Improving Access, Engagement, and Completion at City College of San Francisco

Insights from College and Community Stakeholders

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Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

Introduction

While San Francisco has long been identified as a place of innovation and opportunity, a well-known socioeconomic gap has developed in the city over the last decade, where residents of all ages are struggling to find their position in a changing economy and maintain a financial toehold in one of the nation's most expensive regions. City College of San Francisco (CCSF) offers these individuals a place to find their footing through educational advancement leading to high-demand, high-skilled, high-wage careers.

At the same time, a growing collaboration of CCSF faculty, staff, and administrators recognizes the opportunity to **strengthen the college's services through more streamlined, coherent pathways into and through the institution that lead to improved economic mobility**. The recent seven-year reaffirmation of the college's accreditation, the new state-level investment in the development of guided pathways across California Community Colleges, and the presence of effective pathway models and practices already on campus combine to make 2017 an **opportune time for CCSF to pursue pathways as a strategic priority**.

*Just talk about the numbers. When you're working at a retail job, you bring in $25,000 to $30,000 per year. **You cannot live in San Francisco without having about $88,000 a year. That's just facts.** In the tech industry, if you know Linux, if you know Ruby on Rails, you're making about $100,000 a year. That's plenty for yourself…Us, being born and raised here, we want to stay. **I've been here for five generations. I'm not leaving.***

-Community-Based Organization Program Participant

With this context in mind and in anticipation of these recent developments, CCSF's Office of Academic Affairs engaged the Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges (RP Group) in spring 2016 to **secure a range of stakeholder perceptions on the factors that impact enrollment, persistence, and completion** at the college. Implemented as a two-part study, the RP Group coined this research project "Way-to-Stay SF;" this research aims to inform a process that will establish CCSF as the institution that provides local residents the education and workforce preparation—and thereby the opportunity for social and economic mobility—that enable them to stay in San Francisco. This report summarizes findings from Phase 2 of this research (August – December 2016), which focused on two specific questions:[1]

1. How can the college develop the internal capacity to guide and support "undecided" students to enroll in and complete CCSF's career technical education (CTE) programs?

2. What do un/underemployed San Francisco residents and San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) students served by community-based organizations (CBOs) say they need to access and engage with CCSF's CTE programs?

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[1] The RP Group provided results from Phase 1 in an internal report to the CCSF Way-to-Stay SF team, led by the Associate Vice Chancellor in July 2016. During Phase 1, The RP Group conducted an exploratory study to inform the design and development of a fuller "Way-to-Stay" research plan, intended to "deepen…the education and workforce partner understanding of the student experience, perception, and barriers to enrolling and persisting at CCSF" in career technical education programs (CCSF Request for Qualifications (RFQ), 2016, p. 1).

To explore these questions, the RP Group engaged 42 different college and community stakeholders—from CCSF English and CTE instructors and counselors to CBO leaders, staff, and program participants (including individuals who previously attended the college)—in interviews and focus groups. (See *Appendix A: Research Methodology* for a full description of Phase 2 research activities). This report summarizes the results of this exploration.

Reader's Guide

The RP Group designed this report for CCSF faculty, student development professionals, staff, and administrators interested in furthering the guided pathways agenda at the college. We share results from discussions with community and college stakeholders through the lens of pathway development, with a particular focus on findings that can support improved service to the numerous and diverse populations of "undecided" or "unfocused" students enrolled at CCSF.

The research team recognizes that the "undecided" classification no longer exists as an option at the college;[2] yet our research reveals that many students still practically need intrusive support in understanding their educational and career options, selecting a program of study, determining a plan for reaching their goal(s), and tracking their progress to goal attainment. This finding is foundational to the presentation and understanding of other results generated by this research.

In *Section 1. Key Themes*, we provide a high-level summary of research results, mapped to the Completion by Design "Loss/Momentum Framework," which identifies critical junctures in the student experience—points where students often struggle in, if not fall out of, our colleges (see side bar, Loss/Momentum Framework). This framework offers a useful tool for grounding discussions of access and success and focuses on the student experience as the departure point for this inquiry, analysis, and action planning. It aligns with and can inform the key principles for pathway development put forth by the California Guided Pathways Initiative. In *Section 2. Key Recommendations*, we identify actions (identified through this research) that the college might take to develop and strengthen pathways into and through the college that can help all students reach completion of their goals.

> **Loss/Momentum Framework**
>
> *Completion by Design*
>
> **Connection:** Moving students from interest to application
>
> **Entry:** Supporting students from enrollment to completion of gatekeeper courses
>
> **Progress:** Facilitating entry into program of study to completion of 75% of required coursework
>
> **Completion:** Ensuring movement from full completion of program of study to attainment of credentials with labor market value

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[2] As a result of the Student Success and Support Program (SSSP) requirements, CCCApply now serves as the universal application system for all community colleges in California. This system does not allow students to identify as "undecided," rather all students must select an academic goal.

In Sections 3 and 4, we offer a deeper discussion of (1) findings related to building the college's internal capacity to serve undecided students (including key findings, recommendations, and quotes from counselors, English instructors, and CTE instructors), followed by (2) results focused on engaging external CBO stakeholders in supporting student movement into and through CCSF's programs of study (including key findings, recommendations, and quotes from CBO staff and program participants).

We conclude with ideas for future research (including suggestions for a CCSF Way to Stay SF Phase 3).

Section 1. Key Themes by the Loss/Momentum Framework

When looking across the findings from 42 individuals the RP Group engaged in this research, **several key themes emerge that can inform CCSF's development of guided pathways, designed to help students achieve social and economic mobility**. These themes offer insights into ways to improve connection, entry, progress, and completion—points on the Completion by Design loss/momentum framework (see p. 5 for more information on the framework). As discussed below, findings from the research conducted with the internal stakeholders (i.e., CCSF counselors, English and CTE faculty) aligned most directly with improving student entry and progress at the college, while results from discussions with community stakeholders (i.e., CBO leaders, staff, and program participants) aligned most directly with strengthening student entry and completion—where they can have a more substantive impact. **We summarize these themes below, grouped under each point on the loss/momentum framework.**

Connection

This research underscored that a **range of populations can be tapped in an effort to increase enrollment and completion of CTE programs, from undecided students already at the institution to numerous groups in the community** (e.g., high-performing high school graduates, struggling secondary students, transition-aged youth, adults in entry-level training programs or jobs, or individuals

Connection:

Moving students from

interest to application

chronically disconnected from the workplace). As expected, each of these groups shared different motivations, perceptions of the college, preferred ways of communicating, and programmatic interests and support needs once enrolled. **Prioritizing these populations based on an assessment of the college's capacity and offerings is a vital first step** in boosting enrollment in and engagement with CCSF's programs of study.

CBOs can be strong partners in reaching these various populations and in delivering joint CTE programming to address the unique needs and interests of these groups. Right now, there appears to be a universally limited awareness about CCSF's offerings and benefits among community stakeholders, and at the time of this research, accreditation woes still loomed large in

the minds of these stakeholders. Specific partners have been disappointed and confused by considerable turnover in CCSF's leadership; and some prospective student groups view the college as a "last resort" compared to alternative educational options.

At the same time, **many populations remain open to enrolling in CCSF**, including SFUSD high school students, transition-aged youth, and adults in entry-level training programs and jobs. Similarly, **key CBO partners expressed optimism about current college leadership and an interest in updating and possibly expanding connections and establishing systematic agreements** with CCSF, which could serve as a strategy for engaging and expanding the college's infrastructure for serving priority groups. Providing clarity on CCSF's priorities to key CBOs, articulating top-level leadership commitment to collaborate, and offering practical tools and information for CBOs to act as ambassadors for the college will help reignite these relationships.

This research also underscores that CCSF in general, and its CTE programs in particular, have the opportunity to better **articulate a clear and distinct value proposition for guided pathway participation and completion to different groups and share that value proposition in a way that resonates**—both in message and in methodology. If prospective students know what academic and employment doors will be open to them by completing CCSF programs, it will certainly go a long way toward encouraging their enrollment.

Entry

Conversations with all research participants indicated that the process and requirements for entry into the college could be reviewed and revised with the student in mind. This research indicates students are often lost navigating the college's bureaucracy upon enrollment, serving as a "front-door" deterrent to entering at the college. CCSF can **benefit from a student-centered assessment of its enrollment and assessment policies and practices** as a first step to determining how to effectively facilitate student engagement with guided pathways.

Entry:

Supporting students from enrollment to completion of gatekeeper courses

Discussions with counselors, English faculty, CTE instructors, and CBO program participants who had previously enrolled at CCSF revealed the absence of an official and standardized strategy for helping undecided students find their path to completion once enrolled. Interviews with all research participants indicated that without intentional support and greater structure, undecided students are likely to exhaust their financial aid and fall out of the institution. CCSF's top-level leaders have the opportunity to **articulate an institutional focus on and establish a specific strategic plan for supporting undecided students**, including a specific focus on career exploration and the adoption of evidence-based practices (such as mandatory college success coursework, career development assessments and activities, and robust contextualized basic skills offerings). Interviewees highlighted many **practices already in progress at the college that aid undecided students in identifying and refining their goals**, that could be replicated or scaled to reach more learners.

Additionally, conversations with instructors and counselors reveal a pervasive lack of knowledge about and understanding of CTE programming across different stakeholders at the college. CCSF has the **opportunity to bring together general education (GE) and CTE instructors and counselors cross-functionally to promote connections among these faculty and to effectively supply them with information** that they can then use to educate students of their options. The work underway to improve information on CTE programming for both students and educators (e.g., redesigned CTE webpages on www.ccsf.edu), the presence of contextualized basic skills courses by career theme, and the recent movement to focus FLEX day on specific institutional priorities offer a useful foundation on which to build and grow these connections.

Progress

This research also indicates that CCSF students lack a clear, coherent map of career development and education planning activities to reach their goals. Similarly, faculty lack the mandate, knowledge, tools, and training to proactively integrate these activities into coursework. In turn, CCSF has the opportunity to **chart out career development and education planning activities for students at various milestones along their journey through the college** that they can self-navigate with technology and/or complete with the support of teachers and counselors. Faculty specifically teaching in programs that serve significant numbers of undecided students (e.g., high-demand introductory GE courses and survey courses in key CTE programs) could be engaged and supported as a first priority in reaching more students who need help finding their direction and focus.

> *Progress:*
> *Facilitating entry into course/program of study to completion of 75% of required coursework*

Conversations with community stakeholders indicate that CBO staff and program participants do not perceive CCSF to have programs of study that are structure to efficiently and effectively moves students to completion. Moreover, these interviewees reported not consistently seeing CCSF's programs as having a clear labor market value and direct connections to employers and jobs (while perceiving the programs at other regional community colleges, for-profit institutions, and CBOs as having these benefits and linkages). CCSF's **CTE programs of study have the opportunity to assess their design and delivery with a key end-point in mind: labor market value and entry**. Students need to be able to see the direct link between their coursework and the workplace and know that their experience will lead to job opportunities.

Moreover, individuals participating in sector-based training in CBOs want their experience to count toward the completion of a CCSF certificate, degree, or transfer (currently available through other community colleges and for-profit institutions). **Developing formal agreements with key CBO partners that align with priority pathways at the college may encourage more CBO program participants to select CCSF** to complete a credential.

While technological solutions may offer one path toward providing CCSF learners information to inform and encourage their progress, this research indicates that **students of all types still seek face-to-face support** from mentors and peers to encourage their sense of belonging and secure their retention. Ongoing proactive support from caring educators and peers, and

opportunities to participate in cohorts can help students stay connected and maintain their focus on their program of study—particularly in an institution as large and as difficult to navigate as CCSF. CBO retention practices and successful cohort models already implemented by the college (e.g., Metro Academics, Puente) offer CCSF a range of approaches to consider when developing pathways.

Completion

This exploration reveals that **CBOs can provide complementary services for high-demand CTE programs of study including job preparation and placement and connections to employers** that CCSF may not have the capacity to cultivate and maintain. Key CBO partners can be leveraged to secure support with work-based learning, employer engagement, job search, and job placement related to the college's priority pathways. Conversely, **CCSF can offer preparation that leads to the completion of workforce credentials that CBOs do not currently have the capacity to delivery** (e.g., basic skills development, college credit, externally accredited CTE programs).

> *Completion:*
>
> *Ensuring movement from full completion of course/program of study to attainment of credentials with labor market value*

Exploring the development and renewal of collaborations with key CBOs with completion in mind may help clarify which partner is best positioned to provide which service.

Section 2. Key Recommendations

This research ultimately presents several next steps the college could take to strategically advance student connection, entry, progress, and completion at CCSF, including actions the college can take internal to the institution, and opportunities it might pursue with external partners.

Internal Opportunities

- **Articulate a strategic focus on helping undecided students** find direction, persist, and complete at the college (see a further discussion of findings related to undecided students on page 11).

- **Reinstitute a methodology for quantifying, segmenting, and tracking undecided students at the college.**

- **Focus college-wide professional development on serving undecided students and brokering connections across GE and CTE divisions** to promote an awareness of all options available to these learners.

- **Supply GE and CTE faculty with the information and tools to inform their students about career and college options and to support their planning**, with a specific focus on programs and departments that serve large numbers of students.

- **Adopt new and scale existing strategies to provide information about educational and career options directly to students** (e.g. orientation, low unit college success and CTE survey courses). **Require all undecided students to engage with these strategies at varying degrees, depending on where they are in their decision-making**. Explore alternative modes for engagement (such as YouTube videos, online delivery) to reach more students. At the same time, ensure that students are able to access in person support when they need help, have questions, or feel lost in the bureaucracy.

- **Establish a navigator system** whereby students transitioning into the college (including from CBO programs) have a central and consistent touch point for getting questions answered about assessment, enrollment, financial assistance, and academic and social supports.

- **Facilitate connections to specific learning communities**, first-year experiences and support groups on campus for new students (including individuals transitioning from CBO programs).

- **Increase the availability of contextualized basic skills offerings related to key CTE programs in priority pathways.**

- **Embed career exploration and education planning at key points throughout students' journey** so discovery and planning is experienced iteratively and as an ongoing process (rather than a one-time event).

- **Identify scalable ways to ensure students have connections** to faculty, peers, mentors, and employers throughout their college experience to get face-to-face guidance and support.

External Opportunities

- **Rejuvenate connections with existing partners and/or forge new links** to CBOs that serve groups prioritized by the college.

- **Establish instructional service and partnership agreements that include common metrics with CBOs** that are intentionally designed to outlast the presence of any one individual at CCSF or the CBO.

- **Articulate clear value propositions** for enrolling at CCSF in pathways to priority groups.

- **Tap social media, CBOs, and coalitions that reach significant numbers of people who fall into priority groups** to speak directly to how enrollment at CCSF can serve their interests and specifically improve their future prospects.

- **Empower CBO staff with information** on CCSF's enrollment requirements and opportunities that directly relate to the CBO's programming.

- **Strategically offer basic skills preparation for CBO program participants** that can jumpstart their engagement with the college and smooth their future path at the institution.

- **Align CBO training with CCSF's programs** and broker agreements that allow CBO training completers to secure college credit for their experience, thereby allowing students to progress more quickly to attainment of a related CCSF certificate or degree.

- **Leverage CBO connections to secure support for work-based learning, employer engagement, job search, and job placement, as well as to explore partnerships designed to deliver short-term, high-demand skills training** for programs that fall under key guided pathways.

We now turn to a deeper dive into the findings and themes related to each specific area of inquiry pursued through this research.

Section 3. Developing CCSF's Internal Capacity to Serve Undecided Students

The RP Group engaged a sample of CCSF counselors, English faculty, and CTE instructors to explore how the college can strengthen its internal capacity to serve undecided students, given their unique perspectives on and experiences with these learners. Through these conversations, a number of issues, opportunities, and ideas for next steps emerged that the college might consider as it pursues development of guided pathways. We organize these findings and recommendations under five key themes below.

1. ACKNOWLEDGE AND IDENTIFY UNDECIDED STUDENTS

Findings. This research suggests that CCSF currently has no systematic or systemic approach to identify and guide undecided students. As a result of the SSSP requirements, CCSF uses the CCCApply system for enrollment, employed by all California Community Colleges. This system no longer offers an "undecided" option on its universal application, and this change makes it difficult to quantify the number and percentage of students who fall into this category, let alone select appropriate interventions to help these learners find direction and focus. Moreover, our research indicates that many more undecided students may be enrolled at the college than is generally recognized by instructors and counselors. Based on their own experiences, instructional and counseling faculty interviewed consistently estimated that between 60-75% of CCSF students are "undecided" in some way—ranging from completely unaware of their options and without a specific goal in mind to decided about a goal but

> I **estimate 80% of new students don't understand their options**. It's not much better for continuing students. I say between 60-70% don't know their options and are undecided.
>
> -CCSF Counselor

> I think that **the idea of undecided is different at different levels.** [At 1A or 1B levels], I'll say that 60% of students know they want to transfer and have an idea of a major, and 40% know they want to transfer, but don't know which major. At the lower end of the sequence, students really are kind of lost. When they talk about transferring, it's very abstract. They don't really know why they want to transfer, where to transfer, and even how to transfer. They say they want to because that's the rhetoric that when you go to college, you're supposed to go onto a four year and get your degree and that's what you've been told forever.
>
> -CCSF English Faculty

unaware of how to achieve that outcome. Instructors and counselors suggested that these different cohorts of undecided students who will likely require a different level of support to encourage their path to completion.

- Reinstitute a methodology for quantifying the number of students who are undecided upon connection and entry to the college.

- Identify a scale for "undecided" to recognize the range of students who fall into this overarching classification.

- Segment the data on the undecided student population accordingly, and use these data as a guide for developing related strategies.

2. PRIORITIZE CAREER DEVELOPMENT AS PART OF A STUDENT SUCCESS AGENDA

This research reveals that CCSF does not currently have a shared agreement on the vital importance of career development to student success, particularly for undecided students, or a strategy for integrating this type of exploration and advising throughout the student experience. CCSF students, regardless of where they fall on the "undecided" continuum, do not reliably receive support for or engage with exploration and planning that links college and careers. Moreover, they are not consistently supported to conduct this exploration and planning in an iterative way throughout their college journey to acknowledge evolving interests and needs.

There is no one size fits all approach to career development. Undecided students need to be differentiated so that activities and interventions can be selected, targeted, and tailored to meet the students where they are in their college and career exploration and decision points. That said, according to respondents, students might be more open to intensive exploration support earlier in their education path. Moreover, students benefit greatly from face-to-face experiences and relationship-based support that despite the cost and time required for implementation, are critical for some students to inform their college and career path. In turn, strategies and interventions should include opportunities to connect with mentors, faculty, and industry professionals, and should be considered high-impact.

Recommendations:

- Clearly articulate, from top-level leadership, that career development and exploration is a priority in the college's student success agenda.

> *Some students don't even attend orientation. We need to more strongly enforce this. And we need a policy or requirement that includes the career awareness piece. **We're losing students because we don't make sure students know about the resources we have**.*
>
> *-CCSF Counselor*

> *Career counseling hasn't been a priority; we see there are problems with undecided students dropping out, problems with retention, problems with probation. If students don't have goal, they're not as successful. [The new Associate Vice Chancellor for CTE and Workforce Development] has a **bigger vision of linking academic and careers. It's so important in the development of all students**, whether they're a job changer, SFUSD graduate, ESL student transitioning from noncredit to credit.*
>
> *-CCSF Counselor*

- Map out a path that establishes developmental benchmarks and milestones for both college and career development; ensure students can both self-navigate some activities and engage in others with support from a teacher or counselor.

- Require career development and college success coursework or workshops for all students, given the potentially large proportion of learners who fall on the "undecided" continuum; consider multiple modes of delivery (e.g., face-to-face sessions, online courses, on-demand videos, etc.).

- Embed career development systematically into key points in college entry and early progression (e.g., pre-collegiate math and/or English courses).

- Develop more resources for students about (1) program choices to support increased career awareness, and (2) on-demand, self-navigation tools that allow them to explore their options.

- Conduct research with students to better understand where they actually get information about career choices; much more needs to be understood about the best channels to reach students.

3. IMPROVE COMMUNICATION

Findings. In order to systematically embed college and career development into the undecided student experience, communication at CCSF must be improved. There is a lack of systematic connections across silos and functions (e.g., GE and CTE, instruction and student support), resulting in inconsistent and insufficient knowledge across counseling and instructional faculty about CTE options, programming, and requirements. Faculty cited a general communication overwhelm, in the multiple modalities that CCSF currently employs (e.g., email), so that many attempts to improve communication via those channels were practically moot.

Further, there can be a disconnect between program faculty and the college as a whole, particularly in CTE departments where instructors identify more strongly with their industry and program, than with their relationship to the college or their role in carrying out overall college priorities. For larger CTE departments, there are even communication failures between department chair and program coordinators. To ensure undecided students receive accurate information, these

*The **most ideal situation would be for all college students to be required to do a college success course**. Maybe a short-term course that every student takes, in person or even online. Use technology to do it too, maybe YouTube videos.*

-CCSF Counselor

*People are always saying City College has always been in silos. Everyone is doing their own thing within their own silo, and **people don't really have that cross communication**.*

-CCSF English Faculty

*We're so connected to our industry that we **fail to see we're part of a larger college**.*

-CCSF CTE Faculty

*I think that too many people in [my program] want to blame counseling, "Counselors don't know us, counselors don't do whatever…" Well, **we've never really taken the time to actually interact, train, and educate them**.*

-CCSF CTE Faculty

*There's been the Pathways group. That was the first time I'd ever heard of CTE. **What is it? Career and Technical Education. Is that what that stands for?***

-CCSF English Faculty

channels need active improvement.

Recommendations:

- Work with school deans and department chairs to determine ways to inform both CTE and GE program faculty of the college's broader priorities and agenda, and connect their work to those priorities. Explore both technological and relationship-based activities. Creativity may be required, because old modalities (such as email) seem to be seen as ineffective.

- Use professional development days as a way to establish a college-wide focus on supporting undecided students as a responsibility across all program types and college functions.

- Create opportunities for cross-pollination and information sharing between CTE and GE programs and college functions; consider expanding collaborative efforts that bring practitioners together cross-functionally such as the development of more contextualized basic skills courses in key pathway areas.

- Consider restarting the Pathways group that was convened informally by faculty to define the components of a "pathway," establish quality indicators for this approach, advance related innovations, and foster the exchange ideas about program design and approaches.

4. FOSTER UNIVERSAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR STUDENT ADVISING

Findings. In addition to improving communication and information flow, this research suggests that CCSF counselors and instructors need the mandate and tools to support all students, undecided learners in particular, in career and college exploration and planning. We know that counselors are critical to guiding students in selecting an educational goal, developing a plan for progress, and supporting program completion; however, **this research indicates that access and quality of service varies greatly depending on time of year, program, and counselor**. Moreover, there are few systems in place to ensure that CCSF students are regularly connecting to counseling throughout their educational journey. The **specific function of career development is occurring in pockets throughout the college, and is not routinely connected to education plan development**. Both academic and career counselors

> *I don't want to be a counselor, because I'm afraid I'm going a screw it up, and I'm going to give them the wrong information. I consider them the experts on anything related to students achieving their educational goals…. I guess if I received information on CTE programs, I would also want to know how I should disseminate this information. I don't want to just throw the pamphlet at them either, but I also don't want to say things that I can't really speak to because I'm not an expert….**What are some talking points, what should we tell students about these programs?***
>
> *-CCSF English Faculty*

> *I feel like students should have a counselor or some people just know what else is out there, what other opportunities are available. I went to [CCSF] for EMT. I didn't want to do that anymore, so I was just like, "Oh, well. That's it. **"I feel like if I had someone to point me to, "Well, what about this, what about that?" That might have helped me continue to stay at City**…I was just on my own. Just showing up, taking [classes]. Doing it all on my own.*
>
> *-CBO Program Participant, Former CCSF Student*

discussed their role in facilitating career exploration to support a student's program selection; however, the current approaches to facilitating this kind of exploration appear time intensive and seem to reach limited numbers of students.

Faculty also serve as a critical touch point for students, and this research suggests that all faculty need to have a more concrete and resourced role in supporting undecided students. GE instructors indicate they rely on counselors to guide students in education planning. In some cases, college and career exploration assignments are being used in English courses, but are not scaled to reach all students. As a primary touch point for a significant number of undecided students, these GE instructors need the programs and tools to embed college and career exploration and planning into their courses.

CTE practitioners also can and do serve as first line of support to students who are in need of guidance. CTE instructors acknowledged that given the unique and specific requirements of their programs and the ongoing changes needed to keep up with the demands of their industry, it is unrealistic to expect general counselors to maintain up-to-date information on their offerings. In turn, these faculty serve a unique intermediary role between the college, employers, and students. CTE instructors reported they are more likely to have information about what is required to complete their specific program and transfer and/or enter the workforce than counselors.

> *I would suggest that it's really important that teachers be aware the students are either afraid to ask questions, or they don't even know which questions to ask, and so a lot of the conversations that we have with our students, they have to be, not necessarily intrusive, but we have to be comfortable asking them questions that maybe aren't the most comfortable types of questions…. You have to have that lens, and to be aware that students need your help.* **Sometimes you do have to have a little bit more of an uncomfortable conversation in order to figure out what they need**.
>
> *-CCSF English Faculty*

> *We do a lot of our own counseling for better or worse, because the* **counselors can't possibly keep up with every change that goes on in our industry**.
>
> *-CCSF CTE Faculty*

Recommendations:

- Provide basic information on the college's CTE programs to GE instructors and counselors; possible approaches include presentations on CTE programs of study during department or division meetings, a brochure with accurate information on program options, specific talking points on how to guide students, and online tools and resources to access information on demand.

- Train CTE and GE faculty on embedding career and college exploration and development activities into their curriculum; focus specifically on courses that reach undecided students at key points in their entry and early progression at the college.

- Prioritize pathways with high demand programming for targeted counseling; for example, develop a targeted, expanded counseling and advising strategy around the health programs at the college given the number of programs available, and the number of students interested in pursuing a goal in this pathway (e.g., one stop counseling for all health programs, based on models at other community colleges in the region).

5. BUILD ON AND SCALE EXISTING STRATEGIES

CCSF is fortunate to have many existing strategies that support undecided students in learning about college and career options, and about CTE programs and pathways in particular. These range from college success courses, to introductory courses to a career program, to contextualized basic skills courses. These practices can inform the creation of a college and career development framework for CCSF's undecided students and can be replicated or scaled to reach more learners.

As a precursor to the recommendations that follow, we suggest the college consider identifying the primary "models" at CCSF that are effective in supporting students in college and career planning, and that lead to program completion. This assessment will allow the college to determine which existing models it might invest in replicating and/or scaling, and also recognize when it needs to look outside the college for additional ideas. We recommend studying these local models through an inquiry-based approach and looking at available data to understand their strengths and areas of improvement. For any approach to be successful and sustainable, an engaged group of faculty and other stakeholders will need to be committed to fostering and adapting it over time.

Recommendations:

- Require all undecided students to complete a college success course; help them understand the range of resources available in the college for their support, and the different educational pathways they can travel; use different delivery methods (e.g., face to face, online) so as to mitigate any added burden to students.

- Offer more, low-unit CTE orientation courses (e.g., Introduction to Allied Health Programs, Information Communications Technology Survey Course) as a way of increasing student exposure to careers, including opportunities in an industry, program options and requirements, and soft skills development. Direct undecided students interested in pursuing a related path to take these introductory courses, and work with faculty to integrate exploration and goal-setting activities into these offerings.

- Offer more contextualized basic skills courses that can serve as an introduction and entry point to CTE pathways or programs of study, while placing students on a path toward the completion of math and English requirements.

> *Some more career counseling might be helpful. Right now, we have an office, but I don't think to send students to it,* and I don't think CTE [faculty] really think of sending students to it. A better connection, and us knowing what the students are going to get if they go there, and even working more closely with the Career Center [would be good]. *Maybe we do some projects together, and really help students focus more on what they want, and who they are, and lining things up.* Just having better meta thinking about what all of these different career paths are at City College, so even if a student's not working well in my program, I have a sense of where they might be better, because I know what their talents [are] and what they map to. None of that dialog is going on now.
>
> -CCSF CTE Faculty

> I think *these short, one or half unit courses help people walk along the pathway*…. I think it would be great too, to…have representatives from multiple health professions come in and give a sample of what they do…. That may be something that's done more in high school…but that leaves out people that are coming to us older.
>
> -CCSF CTE Faculty

- Leverage existing support strategies such as Early Warning, which serve a large percentage of students, and design embedded, collaborative interventions to ensure all students are getting exploration support, rather than 'opting in' to seeing a counselor.

Section 4. Increasing Access and Engagement of Community Groups

The RP Group engaged a sample of CBO leaders, staff, and program participants (both youth and adults) to explore how CCSF can strengthen its capacity to externally engage different groups that could benefit from education provided by the college. These conversations with community stakeholders are particularly pertinent given the growing emphasis on community college/CBO collaboration in the current workforce development funding and policy environment. The perspectives of key community partners and their clients can help CCSF better respond to the movement among state educational and workforce agencies to more closely align on workforce outcomes, and in turn, the mandate to improve alignment of service delivery across community colleges and CBOs.

This research suggests that **key CBOs can (1) strategically direct student groups into the college, (2) serve as a model for effective support practices as CCSF works to improve entry and progress, and (3) provide services and supports that can complement the college's programs of study, particularly for students in the completion phase.** We summarize below key findings and recommendations to inform CCSF engagement of external partners in support of the development of pathways in to and through the college.

*Students are confused, faculty are confused, [we are] confused about what are the college's priorities and goals. **It starts at the top with leadership and their vision**.*

-CBO Staff

*Why do I work with other community colleges? **Honestly, the fact that [other colleges] return my email, return my calls on a regular basis, and stay engaged**. That is the main reason I've been spending a lot of time trying to work with them.*

-CBO Staff

Key Findings

FORGING CONNECTIONS TO THE COLLEGE

CBOs we spoke with in San Francisco (e.g., Goodwill, Jewish Vocational Services, Year Up, and JCYC) have previously forged partnerships with CCSF that have served as a conduit between their training initiatives and the college's CTE and workforce development programs. While CBO leaders and staff report (at best) uncertainty about the status of their connection to the college, and (at worst), distrust in and dissatisfaction with prior partnerships, they all also report **positive interest in continuing to collaborate with CCSF to better serve their CBO clients (both adults and youth)**, and an **optimism in the capabilities of the**

***I realize how little I know about City College and its options**. I thought, "Oh, City College, it's simple. There's not much to it." No, there seems to be a lot more to it, and I don't know much about it. There definitely needs to be some more publicity going to high schools...it's **important to let youth know that it is a good opportunity and it's beneficial for their future**.*

-CBO Staff

college's current leadership to renew these relationships. CBO staff and program participants all cited concrete and specific ways to begin rebuilding these bridges and are eager to connect.

The following issues will need addressing in any effort to rejuvenate relationships with key CBO partners.

- **Reliance on individual champions rather than systematic a nd systemic linkages:** Productive and long-lasting collaborations have been in place that leverage CCSF's programs with CBO supports and other resources, but this research suggests these connections almost always depend on the relationship between the CBO and an individual champion at the college, making these relationships extremely vulnerable to changes in CCSF leadership, staffing, and priorities. Further, wi th no system in place and no clearly-defined point of contact at the systems level, CBOs do not know how to engage with the college, meaning that relationships are usually built at the individual or program/department level.

- **Ongoing changes in the top-level leadership at the college:** Numerous changes in the college's executive leadership over the past five years have left the CBOs interviewed without a clear understanding of CCSF's workforce development priorities, who is setting those priorities, and whom to contact to maintain/renew their relationships.

- **Loss of confidence in the institution**: The college's public accreditation battle has left some CBO partners wary of maintaining or forging programmatic agreements. The college's recent accreditation reaffirmation will undoubtedly help to assuage these concerns.

- **Lack of efforts by the college to engage with the CBO community:** CBO interviewees cited a breakdown in communication with community training and service providers, including a failure to keep CBOs informed about what CCSF has to offer their clients and stable methods to engage with those opportunities.

- **Concerns about the relevance of CCSF programming:** Many CBO leaders and staff also described the college as lacking flexibility to offer the kind of short-term programs their clients need. Further, some CBOs feel that CCSF does not keep up with labor-market demands and opportunities, especially in technology where the success of short-term, for-profit workshops and courses indicate the potential demand that exists in San Francisco for training in high-growth specialty areas such as cyber-security.

> *When we've had our young people that are trying to go to proprietary [colleges]—or as I call them predatory—colleges, usually it's because **they [think], "Oh, in six months or in nine months I can get this certificate, and I can be working. At City College it's going to take me two years."***
>
> *-CBO Staff*

> ***They know or they think that it's high school, part two.*** *A lot of our young people will say, "I don't want to go to [CCSF], because going to City is just like being in high school again." They're under the impression that they're going to see all of the same people from their high school that they've already been going to, and they want something that feels more like college.*
>
> *-CBO Staff*

As the college considers which community partners to engage, it is useful to recognize that **CBOs can offer CCSF access to a diverse group of prospective student groups** including SFUSD youth participating in a wide range of CBO programs (from academic support to career development and work-based learning); transition-age youth and adults engaged in sector specific training; and un/underemployed adults with significant barriers to education and employment. **Each of these populations requires a different type of outreach strategy and transition support to encourage their enrollment at CCSF**.

For example, CBO program participants expressed a range of perceptions about enrolling at CCSF. Some SFUSD high school students and graduates we reached through CBO programs **see CCSF as "the last option."** Part of the problem is a general reluctance on the part of high school students to continue their education in a local community college, which they perceive as an extension of high school. Some advisors of local high school students, including high school counselors and CBO staff, reinforce t his view or even discourage students from considering CCSF. On the other hand, youth who had direct contact with CCSF through dual enrollment or summer classes described positive experiences. Similarly, **young adults who had previously enrolled at the college expressed a positive perception of the institution**, citing it for its accessibility, affordability, and high-quality teaching.

All CBO program participants interviewed expressed an openness and interest in CCSF's programs (both CTE and traditional transfer pathways), **but were unclear about how to get information that was concrete, timely, and actionable.** Moreover, CBO leaders, staff, and program participants commonly noted that the **college does not clearly articulate a value proposition to prospective students and their advisors,** addressing important questions such as, "How can CCSF help you meet your goals," "How long will it take," "What will it cost," "What will you be able to do and earn when you complete your degree/program?" By contrast, CBOs tend to provide this information on their programming in a tangible and accessible way. Some CBO leaders also identified that for-profit colleges are attractive to their clients because they offer prospective participants clear value propositions. CBO youth participants were aware that there were vague benefits to attending CCSF (while in high school and transitioning into college), but did not have details needed to engage further. Individuals participating in CBO workforce training noted these kinds of questions would absolutely need answering in order to encourage their attendance at CCSF.

> *They [the for-profit boot camps] charge $20k for it. So every time I hear about a boot camp, I think, "A community college can do that." Obviously, it can't do that within the inflexible structures that they have right now**, so I would say looking at different structural ways of teaching for technology is super important**.*
>
> *-CBO Staff*

> *One concrete thing...is having a representative from CCSF come to [a staff] meeting and just **really get the staff to pitch in by saying, "What would YOU like to know if we were going to forge this relationship with CCSF?"** so that you would feel empowered to provide options to [program participants] when they come to you and ask for advice, because I really do think that a lot of our students turn to staff. By empowering staff, by giving them the correct information, I think that's going to help with the process of students enrolling after [program] graduation.*
>
> *-CBO Staff*

FACILITATING ENTRY AND PROGRESS

CBO staff and program participants repeatedly expressed **concerns about and/or shared first-hand accounts of challenges navigating the college** once enrolled including an absence of guidance around goal setting and educational planning, difficulty enrolling in required coursework, problems with the application of credits from other institutions, remediation issues, and a general absence of community or connection at the college.

CBO program participants often lack social and/or educational capital and **appreciate the sense of community, comprehensive support, and the direct access to employers** and the workplace that they might not otherwise have, **offered by their CBO experience**. CBO staff and program participants **noted the value of recreating the CBO cohort experience once inside the college** as a way to both provide targeted supports that address navigation issues as well as to create a sense of connection and engagement to encourage their persistence.

Moreover, CBO staff and participants underscored the **importance of the college recognizing the preparation and training received through CBO programs** and awarding credit for that experience.

Furthermore, CBO staff and program participants noted issues with the structure of CTE programs at the college, calling out the **length of time that some programming takes to complete**, compared to similar programs offered by other community colleges in the region and/or proprietary institutions, and the **lack of connection between these programs and the workplace**. For example, one CBO mentioned that CCSF's Medical Assisting program requires a two-year commitment to complete, while other programs in the region (community colleges included) require 18 months or less. CBO program staff and participants in industry-related training programs particularly underscored the importance of these linkages between the program and employment given the absence of employment networks often available to some prospective student groups and the need to have their result immediately in securing a living wage job.

SUPPORTING COMPLETION AND EMPLOYMENT

CBO programs believe they have important resources

*People's experience of [the college], from what I've heard, is it's archaic, it takes forever. [They say], "**I don't know who to talk to, I don't know why I'm not getting my transcript, they can't find me in their system, I know I graduated from there**."*

-CBO Staff

*Basically, the difference between college and [my CBO program] is the timeline. [My CBO program] offers you an internship that [can lead to a job]. If you do well in whatever internship you're in, you're able to get a wage that's way above the minimum starting out. I feel like that promise is what motivates people to do it**. The program is not easy...it's only 11 months. But [I know] if I get through this 11 months, I'll have the skills that I need**.*

-CBO Program Participant

*I've had a student who had credits from three different colleges, and when they went to apply to another college, none of those credits counted...Now, they not only have to redo those credits, but their grades were not high enough, so they had to take remedial courses. I've often heard from students **that is the number one challenge outside of not having family support and not having the financial assistance they need to pay for college. That aspect of not being able to navigate it in a way that seems fairly intuitive**.*

-CBO Staff

that could leverage CCSF's offerings, including job search and placement supports and services. CBOs believe that many CCSF students complete their coursework not knowing how to parlay their new skills and competencies into a job. **CBOs can help CCSF students with their job search and employer connections**. **CBOs can also help CCSF respond to the local technology-driven labor market's rapidly changing need for new skills.** While CCSF needs time to get new courses approved, CBOs can move in rapidly and possibly in collaboration with CCSF instructors to develop new curriculum that could first be offered by the CBOs as short-term workshops or seminars then subsequently connect seamlessly to CCSF's for-credit courses in the subject area.

Recommendations

- Have the college leadership **prioritize populations CCSF aims to engage** in the community.

- Once these populations have been prioritized, **set goals around their engagement**; identify the unique marketing strategies, supports for enrollment, and educational programming required to meet their needs. Having clear engagement goals and related strategies will be key to the successful recruitment, enrollment, and completion of these groups.

- Then, **set related goals for collaborating with and supporting local CBOs** that can reach those specific populations.

- **Engage in an outreach and education campaign with these key CBO partners** that clearly articulates the college's CTE and workforce development priorities and options.

- Clearly **communicate the value proposition CCSF's CTE programs of study** offer to CBO partners and to any prospective student group. Prospective students and partnering CBOs need to clearly understand the cost/benefit analysis for participation—what program enrollment would require and how it would offer a concrete pathway to improved employment and/or advanced education opportunities. Address all underlying concerns about costs, time requirements, navigation issues, absence of community and connection once enrolled.

- **Use new approaches, messages, and modes** (e.g., social media) when communicating this value proposition including having central point of contact for CBO partnerships to ensure consistent messaging and quality services.

- **Equip and empower CBO staff to educate their program participants** about the educational options available at CCSF, and how to practically access these options.

> *If there is any way to have a home base [at the college]*, *that there was some kind of shared identity, whether it was first generation students or just people that are just starting their college experience or something like that. I think that would be very helpful. I still think that those themes of developing a community,* ***a safe space where they can be themselves, that they can ask really transparent questions*** *about, "Hey, what's going on here? How do I get from point A to point B?" is important.*
>
> *-CBO Program Participant*

> *I really just want to know what [CCSF] has to offer because, well, it's a backup plan for me. I feel like I still need to know what the benefits are and what I should choose that over some other community college or just another university.* ***What advantages does [CCSF] bring me besides costing less****?*
>
> *-CBO Program Participant*

- When renewing or establishing collaborations with key CBO partners that offer training in specific sectors, **consider creating systematic agreements** that will remain in place regardless of a change in staff or leadership.

- **Connect people transitioning from CBO programming with specific communities/cohorts within the college** so the sense of community and support they received in their prior organization continues once enrolled.

- **Award CBO program completers with credit toward a related credential** at the college to recognize their prior training and experience and facilitate completion.

- **Tap CBO partners to provide complementary career exploration, job skills development, and employment placement services** related to key guided pathways.

*Maybe City should partner up with jobs. [My CBO program] is successful because they have [employer] partners...you're getting an internship for sure. Like, "Oh this is the job you want? You can get that on- the- job training while you're pursuing the degree. It's a community college, but within [our program], you get experience from one of our partners." That would entice me. **It gives access to people who might not necessarily have access to that employment otherwise**.*

-CBO Program Participant

Conclusion

CCSF is moving into a new era, having settled many of the outstanding accreditation issues confronting the college during the past five years. The opportunity to develop a coherent set of pathways for current and future students is now presenting itself. A growing cadre of creative and energized faculty, staff, and administrators are showing an interest in pursuing guided pathway development, and at the same time, the state is making available new resources to support the changes the college needs to address.

To this end, the RP Group research team considered which additional research activities would further inform and support guided pathway development, with a focus on undecided students, and with community partners in mind. We assert the following activities will help the CCSF Way to Stay SF team make a case inside and outside of the college for this work and outline the first steps toward setting priorities and staking out a path to implement some of the recommendations.

To better serve undecided students:

- Engage current undecided students as well as CCSF students who are in the completion phase (have completed 75% or more of required units) to collect their perspectives on the loss/momentum framework, including identifying barriers to and facilitators of connection, entry, progress, and completion at the college.

- Research approaches inside the college that could be replicated or expanded to reach more undecided students.

- Research approaches in other institutions and systems that could be adopted at CCSF to support undecided students.

To improve CBO engagement:

- Interview individuals from CCSF who, in the past, have been CBO champions and worked successfully with CBOs. Explore what they learned, how they made their relationships work, and how these connections could be strengthened and effectively supported by the college leadership.

- Find examples of colleges that have a history of working effectively with CBOs.

- Use frameworks such as that developed by Peter Bahr[3] to prioritize target populations, and then identify CBOs that can effectively leverage the value proposition CCSF has to offer to these populations.

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[3] In *What's completion got to do with it?: Using course-taking behavior to understand community college success*, Bahr and Booth (2012) examined variable such as students' course-taking and course success to identify clusters of patterns for how students use the community colleges. Based on these findings, they then described six different groups of students, including the completion-likely, somewhat completion-likely, completion unlikely, CTE students, skills builders and non-credit students.

- Use models such as Completion-by-Design' Loss/Momentum Framework to map out what the target populations would need to be engaged and enrolled and to progress through completion.

- Use conclusions drawn from these research-driven activities to identify and approach potential CBO partners.

- Once a plan is in place, ensure there is a clear process for CBOs to engage CCSF, both in agreements and single points of contact who are able to provide a strong customer service approach including follow up, messaging, and quality accountability.

Appendix A. Research Methodology

The RP Group research team worked in partnership with the Associate Vice Chancellor of Instruction, Workforce and Economic Development to connect to a range of interview and focus group participants. CCSF's Way to Stay SF team recommended CBOs to engage based on their:

- Current or past partnerships with the college

- Programmatic alignment with potential areas of pathway development (e.g., health, technology, business)

- Engagement of either (1) young people who were currently or recently enrolled in the San Francisco Unified School District or (2) adults in entry-level training programs

Internal to the college, the RP Group's project director reached out to the Academic Counseling Department Chair to connect the research team to a sample group of counselors who regularly work with undecided students. Similarly, the project director worked with the Associate Vice Chancellor of Instruction, Workforce and Economic Development to connect to faculty teaching in CTE programs that relate to pathways prioritized for potential growth and/or development. Finally, to understand more about undecided students, the project director reached out to the English Department Chair to nominate faculty for participation in interviews, given the large percentage of undecided students who enroll in English coursework upon entering the college.

Research activities conducted by the RP Group research team included one-hour, in-person focus groups and interviews, and phone interviews, depending on the type of participant (e.g., CBO leader/staff or program participant; CCSF counselor, English faculty, CTE faculty). We used a customized interview protocol for each participant type. Questions for internal stakeholders generally covered the following: identifying and defining the undecided student population; discussing existing strategies for supporting undecided students in finding their path at the college; and exploring suggestions for new policies and practices the college can embrace to effectively support these students. Questions for external stakeholders generally covered the following: describing their CBO approach and/or experience; identifying their experience with and understanding of the college; exploring ways the college can better inform and engage prospective students and community partners about educational options at the college; and ways to improve student movement into and through the college.

Find below a list of specific research participants, by type.

Table 1. Research Participants

Type	Number of Participants	Details
CBO leaders/staff	22	Year Up - 5 staff (executive director, administrative staff, instructors)
		JCYC - 9 (executive director, program director, 7 program coordinators)
		Goodwill - 2 staff
		Jewish Vocational Services - 6 program directors and instructors (3 working with entry-level adults, 3 working with SFUSD youth)
CBO program participants	12	Year Up - 4 program participants
		JCYC - 8 youth leaders (juniors and seniors in SF high schools)
CCSF counselors	2	1 career counselor
		1 general counselor
CCSF instructors	6	3 English faculty
		3 CTE faculty (business, EMT, multimedia)
Total Participants:	**42**	