

Engagement & Commitment



The Office of Community College Research and Leadership (OCCRL) was established in 1989 at the University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign. OCCRL is affiliated with the Department of Education Policy, Organization and Leadership in the College of Education. Our mission is to use research and evaluation methods to improve policies, programs, and practices to enhance community college education and transition to college for diverse learners at the state, national, and international levels. Projects of this office are supported by state, federal, and private and not-for-profit organizations. The contents of publications do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of our sponsors or the University of Illinois. Comments or inquiries about our publications are welcome and should be directed to OCCRL@illinois.edu.

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Pathways to Results (PTR) is an outcomes-focused, equity-guided process to improve pathways and policies that support student transition to and through postsecondary education and employment. PTR focuses on addressing equity gaps between diverse learner groups and continuously improving processes critical to student success, including retention, completion of postsecondary credentials, and transition to employment.

The PTR process is most effective when it begins with a strong collaboration of team members and partners focusing on the critical problems that get in the way of student success. These problems are identified when the teams use student-level data to identify outcome and equity gaps in results between racial, gender, low-income and other underserved groups. Major processes are assessed to understand how contributing factors create the identified problems and impede student success. Implementation and evaluation plans are designed to create solutions that increase the impact of pathways immediately and over time. Team members reflect on what they have learned and share insights with one another, enabling them to sustain and scale the knowledge they have acquired with others.

PTR provides the opportunity to continuously improve pathways and produce ever-more equitable student outcomes. When PTR is implemented fully, the opportunity to improve pathways never ends.

“An overarching goal and benefit of the PTR process is that it provides the opportunity to continuously improve pathways and programs that produce ever-more equitable student outcomes.”

Overview

Engagement and Commitment is fundamentally about improving programs and pathways. It invites and forms a broad-based group of stakeholders into a partnership that is committed to creating more equitable outcomes for all students. This partnership should include education practitioners; policy makers and policy leaders; business, industry, labor and community leaders; workforce investment board (WIB) members; adult education providers; community-based organizations; parents and students; and others who are committed to achievement and success for all students.

The purpose of the partnership is to provide direction and support for full-scale implementation of Pathways to Results (PTR), including understanding the capacity of local schools, colleges, universities and workforce training providers to meet the needs of diverse learners; researching policy and funding sources that may be needed to help implement needed changes; reviewing local and regional labor market data to understand which pathways are important to the area; and analyzing other data pertaining to the performance of students in progressing through the education system and obtaining employment.

Purpose and Goals

The primary purpose of Engagement and Commitment is to form a broad-based group of stakeholders that is committed to achieving more equitable outcomes for all students. This partnership should include education practitioners; policy makers and policy leaders; business, industry, labor and community leaders; workforce investment board (WIB) members; workforce and adult education providers; community-based organizations; parents and students; and others who are committed to improving access, achievement and success for all students. The partnership recommends individuals to serve on a team that is tasked with carrying out the project. By reviewing data on existing student performance, teams prioritize pathways and programs that should be improved to raise student achievement and enhance student success.

The goals of this process are to:

1. engage and gain the commitment of key partners and team members in implementing and improving programs and pathways,
2. review existing data to help specify and refine the initial problem statement that is included in the *PTR Charter*, and
3. plan from the beginning to transfer lessons learned to other pathways and programs that need to be improved.

Outcomes and Equity

Engagement and Commitment invites the partnership to participate in an open and thoughtful dialogue about the fundamental ways programs and pathways can be improved. Once formed, team members are invited to participate in this dialogue too. A critical goal of PTR is to close gaps in academic achievement, high school graduation, college and career readiness, college transition and completion, credential attainment, placement in family-wage employment, and other critical outcomes between student sub-groups so that all students benefit from their education experience.

Stakeholders who represent business, industry and labor organizations; K-12 schools, colleges and universities; and other workforce, adult and community-based groups need to be engaged to ensure that all students have the support they need to be successful. Especially important to the PTR process are individuals who champion success for underserved student populations. By ensuring that an equity-minded approach is used to support all students, the PTR process can contribute to improving student outcomes.

Outputs

Materials available to support this process are:

- *SWOT Analysis* results,
- *Outcomes Menu*, and
- *PTR Charter*.

Steps at a Glance

STEP 1: Engage leaders and form the partnership.

This step invites education, employer, community and other leaders to engage in a partnership to guide and support the PTR project. The partnership engages leaders in a thoughtful dialogue to garner their support for carrying out a PTR project that is focused on improving pathways. These leaders bring significant experience with the local context, and they advise on the selection of pathways and programs that matter to the student populations served by the education system and the local economy. They recommend pathways that need improvement to create more equitable outcomes.

STEP 2: Gather input from the partnership.

Step 2 asks the partnership to review policy and funding pertaining to education; to analyze local and regional labor market data; and to study other information that may be relevant to setting priorities for the PTR process. The partnership is encouraged to conduct a *SWOT Analysis* (See Appendix A) to determine the capacity of educational institutions, employers, workforce and adult providers and other organizations to work collaboratively to improve pathways and programs of study. Once the pathways and programs are identified, a problem statement is formulated for the *PTR Charter* that articulates issues and concerns with selected programs. Members of the partnership are invited to sign the initial draft of the *PTR Charter* to establish a clear, agreed-upon starting point for the PTR process.

STEP 3: Identify and convene the team.

The partnership recommends individuals for the team, including recommending individuals who are good candidates to lead the team. The team leader has primary responsibility for communicating regularly with the partnership, extending meeting invitations to team members and others, gathering materials and resources for team meetings, summarizing and reporting results of the PTR process to local and state leaders, and providing direction and support throughout the entire process.

Step 1:
Form the
Partnership

Step 2:
Gather Input

Step 3:
Identify and
Convene Team

Who Should be Involved?

The partnership should be composed of representatives from all levels of education, including K–12 schools and postsecondary institutions (2- and 4-year colleges and universities); employers and labor; workforce and adult providers; community-based organizations; and others who are committed to the future of the region’s education, workforce, and economic entities. When selecting individuals to serve the partnership as well as the team, consideration should be given to selecting individuals who are responsible for:

- program quality, including program review and improvement
- academic (K–12 and college) and career planning
- student success within and beyond the classroom
- curriculum and instructional innovation, including technology applications
- student assessment and advisement
- student progression, credentialing and completion

Detailed Steps

Step 1: Engage leaders and form the partnership.

This step begins with key stakeholders formed into a committed, broad-based partnership working together to develop a statement of mission and goals to guide efforts to improve pathways. This statement provides clarity of purpose for the project, including reducing the potential for misunderstanding among partners. A shared vision is critical to providing leadership during periods of transformational change, so a plan is developed to ensure education practitioners, policy leaders, employers, community members, and other stakeholders understand the PTR process and communicate frequently about resources and activities that support it. The partnership engages in “significant discussions” (League for Innovation in the Community College, 2010, p. 1) that draw upon historic and current labor market data; information about the current status of pathways, and bridge programs; the performance of diverse groups who participate in education; and other information pertaining to education, the workforce, and the economy.

The stakeholders should include organizations and individuals who represent all levels of the education pipeline as well as business, industry and labor representatives; community-based organization and other community representatives, and members of local workforce investment boards (WIBs).

The partnership is also identified and convened to review background documentation and tools, templates and materials specified in the appendices of this module.

Step 2: Gather input from the partnership.

The partnership members also review the PTR modules and materials on the OCCRL website. A period of study and reflection enables members of the partnership to create a shared understanding of the current status of education in the region and apply this knowledge to the PTR process.

The stakeholders are responsible for giving input to the initial draft of the *PTR Charter* (see Appendix A), including providing goals and developing the initial problem statement. All members of the partnership are invited to sign the *PTR Charter* to demonstrate their commitment to improving pathways and programs of study by addressing issues and concerns that get in the way of all students' success in school and the labor market. The *PTR Charter* is further developed in the Outcomes and Equity Assessment process.

Step 3: Identify and convene the team.

The partnership recommends identifying individuals who will be valuable contributors to the team, including individuals who will provide leadership for the team. Inviting the partnership to recommend team members provides a way for partners to “own” the PTR process even when they cannot be engaged in all the meetings, due to other leadership obligations. The team leader has primary responsibility for extending meeting invitations, gathering materials and resources for team meetings, summarizing and reporting the progress of the team, and providing direction and support throughout the process. Team members have a responsibility for participating fully in the process and contributing individually and collectively to improving pathways.

An activity of special importance to the team is review and analysis of existing data on student performance and outcomes pertaining to the selected pathway (see the *Outcomes Menu* in Appendix C). Results of previous program review, accreditation, and other evaluation and assessment processes should be studied by team members to give them an idea of pathway and program quality and student outcomes, including participation (enrollment), academic achievement, retention, completion, credentialing, and employment. (These data will be further analyzed and disaggregated by student sub-group during Outcomes and Equity Assessment.)

By the end of Engagement and Commitment, team members work collaboratively to update the *PTR Charter* and develop the beginning of the plan. This plan should communicate a meeting strategy, timeline, and responsibilities for addressing each process and related products and outputs of the PTR project.

Reflection Questions

1. How do partners and team members engage in the PTR process?
2. How does Engagement and Commitment facilitate improving pathways and programs?
3. What problems emerge as most critical to improving the performance of diverse student groups?
4. How does the PTR project align with other pathway or program improvement goals of the partners?

References & Resources

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Appendix A SWOT Analysis Tool

Strengths	Weaknesses
Opportunities	Threats

Appendix B PTR Charter

Lead Organization:

Date Charter Created:

Last Date Charter Updated:

Part I:

Pathway:

Problem: What problem(s) is the team attempting to solve?

Rationale: Why should the problem be addressed? Why is the project worth doing now? What are the consequences of not doing the project? Reference documents that are relevant, such as grant proposals.

PTR Charter (continued)

Cluster Partners and other Stakeholders: What organizations, partners and other stakeholders will be involved and affected by the project, and what are their expected contributions?

Partners and other Stakeholders	Expected Contributions

Project Sponsor/Owner: Who is/are the project sponsor/owner(s) who will be responsible for ongoing implementation of the identified solutions?

Team Members and Roles: Specify the members of the improvement team and their roles within the team.

Team member	Team role(s)	Telephone	Email address
	<i>Leadership Team Member; Postsecondary Faculty (4 year)</i>		
	<i>Leadership Team Member; Postsecondary Faculty (2 year)</i>		
	<i>Leadership Team Member; Secondary Faculty</i>		
	<i>Leadership Team Member; Postsecondary Counseling Representative</i>		
	<i>Leadership Team Member</i>		
	<i>Project Lead; Leadership Team</i>		
	<i>Project Lead; Leadership Team Administrator</i>		
	<i>Leadership Team Member; Institutional Researcher</i>		
	<i>Leadership Team Member; Information Technology Administrator</i>		
	<i>Leadership Team Member; Guidance and Counseling</i>		
	<i>Leadership Team Member; Support Services</i>		
	<i>Career Advisory Committee (business and industry representatives)</i>		
	<i>Career Advisory Committee (business and industry representatives)</i>		

Charter – Part II:

Improvement Goals: What are the goals of the project? Specify how the team will determine if these goals have been achieved.

Goals	How the team will determine if the goals are achieved? met?

Event/ Task	Team member	Target Date

Students and other beneficiaries: Based on what you know now, what student groups are most likely to benefit from the project, and in what manner?

Other Resources: What other resources are needed to support the project?



Appendix C Outcomes Menu

This tool provides a list of student outcomes that your partnership and its member organizations have already collected related to the identified pathway. The list provides a starting point for a team conversation about student outcomes that should be part of the PTR project. Teams should check outcomes that are currently analyzed at any point along the educational pipeline. In Outcomes and Equity Assessment, the team conducts additional outcomes assessment by racial/ethnic, gender, age, and other characteristics to measure student performance and set the stage for addressing identified equity gaps.

Place a check in the box if results are currently available	Outcomes
	Academic Achievement in Language Arts, Reading, Math, Science, & CTE (each grade level)
	Cluster-level course (CTE) attainment
	Secondary technical skill (CTE) attainment (based on technical skill assessment)
	Graduation from high school (diploma attainment)
	Enrollment in honors & AP courses
	Completion of a major educational functioning level (for Adult Education Students)
	GED completion
	Dual credit participation
	Job placement after high school
	Successful completion of college placement exams
	Enrollment in community college or other 2-year college
	Enrollment in postsecondary credit-bearing coursework
	Enrollment in 4-year college or university
	Completion of developmental education (by level)
	Completion of gatekeeper course in English

Place a check in the box if results are currently available	Outcomes
	Completion of gatekeeper course in Math
	Completion of gatekeeper course in CTE
	Completion of 15 college-level credits
	Completion of 30 college-level credits
	Completion of the transfer (general education core) curriculum
	Semester-to-semester retention
	Credit-hours attempted/completed
	Postsecondary technical skill (CTE) attainment (based on technical skill assessment)
	Certificate completion
	Associate's degree completion
	Bachelor's degree completion
	Job placement after 2-year college
	Job placement after 4-year college
	Transfer from 2-year college to 4-year college
	Earnings (either average earnings or earnings change)
	Employment in an industry related to the pathway
	Employment retention
	Other:
	Other:
	Other:
	Other:



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