

## About the Linked Learning Pathway Improvement Toolkit

The Pathway Improvement Toolkit is designed for pathway teams at all levels looking to improve the opportunities to engage youth, transform systems, and advance equity. The toolkit includes the following resources:

1. This **User Guide**, which offers detailed support for using the toolkit.
2. A [Self-Study Tool](#), with step-by-step guidance and questions to help you capture a meaningful picture of your pathway’s successes and areas for improvement.
3. An [Action Planning Template](#), designed to support your team’s analysis of the [Self-Study Tool](#) results and to plan for improvement.

## How to Use the Toolkit

There is no one “right way” to use the [Self-Study tool](#). Every pathway team has its unique context, established structures, routines, and preferences.

Whatever tools you use and how you use them, it is best to take on this work with your full pathway team over a series of meetings that includes time for planning, conducting the self-study, analyzing results, and planning for the future. This document includes detailed guidance for each of these meetings and their related tools.

	<i>Participants</i>	<i>No. of Meetings</i>	<i>Duration</i>
<b>Planning</b>	Core/Lead team	1	30–60 min
<b>Completing the Self-Study</b>	Full team	1-3	30–45 min
<b>Creating an Action Plan</b>	Full team	1 per section; 1 overall	45–60 min
<b>Monitoring Progress</b>	Full team	multiple, regular	30 min

Please reach out to Robert Curtis, Senior Director of Networks and Practice Development, with any questions at [robert@linkedlearning.org](mailto:robert@linkedlearning.org), using the subject: “Pathway Improvement.”

## PLANNING

Meeting(s): 1, 30–60 min

Participants: Core/Lead Team

Tools needed: User Guide

In order to maximize your experience with the [Self-Study Tool](#), take time for your team to plan. We recommend that you share this User Guide with the team prior to the planning meeting.

During the meeting, consider the following:

### Why Complete a Self-Study?

- **Set the Table.** It is important to be clear about the purpose of completing the self-study at this time for your pathway.

*Suggested Action: To start, provide an overview of the self-study process with the core team. Ask each participant about potential benefits or concerns they might have.*

### Who Should Be Involved in Completing the Self-Study?

- **Be Inclusive.** High-functioning pathways often receive support from site administration, non-pathway staff, business and industry partners, parents, and students in addition to pathway practitioners. While the self-study process may be completed by pathway teachers alone, there are benefits from broadening participation to include students and other stakeholders.

*Suggested Action: Invite a handful of thoughtfully selected supporters, partners, and stakeholders including a current and former student(s) to participate in the self-study process.*

### When and Where Will You Complete the Self-Study?

- **Make Time.** Schedule ample time to discuss, examine artifacts and evidence, and come to consensus. You may want to schedule different meetings (with different participants) for each of the three domains covered in the [Self-Study Tool](#): (1) integrated program of study, (2) work-based learning, and (3) integrated student supports.

*Suggested Action: Schedule sessions to move through the self-study at times that work for invited partners and supporters.*

- **Select a Productive, Accessible Space.** Consider selecting space for meetings that will allow for focused discussion with minimal disruptions; how you can support your team to do this virtually, if necessary; and whether you will create a shared folder and documents for collaborative work.

*Suggested Action: If convenient, hold the sessions off-campus in a place that inspires collaboration, openness, and reflection, and is readily accessible. If doing this virtually, be sure to ensure that all team members can participate equitably.*

## What Domain Will You Start With?

**Choose a Starting Point.** While the [Self-Study Tool](#) is designed to be comprehensive, you can start with any one domain or area that is of greatest interest and need at this time.

*Suggested Action: Determine, in advance, the domain(s) for initial focus, a realistic period to complete the action plan, a process for monitoring progress, as well as a proposed timeline for transitioning to a self-study of the remaining domains.*

## How Will You Support Completion of the Self-Study?

- **Assign Roles and Preparation Tasks.** Clarify roles in order to foster efficiency and thoughtful completion. Who will coordinate the schedule, send reminders, and secure meeting space? Prepare materials, including related data? Facilitate the sessions? Record results? Is it helpful to designate someone who repeatedly asks about artifacts and evidence, or who serves as process observer to ensure equitable participation?

*Suggested Action: Nurture budding talent. Allow a variety of team members to step up and assume leadership roles. Use the process to build capacity and buy-in among team members, supporters, and/or partners.*

## Are You Ready to Move Forward?

- **Review your Plans.** To be sure everyone is on the same page, take a few minutes to review your plans and confirm the agreements you have made.

*Suggested Action: Come to consensus on each aspect of the plan to assure full support moving forward. Be prepared to orient the full team at the next meeting when you begin to conduct the self-study. Finally, we recommend that, as a group, you review the rest of this User Guide to determine additional preparation that may be necessary or advisable.*

### Next Steps

Following the planning meeting, consider the following steps to get ready for the first meeting where your larger group will complete the [Self-Study Tool](#):

- **Share your strategy.** As you exit the planning session, we recommend that you share the results of your planning with site and district leaders, advisory board, and potential self-study participants *prior* to conducting the self-study. Only by being aware of your plans can they offer support, ask questions, or provide input to help ensure a productive experience.
- **Prepare to complete the Self-Study Session.** What do you need to do to prepare for the first session of the self-study? What actions now will lead to a successful self-study? Refer to the assigned roles and clarify tasks to address technology needs, prepare materials, etc.
- **Determine what data or evidence to collect, analyze, and share.** Review the data and evidence and determine what data to share or summarize prior to conducting the self-study.

# COMPLETING THE SELF-STUDY

Meeting(s): 1–3, 30–45 min each

Participants: Full team

Tools needed: Self-Study Tool

In this step, your full participant group will complete the [Self-Study Tool](#) together. Consider the following recommended best-practices for each session:

## I. Opening

- **Setting Tone.** Start with setting the tone for positive, strengths-based action.

*Suggested Action:* Open the session with a brief activity to ground participants in your goals and objectives for the self-study process.

- **Orient Your Team and Establish Process.** Make sure all team members fully understand the process for completing the self-study. Take your time and be open to proposed changes.

*Suggested Action:* Write your “why(s)” down and make sure it is publicly posted throughout the session. We recommend that equity be central to your written purpose. (E.g., “Our goal is to improve the learning and opportunities for the young people you serve, particularly those who historically have been furthest from that opportunity.”)

*Suggested Action:* Review the results of the planning session, the process, timeline, respective roles, etc.

*Suggested Action:* Include time for all team members, partners, and supporters to voice their perspective and ask questions.

- **Establish Clear Norms That Ensure Equity of Voice.** Recognize that each team member brings a unique and valuable perspective and that individuals process information differently by setting a set of collective norms.

*Suggested Action:* Establish a set of norms for the self-study. Facilitators may want to offer some suggested norms for consideration. For example:

- Engage with an assets-based lens
- Be curious (inquire about options and opportunities)
- Monitor airtime
- Respect the privacy of participants
- Center students

*Suggested Action:* For each question of the self-study, the facilitator should use a process that gives team members time first to think about their own individual response before sharing and discussing group responses.

*Optional Action:* Introduce a specific sharing process (e.g., whip-around, starting with a different person each time) to assure balanced airtime.

## II. Completing the Self-Study

- **Share Context.** Begin each section by reviewing the first page of that section in the [Self-Study Tool](#) (e.g., Integrated Program of Study). Share an overview of any key data or evidence that you have related to this domain.

- **Support with Evidence.** While pathway data is not required to answer most self-study questions, accessing related data will enrich your discussions and contribute to verifiable results, particularly for equitable access.

*Suggested Action: As you complete the self-study, take note of data or evidence gaps, or areas for further investigation.*

*Suggested Action: For each question of the self-study, ask: How do we know? What's the evidence? Do we have artifacts to present as proof?*

Data sources referenced in the tool, broadly:

- Student participation and attendance data, disaggregated by student subgroups where possible, including English learners
  - Academic coursework and pathway program requirements
  - Teacher/educator and industry partner data, including specific supports and frequency of participation
  - Student, educator, industry partner, and community member engagement (opportunities for input, collaboration, evaluation)
- **Allow for Discussion.** Where appropriate, refer to your norms to monitor airtime and re-focus on equitable access for all young people. After individual reflection and discussion, try to come to a consensus and identify next steps.

*Suggested Action: Allow each person to read the question and choose their response before coming to consensus as a group.*

*Suggested Action: Use a process (e.g., whip-around or popcorn) to allow each participant to share their response and why they chose that response.*

### III. Reflection

- **Reflect and Debrief.** Take time to reflect on your process: Did you effectively follow your plan? Were you flexible and adaptive when necessary? Did all team members contribute in an appropriate way? How did you use data to inform results? How would you improve the process next time?

*Suggested Action: This is your chance to model best practice for your students and reflect on your progress. Go into the conversation with a spirit of true curiosity and inquiry and a willingness to be open, vulnerable, and transparent.*

*Optional Action: Consider offering an anonymous way to submit feedback, such as an online survey. This will give participants an opportunity to reflect over time, look for relevant information or resources, or submit sensitive input.*

- **Close Out.** Discuss and agree upon adjustments for next session, share notes, and review next steps. Share gratitude and end on a note of positivity.

# CREATING AN ACTION PLAN

**Meeting(s): 1 for each Linked Learning domain and 1 for overall pathway vision and theory of change, 45–60 min each**

**Participants: Full team**

**Tools needed: Action Planning Template**

These sessions focus on completing an action plan using the results of the self-study. The provided [Action Planning Template](#) will help you synthesize, prioritize, and agree on key next steps to improve your pathway, starting with the Self-Study Analysis (see below).

Action planning can be done by the pathway team collaboratively and include other stakeholders. [The Action Planning Template](#) includes the Linked Learning Elements for reference, and three working sections:

- 1. Self-Study Analysis:** Using the results of the self-study, use this section to indicate your current and desired states and priorities.
- 2. Setting Vision:** After you have completed the Analysis section, work with your team to develop a working set of visioning elements (vision, goal, theory of change, etc.)
- 3. Timeline and Benchmarks:** Use this section to indicate key actions, activities, and benchmarks to continuously improve your pathway in service of your vision.

*Remember that this tool is meant to help you support students; rather than endeavoring to complete all the boxes, focus on what is most relevant and important for your pathway and your context at this time.*

## 1. Self-Study Analysis

For each workstream, enter the following information:

- **Current State and Priorities:** Review and document key characteristics of the current state of the pathway for the various criteria in any or all of the domains that you have completed the self-study.
- **Future State of Pathways:** Based on the self-study, come to an agreement about the desired future state for each of the criteria. You may not have a desired future state yet identified for each criterion.
- **Changes Needed:** Indicate discussed changes or relevant areas for growth.
- **Evidence of Success.** For each item in the action plan, consider what data or artifacts may be available to serve as a baseline and could demonstrate progress in the future.
- **Priority Going Forward:** Priority should be based on relevant criteria. For example:
  - Is this a necessary precursor for later work?
  - Does this naturally build on existing assets?
  - Can this be combined thematically with other action items into a logical bucket of work?
  - Is this high leverage for impact on adult practice or student outcomes?

Once you have ranked your priorities, **choose two to three “high” priority areas of growth.**

- **Owner:** One individual should be the “owner” of each item—that team member does not necessarily have to do the work but agrees to be held accountable for its successful completion. Do your best to distribute responsibility in order to reduce the burden on individuals and promote shared accountability.

*Suggested Action: Rather than assign owners, ask for volunteers of action items. Include partners, students, and supporters as responsible parties, when appropriate.*

## 2. Setting Vision

Once you have completed the Self-Study Analysis, work together to set your pathway’s vision theory of change. Consider starting with #6 to ground you in your pathway’s priorities/values, and in equity-based decision-making.

1. **Vision.** What will the future state look like if you are successful in implementing equitable high-quality pathways? Clarify how the future of pathways will be different from the past.
2. **Top 2–3 Goals.** What are the most critical goals going forward? Use your “priorities for next year” from the Self-Study Analysis and set goals that are “SMARTIE:” strategic, measurable, ambitious, realistic, time-bound, inclusive, and equitable.<sup>1</sup>
3. **Theory of Change.** What are the key actions or strategies that will move your pathway towards your vision to achieve your goals? Why do you think these are the key actions or strategies?
4. **Key Assets and Barriers.** What do you need to grow or develop more fully? What are the existing barriers to achieving your goals? Removing barriers such as inefficient processes and hierarchies provides the freedom necessary to work across silos and generate real impact.
5. **Measures of Success.** How will you measure success and progress? These can include changes in behavior, structures, processes, or specific student data.
6. **Guiding Principles.** What are your guiding principles or core values related to pathways and learning?

## 3. Timeline and Benchmarks

Use our Timeline and Benchmarks tool to design a timeline for your priority action steps. We recommend that you:

- **Set the Timeline Together.** Project your template on a screen, complete it in real time during a meeting, and share the final version with the team.
- **Consider Options.** For any area of growth, there may be several different ways to approach improvements. Be willing to think outside the box and explore creative solutions. Where available and appropriate, collaborate with colleagues from other pathways, and prioritize approaches that pursue equitable opportunities and outcomes for all students.
- **Establish Benchmarks.** For larger action items, break them down into smaller chunks and identify benchmarks for making incremental progress.
- **Monitor Progress.** Establish a process monitoring progress on action items. Show compassion and support for colleagues. Explore ways to remove roadblocks and collaborate in order to complete the action plan in a timely manner. While it is not included in our template, some find it helpful to assign

<sup>1</sup> Additional information about SMARTIE goals can be found here: <https://www.managementcenter.org/resources/smartie-goals-worksheet/>.

green/yellow/red color codes to identify items that are advancing as planned, delayed or presenting challenges, and halted or unachievable.

- **Publish It.** The best way for any individual or group to hold themselves accountable is to share intentions or plans with others. Make your plan publicly accessible to students, parents, site administration, and your advisory board. We recommend that you set up meetings with different audiences (e.g., parents, site administration, and advisory board) to share the action plan. Invite them to ask you about progress and to help hold you accountable.



## MONITORING PROGRESS

**Meeting(s): Multiple, regular**

**Participants: Full team**

**Tools required: Completed Self-Study Tool**

While it is a great achievement to earn Silver or Gold Certification, the most important effort is to engage in regular cycles of assessment, action planning, tracking improvement data, and demonstrating progress. We recommend you repeat this self-study process on regular intervals—at least every year, if not more often. Make adjustments as you move from one domain to another (or repeating improvement efforts within one domain) based on reflection and feedback.