the “college selection is more constrained and happenstance than deliberate choice.” Of adults surveyed for Public Agenda's 2009 study, 68 percent of noncompleters said that “the opportunity to talk with advisors who know all about the different college and job-training programs so you can make a good choice” would be very helpful for moving students toward degree completion.<sup>23</sup>

This complicated and rapidly changing economic environment makes it increasingly difficult for workers to identify stable, family-sustaining jobs that match their interests and aptitudes. A greater challenge yet is figuring out how to build from experiences in one job to create a coherent career path without taking too many detours or wrong turns.

Even a decade ago, a Gallup survey identified a need for career planning assistance among adults of all ages. The 1999 National Survey of Working America reported that 7 in 10 people indicated that “if they were starting [their work lives] over, they would try to get more information about the job and career options open to them than they got the first time.”<sup>24</sup> Younger adults, as well as those with less than a four-year college degree, were more likely than college graduates to say they would have benefited from additional information. Regarding likely sources of assistance, 39 percent of adults said that they would seek guidance from a career counselor.

A completely smooth career path is an unrealistic ideal, of course, and a few career detours are to be expected. But many workers, especially those with lower levels of education and income, can ill afford many wrong turns, particularly in this economy. They are falling behind the economic curve every day and need assistance with career navigation just to keep up with the pack.

### Competition for highly skilled workers is a challenge for employers

Employers, too, face tremendous challenges due to the market's volatility. Globalization and a growing reliance on technology are intensifying the competitive environment they operate in. With increasing need for specialization within companies—especially in science and technology industries—it becomes more difficult for companies to find candidates with the right mix of skills and experience. Employers need ways to access and maintain a highly skilled workforce, especially as the economy continues evolving from an industrial to a knowledge base.

Many employers struggled to find qualified applicants before the Great Recession hit: A 2006 Conference Board study found that many employers felt new job market entrants lacked the skills they needed for success.<sup>25</sup> The 2007 Employment Dynamics and Growth Expectations Report found for more than half of hiring managers “the primary recruiting obstacle remains a shortage of qualified workers,” with professional and technical jobs being the hardest to fill.<sup>26</sup> Despite the recession's increase in unemployment, the 2009 EDGE report found employers reporting a shortage of qualified applicants—recruiting a new full-time employee could take 4.5 to 14.4 weeks, depending on the position.<sup>27</sup>

The problem many employers face now and will continue to face is that job seekers are not trained for the jobs employers are offering. The Bureau of Labor Statistics' projections indicate that most job growth will be in occupations “requiring advanced or specialized skills.”<sup>28</sup> The large number of baby boomers reaching retirement age also means that employers will soon have large numbers of specialized, high-level jobs to fill. But unemployment reports show much higher unemployment among workers with a high school diploma or less.

As routine work continues to be outsourced, most work available in the United States will be higher-skilled knowledge work. Julian Alssid of the Workforce Strategy Center argues that the United States is in a “skills recession,” which means that the skill sets of today's job seekers don't align with the needs of employers. This can lead to both high unemployment and a labor shortage.<sup>29</sup> The American Society for Training and Development describes a skills gap as when a company “can no longer grow or remain competitive because it cannot fill critical jobs with employees who have the right knowledge, skills, and abilities.”<sup>30</sup> ASTD's research finds that employers' changing needs combined with low educational attainment is contributing to this gap. As the economy recovers and jobs become available, many displaced workers—especially those in declining industries—will need to retrain to fit labor market demands.

Some larger employers with enough resources invest in career development programs for their employees. These companies, which are anomalies, view the ability to invest in the ongoing development of their talent as vital to the bottom line. Unfortunately, many of these companies do so only for higher-level employees, not entry-level workers. Many more companies rely on the “catch and release” model of human capital acquisition: They continually hire new talent as people with outdated skills leave. Despite the huge number of companies that do this, it is highly inefficient and very costly. Companies struggle to stay competitive if they remain understaffed for long periods of time, and job searches, not to mention on-the-job training, are costly. When companies compete for a small pool of skilled workers, they may find they need to pay more to attract and retain talent.<sup>31</sup>

A lack of communication between the supply and demand sides of employment leads to costly inefficiencies, including more time collecting unemployment for workers and more time spent getting new employees up to speed. Career navigation services could serve a critical role keeping up with the changing needs of industries and informing job seekers how to build the skills needed to make a job or career switch. Companies would benefit from seeing their human capital needs addressed by education and training providers.

## A global perspective on career guidance

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, an international organization helping governments tackle the economic, social, and governance challenges of a globalized economy, found significant deficiencies in national career guidance services in a review of surveys of 37 countries, including England, Ireland, and Canada.<sup>32</sup> The survey did not include the United States, but found many problems similar to those here. “Career Guidance: A Handbook for Policy Makers,” a 2004 OECD report on the survey, noted the following issues:

“Access to services is limited, particularly for adults. Too often, services fail to develop people’s career management skills, but focus upon immediate decisions. Training and qualification systems for those who provide services are often inadequate or inappropriate. Co-ordination between key ministries and stakeholders is poor. The evidence base is insufficient to allow proper steering of services by policy makers, with inadequate data being available on costs, benefits, client characteristics or outcomes. And in delivering services, insufficient use is made of ICT [information and communications technology] and other cost-effective ways to meet client needs more effectively.”<sup>33</sup>

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## The gap between need and access to effective career navigation supports

Both workers and employers would benefit from a more coherent national approach to providing career navigation services. Workers perceive this need, and evidence suggests there is a growing demand from workers and employers for career navigation services. But the way adults navigate their careers is haphazard and access to guidance is limited.

### The demand for career navigation services

The demand for career navigation services is significant and expected to grow. As noted above, 70 percent of workers indicated in a 1999 survey that if they were to start their work lives over again, they would benefit from more information on careers and career navigation. A 2000 publication of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Technical Education also pointed out the growing need for career development specialists, particularly those trained to address the 21st century workforce's needs.<sup>34</sup>

Some signs indicate more people are entering the field to meet this demand: The International Coach Federation, which includes career, professional, and personal counselors, had 2,100 members a decade ago—that number has jumped to 16,600.<sup>35</sup> And both Yahoo! HotJobs and CareerBuilder.com listed “career counselor” in 2009 as a field poised for growth.

Further, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates increased growth for educational, vocational, and school counselors—about 13 percent between 2006 and 2016. That would amount to a 40,000 worker increase, from 260,000 to almost 300,000. Although the BLS does not provide growth rates by types of counselors, it does project increased demand specifically for vocational and career counselors. The need for these positions “should grow as multiple job and career changes become common and as workers become increasingly aware of counseling services,” states the *Occupational Outlook Handbook: 2008-2009*. “In addition, State and local governments will employ growing numbers of counselors to assist beneficiaries of welfare programs who exhaust their eligibility and must find jobs. Other opportunities for employment of counselors will arise in private job-training centers that provide training and other services to laid-off workers and others seeking to acquire new skills or careers.”<sup>36</sup>

### How individuals navigate their careers

The United States has never had a coherent, intentional career navigation system. For a long time such a system was unnecessary because most jobs valued physical strength and endurance over education and skills, and workers tended to stay with the same company for most of their working lives. Workers who needed career advice often received it from family and friends. Often, children simply entered the occupations and professions of their parents.

As the nation's economy has shifted to a more dynamic one based on information and knowledge, career navigation supports have emerged from a wide variety of sources, but the supports are highly uneven and disorganized. Career navigation assistance today is a hodgepodge of different types and intensities of career guidance offered by different institutions and people with varying levels of qualifications.

Starting at a young age, Americans today must develop career ideas without much guidance. Almost without exception, the typical American is first exposed to the notion of career development at a very early age with the question: "What do you want to be when you grow up?" The answer is usually based on what the child's parents or other close adults do, or what the child has seen on television or the Internet. Common responses today include forensic scientist, doctor, or sports star.

Children in low-income communities usually have few role models with family-supporting careers. Daphna Oyserman, a social psychologist at the University of Michigan, found that for low-income and minority youth, social context—including a lack of role models—restricts children's view of possible occupations. Their view of what careers are valued is also influenced by what they grow up with.<sup>37</sup> These young people might identify jobs that are or have been important in their neighborhoods but offer little opportunity for career advancement, such as barbers or beauticians. Primary schools and youth development programs in low-income neighborhoods often offer career exploration opportunities, but the quality and quality vary significantly.

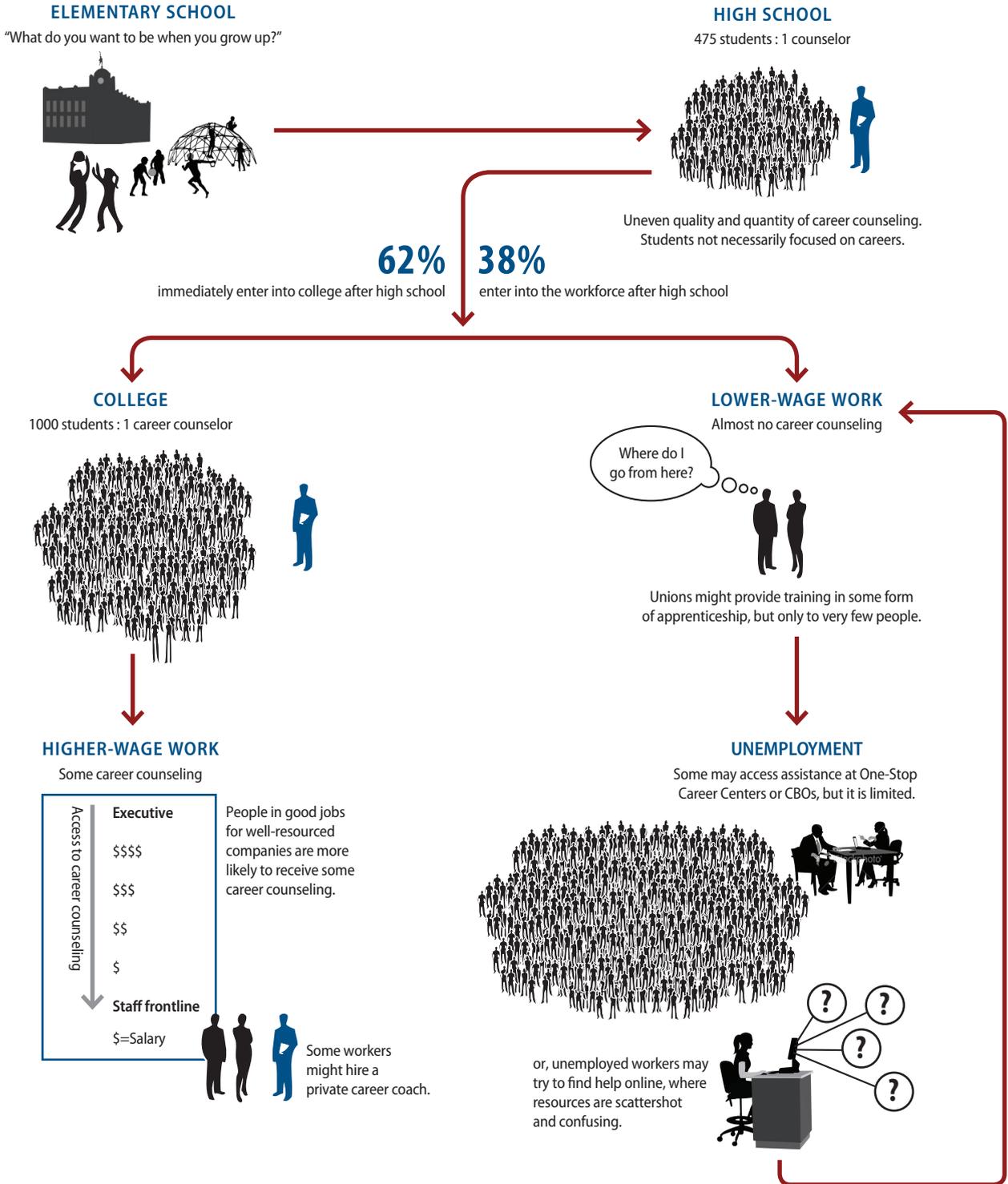
The lack of guidance continues in primary and secondary school. Guidance counselors are common fixtures in middle and high schools, but they typically provide little targeted career guidance. Professional school counselors have a master's degree or higher in school counseling or the substantial equivalent and are certified or licensed in the state in which they work, according to the American Counseling Association. There are more than 100,000 guidance counselors in public schools throughout the country, including elementary, middle/junior high, and high schools, and their mission is to "address the full array of students' academic, personal, social, and career development needs."<sup>38</sup>

Although the American School Counselor Association recommends a counselor-to-student ratio of 1 to 250, the average is actually 1 to 475.<sup>39</sup> Worse, school guidance counselors are some of the first staff to have their jobs eliminated or their hours reduced in times of tough budget cuts.<sup>40</sup> Given the size of their caseloads and the range of their responsibilities, it's no wonder that guidance counselors often are unable to spend much time providing individualized career guidance, making sufficient, quality career development assistance impossible.

College students are likely to experience similar problems finding career navigation assistance as those they encountered in high school: high advisor-to-student ratios and little individualized assistance. College help is often split between two types of counselors: Academic advisors help students navigate the course requirements for graduation, and career counselors help students gain job experience or find a job upon graduation.

# What Do You Want to Be When You Grow Up?

How Individuals Navigate Their Careers



Some colleges are beginning to incorporate career exploration assistance into freshman orientation programming. But both the quality and quantity of these services vary. Four-year colleges and universities are more likely to provide these services because they have more traditional students and more resources than community colleges. At community colleges, where most working learners are likely to enroll if they seek postsecondary education at all, the counselor-to-student ratio is an untenable 1 to 1,000.<sup>41</sup>

College graduates who find jobs are unlikely to have access to any career development assistance except during periods of employment crisis, such as a layoff or dislocation. Some may go to work for a company that has adopted a robust “talent management” system, but this is far from the norm.

Whether or not working adults go to college, they use a variety of informal and untargeted methods for navigating their careers. According to the 1999 survey conducted for the National Career Development Association, 42 percent of adults in the labor force looked to friends and relatives for help locating employment opportunities. The same percentage used print media and television, and 39 percent went to some sort of career counselor. One in eight turned to the public library or the Internet.

Because this survey was conducted in 1999, some of this data certainly has changed, especially regarding Internet usage. Nevertheless, the overall theme surely remains valid: Working adults seeking career navigation assistance face a bewildering variety of information sources of uneven quality and value.<sup>42</sup>

Adults who don't go to college after high school or who start but don't finish are even less likely to have access to any employer-provided career development assistance. These individuals may receive assistance from the public workforce system, a nonprofit community organization, or the open market, but they are likely to access services only at times of unemployment, when they are least likely to be able to engage in career development. Being unemployed, they must focus on replacing lost income.

The public workforce system, which is guided by the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration, offers some career navigation assistance through its 1,800 One-Stop Career Centers that provide access to services funded by the Workforce Investment Act and the Employment Service. About 15 million people receive services through these centers each year. Core services are available to all at no cost and include job search and placement assistance, job referrals, information about the local labor market, and preliminary assessments of skills and needs. Intensive services include comprehensive assessments, case management, short-term prevocational services, work experience, and internships. The quantity and quality of these career navigation services vary widely by state, and sometimes by community.

Some people may be able to access career counseling services through community-based organizations. These organizations, however, can be few and far between outside major metropolitan areas. And their resources usually are quite limited, which restricts the number of people they can serve.

Of course, many individuals in search of career counseling services turn to the Internet. A Google search for “career counseling services” and related terms illustrates the problem with this approach: The search generates dozens of links in a confusing array of potential options, which leaves it up to the individual to assess what services are legitimate and useful.

# Promising models of career navigation innovation

Outstanding examples of effective programs for workers and learners at various stages in their careers exist within the nation’s mishmash of career navigation assistance services. This section highlights promising models across the country that have been created by a range of entities typically providing career development assistance to working learners: community colleges, the public workforce system, community-based organizations, labor unions, and, less often, employers.

We selected these examples to demonstrate approaches that could be replicated. The search was not exhaustive, however. Many more promising programs exist. Moreover, like those described here, most if not all remain “boutique” programs for the time being, limited in scale and impact given the minimal funding available.

The promising career development programs below share a number of distinct characteristics that contribute to their effectiveness. (See Appendix B: Case Studies for more detailed descriptions of each program.) In each case, the programs:

- Tailor services to local labor market trends, which enables them to provide the most relevant and useful career information
- Tailor services to individual clients’ specific needs—covering a broad range of education and training levels
- Form partnerships with community-based organizations, colleges, and employers, which bridges gaps between the worlds of work, education, and social supports

Effective programs also tend to:

- Regularly track and review progress to ensure that they are meeting client needs
- Provide specialized training to staff to help them understand how to work most effectively with low-income, low-skilled populations

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## Community colleges: The Virginia Community College System’s Education Wizard

The Virginia Community College System debuted the “Education Wizard” in March 2009, an interactive, online career planning tool to help students make educational choices with

their career goals in mind. The creators solicited student and faculty input to design the site—which features a talking avatar to guide users through the available resources—and to determine its essential components. Both enrolled and prospective students can access information on college majors, career options, and local labor market trends as well as financial aid and scholarships. The wizard offers “one-stop shopping” to help students make informed decisions about enrolling in and paying for postsecondary education. More than 200,000 people have accessed the site since its launch.

## Breaking Through colleges provide intensive career navigation and support

Breaking Through, a national initiative of the National Council for Workforce Education and Jobs for the Future, works with community colleges to develop pathways to occupational credentials for working adult students with educational attainment below the eighth-grade level. One of the four components of the service model is to provide intensive support services for these students, who often face multiple academic and personal challenges. Another component is providing intermediate labor market payoffs on the road to a credential, including the provision of career exploration opportunities.<sup>43</sup>

Several Breaking Through colleges have designed or adopted creative career advising models to help students navigate college, careers, and life challenges. For example, the Community College of Denver offers a one-credit course that helps students develop skills to manage career decisions. The course begins with personal exploration assignments that help students develop their writing and reading skills, and it later assigns students labor market research, which improves their research skills.

Students complete interest inventory assessments, participate in informational interviews, do job shadowing, and complete other assignments related to career exploration. They also attend a career majors fair where they learn about the courses they need to take to earn the credentials they are seeking. Students complete two final projects: a career development plan that they can use throughout their studies at the college and beyond, and a PowerPoint presentation on their career plan, which they present to the class.

Portland Community College in Oregon realized that its existing system of academic advisors, workforce program advisors, and counseling

staff did not serve its lowest-skilled students, who needed the most assistance. So the college created a position with its Breaking Through funding to provide intensive counseling and case management services for high-need students going through developmental education and into occupational training. While funding was available, the counselors worked with cohorts of 30 to 60 students per academic term.

Jobs for the Future is developing a training package for transition counselors to help staff in youth programs, community colleges, and One-Stop Career Centers provide more effective career and postsecondary counseling and navigation services. The training will help counselors and advisors better understand local labor markets and identify local postsecondary programs that best serve and prepare young adults who are not quite ready for college. Such information has been a critical missing piece of traditional transition services, which help with college applications or resume preparation but rarely provide comprehensive career guidance to ensure a good employer-employee match.

The training curriculum will focus on matching career growth areas to postsecondary programs of study, using a systematic methodology for assessing the effectiveness of local education and training programs, and deepening knowledge about occupational certification and degree requirements, course requirements, and career ladders and lattices. The training will be beta tested this spring with a small, informed group of counselors, and their feedback will be used to refine the curriculum. A formal pilot later in 2010 will pave the way for more comprehensive dissemination, targeting high school, youth program, and community college counselors and transition staff in cities, states, and national networks.

The Education Wizard has proven to be a valuable tool for career counselors as well as students. Community college-based “career coaches” in Virginia work in high schools across the state to help students develop career goals. The coaches use the Education Wizard to assess students’ career interests and find Virginia colleges that match their interests and objectives.

Several key features make this a promising model:

- It was developed with the wide range of users’ needs in mind.
- High-quality, up-to-date, comprehensive information is tied to local labor market trends.
- A regular review process helps ensure the website continues to meet user needs.
- A strong marketing campaign through individual career counselors and social media sites helps the wizard reach as many potential users as possible.

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### Public workforce development systems: NOVA Workforce Investment Board in Silicon Valley and South Central Michigan Works!

The federal Workforce Investment Act disburses workforce development funding to states, which distribute the money, combined with state contributions, to local and regional Workforce Investment Boards. Regional WIBs are well positioned to tailor their services to the specific needs of the people they serve. The two WIBs described here—the NOVA Workforce Investment System in Silicon Valley, California, and South Central Michigan Works!—offer examples of comprehensive, integrated career navigation assistance systems that respond to local circumstances.

NOVA’s Silicon Valley location serves a highly educated group of displaced workers. The volatility of the region’s job market means workers need to keep their technical skills up to date and develop or improve their networking and entrepreneurial skills. At NOVA’s One-Stop Career Centers, a comprehensive service delivery model offers workshops and guidance in these areas along with more traditional assessment services, coaching, and job search support.

Across the country, the Michigan WIB serves a starkly different population. South Central Michigan Works! serves a large number of job seekers who must improve their basic skills before they can take advantage of No Worker Left Behind, the state scholarship program for retraining displaced workers. The WIB mapped the region’s educational programs and assessed the skill needs of local employers. It combined this information with a process that integrates intake and assessment, which allowed it to become more efficient in matching workers with the right programs. Career navigators assist job seekers with designing individual learning plans as well as providing referrals, counseling, and other supports.

Both of these promising models:

- Have a deep knowledge of local labor market supply and demand and have organized that information for their clients' benefit
- Integrate services of the Workforce Investment Board and those of regional partners
- Use data systems to track progress and ensure continuity of service

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## Community-based organizations: YouthBuild Philadelphia and Boston's Jewish Vocational Service

Community-based organizations often provide intensive, comprehensive career development services that help adults progress beyond low-wage, low-skill employment. YouthBuild Philadelphia and Boston's Jewish Vocational Service are examples of promising career coaching models serving lower-skilled adults. By partnering with employers and local education providers, these CBOs can connect workers with both training and good jobs. They provide highly qualified career coaches and case managers who know how to work with adults facing multiple life challenges.

At YouthBuild Philadelphia, a charter school program that combines academic preparation with hands-on job training, cross-departmental communication means that staff members are highly responsive to students' needs. Everyone focuses on the end goal of transitioning students into postsecondary education and meaningful employment. YouthBuild's partnerships with employers and postsecondary institutions ease transitions and enable staff to stay connected with students as they start training programs or new jobs. Staff members also can work as liaisons that help students navigate the worlds of work and school. The program makes sure that students earn meaningful credentials that will be valuable to employers.

At Jewish Vocational Service in Boston, comprehensive coaching programs help frontline health care workers gain the credentials they need to advance in the field. Coaches help students assess career goals and map out pathways. They also conduct academic gap analyses to determine what further education and training individuals need to succeed. The coaches work closely with employers, who are committed to the program. And they act as liaisons with community colleges to track students' academic progress. JVS considers its highly qualified coaches to be an essential part of the model's success, along with partnerships and employer buy-in.

These promising models:

- Maintain strong partnerships with employers and educational institutions
- Focus organization-wide on coaching and case management
- Focus on academic skill building and job training
- Have dedicated staff members who are skilled at working with low-income, low-skilled populations

## Year Up: Training, internships, and career planning for urban young adults

Year Up, which was founded in Boston in 2000 and now serves more than 1,600 students in six cities, provides urban young adults with a combination of hands-on technical and professional skills training along with extended paid internships. Participants benefit from numerous supports to address career planning needs. Staff members serve as advisors who meet weekly with participants to talk about professional and personal issues. Each participant is also assigned a mentor from the business community to further assist with career development and planning. Weekly guest speakers offer career and life perspectives and often become part of the participants' growing professional network. Field trips to work-

places heighten awareness of business settings and opportunities. Volunteer social workers and tutors offer additional support.

Further, the program explicitly teaches professional networking skills, since most incoming Year Up participants have no professional networks to draw on. Mentors and guest speakers often become part of student networks. The Year Up Alumni Association serves the needs of the growing network of graduates. Year Up seeks ultimately to create a community of professionals who will provide deep and lasting support for its alumni.

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### Labor unions: District 1199C Training and Upgrading Fund and the American Federation of Teachers' Learning Advisors

Labor unions frequently have training funds and learning centers to help members build their skills and advance their careers. Union-based programs also can include access to supportive services such as career counseling. The District 1199C Training and Upgrading Fund in Philadelphia, created in 1974, works with local hospitals to give workers educational opportunities and career support. The fund provides both incumbent and prospective workers with a variety of training opportunities that will help them advance up a career ladder and earn higher wages. Career counselors are an essential element of these programs, and they conduct assessments, help workers develop individualized career plans, direct them to the appropriate training resources, and assist with job placement.

The American Federation of Teachers is also developing a program, based on a United Kingdom model, to offer more career development coaching to teachers and school support staff. Workplace-based "learning representatives" will coordinate on-site activities and connect teachers and staff with educational opportunities that can advance their careers.

Both of these promising models:

- Build on labor unions' mission of supporting workers
- Offer targeted coaching services through sector-based unions
- Use union relationships with employers to negotiate employee release time for career development activities

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## Employers: IBM, Microsoft, CVS/WorkSource Partners, and Springboard Forward

Some employers have come to the conclusion that investing in human capital makes good business sense, and they are developing their internal talent pools by providing career development opportunities for incumbent workers. This is true of the employer partners in the above examples. Other examples of employer-based career coaching come from IBM, Microsoft, CVS, and a number of companies in the San Francisco Bay Area. IBM and Microsoft have put together their own career development systems, CVS works with a for-profit company, and the Bay Area employers contract with a nonprofit career development agency.

IBM and Microsoft both combine online tools with traditional coaching and mentoring to help employees advance within the company. IBM's career development suite gives employees information on skill-building opportunities for the specific skills they need to advance. Employees can use the online system to develop personal career plans, and they can access a network of career advisors and mentors. Microsoft also uses an online tool to help employees plan and track career advancement goals, and employees can work directly with supervisors to create individual learning and career development plans.

CVS Caremark, the national drugstore chain, contracts with WorkSource Partners to create career development programs for entry-level workers. This enables the company to promote frequently from within. The company also has created a pre-employment program to prepare disconnected youths for work, which includes a strong coaching component. The WorkSource Partners career coaches help new young workers advocate for themselves, build relationships with their supervisors, and make decisions that advance their careers. The two-year pilot of the Retail Career Development program for entry-level workers showed promising results, including improvements in employee engagement, retention, and performance.

Nonprofit Springboard Forward in San Francisco supplies similar career development services for companies such as Goodwill San Francisco and El Camino Hospital. Its one-year, worksite-based program includes interest and skills assessments, career planning workshops, training on effective job hunting and interview strategies, and ongoing one-on-one meetings with coaches.

These promising models:

- Work with employers who are committed to employees' career development
- Make services available to all employees, including entry-level workers
- Provide in-person support for workers through coaches and mentors
- Provide services at the workplace

# A national framework for career navigation services

The United States must address the shortcomings in its current career navigation services, particularly for working learners. The nation needs an intentional, comprehensive approach that builds upon strengths in the field. As the promising models described in the second section demonstrate, innovative approaches to career navigation are emerging from diverse sectors. These programs show how different institutions can strengthen individuals' career navigational skills. But they remain isolated examples that serve limited numbers of adults.

What would it take to develop a more coherent, transparent, efficient set of initiatives that had the capacity to provide career navigation services to more Americans? This section paints a vision of what such a system might look like. We offer it as a framework for contemplating the guiding principles and critical questions for expanding today's career navigation services. It is a starting point for thinking nationally about services that by their nature are regional and local.

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## Vision

A national approach to improving career navigation services would focus on ensuring that any worker, at any time in her or his career, could access information and resources that would help him or her make smart career decisions. The assistance could be self-directed or guided by support from a professional depending on individual needs.

The system would offer proven assessment tools to help people develop a better understanding of their strengths, weaknesses, skills, and interests. It would supply information about a broad range of career options via multimedia resources—ranging from videos of workers in various occupations to clearly explained data about specific jobs such as local labor market demand, education and skills required, and typical compensation. People exploring specific education and training programs could find information on providers in their region, course offerings, graduation rates, and financial aid.

Additionally, individuals could create and continually update a lifetime career profile describing their education, training, credentials, work experience, and other relevant information. Profiles could serve as resumes as well as individualized career navigation plans that could be updated at any time and used consistently throughout one's working lifetime.

More intensive services, such as career coaching, advising, or comprehensive counseling, also would be available depending on one's needs. Working learners and job seekers could connect with others through social networking technology and receive peer support, advice, and encouragement. Updated career-relevant information could be sent electronically through email, text messages, or other dynamic tools.

Encouragingly, much of the information and technology that would be part of an online career navigation clearinghouse already exists. Multiple websites have career assessments and planning advice and dozens house layers of links to useful resources. The overall quality, however, suffers from a fundamental missing piece: a way to coordinate everything into a centralized portal or home base that career navigators could trust as reliable source for valuable, up-to-date information. Also missing is a proactive, dynamic interface for career navigation. Many websites may list links and resources, but the sites are often static, passive, and confusing. They do not provide users with the tools to create a customized game plan for taking advantage of the available resources.

There is a foundation for the personal assistance component of this vision. The architects of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 envisioned a career development system with several important similarities. It was to be universal and widely available through state, regional, or local One-Stop Career Centers. And it was to provide a broad spectrum of services and coordinate U.S. Department of Labor programs at a minimum, while ideally bringing in other community education, training, and career advancement resources.

A key design principle of WIA was individual empowerment. This empowerment was to be actualized by providing greater levels of information and guidance through the One-Stop system by implementing a system of consumer reports containing key information on the performance of training and education providers.

For a variety of reasons, however, the WIA system fell short of its vision. WIA's initial priority of placing people into jobs quickly rather than guiding them into education or training diminished its focus on career development and the resources and staff to provide these more complex services. The consumer reports model encountered problems caused by reporting burden and issues with data collection. Making matters worse, the federal workforce system has suffered significant funding cuts over the last two decades, which resulted in limited resources being stretched to support direct services as well as capital and administrative costs.

Disconnected silos persist today despite the federal government's attempt to combine services in one location and coordinate career development across agencies. For example, in some communities the Employment Service Office, which provides labor exchange services to connect employers with job seekers, is across town from the One-Stop Career Center, even though the Department of Labor governs both. Some of the best programs, such as those highlighted in this report's second section, do a good job of integrating services and the result is a seamless set of offerings to clients. But that is not the norm.

Core services such as job search and placement assistance, referrals, local labor market information, and preliminary assessments of skills and needs, work experience, and internships are universal. But the more robust career navigation assistance that many working learners are likely to need—comprehensive assessments, case management, short-term prevocational services and training—are limited to those who qualify for certain education or training programs.

An ideal system would connect community college counselors, community-based organizations, unions, employer models, and private coaches, who all regularly help individuals think about and plan their careers and career preparation. But to date, all of these critical services remain fragmented rather than functioning as an integrated, transparent career navigation system.

A new national approach would knit together and scale up successful programs and entities into a cohesive, flexible, diversified system. This approach would make the system realistically cost effective and capitalize on the resources that have emerged over the years. The product of this approach could be a website where all career navigators could find a “home base” for career development as well as easy-to-use existing resources.

The European Commission on Lifelong Guidance has produced a set of guidelines that detail what “an ideal model of a lifelong guidance system” would look like (see Appendix A). It covers what citizens should be able to expect from a national career navigation system along with policies to promote access and quality. It also describes the interagency cooperation and partnerships needed to make a national system function and recommends processes for ongoing evaluation and review. These guidelines would provide a starting point for imagining how the United States could approach the need for lifelong career navigation.<sup>44</sup>

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## Key design principles

The following key design principles should frame a national conversation about how to expand the nation’s system of career navigation services and guide its development:

**Provide continuous and lifelong access to career navigation:** Career navigation is an ongoing process from childhood through adulthood with many job changes throughout. Most workers do not need continuous career development assistance, but they should have continuous access to assistance so they can get help when they need it.

People also benefit from different types and intensities of assistance at different points in their lives. Young people early in their career development and working adults during career transitions need more intensive assistance, perhaps with a counselor. Noncareer changers may require less intensive advising or coaching to assist them with a job change or educa-

tional upgrade. Lower-income workers and those with lower educational attainment may need more comprehensive counseling that includes some assistance with life challenges.

**Increase capacity to meet national demand:** Career navigation is universally important—for workers, employers, and the national economy. Therefore, career navigation resources should be universally provided. Existing resources and programs serve many people but far fewer than what’s needed. Constrained funding limits realizing the full potential of these resources—for example, community college counselors carry routine caseloads of 1,000 students each. Additional funding must boost capacity.

**Provide high-quality service that conforms to appropriate common minimum standards:** Career navigation is too important to be left to a hodgepodge system. Many existing programs provide high-quality service and a national system should build upon them. As the system is scaled up, however, all assistance providers should be held to common minimum standards (see box, “Key competencies for career navigation”).

The federal government should establish a “gold standard” for both career navigation assistance programs and career navigation professionals, including counselors, advisors, and coaches. The standards should be mandated for government-funded programs but voluntary for others. Incentives should be created to encourage other public, nonprofit, and private career navigation professionals to adopt the standards in order to establish consistency in the field. Meeting the gold standard might be a requirement for a provider to be connected to a federally endorsed career navigation website.

There are models that could be helpful in establishing this standard. The U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Vocational and Adult Education issued updated National Career Development Guidelines in 2003.<sup>45</sup> These can serve as a framework of career development competencies, mastery indicators, and a recommended strategy for putting in place career development programs for youths or adults. Many career coaching programs specify standards and competencies that should be considered. The guidelines developed by the European Commission’s Expert Group on Lifelong Guidance also could be helpful in creating standards for a new national career development system (see Appendix A).<sup>46</sup>

**Integrate multiple service providers with each offering appropriate services for particular populations or clients:** A decentralized system of diverse career navigation assistance providers can be a strength if it is held to quality standards, coordinated, and comprehensive enough to provide universal access. Integrated service providers—such as nonprofits, employers, and educational institutions—were a critical piece of many of the promising models featured in the second section. It should be a key element of a national approach to career development. A system that coordinates and integrates programs and services would make sure more adults find the services they need no matter where they start their career search.

## Key competencies for career navigation professionals

Practitioners in a national career navigation system should be held to a minimum competency standard. While many certification systems for career counselors and coaches exist, from master's degrees in career counseling to competency requirements for coaches, all are different. There are common themes, however, and these should be analyzed and translated into a national standard or continuum of quality standards.

Important requirements and competencies may include:

- Appropriate training and credential for a specific service provision whether it is counseling, coaching, or something in between
- Understanding of adult learning theory
- Knowledge of the regional labor market and growing industries and companies
- Knowledge of specific education and training options for specific career interests
- Knowledge of specific community resources and programs
- Familiarity with assessments used to determine interests, skills, and values
- Ability to relate all of these factors to the individual's goals
- Expertise motivating individuals to translate plans and goals into action steps

Competencies developed by Dorothy Wax, director of career services at the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning.

### **Provide unbiased and objective assistance carefully tailored to individual needs:**

Career navigation assistance should be driven by individuals' needs. They should have access to unbiased, objective career assistance that is delivered by professionals who are not affiliated with any particular education or training provider or industry. Some individuals, especially those in the early stages of career development, need this objective assistance. Those farther along will require more targeted assistance.

**Empower the individual with career navigation skills:** Career navigation is becoming a critical life skill. A national model of career navigation should make it so that all individuals receive career navigation education. This would help ensure that all workers can effectively manage their career development—and that the nation's human capital is effectively deployed. Here, too, the system should build upon existing models.

**Provide efficient, streamlined services that fully utilize technology for maximum scale:** The system must be extremely efficient to cost effectively provide continuous, lifelong, universal access to career development assistance. This requires streamlined services that meet each client's needs without establishing overly complex and costly programs. Quick, accurate assessments of client's needs—counseling, coaching, advising—and quick, efficient connections to the appropriate assistance will be a must. Clients

should be able to serve themselves when possible and to become more self-sufficient over time using their own career navigation skills.

Technology will play a critical role. As the Virginia Community College System Education Wizard demonstrates, thoughtfully designed, technology-based systems that focus on the user and leverage other electronic systems can be powerful. Additional technology-based solutions upon which to base a more robust, dynamic system can be found in Appendix C.

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## Design questions

The authors' research into promising examples of career navigation point us to a number of key design principles and critical questions relevant to scaling up services to meet national demand. Designing or rebooting any complex service delivery system at scale means making difficult choices on services offered, the platform to be used, the mix of technological and human interfaces, governance, level of centralization, tradeoffs between standardization and customization, and of course cost. As efforts to conceptualize, pilot, or systematically expand career navigation take shape, advocates will need to articulate options and make choices about these issues. We note a few of the more important design challenges and choices below.

### National vs. regional-local

There are certainly benefits to addressing a national need on a national scale, but labor markets and training opportunities show major variations across regions and communities. For example, the job options and educational offerings in the rural Southeast will be very different from those of a large Midwest city. The challenge is determining how much to rely on local service providers, which could lead to greater variation in capacity and quality, and how much to coordinate at the state or national levels.

### High tech vs. high touch

A number of technology-based approaches to career development would enable job seekers to access information and services from any location, at any time, and through a variety of media. The growing popularity of social networking sites, texting, and tweeting, and even computerized matching services, offers an opportunity to make online career navigation services more dynamic, accessible, and customizable. Yet technology has its limits, and some job seekers may benefit more from the one-on-one, face-to-face aspect of more traditional career counseling. Some may prefer networking at events rather than through online services. Relying too heavily on technology could alienate some potential clients, particularly the less technology-savvy older or low-income individuals most in need of support and assistance.

## Networking vs. governing

The second section demonstrated that a number of programs make high-quality career development available in a decentralized system. There are also strong program models that are part of the public system and are more centrally governed. Improving access to services will require strategies to network the array of providers by breaking down existing silos and increasing communication to serve clients more effectively.

This method, however, relies on service providers to monitor their own quality and effectiveness. A governing entity that oversees providers and maintains standards could raise overall quality but also be bureaucratic and costly. A related question is the level at which a governing entity would be situated: local, regional, state, or national.

## Standardization vs. individualization

The government should create quality standards for career navigation services, but should the services themselves be standardized? Standardization promotes efficiency in development, dissemination, and quality—for example, creating uniform referral procedures for adults seeking further education and training. But job seekers have unique needs, and moving too far in the direction of standardization could have negative effects.

Case in point: A recent evaluation of individual training accounts (vouchers for training programs) offered through WIA One-Stop centers training programs found that when job seekers were offered the option of free counseling provided by the One-Stop, only 4 percent elected to receive it. When the vouchers made counseling mandatory, some job seekers refused the vouchers.<sup>47</sup>

These statistics seem at odds with the 1999 Gallup study findings that identified a much higher interest in career navigation services. But they also illustrate the limits of mandatory or highly uniform approaches.

A variety of federal and state government actions can help with the design questions and move us toward a more coherent, integrated network of career navigation services with the capacity to meet the growing national need. But the conversation about why we need better career navigation services for adults and working learners is just getting started. We offer suggestions of where to go from here in the next section.

# Recommendations for next steps

The federal government can and should play a significant role in meeting the national need for career navigation services. The U.S. Department of Labor's Tools for America's Job Seekers Challenge is one example of how the federal government can give increased attention to navigators' needs. This initiative allowed users to submit and recommend a wide variety of career navigation tools that are now available on the Education and Training Administration's CareerOneStop website.<sup>48</sup> DOL also announced plans to launch a virtual One-Stop encompassing several career navigation tools.

We recommend two corresponding sets of activities the government could take to promote more widely accessible and effective career services:

- A national communications campaign to raise awareness of the pressing need for more robust career navigation services
- Extensive research and development to better map and evaluate existing resources and to test new and scaled-up models

The research and development phase does not have to be a long process. As demonstrated throughout this paper, there are many small-scale models and promising resources from which to build a career navigation system. But these activities need to be thoughtfully executed and look to maximize learning about powerful design options that are potential game changers.

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## Communications campaign

- **Use the bully pulpit:** Build from President Obama's challenge to the nation that all Americans earn at least one year of higher education or job training, and capitalize on federal changes to unemployment insurance and Pell grant programs. The secretaries of Education, Labor, and Health and Human Services should build career navigation into their talking points regarding the administration's postsecondary education agenda. Further, their respective departments should incorporate ideas for a new national model of career navigation into program planning for a more robust education and workforce system and a higher-skilled workforce.

- **Seed a paradigm shift:** The federal government (Education, Labor, HHS), in partnership with business, colleges, unions, and workforce programs, should support a national campaign to raise workers’, employers’, and other stakeholders’ awareness of the necessity and value of career development services across every person’s working life.

There is fertile ground for such a campaign. Many workers are feeling vulnerable to the unforgiving economy and might welcome clearer signals and support on how quality career navigation should be more readily available to them. Employers, too, likely would welcome this change as they struggle to find and keep the right talent for their workplaces.

One model to draw from is the “Go Higher Kentucky” communications campaigns to encourage Kentuckians to enroll in postsecondary education.<sup>49</sup> This coordinated communications strategy includes compelling and hip public service announcements on television and radio, as well as direct mailings, publicity kits for community organizations, press conferences, rallies, and informational and interactive websites. Increasing numbers of Kentuckians are using the site to access information on postsecondary options.

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## Research and development

**Map it:** The Office of Adult and Vocational Education at the Department of Education and the Employment Training Administration at the Department of Labor should conduct a joint analysis and assessment of U.S. career development assistance services. Map assets and promising models and note gaps and weaknesses.

**Develop national standards:** OVAE and ETA should work together to create national standards for all career navigation programs and the professionals who provide the services. Build from research on successful programs as well as on existing national and international models. Tie federal funding to the adoption of these standards and encourage foundations to do so as well.

**Increase the resources supporting career navigation:** The supply of affordable career navigation assistance falls far short of meeting what’s needed, especially in public and non-profit systems. To help solve this problem, the federal government could increase funding for career navigation services through the Workforce Investment Act and other current programs.

It could also offer incentives to state governments and local institutions such as community colleges to increase career development funding by providing matching funds or challenge grants for the increased investments. New federal programs or initiatives—such as the American Graduation Initiative, which seeks to increase the number of adults with postsecondary credentials—ought to encourage attention to and resources for growing and testing improved career navigation models.<sup>50</sup>

**Invest in rigorous evaluation of promising models:** Investigate what models work for what populations. Evaluation should consider questions of cost: What models provide a strong return on investment? What models can be scaled up in a cost-efficient manner? Evaluating models will also require building better linkages between existing data collection systems, such as those for postsecondary education, workforce education, and employment data.

**Scale up promising models:** Pilot and evaluate large-scale demonstrations of promising models to test their effectiveness and assess their potential for national scale up. This paper features some promising models—there are likely dozens more pockets of innovation throughout the country. Consider implementing a national competitive grants program administered jointly by the U.S. departments of Education and Labor.

**Provide incentives for employer-driven models:** Encourage more companies to invest in advancing incumbent workers' skills through work-based learning, access to career pathways, and opportunities to earn college credit. The companies involved with Jobs to Careers and the National Fund for Workforce Solutions, two national career development initiatives, have reaped major payoffs from investing in their employees' career development, including reduced staff turnover, fewer vacancies, higher quality of service, and greater company loyalty.

What's more, the community often sees companies that invest in career development as "companies of choice." Stanley Street Treatment and Resources, a provider of mental health, primary health, and substance abuse treatment services in Massachusetts and Rhode Island, is one Jobs to Careers project that benefited from its investment in employee career development. SSTAR has increased professionalism and higher effectiveness among staff, which in turn makes the nonprofit agency more competitive and increases its overall profit margin. The company also lowered its lower recruitment costs and improved employee retention.

**Incubate new ideas:** Engage creative thinkers and pilot bold innovations, especially technology-based solutions. This is an underdeveloped area that could provide the cost-effectiveness required to make the system comprehensive, universal, and lifelong. Consider a competitive process to solicit ideas.

One approach would be to launch a competition similar to the X PRIZE, a \$10 million-plus award given to the first team to achieve a specific goal set by the X PRIZE Foundation. While this type of funding often comes from private foundations, the federal government could develop similar competitions or leverage private funders to encourage creative approaches.

**Pilot creative financing mechanisms:** The primary strategy for financing programs that make up a national career navigation system should be to scale up successful programs and increase their corresponding funding sources, such as postsecondary institutions, government workforce programs, employers, philanthropy, and users. But this will not

be sufficient to fund all the necessary services. For a broadly accessible, coherent, and cost-effective national system to gain traction, the federal government will need to pilot innovative financing mechanisms as well as innovative program models.

One possibility lies in the Center for American Progress’s report “Working Learners: Educating Our Entire Workforce for Success in the 21st Century,” where Louis Soares advocates “Micro-Pell Grants” as a way to direct more funding to working learner programs.<sup>51</sup> The Micro-Pell policy concept was to target Pell grants toward individuals who work and would achieve a credential incrementally over time. Perhaps these grants could cover career navigation services at community colleges or community-based organizations as well.

Another possibility is using unemployment insurance to pay for career navigation and training before workers become unemployed. This would be especially helpful for workers who know layoffs are imminent. The ability to seek career guidance and start retraining before unemployment begins could help people find a job more quickly, and they would spend less time collecting unemployment.

# Conclusion

Today's workers are likely to make a number of job changes over the course of their careers. Many will change career fields or find they need to continually upgrade their skills to maintain their employability. As industries shrink and grow, some displaced workers will need to retool their skill set completely in order to find a new job. They need the right tools to tackle these challenges, but these tools aren't always readily available. And even when they are, the quality varies.

Career navigation in the United States has long been seen as a personal responsibility and something an individual does only at the beginning of his or her working life. In today's labor market, however, career navigation is an essential, lifelong skill, and the United States lacks a coherent, integrated network of career guidance services.

This paper's purpose is to argue for increasing the availability of career navigation services and to highlight a number of promising models. As we've shown, there are many small-scale models and promising resources we can use to begin building a more coherent, integrated network of career navigation services. And much of the information and technology to get there already exists.

We think the federal government can and should play a role in this endeavor. It can do this in two ways: through a national campaign to raise awareness and through research and development that takes stock of existing resources, evaluates them, and tests new and scaled-up models.

The authors hope our vision of a national approach to career guidance will spur a long-overdue conversation about how to make sure any working adult, at any point, can get the information and resources he or she needs to enjoy a productive and rewarding career.

# Appendix A: The key features of a lifelong guidance system

**By the European Commission's Expert Group on Lifelong Guidance  
From "Career Guidance: A Handbook for Policy Makers"<sup>52</sup>**

This appendix gives the key features of a lifelong career guidance system. The European Commission's Expert Group on Lifelong Guidance produced these and intended for policymakers to use them as a checklist for self- and peer-review at the national level. They represent the ideal model of a lifelong guidance system against which the features of existing national systems can be assessed. They should be used in conjunction with the common aims and principles for lifelong guidance and the criteria for the assessment of the quality of career guidance (see report).

## **1. Citizen-centered features**

- All citizens have access to guidance throughout their lives, at times, in locations, and in forms that respond to their needs.
- Citizens are provided with opportunities to learn how to make meaningful educational and occupational decisions and how to manage their learning and work so that they can progress through diverse learning opportunities and career pathways.
- Mechanisms exist to allow citizens to: invest efficiently in and benefit from lifelong learning opportunities; identify competences gained from nonformal and informal learning; and develop other competences.
- Citizens' participation in guidance is enhanced through the application of principles for lifelong guidance provision.
- Citizens' entitlements to guidance are clearly defined.
- Citizens are referred for additional guidance assistance, as appropriate, within and across sectors, and across national boundaries.
- Continuous improvement of guidance services, of career information, and of guidance tools and products is promoted through the application of quality assurance mechanisms, in which the citizen and user plays a key role.

## 2. Policy development features

- Lifelong learning and the development of employability are the guiding principles and frameworks for the development of policies, systems, and practices for lifelong guidance.
- Policies and programs for lifelong guidance are an integral part of national- and European Community-level social and economic development policies and programs. These include policies and programs relating to education, training, employment, social inclusion, gender equity, human resource development, regional and rural development, and improving living and working conditions.
- Guidance policies and programs are developed in a coordinated way across education, training, employment, and community sectors within a lifelong learning and active employability framework.
- The roles and responsibilities of all those who develop lifelong guidance policies, systems, and programs are clearly defined.
- Policies and programs for lifelong guidance are formulated and implemented through stakeholder participation in mechanisms such as national forums for guidance. Relevant stakeholders include ministries, users, social partners, service providers, employment services, education and training institutions, guidance practitioners, parents, and youth.
- Policies and programs for lifelong guidance take into account national and international economic change and technological development. They are reviewed periodically in relation to current and planned social and economic development.

## 3. System coordination features

- Guidance systems operate in an open, flexible, and complementary way across education, training, employment, and community sectors.
- Guidance services within one sector are coordinated with services in other sectors at national, regional, and local levels. Close cooperation and coordination exist between guidance provided outside of the education and training system and guidance provided within it.
- Formal networks and partnerships of guidance providers are established at the local level.
- Guidance in the workplace is delivered by partnerships between education and training providers, public employment services, enterprises, and organizations that represent workers.

- Representatives of the social partners and other stakeholders are included in the bodies responsible for governing publicly funded guidance services.
- In decentralized structures, central arrangements exist to ensure consistency in regional and local services so that all citizens benefit equally, regardless of geographical location.

#### **4. Targeting within universal provision**

- Measures are taken to provide effective and adequate guidance for learning and work for groups who are at risk of social exclusion such as: persons who did not complete compulsory schooling or who left school without qualifications; women; older workers; members of linguistic and other minority groups; persons with disabilities; migrant workers; and workers in fragile economic sectors and enterprises who are at risk of unemployment. The goal of these measures is to help these groups to enjoy equality in employment and improved integration into society and the economy.
- Such measures are part of national, regional, and local strategies for universal lifelong guidance provision.

#### **5. Review features**

- Guidance systems and programs are periodically reviewed in order to:
  - Make the best use of available resources
  - Promote synergy within and across education, training, and employment sectors
  - Adjust their organization, content, and methods in light of: changing social and economic conditions; the changing needs of particular groups; and advances in relevant knowledge
  - Make any changes that are required for the effectiveness of national policies
- Research is undertaken to support evidence-based policy and systems development.
- Research and experimental guidance programs are designed in order to:
  - Evaluate the internal efficiency and external effectiveness of individual components of the lifelong guidance system
  - Determine the direct and indirect costs and benefits of alternative patterns and methods of providing lifelong guidance
  - Determine criteria for setting priorities and establishing strategies for the development of lifelong guidance for particular sectors of economic activity and for particular groups of the population

- Increase knowledge of the psychological, sociological, and pedagogical aspects of lifelong guidance
  - Improve the psychological tests and other methods used for the identification of competences, the appraisal of aptitudes and interests, and the assessment of levels of knowledge and skill attained through nonformal and informal learning
  - Assess employment opportunities in the various sectors of economic activity and occupations
  - Improve available information on occupations, their requirements, and career progression pathways
- Administrative arrangements and methods are designed and modified so that they support the implementation of lifelong guidance programs.

## 6. International features

- Europe is the reference field for the provision of lifelong guidance services within the European Union.
- Member states cooperate with each other, with the European Commission, and with other stakeholders in planning, elaborating, and implementing collaborative action in lifelong guidance within the context of community policies and programs for education, training, and employment.
- Such cooperation may include:
  - Bilateral or multilateral assistance to other countries in the planning, elaboration, or implementation of such programs
  - Joint research and peer reviews to improve the quality of the planning and implementation of programs
  - Helping those who work in guidance to acquire knowledge, skill, and experience not available in their own countries—for example, by giving them access to facilities in other countries or by establishing joint facilities
  - The systematic exchange of information, including the results of research and experimental programs, by means of expert meetings, transnational exchanges, and placements, seminars, study groups, thematic networks, or exchange of publications
  - The preparation and dissemination of basic guidance material, including curricula and job specifications, to facilitate occupational and geographical mobility
- Member states encourage and support centers that facilitate exchange of experience and promote international cooperation in policy, systems, and program development and methodological research.

# Appendix B: Case studies of promising career navigation models

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## Community colleges

### The Virginia Community College System’s “Education Wizard”

The “[Education Wizard](#)” is an interactive, online career-planning tool that helps current and potential Virginia community college students make educational choices with career goals in mind. This engaging website was launched in 2009 and provides “one-stop shopping” for individuals seeking information on postsecondary education and pathways to high-wage, high-demand occupations that stem from college courses.

The wizard brings together a variety of disparate resources and includes new, specially designed datasets to help a user select a career of interest, find the education requirements needed for a desired career, navigate the financial aid system and figure out how to pay for college, and even apply for admission to a community college or transfer from a college to a university.

Information about community college programs and majors spanning the entire Virginia Community College System was already available. But the Education Wizard builds on this, adding a comprehensive, searchable database of scholarships offered at system colleges as well as all current transfer agreements among the state’s 23 community colleges. “Ginny,” the Education Wizard’s friendly, speaking avatar, welcomes people to the website and guides them through the site’s key features.



Students often begin the wizard by completing simple online assessments that help them identify careers that match their interests. Next they can delve into user-friendly and geographically tailored information on individual occupations—for example, local median salaries, local projected demand, the largest local employers, and the specific education offered locally to qualify for the occupation. Students then can explore programs, majors, and courses offered by Virginia’s community colleges and compare tuition and fees at nearly 100 public and private institutions across the state. They can apply to any Virginia community college through the system. With a user-specific checklist and automated email reminders, they also can plan a transfer from a community college to a university.

The Education Wizard assists students with financial aid research by allowing them to estimate student- and college-specific financial aid awards. It also engages users in an avatar-hosted step-by-step tutorial on completing federal financial aid forms. Additionally, students can search among hundreds of scholarships offered by community colleges and their local communities.

#### *Program development*

In 2006, Glenn DuBois, chancellor of the Virginia Community College System, identified the need for better information to help students and potential students make important career and education decisions. He raised federal funding to develop a web-based tool that would assist individuals in these critical planning processes.

The Virginia Community College System analyzed student needs, evaluated resources currently available, and sought guidance from subject-matter experts to help crystallize the chancellor’s vision.

#### *Value*

The wizard’s success is apparent in its site usage, user satisfaction, and the value it brings to students and those who serve them. The Virginia Community College System’s total population is a quarter-million students, and the wizard hosted 185,000 unique users and recorded almost 250,000 total visits and 2 million page views between March and October 2009.<sup>53</sup> Users spent an average of more than six minutes each exploring the site, which is very high for a website of this nature. Analytics further indicate that users have explored all aspects of the wizard’s rich content.

In surveys administered to users who tested the site before its official launch, satisfaction rates were consistently greater than 90 percent. Professionals who assist students in college and career planning reported similar satisfaction rates. They praised the way the site helps them serve multiple students at one time with information that helps improve access to community colleges—something especially important when the number of student services professionals does not keep pace with demand.

The wizard demonstrates particular value to community college “career coaches” who work in high schools to help younger students define their career aspirations and figure out how to achieve their goals. About 120 career coaches serve 165 high schools across Virginia, seeing 58,000 students individually or in small groups each year. The website helps students and coaches find apprenticeships and workforce training as well as information about postsecondary programs. It has proven valuable for professionals with limited time to spend with each student who seeks their help.

#### *Future expansion*

The Education Wizard’s success has led Virginia to consider expanding the tool. The Virginia Department of Education, the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, the Virginia College Savings Plan, and the Educational Credit Management Corporation are collaborating with the Virginia Community College System in this endeavor. Their plan is to expand the wizard to include tools that will assist Virginians in planning for postsecondary options beyond community college. Information on four-year colleges will be added to the site this spring. Starting in fall 2010, students will be able to create and store academic and career plans. They also hope to build on the career coach model and encourage students to start using the wizard much earlier in their education.

#### *Key features*

Several key features make this a promising model.

**The service is designed to meet users’ specific, carefully identified needs.** Virginia’s community colleges set out to identify the most pressing questions that community college students face in planning for and navigating through postsecondary education. A statewide survey of community college faculty and staff, as well as a student survey administered at two community colleges, helped identify three major themes.

First, students most value but have the least access to information on paying for college. Second, students of varying ages are interested in and in many cases prefer the Internet as a way to receive information on paying for college. Third, faculty and staff identified that students are most in need of information on selecting potential occupations and determining the appropriate program of study leading to those occupations.

**The service offers high-quality, up-to-date, comprehensive information tied to local labor market trends.** To develop the wizard, an advisory board composed of leaders from individual colleges and the statewide community college system office sought the guidance of experts in each of the project’s functional areas. For example, the workgroup for career planning included experts in career counseling and workforce development from across the state. These specialists helped to further clarify the specific information that would be most useful to students, such as linking personal interests to specific careers, local median salaries for those occupations, and projected demand in the field. The

specialists also recommended that the data be updated quarterly to sustain its relevance. Obtaining and maintaining quality data and making the wizard easy to use were guiding principles in the development of the services' features.

**A regular review process ensures that the site continues to meet user needs.** After the initial survey of students and faculty, the community college system evaluated which wizard resources were most useful in guiding student decision making. A scan of the local labor market also determined potential solutions available in the marketplace. The results identified relatively few disconnected tools that were unable to meet the scope of student needs. These results, student feedback, and faculty input informed a several-month process of reviewing, editing, and improving the site before a statewide pilot to validate usability and content shared the tools with more than 2,000 students in seventh grade through college.

**A strong marketing campaign through individual career counselors and social media sites expands the reach to potential users.** The Virginia Education Wizard's success did not rely solely on building a high-quality system and assuming the good word would spread. Major traditional and high-tech efforts informed key constituent groups of the wizard's value and the impact it could have on students. Traditional marketing reached out to school counselor networks, education associations, career coaches, and college personnel from across the state. The wizard also was introduced to potential users directly through a variety of social media venues, including Facebook, LinkedIn, MySpace, Twitter, YouTube, and Flickr.

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## Public workforce development systems

The federal Workforce Investment Act disburses workforce development funding to states, which distribute the money, combined with state contributions, to local and regional Workforce Investment Boards. This system allows regional WIBs to tailor their services to the people they serve.

Within the public workforce development system, a growing number of WIBs and One-Stop Career Centers are developing innovative ways to provide career planning services to unemployed workers. They respond to the needs of each local economy and provide adults with employment services. They also operate behind the scenes to connect the many services and resources that help unemployed workers get their careers back on track.

The NOVA Workforce Investment System in Silicon Valley and South Central Michigan Works! show great promise as career navigation models offered through public workforce systems.

## NOVA Workforce Investment Board, Silicon Valley, CA

Silicon Valley job seekers faced a highly volatile economy even before the current recession. The region long has been characterized by a constant drive for new technologies and products, simultaneous job creation and elimination, and a demand for flexible workers with multiple skills and strong entrepreneurial orientations. Despite high levels of education, Silicon Valley workers are likely to be contractors rather than traditional employees, and they must be prepared to transfer their skills to new jobs or even new careers at short notice. Even those from high-technology industries find it difficult to meet the economic challenges without the support of sophisticated networking and entrepreneurial training.

The Northern Valley Workforce Investment Board has developed several innovative strategies to enable dislocated workers to navigate this ever-shifting labor market. Two programs in particular, CONNECT! and ProMatch, help workers leverage their existing skills and gain new ones as needed to find new employment.

The CONNECT! Initiative is a partnership of more than 30 regional workforce development organizations that provides services for job seekers, businesses, and youth. The initiative's Job Seeker Center offers all clients an orientation where a welcome team handles data collection, eligibility verification, registration, and enrollment. An experienced career advisor conducts an initial evaluation of needs and skills and assists the client in developing an initial job search.

The initiative's One-Stop Centers offer a wide range of workshops, including resume writing, interviewing practices, and using the LinkedIn.com social networking tool. All aim to help each client understand her or his strengths and weaknesses, how to market competencies, and how to network to locate available jobs. Clients have unlimited access to career advisors on a drop-in basis, and they can get ongoing career counseling and job search assistance. CONNECT! staff members use a tracking system to ensure continuity of service since clients commonly see different advisors on each visit.

CONNECT! also helps the unemployed understand their strengths and weaknesses and build skills that are desirable in the labor market. Clients can access intensive skill development and training services, including comprehensive assessments, one-on-one intensive career coaching, and Workforce Investment Act and Trade Adjustment Assistance funded training. All training participants receive counseling and career advising services.

The NOVA workforce board also operates ProMatch with the California Employment Development Department. ProMatch serves job seekers who are experienced professionals and willing to provide peer coaching and lead networking and entrepreneurial workshops. NOVA and EDD contribute staff support. Members attend weekly meetings where they share success stories, seek connections with targeted employers, and receive emotional support.

ProMatch also has served as an engine for new business and economic growth. Jeff Winters, who was previously the CEO of a robotics company, was inspired to join with two other alumni in launching an online web business designed to help experienced professionals find jobs. OurExperienceCounts.com offers resources and virtual workshops for older job seekers.

### South Central Michigan Works!

Michigan's "No Worker Left Behind" program provides any unemployed or underemployed individual earning less than \$40,000 per year with up to two years of tuition at a state community college or other approved training program. More than 100,000 individuals were enrolled as of November 2009. Early in this two-year-old program, however, it became clear that many dislocated workers required remedial or developmental education to acquire college-level skills and be able to participate in postsecondary education or training programs.

To address this challenge, South Central Michigan Works!, the regional WIB located in Hillsdale, joined forces with education providers, including the South Central Michigan Regional Adult Learning Partnership and other community partners, to form the South Central Michigan Works! Partnership for Regional Solutions Center. The advisory group started by assessing the region's education and training capacity. Next, working with local economic development agencies, it matched their education and training assets with the education and skills needed in the area. The analysis found more than 1,700 emerging regional jobs in such fields as business and finance, health care, life sciences, chemical engineering and processing, and advanced manufacturing.

The regional collaborative has consolidated intake, assessment and diagnostics, and program placement to make those processes more efficient. It also has implemented navigation and tracking systems that help adult learners move along the education continuum into postsecondary education and/or employment. In addition, the group has expanded the capacity of Adult Basic Education and English as a Second Language programming. The region has a strong need for both these services—there are high rates of low literacy and one out of every three working-age adults in Michigan lack the basic skills needed to get a family-sustaining job. Eleven percent of working poor families have a parent who speaks English less than "very well."<sup>54</sup>

Consolidated services are delivered through the South Central Michigan Works! One-Stop Career Centers. As the hubs for No Worker Left Behind, the centers already take a career pathways approach for clients. Adding developmental education assessment, placement, wraparound support, and career navigation services allows the centers to offer a full continuum of services. "Career managers" assess adult learners' skills, help them develop individual learning plans, and provide the counseling and supports needed to reach their individual employment goals.

Individuals are placed in the appropriate adult learning venue depending on their skill levels and learning plans. Both classroom-based and volunteer tutor-based programs are available through adult education providers and the Community Action Agency. Job seekers also have the option of entering a registered apprenticeship program. A mobile One-Stop Center brings career navigation resources and trainings directly to employers and community-based organizations. And a web-based data system will track learner progress and connect programs across the region, resulting in a community-wide approach.

### Key features of public workforce programs

Key features make these models promising.

- The programs are highly responsive to local needs.
- The services of the Workforce Investment Board and regional partners are well integrated into the models.
- Staff use data systems to track individual progress and ensure continuity of service.

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### Community-based organizations

Community-based organizations can play an important role providing adults with career navigation services. They often fill in the gaps between what public systems and employers can offer and what adult workers need.

Many community-based organizations offer much more intensive services aimed at specific group or specific sectors. YouthBuild, for example, targets people ages 16 to 24 who have not finished high school. Many JVS-Boston programs focus on the health care industry. Community-based organizations often partner with other institutions, such as colleges, employers, and social services. Through partnerships these organizations can provide much more comprehensive services for their clients.

### YouthBuild Philadelphia Charter School

YouthBuild Philadelphia Charter School is a 12-month program for high school dropouts between 18 and 21. The program, which serves about 220 students each year, takes a comprehensive approach to career coaching. YBPCS responds both to individual needs and interests, as well as to employers and to local labor market trends.

Key elements in the program's success include a 46-person staff that is committed to creating a culture of transitioning graduates into postsecondary education and meaningful

employment, a broad range of meaningful partnerships with postsecondary institutions and workforce organizations, and a sharp focus on helping students earn industry-recognized certifications.

#### *All-staff focus on career counseling*

No matter what a staff member's specific job title is, they all help maintain YBPCS's focus on college and careers. Every staff member embraces his or her role as a mentor with an opportunity to help students develop workplace and postsecondary skills. All share the belief that every interaction with a student represents an opportunity to communicate consistent expectations regarding behaviors that lead to postsecondary and career success.

This shared language forms the basis for purposeful communication with students whether in person or electronically. YBPCS staff members take every possible opportunity to describe how the instruction, activity, conversation, or task students are completing relates to future expectations in career or postsecondary settings.

#### *Structured meeting time*

Critical conversations take place between staff during dedicated time at daily and weekly staff meetings to make sure they can learn together and share information about students. The meetings include perspectives from staff across the entire organization and include discussion, problem solving, and action plans for follow-up and implementation.

YBPCS uses two specific meeting structures to foster cross-departmental and innovative communication among staff: case conferences and departmental "speed dating."

During weekly case conferences, staff members from seven departments come together to discuss individual student barriers, achievements, and goals. Each conversation leads to the creation of an action plan for how multiple staff members from different academic and instructional perspectives can support the student. The action plan may include steps to re-engage a student into school after an extended absence, communication about an upcoming college application deadline, or other matters. This system ensures that all staff members understand next steps and key messages to be communicated to each student—which makes it much more likely that the student will take the action necessary for his or her own success.

Staff also use a technique called departmental "speed dating" to stay informed of all internal initiatives and better understand the actions and priorities of departments they do not work in. Under this model each YBPCS department meets with another internal department for a half hour to address one essential question. Each department subsequently switches to spend the half hour on another question of interest with a different department. During these activities, staff members often begin to build collaborative curricula, share ideas, and discuss resolutions regarding competing priorities.

### *Partnerships and certifications*

YBPCS recognizes its limitations as a single institution and makes a concerted effort to increase its impact by coordinating with postsecondary institutions, employers, and social service agencies. Strong partnerships are critical to the model. The school follows a lengthy and intensive process for identifying the best possible partners. Among the questions the school has found most important to explore are how the partnership will support the students and help them reach their goals and how to share the same values in working with a particular student.

**Workforce partnerships:** YBPCS's workforce partners provide real-world work experiences that help students make wise choices about careers. YBPCS staff members begin by researching if and how potential partners could match student interests and provide local job market opportunities for creating upwardly mobile careers. Staff members also ask questions about a partner's experience in serving similar populations—for example, in terms of age, class, and race. Based on these results, the school begins working with workforce partners to expose students to work opportunities through guest speakers, internships, job shadowing, and apprenticeships.

**Postsecondary partnerships:** Postsecondary partners provide students with extensive postsecondary exposure, counseling, guidance, and support. The school's work with the Community College of Philadelphia exemplifies collaborative work toward common goals. CCP provides YBPCS graduates with a financially accessible postsecondary option. This partnership allows YBPCS to co-locate staff for a consistent presence on campus; organize a YouthBuild alumni community that connects graduates; implement a learning cohort for graduates; access student information such as class schedules, grades, and attendance; and communicate directly with CCP faculty working with students. YBPCS staff members also connect graduates to exclusive CCP services for low-income students—including tutoring, day care, and transition counselors—and assist with registration and campus life.

**Certifications:** All YBPCS partnerships offer certification or credit toward industry-recognized credentials. These credentials offer documented evidence of students' readiness to succeed in life. Through business advisory councils, the school seeks the advice of industry leaders, usually recruited through its board of directors, on the certifications, experiences, and skills that will prove most valuable to local employers.

Credentialed training programs are available for students while they are enrolled in YouthBuild. The trainings culminate in an attainable credential or credits that can be built upon as graduates begin their journey on a career pathway. All students complete this "first" certification while at YouthBuild, and they are encouraged to plan for a full career trajectory and potential upward mobility within their selected occupation. Steps to a "second" post-program certification are clearly articulated.

YBPCS sees a need to delineate the broad range of services it collaborates with partners on through formal and written agreements. Toward this end, it is developing and implement-

ing “Memoranda of Understanding” to specify expected roles and responsibilities for both sides of each partnership. Partnerships can be strengthened and sustained beyond the tenure of individuals currently responsible for the relationship by ensuring an institutional commitment to agreed-upon parameters for completing various elements of the work.

## JVS Boston and Hebrew Senior Life

JVS empowers individuals from diverse communities to find employment and build careers, and it partners with employers to hire, develop, and retain productive workforces. It uses partnerships with local employers to give incumbent workers the tools they need to move up career ladders in health care. These tools range from educational services—pre-college classes, GED classes, and job training—to career exploration and coaching. In JVS’s programs for health care employers, a key element is career and academic counseling for incumbent workers. Coaches provide critical support and work with participants to overcome barriers, obtain skills, and navigate the systems of postsecondary education.

JVS launched its work with Hebrew Senior Life, a health care and housing organization, in 2006. The program was initially targeted at nursing, and JVS provided only pre-college classes, with the goal of transitioning workers to the LPN training program at Mass Bay Community College. But Hebrew Senior Life engaged JVS further when it realized that 9 students out of a cohort of 14 were failing in their final semester of nursing school. In response, JVS introduced intensive academic coaching to provide structure, support, and academic assistance to workers. Thirteen of the students graduated.

The full-scale program that JVS provided for Hebrew Senior Life starts with career path exploration—helping workers understand their options and determine appropriate pathways. JVS conducts an academic assessment and a college-readiness assessment with each participant. An academic coach then works with participants, providing them with resources, tools, and supports that build their skills and fill in gaps that would prohibit them from moving forward. Coaches help their clients develop ways to balance the difference aspects of their lives since it can be difficult to start an educational program while working full time. The coaches also connect with liaisons at a community college to check on individual academic progress and make sure students stay on track.

In this model, coaches fill a critical missing link between employers, colleges, and workers. Academic coaching has proved successful in the 2008 and 2009 cohorts: 20 out of 26 workers have graduated. All 20 passed the licensure exam, and 18 now work in nursing jobs at Hebrew Senior Life. The program expects to graduate 20 additional LPNs in 2010 and 2011.

This program has provided significant benefits to Hebrew Senior Life in advancing workers, filling needed positions, and increasing staff retention. This model is now used with nearly 100 students at health care employers in Boston’s Longwood medical area.

The model has four key elements:

**It integrates career and academic coaching.** This is especially important for lower-skilled workers who tend to need higher levels of education in order to advance their careers.

**All coaches are highly qualified and experienced.** The intensive coaching model is a highly individualized process: Coaches can tailor their services to each student's unique needs. To do so, coaches must understand the low-income population they will work with and be aware of the particular problems working adults face. They must be able to identify resources, provide tools, and meet with participants on a regular basis. They also must have high energy, a positive attitude, and be participant-focused, which means they need to consider it their job to guide each student on his or her journey. Finally, coaches should understand the academic process and the community college environment and be connected with the community college.

**The model creates strong partnerships with employers.** Employer buy-in is necessary if employees are to balance the demands of working and learning. Employers can be supportive by contributing to the cost of the program. They can also provide paid release time or permit services to take place at the workplace. Ideally, they establish ways that employees who go through coaching and academic skill development move into higher-level jobs.

**Integration across all partners is essential.** A key role of the coach is acting as a liaison among the workplace, the community college, and the student.

### Key features of community-based organization programs

Key features make these models promising:

- Community-based organizations form strong partnerships with employers and educational institutions and can work as an intermediary.
- There is an organization-wide focus on coaching and case management.
- The program focuses on academic skill building and job training.
- The staff is dedicated and talented at working with low-income, low-skilled populations.

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### Labor unions

Labor unions can play an important role in an expanded national career navigation strategy because of their experience supporting workers and providing them with education, training, and career navigation assistance. Labor unions offer career counseling through a variety of approaches. Apprenticeship programs in the skilled trades typically include a career counseling component focused on the targeted career area. One major benefit

to the apprenticeship model is that mentorship is built in: New workers connect directly with more experienced workers who can provide sector-specific career guidance.

Many unions have negotiated and established training funds and training centers that provide education and training opportunities and career counseling to union members, and sometimes to nonunion members. Unions also serve as advocates for their members and can negotiate for paid release time for training and other employer practices that promote employees' career development.

### District 1199C Training and Upgrading Fund, Philadelphia area

The District 1199C Training and Upgrading Fund in Philadelphia is a national model of a joint labor-management partnership in education. The Training Fund was created in 1974 through collective bargaining agreements between nine Philadelphia hospitals and District 1199C of the National Union of Hospital and Healthcare Employees, AFSCME, AFL-CIO. Under provisions of the Taft-Hartley Act, the parties agreed to create the Training Fund to provide educational benefits to union members and the community.

The Training Fund now has 50 contributing partners and is a vehicle for providing incumbent and prospective workers with opportunities to advance to better jobs. It provides basic and job-skills training to close to 4,000 students each year. About half of the students are union members employed in health care, and half are community residents, including laid-off workers and welfare recipients. The fund offers a wide variety of education and training opportunities, including basic skills education, vocational training in health care occupations, bridge programs into college, and technical training that articulates with postsecondary certificates and degrees.

Nearly all of the programs include access to a career counselor and comprehensive career counseling supports. The counselors help people create individual educational plans to achieve their career goals. They start by providing labor market information on a variety of health care and human services occupations, as well as the educational requirements associated with each step on the career ladder. Next, the counselor works with the individual to evaluate his or her career interests, skill levels, and academic readiness. Then participants choose from a variety of education and training programs available at the fund's Breslin Learning Center or at local schools. Students receive assistance in determining a step-by-step career plan and timeline with associated educational components. Counselors also help individuals with resume writing, interviewing skills, and job placement, among other supports.

Unions in other industries have similar training funds, learning centers, and programs. Examples include the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Communications Workers of America's "advocates," United Auto Workers, International

Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers and the Boeing Company, the Steel Workers Institute for career development, and construction trades unions.

### American Federation of Teachers Learning Advisors

The American Federation of Teachers began testing [a new advising model](#) in 2008 based on a concept borrowed from the United Kingdom. The AFT launched pilot programs in Baltimore, Illinois, Rhode Island, and California to provide workplace-based “learning representatives” to supply teachers and school support staff with advice on learning opportunities and career development.<sup>55</sup>

These pilot programs are modeled after the United Kingdom’s “[Union Learning Representatives](#),” who provide career counseling to employees, conduct learning needs analyses, coordinate activities at on-site learning centers, and help to improve workers’ confidence in their ability to gain education and skills that will enable them to progress on the job.

The 22,000 Union Learning Representatives are volunteers. But like other types of official union representatives, they have statutory rights to paid time from their employers to carry out their duties as ULRs and to train for the position. And the government provides funding to the Trades Union Congress (the equivalent of the U.S. AFL-CIO) to train them.

The ULR program is showing positive signs with room for improvement, according to a 2009 research paper commissioned by the Trades Union Congress’s Union Learn organization. Half of managers responding to a survey about ULRs felt that “ULRs have had some impact on either employer-funded or non-employer-funded training in their workplaces. . . . Overall, both the ULRs and the managers reported in surveys that ULRs have a greater impact on training where ULRs are active, where managers value their activities and where managers negotiate with union representatives when deciding training matters.”<sup>56</sup>

### Key features of labor union programs

Key features make these models promising:

- The programs build on the union mission of supporting workers.
- Sector-based unions provide effective, targeted coaching services.
- Unions can use their relationships with employers to negotiate for release time for career development activities.

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## Employers

Some employers recognize the value of developing their internal talent pool and provide career development opportunities for employees. Larger companies, such as IBM and Microsoft, often have the resources to create internal systems. Smaller companies may hire organizations to provide this assistance.

In the examples here, CVS works with a for-profit company, while several San Francisco Bay Area employers join together to work with a nonprofit career development agency. In all cases employers understand that by helping employees improve their skills and advance their careers, they also improve the quality of their workers, retention, and, often, the company's bottom line.

### IBM

IBM invests in the career development of employees because it makes sense—not only for the workers themselves but also for the company and its clients. IBM recently brought together its wealth of career development resources into a simple, easy-to-use “career development suite” that takes advantage of the company's expertise in emerging technologies and social learning strategies. The suite is organized as a three-step model with tools and resources available for planning career development, gaining skills and experience, and tracking progress. It is primarily an online resource but integrates in-person career development advising as well. It is accessible globally via IBM's intranet.

Among the suite's promising features are online tools for preparing individual career development plans and identifying the skills, education, and training required for embarking on a new career path. The suite also provides guidance on developing competencies that IBM would like all employees to have, as well as personalized learning recommendations based on an employee's job, organization, country, interests, language, industry, and other demographic data. Employees can access databases to search for new jobs, projects, or temporary opportunities within IBM and develop an online resume to be shared across IBM when applying for positions.

It is also possible to access formal and informal learning opportunities aligned with specific roles or careers, including podcasts, virtual reality experiences, and other simulated work-based learning programs. Further, IBM provides a career mentor network: Employees have real-time access to volunteer career development advisors from IBM offices around the world and online tools where employees can request and search for a mentor. IBM knows that different employees have distinct needs, and it has created a variety of formal and informal mentoring programs that infuse career development into the culture of the company.<sup>57</sup>

## Microsoft

Several online tools aid Microsoft employees with career development. The company's performance review process incorporates career development into one of the two annual performance review periods.

Six months after each employee's annual review, employees participate in a midyear career discussion. This review is designed to look forward and focus on long-term career development within Microsoft. As part of this process employees use Career Compass, a tool developed by Microsoft's human resources department.

Career Compass is an online, interactive application for career planning and development. It is based on the Microsoft Career Model, which provides common, specific language to use in discussions of career development; a framework for moving across disciplines and professions; and support for developing along both individual contributor and management career paths. Career Compass assists employees and their supervisors by structuring an in-depth conversation about the employee's progress to date and next steps in terms of career development. Employees create their own development plan to achieve desired goals and career outcomes.

Microsoft's internal human resources website has extensive tools to help employees create career development strategies. The website has six categories of career development resources: training, core competencies, business fundamentals, assessments and feedback, mentoring, and career planning.

Microsoft developed "MySite" to share information throughout the international company. MySite is a professional-social networking site that provides each employee with an internal webpage for storing documents, links, resources, and contacts. Employees can list their skills, experience, and interests on their personal profiles, and they can search other profiles for people with similar interests. The site serves as a way to see what colleagues are working on and what they have accomplished.

Microsoft also has created a public webpage for students to explore internships or full-time work with Microsoft. The website has a section dedicated to career development, including tips on interviewing and writing resumes, along with information on what Microsoft looks for in interns and employees.

The Microsoft Academy for College Hires is designed to continually help new college graduates who have joined Microsoft develop their careers within the company. MACH provides specially designed tools, resources, and training to encourage long-term career development. The program supports successful transitions from school to the work environment.

Microsoft's student website provides career resources for students at all levels who are considering employment with Microsoft. There is also a student lounge where employees

as well as students entering the technology field can create profiles and post comments, links, videos, and events. This webpage is designed to assist career development through peer learning and serves as a space to share information with other Microsoft student employees all over the world.

### CVS/Pharmacy and WorkSource Partners, Inc.

WorkSource Partners, Inc., a for-profit organization, provides an array of workforce development services to employers and individuals in several states, including Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island. Services range from program design to execution and management, as well as direct services for frontline workers, such as career coaching. WorkSource Partners led the design, implementation, and management of a Retail Career Development Program for CVS/Pharmacy from 2007 to 2009. This was an innovative approach to “promoting from within” training for CVS, which aims to cultivate the talent of its entry-level workers while providing quality services to its customers.

WorkSource Partners recently designed and implemented a program to help disconnected youth ages 18 to 24 prepare for jobs at CVS and receive career coaching and support. The program partners with JVS in Boston, and includes a six-week, pre-employment training period during which the youth meet daily with a learning coach-counselor. The coach helps each participant develop a career plan and connect to resources in the community, such as food stamps, transportation, and community college classes. Each coach works with about 20 youth and 10 CVS managers or supervisors at a time and spends about 16 hours each week coaching and doing case management. The rest of the coach’s full-time load consists of assisting with job development, curriculum development, and other program assistance.

After youth in the Boston pilot complete the pre-employment training, they work at one of about a dozen participating CVS stores. They continue to meet with their coaches twice a week for up to a year after hire. These meetings are informal and happen via email, phone, or in person. Simultaneously, the coach works closely with the supervisors and managers at the participating store to help them be mentors who understand how to assist the new employees with their CVS careers.

The coaches and other program components are funded in part through the Workforce Investment Act. WorkSource Partners acts as an intermediary across the company, employers, and instructors, while CVS provides significant in-kind resources. CVS pays for managers and supervisors’ time to meet with the coach and youths, helps develop training curricula and career paths, and helps create a virtual cohort of youths to support one another in the program. CVS also pays for the time the new employees spend receiving coaching after being hired.

According to WorkSource Partners, coaches are the key to the program—particularly each coach’s skills, the quality tools they use in the coaching process, and their knowledge of community resources for the youths to access. The coaches need to be able to relate well with the young people and show them step by step how to be their own advocates, as well as to how to build strong, lasting relationships with CVS managers and supervisors. High-quality career development tools are an important part of this process, including career planning templates and question protocols to help guide participants through problem-solving scenarios that arise in everyday life.

## Springboard Forward

Goodwill, Ross Stores, El Camino Hospital, and other employers in the San Francisco Bay Area have contracted with the nonprofit Springboard Forward to assist their employees with career development. [Springboard Forward](#) developed the model specifically for entry-level workers in lower-wage jobs. The program lasts one year and is provided at the employer site on company time.

The program consists of 10 hours of training with certified career coaches, a two-hour introduction, and a weeklong program that looks at the employee’s values, skills, goals, and interests. During this time, employees are assessed and taught how to make a career plan, conduct interviews, and research jobs. Supervisors also receive training in encouraging and assisting the employees in their career development. Over the next 11 months, employees put their career development plans into action, continuing the work they started during the training through one-on-one meetings with a Springboard Forward career coach.

The companies that have contracted with Springboard Forward have been very satisfied with the results: Their employees are more confident and work harder to achieve a higher position in the company. An evaluation conducted by Kenexa found that 41 percent of employees achieved on-the-job advancement and 86 percent of employees saw a direct link between their jobs and their company’s objectives.

As with the WorkSource model, a vital component of Springboard Forward’s program is career coaching. Many of the career coaches are under contract with Springboard Forward to provide a few hours of coaching every week and to participate in regular coach meetings and trainings. The coaches, who tend to be highly paid executive and personal coaches, do this as a partially pro bono service. They receive only a fraction of their normal private fees, seeing this as a way to “give back” to their communities.

Springboard Forward looks for several important characteristics in potential coaches, including the ability to be good listeners who can understand employee career goals and the life challenges that often impede lower-wage workers from achieving their goals. These career barriers can range from transportation and child care issues to low self-confidence and low educational attainment.

## Key features of employer programs

Key features make these models promising:

- Employers are committed to employees' career development.
- The services are available to all employees, including entry-level workers.
- Coaches and mentors provide in-person support for workers.
- Services are provided at the work site.

# Appendix C: A career navigator that integrates Facebook, ematching, blogs, texts, and tweets

A national career development web portal could combine a Facebook-like portfolio and social networking feature with an avatar similar to the Virginia Education Wizard model. The avatar would guide individuals to complete key education, credential, work experience, and personal interest sections of a Facebook-like page. A person who needs career navigation assistance could access it through the interactive portal behind the portfolio page.

An individual who needs more intensive assistance could complete a matching profile similar to those used for dating sites such as eHarmony to access a well-matched counselor, advisor, or coach online or via telephone. The career assistance provider would have access to the portfolio page in order to better understand the circumstances and needs of the individual. Certified career assistance professionals who have met national standards could be registered on the site and make up a pool of career counselors, advisors, and coaches.

Individuals also could use the social networking component of the site to interact with other career navigators. A person could join discussion groups whose members have similar interests and career goals. Career professionals could blog or tweet about specific career fields or with career advice. People could use the site and resources intensively when necessary or less intensively between major career changes or upgrades, but the portfolio and resources would always be available. If the account is dormant for an extended period, the site could send an email or text message asking, “Have you checked your career plan lately?”

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## Existing technology-based career navigation models

The Virginia Community College Education Wizard described in the case studies is one example of a technology-based approach to providing career navigation. The following are other examples of existing online tools.

**Careeronestop.org:** This website provides links to information about occupations, industries, skill requirements, education, and training options, as well as such resources as self-assessments and links to local One-Stop Career Centers. Components are organized into packages customized to different types of users. Dislocated automobile industry workers, for example, can click on a link and get a page of references specifically for them. This site has a plethora of information, but it can be overwhelming and confusing. At present the

information is not as tightly tailored to local labor markets as a career navigator would need, and it does not include career planning tools.

**Career Voyages:** This website is the result of a collaboration between the U.S. departments of Labor and Education. It provides information on in-demand occupations along with the skills and education needed to attain them. This information is tailored to four different types of users: students, parents, career changers, and career advisors. It has a significant amount of information on occupations, including a library of 90 second videos on many different occupations. It links to many resources and includes a finder for One-Stop Career Centers where users might access personal assistance. The site is in both English and Spanish.

**Minnesota ISEEK:** This website was a precursor to the Careeronestop.org site. Again, it contains a significant amount of information and links to multiple resources. A virtual tour of the site is useful but not as dynamic and enticing as the Virginia Education Wizard avatar.

**Minnesota eFolio:** eFolioMinnesota is a product of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System. The website helps Minnesotans create password-protected personal electronic portfolios that enable users to digitally document and share their education, employment history, activities, and goals. These are similar to “hard copy” portfolios, except that they are much more versatile and are created in a virtual environment. Users can upload documents, pictures, computer graphics, audio, and video files into their electronic portfolios, which can be accessed at any time from anywhere to change or add content.

There are three user groups: students, educators, and others considering a job or career change. Users have access to links to other career-related resources as well as to up-to-date answers to frequently asked questions and telephone numbers for live career advisors. This is an excellent model for a potential national electronic portal.

**Minnesota MyMilitaryEducation.org:** This website is designed for returning veterans in Minnesota. It helps Minnesota veterans understand their education benefits and develop a password-protected profile to better understand their skills and interests and show their employment history. A trained online support team answers veterans’ questions and facilitates access to services.

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