

***ACHIEVING THE DREAM'S
COMMUNITY VIBRANCY
FRAMEWORK AND
PERSPECTIVES ON
COMMUNITY COLLEGES
IN 2025***

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Achieving the Dream



Unlocking Opportunity: The Second Annual New Jersey Community College Opportunity Summit

New Jersey Council of Community Colleges

June 6, 2025

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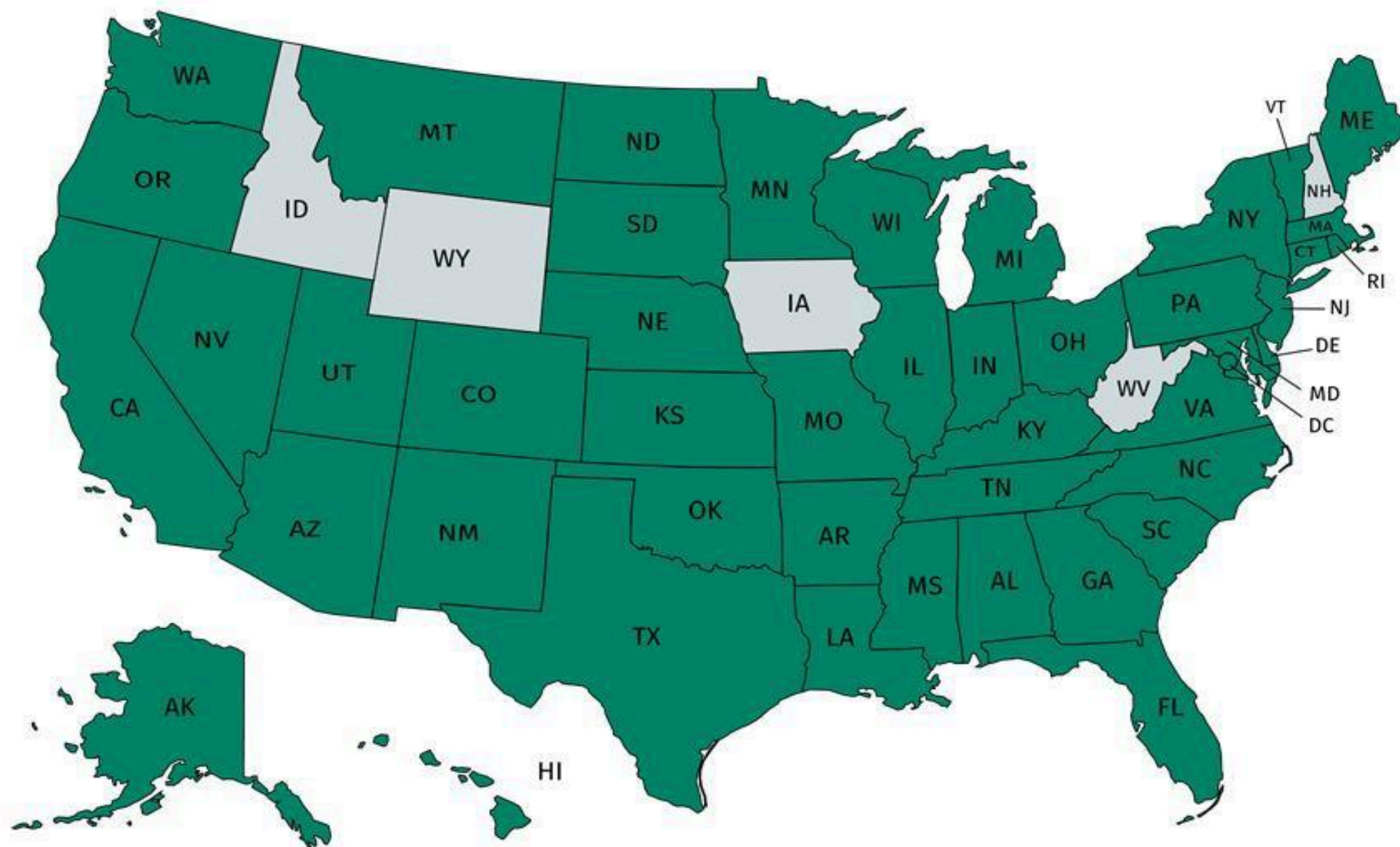
About Achieving the Dream



We believe in a world where every community college is a catalyst for more equitable, economically vibrant communities. Alongside hard working leaders, we're transforming colleges — from how they lead to how they teach — to put students at the center, so that all students can access life-changing learning that propels them into community-changing careers.



ATD's Network



318
Colleges

45
States



ATD Services



Foundations of Transformation

Work intensively with a team of ATD coaches to build foundational capacities for student success.



Coaching

Build upon Foundations of Transformation with structured guidance, ongoing feedback, and collaborative accountability.



Seminars

Exchange ideas with teams from several community colleges in structured series culminating with a tailored action plan.



Assessments

Make informed decisions about opportunities for improvement with our thorough evaluations of institutional performance.



Workshops

Learn specific skills in hands-on, interactive training sessions that dig into foundational strategies and practices.

Agenda



Provide national context for the Community Vibrancy Theory of Change



Introduce the Community Vibrancy Framework



Consider ways to translate the Community Vibrancy Framework into Action



Q&A

National Context for Change

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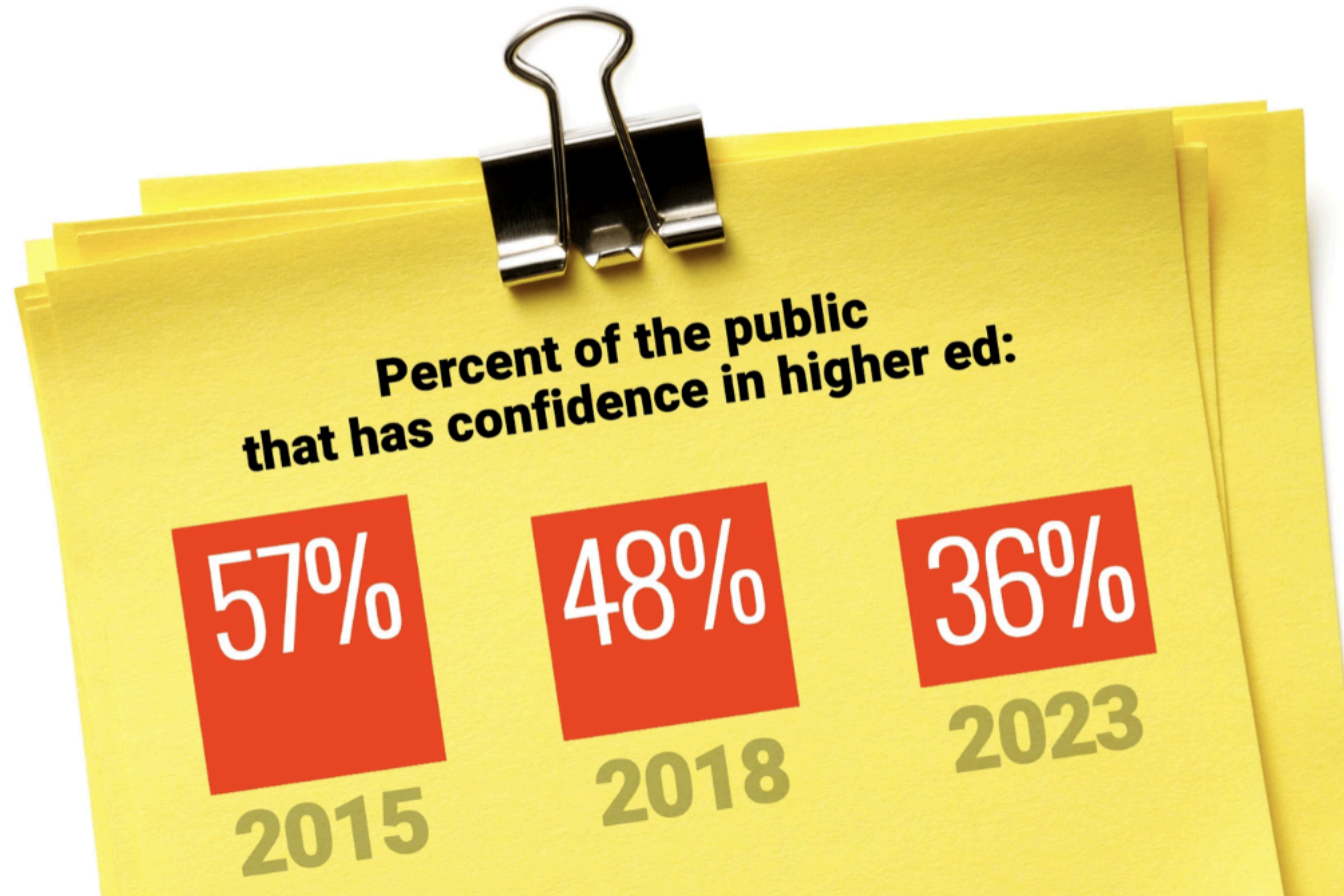
Many Americans Still Not Accessing Postsecondary Education

Though greater numbers of Americans have a college degree than ever before . . .

- Largest group in US is still those whose highest level of attainment is a high school or GED diploma followed by those with some college but no degree.



Public Confidence in Higher Education has Waned

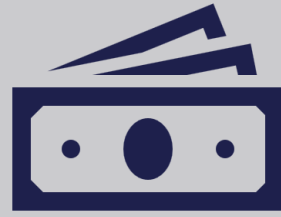


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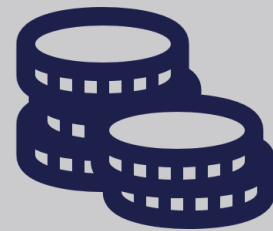
Source: [Gallup Poll](#)



Why Has Public Confidence Diminished?



Cost and Student Loan Debt are Rising



Many Do Not Experience Upward Mobility Post College Completion



It Takes Too Long to Recoup Educational Investments

Data Suggests Some Concerns are Valid

Less than 1 in 3 Associate Degrees...

Awarded by community colleges in 2016/17 produced median earnings greater than \$40K and the same was true for less than 1 in 4 certificates awarded. This is below the 4th income quintile nationally (currently at 42K) which is the minimum income quintile for college graduates to experience economic mobility (CCRC)

Field of Study...

Explains most of the variation in earnings and loan repayment – not student demographics, however, colleges that enroll proportionately more marginalized students tend to offer fewer programs that lead to highest earnings.

Recouping Educational Costs

...

A study by Third Way revealed nearly ¼ of all college programs show graduates failing to earn enough to recoup their net cost of attendance within **20 years** after earning their credential and some programs failed to show any economic premium whatsoever.

Source: Davis Jenkins and John Fink (2021). To Build Back Enrollment, Community Colleges Must Ensure That Their Programs Are Worth Completing, Community College Research Center, Wednesday, 29 September 2021

<https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/easyblog/community-college-enrollment-value.html>

Source: Carnevale, A.P., Garcia, T.L., Ridley, N., Quinn, M.C. (2020). *Overlooked Value of Certificates and Associate Degrees*. Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce. Retrieved from CEW website:

<https://1qyhoq479ufd3yna29x7ubjn-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/CEW-SubBA.pdf>

Source: Which College Programs Give Students the Best Bang for Their Buck, Thirdway. August 13, 2021. Retrieved from website <https://www.thirdway.org/report/which-college-programs-give-students-the-best-bang-for-their-buck>.



There is More Worth Striving For

Today's Commission on Higher Education:

The Postsecondary Value Commission

“If postsecondary education can ensure equitable attainment for students of color and students from low-income backgrounds and increase the number of these students who reap the economic benefits of a postsecondary credential, it will have a tangible payoff for society in terms of . . .

- A stronger economy
- An increased tax base
- A more diverse and prepared workforce across middle and high skill jobs
- A healthier populace
- Less reliance on taxpayer dollars for public assistance programs”

Source: Ma, J. Pender, M., and Welch, M. Education Pays 2019 THE BENEFITS OF HIGHER EDUCATION FOR INDIVIDUALS AND SOCIETY, College Board,
<https://research.collegeboard.org/pdf/education-pays-2019-full-report.pdf>

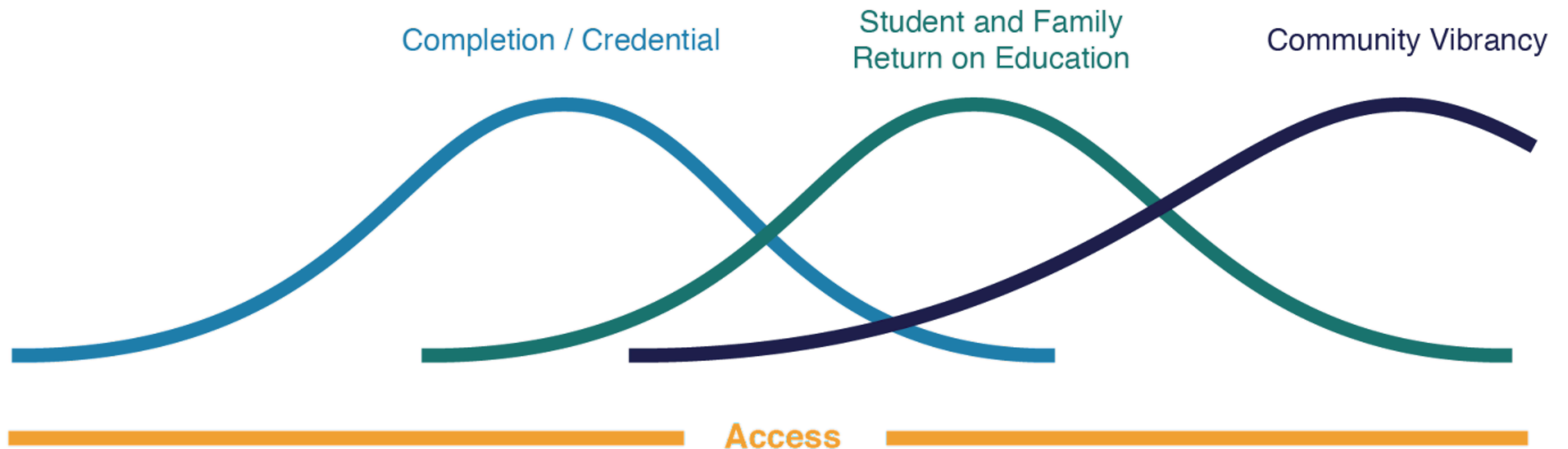


The Community Vibrancy Framework

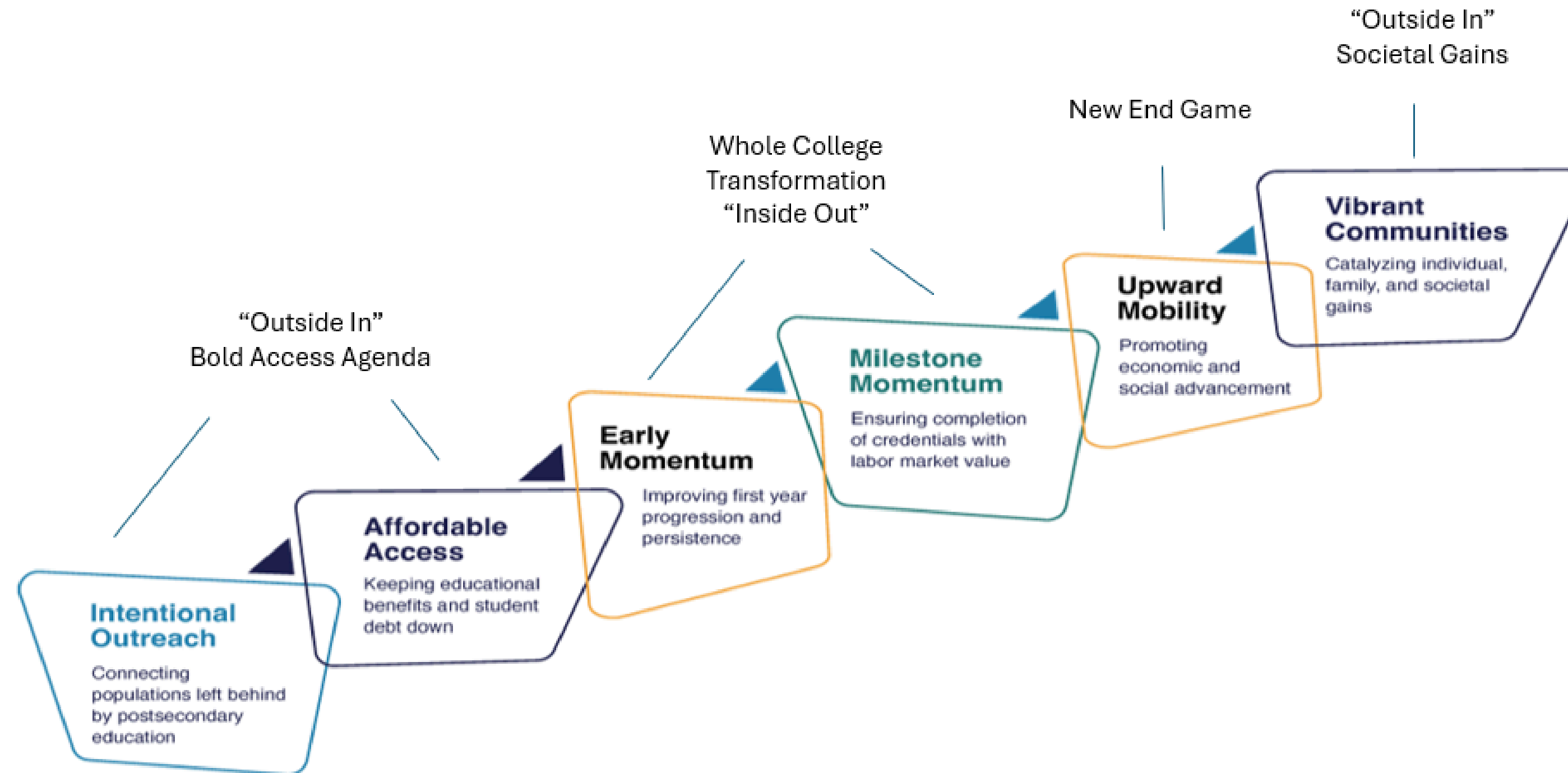
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The Evolving Student Success Agenda



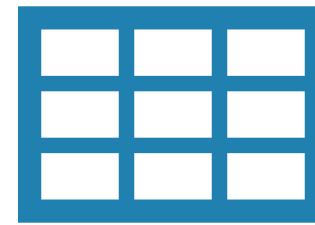
A New Transformational Framework



Accompanied by a Suite of Resource Materials



5 Module Curriculum



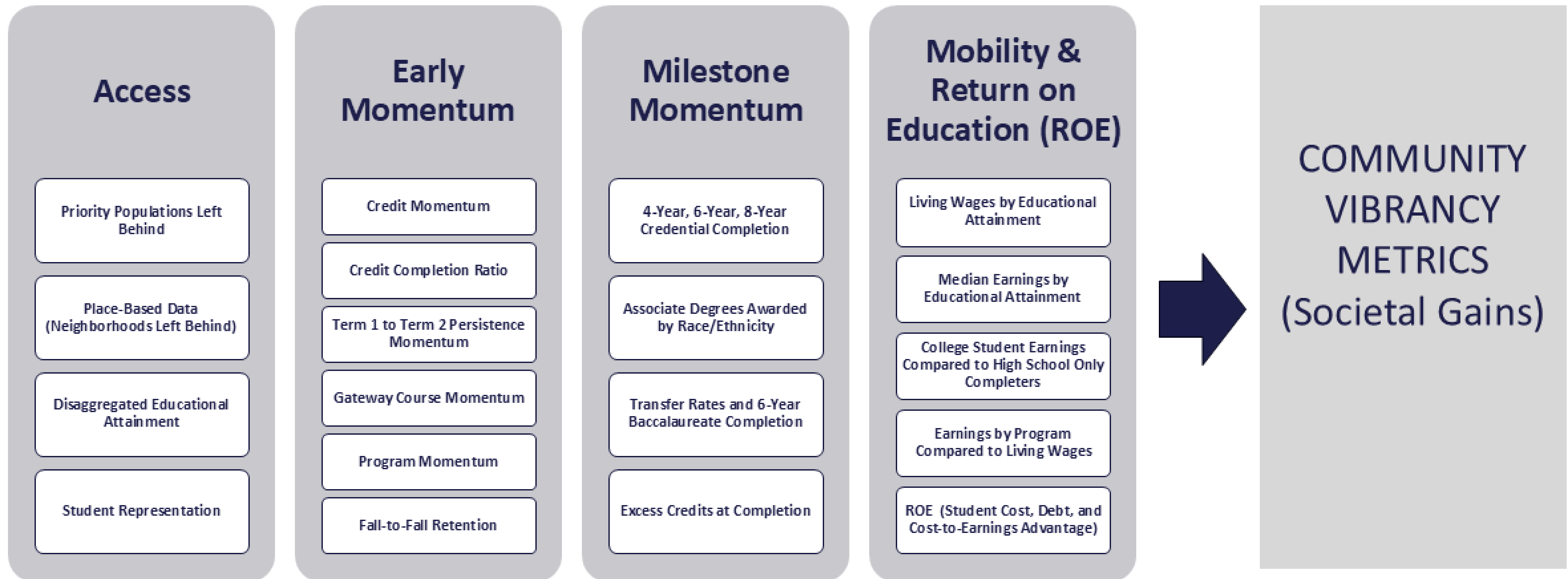
**Customized Data
Workbook**



**Data Workbook User
Guide**

Recommended use in tandem with ATD coaching

Incorporating a New Metrics Framework



Community Vibrancy in Action

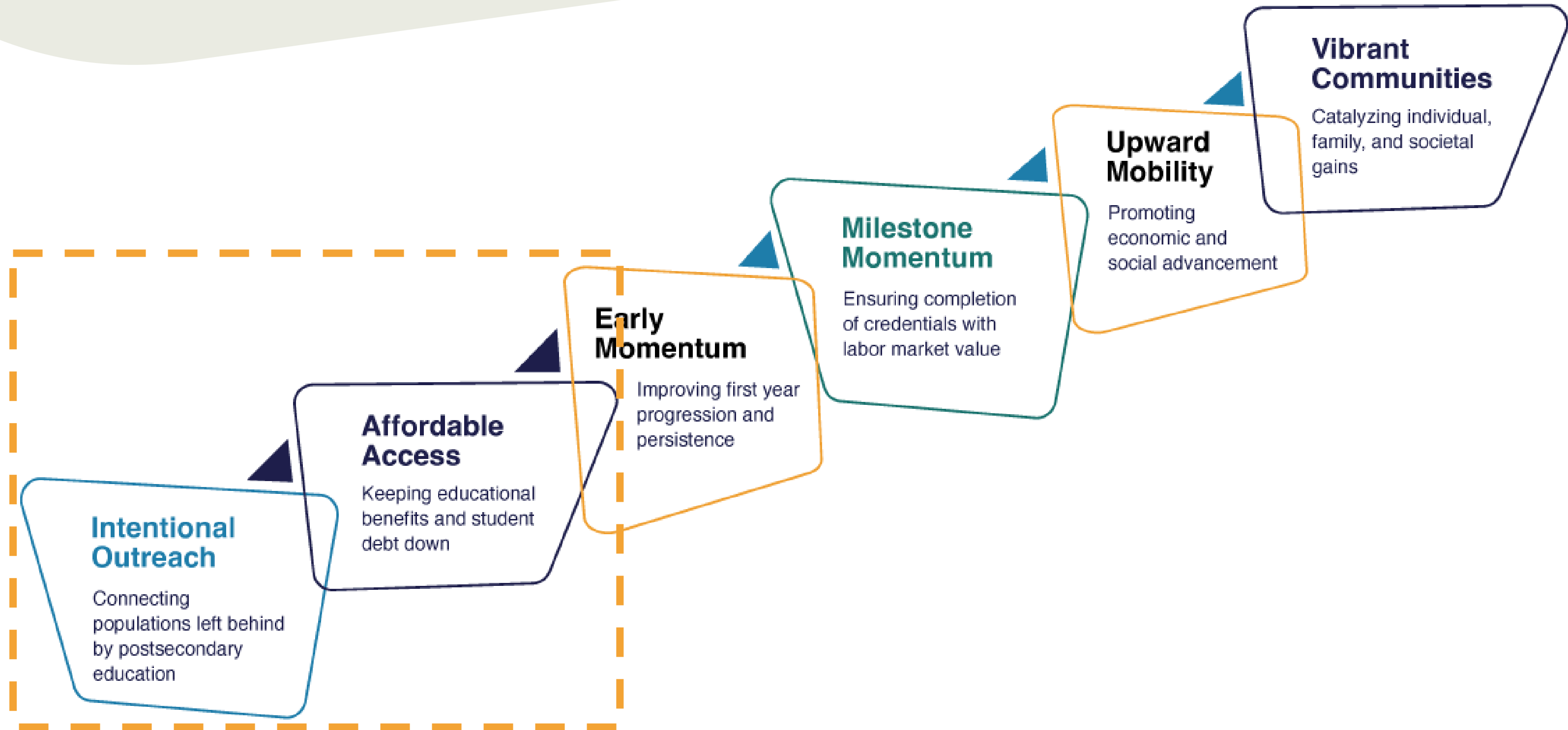
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15 Inaugural Colleges



Intentional Outreach & Affordable Access



Outside-In Insights

- Strengthens the value proposition/helps change the narrative
- Helps colleges see local opportunity in new ways (using a data-informed approach)
- Leverages localness including place-based planning and execution
- Encourages colleges to reimagine and deepen community partnerships and outreach



Changing the Narrative



"At a time when higher education is becoming politicized and growing numbers of people no longer believe in its value, Community Vibrancy sends a powerful message. Simply put, no one can argue with good paying jobs, family-sustaining wages, and vibrant communities"

Greg Hodges, President



"The community vibrancy work is the next phase of the student success movement, answering the question – success to do what? Ultimately what we want is for enough folks in a community to have economic and social mobility so we are not just lifting up a few, but hopefully we are lifting up the entire community"

Chris Whaley, President



Seeing Local Opportunity in New Ways

Emphasizes Populations left behind by Postsecondary Education

- Adults with some college, no degree
- BILPOC
- Households living below the federal poverty threshold
- Low wage households experiencing significant financial hardship (ALICE)
- Parenting Students
- People experiencing homelessness
- People living in subsidized public housing
- Immigrants and refugees
- Migrant workers
- Justice impacted populations
- Single parents
- Substance recovery populations
- Youth aging out of the foster care system
- Youth not in school nor working (AKA “opportunity” youth)

“We can no longer wait for these people to choose us. We must go to them!”

Dr. Karen A. Stout



Leveraging Population & Place Based Approaches



JUSTICE-IMPACTED AS A PRIORITY POPULATION

Data inquiry revealed that nearly 4% of the population served by North Central State College were impacted by the Justice System



ALICE AS A PRIORITY POPULATION

Pierce College District identified the Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed population as a priority. Given the size of this population, the District **targeted zip codes** that have high percentages of families meeting the ALICE criteria



Reimagining Community Partnerships & Outreach

Influencers

Education/Training
Partners

CBO/Grass Roots
Access Partners

CBO Basic Needs
Partners

Funding Partners
(Retail Round Up;
Philanthropic support,
etc.)

Measurement Partners
(Regional Federal
Reserve Board,
Universities)

Employers (Close
proximity to priority
neighborhoods; Willing
to hire priority
populations)

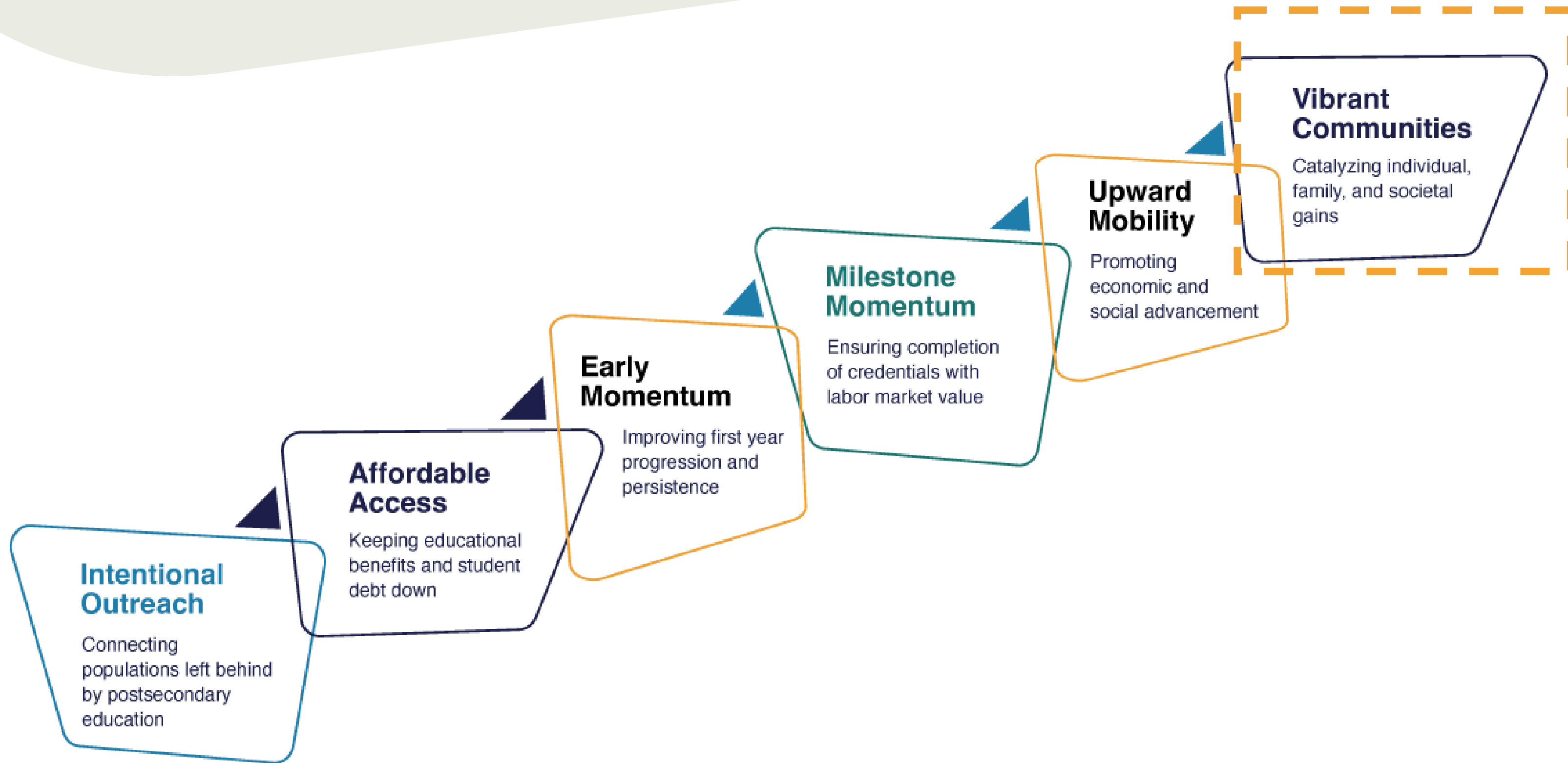
Western Technical
College

"Mapping out relationships with each of the college's community partners can identify strengths but also plays another important role – making sure that partnerships are not simply transactional or solely focused on referring students for supports"

Roger Stanford, President,

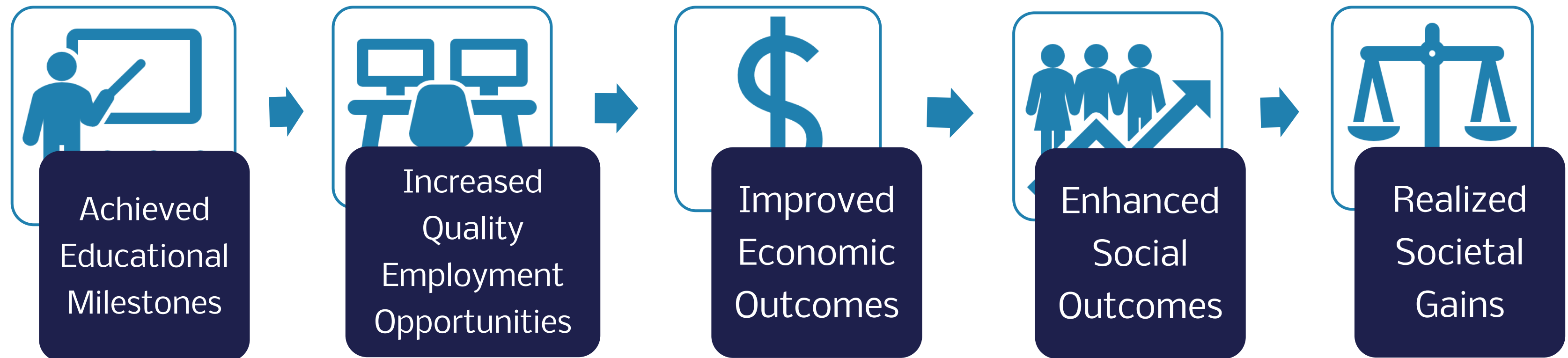


Starting with the End in Mind: Community Vibrancy Metrics



Community Vibrancy Metric Categories

COMMUNITY VIBRANCY METRICS

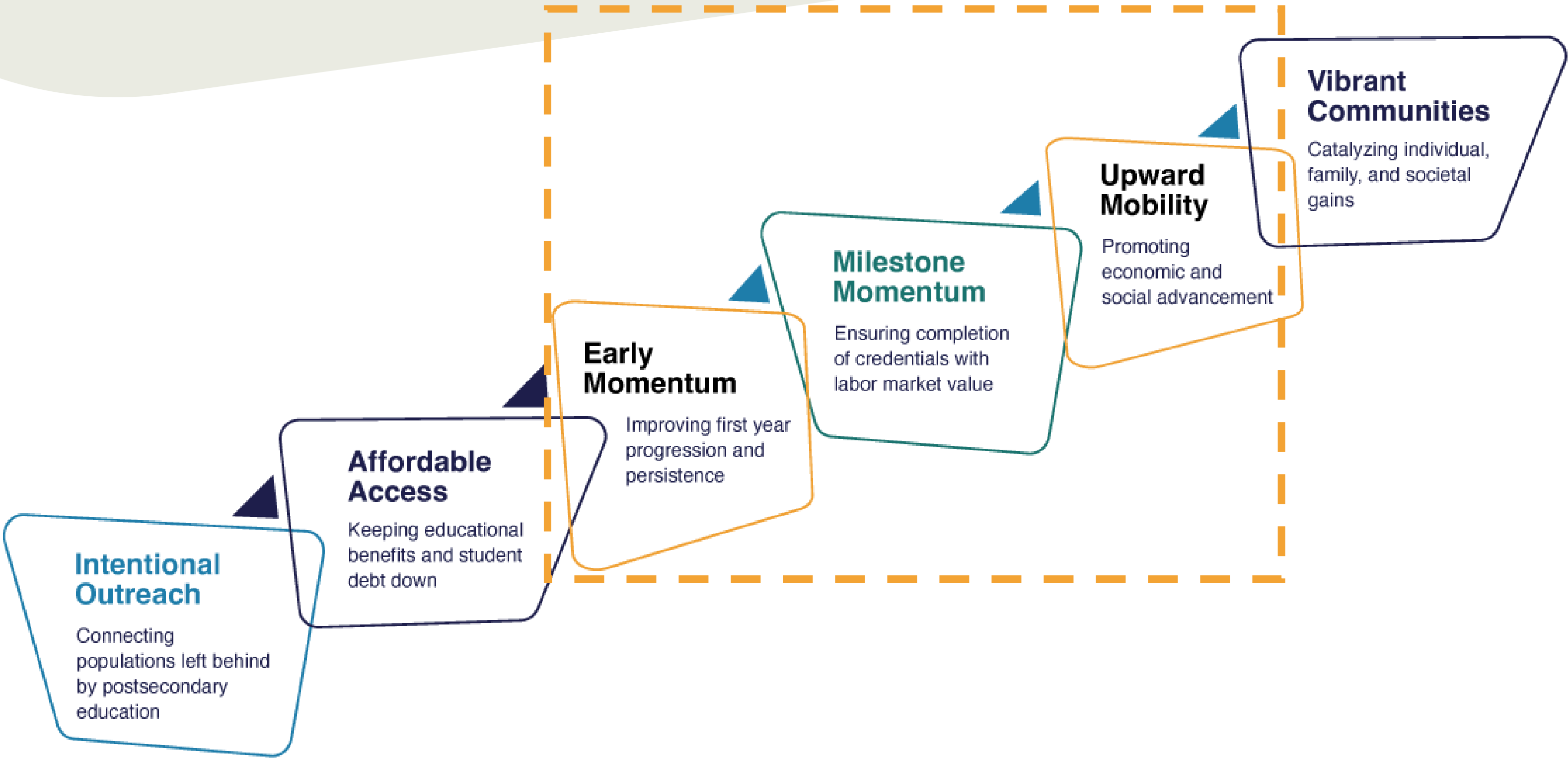


An Example

Priority Population or Neighborhood	Intended Outcomes			
	Educational Milestones	Employment Outcomes	Economic and/or Social Outcomes	Long-term Societal Gains
Example: Opportunity Youth (16–24-year-olds not in school nor working)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased high school completion or equivalency - Reduction in average student share of cost to attend college - Increased college enrollment and completion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stronger labor force participation - Improved career trajectory - Faster recoupment of educational investment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lower unemployment (18–24-year-olds) - Higher per capita income for this population - Higher voting rates (18–24-year-olds) - Increased autonomy and agency - Greater civic engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Less reliance on public assistance among young adults - Lower levels of crime/incarceration among young adults - More representative civic engagement



Momentum & Mobility



Elevating Program Relevancy to Advance Mobility



"Students need to know the ROE of their education and career paths, and how to get the most out of the educational experience. A comprehensive focus on careers that pay family-sustaining wages helps send a message that the college's programs are tied to thriving careers . . . and that the college is invested in each student's success beyond completion."

Anita Hanson, President



"Our college is redoubling its efforts to create credentials of value. We needed to rebrand and explain what this means for the community, then make a concerted effort to explain that to sustain this for our students, we need to braid things together to create credentials of value"

Jeremy McMillen, President



Additional Inside-Out Insights



Reinforces whole college
transformation



Informs strategy



Causes self reflection for
college capacity building
and restructuring



Informing Strategic Plans & SEM



"We were determining the success of the individual in college and after college but neglected the third leg of the stool – the cumulative impact of the college's work in the community"

JB Buxton, President



"If we are not paying attention to our communities and their well-being, we're missing the point. We must reclaim the notion that education is a public good"

Julie White, Chancellor



"Community vibrancy will lead our strategic plan. I think it will speak to our communities and our employers. Doing this will help take us to the next level"

Roger Stanford , President



"Institutions need to plan in new ways for a sustainable future. We are looking at the literature and using research, but I hope we won't have to wait another 50 years to build the leadership and capacity, community connections, and educational delivery models that we need"

Leander McDonald, President



Causing Self-Reflection (Capacity Building, Restructuring Needs, & Realistic Role for Each College)



Elgin College is determining the extent to which current community-serving programs are having the desired impact, considering the value of a cabinet-level post and office focused on community relations and/or community vibrancy, upgrading tools and staff capacity including introducing a CRM and non-marketing outreach programs, and building data-literacy skills of staff.



“The Framework helped the college recognize that rather than take on the role of a “backbone institution” or the lead convenor of other organizations, that building more of a collective approach with community partners based on community needs was a better fit for the college”

Avis Proctor, President



Q&A

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Community Vibrancy Resources & Opportunities

QR Code for Links to Inaugural Cohort Briefs



Strengthening Community Vibrancy Seminar

Helping colleges expand access to populations left behind, strengthen early momentum and credential completion, establish greater economic and social mobility for their students, and connect these gains with stronger and more vibrant communities.

- **October 2025 – April 2026**
- Supporting college teams to move their student success work beyond completion and connect institutional efforts with community impact.
- 5 Content Modules Delivered by ATD Coaches
- Exchange of Ideas with other College Teams
- Culminating in a Tailored Action Plan for Your College

Upcoming Events



2025 Virtual Events

Building a Strategic Enrollment Management Plan that Opens
Doors and Increases Student Outcomes | May 28

<https://achievingthedream.org/events/>



2025 In-Person Events

K-College Institute: Strengthening Pathways Through
Dual Enrollment | July 23-25

Data & Analytics Summit | September 17-19

<https://achievingthedream.org/events/>



Upcoming DREAMs



DREAM 2026 | MARCH 2-5

PORTLAND, OR

