

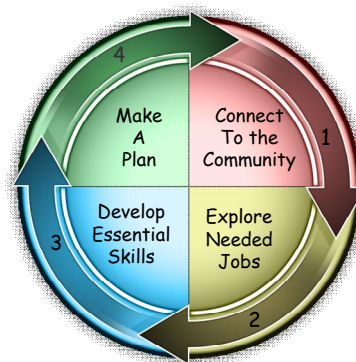


The Four Steps Framework of Workforce Preparation

Endowing the next generation with skills to meet ever-changing personal, economic and social challenges is every community's most important shared responsibility.

Each community, and family, must create opportunities that help young people develop these skills through formal education (high schools, universities, community and technical schools), workplace experiences (part-time jobs, service learning programs and internships) and “safety net” services (community and public programs). Collectively, these efforts support the *Four Steps of Workforce Preparation* that help young people to:

- 1. Connect with the communities they belong to and impact;**
- 2. Know about jobs needed in their community;**
- 3. Learn the skills necessary to fill community jobs;**
- 4. Make plans for success and see them through.**



When young people master these four steps, they have the education credentials, workplace skills and community connections to maintain stable and self-sustaining jobs. When *each* young person in a community has mastered these four steps, local employers find a capable and available workforce and communities have engaged and productive citizens.

While each step is individually significant, they are also interrelated and sequential. A detailed description of the rationale for each step, competencies within each step and policies or programs that support each step follows.

Step 1: Connect to the Community

Jobs take place in communities. Individual and collective needs are met because networks of workers make it happen. When each essential job is done sufficiently, a community operates well and people have the services and goods they need. While this description is evident, young people who are not aware of jobs in their community or are disconnected from local resources find the process of preparing for college and career difficult, if not impossible. Of course, growing up in a community exposes young people to local jobs but many enter young adulthood unaware of the full array of jobs and how they contribute to the systems that make their community work.

Rationale

The first step in preparing for college and career is to understand and connect to one's community. This is important because:

- Youth with few connections to their community often have the most difficult transitions to adult work and life.
- Youth often underestimate their capacity to impact their lives and their community, missing opportunities to take action on issues within their control.
- Young people who know little about their community are less likely to do something about its problems when they become adults.
- The best options for long-term employment are in jobs that are needed in the community.

Competencies

In this step, young people should learn to:

- Understand what they get out of belonging to a community and why community connections are important;
- Understand the impact they can and already do have on their communities;
- Investigate their communities' resources, assets, issues, and needs;
- Investigate the systems operating in their communities;
- Investigate how changes, improvements, and innovations take place in their communities;
- Identify and communicate with their communities' decision makers;
- Communicate their own needs and concerns to others.

Policies and Programs

Community-wide Strategies	Employer-Based Strategies	School-and Community-Based Strategies	Activities with Parents and Adult Mentors
<p>Develop a system for recruiting, training, and matching young people with volunteer projects and activities.</p> <p>Reserve seats for youth and young adult representatives on nonprofit or public boards, advisory groups, and commissions.</p> <p>Communicate publicly how important it is for young people to be skilled and involved in the community.</p>	<p>Sponsor service projects designed and led by youth and young adults (example: Youth Venture).</p> <p>Encourage employees to become involved in community issues and events, particularly those in which youth can participate.</p>	<p>Offer leadership training programs with substantive opportunities to lead school and community groups. (example: Teen Empowerment)</p> <p>Include curriculum at all levels on the needs and resources of the community.</p> <p>Develop a wide range of events for young people to tour, explore, and map their communities.</p> <p>Conduct a contest that inspires youth to find the best solution to a problem in the community and present the options publicly.</p> <p>Create innovative service learning activities that connect young people to their local communities (example: Teen Court)</p>	<p>Interview public officials.</p> <p>Read local newspapers and magazines.</p> <p>Write a letter to the editor.</p> <p>Attend a public meeting of the school board, city council, or a nonprofit organization.</p> <p>Keep a journal of the ways young people can and do make changes in the community.</p> <p>Research a local “system” of interest—its history, key decision makers, funding sources, etc.</p> <p>Volunteer to help a neighbor or local organization.</p> <p>Get involved in a neighborhood association or other community group.</p>

Step 2: Explore Needed Jobs

Young people should understand the types of jobs available in and useful to their communities. In the Emerging Workforce Survey completed by the Initiative, most young people were unable to accurately estimate the amount of education they would need to reach their career goal or the amount of money they would likely earn. Collectively, they indicated only a small number of occupations they planned to enter, relative to the vast number of options available. And very few respondents indicated an interest in the most high-demand, high-wage jobs.¹

The need for more and better exposure to career options and information on how to prepare for them is clear. Casually observing adults at work or reading about different workplaces provide some insights for young people exploring their options. The most effective way for youth to *understand* the wide variety of occupations they may pursue is through hands-on, “real world” experiences. Young people need opportunities to understand how some of the most important jobs in a community - accountants, welders, scientists, public administrators, venture capitalists, principals, general contractors, for instance - work for collective and individual goals. They also need accurate, complete information on how to prepare for occupations.

Rationale

The second step in preparing for college and career is to introduce young people to the jobs needed in their community. This is important because:

- Young people are more likely to commit to education and training when they see how their job will fill an essential community function.
- Workers are more content when they feel their efforts serve a purpose that matters.
- Youth need to explore and try out jobs to discover which are most important to them.

Competencies

In this step, young people should learn to:

- Identify how different jobs impact the community;
- Find objective, complete information on the qualities and requirements of a variety of jobs;
- Explore the jobs that are important to them in hands-on, adult-guided experiences;
- Describe the skills and educational requirements of jobs they have explored;
- Define a “ladder” of related jobs that have increasing opportunities for income and advancement.

¹ Emerging Workforce Initiative, *Emerging Workers Survey Results: Louisville’s Youth and Young Adults Describe their Career and Education Plans*, <http://www.emergingworkforce.org/Final%20Report.pdf> (2008).

Policies and Programs

Community-wide Strategies	Employer-Based Strategies	School-and Community-Based Strategies	Activities with Parents and Adult Mentors
<p>Convene high-growth sectors to identify career pathways and training collaborations.</p> <p>Develop a region-wide jobs network that identifies or creates entry-level positions offering on-site training.</p> <p>Promote opportunities for local experts to present emerging technologies and skills with educators and youth.</p>	<p>Develop and participate in career exploration activities: school-and community-based fairs, workplace tours, job shadowing programs, open houses and informational interviews.</p> <p>Provide summer “internships” for teachers to learn about the skills and occupations needed in your workplace.</p> <p>Identify and publicize “career paths” for high demand occupations.</p>	<p>Create a “convention corps” program for youth to learn from visiting professionals while serving as community ambassadors.</p> <p>Support/expand successful programs that introduce careers (examples: Explorer Posts, Citizen Academies, Junior Achievement)</p> <p>Organize Curriculum-Based Guidance and Advisement systems in schools</p>	<p>Conduct informational interviews with a variety of professionals.</p> <p>Create a “profile” for jobs of interest, collecting announcements or job descriptions, and compiling information on the types of tools, vocabulary, math/science skills, and clothes typically used on the job.</p> <p>Maintain a log of all jobs and work-related experiences (name of employer, dates, duties, supervisor, pros and cons of the workplace).</p> <p>Discuss parent or mentor’s work history.</p> <p>Take a “photo scavenger hunt” of different jobs in the community.</p>

Step 3: Develop Essential Skills

Youth and young adults need many opportunities to explore and develop job skills used to perform a specific occupation (such as operating a machine or completing paperwork); workplace skills used in most jobs (such as time management, critical thinking, teamwork and problem solving), and academic skills for learning or communicating (such as reading, speaking and writing).

Building these skills provide young people the tools they need to be reliable employees, to complete needed credentials and degrees, and to make solid decisions at work and in life.

Rationale

The third step in preparing for college and career is to teach young people how to learn the job and life skills they will need. This is important because:

- Workers need to know the skills they are using and how to transfer them to other situations;
- Workers need to be able to anticipate the skills employers will need and to make a plan for getting them;
- Youth must fully understand their employment and education options to make quality decisions.

Competencies

While developing useful skills is a life-long process, at this step in workforce preparation young people should learn to:

- Identify the skills and knowledge needed to do a specific job;
- Understand the professional, interpersonal, thinking skills essential to succeed in any job;
- Investigate the specific options for preparing for an occupation, including formal education and on-the-job experiences;
- Assess the costs (money, time and effort) of different educational options;
- Understand the processes for entering and completing high school, college and specific skills training programs;
- Reach for the highest level of academic achievement possible;
- Assess their current skill levels, style of learning and academic strengths;
- Practice many different job, workplace and academic skills.

Policies and Programs

Community-wide Strategies	Employer-Based Strategies	School-and Community-Based Strategies	Activities with Parents and Adult Mentors
<p>Promote effective collaborations that align curricula for cohesive skill building and credit transfers (example: P-16 Councils).</p> <p>Develop high-quality educational alternatives that help students with all learning needs earn high school and college credentials.</p> <p>Convene an independent commission of employers, parents, youth, and teachers to evaluate the effectiveness of skill-building programs in schools and the community.</p> <p>Examine the local and state policies that make it more difficult for low-performing students to develop needed skills.</p> <p>Streamline college and financial aid application processes.</p>	<p>Develop opportunities to teach students work-relevant skills through internships and apprenticeships.</p> <p>Sponsor youth-led enterprises that teach entrepreneurial skills and provide micro-financing grants.</p> <p>Host education and financial aid fairs in the workplace.</p> <p>Work with schools to ensure they are twenty-first century skills.</p> <p>Support tuition assistance programs for current employees.</p> <p>Hire and train youth for entry level positions.</p>	<p>Create a work assessment center for evaluating work and life skills through hands-on simulations and scenarios.</p> <p>Develop classes to improve academic and workplace skills.</p> <p>Offer a SEED (Stipend for Education and Employment Development) program.</p> <p>Create youth employment programs that provide pre-placement training, skill development, and adult support.</p> <p>Develop gateway courses for high-demand career fields.</p> <p>Offer school bridge activities for students in 5th, 8th, 12th grades.</p> <p>Support and expand College Access Centers.</p> <p>Implement “career first” programs that place young people with employers for internships.</p>	<p>Attend college tours and orientation programs.</p> <p>Investigate opportunities for high school students to enroll in college courses.</p> <p>Practice the decision making, conflict resolution, and problem solving skills necessary in college and the workplace.</p> <p>Ask work supervisor for an evaluation of current skills and ways to learn new skills.</p> <p>Work with a tutor to build skills in needed areas.</p> <p>Take an online course in a career field of interest.</p>

Step 4: Make a Plan

Once a young person begins developing the competencies in each previous step, they need a specific and manageable plan for taking action on what they have learned. Young people need to team up with adult mentors for guidance in setting reasonable goals, maintaining the motivation to reach the goals and connecting with the people and resources they need.

Rationale

The fourth step in preparing for college and career is to assist young people make plans for success and see them through. This is important because:

- Young adults who have specific and realistic plans for reaching their goals are much more likely to achieve them;
- Youth need access to adult guides and community resources to succeed;
- Youth can learn the skills to stay motivated, overcome problems, and make decisions.

Competencies

In this step, young people should learn to:

- Predict the impact of various personal decisions, actions, and inactions;
- Set goals that are clear, important, challenging and consistent with their priorities;
- Make specific and realistic plans for reaching their college and career goals;
- Learn how to stay motivated, overcome problems, remain on course, take responsibility and make good decisions;
- Connect with adults who can skillfully guide them;
- Make informed decisions about how to finance their educational, job and personal goals;
- Locate and access resources in the community that can help when they encounter difficulties reaching their goals.

Policies and Programs

Community-wide Strategies	Employer-Based Strategies	School-and Community-Based Strategies	Activities with Parents and Adult Mentors
<p>Assess the services designed to assist youth and develop a comprehensive plan for expanding or improving the services.</p> <p>Examine existing policies and programs that assist struggling adults to see if they can be modified to also address the early needs of young people (preventive rather than prescriptive approach).</p> <p>Identify policies that hinder youth from entering adulthood with a clean slate.</p> <p>Develop a comprehensive strategy for assisting youth with complex independent living needs.</p> <p>Establish association for professionals working to prepare young people for career and college success.</p> <p>Develop a community-wide scholarship fund.</p>	<p>Encourage current employees to volunteer for mentoring programs.</p> <p>Collaborate with program staff and educators to elevate their workforce development skills.</p> <p>Contribute to a community-wide scholarship fund and provide in-kind donations to schools and community-based organizations.</p>	<p>Support mentoring programs that involve parents, teachers, and other adult volunteers in providing academic and career information (example: Industry Extension Agents).</p> <p>Create/expand college success and financial management activities.</p> <p>Create/expand IDA programs for young people.</p> <p>Develop a one-stop services center for high risk youth and young adults (homeless, parenting, former foster care or juvenile justice involvement).</p> <p>Solicit donations from area businesses for youth preparing for college and career (student memberships to professional organizations, small business startup costs, career related tools and clothing, etc).</p>	<p>Make a personal budget.</p> <p>Write down a career plan with specific action steps.</p> <p>Practice interviewing for a job.</p> <p>Get personal references, referrals, recommendations.</p> <p>Start a record system for tracking work, school, and volunteer history.</p> <p>Gather “transition items” when on sale (books, school supplies, computer, apartment supplies).</p>

Communities, schools and families can create opportunities for young people to develop the competencies in each of the Four Steps of Workforce Preparation. Ideally, there would be many opportunities for discovery, guidance and information. When young adults successfully navigate these steps, they transition to adult work and life equipped with the skills and tools they need to excel.

For more information on this framework, contact Elizabeth Senn-Alvey at:

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