



IMPROVING DATA TO IMPROVE PATHWAYS, WORKFORCE TRAINING, & ECONOMIC MOBILITY

INSIGHTS FROM THE FIELD

COLORADO
SUCCEEDS



INTRODUCTION

Over the last few years, Colorado Succeeds, its member companies, and several partners ideated a collaborative strategy to tackle the talent shortage in Colorado's construction and skilled trades sector. Thanks to an [investment from the state of Colorado](#), **Project SCALE** was officially launched in 2024. Key to closing the talent gap is designing a comprehensive construction trades pathway to economic mobility, with employers and data in the driver's seat.

A critical Project SCALE partner, tasked with expanding construction trades career preparation and work-based learning in high school, is [Careers in Construction Colorado](#) (CICC). CICC's mission is to empower students to choose a career in construction through hands-on training and industry-recognized certification while creating a sustainable workforce. To achieve the overall goal of filling more than 30,000 construction trades jobs by the year 2030, CICC needs to expand programming across the state, with both high schools and employers. This requires a deep understanding of outcomes data to continuously improve and provide transparent information to learners, families, and employers.

This project was also the focus of Colorado Succeeds' participation in [Accelerate ED](#), a national cohort focused on regional and state teams designing seamless and equitable pathways to postsecondary and career success. With the support of the Acceleration Fund, partners at Education Strategy Group (ESG), and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Colorado Succeeds supported CICC in designing new data collection protocols, identifying successful participant engagement strategies, and investigating wage and employment outcomes data best practices to share with the field.

This brief elevates key learnings from the perspective of and for local training providers that can inform and enhance local, statewide, and national efforts to track economic mobility data. Providers engaged are focused on understanding how their programs are leading to thriving careers for their participants – the “stickiness” of workforce training programs.

At the same time, the state of Colorado is undergoing the implementation of a [Statewide Longitudinal Data System](#) (SLDS), which will help to make some of these practices more seamless, equitable, and systemic across programs and regions. **This paper is intended to support the programs and providers in the work now, with recommendations and insights into what an effective and efficient statewide system should ensure is possible in the future.**

ECONOMIC MOBILITY DATA: GOOD FOR PARTICIPANTS, PROVIDERS, POLICYMAKERS, & EMPLOYERS

When examining data on the economic mobility of Coloradans, we aim to understand how learner/earners, or I/earners, are experiencing and growing thriving, long-term careers. Educational opportunities to gain advanced skills, whether through a degree in higher education or stackable credentials, accelerate these careers. Amid these opportunities, we must focus on wage and employment outcomes to understand how I/earners progress from entry-level, perhaps short-term jobs, into family-sustaining and flourishing careers.

A more comprehensive and accurate understanding of wage and employment outcomes affords multiple benefits across all participants and partners. Students or participants, and their families, gain awareness of the long-term potential of careers and pathway options. Local workforce training providers (at the high school and postsecondary levels) are able to celebrate their impact on participants' careers while identifying opportunities for continuous improvement. State agencies and advocacy organizations can pinpoint what's working and advance effective policy.

At the core, by connecting to and furthering our understanding of employment outcomes, we build data-informed connections across all levels and partners—participants, providers, support agencies, and employers. We enhance the talent pipeline for employers with facilitated job opportunities for participants. And because we care not just about placement, providers and employers leverage outcomes data to study retention and job performance to align on the most effective preparation strategies.

RETURN ON INVESTMENT FOR ECONOMIC MOBILITY DATA



For students & participants
Awareness of pathway potential



For providers
Storytelling, fundraising,
& refinement



For state agencies
Sharing and support of
best practices



For employers
Enhanced talent pipeline
& retention



“At Careers In Construction Colorado (CICC), our mission is to educate, empower, and employ students, preparing them to make meaningful career choices after high school. We believe that Career Connected Learning is essential for equipping students with the skills and opportunities needed for success. With over 10,000 students having participated in our program and more than 1,600 placed in entry-level positions within the construction industry, our commitment to their ongoing journey remains strong. Through strategic data tracking and sustained relationships, we continue to ensure that students have the support they need to thrive in their chosen careers post high school graduation.”

—Renee Zentz, President, Careers in Construction Colorado

LEVERAGE EXISTING DATA AND BEST PRACTICES

While we promote the benefits of tracking and assessing economic mobility, we know these efforts are challenging. Tracking participants after they leave your program can be daunting and unknown. Program leaders may also need to address concerns about feasibility and validity while beginning discussions about how to measure employment outcomes.

Fortunately, there are existing data systems and best practices you can leverage. **A key starting point for your program, regardless of your current efforts to track employment outcomes for participants, is to explore and access these available data and approaches.** These systems provide foundational data for studying economic mobility across pathways and from your training program – employment status of participants and wage outcomes over time. While they may not be widely known, these systems may offer the most insightful and comprehensive data to understand economic mobility.

CURRENT COLORADO ECONOMIC MOBILITY DATA

Colorado Department of Labor and Employment

- ▶ [Connecting Colorado](#) includes employment records with wage outcomes. These data are ultimately reported to the federal government as part of Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) reporting.

Colorado Community College System

- ▶ [Annual Perkins Reporting](#): To meet federal requirements, secondary Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs are required to collect data on participants' employment status. Schools often collect this data through surveys.
- ▶ [Concurrent Enrollment Reports](#): The system's annual concurrent enrollment report includes average wage outcomes for concurrent enrollment participants.

Colorado Department of Higher Education

- ▶ [Return on Investment Report](#): The Department releases an annual report that includes annual return on investment for postsecondary programs 1, 5 and 10 years after students complete their degree.
- ▶ [Minimum Value Threshold](#): The Department recently developed a minimum value threshold that uses wage outcomes to calculate a minimum value threshold to help colleges recognize programs that are helping students achieve economic mobility.

Each of these reports provides helpful proxies as well as best-practice approaches for calculating economic mobility outcomes. With the exception of the Career and Technical Education reporting, all of these reports leverage data that is collected centrally. For example, data reported about education outcomes at the state level is matched with information from the state’s Unemployment Insurance (UI) system to calculate wage outcomes. This is all done through inter-agency data-sharing agreements. Unfortunately, it’s difficult for individual programs to access data specific to their participants currently.

THANKFULLY, THERE ARE A FEW OPPORTUNITIES TO ADDRESS THIS DISCONNECT IN COLORADO

1. The Colorado Wage and Outcomes Results Coalition ([WORC](#))

A recent partnership between the [Colorado Equitable Economic Mobility Initiative](#) (CEEMI) and the [Colorado Evaluation & Action Lab at the University of Denver](#) (the Colorado Lab), leveraged a critical data governance structure, the [Linked Information Network of Colorado](#) (LINC), to link data from workforce programs with Unemployment Insurance wage outcomes to report out on quarterly earnings both before program participation and after program completion.

This important infrastructure is being made available to all Opportunity Now grantees like Project SCALE so that they can access economic mobility data. To participate, partners will enter into an MOU and provide student-level information to the Colorado Lab. In return, they will get custom reports that include employment and wage outcomes for participation for those participants they can identify.

While this will not solve the long-term challenges of data access, initiatives like WORC provide an essential use case for broadening access.



“CrossPurpose has a long history of studying the economic mobility of our participants. It’s in our DNA. But, we are thrilled to partner with WORC to study and showcase the impact of our programming in our participants’ lives through validated, rigorous analysis conducted by an external research partner.”

—Josh Ryken, Senior Government Liaison, CrossPurpose

2. Colorado's Statewide Education and Workforce Data System

In 2024, the Colorado legislature passed [HB24-1364](#), which required the Office of Information Technology to create a Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) governed by a public board and focused on data access and use while prioritizing privacy.

Colorado has a long history of working together to create systems that allow for longitudinal analysis, but no agency has been tasked with leading the long-term vision and sustainability of a statewide solution that expands access to parents and families, program leaders, and policymakers. The system will be able to follow students from early childhood, into the K12 education system, then into postsecondary education, then into the workforce using secure protocols that protect privacy. It will allow for data to be disaggregated and explored. Additionally, the governance board will create a long-term vision and ongoing guidance so the data, reports, dashboards, and other functionality can continue to evolve and expand. Finally, it will allow projects like WORC to happen at a lower cost with significantly greater efficiency, and it will create a pathway for programs like CICC to share and request data.

The first report from Colorado's Statewide Longitudinal Data System is due in the Spring of 2026. It will mark an important first step toward better data for learners, program leaders, and policymakers across Colorado.

PROVIDER TAKEAWAYS FROM THE CURRENT STATE OF DATA IN COLORADO

In addition to accessing and building more awareness of current publicly available data, and as your program considers and compiles data on wages and employment, it is essential to establish a platform to track outreach and store these data. You might start small for collecting these data, perhaps in a spreadsheet; but should soon explore ways to integrate these data into existing systems and/or adopt more comprehensive software like Salesforce, Zoho, and RiseKit.

Once a data source is identified, ensure you have **MOUs or data-sharing agreements** in place between your program, state-level agencies, and other partners (e.g., K12 school districts.) In these contracts, detail the specific data requested and the process of sharing the data, while maximizing the intended utility across partners. Consider outlining the data variables to be shared, including whether personally identifiable information is allowable to share, how the data will be stored, and when the agreement ends. By leveraging these existing data, your program maintains **data privacy and security**. Furthermore, **third-party analysis and research** of your participants' outcomes validate findings.

"If we truly value economic prosperity and mobility, then our reporting, accountability, and incentive systems for education must evolve to reflect that."

Measurement for Mobility, American Student Assistance & Education Strategy Group, May 2024

ACTIVATE AN ALUMNI NETWORK TO UNLOCK DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF CAREER SUCCESS

To build on available data on employment and wage outcomes, your program will likely desire more contextual and detailed data on your participants' economic mobility, and how your program contributes to these careers. You might wonder:

- ▶ Where are former participants employed? Does my program have connections to these employers?
- ▶ How satisfied are participants in their jobs? How can my program continue to support their career?
- ▶ How are participants feeling like they belong in their careers? How can my program partner with employers to build welcoming and supportive cultures?

Employment records and wage data are key to collect and study, but these additional questions necessitate outreach to participants. To tackle some of these questions, we partnered with CICC in Fall 2024 to pilot an outreach effort to their recent participants. We conducted a brief survey to further understand employment placement and “stickiness”, i.e., retention in job while reinforcing the connection between these participants and CICC.

In this outreach, we revealed several effective practices. Most notably, promote your program's values with transparency and frequency to build trust prior to and during your outreach to participants.

ENSURE OUTREACH TO PARTICIPANTS IS BUILT ON TRUSTING AND TRANSPARENT RELATIONSHIPS

Reinforce the value of the provider.

- ▶ Reiterate the goal of the provider is to promote thriving careers for participants.
- ▶ We are “building a bridge” from their education to their career.
- ▶ We want to be your career navigator especially at the beginning of your career (1-5 years out of school)

Be clear on expectations and purpose of data collection.

- ▶ Early on (prior to the participant graduating/completing), outline how your program expects to receive responses and how it wants to stay in touch.
- ▶ Establish an expectation (MOU) of checking in, tracking employment
- ▶ Consider incorporating Social Security Numbers into these MOUs and expectations to facilitate data collection from CDLE.

Consider additional effective practices in outreach to participants.

- ▶ Be realistic about what you can control in your outreach. Reaching 100% of your intended audience is unlikely. Set ambitious response rate targets that will ensure your data are representative and insightful.
- ▶ Lean into individual relationships. Allocate time and resources for your staff, who are most connected with individual participants, to conduct outreach.
- ▶ Incorporate outreach into a broader participant network. Host events and provide support in routine, structured, and celebratory ways. Conduct survey administration during events.
- ▶ Include non-completers in your outreach. These participants, while they may not have completed/graduated from your program, may have gained important skills that are impacting their economic mobility.
- ▶ Incentives help engage participants and value their time. Consider things like gift cards for survey respondents and food at events..
- ▶ Surveys must be very short. Limit your questions to the most important and most feasible to collect.
- ▶ Complete the feedback loop. Report findings from your outreach back to your participants to celebrate impact. Confirming the use of the data you collected from participants will build future engagement.



“I learned a lot of construction skills during high school as a participation in Careers in Construction Colorado. I was a little surprised to hear from them after I graduated, but I told them where I’m working and how it’s going. It’s nice to know they are still around to support me as I develop in my career.”

—Participant, Careers in Construction Colorado

CONSIDER EMPLOYER-LED STRATEGIES

In addition to ensuring employers have access to and are leveraging outcomes data to understand both the quality of training programs and study retention and job performance, the effective integration of employer-led talent strategies can support the overall pathways and data collections design and improve relationships between K12, postsecondary, training programs, and employers.

[Project SCALE](#) is an employer-led and data-driven coalition of more than 40 industry and education partners, focused on building sustainable talent pipelines by aligning industry needs, engaging education partners, and creating stackable credential pathways from high school to apprenticeships and postsecondary.

Project SCALE’s innovation lies in using data to create clear, stackable career pathways. Encompassing high schools, state Career and Technical Education (CTE) officials, community and technical colleges, workforce training and apprenticeship programs, and employers, Project SCALE members have established clear hiring requirements, coordinated training programs, and aligned resources to place opportunity seekers on accelerated paths to high-wage positions. **By maintaining alignment between stakeholders, from training providers to employers, and leveraging a long-term systems-change framework, Project SCALE ensures skilled trades pathways will remain responsive to evolving market needs.**

This comprehensive, employer-led initiative is a bold model for transforming workforce development in Colorado, as it addresses both immediate and long-term talent needs while supporting career advancement across a range of skilled trades. Through structured processes and continuous improvement strategies, Project SCALE has become a codified model for closing talent gaps across industries and ensuring jobseekers can access in-demand, high-wage careers—one that all those working on collaborative pathways and data efforts should consider.

LOOKING AHEAD: KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR DATA

This report highlights the transformative power of data in shaping successful pathways for learners and advancing workforce development. By examining wage and employment outcomes from postsecondary programs, we can further emphasize the value of data in enabling students, educators, and policymakers to make informed decisions that lead to economic mobility. The key takeaway is clear: improving data systems is not just about tracking numbers but about empowering individuals and communities to thrive.

As Colorado moves forward with implementing a Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS), we can also glean valuable insights from local programs and the data collection that has been happening across the state. These key considerations should be elevated into the conversation with state agency leaders as they implement the SLDS enacting legislation.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- ▶ **Localized Data Access:** Ensure that learning providers and local decision-makers have access to participant-specific data, including wage outcomes, so they can evaluate and improve their programs.
- ▶ **Data Privacy and Security:** Prioritize the protection of personal information in all data-sharing agreements, ensuring compliance with privacy laws while maintaining the utility of the data.
- ▶ **Outcome-Based Program Evaluation:** Focus on tracking not just participation but also long-term career outcomes such as wage growth, retention, and job satisfaction to ensure programs are truly delivering on their promises of economic mobility.
- ▶ **Continuous Improvement:** Use the SLDS as a tool for ongoing program refinement and resource allocation, and ensure local learning providers can leverage data for continuous improvement and adaptation to evolving workforce needs.

By keeping these priorities in mind, Colorado can build a data system that serves as a powerful tool for advancing both individual success and statewide economic growth.

ABOUT COLORADO SUCCEEDS

[Colorado Succeeds](#) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan coalition of business leaders invested in improving schools, changing educational outcomes for all students, and shaping the future of Colorado's workforce. Since 2006, Colorado Succeeds members have worked to build a system where learners are educated to their greatest potential, employers can recruit homegrown talent, and policymakers are responsive to critical needs. We believe great schools are good business.