



Modernizing Statewide Career Navigation Systems: A Policy Assessment Tool

AUTHORS

David Altstadt
Director, JFF

Erica Cuevas
Director, JFF

Alex Sileo
Senior Manager, JFF

Introduction

Young people today face a rapidly changing economy, a shifting education landscape, and a challenging job market that together make today's education-to-career ecosystem particularly difficult to navigate. As they seek to identify education and career pathways of interest, acquire new skills, and advance in their chosen professions, young people are often met with a staggering number of choices regarding what's next. They may find pathways with unclear entry and completion requirements, and indeterminate financial cost, expected return on investment, and potential to lead to a quality job and economic advancement.

The [Britebound Center for Career Navigation at Jobs for the Future](#) works to develop policy solutions to help young people ages 16-24 understand and navigate education and career pathways after high school. We believe that all young people should have access to a qualified career navigation practitioner like a school counselor or career coach who can help them understand their goals, acquire critical skills, and choose from the wide range of available postsecondary education and training opportunities in their region.

Research consistently underscores the effectiveness of [career navigation services and supports](#) that provide timely knowledge of education and career opportunities, skills-building exercises, and social capital. [Multiple studies](#) link access to career navigation practitioners with improved student academic and behavioral outcomes in K-12 schools. [Similar studies](#) document how postsecondary advising can help students persist through college and attain postsecondary degrees, and an [evaluation](#) of workforce services for adult workers demonstrated that intensive one-on-one services like career counseling and coaching helped to increase worker earnings over a follow-up period.

While career navigation decisions are personal to each learner and worker, they are not made in isolation. State policy plays a critical role in shaping whether young people can access the personalized guidance they need to explore available options and pursue the path that best suits their needs, skills, and interests. Unfortunately, few states have adopted most of the policies we believe contribute to a comprehensive and effective career navigation system. Our [50-state analysis](#) finds that states have not fully leveraged the vast array of policies available to modernize their current career navigation systems. Our accompanying [state policy agenda](#) further outlines several actionable, evidence-informed recommendations for how state leaders can work to expand access to and improve the quality of personalized guidance for young people.

How State Policy Can Transform Career Navigation for Young People: A 50-State Analysis [↗](#)

This report highlights the need for states to build more effective career navigation systems to better meet the needs of all young people and analyzes the extent to which each state has enacted 19 policies necessary to achieve that goal. Few states have adopted most of the policies that we believe create the conditions for a comprehensive and effective career navigation system.



Purpose of this Policy Assessment Tool

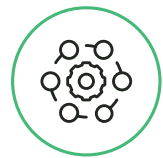
This tool is meant to help state and local users assess a state's progress in adopting and implementing key policies that are critical for helping young people make informed decisions about what's next after high school. By filling out the tool, these users will gain a better understanding of the unique policy environment and conditions of a particular state and will be able to identify gaps and potential action steps for modernizing the state's navigation systems, as recommended in the Center's 50-state analysis and state policy agenda. The tool is organized by five essential elements of statewide career navigation systems:



1. Crafting an overall statewide vision



4. Investing in career navigation practitioners



2. Incentivizing cross-system collaboration on effective career navigation approaches



5. Integrating technology tools and platforms to augment in-person guidance



3. Adopting quality standards for counseling and advising

Who is this tool for?

State and local policymakers, advocates, intermediaries, and others can utilize this policy assessment tool to document their state's progress toward enacting key policies that contribute to a modern and effective statewide career navigation system. Users at the state level can utilize this tool to determine which policies critical for expanding access to high-quality personalized guidance their state has in place, where additional reforms are needed, and whether more coordination is needed with their local counterparts to better implement current policies. Users at the local level can utilize this tool to better understand the state policy conditions they operate under, which state policies can serve as the foundation for local reform efforts, and where more alignment is needed with their state counterparts to ensure state policies are responsive to local needs.

State Policy Actions for Expanding Career Navigation and Personalized Guidance for Young People [↗](#)

Many states are leaving powerful tools on the table when it comes to helping young people navigate education and career pathways. This policy agenda outlines actionable recommendations that states can adopt to help young people connect with well-trained practitioners and pursue education and career paths that align with their skills and interests.



Instructions for Completing this Rubric

- 1. Review each question within each of the five elements and assess where the state currently sits regarding each policy's adoption, implementation, and sustainment.**

Options range from whether the policy exists to whether it is implemented fully and working as intended. To get started, it may be helpful to consult information from prior in-depth reviews and assessments of the personalized career guidance services and supports currently provided to 16-to-24-year-olds (such as prior taskforces, commissions, reports, or listening tours of key partners). As you answer the questions below, consider legislation, agency or administrative rules, state agency requirements or guidance, state WIOA or Perkins plans, executive orders, and other items that can contribute to each state's overall policy environment.

- 2. Take notes to detail current progress adopting and implementing each policy, list key documents or resources, and identify responsible stakeholders.**

Each question includes space for users to further describe state progress in policy adoption and implementation, to identify essential information, and to list agencies and other stakeholders responsible for supporting each policy. Once completed, the tool will depict the state's current progress adopting critical policies, potential levers or partners to build on this progress, and ongoing barriers that may inhibit additional improvements.

- 3. Identify the next action steps based on your responses.**

Each essential element of the tool includes a set of action steps to consider as users assess a state's adoption and enactment of key policies. These action steps can help users identify where to start when adopting or modifying specific policies. Users should also review the Center's 50-state analysis and state policy agenda for additional information about these policies and state examples to emulate.

- 4. Keep the conversation going.**

This tool is meant to serve as a guide for users to articulate progress and to reflect on how they can build on state and local efforts to modernize career navigation systems. Once completed, this tool can serve as an opportunity to share ideas with colleagues, policymakers, and other key partners. Users can also reach out to the Center with additional questions and requests for more information or technical assistance and coaching.



Element #1 Craft a statewide vision for career navigation that emphasizes multiple pathways to career success and focuses on cross-system collaboration and innovation.

Why does this matter? Career navigation services and supports typically exist across education, workforce, and other sectors, and typically cannot be administered effectively by a single entity or regulated by a single law. With so many institutions and stakeholders involved, states should consider developing and adopting a unified vision for career navigation to identify specific goals for the expansion of services and supports, promote collaboration among key stakeholders, and incentivize practitioners to adopt best-in-class practices.

Q1.1 Does the state have a statewide vision for career navigation? *The vision should ideally cut across education and workforce systems, have been developed and endorsed by multiple agencies, clearly define what high-quality career navigation services are, and align with the state's broader education and workforce initiatives*

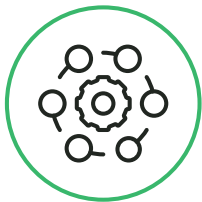
No policy exists related to the recommendation.	Yes, the policy exists but only partially reflects the recommendation.	Yes, the policy exists as recommended but is not being implemented fully or effectively.	Yes, the policy exists as recommended and is working as intended.	I don't know.
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Notes				



Element #1 Craft a statewide vision for career navigation that emphasizes multiple pathways to career success and focuses on cross-system collaboration and innovation.

Q1.2 Does the state have a measurable goal for the expansion and/or improvement of career navigation services? *This goal should ideally establish roles and responsibilities for stakeholders charged with making progress toward this goal.*

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Action Steps: <i>Tactics to consider based on your responses.</i>	Develop and/or adopt: Vision documents are typically crafted by governor's offices, their designees (such as cabinets or key commissions), or relevant agencies (such as K-12, postsecondary, or workforce entities). Consult with these entities to identify key champions and jointly craft a vision for career navigation that emphasizes multiple pathways to career success and focuses on cross-system collaboration and innovation.	Expand or reform: Revise current vision for career navigation to clearly articulate a goal for the expansion of career navigation services to target priority populations, define high-quality career navigation services, and clarify roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders.	Implement with fidelity: Incentivize key stakeholders to adopt and utilize the current vision for career navigation by identifying vital levers or mechanisms such as integration with current supports for career navigation practitioners or required activities of students in education and workforce settings.	Sustain and/or scale: Articulate the effectiveness and utility of the current vision to expand funding for activities that fall within the vision and scale its use with additional stakeholders.
				Consult: Conduct a review and assessment of the career navigation services and supports currently provided to 16-to-24-year-olds to determine what exists; how it's being funded; whether there are any gaps in service or any duplication of effort; whether current programs are effectively addressing the needs of all young people; and how current legislation, guidance, or planning documents address career navigation.

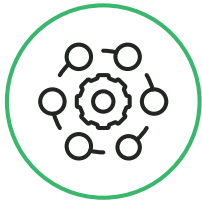


Element #2 Incentivize cross-system collaboration on providing career navigation services and supports.

Why does this matter? Career navigation services and supports are offered across education and workforce systems, but young people may access and experience these in a haphazard manner with inconsistent or contradictory guidance and resources. State leaders should work to ensure career navigation is seamlessly integrated into each young person’s education and workforce journey with multiple touchpoints and opportunities to engage with culturally competent practitioners.

Q2.1 **Does the state have an operational framework that details activities and supports for young people as they age and move across systems or settings?** *This should align with the state’s overall vision for career navigation and can include co-developed materials, events, or resources related to postsecondary education or career exploration, a structured progression of advising experiences, and/or data collection and data sharing agreements.*

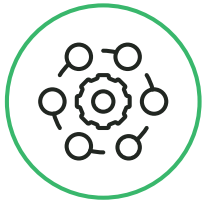
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Element #2 Incentivize cross-system collaboration on providing career navigation services and supports.

Q2.2 Does the state have a policy in place to ensure young people develop an individualized career and academic plan? *These plans should ideally be created by the end of eighth grade; updated annually; document student interests, goals, and experiences; and follow a student as they progress on pathways into postsecondary education, training, and the workforce.*

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Element #2 Incentivize cross-system collaboration on providing career navigation services and supports.

Q2.3 Does the state provide opportunities and incentives for education, workforce, and other partners at the local level to work together to align career navigation services and supports across systems and settings? *This can include dedicated funding for alignment opportunities, shared staffing models, shared technology tools and data systems, or common professional development offerings.*

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Action Steps: <i>Tactics to consider based on your responses.</i>	Develop and/or adopt: Develop a statewide career navigation framework that can outline how career navigation services and supports are offered as young people progress through education and workforce settings, and guide cross-system alignment and collaboration efforts among key leaders and practitioners (such as establishing individual learning plan requirements).	Expand or reform: Modify the existing statewide career navigation framework to reflect additional education and workforce system priorities and generate additional buy-in for cross-system alignment efforts (such as establishing or revising individual learning plan requirements).	Implement with fidelity: Align policies around hiring and training of career navigation practitioners or the creation and updating of individualized career and academic plans for young people with the statewide career navigation framework to encourage greater adoption and coordinated use by practitioners.	Sustain and/or scale: Determine opportunities to incorporate tools, platforms, or systems to further routinize cross-sector collaboration within annual processes, reporting procedures, offerings to practitioners, and learner and worker requirements.
				Consult: Conduct outreach to education and workforce stakeholders to better understand current frameworks and policies guiding career navigation services and supports and determine further opportunities to align.



Element #3 Adopt quality standards for career counseling and advising across systems and invest in professional development to effectively implement best practices.

Why does this matter? As a result of varying capacity constraints, populations served, and professional requirements or incentives, career navigation practitioners across education and workforce systems need guidance and support to further develop and improve their counseling and advising efforts. Quality standards can set clear and rigorous expectations for education and workforce systems and career navigation practitioners to provide the right dosage of reliable, timely, tailored, and culturally competent guidance and wraparound supports to young people. Moreover, state standards can outline the type of data that should be collected, identify research-informed resources and toolkits that practitioners can utilize, and clarify the individual roles and outcomes expected for different practitioners and the publicly funded systems they operate under.

Q3.1 Does the state set evidence-informed quality standards for career navigation services and supports? *Ideally, standards should exist in all systems and settings (K-12, postsecondary education, and workforce development).*

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Element #3 Adopt quality standards for career counseling and advising across systems and invest in professional development to effectively implement best practices.

Q3.2 Does the state provide targeted professional development opportunities to ensure practitioners across all systems have the skills and expertise to provide high-quality guidance to young people? *Ideally, this would include professional development in evidence-based career advising strategies, application of the state’s labor market information tools, and understanding of priority industries and occupational trends. experiences; and follow a student as they progress on pathways into postsecondary education, training, and the workforce.*

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Element #3 Adopt quality standards for career counseling and advising across systems and invest in professional development to effectively implement best practices.

Q3.3 Does the state have a policy that defines preferred or required qualifications for career navigation practitioners across K-12, postsecondary, and workforce systems? Ideally, these qualifications should address relevant certifications, education or training backgrounds, and the core competencies that all practitioners should possess.

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Action Steps: <i>Tactics to consider based on your responses.</i>	Develop and/or adopt: Engage a diverse range of stakeholders to review existing research related to career navigation services and supports; establish evidence-informed quality standards for career navigation services and supports at all levels and in all systems and settings; determine what resources and supports practitioners may need to implement these standards in an evidence-informed manner; and review how current hiring criteria and professional development aligns with these standards.	Expand or reform: Engage a diverse range of stakeholders to revise current quality standards to ensure their applicability to a broader cross-section of career navigation practitioners and alignment with ongoing education and workforce initiatives.	Implement with fidelity: Ensure quality standards clearly align with qualifications criteria, professional development opportunities, and broader education and workforce initiatives to ensure practitioners have a clear sense of the expectations and supports to meet them.	Sustain and/or scale: Consider opportunities to further align quality standards, qualifications criteria, and professional development and peer learning opportunities across systems and settings, as applicable.
				Consult: With practitioners working across systems and settings, consult individual education and workforce agencies to determine if there are existing quality standards, qualifications criteria, or professional development requirements; opportunities to further incentivize their use; and areas where further alignment of these standards across systems and settings is possible.



Element #4 Invest in and expand access to career navigation practitioners who can provide high-quality personalized guidance to young people, regardless of setting.

Why does this matter? Personalized guidance and related supports have been found to be effective across multiple settings. Yet too many students lack sufficient access to a practitioner who can provide career navigation services and timely guidance. States can utilize dedicated state K-12 funding, postsecondary or workforce funding, or available federal funding across these systems to ensure that all young people receive access to these services. In addition to expanding access, this funding is critical for improving outcomes as lowering student-to-practitioner ratios increases the likelihood of students having conversations with these individuals regarding their postsecondary plans.

Q4.1 Does the state deploy funds to expand the number of career navigation practitioners available to young people to support their transition to what comes next after high school? *Sources may include state-level funding for K-12, postsecondary, career and technical education, and workforce development.*

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Element #4 Adopt quality standards for career counseling and advising across systems and invest in professional development to effectively implement best practices.

Q4.2 Does the state deploy federal funds to expand access to and improve the quality of career navigation services and supports for young people?

Sources may include ESSA, Perkins, HEA, WIOA, SNAP E&T, TANF, and others.

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Action Steps: <i>Tactics to consider based on your responses.</i>	Develop and/or adopt: Provide dedicated state funding or tap available federal funding to expand the number of career navigation practitioners available to young people across systems.	Expand or reform: Broaden current dedicated state funding or utilize additional federal funding to increase the number of career navigation practitioners available to young people across systems, including through the blending and braiding of available federal and/or state funds.	Implement with fidelity: Ensure state and local partners better understand how they can currently utilize available state and federal funding to increase access to high-quality career navigation services and supports, including through the blending and braiding of available federal and/or state funds.	Sustain and/or scale: Articulate to key decisionmakers the return on investment of current federal and state-funded career navigation services and supports to ensure continued backing.
				Consult: Map where current career navigation services and supports are presently offered across settings to identify federal and state funding utilization and determine additional areas where these funds could potentially be utilized by stakeholders.



Element #5 Integrate technology tools or platforms into practitioners’ interactions with students so that they take a people-centered, technology-enabled approach to personalized guidance.

Why does this matter? States can augment in-person counseling and advising with technology tools and platforms that can house labor market information and education and training program data alongside career navigation resources such as online training courses, career interest surveys, goal-setting tools, individualized career and academic plans, job search assistance tools, and others. These tools and platforms should supplement (and not replace) in-person guidance and allow students and their families to engage in academic and career planning individually or with other practitioners asynchronously as needed.

Q5.1 Does the state deploy a publicly funded technology tool or platform to support career navigation of young people? *Ideally, the tool would provide young people with timely and accurate data about postsecondary education and training programs, associated program costs, education and employment outcomes, and labor market demand for related credentials and careers.*

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Element #5 Integrate technology tools or platforms into practitioners' interactions with students so that they take a people-centered, technology-enabled approach to personalized guidance.

Q5.2 In deploying this tool or platform, does the state provide training and professional development opportunities to enhance practitioners' capacity to use it? *These opportunities should help practitioners use these platforms to provide young people with career navigation services such as online training courses, goal-setting exercises, individualized career and academic plans, available education, training, and employment information, and other tools.*

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Action Steps: <i>Tactics to consider based on your responses.</i>	Develop and/or adopt: Establish a statewide career navigation technology tool or platform that provides labor market information, data on education and workforce program outcomes, and other career navigation resources at no-cost to learners.	Expand or reform: Build out the functionality and capacity of the existing tool or platform to include additional labor market information or data, career navigation resources, and accessibility features, and ensure the platform is accessible to young people regardless of their setting (i.e. secondary, postsecondary, and workforce programs).	Implement with fidelity: Integrate the use of the existing tool or platform within current career navigation requirements, policies, and procedures, and provide training to practitioners to further utilize these tools in their interactions with young people.	Sustain and/or scale: Further promote the existing tool or platform with additional practitioners, students and their families, and other stakeholders to increase uptake.
				Consult: Connect with education and workforce leaders to identify which technology tools and platforms are currently utilized in different settings, how these tools and platforms are funded, which populations of young people and practitioners can access them, and their effectiveness.

Acknowledgments

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About Jobs for the Future

Jobs for the Future (JFF) transforms U.S. education and workforce systems to drive economic success for people, businesses, and communities. www.jff.org.

About the Britebound Center for Career Navigation at JFF

The Britebound Center for Career Navigation at JFF empowers young people ages 16-24 to better understand and navigate quality education and career pathways after high school by providing access to resources and opportunities that will lead them to meaningful, quality jobs.

