

## LEADERSHIP COMMUNITY APPLICATION

The public and private partners that lead the Illinois Education and Career Success Network invite your community to seek designation as a **Leadership Community**.

The Leadership Communities designated through this application process are eligible to receive targeted technical assistance, capacity building, and funding to support community-level approaches to advance student success in life after high-school through strategies designed to achieve career readiness and college/credential attainment. These supports will be coordinated through the Illinois Education and Career Success Network Organizers: Advance Illinois, Education Systems Center at Northern Illinois University (EdSystems), and the Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC).

This is an open application and communities may apply at any time by submitting their completed application to the Illinois Education and Career Success Network Director at [enjuguna@niu.edu](mailto:enjuguna@niu.edu)

### Background

Today, two-thirds of employers say they need employees with some postsecondary education. However, just over half of Illinois residents have a high-quality college degree or postsecondary credential. Many students feel disconnected from the education system, and communities are seeking new ways to bridge the increasing divide between what students are learning in the classroom and the shifting needs of the employment landscape.

The Illinois Education and Career Success Network is a growing network of communities that are committed to the Illinois goal of increasing the proportion of adults in the state with high-quality postsecondary degrees and credentials to 60% by the year 2025. The mission of the Success Network is to **support communities to increase meaningful and equitable postsecondary attainment and civic engagement**, so that more residents participate in their regional economies, civic activities, and achieve postsecondary and career success.

The Network Organizers came together in 2013 to create a Community of Practice to help local and regional teams accelerate progress toward the 60% by 2025 goal. These teams are using the principles of collective impact to support collaboration between public and private partners to:

- Make education more relevant for students by driving a deeper connection between what is taught in the classroom and careers in a changing economy
- Facilitate student progression through key education transition points and into careers through innovative college and career pathway design
- Adopt specific strategies to drive equitable college and career readiness, as well as postsecondary degree and credential attainment
- Collect and use a range of local data for continuous improvement

## How do Network Organizers Support Participating Communities?

The Network Organizers (Advance Illinois, EdSystems, and ISAC) manage a peer-to-peer learning and action Network by providing the supports outlined below.

General Supports for Illinois Communities	Targeted Supports for Leadership Communities
<p><b>Hosting an annual convening to bring together communities, technical experts, and state/national leaders</b></p> <p><b>Promoting the work of the Network and documenting and sharing best practices in partnership with internal and external members</b></p> <p><b>Connecting local community efforts to state supports to advance the State's 60% by 2025 goal</b></p>	<p>Providing technical assistance on key activities communities may implement to increase meaningful and equitable postsecondary attainment and civic engagement</p> <p>Providing guidance and structure for strategic stakeholder engagement and planning to get community agreement on their goals and key activities to achieve those goals</p> <p>Serving as a conduit for financial support to communities for strategies to increase meaningful and equitable postsecondary attainment</p> <p>Providing a cradle-to-career data dashboard that communities can use to analyze their current outcomes, assess progress, and highlight areas of focus</p>

## Theory of Change: Collective Impact

To learn about Collective Impact, visit Stanford Social Innovation Review at [ssir.org/articles/entry/collective\\_impact](https://ssir.org/articles/entry/collective_impact).

The Network is committed to partnering with communities using the process principles of collective impact:

1. A common agenda of mutually reinforcing activities and shared qualitative and quantitative goals
2. Data-informed decision-making using shared measurement;
3. Clear articulation of mutually reinforcing activities;
4. Continuous communication among all stakeholders that make up the birth-to-career system; and
5. The development of backbone support—an organization that can act as an intermediary for the entire initiative and coordinate participating organizations and agencies.

The Network recognizes that developing community-level approaches to college and career readiness and postsecondary degree and credential attainment requires a deep commitment from partners across the spectrum of workforce development, education, human services, community-based

organizations, employers, and economic development agencies. Coordination of this kind requires investment and a model for sustainability, as well as state-level commitments to providing technical and networking supports and helping communities leverage available resources in innovative ways.

Leadership Communities will partner with each other, the Network’s Organizers, and other partners to support the goals of: developing cross-sector partnerships, determining and seeking adequate financial resources towards community identified goals, and documenting a local urgency for change.

## Strategies to Drive Postsecondary and Career Readiness and Attainment: State Frameworks

A core function of the Network is to leverage state policy on college and career readiness and attainment to support the work of communities to improve college and career readiness outcomes. The Network Organizers do this both by elevating effective community practice to inform state policy and then tracking local-implementation to ensure that state policy is working in service of communities hitting our state goals.

In 2016, the Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness (PWR) Act was signed into law. The Act includes multiple frameworks for activities from middle school through early college that can be used to align the education and career systems in Illinois. The frameworks include the Postsecondary and Career Expectations (PaCE) framework, the College and Career Pathway Endorsement (CCPE) framework, and a framework for implementing Transitional Math at the high school level. The state also initiated Competency-Based Education pilots. Finally, so as to bring tighter alignment between these frameworks and state education goals, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) included a College and Career Readiness Indicator (CCRI) in the K-12 accountability system.

### Unifying Elements of the Activities in Each Framework:

**ACADEMIC READINESS:** Students should complete their high-school (secondary) education ready for credit-bearing college coursework (i.e., requiring no English or math remediation in college), and when possible, earn some early college credit via Advanced Placement or dual credit coursework.

**POSTSECONDARY AND CAREER EXPLORATION AND PREPARATION:** Students should have a range of experiences and activities that prepare them for what comes after completing their secondary credential.

1. Connecting Secondary to Postsecondary: Students should be able to plan for and connect secondary coursework and experiences to postsecondary and career preparation.
2. Exposure, Exploration, & Preparation: Students should have the power to make informed decisions about what comes after high school based on their interests and skills. This includes exposure to career clusters, as well as participating in activities along a continuum of work-based learning that support exploration and preparation.
3. Financial Aid Implications: Students should know what their financial aid options are and how to access them, no matter what their postsecondary pathway entails.

The Network believes that there are specific actions that require partnership between K-12, postsecondary education, employers, and community members that can lead to successes described in the frameworks. These include but are not limited to:

- Developing a college and career pathway system connecting secondary and postsecondary partners
- Implementing competency-based graduation requirements in high-school
- Participating in the Illinois GEAR-UP (ILGU) program
- Implementing transitional math and ELA coursework in high school to reduce remediation rates
- FAFSA (financial aid application) completion campaign
- Data-sharing with partners across the birth-to-career spectrum (e.g. the Kindergarten Individual Development Survey, postsecondary remediation data, workforce training data, etc.)

The activities listed above are not exhaustive; the Network Organizers encourage interested communities to identify the strategies that best target the challenges in the educational and workforce pipeline they identify through their data. As such, community-determined activities may include strategies targeting students anywhere along the educational pipeline. However, communities must articulate how these strategies ultimately connect to improved college and career readiness and postsecondary attainment.

## **Expectations of Leadership Communities**

As a Leadership Community designee, communities are expected to thoughtfully engage in the peer-to-peer learning Network through:

- Participating in the annual convening and meetings where appropriate and feasible;
- Sharing best practices, milestones, and outcomes on a regular basis with Network Organizers and other Leadership Communities;
- Regularly seeking support from Network Organizers to achieve goals;
- Using local data for continuous improvement; and
- Leveraging the supports of the Network and Network Organizers to help you achieve your goals.

## Application Process

Communities interested in participating in the Illinois Education and Career Success Network should reach out to Director Edith Njuguna at [enjuguna@niu.edu](mailto:enjuguna@niu.edu). The Network Organizers will provide support to communities as needed throughout the application process.

All communities applying to receive the Leadership Community designation must outline a plan of action for working with partners to achieve a local education and career outcomes goal(s). The Network Organizers are available to help you coordinate partners to identify your goal(s) and create your community plan.

This plan and application must address the following issues. Click the field below each bullet below to complete the application (with the exception of bullet #8).

1. Define your community's region (i.e., geographic area the community plan will cover).
  
2. Identify (or outline the process to identify) 3-5 ways you will measure success, including a timeline. (The metrics may be selected from the Success Network Cradle to Career Dashboard at [dashboard.ILSuccessNetwork.org](https://dashboard.ILSuccessNetwork.org) or other sources. Metrics other communities have chosen include: Well Child Care Visits (Health Care Visits for Low-Income Infants), 8th graders passing algebra, FAFSA completion, High School Graduation, and Postsecondary Remediation rates, among others.)
  
3. Identify (or outline the process to identify) key activities that will commence implementation during the next 12- to 24-month period for increasing college and career readiness and postsecondary attainment. Please briefly describe these strategies, which can be similar to the activities outlined on page 3 or others you identify.

4. Identify (or describe your plan to identify) 3-4 priority workforce development and career areas based on these groupings below: Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources; Arts & Communication; Finance & Business Services; Health Sciences & Technology; Human and Public Services (including Education); Information Technology; Manufacturing, Engineering, Technology & Trades.
  
5. Describe how the activities identified will be intentionally designed to eliminate disparities in educational access and outcomes for students from historically underserved and underrepresented populations.
  
6. Describe the strategies you currently use or will use to engage individuals or groups that will be impacted by the decisions or activities of your collaborative, when deciding which efforts to focus on to achieve equitable postsecondary attainment goals.
  
7. Identify a partner who will serve as a trusted intermediary organization to build a common agenda, articulate mutually reinforcing activities, measurements, and communications across sectors involving PreK-12 education, postsecondary education, employers, and civic community. Examples of intermediary organizations include: community-based organizations, United Ways, Chambers of Commerce, Local Workforce Innovation Boards and existing Collective Impact leads.

8. Formally document your partnership with a Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) on all the above goals and activities involving all the following stakeholders:
  - Employers
  - Secondary education partners
  - Postsecondary education partners, specifically including the area community college
  - Municipal leaders
  - Representatives from community-based organizations
  - Elementary and/or early childhood education partners (optional, but highly encouraged)

**Please attach your MOU when you submit this application.**

9. Describe your plan to engage additional community partners as your work moves forward and evolves over time.

**Please submit your completed application and MOU or questions to:**

Edith Njuguna, Director  
[enjuguna@niu.edu](mailto:enjuguna@niu.edu)