

# Designers in Residence 2.0: Accelerating Pathways

Higher Ed Leaders as Regional Transformation Agents

June 2023 - November 2024

Education Design Lab

**What if students in every high school had the opportunity to take an additional year of courses related to a career of their interest, earn enough college credits to finish an associate degree by year 13, and be well-prepared for a great job or further education toward a bachelor's degree - all at no cost?**

Designers in Residence 2.0: Accelerating Pathways connects learning from Accelerate[Ed] and Designers in Residence 1.0 to accelerate pathways for low-income students to earn an associate degree by one year from high school graduation. This cohort brings together postsecondary leaders to build and enhance their regional ecosystem teams to design and activate accelerated guided pathways.

---

## The Challenge

Today, our K-12 and postsecondary systems fail to support upwards of 60% of Black, Latino, and/or students from families with low incomes to enroll and persist into their second year of college. The COVID-19 pandemic has also amplified many underlying inequities and trends. Amidst a pandemic-induced recession, [the connection between social mobility and postsecondary credentials](#) continues to strengthen. At the same time, the pandemic has heightened existing barriers to postsecondary entry, resulting in a plunge in initial postsecondary enrollment for the high school class of 2020, particularly within two-year institutions. Concerns not only about affordability but also the need to provide family-supporting income, have grown. These concerns, combined with low [postsecondary student success rates](#), lead students to question the value and relevance of continued education.

There are many efforts in place to accelerate innovation and create new, more accessible pathways. Early College and P-TECH high schools have shown promising results, demonstrating that it is possible for students to accelerate credential completion. Likewise, more students are enrolling in dual enrollment classes and career and technical education (CTE) is seeing a resurgence in both interest and innovation. On the postsecondary side, [guided pathways reforms](#) are creating career-aligned, coherent programs of study. And, driven by the increasing scope of digital delivery of postsecondary education, innovators are developing new, ["hybrid college" models](#) for students' 13th year, which are tailored to support students who have previously not been well-served by traditional institutions.

Despite these advancements, many students remain unable to access the traditional high school to postsecondary pathway. Thus, we also need to build new, [accelerated, high-value pathways](#) that are explicitly designed to support students for whom the traditional pathways are not working. These new pathways must be broadly accessible to students across achievement levels, affordable and responsive to students' needs to earn family-supporting income more quickly, explicitly aligned with high-wage, high-growth occupations, and supportive of students across academic, career, and social-emotional domains.

---

## The Opportunity

The Lab is seeking senior leaders from up to 11 postsecondary institutions to participate in the Designers in Residence 2.0: Accelerating Pathways to build and enhance their regional ecosystem teams to design and activate K12-to-Career accelerated guided pathways. Designers will provide rich user testing learnings and recommendations to improve and iterate ecosystem tools available (developed by the Lab and others) and surface the need for new tools to meet accelerated guided pathways.

Over 18 months (June 2023 - November 2024), designers in residence 2.0 will work with the Lab to

- Build their capacity to serve as regional transformation agents to align K-12, postsecondary, and workforce ecosystems;
- Establish ongoing teams representing all regional stakeholders;
- Learn human-centered design
- Co-lead design sessions with regional teams to build a sustainable, effective education to workforce ecosystem;
- Provide rich user testing feedback on ecosystem alignment and other transformation tools.

This community will leverage design principles, blueprint for scale, and other elements designed to support learners from Black, Latino, and low-income backgrounds to complete an associate degree by one year after high school graduation.

### The Design Question

**How might we strengthen our leadership role to better drive regional ecosystem alignment for Black, Latino, and students from low-income backgrounds to earn an associate degree one year from high school graduation?**

---

## Overview of the Application Process

Senior postsecondary leaders interested in working with the Education Design Lab as Designers in Residence must be invited to apply. Nominations are welcome. Contact [Jess Lauritsen, Ed.D., Senior Education Designer at the Lab](#).

### Timeline

- Application opens - February 2023
- Applications due - March 17, 2023
- Cohort participants notified - April 2023
- Kickoff - June 6 & 7, 2023 in person in Washington, D.C.
- Cohort Activities - June 2023 to November 2024 (majority virtual, some in person)

## Who is Eligible to Apply?

- Senior higher education leader with direct management responsibility and/or expertise for dual enrollment, guided learning pathways, career-connected learning, or similar.
- From a higher education institution that demonstrate:
  - **Commitment to Racial Equity** - Has publicly committed to a set of racial equity goals.
  - **Implemented Guided Learning Pathways** - Have implemented and understand the importance of Guided Pathways which include streamlining the student journey to and through the college by providing structured choice, proactive student support, and clear learning outcomes.
  - **Commitment to Expanding Dual Enrollment Accelerated Pathways** - Have a demonstrated commitment to expanding dual enrollment and accelerated pathways from K-12 into college, using a guided pathways approach or similar.
  - **Strong Partnerships with K-12 and Workforce** - Have demonstrated strong partnerships with employers to organize demand-driven pathways and embed career-connected learning alongside K12 and postsecondary partners.
  - **Commitment to Guiding Principles** - Are committed to incorporating the following guiding principles into their pathways:
    - Principle 1. Goal: Designed to enable young people to attain an associate degree through an additional year of formal education - year 13 - leading directly to good jobs and/or further education towards a bachelor's degree.
    - Principle 2. Program: Designed around an intentional, integrated curricular experience and integrated student support.
    - Principle 3. Delivery Model: Designed to minimize transitions for students and ensure opportunities are available and equitably accessible for all students across the region and/or state.
    - Principle 4. Funding Model & Cost: Designed to ultimately be sustainable via public funding and affordable for students.

**Selected cohort member institutions will receive a grant of up to \$75,000 to use as needed by the institution.**

## Program Overview

### What will Designers Do Throughout The Program?

- Designers in Residence will:
  - Participate in program convenings of all designers (mostly virtual and up to 2 in-person 2-day convenings)
  - Participate in bi-weekly design sessions with the Lab
  - Co-lead a minimum of 3 regional ecosystem sessions with the Lab to be sustainable and create a pathway program
  - Develop an implementation blueprint with the regional ecosystems design team
  - Provide feedback on the use of each ecosystem tool used throughout the design process
  - Participate in the Designers in Residence Community of Practice and create opportunities for ecosystem stakeholders to participate as well
  - Co-present with the Lab to share the work of the Designers in Residence

### What is a Regional Ecosystem Design Team?

At the Lab, we define regional ecosystems as regionally-focused, inter-industry, K-12, and higher education partnerships with centralized infrastructure, a shared agenda, consistent communication, and alignment across participating partners (adapted from Stanford Social Innovation Review on Collective Impact).

Designers in Residence will build or enhance their regional ecosystem design teams that include members who:

1. Have an established active working relationship.
2. Demonstrate a commitment to shared goals and definitions, including racial/socioeconomic equity.
3. Include dedicated staff to lead the work and other ad-hoc roles for critical regional work.
4. Maintain a partnership structure for operationalizing the vision and delivering programs.
5. Have a demonstrable track record of pathway program/model development.

### Commitment to Guiding Principles:

We are seeking higher education leaders from institutions that can commit to incorporating a set of guiding principles that outline the key qualities of associate-degree-by-grade-13 initiatives and the opportunities that they provide for young people into their initiative. *We do not expect that applicants have each of the guiding principles currently in place, but that they commit to using the support and resources from the Lab towards these objectives.*

- **Principle 1. Goal:** Designed to enable young people to attain an associate degree through an additional year of formal education - year 13 - leading directly to good jobs and/or further education towards a bachelor's degree. Student can earn:
  - A minimum year's worth of high-quality program-aligned transferable college credit (a minimum of 30 college credits) by the end of 12th grade
  - A transferable, regionally in-demand, career-aligned associate degree by the 13th year
  - Guaranteed acceptance to regional/state bachelor's degree programs upon completion of the associate degree

- **Principle 2. Program:** Designed around an intentional, integrated curricular experience and integrated student supports:
  - Provide career-aligned coherent program(s) of study that extends beyond introductory courses, designed around skills and credentials needed in specific middle- to high-wage, high-growth career clusters within IT, healthcare, business, or other high demand sectors in your region.
  - Informed and validated by employers in these sectors, integrated learning and work experiences
  - Student perspectives and experiences are incorporated into the design of an ongoing evaluation of the program
  - Quality postsecondary and career advising are provided to help students select and prepare for a range of postsecondary pathways offered
  - Student supports are embedded and span academic, career, financial aid, and social/emotional domains
  - Credit articulation/transferability agreements between and across institutions are established to maximize transitions.
  - Programs are anchored to institutional brands that are recognized and valued in the local job market (as reflected in graduate employment rates)
- **Principle 3. Delivery Model:** Designed to minimize transitions for students and ensure opportunities are available and equitably accessible for all students across the region and/or state.
  - Integrated into high school and institutional schedules and delivered through a range of high school models (comprehensive and focused/magnet, small and large, in-person and virtual)
  - Accessible to students across large geographic areas via partnerships and articulation agreements between SEA/LEAs, degree-granting institutions/programs, and employers
  - To ensure accessibility, student support, coursework, and other learning experiences can be delivered in-person, virtually and in hybrid models.
  - Incorporate intentional strategies to help prepare students for the rigors of college- and career-level coursework and experiential learning
  - Fully accessible and equitably available across student achievement levels (without exclusionary entrance or selection policies)
  - Use data to regularly monitor student outcomes and ensure equitable opportunities and supports
- **Principle 4. Funding Model & Cost:** Designed to ultimately be sustainable via public funding and affordable for students.
  - Draw on and bring together multiple sources of public funding (e.g. K-12, dual enrollment, 13th year, Pell/state financial aid, workforce) in ways that are accessible for both institutions and students
  - Require no or minimal tuition, and support students to navigate and address non-tuition affordability barriers (books, transportation, food, housing, etc.)

---

## Background

### Designers in Residence 1.0

In 2021, 11 visionary thinkers and doers who are leaders in postsecondary across the country spent 10 months as Designers in Residence to envision the role of higher education to be regional change agents to close economic and racial opportunity gaps. In partnership with the Lab, the first cohort of Designers in Residence developed two resources for higher education and ecosystem leaders to start aligning regional stakeholders and partners toward building a truly equitable future.

- **Resource #1 - Ecosystem Self Assessment:** A tool for leaders of community-based organizations, education institutions, and workforce development agencies who seek to align their ecosystem with an equitable future state in work, vision, and goals. The Self-Assessment is designed to catalyze conversations between partners and stakeholders, plus provides space to prioritize goals and track the next steps.
- **Resource #2 - First Steps to Regional Transformation:** An interactive resource and actionable framework that offers steps in implementing three levers for regional transformation. This tool offers inquiry, ideas, and actions as first steps to build towards the elements of the future state that higher education institutions, partners, and stakeholders have collectively identified as priorities.

### Accelerate[Ed]

To accelerate paths to economic opportunity and mobility for students who have been historically marginalized and to reverse the negative impacts of the pandemic, large-scale change must occur in how K-12 systems, higher education institutions, and employers work together to design pathway systems that minimize transition hurdles and maximize support for all students. The [Accelerate ED](#) initiative supported community partnerships that brought together the relevant actors - at the city, county, or state level - that have begun this work together and have the appetite to tackle the challenging cross-system design work needed to deliver accelerated postsecondary pathways to young people at scale. The initiative included an initial cohort of 12 design teams comprised of cross-sector partnerships spanning K-12, higher education institutions, workforce actors at the city, county, and state levels, and community-based organizations.

**Designers in Residence 2.0: Accelerating Pathways is funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation**

**Learn more about  
the Lab + our work:**

Get an inside look at our  
on-the-ground work— delivered  
right to your mailbox.  
[Join the Innovator Network](#)

Learn more on our website  
[eddesignlab.org](https://eddesignlab.org)

Questions?  
[connect@eddesignlab.org](mailto:connect@eddesignlab.org)

Find us on LinkedIn  
[Education Design Lab](#)

Follow the Lab on Twitter  
[@eddesignlab](#)