



# Measuring the Success of a Workforce Preparation System

It can be challenging to measure the success of a workforce preparation system. To understand the long-term impact of collective, coordinated efforts requires more than an account of the accomplishments of programs or individuals. Program “outcomes” are often narrowly focused on participation rates or short-term results – for instance, how many youth completed the program or how many graduates enrolled in college. These measures rarely indicate the skills youth have developed or how they may have put those skills to use for long-term success.

Similarly, measuring how well individual youth are preparing for work and life has its limits. Traditionally, academic indicators, such as GPA’s, ACT/SAT scores and AP test results, have been used to measure the “college and career readiness” of students individually and collectively. However, these assessments do not measure many of the critical skills needed in the workplace, higher education and life such as commitment to completing a task, working as a team member, or solving problems creatively.

Evaluating the impact and efficiency of a system will require a different approach. The measures of success should be drawn from multiple sources and examine short- and long-term indicators of readiness, including social and economic outcomes for youth engaged with the system. Such a layered approach provides a meaningful way of assessing workforce preparation because it takes into account the needs of all stakeholders.

Three key objectives will guide a system’s process of self-evaluation and enable it to report the impact of its work to the community, funders and other stakeholders. These objectives reflect the need for a workforce preparation system that prepares all young people with relevant skills and credentials, benefiting employers and individual workers alike.

## **Objective 1: Employers find the emerging workforce is available, capable, and productive.**

While system goals that focus on educational attainment levels of a community are important, they may miss the opportunity to highlight the skills most relevant in the local labor market. A successful community-wide workforce preparation system of schools, programs and other supports should ultimately assist young people to be qualified, motivated and engaged employees. It must be driven by the demands of the labor market.

*Indicators of success on this objective include:*

- Number of applicants or students in the education pipeline for high-demand and critical careers;
- Number of youth holding employer-validated work readiness credentials;
- Aggregate costs for training young adult workers in workplace and basic skills;
- Percentage of employers that drive the economy participating in workforce preparation activities.

## **Objective 2: Young adults are consistently and adequately employed.**

A successful system will also measure its success by the economic and social wellness of the community's young adults. Information is often available and analyzed on the needs of a community's children – reading proficiency, exposure to health and safety risks for instance – with the hope that early investments will pay off by the time a young person reaches adulthood. However, a workforce preparation system focuses many efforts on older youth and young adults and should ultimately measure its own success by their wellbeing directly.

*Indicators of success on this objective include:*

- Percentage of the community's young adults living in poverty or economically dependent on public or family support;
- Average monthly income of the community's young adults;
- Employment stability of young adults, as reflected in rates of unemployment, turnover, and labor participation;
- Number of high school and college graduates employed in a field and level appropriate to their degree or diploma.

### **Objective 3: Workforce preparation system is inclusive, comprehensive and effective**

Finally, the system should measure how well it is involving all young people in workforce preparation activities throughout the community, regardless of social or economic situation. It should help stakeholders understand what is keeping young people from participating in high- quality activities or supports so all components can be inclusive and the system as a whole can be effective.

*Indicators of success on this objective include:*

- Percentage of 16-24 year-olds attending school or working and characteristics of those who are not currently enrolled or employed;
- Percentage of youth in a community who have career goals and a specific plan for reaching them;
- Number of students participating in high quality co-op, employment, magnet or career academy, internship or apprenticeship experiences;
- Percentage of minority, at-risk, and disadvantaged young people who participating in workforce preparation programs.

Not only should a system measure its success by these objectives and indicators, the existence of a system will facilitate the availability and accuracy of these measures. Where data currently exist (unemployment and labor participation rates, for instance), a coordinated system can facilitate understanding of trends and pinpoint local implications. Where data are not currently collected or accessible, an effective system can develop an instrument or method that accurately measures progress toward important objectives.

For instance, periodic community-wide surveys administered within a well-coordinated network can provide specific information on topics and trends, such as what types of summer jobs did he community's youth hold, what types of careers would they like to explore, and what services would help youth access financial aid for college. Feedback on the value of individual services or activities from youth participants also provides insight into which services need to be expanded, changed, or eliminated.

An effective workforce preparation system will provide objective, comprehensive and transparent information on its efforts so that it can be accountable and responsive. In practice, information will be available online for program managers, funders, policy and legislative decision makers, and youth themselves to improve the preparation of the emerging workforce.

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