

BUSINESS

Bridge2Careers: New tool helps build education-to-workforce pathway

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Did you know, New Mexico's first comprehensive set of career pathways, maps that lead from education to employment in our key industries, were created here in Doña Ana County?

For five years, we have been able to show the connections from specific programs in education (career and technical education, skilled credentials, two- and four-year degrees) to the very real, relevant, and well-paying jobs right here.

The precedent-setting work of the Workforce Talent Collaboration and The Bridge of Southern New Mexico brought these pathway maps into fruition to help educators, the workforce system and employers each know what their unique roles are in building a talent ecosystem. In turn, students or those seeking to gain new jobs in growing industries had maps with multiple on- and off-ramps into specific careers in those industries.

And now, the rest of the state is catching up/ The New Mexico Public Education Department recently published its strategic plan for meeting the requirements of the Yazzie-Martinez lawsuit, and career pathways are front-and-center as a critical component.

So again, kudos to every single member of the Workforce Talent Collaborative who made this all possible!

But, we are never content to just stay still.

We are ready to announce something brand new for our community to help individuals chart their own personal career pathways that start with income and career destinations,

and then reverse engineer the career pathway to get them there.

Thanks to New Mexico State University's great team for OnDemand Learning, we can now offer a free online, micro-credential course for building your own career pathway: the Bridge2Careers Micro-Credential.

Building Your Bridge2Careers walks participants through the process of understanding their own income goals, the careers that can provide those incomes, and the careers that are best matched to their skills, interests and values. Once the career destination or destinations are in sight, then the course shows participants how to explore and plug into the educational choices to get there.

The course is only six sessions long. It includes short videos that walk through each step of the process, using the wealth of information available on the Bridge2Careers website, and ends with the opportunity to create your own unique pathway. The course also provides the opportunity to weigh out the financial side of a career pathway, helping students determine the cost of education in light of the future income potential of their career destinations.

This is a great summer activity, by the way for students and adults to take a moment and create a specific plan to take you from where you are today and where you want to be in the near or a little more distant future. It can prioritize the decisions you make about high school, college and university coursework. It can prioritize the on-the-job training opportunities, internships, or job placements that our Workforce Connections partners seek out for those they work with. It can help employers see that prospective candidates with the right skills are really committed to their careers in those industries, ensuring success for our local businesses.

Building Your Bridge2Careers couldn't have come at a better time, especially for high school students. There's a real shift underway in which students are thinking very strategically about high school and higher education expectations.

According to an updated national survey of high school students called Question the Quo, students want "shorter, more affordable, career-connected pathways." Post-pandemic, they are less likely to pursue a four-year degree (due to worries about cost, debt, and

career-readiness) and far more interested in being well prepared in high school for careers right away.

Thanks to the great work and the amazing partnerships here in Doña Ana County, we are already at the destination called for in the report.

With to our pathways, and now our micro-credential online course, information is power for building the futures our people want and that our community desperately needs.

Tracey Bryan is president/CEO of the Bridge of Southern New Mexico.

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