

# WIOA Young Adult Program

## Chapter 09: Career Pathways

### Summary

Career pathways are the new way of doing business, and they operate at two levels – a systems level and an individual program level. A **career pathway system** is made up of multiple career pathway programs, workforce and support service partners. These programs are all oriented around a shared understanding of the needs of industry. Often, tools like career pathway maps are used to talk with students and job seekers about how they can progress through education and training experiences to obtain employment. A **career pathway program** offers a clear sequence of stackable credits and credentials, combined with support services, which enables students and job seekers to secure industry-relevant skills, certifications, and credentials and advance to higher levels of education and employment in high demand occupations.

### Relevant Laws, Rules, or Policies

[Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act \(Public Law 113-128\)](#)

[WIOA Final Rule \(Dated 08-19-2016\)](#)

[WIOA Final Rule: Unified and Combined State Plans, Performance Accountability, and the One-Stop System Joint Provisions \(Dated 08-19-2016\)](#)

[U.S. Dept. of Labor Training and Employment Guidance Letter No. 8-15 \(Dated 11-17-15\)](#)

[U.S. Dept. of Labor Training and Employment Guidance Letter No. 23-14 \(Dated 3-26-15\)](#)

[U.S. Dept. of Labor Training and Employment Guidance Letter No. 19-14 \(Dated 2-19-15\)](#)

[U.S. Dept. of Labor Training and Employment Guidance Letter No. 12-14 \(Dated 10-28-14\)](#)

[U.S. Dept. of Labor Training and Employment Guidance Letter No. 21-16 \(Dated 3-2-17\)](#)

[Career Pathways Toolkit: A Guide for System Development](#)

[2018 WIOA Core Monitoring Guide](#)

[U.S. Dept. of Labor Training and Employment Notice No. 22-19 \(Dated 4-3-20\)](#)

[U.S. Dept. of Labor Training and Employment Notice No. 25-19 \(Dated 6-8-20\)](#)

[U.S. Dept. of Labor Training and Employment Guidance Letter No. 23-19 \(Dated 6-18-20\)](#)

[Office of Management and Budget Code of Federal Regulations 2 CFR 200 \(Uniform Guidance\)](#)

[U.S. Dept. of Labor Training and Employment Notice No. 12-21 \(Dated 10-15-21\)](#)

[U.S. Dept. of Labor Training and Employment Notice No. 14-21 \(Dated 10-27-21\)](#)

[U.S. Dept. of Labor Training and Employment Notice No. 18-21 \(Dated 1-4-22\)](#)

[U.S. Dept. of Labor Training and Employment Guidance Letter No. 10-16, Change 3 \(Dated 6-11-24\)](#)

[U.S. Dept. of Labor Training and Employment Guidance Letter No. 9-22 \(Dated 3-2-23\)](#)

[U.S. Dept. of Labor Training and Employment Guidance Letter No. 9-22 Attachment 1 \(Dated 3-2-23\)](#)

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#### Policy

WIOA requires states and localities to collaborate with adult education, postsecondary education, and other partners to establish career pathways systems that make it easier for all Americans to attain the skills and credentials needed for jobs in their regional economy.

As defined in WIOA, the term “career pathway” means a combination of high-quality education, training and other services that:

- a) aligns with the skill needs of industries in the economy of the State or region involved;
- b) prepares an individual to be successful in any of a full range of secondary or post-secondary education options, including registered apprenticeships;
- c) includes counseling to support an individual in achieving the individual’s education and career goals;
- d) includes, as appropriate, education offered concurrently with and in the same context as workforce preparation activities and training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster;
- e) organizes education, training and other services to meet the particular needs of an individual in a manner that accelerates the education and career advancement of the individual to the extent practicable;
- f) enables an individual to attain a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, and at least one recognized post-secondary credential;
- g) helps an individual enter or advance within a specific occupation or occupational cluster.

In October 2016, the Department of Labor issued a *Career Pathways Toolkit: A Guide for System Development*. The Toolkit features Six Key Elements of Career Pathways that help guide state and local teams through the essential components necessary for developing a comprehensive career pathways system. The six elements are:

1. Build cross-agency partnerships and clarify roles (a no-wrong door approach)
2. Identify industry sectors and engage employers
3. Design education and training programs
4. Identify funding needs and sources
5. Align policies and programs

## 6. Measure system change and performance

The overview of each element includes examples of “Promising Practices,” “Career Pathways FYIs” highlighting useful information about career pathways, “How Tos” to guide a team in carrying out activities within each element, and a “Tool Box” that lists team tools, publications, and resources available to facilitate implementation of the key components of each element.

Career pathways should be incorporated into each youth participant’s Individual Service Strategy (ISS). In the ISS, career pathways should be based on objective assessment and offers a clear sequence of coursework and training that leads to entry-level work experiences and career advancement. In doing so, an individualized roadmap matching the participant’s unique needs and career and educational objectives will be outlined and updated to reflect milestones achieved and any changes in goals or plans related to career pathways. For additional guidance on incorporating career pathways, U.S. DOL has provided a [sample ISS](#).

The guide also includes a section with career pathways tools and resources and a third section with career pathways references, including a glossary of terms.

The [Career Pathways Toolkit](#) can be accessed from the [WorkforceGPS Career Pathways website](#).

In the appendix to this policy, guidance on the Integrated Resource Team (IRT) model is provided. The IRT model is a best practice identified by the U.S. Department of Labor and was implemented in Minnesota as part of the Round 3 and 7 Youth Disability Employment Initiative discretionary grants. The IRT model is a person-centered career pathways strategy that can assist in building and maintaining cross-agency partnerships, engaging employers, and identifying funding sources.

An additional tool was developed by the National Disability Institute as a technical assistance tool for the Disability Employment Initiative. The [Career Pathways Readiness Assessment Tool](#) can be used to assess progress with regards to the six aforementioned key elements.

The U.S. Department of Labor released in Spring 2017 the [Youth Case Management Toolkit](#). This toolkit is designed to develop the knowledge, skills, and aptitudes youth need to succeed in their career pathways and gain self-sufficiency.

The Department of Labor 2018 Core Monitoring Guide reviews the development of career pathways systems and programs across WIOA programs, including WIOA Youth as applicable.

Examples of questions relating to career pathways programs that may be asked during monitoring include:

- How were the sectors chosen for which the career pathway system and/or program is/was developed?
- What labor market analysis was used?
- How are employers or industry leaders engaged in the development of the career pathway program? What are their specific roles?

- How does the career pathway program offer a clear sequence or pathway that combines education coursework and/or training that leads to stackable credentials?
- How is skill attainment measured along a career pathway?

Monitoring will also review individual participation in career pathways training as appropriate, based upon individual needs and employment goals.

### **Virtual/Online Resources for Career Pathways programming**

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted many aspects of career pathways programming. A number of resources have been developed to support WIOA programs and employer partners with virtual engagement and service delivery.

Virtual engagement can be difficult and there are a number of online resources that can be leveraged to engage with youth. Various topics are included in the virtual engagement resources from WorkforceGPS. These resources can be found here:

1. [Part One – Staying Connected: Resources on Virtual Engagement](#)
2. [Part Two – Staying Connected: Resources on Virtual Engagement](#)

Virtual service delivery has become a permanent fixture of workforce development programs. WorkforceGPS has specific resources that WIOA Youth providers can use to provide clients with services in a virtual format:

1. [Service Delivery: Virtual Tools](#)

Employer partners, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, shifted many positions to remote work status. In response to this, the Philadelphia Youth Network developed a “Virtual Internship Toolkit” that helps companies with structuring and implementing virtual internships. This toolkit can be found here: <https://youth.workforcegps.org/resources/2021/06/16/13/47/Virtual-Internship-Toolkit>.

In addition to nationally developed resources on virtual engagement and service delivery – WIOA Youth providers in Minnesota have developed a number of resources in response to virtual career pathways programming. These resources can be found on the Office of Youth Development Youth Resources webpage: <https://mn.gov/deed/programs-services/office-youth-development/resources/#3>

### **Training a Skilled Workforce for Artificial Intelligence Infrastructure**

In July 2025, the “[Winning the Race: America’s AI Action Plan](#)” was released to spur the development and implementation of artificial intelligence infrastructure nation-wide. Taking a multipronged approach, the action plan identifies the importance of AI related job training and within workforce development activities including industry-driven training, expansion of early pipelines through general education, career and technical education, and Registered Apprenticeships. The action plan also identifies workforce system stakeholders as important

entities in expanding early career exposure and pre-apprenticeships that engage middle and high school students in priority AI infrastructure occupations. As stated in the action plan, “these efforts should focus on creating awareness and excitement about these jobs, aligning with local employer needs, and providing on-ramps into high-quality training and Registered Apprenticeship programs.” These priorities align with the WIOA Youth services and WIOA Youth providers are encouraged to identify opportunities for WIOA eligible youth to engage in services that support AI action plan.

## **Mental Health Assessment, Referrals, and Training for Staff**

While youth workforce development professionals are not expected to be experts in mental health, youth workforce agencies can play an important role in supporting the mental health of participants through assessments, comprehensive guidance and counseling, including referrals to partner organizations that specialize in mental health support. Additionally, youth workforce agencies can and should leverage support services to alleviate barriers caused by mental health challenges. When possible, agencies should consider providing staff trainings that focus on mental health so staff can better recognize and address the mental health challenges youth participants may be facing.

One method to increase awareness of mental health challenges recommended by the U.S. DOL’s ETA is to integrate mental health assessments into objective assessments. In doing so, potential mental health needs may be identified. Addressing those challenges through referrals to mental health professionals may be critical for youth participants to persist through programming.

The state of Ohio has developed “well-being” questions that are incorporated into their comprehensive assessment. This resource provides an example of the types of questions youth workforce agencies could ask of participants in order to better understand and ultimately address mental health needs. This resource can be found here: [Comprehensive Assessment with Well Being Questions](#).

## **Youth Voice in Career Pathways Programming:**

The U.S. DOL was one of 22 agencies that participated in the Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs. This interagency work group created the “[Assessing Youth Involvement and Engagement](#)” tool that assists organizations and community partnerships with involving youth in programs. Involving youth in program development can also help youth develop leadership skills which is a requirement of WIOA Youth programming. The U.S. DOL’s Employment and Training Administration has developed a tip sheet that can be found here: “[Civic Engagement for Leadership Development](#)”. For additional resources on how to engage youth and incorporate youth voices into programming see “[Resources for Engaging Youth Voice](#).”

## **Related Links:**

[WorkforceGPS – Career Pathways](#)

[DEED - Office of Youth Development](#)

[Youth Disability Employment Initiative](#)

## Appendix – Integrated Resource Team Models

### Summary

An Integrated Resource Team (IRT) is a key strategy to advance youth through their chosen career pathway. IRTs represent a youth-driven team whose members communicate insights and provide interventions to support a common employment and/or educational goal through a coordinated sequence of services tailored to assist youth achieve their goals.

WIOA Youth Case Managers may likely convene and/or facilitate the first meeting of the integrated resource team. This however, should be predicated on the youth-identified goals, strengths, and other needs. To help holistically address the needs of youth, WIOA Case Managers can use the [Guideposts for Success](#) framework to determine any additional service providers that should be a member of the youth's IRT. A gap in services that falls outside the scope of workforce development activities may be identified but presents an opportunity for WIOA Case Managers to connect youth to additional service providers and programs. Depending on the youth's individual situation, youth may not need services or supports in each of the Guideposts. A list of potential partners, although not exhaustive, is included at the end of this policy. **Prior to sharing any private, sensitive, or protected information about the youth participant with other service providers, be sure to have all necessary release of information forms signed by the appropriate parties.**

After the initial IRT members, including the youth, convene, subsequent convenings of IRT members should be scheduled **as necessary** to ensure that the youth is making progress on his/her stated goals and that needs are being addressed by key service providers. The membership of an IRT should be flexible and change as needed, depending on the issue or goal being responded to at a particular time.

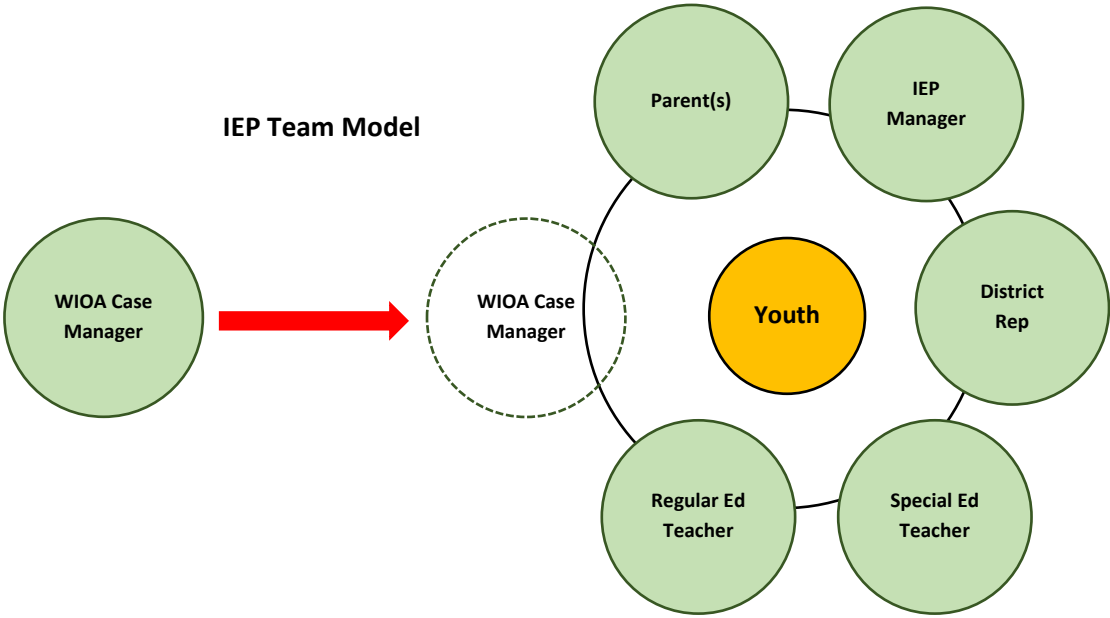
### Integrated Resource Teams in Practice

Integrated Resource Team composition may involve different partners if the youth is considered an In-School Youth (ISY) or an Out-of-School Youth (OSY). Strategies for convening an IRT to implement interventions or services strategies for ISY and OSY are contained in this policy.

#### **IRTs for In-School Youth with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 Plan**

Integrated Resource Teams for ISY may not be necessary if the youth is on an IEP or 504 Plan. Federal and state law prescribes specific requirements that must be included in a youth's IEP or 504 Plan. Nearly all of those requirements align with goals, activities, and outcomes that could be addressed in an IRT setting. Because of the considerable overlap, convening an IRT could be duplicative and unnecessary. In this instance, WIOA Case Managers invited to participate in IEP team meetings can help ensure youth are meeting education and employment goals stated in the IEP.

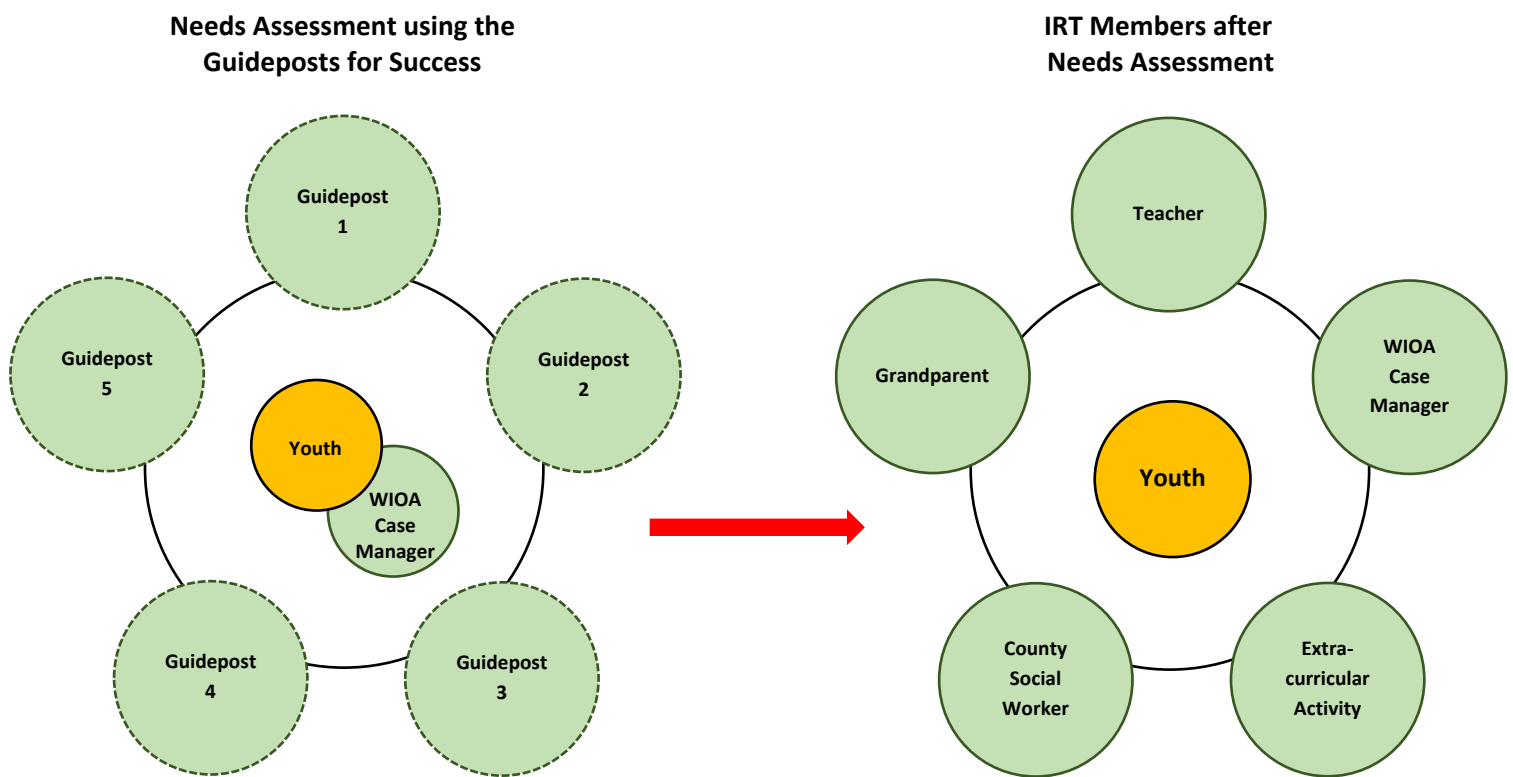
**IEP Team Model**



## IRT for In-School Youth without an Individualized Education Program

For youth who do **not** have an IEP, convening an Integrated Resource Team can be helpful in addressing the youth's needs. Utilizing the [Guideposts for Success](#) framework to identify gaps in service can assist WIOA Case Managers in identifying additional service providers that could support the youth. In the example below, the youth and WIOA Case Manager work together to identify individuals and activities that can support the youth in achieving his/her goals. For **Guidepost 1** they identified a teacher; **Guidepost 2** the WIOA Case Manager providing a work experience; **Guidepost 3** the youth's participation in an extra-curricular activity; **Guidepost 4** county social worker to help the youth find housing needs after high school; and **Guidepost 5** the youth's grandparent supporting them through high school.

### In-School Youth IRT Model



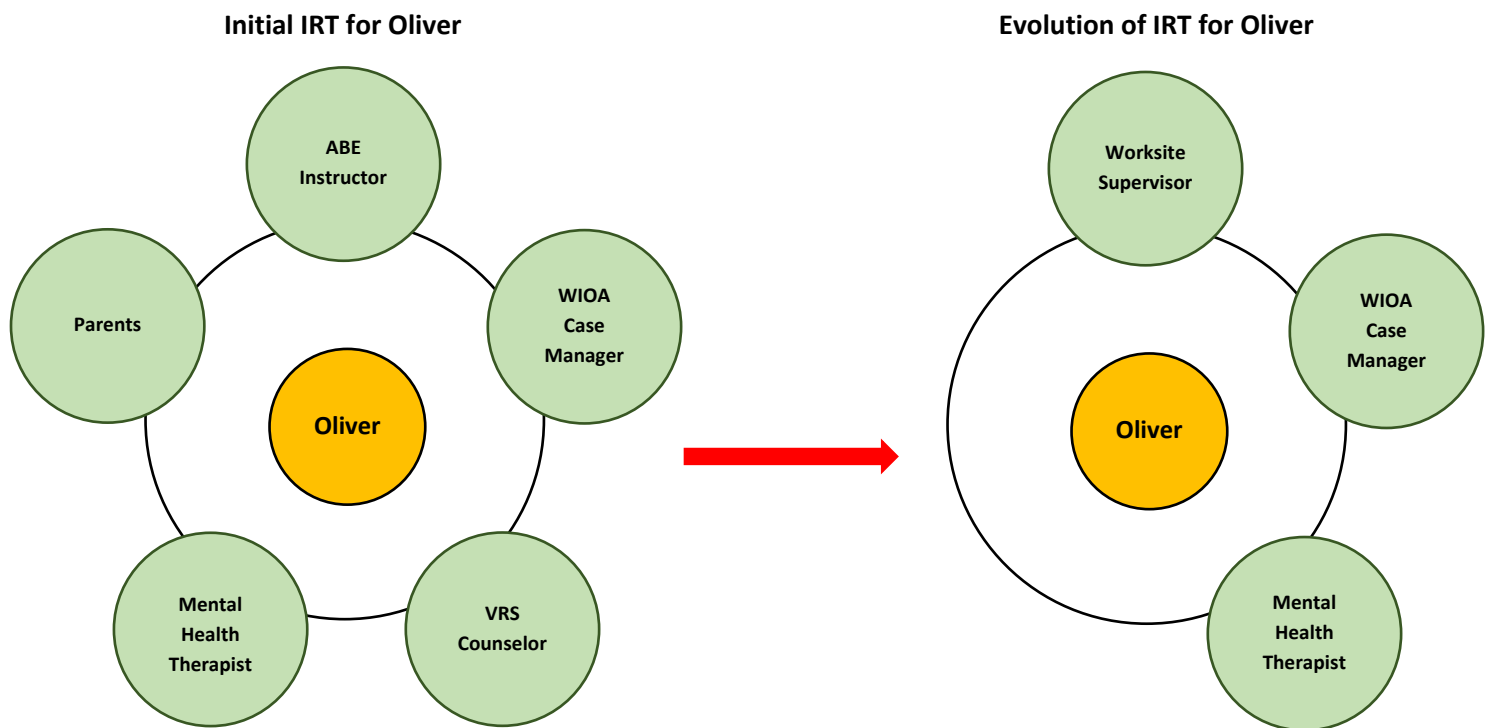
For in-school youth, an IRT may not be necessary if the youth is not working with other service providers or programs. Keep in mind that for some youth, family support may look different. For example, youth who are practicing self-advocacy skills, it may be best to engage with parents/family members in other ways than an IRT. Regardless of who is involved in the IRT, a person-centered approach should be taken to support the youth.

## IRTs for Out-of-School Youth

Given the unique circumstances of an OSY, an IRT may involve different partners. Using a scenario from “[Incorporating the Guideposts for Success into Minnesota’s Personal Learning Plan Process](#)” you can see how different partners can come together to support an OSY.

Oliver is a 20-year-old high school drop-out with a mental health related disability. He connected with a WIOA Case Manager to help him find employment. The WIOA Case Manager worked with Oliver to holistically assess his needs. The WIOA Case Manager identified Adult Basic Education as a partner agency that Oliver should be connected with to earn his GED. Oliver’s ABE instructor was concerned that Oliver might have an undiagnosed learning disability and subsequently connected Oliver with Vocational Rehabilitation Services. Oliver also made the decision that he wanted his mental health therapist and parents to be members of his integrated resource team. With support from his IRT, Oliver decided to pursue a career pathway in taxidermy. Oliver was hired on part-time assisting a local taxidermist and decided to enroll in taxidermy school. Below depicts Oliver’s initial integrated resource team and the evolution of his IRT as he explores a career pathway in taxidermy.

### IRT Model for an Out-of-School Youth



Depending on their unique situation, OSY may have an IRT that evolves over time to include other partners and service providers. For youth who may need economic stabilization resources, it may be best to include **MFIP/TANF Counselors**, **County Social Workers**, **Centers for Independent Living (CIL) staff**, and/or **Benefits Coaches** to assist with public assistance benefits and housing resources.

### **Key Takeaways:**

- 1. Integrated Resource Teams are person-centered, youth-driven, and designed to support youth in achieving their education, employment, and personal goals.**
- 2. There is no one way to convene an IRT. Integrated Resource Team membership is dependent on the unique needs and goals of the youth.**
- 3. Integrated Resource Teams for in-school youth *may* be duplicative and unnecessary if the Youth has an IEP team.**

### **Identifying IRT Activities and Partners**

To help WIOA Case Managers with identifying activities and partners to include in an IRT utilize the PACER Center's publication "[Incorporating the Guideposts for Success into Minnesota's Personal Learning Plan Process](https://bit.ly/2k7LCtE)." This publication provides ideas and best practices for integrating the Guideposts for Success into Individual Learning Plans which can also be adapted to employment plans. When convening IRTs the WIOA Case Manager should utilize a Youth Action Plan, Individual Employment Plan, or an Individual Service Strategy (ISS) as the foundation for youth to identify education, employment, and personal goals. An example of a Youth Action Plan and ISS that integrates the Guideposts for Success in addition to the 14 WIOA Program elements, and five allowable Pre-ETS activities can be found here: <https://bit.ly/2k7LCtE>.

Below is a list of potential partners who may be beneficial to the youth in achieving their education and/or employment goals. This is not an exhaustive list; other individuals, service providers, or organizations may be beneficial in supporting the youth.

- County Foster Care representative;
- County Juvenile Justice representative (Probation officer, truancy officer, etc.);
- County Waiver Services representative (for youth on waivers paying for Personal Care Attendant, Job Coach, etc.);
- Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor;
- State Services for the Blind Rehabilitation Counselor;
- Mental Health Practitioner or ARMHS representative;
- Adult Basic Education representative;
- PACER Center Parent/Family advocate;
- Benefit and Work Incentive Practitioner;
- Post-Secondary Disability Services/Accessibility Services representative;
- College Bridge Program Representative (TRIO, Upward Bound, College Possible, etc.)
- Work experience supervisor, workplace mentor, workplace human resources representative;
- Non-parental adult, friend, or spouse;
- Guardian ad litem;
- Center for Independent Living representative; or
- Community-based organization or Community Action Agency representative.