

# Discover Your Future

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# ECMC Group helps students succeed— it's our mission.

ECMC Group is a nonprofit corporation focused on helping students succeed. Headquartered in Minneapolis, ECMC Group and its family of companies provide financial tools and services, as well as funding for innovative programs to help students achieve their academic and professional goals.

## About ECMC Group Companies

### ECMC

ECMC was created by the U.S. Department of Education as a public-private partnership designed to provide administration support for the Department's federal financial aid portfolio. ECMC also provides students, families and organizations with free resources to help them plan and pay for postsecondary education which include scholarships, technical assistance, financial literacy education and mentorship.

### ECMC Foundation

ECMC Foundation's mission is to improve higher education for career success among underserved populations through evidence-based innovation. The Foundation focuses on removing barriers to postsecondary completion; building the capacity of organizations, institutions and systems; and transforming the postsecondary ecosystem using strategic grantmaking and program-related investments, to support both nonprofit and for-profit ventures.

### Education Impact Fund

The Education Impact Fund accelerates the transformation of America's postsecondary and workforce ecosystem by investing in innovative, early-stage companies and collaborating with institutions, employers and communities toward a shared vision of improving education access and outcomes for underserved learners.

# Where We Started



# The Vision

Our vision was to engage the full education and workforce ecosystem to close **workforce opportunity gaps** that continue to persist in the Minneapolis-Saint Paul metro area with a particular focus on **young adults (16-24) from under-resourced communities**.

## Identified Problems

- Our region faces a talent/demand crisis with many unemployed, under-employed or non-participating individuals from coming from under-resourced communities
- Efforts to address the talent pipeline are often isolated and siloed
- Disparities in education, employment, and wealth persist for young adults coming from under-resourced communities

## Young Adult Centered

Central to this work is the perspective and experience of young adults from under-resourced communities. Through ongoing engagement, they guide our thinking, direction, and solutions. We believe this is a critical differentiator of our work in this space.

## Accessible For All Stakeholders

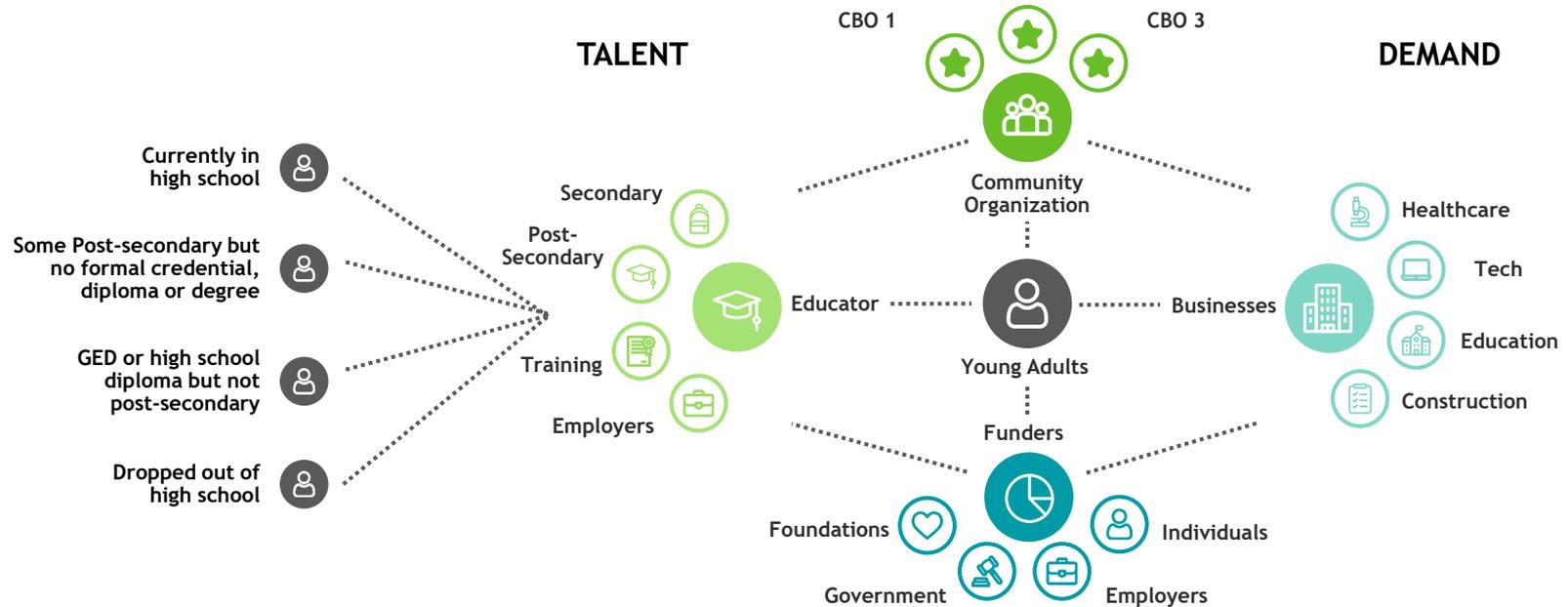
Representatives from the full ecosystem co-created opportunity areas and solutions within those opportunity areas. We know professionals in education, non-profits, businesses, governments, and funding organizations have unique and valuable perspectives on how to position young adults for success.

## Proactive and Value-Adding

Our work seeks not to recreate what already exists, but to further the learnings and efforts already underway. We know this important work has been approached from many different angles, and we hope to bring these angles together to increase collective impact to drive systemic change.

# The Future State Ecosystem

The ecosystem is orbiting the young adults to support them to get to the “finish line—a strong career”



# Two Distinct Concepts Designed by Young Adults

## Discover Your Future (DYF)

### What Is It?

A framework to empower a workforce that drives Minnesota's future by creating a system of support for personal learning plan (PLP) requirements, a centralized data system, and an intentional coordination of stakeholders across the ecosystem for student career exploration and experience.

### How Is It Different?

- Offers a consistent career exploration option for all students.
- Provides a system of support to build capacity for the PLP for students.
- Creates a localized path to relevant credentials of value for every student.

## Co-Lab

### What Is It?

A centrally located resource and guidance hub that houses dozens of ecosystem organizations for young adults to access the resources they need to support their mental/physical health, financial wellness, education aspirations, and career growth.

### How Is It Different?

- Meets young adults where they're at, bringing a holistic suite of pre-existing programs and services to a centrally-located physical hub where young adults feel a sense of ownership, safety, and belonging
- Initial design fostered community building AND drove education/career outcomes

# What We Learned

Discover Your Future



# The Case For: Discover Your Future

## Needs Addressed

As part of early discovery, students expressed a desire for:

- A way to understand more career paths
- Bringing their families along in the decision-making process
- Access to meaningful mentorships and professional networks

As a state requirement, PLPs have potential to address the above. But we've learned that changes are needed to ensure every student benefits.

- Schools often need more capacity and resources to fully implement the PLP
- When students transfer schools, the PLP doesn't move with them
- Tracking state-level outcomes is limited
- Consistent interaction with employers for scalability across districts
- Sharing of ideas, programs and concepts across MN districts

## The Idea

A comprehensive and consistent **statewide** career exploration framework that improves student outcomes in high school and beyond, builds the future economy of Minnesota, and engages local community **strengths to build the future workforce.**

## Key Features

- Comprehensive career exploration options for each student.
- A system of support to build capacity for PLP implementation.
- A localized path to relevant credentials of value for every student
- A centralized data system to track state-level outcomes
- Create a best-practice repository for schools
- A connected education and workforce system to build a thriving economy for the state

# Re-engaging Young Adults Is Essential for Our Economy

55%

Of 9th graders report feeling in control of their lives and future

*2022 Minnesota Student Survey*

27,800

Young people ages 16 to 24 in the Twin Cities (8.4%) were disconnected from school and work in 2022

*Measure of America, Youth Disconnection in America Report, 2024*

\$350M

Annual cost to Minnesota taxpayers from disconnected youth statewide

*Measure of America, Youth Disconnection in America Report, 2024*

\$17,500

The replacement cost for a recent college hire in Minnesota earning a median salary of \$43,867

*Gallup Workforce, 2024; Minnesota Office of Higher Education College Graduate Outcomes, 2024*

# Insights Gained from Harris Poll

## Minnesota Employers & Young Adults in the Workplace

- On preparedness, only 4 out of 10 employers say young adults are “very prepared” for entry level roles in their organization.
- 71% of employers say that reliability stands out as the biggest soft-skill gap and the most urgent issue to fix.
- 93% of employers agree that work-based learning helps organizations identify and develop long-term talent.
- 93% agree that involving students in real workplaces is key to empowering the future workforce, however many employers face key barriers which include: lack of student awareness of the program, limited staff capacity, coordination with schools and program costs.
- 94% say that career readiness programs are important to help high schoolers have direction before they start to incur debt in postsecondary education.
- 92% say that they need to do a better job helping high school students understand career options before they enter postsecondary education or the workforce.

## Key Takeaways + Recommendations from Multi-state Research

<b>Define Flexible Career Pathways</b>	Create clear career pathways with flexibility for individual interests and needs. Offer various career exploration options, including work-based learning, internships, and digital exploration.
<b>Addressing Access Challenges</b>	Utilize accessible technology consistently to overcome barriers for diverse students and rural communities. Ensure equal access to digital resources and tools for career exploration.
<b>Comprehensive Data + Accountability Systems</b>	Partner with education and workforce agencies to develop robust data systems tracking program effectiveness, student outcomes, and workforce alignment. Use data to inform program improvement and address student achievement gaps.
<b>Attract + Retain Qualified CTE Counselors</b>	Having career coaches or WBL coordinators reduces stress on school budgets and teachers. Offer professional development opportunities and incentives such as scholarships, loan forgiveness, or salary supplements.
<b>Student Engagement + Leadership</b>	Foster student-led communities and empower students as leaders with agency in their career development.
<b>Partnerships + Support</b>	Leverage industry and community partnerships for administrative support, career coaching, and work-based learning coordination.
<b>Early Exploration</b>	Career exploration from grades 9-12 is standard, with earlier exploration skewing toward dreaming and imagining possibilities and less toward career-connected learning. Families are most often engaged at younger ages as well.

# The Concept

A statewide comprehensive career exploration framework that improves student outcomes and provides high schools with the resources they need, supported by a centralized data system.

Discover Your Future relies on many partners to achieve consistency in programming for career exploration across the state of Minnesota.

Over time, Discover Your Future will build on what is working well based on data, and adapt to the current needs of the community

## A Co-created Experience

Envisioned by young adults, co-created alongside young adults and a professional advisory group including educators, and built for scalability across the full state of Minnesota.

## Centered On Student Experience

The student experience drives decision-making. Discover Your Future seeks to evolve and adapt as student outcomes become clear. Young Adults participated in the creation and design of the identity and student experience.

## Engaged Partners

Many important partners are necessary to deliver career exploration programming for high school students. Community members provide and receive value in their unique ways as part of Discover Your Future. We know schools cannot do this alone, and students receive greater educational value when other community members are involved.

## Consistency

Striving not to recreate what already exists, Discover Your Future seeks to build on what is working well across the state to provide each student with meaningful and robust opportunities to explore career pathways. We want to use the strengths we already have and augment gaps. In addition, we imagine a centralized data system to support the consistent application of best practices.

# Category Breakdown

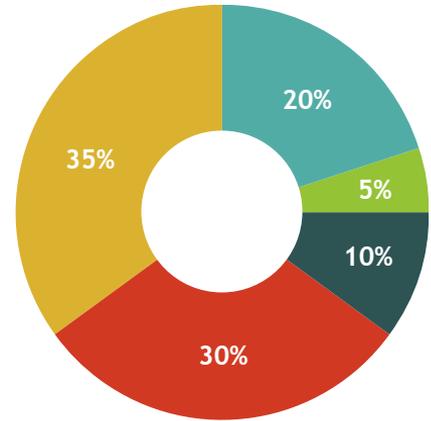
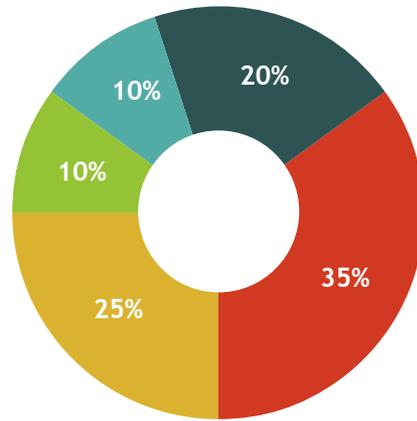
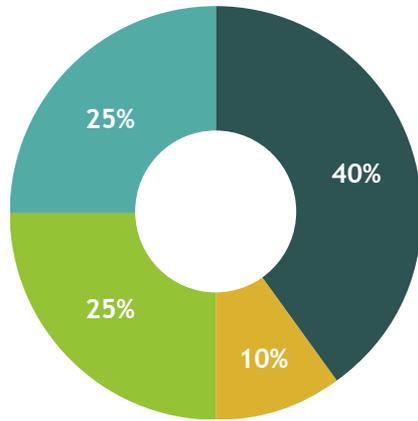
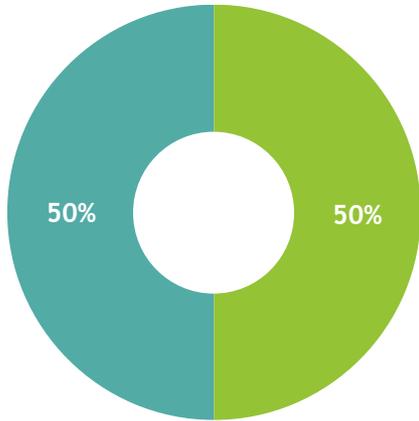
As students progress through their high school career, their area of focus shifts. They move from exploring multiple pathways to selecting a pathway and planning for it, to making decisions to help them achieve their goals within a pathway.

Exploration

Exposure

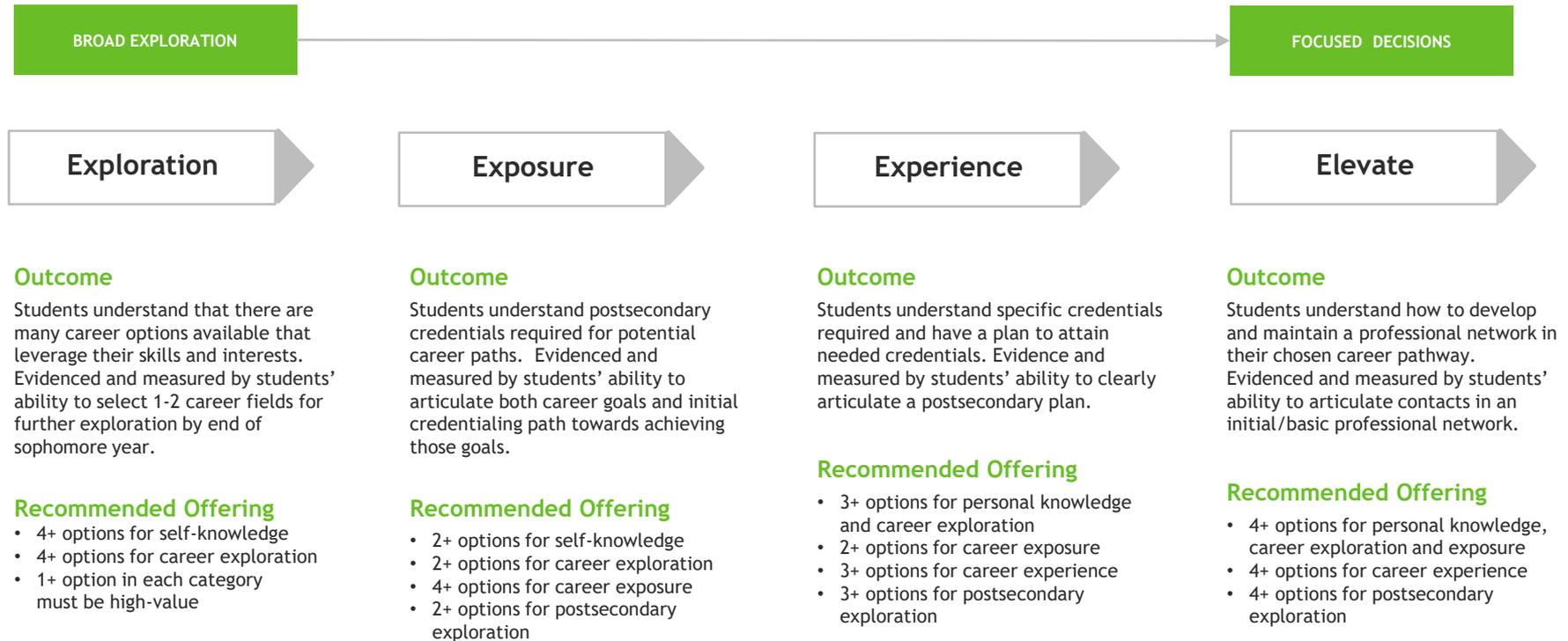
Experience

Elevate



- Personal Knowledge
- Career Exploration
- Career Exposure
- Career Experience
- Postsecondary Exploration

# Framework Overview



# The Bottom Line

## Current State

An opportunity to address big challenges in career pathway planning

- High absenteeism
- High postsecondary attainment gaps
- Large workforce gaps
- Constraints around funding mechanisms lead to inefficiencies across partners + start-up funding cliffs
- Students miss vital opportunities to explore potential careers and postsecondary pathways

## Future State

An aligned and coordinated system that builds capacity to provide what students need

- Students and their support systems experience the wealth of resources this state has to offer through local and regional partnerships
- Schools get access to necessary resources to implement the PLPs in way that maximizes flexibility and while ensuring every student has access to meaningful pathway planning
- Employers gain connections to their communities and build the workforce of the future

## Value to Stakeholders

### 8% wage growth

Students who focused on at least a sixth of their high school credits on career pathways experienced 8% higher wages seven years after graduation.

### 14% more regional workforce

Students who participate in career pathways are 14% more likely to work in the region where they attended high school 5 years after graduation.

### \$9.4B contributions

Estimated economic contributions of students who graduate from MN public colleges/universities and live and work in the state of Minnesota after high school.

### 12% higher graduation rates

Students who participate in career education during high school have a graduation rate of 95%, 12% higher than the current state average.

### \$12.77 return for every \$1 invested

Discover Your Future is a coordinated, yet complex, system for partners across the state. Coordinated partner engagement and a centralized data system increase the impact for all stakeholders. Each partner has something to offer and benefits to receive. Ultimately, the state of Minnesota experiences a thriving economy that works well for each of its residents.

# Achieve Twin Cities

Discover Your Future Pilot



INTEGRITY



EXCELLENCE



SERVICE



TEAMWORK



WELLNESS



Our vision is that all young people have full and equitable access to postsecondary education and career opportunities, creating a more just and vibrant community.



# The Model: Three Interconnected Strategies

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**Student-centered postsecondary planning support** so every student can imagine, plan and pursue a future that fits their goals.

**Career experiences and internship opportunities** for students to explore their career interests and build work readiness skills.

**A robust network of employers and volunteers** to facilitate career connections and nurture our future talent.

## Broad Impact

**15,500+** students are supported through our services each year, and **8,500** participate directly in events and advising. **93%** of seniors engage with Achieve programming.

With our support:

- Confidence in future planning rises **21 percentage points** during senior year.
- **93%** of seniors graduate with a documented plan for their future.
- Lower-income students and students of color who work with Achieve enroll in college at over **50% higher rates** than those who do not.
- FAFSA completion reached **60%** in Minneapolis and Saint Paul, compared with 47% statewide.
- Since 2021, the number of students selecting high quality non-college pathways has **nearly doubled**.



# Discover Your Future

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Alignment of career exploration and experience efforts across the district.

Building systems and infrastructure to centrally support employer engagement needs.

Creating higher quality and more consistent career experiences for students across high school years.

# Opportunities

- **Earlier and more consistent career exposure**, especially in 9th and 10th grade, so students can make informed choices sooner.
- Stronger employer engagement, including employers willing to create and support **real work opportunities for young people**, including internships and work-based learning in high-demand fields.
- **Better integration of district career offerings** and outside providers, ensuring that students experience seamless support as they explore their interests.
- Resources and accountability that would support districts in prioritizing **a robust and coherent approach to career and college readiness**.

