

# **Achieve Wyoming: A Proposed Framework for a Statewide Career Development System**

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## **SUMMARY**

Developed for Wyoming Afterschool Alliance  
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## Overview

High-quality afterschool and youth development programs have been shown to:

- Improve academic success and promote healthy development
- Encourage social and emotional learning
- Decrease crime
- Actively support and strengthen families

Research has established that a skilled, stable, and motivated afterschool and youth development workforce is a key determinant of quality programming. Building a strong workforce calls for a comprehensive career development system. This includes a professional development system that provides education, training, and technical assistance as well as other key components.

The Wyoming Afterschool Alliance (WYAA) has determined that initial efforts for professionalizing the afterschool workforce should focus on creating a statewide framework and infrastructure for that entire career development system, building on quality improvement efforts already in place.

This report identifies six components of a comprehensive career development system and makes recommendations for advancing each component in Wyoming. A cross-sector, continuum approach (one that supports those who serve a broad range of ages) is the most cost-effective way to provide quality programming for children and youth; with this in mind, these recommendations build on current systems and initiatives established in the early childhood field.

## Components of a Career Development System

**1. Definition of quality**—A definition of quality includes (a) *common terms and definitions*, a common language and set of expectations that describe the field as a profession; (b) *core knowledge and competencies (CKCs)*, the knowledge and skills that specify what an afterschool and youth development professional needs to know and do to provide quality programming for children and youth; and (c) *quality program standards*, a set of standards that identify program quality.

### Recommendations

- Consider a consensus-building process to agree on common terms.

- Send a CKC’s self-assessment to all afterschool and youth development staff. Begin to align trainings with core competencies, and use CKCs as the basis for course descriptions when creating academic pathways. Longer term, align with early childhood core competencies.
- Develop a set of quality program standards.

**2. Academic pathways**—The possible paths, including training, one can take to continue professional growth.

Recommendations

- Continue to develop and market online modules.
- Build academic pathways, beginning with relationships at the University of Wyoming Outreach School and allied community colleges.
- Communicate these pathways to afterschool and youth development professionals and undergraduate students.

**3. Registries**—*Professional registries* are a central location for staff to record trainings attended and credentials or degrees earned, while *training/trainer registries* are a central hub for listing and advertising available trainings and for trainers to receive feedback.

Recommendations

- Begin necessary steps to expand early childhood registry to include afterschool and youth development programs.
- Engage in publicity efforts, perhaps connected with academic pathways such as the new online modules.

**4. Career pathways**—Steps of career advancement that are connected to increased professional development. While a traditional career ladder allows for growth in just one direction, a career lattice allows for diversity of entry points and values lateral, diagonal, and vertical growth and development.

Recommendation

- Collaborate with early childhood to create a career pathway that is inclusive of afterschool and youth development professionals, perhaps by expanding the current Wyoming Career Development Scale.

**5. Compensation**—Salaries commensurate with education and experience, as well as benefits and other bonuses.

Recommendations

- Specify suggested salary increases in career ladder.
- Advocate for funding at the local and state level.

**6. Funding and sustainability**—Public and private sources of funding that support and sustain a career development system, as well as links to larger system building efforts.

Recommendations

- Explore potential funding streams. Move forward with necessary adaptations to licensing to allow WY Quality Counts and CCDBG funds to be expanded to afterschool and youth development professionals.
- Collaborate cross-sector across the continuum throughout the career development system.
- Consider organizations such as Wyoming Kids First to house a cross-sector career development system.
- Link to larger system-building efforts, such as by developing quality program standards that are part of a quality improvement system.

Wyoming is well-poised to build on existing systems and initiatives to create a strong career development system. By addressing each of the components and using a continuum approach, Wyoming can create a strong and stable workforce and advance the field of afterschool and youth development.