



**National  
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Connecting College and  
Career Success

# Lessons on Advising, Data, and Partnerships

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## Introduction

Postsecondary education is important individually for securing personal and professional satisfaction and success, but also socially for ending cycles of inequity. It is clear that our field's work – assisting low-income, first-generation students with accessing and completing postsecondary education – is profoundly important. What is often unclear, to students and their families, at least, is the career path to which that access and success leads. When NCAN members work with students and their families to help them prepare for, enroll in, and complete college, it is important that students have a sense of the broader, longer-term purpose of their effort and investment.

To make that sense clearer for members, and in turn students and their families, NCAN has been engaged in work that will connect career success with members' access and success services. This work is generously supported by the Strada Education Network (formerly USA Funds.)

The question of “why career success?” is an important one, and it represents a new direction and area for our field. Recall that there was a time when our field more solely focused on college access, with just a few practitioners focusing on postsecondary success work. Today, NCAN member programs are much more commonly engaged in postsecondary success work. NCAN believes that it is now time to consider adding a new area of service – career success – to the mix. The thinking behind this belief is that helping students connect career success to college success allows them to better grasp the relationship between academic pursuits and professional futures, and become more motivated and prepared to apply and matriculate to – and persist and complete at – a postsecondary institution.

Students need to understand the variety of possible careers and those of most interest to them, as well as the corresponding academic requirements. With that knowledge, students can look for relevant internships and other pre-professional experiences and follow a more efficient and meaningful academic path – in terms of both time and finances – to completion.

In spring 2017, NCAN's annual Spring Training series focused on this emerging area of work. Across four cities (Phoenix, Houston, Indianapolis and Providence), attendees learned from field experts on a variety of topics, from integrating career success work in a college access and success program, to accessing and using workforce data, to connecting with local, regional and state stakeholders to create partnerships for career success.

This white paper focuses on the lessons learned from this training series and suggests resources members can use to further their understanding of this area. From programs just embarking on this work to those that have been committed to it for years, our hope is that herein are lessons contained for everyone. This paper is divided into sections on integrating career success into advising, identifying relevant career and workforce data, and the importance of partnerships for career success.

## A Note on Equity and Career Success

NCAN members know well the inequities faced by low-income, first-generation students, many of them students of color. So often, these inequities manifest as differences in opportunities. There are many obstacles between these students and the path to college completion, and NCAN members operate around helping students and their families understand and overcome these obstacles. Anecdotally and statistically, we know that some paths are prematurely closed for low-income and first-generation students. Because of this and because of the opportunity gaps these students face, many NCAN member programs define success as a student achieving a four-year degree, as do many students from more affluent, better-resourced communities.

The idea of “tracking” students into certificate programs or two-year institutions is anathema to many members, as they view it as emblematic of the opportunity gaps our students have historically faced. We have struggled with this concept ourselves at NCAN, and it forced us to be more thoughtful and nuanced as we embarked on our career success work. What we have come to understand and believe is:

- Given that Georgetown University’s Center on Education and the Workforce projects that 65 percent of all jobs will require postsecondary education and training beyond high school<sup>1</sup>, all students should have access to high-quality and affordable postsecondary education that contributes to positive educational, career, and life outcomes;
- What that postsecondary education looks like will vary among students across their goals and interests; and
- All students should be given knowledge of all of their options in order to make the best decision for them, without being pressured or “tracked” on the basis of anything except their goals and interests. This includes, but is not limited to, understanding future labor market needs and encouraging students to look at those when considering both potential courses of study and careers.

We understand that some NCAN members will continue to focus primarily on their students completing at four-year institutions, while others will suggest a broader range of postsecondary options. We remain value-neutral on those two paths but hope that there are elements of career success that programs of all shapes, sizes, and missions will be interested in learning more about.

## Spring Training Events

Each of the Spring Training events included programming consistent across all four sites, along with more locally focused panels. Joining us in each city were Dr. Mark Schneider of [College Measures](#) and the American Institutes for Research, and,

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<sup>1</sup> Carnevale, A. P., Smith, N., & Strohl, J. (2013). Recovery: Job growth and education requirements through 2020. Washington. Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce. <https://cew.georgetown.edu/cew-reports/recovery-job-growth-and-education-requirements-through-2020/>

depending on the location, either AiLun Ku or Jessica Pliska of [the Opportunity Network](#) (an NCAN member also known as OppNet).

## Incorporating Career Success into Advising

### *Key Takeaways:*

- Programs can ease into career success activities; they do not have to go from 0 to 60 and provide a wholly comprehensive array of programming in this area (although some do). There may be parts of their existing work that can be adapted to career success programming.
- Career success programming is varied. Different approaches by different programs can still generate rewarding opportunities and successful outcomes for students. There is no one right way to do this work.

"How to Incorporate Career Success Programming Into Your Advising," the afternoon Spring Training presentations guided by OppNet's Ku and Pliska, revolved around their [Career Fluency](#) framework, which emphasizes developing skills and experience in four key areas:

- college access, transition, and success;
- professional skills and etiquette;
- career exposure; and
- networks and social capital

Within this framework, OppNet helped attendees identify their organization's assets and strengths as well as something with which they struggle, allowing them to think creatively about a concrete approach to better developing their students' career fluency. OppNet also helped attendees look at their program's current activities through the lens of the Career Fluency Framework, to see how some of these activities might fall into one of their four key areas.

At each site, OppNet also spotlighted one NCAN member – [Be a Leader Foundation](#) (BALF), [Genesys Works](#), [Starfish Initiative](#), or [Bottom Line](#) – that could provide practical, replicable insight for programs interested in expanding into career success work.

In Phoenix, Soilo Felix shared BALF's [college-going curriculum](#), which starts at grade seven and includes career exploration with two major components. One is Professional Shadow Day, where BALF collaborates with other organizations to give students real-world perspective on what different careers entail. The second includes a partnership with [Sponsors for Educational Opportunity](#) to identify college students for [SEO Career](#), a professional development and internship program targeting talented Black, Hispanic, and Native American undergraduates.

Genesys Works empowers high school students from challenged backgrounds to achieve college and career success through skills training and meaningful work

experiences in Houston. Joe Small shared some primary elements of Genesys Works Houston's program, including the Meaningful Internship Model and skills trainings, whereby the organization provides eight weeks of training during the summer before a student's senior year of high school. The training includes technical skills in information technology and business operations, as well as professional skills necessary for today's corporate workplace. The paid, year-long, 20-hours-per-week internships help students further develop and refine these high-demand work skills while providing valued services to corporate partners.

Robin Elmerick of Indianapolis' Starfish Initiative shared that her organization focuses on filling the gap left by the high student-to-counselor ratio in the state in Indiana. Starfish's commitment to this work is also grounded in research showing that students who stay within the same general area of study are more likely to complete college. Many of Starfish's activities focus on helping students identify the careers and related areas of study in which they are most interested through skills and interest assessments, college and career fairs, job shadowing, and workplace opportunities. The cornerstone of Starfish's activities is mentoring – mentors work with students over a four-year period and provide yet another layer of support. They identify students in danger of falling off track, help them process the career activities in which they engage, and assist them through the college identification, application, and financial aid processes.

In Providence, Bottom Line's Dave Borgal discussed his organization's move first into college success services and later into career success services. Bottom Line uses the [DEAL](#) (degree, employability, affordability, and life) framework to guide students toward successful outcomes. The employability piece is key, and a major focus when advisors engage with students in college. Bottom Line's services in this area are a blend of the abstract (e.g., helping students find the right career path, increasing their professionalism) and the functional (interviewing, resume and cover letter writing, networking, setting up and editing a LinkedIn profile). Each of these topics has a place in the [resource library](#) on Bottom Line's website, and students can find links for more information on any topic on which they need more information.

Although there are some common elements across these four member programs, it is clear that each program has a different approach to providing career success services. In each case, a specific career success curriculum interacts with the program's college access and success work. But beyond that there are different strategies – such as external mentoring, internships, and program advising – that keep students on a successful career track. This should signal to members that an organization wishing to incorporate career success into their programming should consider which approach best maps to its resources, personnel, partnership, and of course, mission.

## Identifying Relevant Career and Workforce Data

### *Key Takeaways:*

- There are data available that can and should inform students' career pathways. Students, families, and other stakeholders should turn to data like workforce projections and wages when considering academic programs.
- Data can provide important guidance for students and their families, but advisors should keep in mind that the ultimate goal is finding students a professionally rewarding career path that is also personally satisfying.

Through the [Common Measures](#) and [Benchmarking Project](#), NCAN has signaled to members the importance of selecting metrics, managing data, and examining outcomes. These practices are also important to career success programming, but the metrics and data from the college access and success field do not always map directly to career success. For members, finding career success-related data may be different than finding other data with which they are familiar. To address this topic, Dr. Schneider presented at all four Spring Training sessions. Schneider, vice president and institute fellow at the American Institutes for Research and president of [College Measures](#), is a leading expert on outcome measures of college and career productivity. His work with College Measures revolves around setting up state-specific workforce data websites that connect labor outcomes with postsecondary academic programs and credentials and predict the jobs that will be most-needed. These websites, called "Launch My Career," are currently available in [Texas](#), [Tennessee](#), and [Colorado](#), with additional partnerships in Florida, Minnesota, Rhode Island, and Virginia.

Schneider's presentation focused on three main points:

- making the case for the real economic value sub-baccalaureate degrees and credentials can offer in some communities;
- examining the workforce data that programs can use to advise students about "hot jobs," "hot skills," and "high return on investment (ROI)" positions; and
- providing students with workforce projections that predict the need (or lack thereof) for a given occupation.

Schneider emphasized that sub-baccalaureate degrees can provide a middle-class lifestyle and stable career, and critiqued what he sees as something of a stigma in the education field around these types of credentials. Schneider noted that students who pursue these credentials can very feasibly pursue a path to a sustainable and advantageous economic position. Using data from Texas, he pointed to a number of bachelor's and even master's degrees that earn their recipients lower salaries 10 years after completion than does the average certificate or associate's degree. Technicians, especially, trended toward earning more than the statewide average 10 years after completion. Schneider said when students aim to "fix things or fix people" (e.g., nursing, electrical engineering, drafting), they may be particularly successful with a certificate or associate's degree.

Having made clear his belief that misconceptions abound about the viability of sub-baccalaureate credentials, Schneider turned to the question of how to get the data on labor outcomes of credentials of all types. His presentation asks, "College students have thousands of academic programs they can choose from, but which ones are likely to lead to well-paying careers and as good life?" Fortunately, he notes, "Many states

have the information that could inform students' choices, reducing their worry about debt and launching students into the middle class." Schneider, through College Measures and state partnerships, is working to bring that data to students, their families, and other stakeholders. The building blocks of the College Measures work are "hot jobs," "hot skills," and "high return on investment."

Hot jobs are those that are currently in demand in a locality, state, or region, but they also include jobs that will be in demand in the future. Students and their families considering an academic program should be simultaneously considering the prospects for being hired and staying employed in the future. Most states have workforce projections (NCAN is aggregating the [state websites](#)), but the quality, comprehensiveness, and usability vary widely. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics also [produces workforce projections](#) along with its annual Occupational Outlook Handbook.

Hot skills, often irrespective of field or career, are those that employers value in employees. Examples from [Launch My Career Colorado](#) include "gather and analyze data in work settings," "lead and motivate co-workers and colleagues," and "coding, web design, and app design." Schneider noted that adding these hot skills (which in some cases can be learned or honed outside the classroom or through work experiences) tends to result in a wage premium for students. For example, combining data from Launch My Career Texas and the job market analytics site Burning Glass, Schneider found that the entry-level wage for a psychology bachelor's degree-holder was \$42,000, but adding statistics and data analysis skills could greatly increase that figure.

Finally, Schneider turned to the concept of ROI, which asks, "How much will this credential pay off, economically and personally?" Although the economic question is important (how much more will X credential or degree earn me over 10 to 20 years than if I do not get the credential or degree?), the presentation emphasized, "It isn't just about how much you earn. It is about achieving the life you would like to lead!" Working with Gallup, College Measures also displays for different majors the percentage of people who say they have a deep interest in the work they do, have the ideal job for them, and are satisfied with their personal life today. This is a valuable lesson for NCAN members that are providing or considering providing career success services: Although many of the conversations revolve around dollars and cents, the aim is to help students find professional *and* personal satisfaction.

Data resources that are helpful for providing career success services to students are continuing to emerge. This is especially true as different stakeholders – and especially the public sector – come to understand the value in collecting and disseminating this data for meeting future workforce needs. NCAN will continue to apprise members of the resources that are available to them and, in turn, their students and families.

## Creating Partnerships for Career Success

### *Key Takeaways:*

- Programs do not, and arguably should not, go it alone in providing career success services. Successful initiatives are often collaborations among business, government, K-12 school districts, community-based organizations, and postsecondary institutions.
- Each of these stakeholders can play an important role, but the exact combination of partners will be heavily dependent on the context on the ground.

In each Spring Training city, a morning panel focused on "Partnerships to Facilitate College and Career Success." Content in each city varied to reflect the on-the-ground partnerships that connect higher education, nonprofit, K-12, business, government, and philanthropic stakeholders to pull in the same direction.

In Phoenix, the [Greater Phoenix Chamber of Commerce Foundation](#) and one of its members discussed the Phoenix Forward initiative, which blends public policy and advocacy with workforce and economic development. The initiative has four industry leadership councils that each tie to specific occupational categories: advanced business services (for example, careers in cybersecurity, compliance and risk management, and financial services) transportation and logistics, healthcare, and bioscience. After identifying a pain point in an industry or around an occupation shortage, revealing the reason for the shortage, and developing a strategy to address it, these industry councils then go on to work with partner stakeholders to promote the career and help students move into it successfully.

Russell Johnson, President and CEO of Merchants Information Solutions, walked through this process of building career pathways – in this case, into cybersecurity. First, an industry council identified 8,400 open cybersecurity positions in Arizona alone (Johnson noted that these numbers could grow exponentially in the future). Then, the leadership council worked with the local community college to review curricula and develop career pathways that would help students qualify for these cybersecurity positions. Employers also committed to doubling the number of workforce experiences available to students to further their interest in cybersecurity. Finally, the council developed a website and marketing plan to be a resource hub for those interested in cybersecurity careers.

Conversations about career readiness have become more frequent in Houston after a 2013 bill required all incoming 9<sup>th</sup>-graders to select an endorsement (area of study) based on their career interests and academic goals. To that end, the Houston “partnership panel” assembled various stakeholders, including NCAN members [Project GRAD Houston](#) and the [Center for Houston’s Future](#), to discuss the role of nonprofit college access and success organizations in promoting career success for students. Insights from those panelists and others, such as Workforce Solutions, a workforce development organization that helps meet employer needs and build individual careers, showed that multiple sectors share and advance the goal of facilitating career exploration to ensure students successfully transition into the local workforce.

That collaborative theme extended to Indianapolis, where [Ascend Indiana](#), the [Indiana Youth Institute](#), [EmployIndy](#), and the [Indiana Department of Workforce Development](#) partner to provide workforce projections and inform students, employees,

and other stakeholders about career pathways in fields where jobs will be in demand. The audience learned about Ascend Indiana's work to align future labor market needs with relevant degree or credential opportunities and available talent. Beyond workforce projections, the panel discussed how to help young people identify their passions by exposing them to career opportunities and providing a sense of the jobs available as well as the obtainable skills and credentials needed to be successful in those jobs. These experiences, along with several state-based simulator tools available online, can help students turn a job into a fulfilling career.

Finally, in Providence, attendees heard from a number of experts. First, Rhode Island's First Gentleman Andy Moffit discussed the importance of college access and success in his own life and highlighted initiatives supported by his wife, Gov. Gina Raimondo. Rhode Island has been a leader in promoting career pathways for students, and the Providence partnership panel brought together K-12 and government entities from a variety of perspectives. For example, the state has greatly expanded access to dual enrollment for high school students, and an Advanced Coursework Network helps students take college or other advanced coursework that their high school may not offer.

The network allows students to take Advanced Placement classes that might not be available at their home high school at other high schools, and pursue postsecondary coursework at institutions around the state. For example, students can begin work on an emergency medical technician (EMT) certificate while still in high school, getting a jump start on a lucrative career that is also in demand when they graduate. Perhaps most importantly, the Advanced Coursework Network allows students to participate in this additional coursework without changing their home high school – a barrier for other students in the past. Panelists discussed some of the logistical challenges associated with providing these additional opportunities to students, for example transportation, which brought together multiple stakeholders to identify funds and develop processes to make sure students wanting to take advantage of the network could actually get to the classes now available to them.

Additionally, the panelists discussed changes to early college and career awareness that they hope will reach middle school students to make them aware of the myriad college and career pathways that are available to them in-state.

The four partnership panels were very different from one another, which presents an important takeaway: There is no boilerplate approach to partnerships for career success. Local, state, and regional employment contexts as well as the relative interest, capacity, and experience for collaborating will determine the activities and scope of a career success partnership. Across the panels, presenters identified communication between stakeholders as critical at every stage. At the outset of a partnership, simply assembling stakeholders in the same room to discuss their overlapping interests and capacity for promoting college and career success for students can uncover key goals, ideas for approaches, and the resources and capacity each stakeholder can contribute. Too often, different stakeholders could advance their efforts if they just took the time to sit down and talk. Once a partnership gets off the ground, continued communication is

necessary to make sure that the new processes and activities are running smoothly and to identify solutions to problems that arise.

Finally, although the various panels identified a number of approaches to this collaborative work, NCAN members and other stakeholders should not necessarily try to replicate any of these, not because they are not successful (they are!) but because, again, this work is context-dependent. These partnerships present inspiration for potential directions to pursue.

## Conclusion

NCAN's 2017 Spring Training series explored three important facets of connecting college and career success: advising students, using data, and identifying partners. Both through the various presenters and attendees' questions and comments, NCAN gained fresh insights into this new expanded direction for the college access and success field. This brief has attempted to capture these insights and provide concrete, actionable advice for NCAN members and other stakeholders in the field.

NCAN will continue to share its work in this area via white papers, webinars, case studies, blog posts, conference sessions, and Success Digest newsletter articles. NCAN has already produced spotlights through these mediums, including the Career Success Spotlight webinars featuring members currently engaged in this work. NCAN is compiling a list of career success-related resources [on its website](#) and encourages readers to check back often as it expands. NCAN's ultimate goal is to provide a broad spectrum of resources that members will find valuable, regardless of whether this is a new direction for their organization or they are already engaged in this work and want to find new approaches to improve their program's practices and, ultimately, outcomes for students.