



# From Designing Policy Solutions to Building Coalitions:

## Key Strategies for Intermediaries to Engage in Policy and Advocacy

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## About JFF

Jobs for the Future (JFF) drives transformation of the U.S. education and workforce systems to achieve equitable economic advancement for all.

[www.jff.org](http://www.jff.org).

## About JFF's Language Choices

JFF is committed to using language that promotes equity and human dignity, rooted in the strengths of the people and communities we serve. We develop our content with the awareness that language can perpetuate privilege but also can educate, empower, and drive positive change to create a more equitable society. We will continually reevaluate our efforts as language usage continues to evolve.

## About the Building Equitable Pathways (BEP) Community of Practice

Since 2019, Jobs for the Future (JFF) has convened the BEP Community of Practice (COP), comprising intermediary organizations involved in designing and scaling pathways systems. Most recently, the COP has centered its learning on three interconnected thematic strands: data quality, racial equity, and policy and advocacy solutions to drive systems change. The learning community investigated each of these core topics over the past few years, and the insights included in this paper are drawn from the expertise of the COP intermediaries as well as JFF staff. The following key insights to inform and mobilize the field can also be found via [blogs](#), [podcasts](#), and [white papers](#), including the "[State Policy Framework for Building Equitable Pathways](#)."<sup>1</sup>

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# Introduction

The next generation of workers in the United States is [skeptical that higher education will lead to a good job](#).<sup>2</sup> While a postsecondary degree or credential is generally still a requirement for careers that pay a living wage, it is no longer a guarantee in today's economy. A quarter of young people aged 18 to 24 anticipate they will never be financially secure enough to retire, and two-thirds never expect to own a home.<sup>3</sup>

In addition, today's students are navigating siloed K-12, postsecondary, and workforce institutions that were not designed to serve their needs. As a result, far too many young people—disproportionately Black and Latinx youth and young people from families without sufficient income for basic needs—fall through the cracks in these systems, particularly at disjunctive points like the transition from secondary to postsecondary education. It will require intentional equity-conscious policy reforms at federal, state, and institutional levels to dismantle and replace structures and systems designed for exclusion and create the conditions for equitable access and success in education and the labor market.

Intermediary organizations sit at the intersection of these systems, where they are too often misaligned. Their convening authority and platform enable intermediaries to organize across the education-to-career system around a cohesive vision of seamless pathways. Since intermediaries work with such diverse stakeholders, they gain knowledge and insights from many perspectives and are, therefore, uniquely positioned to recognize gaps in policy and barriers to implementing and scaling quality pathways initiatives. And that unique positioning enables them to play an important role in educating and informing policymakers.

Regardless of their current level of policy work engagement, intermediaries can use their diverse stakeholder relationships to develop and maximize the impact of practitioner-informed policies. These direct connections with young people, educators, and support service providers let intermediaries think beyond the constraints of existing statutes and silos, devise creative solutions, and catalyze the radical changes required to achieve equitable outcomes. In the coming years, intermediaries will play a key role in mitigating the inequities exacerbated by the pandemic.

This paper outlines potential actions and roles for intermediaries to facilitate the development and implementation of truly equitable education-to-career pathways systems. Specifically, it could

guide the broader field of intermediary organizations and efforts to engage in **policy and advocacy** by outlining how intermediaries can influence the design and implementation of policy solutions to address systemic inequity. Recognizing that intermediaries range widely in size, capacity, and purpose, we offer suggestions that organizations can apply wherever they sit in the policy space. The resource also highlights a set of Building Equitable Pathways (BEP) intermediaries and their work in policy and advocacy.

### **What We Mean by ‘Policy’**

When we say “policy,” we refer to a deliberate system of actions, frameworks, or procedures that guide decision-making and intend to achieve specific outcomes. Government entities formally enact policy by promulgating laws, regulatory measures, and funding priorities. Institutions of higher education, school districts, and education systems play a critical role in shaping policy through both their advocacy efforts and their execution of those guidelines.

### **What We Mean by ‘Racial Equity’**

Within this resource, when we use the term “racial equity,” we mean the condition that would be achieved if one’s racial identity no longer predicted, in a statistical sense, how one fares (see the definition in [Racial Equity Tools](#)).<sup>4</sup> We recognize the unique political and social dynamics may influence a state or organization’s appetite to name an equity or racial equity focus directly. Depending where your state falls on the spectrum of addressing racial inequity, you may need to adjust your language to enter the conversation on why the outcomes you are striving to work toward are important.

# Why Policy Matters

Policy plays a significant role in shaping behavior and creating lasting improvements across practice, programs, and systems. Specific to education and workforce development, policy across all levels—local, state, and federal—can help support and scale best practices while also affecting the lives and futures of today’s workers, learners, and jobseekers and influencing employers and regional economies. Below are a few examples of why policy is critical.



## Resource Allocation

Policy translates to resource allocation on the ground. Policymakers decide which practices are funded, at what levels, and for what purposes. Within the education and workforce development systems, policy at all levels affects the lived experience of current and future workers, students, and jobseekers and influences the direction of economic development strategies.

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## Defining Metrics and Quality

State and federal laws also determine the goals and quality assurance of the programs they fund by establishing evaluation metrics. In practice, decisions like whether to disaggregate outcomes data by race, gender, and ethnicity translate to whether resources are allocated equally, thereby perpetuating systemic inequities, or are instead allocated equitably to redress the impact of centuries of divestment.

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## Scaling Best Practice

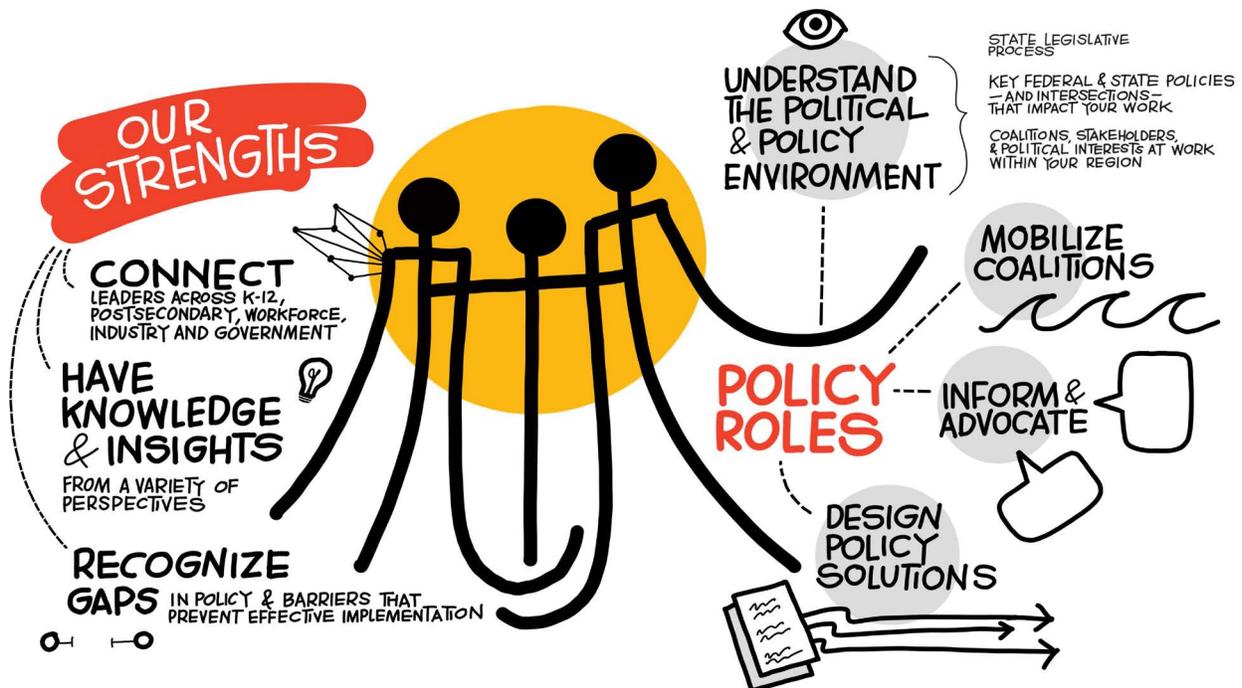
Furthermore, state and federal policies influence adjacent systems. For example, higher education systems and school districts each have their own mechanisms to make policy decisions, and they often look to other regions, systems, or states for best practices. National organizations like the Education Commission of the States and the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association also aggregate and compare education policies nationwide to elevate best practices.

# Policy Roles of an Intermediary



Intermediaries can contribute significantly to equity-centered policy: as an entity that calls meetings, to identify the root causes of inequity and develop targeted policy solutions; as an advocate for policies that will break down systemic and societal barriers and promote systems change; and as a “check” on the system as it carries those policies out.

The Building Equitable Pathways Community of Practice has identified five key areas of work—detailed below—for intermediaries to explore where and how they can drive widescale reform across all aspects of the policy process.



This image summarizes some of the strengths of intermediary organizations and the various roles they can play in policy.



## Establish an Understanding of Policy Environment

Intermediaries' third-party perspective on education systems affords them a unique ability to understand complex political dynamics at play in their state, region, or locality. Intermediaries can help practitioners understand and respond to key considerations—for example, who oversees and influences decision-making in the education-to-workforce space and which issues are contentious. See below for more information on a state policy assessment tool that can help intermediaries assess whether and how their state policy environment promotes equitable education-to-career pathways.

Many intermediaries also have the capacity for legislative analysis and research; this information is often helpful in determining the fundamental causes of inequity in the structure of systems and policies. Government affairs staff members, housed within intermediaries or partner organizations with that capacity, can support advocacy efforts by elevating the legislative vehicles available to drive and scale systemic change.

This context is essential for intermediaries and their partners to form a compelling theory of action to address policy challenges. Intermediaries can take specific steps to master their unique policy environment and help their partners do the same within their unique policy contexts, such as:

- Develop a mechanism, through staff members or consultants, to regularly track local, state, and/or federal policies or policy proposals relevant to building equitable pathways.
- Track promising or moving legislation and share that intel with networks or find a core partner already tracking this information.
- Investigate existing or proposed policies for their historical origins and potential impact on racial equity.
- Identify whether and how a policy seeks to close equity gaps.
- Examine the enforcement and accountability mechanisms associated with any given policy, as well as the policy levers available to implement priorities and scale best practices.
- Pinpoint key and influential legislators and state leaders to determine their priorities, prior education and workforce policy positions, and their constituents' needs and values. Use this to consider who could champion your legislative priorities or to determine common ground.



## INTERMEDIARY IN ACTION

### EmployIndy and Ascend Indiana

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EmployIndy supports residents in its community on their journey to economic prosperity by guiding the local workforce ecosystem and making strategic investments to promote equity and remove barriers to employment.<sup>5</sup> Ascend Indiana, the talent and workforce development initiative of Central Indiana Corporate Partnership (CICP), connects people to careers through an innovative job-matching platform, the Ascend Network; consults to meet high-demand workforce needs through Ascend Services; and conducts research to enable systems-level change through Ascend Insights.<sup>6</sup>

Together, EmployIndy and Ascend have engaged in career advising discussions in Indiana and nationwide. They believe access to culturally comprehensive and equitable information about career opportunities can change students' lives when they can explore those opportunities and receive guidance on navigating education and career systems. Recognizing the importance of career advising, both organizations and a cadre of partners coordinated efforts to promote elevating career advising as a state priority in the coming years. They gathered feedback from partners to understand the top priorities and key actions for working toward systemic change among advising systems. Throughout this work, three core opportunities emerged as the near-term focus:

1. Establish a career advising framework and standards
2. Determine the model for delivering services
3. Create guidance on using relevant funding streams to support models.

In establishing these priorities, they also brought together counselors, principals, secondary and postsecondary leaders, state agency leaders, and legislators to gather input and determine current state policies and career advising guidance, as well as common definitions and key milestones for the work. As a result, the team facilitated the creation of a statewide career advising framework that defines the “what” of career advising—what students should know and be exposed to related to career development across the K-12 journey. State and local partners will seek opportunities to pilot this framework over the next year to inform further action.

Ascend also initiated and held the Indiana statewide Youth Apprenticeship Community of Practice (COP), which consists of over 150 members across 60 organizations and supports pilot launch and expansion while addressing barriers to program scale, including identifying and amplifying the issue of career advising. The COP has unlocked a critical feedback loop between practitioners, intermediaries, and partners piloting programs across the state and system builders, including Indiana policymakers and state leaders, that will enable scale and help sustain this work in Indiana.



## State Policy Framework for Building Equitable Pathways



JFF, in partnership with the Building Equitable Pathways Community of Practice members, cocreated the [State Policy Framework for Building Equitable Pathways](#).<sup>7</sup> The framework informs state policymakers and advocates how policy can disrupt educational achievement gaps and occupational segregation while realizing the vision of discoverable and durable pathways to upward economic advancement. The framework covers 12 key state policy issues—from data systems to dual enrollment to regional capacity—essential to strengthening pathways and closing equity gaps. The issue areas are organized into three overarching pillars—foundational conditions, pathways-friendly policies, and ecosystem enablers—and highlight a mix of levers for policy change. State, local, and systems policy change across all three pillars are necessary to support Black, Latinx, and Indigenous youth and close equity gaps. The framework includes a curated list of examples of states progressing on each policy issue area.

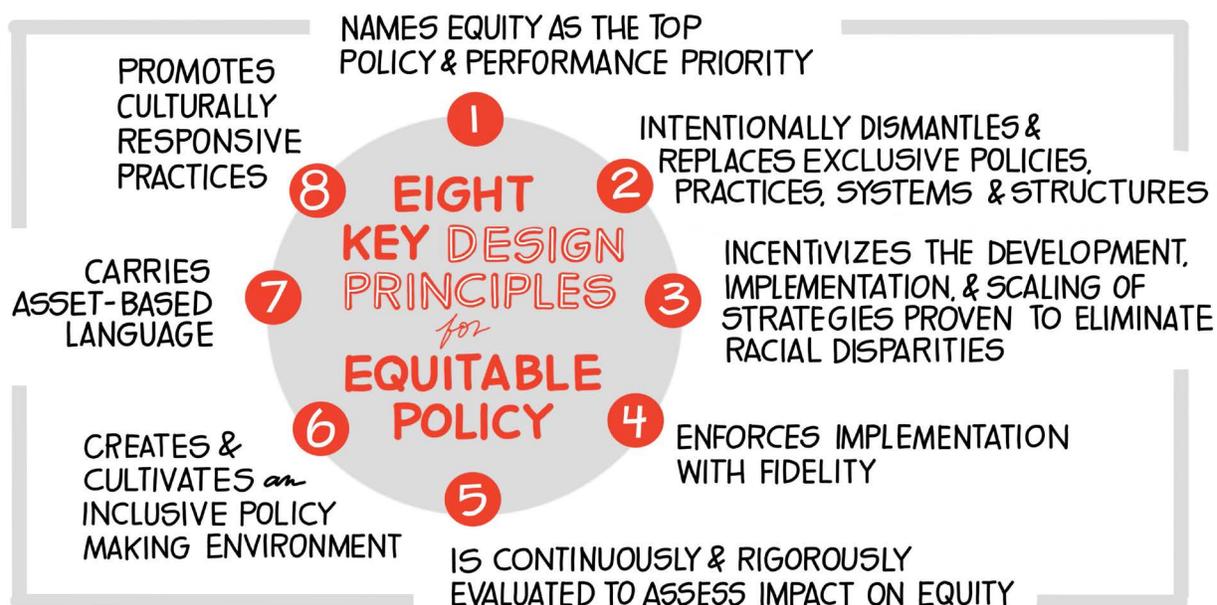
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We also encourage intermediaries and advocates to use the [BEP policy assessment tool](#) as a companion piece to this framework to review existing and proposed policies of their state’s legislative and governing entities to determine the extent to which their state policy environment aligns with the framework and, thus, provides conducive conditions for building equitable pathways.<sup>8</sup>



## Design Policy Solutions That Center Racial Equity

Intermediaries can use diverse perspectives to develop comprehensive, equity-centered policy agendas. Because they work with practitioners and communities, intermediaries are well-positioned to center young people from underresourced communities in program design and policy development. JFF developed a blog that makes the case for [building a new foundation for equitable policymaking](#) and highlights eight design principles for equitable policy.<sup>9</sup>

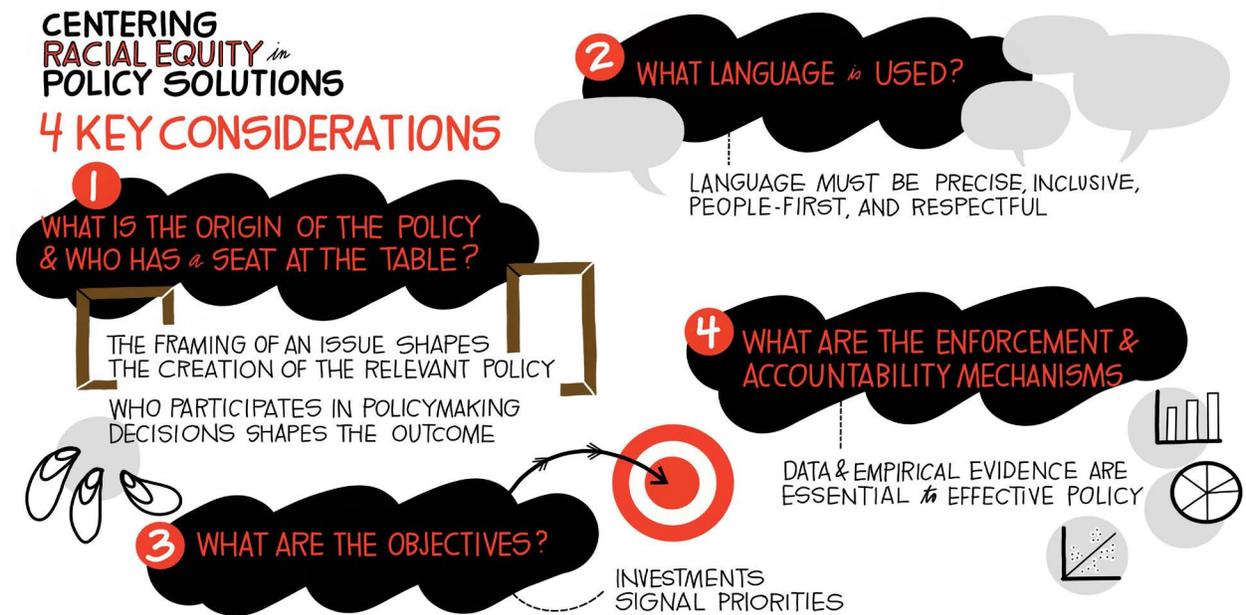


This image summarizes a curated list of eight key design principles for equitable policymaking.<sup>10</sup>

Below are some actions intermediaries can take to ensure policy solutions explicitly support young people’s social mobility and economic advancement.

- Develop a policy agenda or list of policy priorities relevant to your work and that strives to benefit Black and Latinx youth and other communities that have not received equitable investments from the government or private sector. See the [State Policy Framework for Building Equitable Pathways](#) for ideas on developing or refreshing your policy agenda.<sup>11</sup>
- Collaborate with external partners and stakeholders to aggregate existing policy priorities and strategic plans across partners to highlight opportunities for better alignment and resource sharing and to inform the development of your organization’s policy priorities and positions.

- Directly include students, families, and community members who are Black, Latinx, and experiencing poverty in policy discussions **early and often** to understand the barriers they face as well as what's working.
- Continuously review policies and practices to ensure the cultivation of an inclusive policymaking environment.



This image summarizes a curated list of four key considerations for centering race in policy.<sup>12</sup>



## INTERMEDIARY IN ACTION Education System Center

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Education Systems Center at Northern Illinois University (EdSystems) is an intermediary working to strengthen Illinois' education and workforce systems through policy development and program implementation.<sup>13</sup> It builds strategic partnerships and organizes state and local stakeholders to advance racial equity and prepare more learners for productive careers and lives in a global economy.

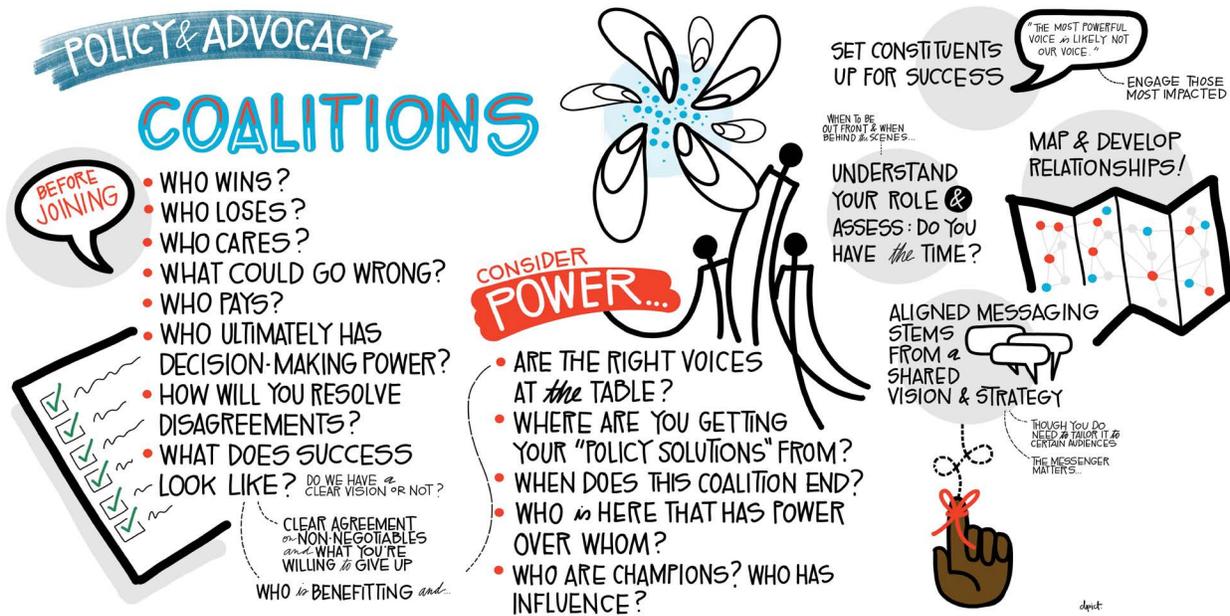
EdSystems played a lead role in the development of Illinois' Postsecondary & Workforce Readiness (PWR) Act, and since the bill was enacted in 2016, it has also guided state and local implementation.<sup>14</sup> It has been instrumental in driving continuous improvement and designing actionable solutions based on lessons learned during the early stages of implementation. EdSystems and its partners also advised legislators on IL HB3296, a law passed in 2022 that will further scale two of the student-centered approaches laid out in the PWR Act (College and Career Pathway Endorsements and the Postsecondary and Career Expectations Framework).<sup>15</sup>

Under HB3296, all districts will be required to either implement these strategies or opt out of the law's provisions if they instead develop their own methods to address core student needs around college and career exploration, development, and success. This renewed "nudge" permits local flexibility without sacrificing accountability, a critical balance in policymaking. EdSystems wants to ensure all districts, and particularly those serving high proportions of Black students, Latinx students, and students from low-income backgrounds, are supported to thoughtfully implement these strategies to equip students with the knowledge, tools, and social capital necessary to transition to and through postsecondary education and into quality jobs.

Additionally, EdSystems facilitated the development of the Model Programs of Study Guides as part of Illinois' Perkins V State Plan, in collaboration with the Illinois State Board of Education and the Illinois Community College Board. It created a process to ensure these pathways led to economic prosperity, using U.S. Department of Labor and MIT Living Wage Calculator data to identify occupations in Illinois with strong growth outlooks and median salaries equaling at least the living wage for a household with one adult and one child. Using these "high-priority occupations" as a starting point, EdSystems convened employers and secondary and higher education leaders to map programs of study to prepare students for those jobs, from early college high school courses through postsecondary credentials.

# Support and Mobilize Coalitions

Intermediaries' work is driven by relationships, making them effective coalition members and leaders. They can mobilize partners across sectors toward collective action strategies that seek to best serve young people and close equity gaps.



This image summarizes key insights shared by Libuse Binder, a JFF state policy innovation fellow, focused on the BEP organizations aiming to build coalitions.

Coalition work is critical but complex. Keeping everyone on the same page is difficult, particularly when part of the advocacy strategy is tailoring messaging to very different audiences. For over a decade, practitioners and leaders from across the country, including those in JFF's [Pathways to Prosperity Network](#), have collectively driven significant progress in the pathways space and learned a good deal about [key strategies for engaging young people in advocacy](#) and the power, [value, and potential of coalition work](#).<sup>16</sup>

Below are some ways intermediaries can strengthen coalitions and partnerships.

- When entering a new coalition or partnership or reevaluating an existing one, consider the following questions:
  - Does the coalition have a clear vision of what success looks like?
  - Does the coalition have a clearly defined leadership and decision-making structure?
  - In terms of messaging, who is the group talking to, what are they saying, and why? If these messages “land,” how will that support racial equity and young people’s social and economic advancement?
  - Does the coalition clearly understand effective strategies for engaging directly with local, state, and/or federal policymakers and elected officials?
  - What value does my organization bring to this coalition? Do we have the capacity to perform our role effectively?
- Invite stakeholders from across sectors and systems to participate in coalition work from the start, assuring all voices a seat at the table and giving partners time to work out their differences during the planning phase
- Engage local and national civil rights organizations in advocacy work to connect education and workforce systems change to broader racial justice movements
- Organize coalition members, who each have their own interests and priorities, around a clear policy agenda to close equity gaps, including the group’s “must-haves” for specific issues and aligning on talking points
- Facilitate asset mapping processes to determine the unique value each member brings to the coalition and assign roles based on their strengths—for example, to identify the best messenger for each decision maker or target audience



## INTERMEDIARY IN ACTION Career Connect Washington

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Career Connect Washington (CCW) is an employer-, state-, federally, and philanthropically funded initiative to promote career-connected learning and close educational opportunity gaps in Washington state.<sup>17</sup> Launched in 2017, with associated legislation passed in 2019, CCW is creating an ecosystem of career explore, career prep, and Career Launch programs. Career Launch programs are defined in state statute and include paid, on-the-job training coupled with aligned classroom instruction resulting in a competitive candidate for continued employment and a valuable credential beyond high school.

The structure of CCW includes a statewide team that partners with and creates the connective tissue within a large, diverse statewide network of employers, labor, nonprofit, government, education, and community leaders toward a shared vision for a comprehensive and equitable career-connected learning system. CCW functions as an intermediary across this diverse network of stakeholders to support alignment, build capacity, and provide funding across individual programs and nine regions across the state as well as 10 industry sector leads. CCW has also received ongoing state funding to issue competitive grants for building new and scaling existing programs to “program builders” (a.k.a. “program intermediaries”) and for the education partners to sustain the program over time and provide capital for equipment funding.

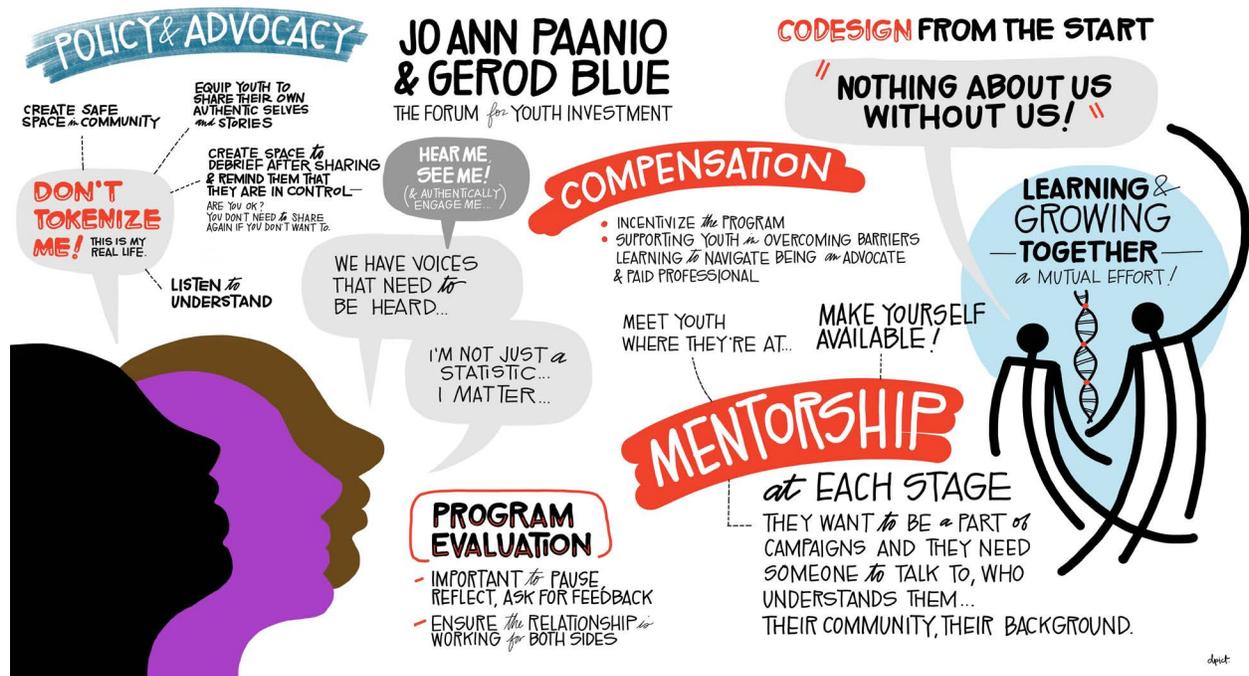
Program builders must involve youth, employers, and education partners within their program design and receive technical assistance to help complete their program development and sustain the program with education partners over time. CCW partners with organizations throughout the state to gather feedback on implementation, highlight policy needs, and improve competitive funding opportunities to best reach their long-term goals. Data measure progress against a long-term goal of having 60% of young people in the high school class of 2030 choose Career Launch as their path forward to college and career.<sup>18</sup> They also measure the initiative goals of ensuring participation, completion, and successful outcomes by Career Launch participants match regional income, race, ethnicity, gender, and other demographics. A directory of Career Connected learning experiences is regularly updated with new programs and allows students and their influencers to explore programs and support resources available in all sectors and geographies across the state.

In 2022, CCW and its partners won a \$23.5 million U.S. Department of Commerce Good Jobs Challenge grant to support workforce training efforts in six high-growth sectors.<sup>19</sup> A major CCW goal for the grant program, called the Washington Jobs Initiative, is for participation rates to exceed each group’s representation in the state population among people who are Black, Latinx, or Indigenous; from families without sufficient income for basic needs; living in rural areas; experiencing homelessness; who are English learners; and/or with disabilities.



## Inform Policymakers and Advocate

Intermediaries can be good advocates by using their relationships to understand and amplify stakeholders' knowledge base, perceptions, interests, and objectives around specific issues and tailoring their messaging and advocacy strategy accordingly. They can also lend their credibility—earned through years of adding value to their regions—to advocacy efforts, taking advantage of their platform to elevate best practices and bring along resisters.



This image summarizes key insights shared by the Forum for Youth Investment's director of advocacy, Jo Ann Paanio, and its senior policy manager, Gerod Blue, who met with representatives of BEP organizations to share strategies for getting young people involved in policy and advocacy.

Certain intermediaries who work directly with students, learners, and workers are well-positioned to empower the people they serve, who are most directly affected by policy decisions, to advocate for themselves. However, not everyone feels comfortable testifying at a public hearing, talking one-on-one with a policymaker, or attending a rally. Intermediaries can match workers and learners with the types of advocacy that will best suit them.

As noted in the introduction, advocates may need to tailor their racial equity conversations depending on their political context. The Lumina Foundation [created this communications manual](#) to help advocates craft tailored messaging to meet their audience where they are while

maintaining an equity frame.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, JFF, nonprofit-focused branding firm Mission Minded, and the BEP community of practice developed [a communications guide](#) that provides intermediaries with best practices on how to effectively tell their stories to advance their shared goals with partners, including policymakers.<sup>21</sup>

Specific roles that intermediaries can play in informing policymakers and advocating include:

- Identify main policy audiences' motivations, priorities, and goals, as well as their level of information and understanding.
- Participate in statewide, regional, or local committees in an advisory capacity to advance practice-informed solutions.
- Engage directly with local, state, and federal policymakers and elected officials via in-person or virtual meetings, calling, emailing, or presenting oral testimonies.
- Share lessons with state and federal policymakers about partners' successes or challenges with building equitable pathways.
- Elevate the voices of young people and community members by empowering them to advocate for themselves and—most importantly—matching them with policymakers willing to engage with them, take them seriously, and value their advocacy. Intermediaries can help identify the type of advocacy that will best fit within their schedules, their interest in understanding of the process, and their comfort level.





## INTERMEDIARY IN ACTION CityWorks DC

CityWorks DC collaborates with partners across Washington, DC’s education-to-employment system to help DC youth and young adults of color attain quality jobs through postsecondary credentials, paid work-based learning, and social capital.<sup>22</sup> Over the last several years, CityWorks DC successfully used its strategic partnerships and position outside the education system to push for equal distribution of opportunity and improve the conditions for work-based learning.

First, CityWorks DC facilitated a “crosswalk” between the city’s local educational agencies and institutions of higher education to identify high school classes that could transition to dual credit courses. It strategized with secondary education leaders about using the existing dual enrollment pathways structure to free up student time for work-based learning activities during school hours.

Second, CityWorks partnered with Bain & Company to survey 1,199 recent DC public high school alumni about their early career outcomes and the factors that either promoted or inhibited their entry into the labor force. While the city collects data on graduation and postsecondary enrollment rates, its capacity to track career outcomes is very limited. The resulting report, D.C. High School Alumni Reflections on Their Early Career Outcomes, addressed a major gap in policymakers’ and education officials’ understanding of their student outcomes.<sup>23</sup> This aggregated feedback from young adults in the District of Columbia will guide future decisions around the types of supports and services that enable students to navigate the workforce successfully. This first data set also proves the utility of tracking students’ early career outcomes, encouraging the city to adopt a more comprehensive workforce data system to shed light on inequities.





INTERMEDIARY IN ACTION

## Connecticut State Colleges & Universities

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Connecticut State Colleges & Universities (CSCU) is a system of six public colleges and universities: four state universities, one community college with twelve campuses, and one online college. CSCU's government relations and external affairs team works with members of the Connecticut General Assembly (CGA) on issues pertaining to higher education funding and advancement, workforce development, and other opportunities for the 17 CSCU campuses. In this advocacy work, CSCU has found that students are the most effective advocates for themselves and the institutions of higher education (IHEs) that serve them. However, engaging students in an impactful way can be an immense challenge for IHEs, particularly for inclusive public institutions like CSCU that serve largely first-generation and older students, whose free time is often limited by family, work, and other responsibilities.

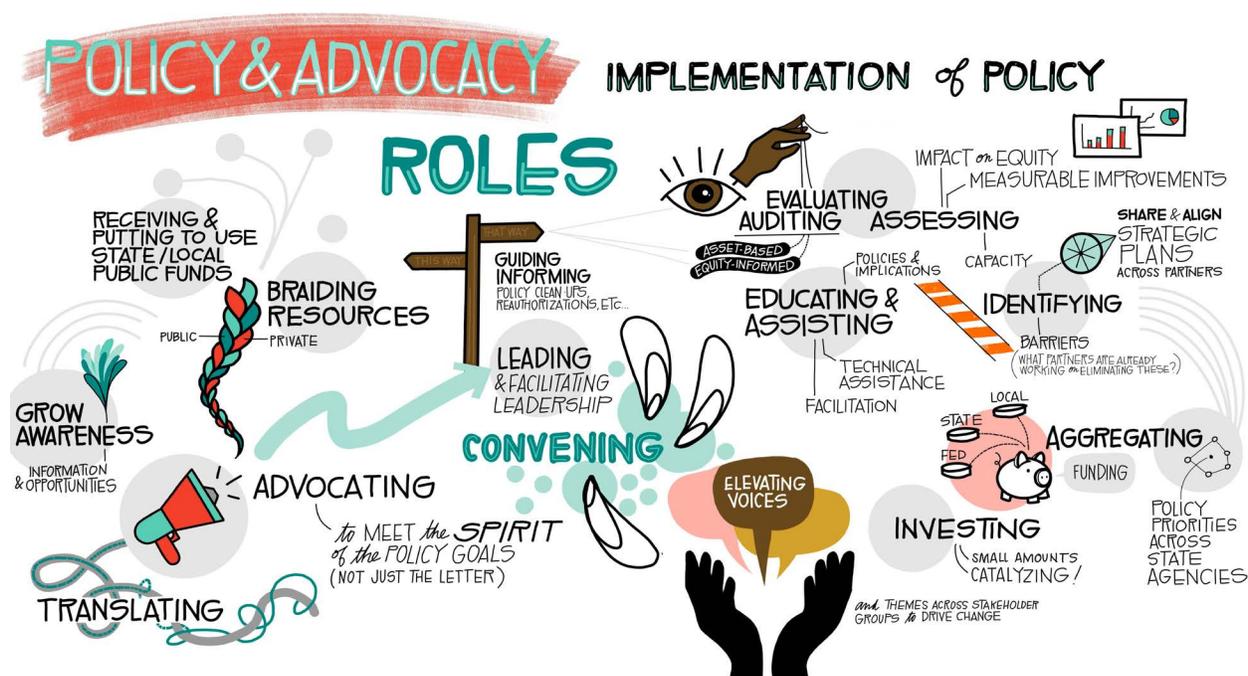
For years, CSCU's advocacy strategy has centered on empowering students to bring their authentic selves and describe their lived experiences in their own words to state policymakers. In 2023, CSCU prepared its students to [testify](#) in public hearings about the CGA Appropriations Committee's fiscal year 2024-25 proposed state higher education budget.<sup>24</sup> Each CSCU student told the story of their individual journey to and through college and how their institution supported their growth. These personal impact statements make the issue of higher education funding concrete, which encourages policymakers to care about issues that may otherwise feel abstract (like annualizing state funding for new collective bargaining agreements or reauthorizing bonding for a new multiyear capital project plan). They want and need to hear student stories that personalize the issue to bring it back to their constituents.

Policymakers expect government relations staff, lobbyists, and professional advocates to give them the big picture, impact analysis, and complex policy implications. IHE staff often underutilize their students' strengths by scripting their remarks and trying to turn them into policy experts. Instead, CSCU shapes its advocacy around the students they serve, focusing on giving them a platform to be their authentic selves. Not only does this drive real change in state policy decisions, but it also helps students feel meaningfully connected to the policy process and empowered to participate.



## Lead Implementation of Policy

Once a policy is enacted, stakeholders must implement it, realizing the broad goals laid out in statute. Implementation strategy translates a hypothesis about what might work (policy as written) into concrete progress in equitable student outcomes (policy in practice). In the near term, for instance, intermediaries can play a critical role in ensuring equitable access to the pathways and jobs created through major recent federal investments in infrastructure, technology, and manufacturing. The BEP COP published a [Planning Tool for Building Equitable Pathways](#) for intermediaries to gauge how their organization can best contribute to emerging or growing pathways ecosystems and develop an action plan to bridge gaps across education and work systems.<sup>25</sup>



This image summarizes some of the key roles intermediaries can play in the implementation of policy.

There are many opportunities for intermediaries to ensure they and the authorities responsible for implementation center equity and acknowledge and deploy the full range of resources, service providers, and others across the system.



These include:

- Assess readiness and potential barriers to policy implementation.
- Develop a clear understanding of the intent of the policy and flexibility it may offer. Just because an activity isn't clearly spelled out in the policy doesn't mean it is prohibited.
- Lead or promote outreach campaigns to inform all system partners of new policy opportunities and explain how they can participate.
- Drive continuous improvement of policy implementation by regularly seeking feedback from stakeholders, including young people, and coordinate cross-sector responses to ensure the system adapts if and when young people's needs change.
- Use resources across the system by verifying correct allocation of funds, braiding and blending resources, and bringing in partners to cover gaps.
- Educate partners about impediments to equitable pathways and partners' roles in dismantling and eliminating barriers they may not even be aware of or have struggled to overcome.
- Guide human-centered research and data practices by calling out implicit bias in evaluation design, data interpretation, and consequent decision-making.
- Create and strengthen combined state plans for legislation that cover multiple federal programs—for example, the Every Student Succeeds Act, the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act, and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.
- Provide technical assistance across the education and workforce space to improve coordination, call attention to duplication and gaps, and advance systemic capacity to deliver equitable outcomes.



#### INTERMEDIARY IN ACTION

### United Way of Greater Atlanta

United Way of Greater Atlanta (UWGA) operates as an intermediary organization, engaging stakeholders across 13 counties in collective impact strategies to drive sustainable, equitable improvements in child and family well-being.

UWGA's CareerReady ATL initiative aims to reduce regional economic disparities through a pre-apprenticeship and youth apprenticeship ecosystem focused on individuals aged 14-24 who are Black, Latinx, and/or youth of color furthest from opportunity. Without support for basic needs such as nutrition, transportation, and child care, many potential CareerReady participants would be unable to access or complete these programs. UWGA has built strong partnerships with human service agencies to meet complex needs and connect their apprentices and pre-apprentices with supportive services. Specifically, they are working to use funds from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Employment and Training program and the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program to provide training and wraparound supports.

By assuming the administrative burden of identifying and facilitating apprentices' access to the appropriate federal funding sources, UWGA helps Atlantans with the highest barriers to college and career success connect to and persist through pathways to high-quality careers. Here, UWGA performs a crucial role in equitable pathways ecosystems: recognizing each participant's unique circumstances and allocating the resources necessary for them to succeed.



# Conclusion

The examples provided throughout demonstrate the breadth of ways intermediaries can get involved in policy and advocacy. There is no universal approach to this work; far from it. Intermediaries are most effective when they apply their robust historical and/or relational knowledge to decide which activities, strategies, and movements to engage in.

Our education and work systems were intentionally structured, in policy and in practice, to serve only the privileged few. National efforts to recover from the pandemic and prepare for major shifts in energy production, goods manufacturing, and service delivery will open doors to innumerable quality jobs. Intermediary organizations play a key role in ensuring local, state, and federal policies and talent pipeline initiatives distribute such opportunities equitably, reach people who were systemically excluded from past chances, and inspire a more just economy rather than further entrenching the inequity we see today.

# Endnotes

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