

Activity: Applying: Five Occupational Pathways

Striving to Thriving researchers developed a pathways worksheet in which focus group participants identified a life or career goal and then mapped out the steps and stages they believed they might pass through as they pursued those goals. You can see the pathways exercise and adapt it for your own group of young people in the toolkit activity MAPPING: YOUNG PEOPLE'S PATHWAYS.

You can learn more about the Five Occupational Pathways and see annotated examples of each category in the Striving to Thriving report.

In the MAPPING: YOUNG PEOPLE'S PATHWAYS activity, you explored a tool and an approach that can help you to learn more about young people's goals and future aspirations. You may have found, as we did, that most young people are optimistic about their future lives. However, there are differences in how well equipped young people feel to set goals for themselves and how confident they are that they have or can locate the information, resources, and people they may need to reach those goals.

These differences in how they see their futures can be described as five occupational pathways ranging from young people who know what their goals are and the steps they need to get there to young people who are unsure of both their goals and next steps.

Five Occupational Pathways

PATHWAY 1: Know what they want to do, and know how to get there

PATHWAY 2: Not sure what they want to do, yet they have a good idea of the steps to take to explore in order to get there

PATHWAY 3: Know what they want to do, but they are unsure how to get there

PATHWAY 4: Not sure what they want to do and unsure of what steps to take

PATHWAY 5: Know what they want to do and think they know how to get there, but their imagined pathway is inaccurate and/or unrealistic

How Can I Leverage the Five Occupational Pathways to Inform my Work?

You can:

1. Learn how individual young people in your program think and talk about their future goals and aspirations and then see how this thinking is similar or dissimilar across individuals and groups.
2. Use the framework to name and group the diverse types of youth experiences, aspirations, and future orientations that are present among participants in your programs.
3. Intentionally assess the types of pathways your organization or program is designed to impact and those pathways for which your programs, supports, or interventions are best suited. For example, is your program designed to engage young people who know what they want to do but are unclear what the steps are to get to their desired work or career goal? Or is your program focused on working with young people who have little to no idea what they want to do or how to get there?

In the pages that follow, you will find suggestions and guidance for how you might apply the Five Occupational Pathways to inform program design and assessment practices.

First, review the Five Occupational Pathways.

- Get comfortable with the Five Occupational Pathways framework.
- Consider reviewing the chapter “Young People Envision Pathways to Thriving” in the Striving to Thriving full report (beginning on page 70), paying special attention to the annotated example pathways from the focus groups.

Second, relate the categories to young people who you know.

- Think about what you may already know about the pathways of the young people with whom you work.
- If you feel you know a group of young people well, you may be able to sort their pathways and their understanding of their goals and aspirations into each of the five pathway categories.
- If you know the group less well, you may choose to complete the MAPPING: YOUNG PEOPLE'S PATHWAYS exercise with a group of young people. If you do not work directly with young people, you might consider having a colleague or a trusted neutral adult conduct the pathways exercise. You can then review the worksheets young people fill out and sort them into the five pathway categories.

Third, take a step back and see what you notice.

- Are there more pathways clustered around one category? Are there themes that emerge in how young people think about and describe their goals and the steps to reach those goals?
- Are there gaps in information, support, or knowledge that young people have identified themselves or that you can identify?
- Are there barriers named by young people that your program can help to address or remove? What could your program do to better help young people overcome the challenges they anticipate they will encounter on their pathways?
- How does seeing young people's pathways categorized in this way connect to how your program supports or impacts young people's career goals and pathways?

Fourth, create some hypotheses for how you might redesign or tweak your program.

- If you find your answers to the questions above reveal some new insights into your work, the next step might be to tweak or re-design your program strategy to better reflect how young people perceive and experience their career pathways and the opportunities you see to strengthen or expand your program's impact.
- For example, if the pathways framework helped you to understand that many young people you work with need help with setting goals before they can articulate the specific steps to reach those goals, how might you change your program strategy to help young people explore different career goals and jobs?

Fifth, consider adding the pathways framework to your assessment practice.

- Use the pathway framework as an assessment tool to understand the impact of your program or intervention on how young people think about their goals and aspirations.
- For example, if you learn that the young people with whom you work primarily have occupational pathways in categories 3, 4 and 5, you may want to assess how your program moves young people towards categories 1 and 2.
- You might ask young people to fill out the pathways exercise when they enter your program or at the beginning of a school year and then again at the end of your program or end of the school year and assess changes to their pathways over a specific time period.

We know you will have other ideas for how to apply this framework to your practice. Please reach out and let the Equitable Futures team know how it's going, where the guidance provided here can be further refined, and what you learn. contact@equitablefutures.org.