

Supportive Services Integration Guide

This guide is designed to help intermediaries identify, assess, and integrate supportive services—such as transportation and child care assistance—into digital jobs pathways. Effective integration of supportive services starts with intermediary leadership in convening partners and designing accessible systems. Services for learners and workers must be embedded across the pathway life cycle—from intake to employment. These services are essential to reducing barriers so that learners and workers can access, persist in, and complete education and workforce programs.

An intermediary's role is to:

- Lead a cross-sector efforts to identify participant needs
- Build and manage partnerships with community-based organizations
- Integrate services into pathway infrastructure
- Monitor service impact and ensure sustainability

Understanding Supportive Service Needs

Identifying the barriers learners and workers face is foundational to building effective pathways to digital jobs. A clear understanding of these challenges enables partners to develop participant-centered solutions. Consider the strategies below to better understand learner and worker needs.

Conduct a Survey of Participants

In close collaboration with program partners, develop a short, anonymous survey to identify learners' and workers' needs and the most pressing barriers they face. Include questions on the ease of accessing the program's location, the convenience of the schedule, transportation needs, and access to childcare, housing, food, and internet service.

Host Focus Groups or Listening Sessions

Convene small groups of current and former program participants for conversations in which they discuss their experiences. Facilitate open dialogue to capture qualitative insights that build on survey findings. Record and analyze feedback to highlight root causes of barriers that limit their ability to access, participate in, and complete training programs.

Develop a Community Program Inventory

Identify existing services in the community using internet research, local directories, and partner referrals. Document service type, contact information, eligibility criteria, intake process, and service capacity. Create a visual map or database to identify both existing assets and service gaps.

The documented list of top learner and worker barriers mapped to available community services can guide strategic partnership-building.

Build Strategic Partnerships With Community Based Organizations

Strong formal partnerships with community-based organizations (CBO) with shared goals are key to scaling and sustaining pathways. CBOs can provide the services that enable learners and workers to overcome barriers limiting their ability to participate in pathways, and these relationships significantly increase the capacity of regional education and workforce systems to serve workers and learners holistically.

Use Data to Establish Priorities

Focus initial efforts to forge new CBO partnerships on efforts to address two or three of the most pressing needs of workers and learners identified in the survey and in focus group discussions.

Evaluate Potential Partners

Screen CBOs based on their alignment with a pathway's goals, the geographic regions they serve, and their capacity to scale. Seek partners that have the experience, infrastructure, and resources to serve pathway's participants.

Meet With Potential Partners and Formalize Agreements

Hold one-on-one meetings with potential partners to discuss pathway goals and the needs of learners and workers. Explore strategies for embedding services into pathways. Formalize agreements using a memorandum of understanding that defines responsibilities, data-sharing protocols, communication cadence, and evaluation measures.

Integrate Services Into Pathways

Learners and workers are more likely to access and benefit from support when it is embedded into the day-to-day program experience rather than offered as an optional add-on. Intermediaries can coordinate an integrated service delivery system that is seamless and accessible to all participants.

Include Information About Supports in All Pathways Resources and Documentation

Update existing pathway maps and curriculum outlines to include supportive service touchpoints. Define when and where participants are introduced to available services. (For example, during orientation or upon completion of a specific milestone.)

Designate Support Staff and Implement a Clear Referral Protocol

Assign a staff member to help participants navigate available support options or create a new role with those responsibilities. Establish clear guidelines for how staff should conduct outreach to participants to provide information about services, coordinate referrals to service providers, track usage, and provide one-on-one support. Train all staff in referral procedures and the principles of trauma-informed care and ensure that they're aware of support resources in the local area.

Sustain and Evaluate Integration

Relationships with institutional partners must be based on trust to ensure that wraparound supports are built for the long term so the pathway can maintain ongoing impact. Intermediaries should design a sustainable and adaptable service model that evolves as community needs evolve.

Track Service Utilization and Outcomes

Create a dashboard to log referrals, services accessed, and participants' feedback about their satisfaction with services. Analyze trends over time and by demographic subgroups to determine enrollment and completion rates and identify areas for improvement.

Meet Regularly With CBOs to Assess Gather Feedback

Meet with CBO partners quarterly to review the progress of service delivery efforts, assess impact, and troubleshoot problems. Discuss learner and worker feedback and review aggregated data to inform decision-making.

Incorporate Services Into Sustainability Planning

Include partners that provide supportive services in discussions about long-term regional plans and strategies. Identify all available funding sources, including federal programs like WIOA and TANF, local grants, and philanthropic partners. Explore ways to braid funds from multiple sources. Co-apply for grants with CBOs when appropriate to strengthen collective funding.

Reflection Questions: 

What are learners' and workers' most significant barriers, and what is currently being done to address them?

Which CBOs could be more deeply integrated into regional pathways?

How can we use data systems better track service usage and outcomes?