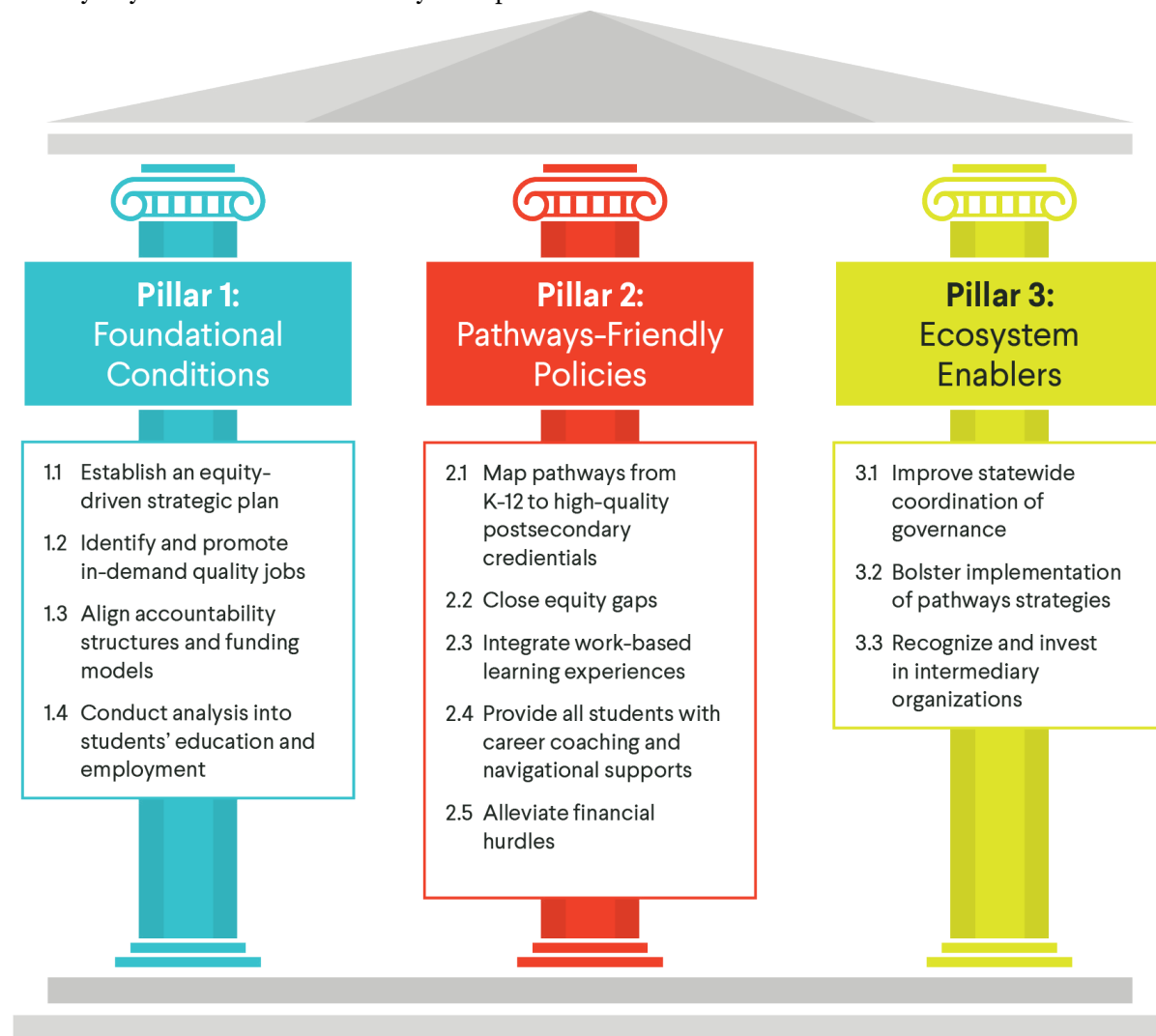# STATE POLICY ASSESSMENT TOOL FOR BUILDING EQUITABLE PATHWAYS

Purpose

JFF and the Building Equitable Pathways (BEP) Policy and Advocacy strand created an assessment worksheet for use by the BEP community of practice and broader field as a tool to review existing and proposed policies of their state's legislative and governing entities to determine the extent to which their state policy environment aligns to the framework and, thus, provides conducive conditions for building equitable pathways. States should use this worksheet to:

Assess one's unique policy environments and conditions against the 12 key state policy issues covered in the State Policy Framework for Building Equitable Pathways to determine the extent to which those conditions enable or inhibit the implementation or scaling of equitable pathways systems;

Identify key stakeholders and ecosystem partners critical for success.

Pillar 1:
Foundational Conditions

1.1 Establish an equity-driven strategic plan

1.2 Identify and promote in-demand quality jobs

1.3 Align accountability structures and funding models

1.4 Conduct analysis into students' education and employment

Pillar 2:
Pathways-Friendly Policies

2.1 Map pathways from K-12 to high-quality postsecondary credentials

2.2 Close equity gaps

2.3 Integrate work-based learning experiences

2.4 Provide all students with career coaching and navigational supports

2.5 Alleviate financial hurdles

Pillar 3:
Ecosystem Enablers

3.1 Improve statewide coordination of governance

3.2 Bolster implementation of pathways strategies

3.3 Recognize and invest in intermediary organizations

How to Use

The worksheet is divided into three major sections (one per pillar). Users should review their states' policies through the lens of racial equity, economic mobility, and systems alignment.

Steps include:

STEP 1:

Read each question and assess where your state falls on a spectrum ranging from no policy exists to the policy exists and is working effectively to build equitable pathways for Black, Latinx, and youth experiencing poverty. As a starting place, consider:

- Does the policy promote upward mobility?

- Does the policy explicitly address race in its design and aims?

- Does the policy boost alignment and coordination across systems?

Digging deeper into designing policy that centers equity, see Appendix A for equity design principles.

STEP 2:

Take notes—brief or detailed—in the dedicated margin to reflect on your state's strengths and opportunities. Consider

- What is the current norm?

- Are there efforts already underway with the governor's office, state agencies, or the legislature?

- Various policy measures: legislation, funding mechanisms, executive orders, codified rules and regulations, agency guidance (including for programs it administers), and state-level plans.

STEP 3:

Keep the conversation going and move toward action. Share and discuss your reflections with your team, other intermediaries, agencies, and policymakers. Consider

- What policy priorities should be added to your organization's policy agenda? When?

- Who can you partner with to move policy priorities along?

Worksheet for Assessing State Policy Conditions

This tool should guide user documentation of state policies. There are likely multiple components or actions needed to build equitable policies under each policy issue area and lever listed in the framework. JFF hopes this tool can be used as a guide to spark future discussions with relevant stakeholders to determine where policies should be created, expanded, or improved to create more equitable pathways for Black and Latinx youth and young people experiencing poverty. Your follow-up policy and advocacy actions should be based on assessment of existing policy conditions.

Note: JFF anticipates most states likely will not have comprehensive state policies in place as referenced in the framework, but rather pieces or smaller components of the state policy issue areas or levers identified as being critical for building equitable pathways. In fact, we expect most states may fall in the "partial" category listed below. Note that the policy issue areas and levers listed in the framework represent the ideal state for building equitable pathways. Check off the areas your state currently has in place, does not have yet, and your priorities for moving toward transformed policy.

By policy we mean both legislation and rules as well as the principles that guide programmatic decision-making and lead to specific outcomes. Policies can be formally enacted in laws, rules, and regulations by government entities—the federal government and state, regional, and local bodies—and policy can be influenced and developed by higher education systems, school districts, and workforce boards.

PILLAR 1
Foundational Conditions for Uncovering and Disrupting Educational Achievement Gaps and Occupational Segregation

Working toward building equitable pathways for Black and Latinx youth, and young people experiencing poverty

	Assessment	No policy exists. Aim: Develop policy	Partial policy exists. Aim: Expand and/or reform policy for robustness	Comprehensive policy exists but is not being implemented effectively. Aim: Help stakeholder implement policy with fidelity	Transformed policy exists and is working as intended. Aim: Sustain and/or scale	Notes
1.1	Does the state have an **Equity-Driven Strategic Plan** that is endorsed by education and workforce agencies and names racial equity as a top policy and performance priority for state agencies and the governor?					
1.2	Does the state identify and promote **in-demand quality jobs**, the **pathways for attaining these jobs** and **advancing up a career ladder**, and the **characteristics of workers** in these positions, in order to discover and address areas of occupational segregation?					
1.3	Does the state **align accountability structures and funding models** that bolster equitable pathways?					
1.4	Does the state routinely conduct **analysis into students' education and employment outcomes**, disaggregate by race, gender, socioeconomic, and geographic level, and make findings publicly available?					

4

PILLAR 2
Pathways Policies for Advancing Equitable Outcomes

Working toward building equitable pathways for Black and Latinx youth, and young people experiencing poverty
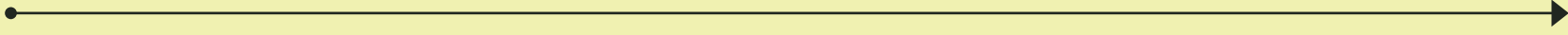
	Assessment	No policy exists. Aim: Develop policy	Partial policy exists. Aim: Expand and/or reform policy for robustness	Comprehensive policy exists but is not being implemented effectively. Aim: Help stakeholder implement policy with fidelity	Transformed policy exists and is working as intended. Aim: Sustain and/or scale	Notes
2.1	Does the state **map pathways from K-12 to attainment of high-quality postsecondary credentials** that launch students into high-demand, high-wage careers?					
2.2	Does the state have policy measures for closing **equity gaps in dual and concurrent enrollment** so that all students may benefit from early college experiences?					
2.3	Does the state **integrate high-quality work-based learning experiences** in academic and career and technical courses to expose and prepare students who are marginalized in college and career pathways?					
2.4	Does the state design, invest in, and support high-quality **career coaching and navigational systems** to strengthen students' exploration, planning, and sense of belonging in college and careers					
2.5	Does the state have policies to **alleviate financial hurdles** to postsecondary entry, persistence, and completion?					

PILLAR 3
Ecosystem Enablers to Foster Regional Collaboration Toward Racial Equity

Working toward building equitable pathways for Black and Latinx youth, and young people experiencing poverty →

	Assessment	No policy exists. Aim: Develop policy	Partial policy exists. Aim: Expand and/or reform policy for robustness	Comprehensive policy exists but is not being implemented effectively. Aim: Help stakeholder implement policy with fidelity	Transformed policy exists and is working as intended. Aim: Sustain and/or scale	Notes
3.1	Does the state improve **statewide coordination of governance** across K-12, higher education, workforce development, human services, juvenile justice, foster care, and other youth-serving agencies, with the aim of establishing a common set of criteria and processes for strengthening college and career pathways and for braiding funding?					
3.2	Does the state bolster local and regional implementation of pathways strategies through the state encouraging **innovation and evidence-based approaches through competitive grants** and other incentives?					
3.3	Does the state **recognize and invest in intermediary organizations** to fulfill the needed purpose of facilitating regional action on college and career pathways?					

Appendix A

8 Key Design Principles for Equitable Policy

JFF recommends users to review policies through the lens of racial equity, economic mobility, and systems alignment. JFF offers a series of key design principles and questions to guide users in their assessment of policy considerations.

1. Policy names equity as the top performance priority for the government, as clearly indicated in policy language, goals, and measures, as well as through funding and budgetary decisions.

   - **Consider:** Is equity a top policy and performance priority, as clearly indicated in policy language, goals, and measures, as well as through funding and budgetary decisions?

2. Policy intentionally dismantles and replaces existing rules, practices, systems, and structures formulated for the purpose of exclusion.

   - **Consider:** Does the policy explicitly address race in its design and aims?

3. Policy incentivizes the development, implementation, and scaling of strategies proven to eliminate racial disparities and make measurable improvements to the conditions of Black and Latinx youth and young people experiencing poverty.

   - **Consider:** Does the policy include a clear set of strategies for addressing equity gaps (including educational attainment gaps, occupational segregation, etc.)?

   - **Consider:** Does the policy promote upward mobility?

4. Policy ensures implementation with fidelity.

   - **Consider:** Does the policy authorize and appropriate sufficient resources to build the capacity of regional pathways systems to plan, implement, and scale equitable pathways solutions?

5. Policy is continuously and rigorously evaluated to assess impact on equity and measurable improvements on the conditions of Black and Latinx youth and young people experiencing poverty.

   - **Consider**: Will the policy be continuously and rigorously evaluated to assess impact on racial equity, and will the findings be made visible and transparent?

6. Policy creates and cultivates an inclusive policymaking environment to encourage the support and participation of relevant stakeholders.

   - **Consider:** Does the policy boost alignment and coordination across systems?

   - **Consider:** Does the policy encourage or require comprehensive approaches to address complex challenges and encourage stakeholders to work outside traditional silos to efficiently and effectively serve the needs of individuals and communities?

   - **Consider:** Does this policy have explicit aims to increase alignment across levels of education (i.e., collaboration across K-12, two-year colleges, and four-year colleges), between education training and workforce/employers, and between education and social service systems?

   - **Consider:** Does the policy make the experience of partnering and aligning systems easier and more affirming for stakeholders?

7. Policy carries language that is asset-based to minimize the threat of harm, deficit, and stereotype reinforcement.

   - **Consider:** Is the language precise, inclusive, people-first, and respectful?

8. Policy promotes culturally responsive practices so that all Black and Latinx youth and young people experiencing poverty can thrive, are seen, and are regarded in the totality of their human dignity.

   - **Consider**: Have Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and Asian American and Pacific Islander youth and their families actively participated in the development and implementation of the policy?