Survey the Learn, Work, & Life Landscapes

“You can’t dream unless you know what the possibilities are because dreams don’t just pop up in your head.”
—Sonia Sotomayor, US Supreme Court Justice

“Instead of a degree in biology, emerging fields will combine biology and global health, or neuroscience and entrepreneurship... The concept of the major will erode into ... an overall portfolio with a bunch of microcredentials that speak to a whole range of strengths.”
—Randall Bass, Georgetown University

Brief description:

- MyWays defines this competency as “the ability to research and understand information, resources, external barriers, and internal factors relevant to upcoming transitions in school, career, and life.”

- Note: This step integrates with Identifying Opportunities & Setting Goals (step #2) and Developing Personal Road Maps (step #3) in an iterative, adaptive way.

- Addressing this competency includes helping students:
  - Research and gain real-world exposure to the rapidly evolving career and life options available in their locality and beyond.
  - Identify and understand the knowledge and skills associated with the careers or challenges that match their strengths and interests (for more on the self-knowledge side of this match, see the Opportunities & Goals competency, next).
  - Explore traditional and emerging postsecondary education, career, and hybrid work/learn options that relate to their interests, including specific transition knowledge and skills for each option (the college or apprenticeship application, resume and interviewing skills, or the processes for participating in project or freelance collaboratives).
  - Identify potential barriers in their college and career landscape that may require additional support or resources.

Where to look for ideas:

College Knowledge

- Summit Public Schools has created a set of publicly accessible student playlists for college transition, including “Admissions Requirements — My Options.”

- This Hechinger Report article reviews a growing network of nonprofit college access organizations using innovative means to get college knowledge to students who want and need it; these organizations include College Summit, College Track, College Spring, College Possible, OneGoal, and College Board’s Access to Opportunity.

Traditional Career Landscape Exploration

- See the National Career Development Association’s list of sites for Career Planning, and the ACT Profile, a free online and mobile college and career planning platform that includes this World of Work Map.

Emerging Work/Learn Landscape –

- Consider experiential exploration of the landscape through avenues like Educurious and Buck the Quo.

Additional resources as food for thought:

- See the two last chapters in ACT’s Beyond Academics: A Holistic Framework for Enhancing Education and Workplace Success.

- See a visual framework for the emerging work/learn landscape in the ACT Foundation’s The New Learning Economy and the Rise of the Working Learner: An Anthology of Recent Evidence.

- The next two primers have additional ideas and resources.

For more resources, see the MyWays website.
Identify Opportunities & Set Goals

“Victor from Art First [a youth development program] ... started to connect his activities in the program (painting, interacting with adult artists) to his emerging identity as an artist. ... [Youth are involved in] ‘finding fit’... a dual process of learning about potential career opportunities... and evaluating how these match their own skills and interests.”

—Nicki Dawes and Reed Larson

Brief description:

- MyWays defines this competency as “the self-awareness, focus, and strategic thinking to cultivate individual strengths, identify and pilot opportunities, and set personal goals for learning, work, and life.”

- **Note:** This step integrates with Survey the Learn, Work, & Life Landscapes (step #1) and Identify Opportunities & Set Goals (step #3) in an iterative, adaptive way.

- Addressing this competency includes helping students:
  - Develop self-knowledge through years of self-directed and authentic learning activities, as well as access to tools to diagnose strengths, interests, and personality traits relevant to life planning. (There is significant overlap here with Habits of Success competencies.)
  - Identify learning, work, and life opportunities likely to match these abilities by focusing on the intersection of assets, aspirations, and market realities (see the diagram in the next column).
  - Create goals that point in a longer-term direction, but include interim steps that can be pursued and evaluated in shorter loops along the way.

Where to look for ideas:

- Next gen learning models that embed self-reflection, adult world learning, and goal-setting into their systems, such as Big Picture Learning, Generation Schools Network, and Summit Public Schools.

- The College Spark Washington College Readiness Initiative’s Career Guidance Washington and AVID programs lead students to discuss:
  - Who are you? What are your interests and values? How do they align with what you want to do?
  - Where are you headed? In academics, career, life?
  - How are you going to get there? What are you doing today to set yourself up for the future?

- **Roadtrip Nation**’s The Roadtrip Nation Experience is designed to help students explore pathways for their futures. This project-based curriculum combines engaging video interviews with introspective activities to help students connect passions to school and careers.

- Success planning electronic platforms include MyBestBets (a postsecondary platform created by Jobs for the Future and YouthBuild USA that aligns a student’s interests with regional employment needs); Blackboard Planner (from MyEdu + JobGenie, with resources from Roadtrip and Burning Glass); Naviance; and Find Your Calling from Career Builder.

- Among the personality, strengths, and interests inventories are StrengthsFinder and AchieveWORKS, and the ACT Interests, Abilities, and Values Inventories.

Additional resources as food for thought:

- On developing self-knowledge, identifying purpose, and using these for Wayfinding or designing your way forward, see Project Wayfinder and Designing Your Life, both out of the Stanford d.school’s design thinking approach.

- For another angle on learner self-direction, see Getting Smart’s Podcast Gen DIY: Emerging Options for Students Navigating Life, and the Generation Do-it-Yourself Toolkit.

- The previous and following primers have additional ideas and resources.

**For more resources,** see the MyWays website.
“We prototype to ask good questions, create experiences, reveal our assumptions, fail fast, fail forward, sneak up on our future, and build empathy for ourselves and others. Once you accept that this is really the only way to get the data you need, prototyping becomes an integral part of your life design process.”

—Bill Burnett & Dave Evans, Designing Your Life⁶

Brief description:
- This MyWays competency is defined as “the ability to translate goals into action steps (or prototypes) for each new stage or transition, especially the transition from high schooler to independent, contributing adult.”

Note: This step integrates with Survey the Learn, Work, & Life Landscapes (step #1) and Identify Opportunities & Set Goals (step #2) in an iterative, adaptive way.

Addressing this competency includes helping students⁷:
- Translate goals into action plans for each new stage or transition.
- Execute the plans through action — starting with “junior versions” or “prototypes” of work, learning, or civic activities, and building toward real-world experiences such as internships, research opportunities, and jobs.
- Move to the next loop of the plan, adapting it based on feedback and lessons learned from the first loop. (For more on this, see the last Wayfinding competency, below.)

Where to look for ideas:
- Real-world learning enables students to prototype choices, gain access to the adult world, and build social capital. See chapter 7 in Big Picture’s Leaving to Learn for a thoughtful list of approaches, including community-based learning), service learning, internships, and other work-based learning, work, travel, and early college experiences. Big Picture and Match Beyond have dual enrollment with Southern New Hampshire University’s competency-based courses. See also the work/learn options discussed in Report 3 and the Wider Learning Ecosystem section of Report 11.

- For an excellent example of embedded prototyping experiences, read about Tech Valley High School’s I-term experiences, which provide increasingly student-organized exposure to four different careers, helping learners discern what they like — and just as importantly, what they are not interested in pursuing.

- Work-based learning and paying work itself represent particularly good opportunities to “try on” a career choice and the social and cultural aspects of a successful transition from adolescence to adulthood. ConnectEd offers a free toolkit based around a continuum of work-based learning experiences that stretch from kindergarten through adulthood. Its expanded version of the graphic below adds sample student outcomes, quality criteria, and examples for each of the four stages.

Where to look for ideas:
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Additional resources as food for thought:
- See chapter 6, “Prototyping,” in Burnett and Evans’ Designing Your Life for insight into the “bias to action,” “build your way forward” basis of this approach. But note that prototypes can be as “proto” as shadowing someone in a career you find intriguing.

- The two previous primers have additional ideas and resources.

For more resources, see the MyWays website.
Find Needed Help & Resources

“Young people report receiving erratic adult assistance... When asked whom he relies on for [help in thinking through life options] a high school junior in one study of mostly work-bound youth notes, ‘I’m not that involved with the school or with my teachers... I can’t even talk with my parents. The only people I talk with are my friends.’

Other young people report that the advice and encouragement they do receive from adults — including at times workplace mentors — does not fit, because the adults do not seem to know them or their life situation well enough.”

—Robert Halpern, It Takes a Whole Society

Brief description:

- MyWays defines this competency as “the ability to identify, locate, and secure the time, money, materials, organizations, mentors, and partners needed to support one’s plans.”

- Addressing this competency includes helping students:
  - Identify which resources they need to implement their action plans.
  - Develop the help-seeking mindset and skills to successfully secure these resources and supports.
  - Build the social capital needed to support all steps in the Wayfinding process, including mentors, role models, weak-tie contacts in their fields of interest, and strong family and friend network supports.
  - Deploy these relationships into a professional network that helps them tap insights, find better opportunities, and make better career decisions.

Where to look for ideas:

See Report 4 for the 5 Essentials in building social capital: caring friends and adults, near-peers and role models, mentors and coaches, networks and weak ties, and resources and connectors.

- Getting Smart’s “Core and More” approach to advisory provides much of the personalized support that helps learners find the help and resources they need.

- The CollegePoint initiative is partnering with the College Advising Corps and The College Board to build a network of advisors. Other college opportunity leaders, such as College Possible and Strive for College, are also working to support underserved youth. College Greenlight targets first-generation and underrepresented students. iMentor builds mentoring relationships that empower students from low-income communities.

- One sector-specific mentoring program example is the ACE Mentor Program, which inspires students to pursue careers in architecture, construction, and engineering. Generation Schools incorporates this in its intensive program; it can also be an after-school experience. Each team is set up to emulate an actual design team.

For online resources to assist students and their advisors in accessing information for all the Wayfinding competencies, see the resources links in the other competency primers, as well as this glimpse of the future of AI and push learning for guidance.

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- Groups such as ACT Foundation, Business Roundtable, and National Network are working to help people find needed help and resources on emerging work and learn opportunities through developing online tools, blueprints, and models. See the ACT Foundation’s The New Learning Economy and the Rise of the Working Learner: An Anthology of Recent Evidence and Learning is Earning in the National Learning Economy.

Additional resources as food for thought:

- In addition to the wealth of resources on different types of social capital in Report 4, see also this summary of the anchor and web of support approach.

For more resources, see the MyWays website.
Navigate Each Stage of the Journey

“The challenge is that to reach goals in the real world there is often no roadmap; problems are unstructured; there are obstacles and hidden rules; heterogeneous systems are involved (e.g. different people and institutions).

According to the ‘Law of Unintended Consequences,’ you may be trying to get to B, but end up at Z.”
— Reed Larson, “Positive Development in a Disorderly World”

Brief description:
- MyWays defines this competency as “the ability to implement plans in the worlds of education, work, and life, making mid-course adjustments as required based on new experience.”
- Addressing this competency includes helping students:
  - Grow personal traits related to adaptability, flexibility.
  - Develop and practice specific skills related to pivoting, reframing, and changing direction.
  - Strengthen their ability to accurately appraise and take risks as they pursue professional opportunities; in the new economy, it is sometimes possible to succeed sooner by failing earlier and more often, in calculated and reflective ways.
  - Develop the skills necessary to navigate systems while dealing with discrimination or other challenges.

Where to look for ideas:
- Project Wayfinder promotes the idea of self-reliant navigators rather than linear pathfinders: “We imagine student wayfinders to take on many purposeful ‘voyages’ over the course of their lifetime. They may not be linear, or neatly connect, but they each represent a sustained investment of energy and effort into a project or career chapter for a period of time... A plan is more like ‘flexible persistence’ — have a plan and a goal, but be prepared to adapt at a moment’s notice when circumstances change (and they most certainly will).” See the graphic below and Project Wayfinder website.
- MyEdu’s research study, The Academic Journey, which illustrates the changing options and directions taken by many participants over time, emphasizing how common changes in direction are, as well as the importance of testing through real-world experience. See a more complete visual of the academic journey, starting from a foundational educational memory — the kind of touchstone authentic, real world experience we describe in Report 11 on learning design — in MyEdu’s resource.
- Big Picture Learning’s 8 non-cog competencies (from William Sedlacek) include “Skills at Navigating Systems” and “Understanding and Dealing with Discrimination.”

A few resources as food for thought:
- Getting Smart and GenDIY’s podcast, “Emerging Options for Students Navigating Life.”
- The “Managing Career and Education Actions” component of the ACT’s Holistic Framework for Enhancing Education and Workplace Success details the kinds of behaviors that pertain to executing, evaluating, and amending plans for action.
- On adapting, pivoting, and re-grouping see the “Plan to Adapt” chapter in Reid Hoffman and Ben Casanocha’s The Startup of You.

FOR MORE RESOURCES, see the MyWays website.
Endnotes

1 Quoted in Tom McGhee, “Justice Sotomayor: New justice center a “magnificent tribute.” The Denver Post, May 2, 2013. The quote cited here was from a speech she gave to eighth, ninth, and tenth graders prior to opening the justice center.

2 Quoted in Jessica Hullinger, “This is the Future of College,” Fast Company, May 18, 2015.

3 Our descriptions of the Survey the Learn, Work, & Life Landscapes competency (as well as the other four Wayfinding competencies) drew from the following three sources:

   1) the small subset of the competency frameworks listed in the Introduction and Overview of this series that addressed personal navigation skills — including EPIC/Conley’s Four Keys (the “Go” Key), ConnectEd’s College and Career Readiness Framework (the “Educational, Career, and Civic Engagement” category), The National Career Development Association’s National Career Development Guidelines (all three domains), and The Assessment and Teaching of 21st Century Skills’ ATC21S framework (the “Living in the World — Life and Career” elements).

   2) additional career management frameworks such as Pathways to Prosperity’s Elements of Career Readiness and New Zealand’s Student Career Management Competencies.


5 Our descriptions of the Identify Opportunities & Set Goals competency (as well as the other four Wayfinding competencies) drew from the sources cited in Endnote 3.

6 Burnett and Evans, Designing Your Life, p. 113.

7 Our descriptions of the Design & Iterate Prototype Experiences competency (as well as the other four Wayfinding competencies) drew from the sources cited in Endnote 3.

8 Robert Halpern, It Takes a Whole Society: Opening Up the Learning Landscape in the High School Years, The Erickson Institute, p. 25.

9 Our descriptions of the Find Needed Help & Resources competency (as well as the other four Wayfinding competencies) drew from the sources cited in Endnote 3.


11 Our descriptions of the Navigate Each Stage of the Journey competency (as well as the other four Wayfinding competencies) drew from the sources cited in Endnote 3.