



DEAN Pathways Request for Proposals

Utilizing a pathways strategy to increase the number and diversity of learners who complete high-value credentials and successfully access family living-wage employment

The Denver Education Attainment Network (DEAN) ignites and accelerates systems change, connecting stakeholders and driving collaboration to build an education-to-career system that works better for all learners, with a focus on learners who have historically and presently been excluded from high-value career pathways. Our vision is two-fold: 1) Dramatically increase the number and diversity of learners who complete credentials that lead to good jobs; 2) Forge a national model for closing equity gaps and increasing postsecondary attainment resulting in family-living wage employment.

Enabling an Equity- Centric Career-Connected Learning Environment

DEAN was founded in 2014 as a direct response to persistent equity gaps in educational attainment and economic opportunity. As a non-profit that sits outside the system, DEAN is in a unique position to work between and among education- and workforce-centric institutions, organizations, and state agencies, to identify and build collaborative strategies and connect work for greater impact. DEAN was founded to work exclusively in Denver, but the success of our pathways strategy has led us to expand beyond Denver and work in a regional and statewide capacity.

According to the 2020 Colorado Talent Pipeline Report, ~89% of Colorado's Tier 1 top jobs require some type of postsecondary education or training. Individuals in Colorado who have a bachelor's degree or higher have the highest workforce participation rate at 77%. Conversely, those with less than a high school diploma have a participation rate of 58%, a gap of 19% (As noted in this report, as credential attainment increases, labor participation increases and unemployment decreases). Recognizing the importance of educational attainment as a driver of economic security and success, the state established an overall attainment goal of 66% by 2025 (certificate, associate degree, bachelor's degree, and/or a graduate or professional degree). Yet, significant educational attainment gaps exist for Latinx or Hispanic populations (30%) and Black or African American populations (41%), putting economic security further out of reach.

To address education and talent gaps and strengthen our regional and state talent pipeline, DEAN has developed and is implementing a pathways strategy. With labor market demand and industry alignment as central to the pathways strategy, there are six elements that we drive to improve completion outcomes and workforce opportunities:

1. **Partnership & Collaboration:** Co-design pathways strategy and shared goals, leveraging existing initiatives to improve education-to-workforce ecosystem.
2. **Academic Alignment with Accelerators:** Create clear academic and career maps that connect K-12 to postsecondary to employment and alleviate procedural burdens on learners. Teams develop common processes and shared templates that are required to



map cross-institutional pathways with built-in postsecondary accelerators like concurrent enrollment, work-based learning, and high-value industry certifications. The shared mapping process ensures clear applicability and transferability that advance learners more efficiently along a pathway beginning in high school.

3. **Student Supports:** Develop cross-institutional advising, navigation, and outreach strategies that ensure structure, supports and consistent messaging along career pathways - intentionally focusing on the areas where learners often get lost. This team identifies barriers and opportunities for cross-institutional advising, navigation and other student support strategies focused on recruitment, enrollment, retention, completion, and transitions to workforce. The team also works on ongoing professional development for counselors and college advisors, ensuring increased knowledge and utilization of the pathways model.
4. **Data & Technology:** Gaps in data create gaps for learners. Information about how learners access information, where learners seek pathways, what credentials and work experiences they accumulate, and their success navigating across institutions and into the workplace will help partners assess the barriers and factors that determine student attainment and success. This team works to develop a shared data framework to capture the student experience of pathways and the impact of pathways on student success; builds robust cross-institutional and cross-agency data sharing agreements to support data collection, sharing and tracking student progress across partners; utilizes a collaborative process where institutions are measuring the success of pathways together; improves partner capacity to explore data and outcomes and use it to improve practice and deepen impact; and maintains confidentiality of the information and data shared among partners.
5. **Employer Engagement:** Better and more easily engage industry along the education-to-career pipeline. Connect and align work-based exposure and experiences to ensure that the skills, competencies, and credentials demand by the labor market are packaged consistently for scalability and wider impact, while meeting the employer where they are.
6. **Policy & Communications.** With regional and state partners, we have created a shared vision for an efficient education to workforce system. Policy: Connecting local, regional, and state initiatives is critical as we inform both practice and policy. Connect to and elevate innovative practices and proof of concept strategies with local and state initiatives and policies. Highlight partner experiences to provide feedback and insights on existing and future policies. Develop policy principles; identify and prioritize policy goals and develop policy agenda, build policy muscle to inform local or statewide policy changes that improve the career-connected learning environment.

Overview

With support from the Walton Family Foundation, DEAN is launching a three-year career readiness initiative aimed at expanding access to economic opportunity for Colorado learners by supporting communities to develop educational pathways that lead to higher education, high-



value credentials, and real-world work experiences connected to high-wage, high-skill, in-demand jobs.

DEAN will establish a new regional education partnership and provide implementation sub-grants to partners to adopt a pathways strategy that relies on the collaborative design and implementation of new high-value career pathways. A high-value career pathway is:

1. Aligned to a high-skill, high-wage, in-demand occupation (as defined by the Colorado Talent Pipeline Report)
2. Reinforces academic learning with related work-based learning experiences
3. Embeds opportunities for learners to earn both related postsecondary credit in a degree-granting program and industry-recognized credentials.

As part of our commitment to creating a more equitable and just education system that serves all learners, this pathways initiative will support learners as they successfully transition from secondary school to higher education and into well-paying careers in growing industries. This RFP aims to support a partnership between local school systems and a community college. The partnership may also include a four-year partner and/or technical college. The proposed pathway strategy is designed to strengthen the link between education, both K-12 and postsecondary, and increase economic mobility in communities by increasing the number of high-quality, career-connected education pathways that *start* in K-12. A core hypothesis of this strategy is that a pathways model, supported by an intermediary, can provide critical linkage between K-12, post-secondary and employers; aligning academic programs, student supports and systems to demonstrated labor market demand. Through intentional collaboration, partners will develop multiple paths to stackable credentials that lead to high-wage, in-demand, jobs and ensure there are no dead ends for students after high school.

Developing a Career-Connected Pathways Strategy - Application Questions

1. Include a basic description and history of your organization (2-3 paragraphs). Please also provide brief descriptions of the key other organization(s) with which you are collaborating.
2. This RFP is seeking existing or new K-12/ community college partnerships to implement a pathways strategy to improve high-value credential completion and access to family living-wage employment for more and diverse learners. In addition, you may choose to include a four-year and/or technical college, and other industry/workforce partners. Describe how your proposed partnership will employ key components of a pathways strategy (6 elements listed above) to achieve your objectives and foster coordination in the education-to-workforce ecosystem. Please also address the following:
 - a. What are the roles and responsibilities for partnering organizations?
 - b. Which elements are already in place to build upon and which elements will need to be developed from the beginning?



3. What problem are you aiming to address through this opportunity, and what are your goals for the project? How do these goals align with the goals of your institution, and how do you see this strategy addressing equity gaps within your region?
4. Please describe how you will evaluate the project moving forward and how both qualitative and quantitative data will be collected, analyzed, shared, and utilized to improve systems and achieve learner outcomes. Please describe your current data infrastructure to support the work and any challenges you foresee in utilizing data effectively. *A requirement for this grant is that you will exchange data with other partners. All partners must be willing to sign a data sharing agreement.
5. Leadership and Management - List the 1-3 people involved in managing the project and provide 2-4 sentence bios that address their specific qualifications for this work.
6. Provide a three-year budget (template on next page). The grant amount will be up to \$200,000 annually for three years (\$600,000 in total).
7. Please provide a partnership commitment letter from each key partner.

To apply please email your responses to kelly@denverednetwork.org and admin@denverednetwork.org by **EOD January 24th**. Application responses should be no more than 5 pages total, budget template and partnership commitment letters excluded. We will notify you of the decision by EOD February 11 with the intention to launch the partnership at the end of February.

Questions??? Please email kelly@denverednetwork.org

Budget Template – DEAN RFP

Budget Narrative

Please provide an explanation of each line item and how it will be used to further your pathways strategy

