

# Pathways of Social Impact

Higher Education  
for the Public Good

EDITED BY SEAN P. CROSSLAND  
WITH ANNABEL WONG  
AND THOMAS SCHNAUBELT



**Campus Compact**

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS  
Distributed by Stylus Publishing, LCC.

COPYRIGHT © 2025 BY CAMPUS COMPACT

Published by Campus Compact  
89 South Street, Suite 103  
Boston, MA 02111

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying, recording, and information storage and retrieval, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication-Data  
[to come]

13-digit ISBN: 978-1-945459-34-4 (cloth)  
13-digit ISBN: 978-1-945459-33-7 (paperback)  
13-digit ISBN: 978-1-945459-35-1 (library networkable e-edition)  
13-digit ISBN: 978-1-945459-36-8 (consumer e-edition)

Printed in the United States of America

All first editions printed on acid free paper  
that meets the American National Standards Institute  
Z39-48 Standard.

**Bulk Purchases**

Quantity discounts are available for use in workshops  
and for staff development.

Call 1-800-232-0223

First Edition, 2025

# INTRODUCTION

## Pathways Framework and Tool

*Thomas Schnaubelt, Sean P. Crossland, and Annabel Wong*



Developed through iterative refinement over several years, the Pathways of Public Service and Civic Engagement (“pathways”) offer a coherent framework for understanding how different but interconnected human actions and endeavors contribute to community capacity building and social change. By placing emphasis on a spectrum of strategies for addressing public challenges, the framework helps practitioners and students identify relevant academic disciplines to draw from, guiding informed action and the cocreation of knowledge and resources aimed at community impact.

It is crucial to recognize that the pathways are not rigidly defined categories but rather serve as a heuristic tool for examining how various approaches to social change intersect and diverge. They are explicitly designed to be intersectional, with flexible boundaries that acknowledge the complex root causes impacting local, national, and global communities.

The pathways are applicable to a range of professional roles in the public and private sectors. Furthermore, individuals whose career interests or roles closely align with a specific pathway can amplify their effectiveness as agents of social change by integrating insights drawn from other pathways. This underscores the notion that individuals can engage with each pathway regardless of their field, position, or status as a student

or practitioner. Through shared language and tactics, the pathways emphasize a commitment to the common good.

Contributions in this volume build upon previous scholarship delineating pathways to careers as change agents. The community and civic engagement field often lacks common language and practices, making it difficult to meaningfully benchmark across institutions, and to conduct robust, cross-institution research or evaluation. We believe that the Pathways framework offers a valuable heuristic that can facilitate alignment and collaboration within the field and pave the way for more rigorous research.

## Genesis and Evolution

The Pathways framework has a lineage that can be traced back to Minnesota Campus Compact's *Social Change Wheel*, BreakAway's *Active Citizen Continuum*, Joseph Kahne and Joel Westheimer's work on "What Kinds of Citizens?," and even the mantra "Change, not Charity." While various civic learning frameworks, including those mentioned, have played a role in shaping the pathways and advancing our field, none have gained widespread adoption. The use of the Pathways framework by numerous postsecondary institutions, schools, and programs, without external incentives, speaks to its resonance within the field. While the Pathways framework is built upon past efforts, its distinctive evolution has been shaped by thoughtful collaboration. In this section we will outline, to the best of our ability, the genesis and evolution of the Pathways framework and accompanying survey.

The pathways were first conceived as part of the development of a 5-year strategic plan for the Haas Center for Public Service at Stanford University. Around 2010, near the beginning of his tenure as the executive director of the Haas Center,<sup>1</sup> Tom Schnaubelt recognized some recurring patterns in his interactions with students. Two specific student examples—perhaps archetypes—illustrate a portion of the original motivation for the development of the Pathways framework (*Note: The interactions were real, but the names are fictional*).

*Elaine the Eager Innovator:* Many Stanford students arrive at the school knowing full well that the world is rapidly changing and faces monumental challenges. They bring with them optimism and eagerness to make positive change. During Admit Weekend, Elaine attended the Haas

Center's Open House and asked, "What social justice issue *isn't* being addressed at Stanford?" As the conversation progressed, it became clear that although Elaine had been involved in a wide array of community service initiatives as a high school student, she had not fully defined her own interests and passions. She simply wanted to *start* something.

*Andy the Angular:* Andy was a participant in a Design for America pitch session. Like Elaine, Andy had been encouraged to engage in social impact and public service projects by both his parents and educators during middle and high school. In fact, he and his family had already created a social venture through which he was selling bottled water domestically and donating all the proceeds to help provide access to clean water in underdeveloped communities in Africa.

As Andy described their venture, he explained that they had intentionally avoided structuring it as a nonprofit because they didn't "want to be beholden to donors" and that "nonprofits couldn't advertise or market products or services." Three things became obvious in the rest of the conversation with Andy. First, he had an unwavering devotion to the concept of social entrepreneurship. Second, his understanding of social entrepreneurship was at best limited, and at worst, highly misconstrued. Finally, he had been led to believe that other forms of engagement were inherently less optimal, sometimes even "bad." Andy had come to Stanford, as many students do, with a preconceived (and somewhat ill-formed) notion about a particular form of public service: in his case, social enterprises as the most effective mechanism for service and nonprofit organizations as inefficient. It is worth noting that while Andy's focus was on social entrepreneurship ("social-e"), this pattern also emerged in other areas, perhaps with the same frequency among students whose primary interest was in activism or policy. In other words, this phenomenon was not restricted to students interested in social-e.

Tom's observations about these interactions resonated with colleagues at the Haas Center and among peers at other postsecondary institutions. These trends were not exclusive to the students he was interacting with, nor were they isolated to Stanford University; they showed up among college and university students in many different contexts.

Another concerning pattern extends beyond students and pertains to a more widespread misunderstanding within the field of higher education community engagement. We use a dizzying array of terms to describe our work: service-learning, public service, civic engagement, social impact, social change, social justice, public scholarship, community-engaged [you fill

in the blank], and so forth. Yet, irrespective of the language used locally, there often arises a need to explain how the focus of our work is different from mere volunteering, or some other misunderstanding stemming from assumptions. At the Haas Center for Public Service, the assumptions range from assuming that “public service” is synonymous with “government service, to thinking the center is the place that one should call when locked out of one’s car (“public safety”), to believing it is where one makes a charitable donation, and, in fact students sometimes leave unwanted belongings at the doorstep as they move out of their dorm.

Each of these concerning patterns served as motivation to construct a framework that would allow us to both describe our work more accurately and complicate and deepen students’ understanding of social change. In addition, we wanted to do it without implying or suggesting an established canon or hierarchy that positions some forms of social change as inherently better than others. While we may individually believe that some are better than others, there is no empirical or ethical consensus around this point.

The first iteration of the pathways emerged through strategic planning conversations with Haas Center staff and stakeholders. The center’s 2010–2015 strategic plan, entitled *Linking Community and Student Development*, initially included the following five pathways for public service: Activism, Community-Engaged Learning and Research, Direct Service, Philanthropy, and Policy/Politics. Shortly thereafter, Social Entrepreneurship<sup>2</sup> was added as a sixth pathway.

Collaborations with other postsecondary institutions to refine the Pathways framework began around 2014. Tom Schnaubelt along with Kristy Lobo, a program director at the Haas Center who oversaw the Public Service Leadership Program, reached out to colleagues at University of California-Berkeley’s Public Service Center and St. Mary’s College of California’s Catholic Institute for Lasallian Social Action to form a group with the intention of developing a shared language that might assist us in advising students. An underlying motive was to consider whether we might find potential differences in predispositions among students at our three institutions. Our group’s work together generated some changes to the pathways language: Activism became Community Organizing and Activism, Policy/Politics became Policy and Governance, and Social Entrepreneurship became Social Entrepreneurship and Corporate Social Responsibility.<sup>3</sup>

Kristy Lobo developed an initial self-assessment survey tool that provided students an opportunity to reflect upon their experiences, interests,

and predisposition toward each of the pathways. The initial working group then began to explore the development of a sophisticated psychometric tool similar to StrengthsQuest using the framework, but faced challenges in developing it without making the survey too long to implement practically. Instead, a brief self-assessment instrument was developed using the Qualtrics platform that included a graphic output that aptly became known as the “spider web” for its six prongs and interconnecting lines. The self-assessment instrument was piloted in 2014–2015 with several programs at Stanford University and St. Mary’s College of California, and the initial analysis yielded interesting results. See Chapter 16, “Pathways Data: An Overview,” for survey examples, results, and analysis over the years.

Between 2014 and 2016, a number of student workshops were piloted, deploying the initial survey instrument as an advising tool and exploring the language used by archetype student organizations (i.e., organizations that aligned themselves with one particular form of social change). The language used to define each of the pathways continued to evolve during this time, and modifications were made to the survey tool, which continued to be utilized primarily as an advising tool. Input was solicited from Campus Compact member institutions and through a series of workshops and webinars hosted by national organizations (e.g., American Association of Colleges and Universities, Campus Compact, the Community College National Center for Community Engagement, Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities, International Association for Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement, NASPA, the American Gap Association, the Building Bridges Coalition, and others).

Efforts to expand outreach to other postsecondary institutions ramped up in 2015 as Annabel Wong, Devanie Helman, and Gail Robinson, under the direction of Jo Wong (the Haas Center’s director of evaluation and assessment), joined the Haas Center team. Annabel Wong started as a student intern from Stanford’s Graduate School of Education during the 2015–2016 academic year, focusing her work on refining the survey instrument; distributing surveys to two community colleges, six public universities, and nine private universities across the United States; and then analyzing the data collected from more than 1,500 respondents. As a higher education consultant, Gail Robinson initially volunteered to assist with outreach to community and technical colleges to ensure the language and instruments were relevant in those contexts. In 2016, Gail became an official consultant at the Haas Center and in 2019 assumed the role of central organizer for the multi-institution Pathways of Public Service Working Group (“Working Group”).

Under Gail's leadership, outreach began to expand the use of the framework and survey tool to other campuses. The members of the Working Group strongly influenced the evolution of the survey tool, exchanging information about advising and programming activities, and how the framework was being used at their respective campuses. Working Group members met quarterly via telephone conference calls, in-person at conferences and events, and eventually via Zoom meetings.

While a small financial contribution was solicited from each collaborating institution to support the Working Group, it was not a requirement for institutional participation. To ensure any campus could participate, efforts to organize and support the Working Group were largely funded by the Haas Center for Public Service. While the Working Group members came from a variety of types of institutions and professional backgrounds, they were interested in developing and implementing a shared framework and tool. With this motivation in common, they formed a learning community whose conversations offered broader insights into the scope and development of the Pathways framework. One important early insight from the group was that the examples that served as illustrations of each of the six pathways within the survey tool were just as important, if not more so, than the formal definitions that were generated.

It was during this period that Sean Crossland became actively involved with the pathways. While members of the Working Group joined from a variety of contexts, Sean's serves as illustrative of a common theme. When he joined, Sean was teaching a course on civic leadership and so was initially drawn to the Pathways framework for its strength in differentiating among various forms of social change. He conceived of the framework as a means of avoiding institutional reactivity and concerns about the language of activism and organizing that was part of the material he emphasized in his teaching. He found the survey useful as a reflective tool for conversations with students, and through these interactions began to deepen his understanding of both flaws and value in each of the different pathways. What started as a "Trojan horse" for him became a tool for expanding his own views about, and sense of interconnection among, different forms of social change.

After numerous presentations at higher education conferences, the Haas Center team decided to host an institute designed to expose newcomers to the Pathways framework and the self-assessment tool and serve as a retreat for active members of the Working Group. The first Pathways institute and retreat took place in the fall of 2019 at Stanford University.

Among the major outcomes of the gatherings were a stronger learning community identity, an explicit focus on research to support the use of the pathways, the tacit endorsement of campuses' ability to "white label" the framework to suit their local context (while keeping the pathways themselves intact), and a conscious decoupling of the use of the framework from an expectation of participating in the joint survey project. There were also some major revisions to the survey and the way the survey results were displayed.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic hindered efforts to reconvene, additional Working Group retreats have been hosted by the University of Pittsburgh (2021), George Washington University (2022), and Utah Valley University (2023). Recognizing that Campus Compact would ultimately be a better long-term administrative home for the Working Group, a series of conversations led to the transition of the leadership of the Working Group to the Compact in 2022.

The Pathways framework itself is conceptually nonpartisan and devoid of ideological loyalties. In other words, the pathways could be utilized individually or collectively for regressive and authoritarian purposes, or toward liberational and democratic aims. Examples of engagement within each pathway exist across the political spectrum. Although students often choose (when given a choice) to participate in experiences that conform to their existing political perspective, care needs to be taken to ensure that involvement in pathways as educational opportunities do not exclusively promote, or put a thumb on the scale of, a particular political stance or ideology. Our work as educators should help in clarifying values but must not rob students of the hard work of determining what those values mean for themselves. These distinctions, and our ability to navigate them, are the most creative part of community engagement work—as well as the most fraught.

## **Pathways Working Group**

By May 2023, 95 institutions and organizations had participated in the Pathways Working Group, with 17,225 students having taken the survey since 2015. Institutional participation has included:

- 73 four-year colleges and universities (both public and private)
- 14 community colleges (all public)

- four higher education consortia (National Campus Compact, two state Compacts, Philadelphia Higher Education Network for Neighborhood Development)
- one state commission on service (UServeUtah)
- four overseas universities (Qatar University, University of Western Australia, East China Normal University, and University of New South Wales)

Current participation includes a subset of this list.

The development of this work has been collaborative and cocreative, involving members of the Working Group and others with varying levels of exposure to the pathways. Our continuing work together on the Pathways framework is to ensure that it is meaningful and accessible for those not familiar with it and that it advances and informs the thoughtful, collective work underway within the Working Group.

## Book Overview

Interest in the Pathways framework is growing nationally. This publication seeks to offer empirical and theoretical framings of the pathways for four related purposes: (1) to explore and synthesize literature focused on the knowledge, skills, and attributes within each pathway; (2) to offer an individual career profile for each pathway; (3) to provide exemplars of the diverse ways in which the pathways are being used across higher education institutions and within communities; and (4) to highlight practical and theoretical implications for future potential uses of the Pathways framework and tool.

Part One seeks to establish an empirical foundation of knowledge, skills, and attributes associated with each pathway. Systematic literature reviews were conducted to deepen and synthesize our current understanding of the unique and shared characteristics among practitioners within and across pathways. By delving deeper into the distinctive features of each pathway, our aim is to guide deliberative choices regarding which pathway(s) might make the most meaningful contributions to community capacity building. Additionally, we seek to further illuminate their interconnected potential.

Part Two elevates examples of pathway experimentation and usage across departmental, programmatic, and curricular approaches. At the

department level, we share examples of how the pathways have shaped strategic visioning. At the cocurricular level, we feature examples of how the pathways have been effectively utilized to systematically transform students' passion into action. At the curricular level we include ways the pathways have complemented course- and discipline-level learning goals. Each example speaks to the successes and challenges in leveraging the Pathways framework.

Part Three offers generative possibilities for future practitioner scholarship and practical application concerning the pathways. We explore ways to enhance the utilization of and engagement with the pathways, encompassing both individual experiences and their potential impact on policy reform. The closing section serves as a call to action to realize the pathways' transformative potential for the community engagement field, and for advancing the public purpose of higher education.

This edited volume serves two primary purposes. First, it aims to offer foundational and empirical support of the Pathways framework, thereby enhancing its relevance to college student learning and career outcomes, social impact, and staff and faculty development. Secondly, it seeks to provoke critical reflection on the institutional commitment of higher education to democracy, emphasizing the ongoing necessity of examining and interrogating this relationship.

Generally, this book is for anyone looking for tools and ideas to help complicate binary thinking around social change and the public purpose of higher education. For those less familiar with the Pathways framework, this work will provide an accessible and in-depth review of its current and possible applications.

Faculty teaching courses related to social change will find value in the Pathways framework and this book as a resource to expand curricular and pedagogical innovations. Practitioners working in public service, civic engagement, and social change-oriented programming will find value in the articulation of the knowledge, skills, and attributes associated with each pathway. Additionally, practitioners and faculty with advisory capacity may find immediate application of the associated resources and examples to support advisees in framing their academic or professional goals around social change. The career profiles section will be relevant to anyone working with students exploring career options. The Pathways framework and associated work emphasize ways to integrate discussions of social change strategies into how students choose their majors and ultimately the careers they may opt to pursue. Graduate and undergraduate students can find

value in the case studies as real-world examples of people engaging in one or more of the pathways, and the career profiles offer models that can inform students' choices about their academic and professional trajectories.

Community change organizations, including nonprofits, philanthropic entities, and state/local governments, may find value in imagining different ways to engage students and professional staff around the social issues that are the focus of their work. Specifically in Utah, the governor's Commission on Service and Volunteerism is using the Pathways framework as training for nonprofit organizations to craft meaningful volunteer opportunities for the community. To that end, they have developed an open-source version of the survey for members of the public seeking ways to become involved in their communities.

Ultimately, this volume should be viewed as a starting point from which scholar-practitioners and community engagement professionals can react, respond, adapt, critique, and innovate. We hope this work offers some insights about the interconnectedness of the pathways and how the convergence of multiple pathways fosters opportunities for enduring and systemic social change. Furthermore, this book is an invitation to practitioners, academics, and students to find their own ways to engage with the Pathways framework.

## Notes

1. Tom also served as a resident fellow in Branner Hall, Stanford's public service and civic engagement theme dorm, from 2010 to 2022.
2. Social entrepreneurship was initially considered but rejected as a pathway by the Haas Center staff, due to concerns that social entrepreneurship, as often practiced, did not adequately attend to the center's principles of ethical and effective service. Eventually it was included as an attempt to influence the practice of social-e (at least at Stanford) with our principles.
3. With both social-e and activism, the decision to create a category using complementary concepts (as opposed to a single name) was in part due to the desire to avoid purely academic battles about the precise meaning of individual concepts that are widely debated.