

## 4. Educational Pathways with Stackable Credentials

---

*“You must be able and prepared to give until you cannot give any more. We must use our time and our space on this little planet that we call Earth to make a lasting contribution, to leave it a little better than we found it.”*

— Former Congressman John Lewis

---

CLP’s founders brought people together from across the U.S. and around the world to advise on how to create new educational pathways to prepare people who have experienced poverty and discrimination to become the next generation of staff and leaders for the front lines of community change work -- strengthening communities, providing essential services with understanding and compassion, and addressing the issues which most concern them and their neighbors.

Our pathways include several steps, with opportunities for students to enter at different stages and to earn useful credentials as they move along the path. With our help, local community leaders and educators have designed each step to attract and serve the needs of students with limited incomes who have faced the challenges of poverty, discrimination and powerlessness.

The large majority of students enter CLP core classes, Certificate and Degree programs already caring about social issues in their community – from access to affordable housing, education, and health care to poverty, racism, and inequality – but not knowing what they can do to bring about change. Through our classes and programs, they learn concrete skills, get exposed to community-change careers, earn invaluable college credentials, and develop a sense of agency as leaders who can effect positive social change.

CLP's approach creates **step-by-step pathways that enable students to continually deepen the competencies they will need for the community change careers they plan to pursue.** Competencies -- what a person knows, knows how to do and has the confidence to do -- are the building blocks of career mobility since they can be acquired through education and work-based experiences and must increase in range and complexity as an employee gains increased responsibility and experience. Competencies are the currency that builds a resume and lets potential employers know what you know how to do. *(Chapter 3 describes CLP's initial job market, or DACUM, study and details on the kinds of job for which a CCS background is especially helpful.)*

Our competency-building approach enables students (and midcareer practitioners) to see a clear road map to life-long careers as community change agents working with a wide range of employers, especially those from the nonprofit and public sectors. This approach builds on CLP's initial job market research, which identified foundational, mid-level, and senior-level competencies in occupations our graduates typically pursue. These models are being further developed based on specific employment sectors using our CLP student, graduate and alumni experiences, and focus groups and interviews with community practitioners, community-based organizations, and academic institutions.

### Competency-Based Career Pathway



## Key Elements in Fully Developed Pathways:

CLP's *Pathways to Careers* are designed to eventually include four main steps. These steps are built one at a time, most often starting with a Community College Certificate or Degree because those programs offer great advantages in reaching large numbers of students with limited incomes, including many from communities of color, and issuing credentials which increase job opportunities and upward mobility.

CLP helps local community and academic leaders build increasingly ambitious and comprehensive pathways with the goal of eventually including –

- **College Credit for “Prior Learning”** – many people with great potential for careers in community organizing, planning and development have already developed extensive and relevant college-level knowledge and skills; a key strategy for increasing their upward mobility is through enlisting a higher educational institution in arranging for people to earn college credits for what they already have learned through community leadership or life experience, training programs, on-the-job learning and volunteer work. *Chapter 5 describes how this can be done through “Prior Learning Assessment”.*
- **Dual Credit for High School/Early College Courses** – the development of high school/early college courses preparing students for careers in community building and change leadership by enabling them to earn college credits which give them a head start toward earning a Degree or Certificate from a community or four-year college. *Chapter 6 covers this topic.*
- **Community College Certificates and Degrees** – the creation of Certificate and Associates’ Degree programs which offer courses in community-building and change leadership while accessing directly relevant on-the-job experience through internships and a practicum. Moving from taking one or two courses to earning a Certificate and then taking the additional courses needed to earn a Degree from a community college, a student can enter the workforce at any stage or, if it’s feasible, choose to expand their skills, knowledge and salary potential by continuing their education.

- **Bachelors' Degrees** --Some will choose to defer taking advanced courses and earning a BA until after working for several years, gaining on-the-job experience, and being able to save funds to pay for that advanced education.

The CLP Network is considering helping local partners develop systems of micro-certificates or “**badges**” or that describe and certify the increasing levels of competency students have developed as they complete courses and progress toward a College Certificate or Degree. We plan to test whether such a system helps students develop a sense of accomplishment, motivates them to continue on, and, if they need to work part-time, helps them gain access to paid internships and jobs which are directly relevant and helpful to their career development.

**CLP has based its planning on the knowledge that many of our priority students would, for financial or other reasons, benefit from a flexible, step by step pathway which issues useful credentials at every step so they can access increasingly desirable part- and full-time jobs to help them meet their financial needs.** The combination of education and work experience forms a pathway to a lifetime career as a change agent.

**Community Colleges** very often are the starting point for developing an increasingly extensive pathway. They offer four major advantages to community leaders and others who want to create a strong new stream of knowledgeable and skilled community organizers and change agents. First, because they are less expensive than public universities, they are the most affordable route to a higher education for people with limited incomes. Second, they attract large numbers of older as well as young students who have directly experienced poverty and discrimination – a distinct advantage for working in communities facing these issues. Third, they have very high admission rates and are thus unusually accessible to students whose public schools may well have been underfunded and inadequate. And fourth, they are accustomed to developing new career pathways by collaborating with associations of employers which need people with skill-sets and knowledge which prepare them for particular careers.

We have a strategy for moving students along an educational pathway that propels them into careers in community change. In addition, we have learned what additional supports students need to both enter into community-facing

careers and move into leadership positions where they can effect lasting change. *Chapters 8-11 below describe those supports.*

CLP's approach is ensured by partnership agreements among groups representing potential employers and high school, community college and university programs in community-building and leadership. Students continually deepen their skills and knowledge as they proceed along the pathway and choose when it's best to enter the community change workforce on a part- or full-time basis. *See chapter 20 on Partnerships.*

## STUDENT STORIES

### How Leadership Students at Macomb College Are Channeling Their Histories Into Action

The Community Leadership Certificate at Macomb Community College in Detroit is often used to enhance any number of degrees at the college, including those in the public service and social work.

Bob Anderson, a 52-year-old graduate of the certificate program, originally from Troy, Michigan, spent 28 years in prison prior to enrolling at Macomb College. And at first, he had little interest in pursuing higher education.



“I wanted to be a truck driver when I first got out,” he said. “I figured it would be easy, and a decent paycheck, but I couldn’t get the funding to afford the license.” So instead, he enrolled in school. He figured he’d eventually be able to find the money he needed, through a combination of grants, loans and work, to afford the license, so at first he said he just enrolled in “whatever coursework tickled my fancy.” He took a geology course, for instance, and a welding class.

Eventually, however, he met Professor Rachelle Zaranek, who introduced him to the CLP program, and helped inspire him to consider