

Learn more through the Collaborative's Partnership Lead- Twin Cities Development:
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CAREER CONNECTIONS OF WESTERN NEBRASKA

Collaboration Partners & Stakeholders:

Twin Cities Development, Educational Service Unit 13, Nebraska Extension-Rural Prosperities, Panhandle Public Health, Western Nebraska Community College, Regional Economic Development Centers, Regional Chambers of Commerce, Panhandle Partnership, 23 School Districts, Snow-Redfern Foundation, USDA, Department of Labor, Western Nebraska Community College and more new partners every day.

A Rural Career Pathways Model

WHY CAREER PATHWAYS?

In order to maintain the economic stability of the United States for future generations to come, job qualifications will require that at least 71% of careers in the 21st century be accompanied by a vocational certificate or licensure, associate's degree, or bachelor's degree by the year 2020 (Lindsay et al., 2016).

The challenges facing rural workforce, and the systems that support them, are unique and require collaborative and targeted approaches that increase career pathways for rural learners while meeting rural employers' needs and spurring entrepreneurship and economic development.

To begin addressing cross-cutting solutions in the Panhandle of Nebraska, a group of system partners came together. Through planning efforts, the Career Connections of Western Nebraska was born. The formation is a cross-agency leadership team focused on the development of strong, vibrant rural economies where businesses thrive, people want to live and work, and students are provided pathways to attain the education, skills, and postsecondary credentials necessary for high-demand, family-supporting careers that keep them in the Panhandle.

By utilizing existing evidence-based strategies practiced nationally through a model called Career Pathways, the diverse partnership began to grow its own rural model. A career pathway system is made up of multiple career pathway programs that span educational institutions, workforce, and support service partners. It aligns public partners and engages them in a continuous conversation that is led by industry to ensure that job seekers and students move seamlessly through and among support programs, educational institutions, training opportunities, and work-based experiences to build skills and credentials that meet industry demand and prepare them for jobs and careers.

GOALS

- Career Connections of Western Nebraska aims to develop, operate, and sustain industry-driven, competency-based career pathways that ensure education, training, and workforce systems stay attuned and responsive to the needs of the labor market in order to:
- Ensure businesses have access to an appropriately skilled talent pipeline.
- Prepare students and workers with the skills and credentials they need for jobs and careers.
- Enhance industry success through development and maintenance of a collaborative and diverse group of regional human service, government, education, and private sector champions that assist in infrastructure development, resource allocation, economic impact, connection to schools and students, and the tools they need for success.

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COLLABORATION

Career Connections of Western Nebraska is a cross-agency leadership team that is committed to braiding resources necessary to develop, operate, and sustain career pathways systems and programs across the 11 Nebraska Panhandle counties. The leadership team represents:

- Education
- Workforce Development
- Economic Development
- Human Services
- Industry (Employers)
- Private Sector Funders

Interested Stakeholders

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Based on work with entrepreneurial rural communities across the country, we are convinced that youth are essential to real and lasting economic revitalization. Attracting young people adds much more than just population to a community:

- Many young people are entrepreneurial by nature with lots of energy. They start new businesses, and with the support of their community can transition existing businesses to the next generation.
- Young adults who move to your community are often well-educated, technology-oriented, and possess a variety of experiences, fresh ideas, and contacts that can be leveraged in a variety of ways to advance community and economic development.
- Young families purchase many goods and services that benefit local businesses, and they support local schools, libraries, and health care services.
- Young families renovate properties and build homes for their families, positively impacting the appearance of your community, property values and local tax revenues.

Here are just three examples of how investing in youth engagement can positively impact rural economic development:

- Youth can be the spark of entrepreneurial energy that communities need to forge ahead with economic revitalization and growth, renewing optimism among adults as well.
- Young people have technology savvy that can help local businesses compete more effectively in our increasing networked economy. Or, they may start new businesses that use technology as a backbone for bringing new wealth and jobs to their community.
- Each alum a community attracts home has a potential impact of three or more as these young adults get married and have children.

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- Newcomers have similar impacts on population if they are invited to become involved in the community and remain as active residents with young families.

YOUTH ASSESSMENT & LOCALIZED STRATEGIES

Youth engagement is a long-term strategy, but also results in short-term outcomes that build momentum in our Panhandle communities. An important resource to help local leaders understand the potential youth hold for their community is an assessment of youth perspectives about their hometowns, future education and career goals, and their desire to stay or return to their hometown.

The Career Connections Collaborative is contracting with Heartland Center for Leadership Development to gain this valuable knowledge so that we can support then next generation within our communities. The youth assessment work through HCLD has been done with over 50,000 middle-to-high-school-age youth and has indicated that often 50% or more picture themselves living in their hometown in the future. Interestingly, this trend is consistent across regions of the country.

Their research also indicates that if just 5% to 15% more young people return home on a sustained basis, they can stabilize population loss due to outmigration, and help to revitalize their hometowns with their energy and entrepreneurial drive. This is due in large part to the exponential impact young families have on population and their contributions to economic revitalization.

The work of this collaboration is to partner with the panhandle school districts, industry and business leaders, and the supportive network of human service agencies, economic development centers, private and public funders and agencies, higher education entities, and many more that play functional roles in creating vibrant communities for the next generation.

WHY THIS WORK IS IMPORTANT TO YOU

Business and Industry Partners:

- Provides a direct pipeline to a skilled labor force
- Integrates internship and apprenticeship programs into a long-term recruitment and retention strategy
- Assists in retaining your best employees.
- Attracts top achievers
- Increases the cumulative ability, experience, and diversity in your workforce
- Creates an employee-centric culture

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Educational Partners:

- Provides students an early opportunity to explore talents and gain experience that will set them on a path to fulfilling careers.
- Engages students in powerful learning that connects them to their communities, nurtures their career aspirations, and provides them with a head start on college, a trade, and/or a career.
- Aligns K-12 and postsecondary education systems and the career and technical education services provided within and across program providers.

How to Get Involved:

We invite you to join the growing collaborative group of individuals that share a belief in the importance of creating opportunities for students, communities, and local businesses. and are committed to take action to make it happen in all 11 panhandle counties.

- Take the survey and help us identify community needs:
- Email us to join one or all of the coordination meetings at: jdiedrich@tcdne.org

