

MEMORANDUM

To: Elena Martinez, Executive Director, Pathways Community Resource Center

From: Patrik Strate, Career Program Planning Consultant

Date: July 29, 2026

Subject: Funding approval request—Pathways Forward pilot

Decision requested

Approve development and implementation funding for a 24-participant pilot of Pathways Forward, an original eight-week career development program for Denver-area young adults ages 18–24 transitioning from foster care. Approval would authorize a 12-week prelaunch period, one program cohort, and 180 days of follow-up evaluation.

Rationale

Young adults leaving foster care are expected to make consequential education and work decisions while many have limited access to the stable financial, relational, and professional supports available to their peers. Research documents lower employment and earnings and interconnected risks involving education, housing, health, and social connection (Courtney et al., 2011; Gypen et al., 2017; Hook & Courtney, 2011). A narrow placement service would leave the underlying career-development task unresolved. PCRC is positioned to integrate counseling, education planning, workforce preparation, advocacy, and community coordination.

First Five Planning Steps

- 1. Define the population.** Serve 24 voluntary participants ages 18–24 who spent time in foster care after age 14 and live in the Denver metropolitan area. Recruitment will occur through child welfare, Chafee, housing, education, and workforce partners.
- 2. Determine needs.** Complete a participatory assessment using a 40-person survey, two paid listening sessions, stakeholder interviews, service-gap data, and a local opportunity scan. A paid Youth Design Council will validate priorities.
- 3. Write measurable objectives.** Track change in career decision self-efficacy, completion of a career-and-education plan and portfolio, warm support connections, education milestones, and entry into employment, paid work-based learning, credentials, or postsecondary education.
- 4. Select delivery methods.** Combine weekly three-hour workshops, three or more individual counseling sessions, six months of near-peer mentoring, case coordination, employer exposure, education navigation, and barrier-removal supports.
- 5. Determine content.** Deliver an eight-week sequence covering strengths and identity, interests and values, career exploration, decision making, supports and barriers, education pathways, employment communication, workplace persistence, and a participant-led launch plan.

Pilot Safeguards and Learning

The pilot will use licensed counseling oversight, screened and supervised mentors, employer partnership standards, informed consent for data sharing, and separate consent for evaluation. Participant supports will include food, transportation, technology access, flexible make-up options, and allowable childcare assistance. PCRC will review implementation at week 4, week 8, day 90, and day 180. The evaluation will report reach, retention, service dosage, participant experience, pre-post change, transition milestones, missing data, and equity patterns. Given the mixed evidence for existing career-readiness programs, continuation or expansion will depend on preapproved benchmarks rather than favorable anecdotes (Morton, 2018).

Approval Conditions

I recommend approval with four safeguards: (a) paid Youth Design Council review before the curriculum is finalized; (b) written referral and employer agreements; (c) a line-item budget that protects participant and mentor stipends; and (d) an evaluation and privacy plan approved before enrollment. The program manager should return with a final budget and partnership roster at the end of prelaunch. These safeguards preserve youth voice, reduce avoidable risk, and give the board credible information for deciding whether the program should grow.

Requested action: Approve the Pathways Forward pilot for implementation planning and authorize staff to finalize the budget, partner agreements, and evaluation protocol.

References: Niles and Harris-Bowlsbey (2022); Courtney et al. (2011); Gypen et al. (2017); Hook and Courtney (2011); Morton (2018). Full references appear in the accompanying proposal.