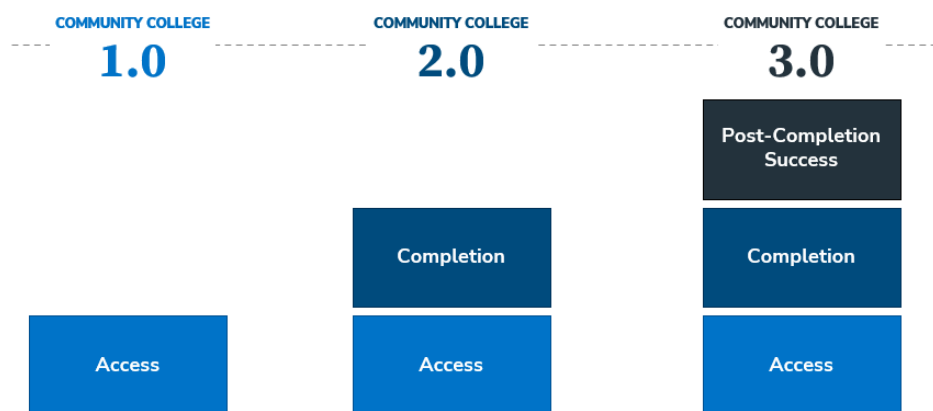


# Strengthening Community College Program Maps and Educational Plans for Post-Completion Value

PRACTICAL GUIDE

## Introduction

This guide is designed to assist community colleges with assessing the state of their program maps and developing educational plans for all students, all through a lens of which programs are likely to lead to strong levels of post-completion success (Community College 3.0<sup>1</sup>). College faculty, program chairs, advisors, and others involved in developing program maps can use this guide to examine the strength of existing maps and develop plans for revising program maps in workforce and transfer programs with a post-completion lens. Additionally, this guide can help advisors, success coaches, faculty, and others involved in the educational planning process develop processes for helping every student develop a full-program educational plan and revise the plan as needed over time.

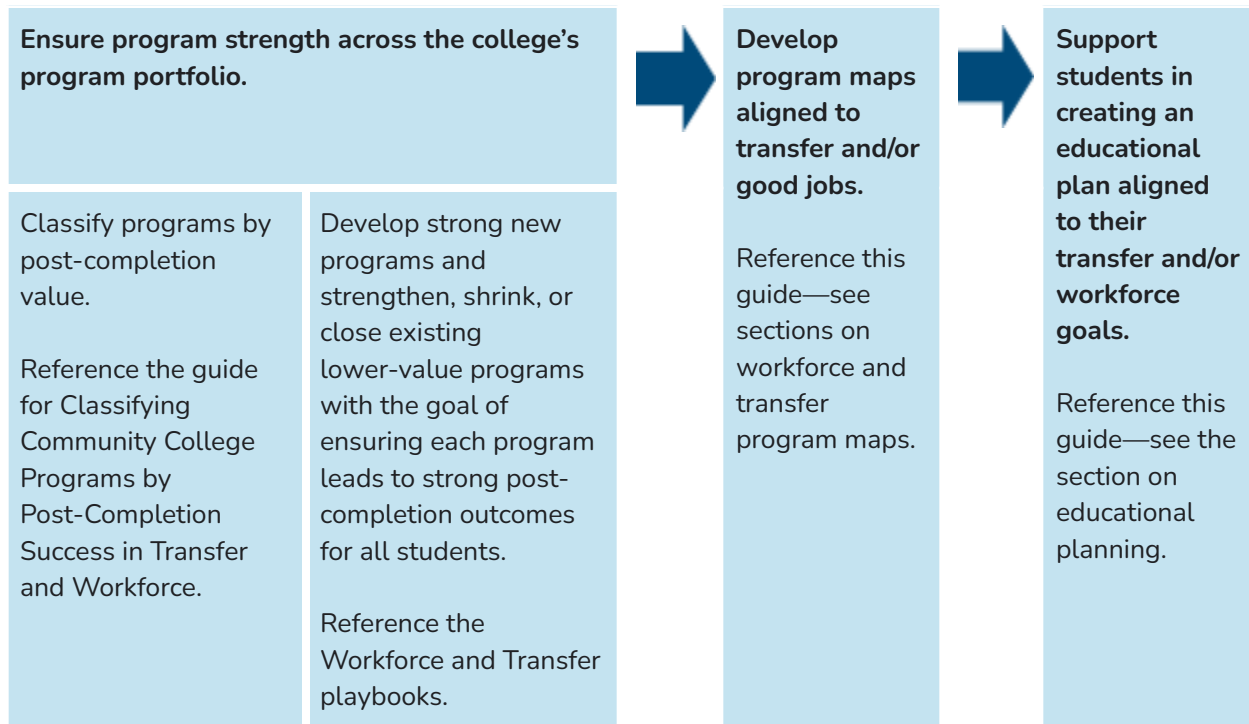


Many colleges have worked to develop program maps as part of guided pathways work that focuses on improving student completion rates, consistent with a focus on improving completion rates (a Community College 2.0 perspective). Moving to a Community College 3.0 perspective requires that college faculty, advisors, and others examine existing program maps and develop new maps that are clearly connected to at least one of the following two post-completion outcomes: transfer into a program of study at a four-year bachelor's program or entry into a job that pays a living wage. The questions in this guide are derived from a Community College 3.0 perspective that centers post-completion success.

<sup>1</sup> Wyner, J. (2016). Community College 3.0: What's next for the student success agenda? 2016 Dallas Herring Lecture. <https://belk-center.ced.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/128/2022/10/2016-Dallas-Herring-Lecture-Joshua-Wyner.pdf>

## Supporting Students to Get On a Path to Post-Completion Success

This guide is designed to help your college evaluate and create strong program maps that can be used to help students develop educational plans leading to strong post-completion outcomes. Doing so, however, requires that colleges first ensure program strength across the program portfolio.



### Referenced Resources:

- [\*Classifying Community College Programs by Post-Completion Success in Transfer and Workforce\*](#)
- [\*Workforce Playbook: A Community College Guide to Delivering Excellent Career and Technical Education\*](#)
- [\*Transfer Playbook: Essential Practices for Two- and Four-Year Colleges\*](#)

### Links to Portions of the Practical Guide

- [Reviewing Transfer Program Maps](#)
- [Reviewing Workforce Program Maps](#)
- [Reviewing Educational Plans](#)
- [Scaling up Educational Planning](#)



## Key Definitions

**Program maps** are annually reviewed, adaptable sequences of courses that show the courses students need to complete a credential at the community college and, for transfer maps, a four-year degree. Strong program maps also include information on experiences students need to have, along with minimum grade point averages (GPA) and other requirements, such as work-based or experiential learning, to advance to transfer in a specific major or to jobs in a specific field. All programs, including both transfer and workforce programs, should be mapped.

**Educational plans** are personalized versions of program maps that are tailored to students' interests (through electives), goals (through major and transfer destination or industry), prior credits (such as those earned through dual enrollment), and timeline (such as tailoring the number of credits per term).<sup>2</sup> These educational plans can benefit students by helping them explore interests and careers, lower the risk of wasted time or credits, plan for the financial costs of attendance, and offer a clearer sense of learning goals so students can monitor progress toward these goals.

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<sup>2</sup> Jenkins, D. & Lahr, H. (May, 2022). Research Evidence on Community College Ask-Connect-Inspire-Plan Onboarding Practices. *CCRC Research Brief*.

## General Assessment of Transfer Maps

Choose a representative transfer map and examine it against the principles for strong transfer maps below.

Map Major-Specific Transfer Paths Through Bachelor's Completion	
Typical transfer maps contain a list of courses for a community college degree, often including many electives.	<b>Strong transfer maps</b> include the specific courses that are required by the four-year institution in a major.
How do your transfer maps compare?	
Show an Adaptable Sequence of Courses	
In typical transfer maps, only showing the list of distribution requirements provides no guidance on which courses to take or when to take those courses.	<b>Strong transfer maps</b> show an adaptable term-by-term sequence of courses that advisors and students can use to create educational plans.
How do your transfer maps compare?	

**Link to Post-Graduate Outcomes**

Typical transfer maps don't contain information about careers aligned with a bachelor's degree.

**Strong transfer maps** link to information about careers aligned with a bachelor's degree, and, if applicable, information about advanced degrees required for good jobs.

How do your transfer maps compare?

**Coordinate Information Across Partners**

Typical transfer maps are not consistent on websites and in other informational materials provided by community colleges and four-year partner institutions.

**Strong transfer maps** are consistent in messaging and information between institutions.

How do your transfer maps compare?

**Reflect:** What might need to change about how you create transfer maps or update transfer programs to ensure your transfer maps are strong?

## General Assessment of Workforce Program Maps

Choose a representative workforce program map and examine it against the principles for strong workforce program maps below.

Create Workforce Program Maps in Partnership	
Typical workforce program maps are created by community college faculty and advisors with little input from employers.	<b>Strong workforce program maps</b> are created in partnership with industry sectors and employers, recognizing that their definition of necessary skills, coursework, and work-based learning is paramount to creating pathways that actually align with good jobs.
How do your workforce program maps compare?	
Show Required Courses in the Order They Should Be Taken	
Typical workforce program maps may only show a list of distribution requirements, which provides inadequate guidance on the sequence of courses and any prerequisite requirements for program entry.	<b>Strong workforce program maps</b> show a structured course sequence, or adaptable sequence of courses, that advisors can use to create educational plans.
How do your workforce program maps compare?	

**Connect to Work-Based Learning and Applied Learning Opportunities**

Most workforce program maps do not intentionally incorporate opportunities or requirements for work-based and applied learning.

**Strong workforce program maps** contain opportunities and requirements for work-based and applied learning within and alongside (e.g., in internships) the adaptable course sequence so every student engages in work-based learning.

How do your workforce program maps compare?

**Link to Post-Graduate Outcomes**

Many workforce program maps do not clearly link to post-completion outcomes.

**Strong workforce program maps** link to career ladders<sup>3</sup> that show how different credentials prepare students for specific jobs, as well as what additional credentials are needed to advance up the ladder.

How do your workforce program maps compare?

<sup>3</sup> **Career ladders** are program-to-career step ladders developed by the community college in partnership with employers and four-year partners that list increasing levels of credentials (e.g., entry-level training, certificate, associate degree, bachelor’s degree) and link each with specific jobs, titles, wages, and time required to complete each step.



Additionally, evaluate your workforce program maps by considering the extent to which expectations are made explicit and clear. Consider the following examples of information that might be made explicit to students by including in workforce program maps:

- Are there admission requirements, and if so, what are they?
- Is this a cohort-based program that only begins in a particular semester or starts at set times?
- Are there expectations around enrollment intensity such that students must be full-time?
- What are the expectations around clinicals or other requirements?
- What are the total costs, including fees and equipment?
- Are there other prerequisites for entering the field (e.g., valid driver's license, background check, drug testing)?

**Reflect:**

- Does this credential lead directly to a good job?
- If not, is it aligned to a more comprehensive learn-and-earn ladder? How likely is it that students will climb the rungs of that ladder? How will you monitor how many students do so?
- What might need to change about how your college creates and uses workforce program maps?

## Reviewing Educational Plans

### General Assessment of Educational Plans

Use the questions below to assess the current state of educational planning at your college.

#### What is the current status of educational planning at your college?

- What percentage of new students are provided targeted, adequate help in developing an *initial* educational plan (i.e., containing one to two terms)?
- What percentage of students are provided targeted, adequate help in developing a *complete*, full-program educational plan (through to a bachelor's degree or a job)?
- Are there differences in the percentages of students (e.g., by race, ethnicity, gender, income status, their particular program) that have full-program educational plans?
- What systems or tools are used to support the creation, updating, and review of students' plans?
- Who is responsible for helping students develop educational plans? Are they provided adequate training?
- Who has readily accessible plans in place now?
  - Who uses them?
  - Who doesn't use them, but should?

#### Overall Reflection

Given what you learned from seeking answers to the above questions, where do you see gaps in practice that you would like to explore further and begin to develop plans to resolve?

## Scaling Up Educational Planning

Program maps are most useful when they are used to develop students' educational plans. The questions below are prompts to consider how your college might improve educational planning at scale.<sup>4</sup>

- Are all students helped to develop a full-program educational plan? If not, is it required for any students?
- Are plans regularly updated or confirmed for all students? How does this happen?
- Who is supporting students with educational planning at each stage?
  - Developing an initial plan?
  - Developing a full educational plan?
  - Updating or confirming the plan?
- Do those supporting students in educational planning have a manageable caseload? Are they provided adequate training? Do they have a clear understanding of what specific student outcomes they are expected to achieve?
- Are plans regularly monitored to ensure students are on track both in taking the courses on their plans and being on schedule to complete within the students' intended timeframe? Who (i.e., advisors, faculty, success coaches) is responsible for monitoring students' progress along their plans? Have they received training on developing educational plans?
- When students are off-track, what happens? Who is responsible for intervening or for monitoring whether interventions were completed (closing the loop)? Do they have adequate training and a clear understanding of what specific student outcomes they are expected to achieve?
- Given the current state, what might need to happen to scale full-program educational planning for all students? Who needs to be involved?

Reflections:

<sup>4</sup> CCRC. (n.d.). Plan: From setting goals with students to making them reality [Guided Pathways Workshop Curriculum]. <https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/research/guided-pathways-workshops.html>

**What gaps in practice stand in the way of helping students get onto and complete an educational plan? Which should you prioritize?**

- What barriers might you encounter in scaling educational planning? How can you plan ahead to address them?
- What resources or support might you need to accomplish scaled educational planning?

Reflections:



**NOTES**