Table of Contents

1. Introduction ................................................................................................................. 3

  1.1. The Career Pathways Initiative and Its Context .................................................... 3

  1.2. About the Evaluation ............................................................................................ 6

2. Implementation Progress ............................................................................................... 8

  2.1. Building and Managing the Career Pathway Model ............................................. 8

  2.2. Building and Maintaining Partnerships ............................................................... 16

  2.3. Fostering an Integrated Career Pathway System .................................................. 19

3. Emerging Lessons .......................................................................................................... 21

4. Recommendations ........................................................................................................ 24
1. Introduction

This is the first annual report of the developmental evaluation of the Career Pathways Initiative (CPI). This report describes implementation progress and emerging lessons from year 1 of the initiative and includes recommendations for the future. As a developmental evaluation report, it is designed to inform Foundation and grantee discussions on how to build on the progress from year 1. The report intent is to facilitate site and cross-site efforts to reach CPI goals in years 2 and 3.

1.1. The Career Pathways Initiative and Its Context

The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving (the Foundation) launched the Career Pathways Initiative (CPI) in January 2016, defining career pathways as “systemic framework that integrates education programs, support services, and career development to assist adult learners to expand their academic and job skill levels to reach self-sufficiency.” Through CPI, the Foundation aims to address the skills gap preventing low-skill, low-literacy adults in the Hartford region from earning family-sustaining wages.

As a longer-term strategy, the Foundation hopes CPI will support the growth of an integrated career pathways system of high-quality education and workforce development programs in the capital region. Working in cross-sector partnerships, CPI grantees are expected to develop career pathways – integrating education programs, support services, and career development – to help adult learners build the academic and job skills they need to reach economic self-sufficiency.
The Foundation developed CPI to address high rates of unemployment and poverty among low-literate, low-skilled Hartford residents, typically underserved by existing workforce development programs. The Foundation sought to develop a long-term, systemic strategy to address the literacy, training, and employment needs of Hartford residents facing “the most pervasive obstacles” to employment: ex-offenders, homeless individuals, single parents, immigrants, low-literate adults, and disengaged young adults.

Economic, educational, and political opportunities led the Foundation to focus this new initiative on integrated career pathway models, including:

- Unmet employer demand for skilled workers in the Hartford region;
- Gap in the workforce development system’s ability to serve low-literate workers;
- The emergence of contextualized learning as a proven strategy in career pathways programs;
- The re-authorization of the Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act (WIOA), including provisions to support low-literate, low-skilled workers;
- The current interest among funders and providers in bringing stakeholders together across sectors to solve common problems.

The three primary goals of the initiative, as articulated in the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving’s CPI Theory of Change (May 2016), are:

1) **Build and refine career pathways to help traditionally underserved low-literate and low-skilled residents succeed in the workforce.** Partners are expected to build and manage models that include the following components:

- Education – including contextualized basic literacy and credential-based programs and using multiple modalities.
- Employment and training – including job readiness and sector-based training; workplace exposure; training; mentoring; and targeted job development, placement, and retention services.
- Support services – including individualized plans and guidance; assistance with needs such as childcare and transportation, flexible scheduling, and on and off ramps.
2) **Support and promote cross-sector partnerships in developing career pathways for low-literate and/or low-skilled residents.** Partnerships, including basic literacy, community college, workforce development, and employment sectors, are expected to:

- Formalize purpose and structure, operating and decision-making procedures, vision, goals and work plans, partner roles and responsibilities.
- Recruit additional partners as necessary, including employers.
- Develop data sharing and use agreements.
- Leverage additional resources to ensure partnership sustainability.

3) **Foster an integrated career pathways system to respond to the workforce needs of low-literate and low-skilled residents.** The Foundation has committed to supporting the two above goals and to promoting an integrated system in the Hartford region by:

- Bringing partners together for quarterly learning community meetings and providing facilitation and knowledge building at these meetings via Move-Up.
- Providing technical assistance.
- Sharing emerging lessons through developmental evaluation.
- Looking for opportunities to help partners work together across partnerships.
- Sharing emerging lessons/results with the workforce development field, both locally and nationally.
- Using lessons to support the Foundation’s policy and advocacy efforts.

---

**Key Assumptions Underlying CPI***

### About the strategy:
- Contextualized learning moves students ahead faster
- CPI training is tied to industries with job opportunities
- Partners are engaging employers and aligning curriculum to employers’ needs
- Partners are thinking not only about career “ladders,” but also about career “lattices”
- Employers are interested in career advancement for low-literate, low-skilled workers
- Partners are recruiting clients that fit their identified target population
- There are enough residents meeting target criteria to benefit from CPI
- Partners have the capacity to implement the program with fidelity to best practice

### About partnerships:
- Cross-sector collaborations can address intractable problems in complex environments
- CPI collaboration is built on partners’ strengths
- Partners share resources and risk
- Partners have the commitment, capacity, and know-how to develop and manage working partnerships
- Partnerships can adjust to leadership changes and turnover among partner organizations
- Partners have the capacity to engage employers

### About systems change:
- A regional, multi-sector, collaborative approach is needed for lasting impact
- The CPI learning community will promote systems change by fostering collaboration across partnerships
- CPI will make an impact on the region’s quality of life by focusing on issues keeping low-literate, low-skilled adults from achieving livable wage

*As articulated in the Foundation’s CPI Theory of Change*
Hartford Foundation for Public Giving Career Pathways Initiative
Year 1 Evaluation Report

To select the partnerships to implement CPI, the Foundation issued a request for letters of intent in July 2015. Applicants could seek to enhance existing programs or initiate new ones and were required to include collaboration with at least one other agency. Nine partnerships were chosen, representing diversity of geography, population served, partnership scale, and existing and new programming.

1.2. About the Evaluation
The CPI evaluation approach is developmental- - it is utilization-focused, providing continuous feedback to decision-makers to generate learning and practical ideas for program improvement. The focus of the evaluation will evolve with the initiative: in Year 1, the evaluation focused on clarifying initiative and site-level theories of change, determining evaluation readiness, and gleaning early lessons. In Year 2, the focus will be on examining whether programs are gaining traction and partnerships are solidifying. In Year 3, the focus will be on identifying promising approaches in career pathways, partnership development, and systems change.

The corresponding evaluation questions by year are:

**Year 1**
- What is CPI’s theory of change?
- What are grantees’ individual theories of change?
- What is grantees’ current level of capacity for tracking program outcomes?
- What lessons are emerging from grantees about what it takes to succeed in the start-up phase of an initiative like CPI?
- What adjustments might be made to CPI’s approach to improve its likelihood of success?

**Year 2**
- What lessons are emerging about what it takes to implement programs and build working partnerships?
- What evidence is there that CPI is moving towards its longer-term outcomes?
- What adjustments might be made to CPI’s approach to improve its likelihood of success?

**Year 3**
- How well did grantees implement their CPI strategies over the course of the initiative?
- What was the impact of CPI?
- What are the lessons learned from CPI?

In answering year 1 questions, we helped each site articulate their program theory of change through a review of program documents (i.e. proposals, work plans, program materials) and an in-depth discussion with partners. To assess their capacity to track
outcomes, we asked each site to complete an online survey, followed by phone interviews and a review of data tools and materials, resulting in the cross-site “CPI Data Capacity Exploration: Summary Report” (September 2016). Given the great variation in data capacity among the sites uncovered through the exploration, we used the findings to inform group and individual technical assistance for sites. We also developed a simple tool to collect outcome data across sites, taking into consideration the disparate definitions of outcomes and indicators and range of data capacity.

In February 2017, the evaluation team conducted site visits that included interviews with grantees, partners, and participants, as well as program observations whenever possible, to assess implementation progress and glean emerging lessons. To complement our partner interviews, we asked sites to complete a partnership self-assessment rubric to gauge progress on partnership development.

Integral to our developmental evaluation approach, is our open and ongoing learning engagement with the sites and the Foundation. Throughout year 1, we sought to engage the CPI programs and the Foundation as partners in our learning process. For example, we discussed the feasibility and effectiveness of a data collection tool we were developing with the sites as part of a data training session – advancing their evaluation capacity while simultaneously improving our data collection strategies. We participated in the Foundation cross-site quarterly learning convenings and had several one-on-one conversations with sites throughout the year. These opportunities enabled us to share early evaluation findings, while gleaning valuable insights as year 1 work unfolded.

In the following section of this report (section 2), we discuss year 1 implementation progress in each of CPI’s three goal areas. In section 3, we present early lessons emerging from the initiative. Finally, in section 4, we provide recommendations to consider as CPI evolves in years 2 and 3.
2. Implementation Progress

2.1. Building and Managing the Career Pathway Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2016 CPI Participant Milestones (cohorts ending by December 31)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CPI TOTAL</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrolled ¹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed at Completion ²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrolled in Ed Program at Completion ³</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed at 6-months ⁴</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrolled in Ed Program at 6-months ⁵</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Students enrolled in program sessions with an end date on/before 12/31/16
² Of participants completed, percent employed, as defined by each site
³ “,” % enrolled in an education program (regardless of employment status)
⁴ Of participants completing by June 2016, % employed 6 months later
⁵ “,” by June 2016, % enrolled in an education program 6 months later (regardless of employment status)

**Participant Enrollment**

Most Career Pathways Initiative (CPI) programs successfully enrolled the targeted number of participants who met the population criteria they were designed to serve. Six of the nine programs successfully recruited and enrolled the targeted number of low-income and/or low-skilled individuals in their specified population groups (e.g., immigrants, homeless individuals, formerly-incarcerated individuals). Several programs attracted participants primarily through word of mouth or informal referrals. Capitol Region Education Council (CREC) was successful in using Facebook as a recruitment vehicle; Goodwin College effectively used a mass marketing campaign via postcards to inform the target population of the program.

Three of the programs encountered some challenges recruiting their targeted numbers. For Our Piece of the Pie (OPP), it proved difficult to find students from the target population who also met the vetting criteria to be successful dual-enrollment candidates. For YWCA, the loss of a key referral partner and stretched staff capacity made recruitment difficult.

Some potential participants were hesitant to register given the program’s time commitment. This appeared to be one of the challenges the Hartford Public Library (HPL) encountered as it began recruitment for Year 2 of its Immigrant Career Pathways program. For many HPL
potential participants, the opportunity cost of remaining out of the workforce during training seemed too high considering the limited hours of the entry-level Hartford Public Schools’ Food and Child Nutrition Services (HPS-FCN) jobs available:

“The reason I hear most from people who are interested but don’t sign up is ‘I need a job now.’ A lot of people find it difficult to do an internship that is unpaid and a lot of folks aren’t interested in those kinds of hours. We need to find ways to incentivize the program because it’s not very reasonable to ask people to make these sacrifices.” (HPL staff)

**Participant Completion**

In 2016, of the 300 participants enrolled in CPI programs, 79% (236/300) completed the program.¹ Most CPI participants, particularly those whose programs provided them with extensive supports, were able to successfully complete core program requirements. Others faced barriers that ultimately prevented them from completing the programs, including: academic challenges; the need for more immediate employment; immigration issues; and family responsibilities.

Given CPI’s intent to serve individuals traditionally left behind by workforce development programs, it is

¹ Analysis includes only those participants whose programs ended by December 31, 2016. An additional 36 participants continued their enrollment in a CPI program into 2017, for a total of 336.

---

**Summary of Desired Outcomes, Goal 1:**
**Build and refine career pathways**

**Short-term (1 year)**

**CPI Partners:**
- Have capacity to build/manage CP models, including: recruiting employers/clients; tracking data; developing resources.
- Provide integrated CP services, with multiple paths, on/off ramps and supports and strategies to retain students.
- Meet target recruitment goals, recruiting clients who are a fit for the program.
- Employers to provide input into curriculum & training, job exposure, placement, and advancement opportunities.

**Participants:**
- Understand: program options/requirements/expectations; cost/benefit.
- Attend program consistently; intend to complete; are engaged/satisfied; are optimistic about the future.
- Build basic, job readiness, & technical skills; achieve program milestones.

**Medium-term (3 year)**

- Strong, sustainable CP models are in place.
- At least 650/1300 CPI participants are employed (earning family sustaining wages) or pursuing further education.

**Long-term (5+ year)**

- Low-literate/low-skilled residents: obtain transferable skills; obtain/retain employment; advance along career ladders/lattices.
understandable that some of the programs encountered challenges recruiting and retaining their target population. These programs are exploring options to strengthen the alignment between their target population’s capacity for success and program requirements.

**Partners and participants interviewed ascribed CPI’s success in large part to the individualized supports the programs provide.** Given the obstacles to success CPI participants may face due to poverty, language, criminal history, substance abuse, among others, many CPI partners included comprehensive case management in the design of their pathway models. Participants in most programs were able to access a full range of supports, from transportation assistance and childcare, to tutoring, to assistance with resume building and interviewing skills.

“We want to clear the path so the stuff that gets in the way of women with children is taken care of. That is this program’s competitive difference – it’s preparing them for education and career as opposed to preparing them for a job” (YWCA staff)

The Literacy Volunteers of Greater Hartford’s (LVGH) case manager/job developer, for example, provided a “high-contact, one-to-one approach” necessary to helping participants attend classes and training consistently; develop soft skills; and, ultimately, gain employment. Guided by goals laid out in each participant’s individualized plan, the LVGH case manager/job developer worked with each participant to help them access the wide range of literacy and skills training needed to obtain their educational and career objectives.

Even without official case managers, most programs provided a high level of individualized support and supervision to participants. At Goodwin, the program manager met weekly with the students, both individually and as a cohort, to make sure they had everything needed to “stay on track.” She referred students to in-house counseling and academic supports and helped them with study skills, such as managing time and getting organized. When needed, she met with participants off campus to accommodate their schedules and transportation constraints. Manchester Community College (MCC) provided similar supports to the CREC students enrolled in its medical office assistant program.

**Participants were grateful for the support and encouragement they received from case managers and other program/partner staff.** They talked about forming close relationships with program staff and the difference that having the support of trusted allies has made in their lives.

“I started working with CPA in 2006 and they have been part of my support system ever since. They helped me through my addiction. I feel like I’ve grown up with them. They’re a family.” (CPA participant)
“The most valuable part is having the coach. We can talk with her about anything and she encourages us.” (YWCW participant)

“CREC pays for everything. Right now, with my income, I wouldn’t have been able to go to school. CREC bought my books; they offered transportation. Everything they did for us was amazing.” (CREC participant)

“[The program manager] goes over and above to help us succeed. She makes sure everyone gets information and encourages us to tell her our problems.” (Goodwin participant)

Participants valued the training they received and, for the most part, expressed strong satisfaction with the CPI programs. Goodwin participants felt the program offered an amazing opportunity to receive intensive training and college credits at no cost to them. Journey Home participants, for their part, were extremely grateful for the opportunity to receive training resulting in employment with Belcan Corporation.

“You don’t typically find opportunities like this. This program gets you in the door. I am very grateful it exists.” (Journey Home participant)

Similarly, HPL participants appreciated that training led directly to employment with (HPS-FCN). They viewed the internship component of the program to be particularly beneficial.

“The internship was very good, because it’s hands on and you’re being shown what you were taught in class right there in the kitchen. The district was good about the timing, too. I wasn’t working at the time, so I was able to finish the internship in two straight weeks.” (HPL participant)

CREC participants interviewed appreciated the opportunity to strengthen their English while pursuing college and career goals. They were also knowledgeable of and enthusiastic about the opportunities the medical office assistant career pathway affords:

“They explain the opportunities we have. This field has a lot of things we can do. They explain what paths we can take.” (CREC participant)

“You can grow in the medical field, there’s all kinds of directions.” (CREC participant)

“As an office assistant, you can work in any kind of office environment, pediatrician, dentist. There are a lot of opportunities.” (CREC participant)
OPP participants, for their part, expressed mixed satisfaction with the Opportunity Academy College Scholars (OACS) program. While they appreciated the chance to begin working towards an associate’s degree while in high school, many found the course load difficult to sustain and the College for America (CfA) online courses difficult to follow, given the absence of live teachers to deliver the content and answer their questions. While they appreciated the academic and case management support from the high school and program staff, many indicated that even with this support, meeting program requirements was difficult.

“This program gets us places faster and furthers our education”; “It was a good opportunity, not a lot of kids get to start college programs while they are still in high school” (OPP participant)

“They told us that it was self-paced. But once you start, then if you don’t get so many CfA competencies by a certain time, you may not be able to continue in the program.” (OPP participant)

“On CfA’s site, they don’t have videos of a teacher teaching, it’s just written content and writing. It would be helpful to see someone teaching it, even if it’s just a video online.” (OPP participant)

In a few cases, a mismatch between target population criteria and program requirements made it difficult for participants to advance through the various program components. For a variety of reasons, some YWCA participants, for example, have taken longer than expected to advance through the program. Some of these reasons might have been anticipated through a more rigorous screening process (i.e. immigration issues, unpaid debt). At OPP, as mentioned above, despite thorough vetting, some participants struggled to keep up with the program’s academic requirements. These recruitment and retention challenges signal a potential mismatch between the desire to serve a more disadvantaged population, participant’s skills and the program requirements participants must meet to succeed.

**Participant Employment**

Fifty-six percent (132/236) of CPI participants obtained employment soon after program completion. Forty-five percent (33/74) of participants who completed the program by June 2016 were employed for six months or more. Some participants also sought to advance their skills and expertise via obtaining additional education upon completing the CPI programs, either in conjunction with employment or as a dedicated pursuit. Upon program completion, 15% (35/236) of CPI participants pursued further education via credit-bearing courses or non-credit
certificates. Six months after CPI program completion, 22% (16/74) of participants who completed CPI by June 2016 were pursuing further education.

The two programs that served as direct pipelines into employment with partnering organizations (HPL and Journey Home) were the most successful in placing participants in jobs immediately upon completion. Journey Home’s Aerospace Employment Placement Program (AEPP) trains Harford residents experiencing homelessness for career-track jobs at Belcan Corporation. Participants undergo a thorough screening process before admission to the program. During training, to monitor students’ progress and offer support as needed, the Journey Home AEPP program manager attends all training classes with them. After training, and their 6-week Belcan internship, which is subsidized by Step Up – a Connecticut Department of Labor program that provides wage and training subsidies to employers that hire unemployed jobseekers – participants are guaranteed employment at Belcan.

As part of a similar model for English-language learners, the Hartford Public Library, in partnership with HPS-FCN guarantees job placements in school cafeterias for graduates of its Immigrant Career Pathways program. HPL participants receive 60 hours of English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction at the library – contextualized for the food service field – followed by a 36-hour internship at a Hartford Public School cafeteria.

HPL’s graduates employed with HPS-FCN expressed satisfaction with their jobs and were positive about the opportunities for advancement: “The program met all of my expectations. I have a great group of coworkers and every day I’m learning more on the job. And my English is improving. I don’t have a choice; they make me speak it at my job [laughing].” (HPL participant)

HPS-FCN, for its part, was pleased with the caliber of employees the program produced: “We’ve gotten successful candidates for the program. We’re getting feedback from the cook managers that these people are really good at their positions. Sometimes we still see the language barrier, though. They still don’t have that fluency.” (HPL partner)

For most CPI programs connecting participants to employment opportunities proved challenging. CPI partners interviewed, for the most part, considered employment a program area in need of improvement. In some CPI programs, employers were involved in the training curriculum design and/or delivery of training. However, most CPI programs struggled to find additional ways to meaningfully engage employers. That is, programs had difficulty securing employer commitment to provide internship opportunities for participants; more difficult still has been securing employer commitment to provide job placements. Because, by design, CPI targets low-skilled, low-literate participants with little work experience, it is especially
challenging to attract employers – even more so than in a traditional workforce development effort.

Community Partners in Action (CPA), for example, seeks to provide training opportunities to ex-offenders in fields that promise opportunities for career development and in year 1 had some success contracting with employers to provide technical training to their clients. Nevertheless, job placement for ex-offenders remains particularly challenging and, in some cases, CPA employer partners did not follow through with the promised job placements. Some CPA participants expressed their frustration that they were not being given a fair shot by employers, despite their efforts: “The training gives you confidence, but it’s no guarantee that you can get a job. We’re still looked on as criminals.” (CPA participant)

For longer-term CPI programs and those with no set end point, some partners felt it was premature to engage employers given the program’s current state of implementation and participant lack of readiness for employment. During most of year 1 for example, YWCA was fine-tuning its CPI model, so interviewees felt it was too early to recruit employers:

“Before bringing employers on board, I have to clearly define our model. An employer doesn’t want to come in while you’re still saying, ‘We are figuring out what we are.’ It’s definitely a priority, but it’s a matter of timing.” (YWCA partner)

Similarly, OPP staff believed it would be prove too difficult to interest employers in their program when its participants are still in high school and at least a year away from potential employment:

“We know how to engage employers, but when you have a population that has not reached the place yet where we can present them as potential employees, it is hard to hook the employers.” (OPP staff)

Nevertheless, many CPI participants expressed resounding interest in more direct exposure to employers in hopes of learning more about different employment sectors and the skills and experience necessary to enter them. Some participants also indicated that more knowledge about various career options might help motivate them to stay enrolled in the program.

“We need more opportunities to actually put our heads into our work. Even talking to a receptionist at a hospital would help us understand what they do and how they got there and ask them questions.” (OPP participants)
In general, CPI programs that pursued career pathways in multiple employment sectors found it more difficult to develop employer relationships than programs with fewer pathways. This is understandable considering that developing many individual relationships is more time-consuming than developing one or few. For some CPI programs, the multiple pathway design is due to an organizational philosophy that favors an individualized approach for participants. Nevertheless, there appears to be inherent tension between being flexible and responsive to participants’ individual interests and structuring a robust career pathway program with strong employer partnerships.

A primary challenge to engaging employers in a CPI partnership is the difficulty framing the value-added for them to dedicate their time and resources. CPI programs found it easiest to engage employers who are, at least in part, “mission-driven.” For example, CPA recently established a successful partnership with Zest, a mission-driven café committed to hiring ex-offenders. Similarly, while Belcan Corporation and HPS-FCN are not necessarily mission-based, their respective leaders expressed a desire to give back to the community. While Journey Home increased the appeal of participating in AEPP by securing public subsidies for Belcan, it was ultimately a confluence of factors that spurred the company’s involvement, including personal relationships and a corporate commitment to social responsibility.

However, most for-profit employers are focused on their bottom line; attracting employers as partners requires sustained “salesmanship” of how they stand to benefit from the CPI partnership. CPA’s job developer, for example, has pursued relationships with several local companies. She spent significant time in the community meeting with employers to pitch to them the benefits to be gained from hiring a CPA participant. Although these efforts are still nascent (begun midway through year 1), CPA’s assertive approach shows promise attracting potential employers’ interest.

For year 2, many CPI programs are intensifying efforts to build employer relationships and to support participants’ transition to employment. While not all CPI programs have full-time job developers, many include job development as a function of a current staff position. A few programs, such as CREC, LVGH, and Chrysalis have added or are planning to add job developer staff positions to address this organizational capacity issue.

CREC, for example, plans to hire a full-time job developer to strengthen this element of their program. By default, job development has become one of the CREC’s case manager’s job functions, but the team has found that it requires full-time attention. As a result, towards the end of year 1, CREC applied for supplemental funding from the Foundation to hire a job developer:
“Job development is our biggest weakness. It’s very time consuming to build those relationships with employers and really sell our students. We really need someone on board full time to do it well.” (CREC staff)

As they look towards year 2, most CPI programs are looking at ways to engage more employers in their training. For example, some partners are inviting employers to speak to participants about their fields, scheduling site visits, or soliciting employer feedback on curriculum. For many programs, redoubling efforts to secure participant internships and employment is a top priority and most indicated they would benefit from technical assistance in this effort.

2.2. Building and Maintaining Partnerships

2016 Partnership Self-Assessment*

*CPI partners completed a self-assessment in the fall of 2016, rating their partnership on various elements of partnership capacity on a scale of one to three, with three representing the highest level of achievement. This chart represents the average scores across the nine partnerships. The self-assessment will be collected again in 2017 and 2018 to gauge progress over time.

**Partner buy-in**

Most CPI partnerships functioned successfully at the end of Year 1; partners largely expressed satisfaction with their collaborative efforts and bought into CPI’s goals and objectives. Partners indicated functioning well in most capacities integral to effective collaboration, such as decision-making, shared resources, communication, and shared learning. Partners interviewed spoke of the importance of a shared vision and the value of collaboration. Most partners clearly understood their roles and responsibilities, and those of other partners within their program. As required by the Foundation, all partner organizations signed MOUs to serve discrete
functions within the partnerships. These MOUs helped clarify roles and responsibilities among partners early in their relationship and helped avoid internal competition. CPA, for example, brought together several nonprofit partners offering some overlapping services, but because each partner was contracted to provide a separate service as part of CPI, they did not view each other competitively:

“CPA sought organizations that were good at very specific things. That’s why nobody in this group was competing with each other. We all do things differently. We’re not obligated to adapt or to fit a model.” (CPA partner)

Importantly, most partners expressed the value of participating in CPI for their organizations. None of the CPI partners interviewed identified any drawbacks to participating for their organizations. In contrast, most saw numerous benefits, including the opportunity to reach new populations; learn how others approach similar work; refer clients for complementary services; and, as discussed above, for employer partners, recruit well-trained, reliable employees.

The partnership with CREC for the ELL/MOA program, for example, allowed MCC to recruit a category of students—advanced English language learners—they would not necessarily otherwise been able to reach:

“Ultimately, as a college, we’d love to have these students come back and get an associate’s degree. So partnering with an organization like CREC helps us bring in those students. Otherwise, we may not be able to reach that population of high-level ESL students.” (MCC)
Through CPI, Chrysalis was able to expand the population benefiting from their services (traditionally, Chrysalis’s services are just for their clients in recovery) to include Urban League clients who were neighborhood residents. Open Hearth clients served by Journey Home’s AEPP program are typically in recovery and face many barriers to accessing employment. For Open Hearth, the AEPP partnership offered a unique opportunity to facilitate client access towards well-paying jobs. Moreover, AEPP participants became role models for other Open Hearth residents, demonstrating that maintaining employment while in recovery is an obtainable goal. For Open Hearth, the partnership added an essential component to their mission of helping participants become self-reliant:

“Finding pathways that aren’t episodic and that can be sustained over time has been very challenging. [With AEPP] we have a direct relationship with an employer who can bring people in and partners who are mindful of keeping participants safe.” (Open Hearth staff)

Many CPI partners expressed the value of building relationships through their joint work: “We are really rolling up our sleeves together – that is an essential part of a partnership – really to drill into different issues and challenges that we have” (YW CW partner). Others viewed this initiative as laying the groundwork for long-term partnership and deeper collaboration. While partnerships see the need to explore additional grant opportunities together, so far only Goodwin – with two MCP workforce development partners – has applied jointly for additional partnership opportunities.

**Partner communication**

Many partners ascribed their partnerships’ success to strong communication, flexibility, and willingness to adapt programs based on emerging implementation lessons. Partners reported frequent CPI-related emails, calls, and meetings to coordinate implementation, troubleshoot, and plan for future cohorts.

Many described instances in which partners reflected on emerging challenges and made timely adjustments to improve their program. For example, Journey Home’s AEPP adjusted training course offerings and content as participant skill deficits were identified and as job openings emerged requiring specific employee knowledge. In addition, AEPP added an on-site workplace communications skills class in response to Belcan’s request.

Similarly, as it became clear that some students in the OACS program were struggling with the coursework, OPP and CfA were in regular communications and worked together to figure out ways to enhance curriculum alignment between the Opportunity Academy High School and CfA and provide additional academic supports. Both partners commented on the flexibility of the other as a factor in the success of their partnership:
Summary of Desired Outcomes, Goal 3: Foster an integrated career pathway system

Short-term (1 year)
- CPI partners participate in learning communities; understand overall goals/their roles in CPI; openly communicate about successes/challenges; increase knowledge of CP & partnership development.
- CPI partners effectively refer clients to one another and to other programs to help clients access additional opportunities in the community.
- HF uses CPI data and findings to shape policy/advocacy priorities.

Medium-term (3 year)
- CPI partners are increasingly coordinating service delivery (beyond each partnership).
- External stakeholders learn about CPI/begin to form connections with CPI partnerships.
- HF & CPI partners develop policy brief around CPs and what it takes to do this work.

Long-term (5+ year)
- Stakeholders across the CT adult literacy and workforce system increasingly collaborate in support of low-literate, low-skilled residents.

The most common areas in which partners felt their CPI partnerships could be improved were bringing employers to the table, learning from shared data, and planning for sustainability. As discussed above, most CPI partnerships found it challenging to engage employers in their efforts. As a result, in planning for year 2, partners were redoubling efforts to bring employers on board. While partners have been pleased with their ability to course correct during implementation, some expressed the need to use data more systematically to drive learning and inform on-going program implementation. Finally, while acknowledging that CPI is still in its early implementation stage, some partners were looking ahead to the end of the grant period and expressing the need to plan together for CPI sustainability and their continued work together.

2.3. Foster an Integrated Career Pathway System

Partners appreciated the opportunity to

“The willingness that OPP has to step back and say, ‘What do we need to do get better?’ and ‘How can we leverage our internal supports to help the students?’ is a success. This first year has been a great opportunity to learn. We have developed a better understanding of the challenges that students who are still in high school face in the program and are working on changes to improve their chance of success” (CfA staff).

“The relationship we established with CfA is a success – they are very much in tune with what we do and are very flexible and amenable to tweaking things and the way they work. Getting to know them and being able to say our vision and values are aligned is refreshing.” (OPP staff)
learn from other CPI partnerships during the Foundation’s quarterly CPI convenings. Overall, CPI partners found great value learning about other local organizations and their programs. Some partners began to refer clients to other CPI programs for services.

“The convenings are great because we are making connections with other CPI partners. We’re learning about what other programs are out there that our students can take advantage of and they’re learning about what we have to offer. For example, now that I know that Chrysalis has a culinary arts program, I can refer people who don’t meet the criteria for our program over there.” (CREC staff)

At the end of Year 1, partners were focused on learning more about other CPI programs for potential client referral. In addition, partners foresaw future collaboration with organizations they were connecting with through the CPI convenings, a promising early indicator of CPI’s long-term goal of fostering an integrated career pathways system.
3. Emerging Lessons

Lesson #1. Balancing the goal of assisting low-skilled, low-literate individuals not typically served by workforce development programs with the need to recruit participants likely to succeed is an ongoing challenge. One of CPI’s core principles is to serve individuals traditionally left behind by workforce development programs because of limited literacy and other employability skills. Nevertheless, to impart the necessary job-related skills and/or confer the credentials required by employers to progress on a career pathway, CPI programs must recruit participants likely to succeed. Some CPI programs found it difficult to recruit participants who meet both the “disadvantaged” criterion and their program’s threshold requirements. In some cases, programs enrolled fewer participants than expected; in other cases, programs enrolled sufficient numbers, but their participants have struggled to meet program expectations and requirements.

Lesson #2. For some potential CPI participants, the opportunity costs of remaining out of the workforce during training may present a disincentive to program enrollment. For many individuals in CPI’s target population, their top priority is securing employment as soon as possible. Training programs that require being out of the workforce for an extended time are only attractive if they promise better paying and steady jobs in the future. Longer programs, unpaid internships, or pathways that lead to low-paying, part-time, or temporary employment may not provide sufficient incentive to offset the investment of time and lost income participants make during training.

At the same time, condensed programs can be more difficult academically and present additional challenges for those students balancing work and family obligations during training, requiring even more intensive supports from programs. In addition, individuals with low literacy naturally require longer training because they must build their basic skills in addition to obtaining technical skills.

This trade-off between offsetting the opportunity costs of training and ensuring a manageable, high quality program is inherent in all workforce development programs. Nevertheless, it is even more pronounced in CPI with its goal of serving low-literate, low skilled individuals.

Lesson #3. Providing high-quality workforce training to lower-literacy individuals requires intensive case management. CPI programs have the double-barreled challenge of serving lower skilled individuals, while maintaining program participation and completion requirements. And CPI participants typically have an array of needs – transportation, childcare, housing, clothing, etc. – and may have weak support systems, requiring hands-on assistance to stay on track to success.
Frequently, participants have not recently attended training or education and/or may have weak study habits. As such, to ensure they attend class regularly and stay organized, CPI participants typically require intensive coaching, tutoring, and other academic supports. CPI participants also typically need support developing soft skills for successful integration into the workforce: learning appropriate workplace norms, resume writing and interviewing, communicating with supervisors, among others.

To ensure success, CPI programs must provide intensive individualized support of all types, at all stages of the program, making CPI’s cost per participant higher than standard workforce development programs.

**Lesson #4. Programs designed as “a pipeline” to a specific employment sector or with a specific employer partner offer greater promise of employment success.** Some CPI programs were designed to move participants directly into a specific employment pipeline, often with guaranteed job placement. After employer-informed training and internship periods, these CPI programs yielded high rates of employment in year 1. This integrated approach, weaving case management, education and training, and employment support throughout the process, from recruitment through “guaranteed” job placement, may create the most efficient and effective pathway toward employment.

**Lesson #5. Multiple pathways may make it more difficult for programs to engage employers and to maximize the use of limited resources.** CPI programs that pursue career pathways in multiple employment sectors found it more difficult to develop employer relationships and find the right training partners than programs with fewer pathways. This is understandable considering that developing many relationships with training partners and employers across employment sectors is more time-consuming for staff than developing and managing fewer pathways.

Programs naturally lose efficiencies of scale when coordinating multiple pathways simultaneously. While some grantees’ organizational philosophies require that their CPI programs be tailored to participants’ individual interests, there is an inherent tension between a highly individualized approach and the ability to structure – with limited financial and human resources – a robust career pathway program with strong employer partnerships and comprehensive student supports.

Not only is recruiting employers and managing training partners more complex, but programs may forego opportunities to provide some participant supports in group settings, increasing the
cost per participant. Maintaining a robust feedback loop between multiple training partners, internship supervisors, and program case managers is also more difficult.

**Lesson #6. Engaging employers in CPI requires successfully framing partnership benefits.** CPI programs must understand employers’ potential motivation for CPI participation and address and deliver their “engagement strategies” accordingly. A confluence of factors can spur employer buy-in and commitment including personal relationships, social responsibility, and perceived financial benefit. Typically, potential employers must be able to see the value-added to their bottom line – and how this may offset risks – of hiring CPI participants. Communicating these benefits is key since employers must typically invest time and resources up front, such as, advising on curriculum, attending CPI partner meetings, and hosting interns.

In some cases, programs may be fortunate enough to find employer partners that are mission-based, or driven, at least in part, by social responsibility or the desire to give back to the community. Other employers may be incentivized to participate by the added value of having new hires receive customized training and ongoing retention supports from an external partner. Additionally, programs such as “Step Up,” a Connecticut Department of Labor program that provides wage and training subsidies to employers that hire unemployed jobseekers can provide an additional incentive.

**Lesson #7. Clearly defined roles for each partner organization minimizes the sense of competition.** Because all partner organizations have signed MOUs defining their CPI functions, roles and responsibilities, CPI partnerships largely avoided internal competition. In addition, because partners typically provide services that are part of their normal offerings, they see no downside to their organization’s participation in CPI. In fact, most partners perceived numerous benefits, including the opportunity to reach a different target population; learn how others approach similar work; refer clients for complementary services; and, in the case of employers, recruit well-trained employees.

**Lesson #8. Partnership success depends on partners’ willingness to adapt their work based on emerging lessons from program implementation.** Strong communication, based on trust and shared goals, allows CPI partners to share real-time data – quantitative and qualitative – about what is working in the program and what adjustments may be needed for improvement. This ability to troubleshoot together, and to enhance programs as needed, in turn, deepens partners’ commitment to these efforts.
4. Recommendations

1) CPI partnerships could benefit from technical or financial assistance to minimize the opportunity costs for participants of remaining out of the workforce during training. Some options to consider include:

- Condensing program timelines to minimize time out of the workforce (this option will require significant individualized supports for participants to ensure success).
- Scheduling training at night or weekends to allow students to hold jobs during training.
- Subsidizing participants through stipends or financial rewards for completing the training.

2) The Foundation and CPI partnerships should work together to manage the inherent tension between serving a more disadvantaged population and ensuring participants are supported and prepared to succeed. Some issues to consider:

- Continuing to serve a more disadvantaged population may require scaling back participant enrollment targets. And will require continued investment in individualized case management, meaning that CPI will continue to be a high cost-per-participant initiative.
- To meet some CPI programs’ and the overall initiative’s enrollment goals, partnerships may need to expand their target populations to include higher literacy, higher skilled individuals.
- In some cases, a tiered approach may be an effective strategy -- with higher-need participants receiving longer training and more supports, while participants with higher literacy pursue a quicker pathway.

3) CPI partnerships could benefit from technical assistance focused on developing sustainability strategies. Given the high cost-per-participant, partnerships may need additional support from the Foundation in developing other sources of future funding.

4) The Foundation should encourage CPI partnerships to define program criteria more concretely to facilitate the screening of participants. Challenges that participants experience during the program may, in some cases, be prevented or minimized through improved pre-enrollment screening.
5) The Foundation and CPI partnerships ought to consider the trade-off between offering individualized pathways based on participant interest (at a higher cost-per-student) versus narrowing pathway options. Fewer pathways may allow for greater economies of scale, making it easier to provide common participant supports and develop employer relationships.

6) CPI partnerships could benefit from technical assistance on framing the benefits and value of employer participation. Separate employer engagement strategies may need to be tailored for mission-driven versus profit-driven employers. Some possible benefits to market and promote include: access to trained and highly motivated employees; access to Step Up subsidies; and employees with access to ongoing case management support.

- Partnerships may also benefit from a focused peer exchange of information on employer engagement combined with a tailored technical assistance session; perhaps through a smaller convening or workshop for the workforce or job development specialists of each partnership.

7) CPI partnerships should consider prioritizing funding to support a job developer position, if they do not currently have a job developer. A dedicated job developer is important in building relationships with and promoting CPI participants to employers.

8) As the programs and partnerships become more firmly rooted, the Foundation will have the opportunity to use quarterly convenings and other cross-site learning opportunities to foster more cross-pollination among the nine partnership programs with an eye towards greater system integration.

- In year 2, the Foundation could use quarterly convenings as opportunities for programs to share adjustments they have made to address barriers to success, such as recruiting participants likely to succeed and obtaining employer involvement. As suggested above for job developers, smaller cross-partnership role specific gatherings or workshops may help facilitate greater peer exchange across all partnerships.

- As the programs begin to yield more lessons learned about cross-sector integration strategies, the Foundation should use convenings to draw out broader lessons for integration across education, employment and training and support services, including models of success, barriers to integration, and advocating for policies to support promising models and reduce existing barriers.