

Levers for Success: Strategies for the Field

Using insights from JFF’s work with NOVA, our mixed-methods research and early implementation with the four [Disrupt the Divide](#) colleges, and the broader field research, JFF developed the following Levers of Success, translating cross-college strengths and areas for action into concrete, evidence-based strategies. The table below organizes the levers, or areas of opportunity and action, across key phases of the learner journey and core areas of institutional practice and provides concrete strategies institutions can adopt, tailor, and sequence to fit their contexts and build onto existing efforts. The Levers for Success are customizable building blocks colleges can use to ensure that more learners—including Black learners and others facing barriers to advancement—can access, persist in, and complete programs that lead to quality jobs in high-growth, high-wage fields.

 Postsecondary Transition	 Collegiate Experience	 Career Progression
Improve recruitment and information accessibility	Increase accessibility and logical entry and exit points for advancement	Increase and elevate career-connected and work-based learning opportunities
• Offer college prep workshops for prospective learners • Provide training for high school counselors on high-growth, high-wage programs and pathways aligned to local and regional needs • Run targeted outreach and reenrollment programs for learners who have stopped out • Define and market the college/program value proposition (e.g., “alumni spotlight” campaigns) • Conduct outreach and recruitment activities with area high schools and community-based organizations via in-person events and college visits, and social media • Host program-specific information sessions (e.g., IT orientations) that explain pathways, supports, WBL opportunities, and career outcomes • Improve college website content so learners can clearly see information on pathways, stackable credentials, and associated careers	• Provide flexible course options, including weekend, evening, hybrid, and online, and advising and tutoring support outside traditional work hours • Design stackable credential pathways with clear entry and exit points aligned with specific jobs/careers, and include both noncredit and credit options • Develop micro-credentials, in partnership with local and regional employers, that recognize high-demand skills and can be stacked to earn certificates and degrees	• Provide WBL through externships, internships, co-ops, and/or apprenticeships, with clear alignment to program learning outcomes and employer priorities • Build and maintain employer partnerships that can host learners in meaningful, supervised roles • Expand career-related work study and part-time student employment tied to programs of study (e.g., help desk roles for IT students) • Integrate employer projects and experiential learning, including micro-internships, into courses • Codesign both noncredit and credit-bearing courses with employers to ensure their relevance and real-world application

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Strengthen academic readiness for postsecondary education • Offer summer orientation and bridge programs focused on academic and college navigation skills • Provide pre-matriculation academic programs in key areas (e.g., math, writing, digital skills); consider summer bridge models • Build strong career pathways to high-growth, high-wage programs, including WBL, through dual enrollment or articulated credits in collaboration with K-12 partners • Conduct targeted outreach to dual enrollment and career and technical secondary learners, and provide supports to facilitate their transition to college after high school completion	Diagnose and address key drivers of attrition • Use predictive analytics to identify learners at higher risk of stopping out, and intervene early • Scale proactive student coaching and support programs, including peer tutoring, through work-study programs • Offer subject- and course-specific tutoring, study halls, and embedded supports in gateway and high-attrition courses, ensuring access for online learners • Offer targeted support for learners considering withdrawal, and deploy exit surveys to track withdrawal drivers • Invest in faculty development focused on inclusive pedagogy and effective assessment • Flag students who have stopped out, and provide targeted supports to help them reenroll, employing group advising when needed	Improve student awareness of high-growth, high-wage career options • Deliver full-journey career navigation support by incorporating both technology tools and in-person advising/activities • Develop and maintain alumni networks and events that expose learners to many career paths • Track and share alumni outcomes data • Offer first-year “college-to-career” courses that integrate career exploration, labor market information, and planning

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Address financial barriers to enrollment • Deliver financial literacy and wellness workshops/ training and coaching for prospective and new students • Expand assessments and credit for prior learning to reduce time and cost of credential completion • Increase access to grants, scholarships, and emergency aid aligned with programs leading to high-growth, high-wage careers • Provide or broker wraparound supports, including transportation assistance, housing support, child care access, and technology access, taking advantage of in partnerships with community-based organizations	Increase visibility and tracking of progress against certificate, degree, and transfer requirements • Recognize certificate and milestone completion before degree completion, combined with career coaching. • Conduct degree and program audits to track and monitor learner progress and as a recovery mechanism for learners who have stopped out • Implement technology-enabled case management for student transfers • Establish guaranteed admission or articulation agreements with four-year partners for key pathways, including associate's degrees • Create an online transfer information center that consolidates program maps, articulation agreements, and advising resources	Provide opportunities to build and leverage professional social capital • Build out mentorship programs that connect students with peers, alumni, and industry professionals, with clear supports for mentors and mentees, and include peer mentoring structures within programs • Provide coaching, workshops, tools, and supports for resume writing, interview skills, durable skills, and building and benefiting from networks • Host networking events, employer panels, and site visits that allow learners to build relationships and practice professional skills • Embed social capital building across the learner journey by integrating network mapping, mentoring, and relationship building into key courses, advising/coaching, and WBL

 Postsecondary Transition	 Collegiate Experience	 Career Progression
	Remove barriers to certification completion • Provide certification exam vouchers to reduce cost barriers for industry-recognized credentials • Offer free practice exams and exam preparation sessions • Embed certification exam tutoring and reviews into existing courses or co-curricular supports	Improve access to, and competitiveness for, job opportunities • Facilitate regional collaboration among educators, workforce boards, and employers to align programs with evolving skill needs • Use online skills assessments to help jobseekers understand their strengths and identify targeted micro-credentials to fill skill gaps • Develop and integrate AI-related competencies into programs to ensure learners' competitiveness in occupations being reshaped by AI and emerging technologies, through continuing education and other programming; consider creating employer-validated micro-credentials



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