



*Montana Career Pathways is a vital education and workforce strategy.*

*Too many students don't understand how education connects to their future, and how to make good decisions that prepare them for college and career.*

*Montana Career Pathways helps students learn about career options that are in demand in Montana, and the types activities they can engage in to prepare for their next step after high school graduation.*

## Montana Career Pathways

This year Montana embraces a major shift in its career pathways program, from individual pathway agreements between one college and one high school, to statewide pathways scalable to all high schools and connected to all MUS colleges. Montana Career Pathways (MCP) will change the way career pathways are developed, displayed, documented, and implemented. It will improve how students, parents, and educators get information about in-demand career options in Montana, and provide actionable information for students to explore and engage in careers while in high school. Perhaps most importantly, it creates the opportunity for secondary and postsecondary educators across the state to collaborate on activities that add value to students' education and strengthen the pathways to career and college.

***Montana Career Pathways helps students make more informed choices about college and career by providing:***

- Clear, concise, labor market referenced information about career options in Montana.
- Opportunities to engage in college courses that support a career pathway via dual enrollment.
- Opportunities to explore and engage in career options prior to college via work-based learning and Industry Recognized Credentials.

***Montana Career Pathways helps educators build high-quality career pathways that prepare students for college and career by providing:***

- Streamlined tracking of MCP programs of study using TEAMS data.
- Opportunities for teacher upskilling and professional development in CTE fields.
- Labor market-referenced information supporting general statewide pathways as well as detailed, high school-specific programs of study within a MCP area.
- Connections with Montana colleges to develop and embed dual enrollment courses, work-based learning opportunities, and Industry Recognized Credentials into MCP programs of study.

### Initial Montana Career Pathways

- Advanced Manufacturing
- Agriculture, Food & Natural Resources
- Agriculture Mechanics & Construction
- Business Management
- Design & Construction
- Education
- Finance
- Health Professions
- Hospitality & Tourism
- Human Services
- Information Technology
- Marketing
- STEM
- Transportation
- Welding & Fabrication

### Overhauling the Pathways Program

Montana Career Pathways is the next evolution of Montana’s Big Sky Pathways initiative. MCP replaces Big Sky Pathways, a transition that will be completed in the next six months. To better improve the utilization and function of the career pathways program a major overhaul of the program was in order. The modernization of Montana’s career pathways involved revision and reorganization in three areas.

- **MCP Website:** The joint development of a new public-facing pathways website with information targeted at students, parents, educators and the public.  
[www.mus.edu/MCP](http://www.mus.edu/MCP)
- **Strengthening Montana Career Pathways Grants:** OCHE’s reprioritization of campus activities using Perkins Rural Reserve funds to support and strengthen MCPs.
- **Montana Career Pathways Programs of Study:** OPI’s creation of a new set of guidance documents and a new MCP program of study verification program for educators so they can use statewide pathways to access Perkins Secondary Local Application funds.

### Montana Career Pathways Website

This new site is intentionally designed to showcase information that resonates with students and parents. The changes incorporate feedback from students, parents, educators, counselors, and industry members to create an information-rich, visually appealing, dynamic digital resource. There are several elements worth highlighting in the new website.

- Information is organized to engage students who are in the “dream” phase of career exploration with links to more in-depth resources for students ready to engage.
- There is a clear emphasis on labor market information including wage data (entry and median) and projected demand for highlighted professions.
- Intentional arrangement of occupations along a continuum to showcase careers and the related education options including: certificate programs, two-year degrees, four-year degrees, and postgraduate options.
- Special emphasis on high-wage, high-demand technical occupations. Particularly those with strong wage outcomes associated with short-term certificates and two-year degrees.
- Focus on activities and courses that help students explore and engage in careers.
- Special “callout boxes” identifying activities that help students explore careers and develop skills of value in the pathway.
- Lists of suggested high school and dual enrollment courses that support exploration of a career pathway, including links to online resources.
- Links to participating colleges offering programs in each pathway area.

### **Strengthening Montana Career Pathways Grants**

To support the rollout of the new Montana Career Pathways, OCHE realigned the [RFP](#) objectives of the grants awarded to campuses from the Perkins Rural Reserve fund. Grants are awarded to campuses annually via a competitive application process. This allows the State Executive Leadership Team (SELT) to determine priority areas for work in the state via the RFP. This year’s RFP charged recipients to utilize funds to support Montana’s CTE educators by growing and enhancing opportunities for ALL Montana high school students to engage in a career pathway via dual enrollment, IRC’s, and work-based learning. Renamed the Strengthening Montana Career Pathways Grant, [ten campuses were awarded funds](#) to help increase access to activities that support a high-quality career pathway. We are excited to see such strong investment in the types of activities that help students become better informed and prepared for life after high school graduation. The awarded grants showcase a variety of projects including:

- Development of on-campus, online, and high school dual enrollment in high demand CTE areas (health, IT/Computer Sci., manufacturing, business).
- Teacher trainings in CTE areas: manufacturing, culinary, education, CAD, health care, and agriculture. These trainings are offered by campuses to develop connections, enhance CTE teacher technical proficiency, assist with integrating IRCs into curriculum, as well as supporting aspiring dual credit teachers.
- Student exposure events like [TekNoExpo](#), [Women in Gear](#), [Manufacturing Day](#), [L.I.F.E.](#) as well as student/parent information nights.
- Assisting teachers in integrating IRCs into their CTE courses (CNA, EMT, CPR, AWS, NCCER, OSHA 10, Quickbooks, ServSafe, etc.)

## **Montana Career Pathways Programs of Study**

In addition to the changes that make up the public-facing side of MCP, a series of documents have been created to support secondary teachers and counselors in their efforts to provide targeted guidance for students in the development of a high school program of study.

OPI's pathway documents for secondary provide educators with an outline of sequential recommended pathway courses linked to the Montana Statewide Longitudinal Data System. These documents also provide teachers and counselors with pathway-specific information and a recommended course plan for all four years of high school. All the information is linked and in agreement with the Montana Career Pathways documents to create a resource that helps students explore generally in pathways and/or engage specifically in a targeted program of study.

The final document that was developed by OPI is a Pathway Validation Document. These documents, specific to each pathway, are created to report back to schools the information on their approved pathway as well as asking for information on their activities surrounding Work Based Learning and Industry Recognized Credentials in the pathway.

The result of all this work and documentation is better support for schools, their teachers, counselors, and ultimately students. All the information required to create an approved pathway will be collected through the TEAMS data, which schools already enter and submit to OPI annually. The new approach to tracking pathways will decrease school's paperwork and reporting burden, allowing them to concentrate on building high-quality pathways. This work will also result in the creation of a statewide baseline of information for Work-Based Learning and Industry Recognized Credentials existing in Montana High Schools at the present time.