

## Helping the American Workforce Leverage Multiple Pathways for Career Growth

*U.S. Department of Education*

**Challenge:** Create digital tools that help American workers to consider and take advantage of the multiple pathways available to find or advance in careers. Tools could 1) make multiple pathways to career success more attractive by helping people envision them as exciting and prestigious, and/or 2) help to make data on these opportunities user friendly and discoverable by American workers.

**Executive Champion:** Diane Jones, Principle Deputy Under Secretary and Acting Under Secretary for Postsecondary Education

**Background:** To many Americans, earning a 4-year university degree is held up as the most attractive, prestigious or only path toward a successful career. Yet, educational institutions, companies, unions, and other entities are increasingly creating multiple, alternative pathways to careers, including apprenticeships, secondary career and technical education programs, community college degree and certificate programs, boot camps, industry certificates, combinations of the above, and new programs that have not yet been invented. These programs unfairly lack the prestige of a college degree, when they often could link to a college degree, possibly paid for by an employer. This is in part because for the past several decades, American higher education and workforce development has focused on encouraging high school students to attend college after graduation. In contrast, in countries like Germany and Switzerland, career and technical education, including apprenticeships, is highly prestigious in society and culture. While college can be very beneficial for many people, it ignores a large swath of Americans who don't necessarily want to attend college right after school, don't want to accrue tens of thousands of dollars in student loan debt, or who simply want to enter the workforce immediately after graduation. To realize the true potential of the American workforce, students need to be fully aware of all pathways to careers. Educational institutions, companies, unions, and other organizations need to market them as attractive, prestigious, and cost-effective career paths for young people. In short, multiple pathways need to be easier to find.

**Why this problem matters:** The American workforce is missing out on many potential educational options to launch or advance careers and develop talent. We need digital tools to help people understand and discover this increasingly important sector of both the economy and the education space. However, finding and assessing these programs isn't easy. People may not even know where to begin looking, and if they were to search online, data is scattered across websites and not easily discoverable. Some come from the private sector; others are administered by state and local governments, companies, or federal government. As a result,

American workers and employers are missing out on valuable opportunities that could help them to launch or advance successful careers.

**Target audience/end user:**

- Young people (ages 14-24) who are trying to determine the best career path or people seeking new careers or skills
- Veterans
- People returning from incarceration
- Local and state education and workforce development policymakers
- Community colleges and trade schools

**Potential open data sets:**

- Occupational Outlook Handbook ([link](#))
- O\*Net ([link](#))
- Cyberseek ([link](#))
- Apprenticeship Available Occupations ([link](#))
- Employment Situation Summary ([link](#))
- Apprenticeship Finder ([link](#))

**Lead POC:**

Sariane Leigh, US Department of Education ([sariane.leigh@ed.gov](mailto:sariane.leigh@ed.gov))