

POSTSECONDARY SUCCESS

Guiding Governments to Build Cross-Sector Partnerships for Career Success

Partner National Association of Counties

Team Libbie Brey, Elizabeth Gandhi, Michelle Hodara



Counties: Key conveners for education and employment

If it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a county to prepare residents for career success. County governments play an important role in education and employment. They have a unique ability to convene entities across sectors—such as education, workforce development, business, and human services—to streamline pathways to good jobs and support residents on those journeys.

The National Association of Counties (NACo)—a nonpartisan organization working to strengthen America’s counties—recognized this unique opportunity. In response, they created Counties for Career Success: an initiative that provides county leaders with resources, peer connections, and learning opportunities to promote cross-sector partnerships for education and employment. Through the initiative, NACo provided technical assistance to a cohort of counties and used the lessons learned to become a national resource hub for county-level cross-sector work.

NACo wanted to make sure the initiative would accomplish its intended outcomes, in particular one North Star goal: that individuals furthest from opportunity have the education, skills, and credentials to be prepared for a career that provides economic mobility and lifelong success. NACo invited Education Northwest to help ground the initiative in evidence, identify clear measures of success, and assess the outcomes.

Building an effective model with evidence and data

Our first step was to help NACo develop a logic model that incorporated research and could serve as a road map for counties nationwide. Every county has a unique context: they serve different communities (for example, urban or rural), have different resources, and carry out different roles. That meant that our logic model needed to be specific enough to offer meaningful strategies and metrics while accommodating the diversity of counties. We [co-developed an evidence-based logic model](#) that outlines five broad levers counties can leverage to accomplish the initiative's North Star goal. We also described specific strategies for each lever as well as expected outputs and measures of success.

Next, NACo needed to implement the logic model. NACo partnered with each county participating in the initiative to build an action plan that aligned with the logic model. To make this work more accessible to practitioners, Education Northwest created an [action planning template](#) that NACo could use to guide counties in developing their own specific SMART goals and measuring success.

Finally, to track the progress of participating counties, NACo and Education Northwest developed an assessment tool based on the logic model. Education Northwest also supported NACo in collecting data for the assessment. We developed interview protocols designed to gather feedback that would support NACo in meaningfully assessing progress. We also partnered with NACo to co-conduct initial interviews with participating county leaders. This built the NACo team's capacity to complete future interviews and conduct future assessments.

A national model: Resources and capacity for scale

As a result of our work together, NACo published a free web-based guidebook, [*Building Career Pathways for County Residents*](#). The guide includes downloadable copies of the logic model and action planning template. These free resources are now available to any county leader interested in bolstering their cross-sector work for education and employment.

In addition to supporting the field, our close partnership equipped NACo team members with skills and strategies to guide counties in building cross-sector partnerships ... and to assess the results. This enduring knowledge can carry over to future projects, building NACo's capacity to achieve its mission and strengthen counties nationwide.