

Pathways to Success: Implementation Manual

Key Considerations and Best Practices
for Implementing the Pathways Model

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THE PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS MODEL

Colorado Pathways to Success (Pathways) is a model intervention designed to prevent and address homelessness among youth aging out of foster care.

Pathways was developed through the Youth At-Risk of Homelessness (YARH) project, a federal initiative of the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) supporting programs that prevent and address homelessness among youth and young adults with foster care experience.

With YARH funding, the Colorado Department of Human Services, Division of Child Welfare, and the Center for Policy Research partnered with youth with lived experience and state youth-serving agencies to develop, implement, and evaluate Pathways. Pathways is an evidence-based intervention aimed at achieving outcomes for youth at risk of or currently experiencing homelessness.

The model found promising results through a formative evaluation and will report results from a summative evaluation in 2028.

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Introduction

This implementation guide provides organizations serving youth at risk of homelessness with practical steps, strategies, and key considerations when implementing the Pathways to Success (Pathways) model intervention. It begins with a broad overview of Pathways and the framework used to conceptualize implementation. The guide then provides organizations with topics to consider in determining organizational readiness, key considerations for program implementers before and during implementation, and guidance on launching and scaling the model. The guide outlines key partnerships, staffing structures, and ongoing practice requirements. It concludes with considerations for long-term sustainability.

This guide supports organizations in implementing the Pathways model through an evidence-based approach, grounded in the EPIS (Exploration, Preparation, Implementation, Sustainment) framework for evidence-based implementation, which treats implementation as an ongoing, non-linear process shaped by the social, political, and organizational contexts in which programs operate.¹

Exploration

Organizations assess whether the intervention fits their needs, priorities, population, and service context.

Preparation

Organizations decide whether to adopt the intervention and begin planning for implementation, including building buy-in, identifying resources, planning for training, clarifying roles, and developing the partnerships needed to support service delivery.

Implementation

Organizations begin delivering the intervention while continuing to monitor fidelity, problem-solve implementation challenges, and refine processes based on early experience.

Sustainment

Organizations focus on maintaining the intervention over time, embedding it into routine practice, and ensuring the staffing, funding, partnerships, and organizational support needed for long-term success are in place.

¹ Aarons, G. A., Hurlburt, M., & Horwitz, S. M. (2011). Advancing a conceptual model of evidence-based practice implementation in public service sectors. *Administration and policy in mental health*, 38(1), 4–23. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-010-0327-7>

This guide is designed to support organizations through all four phases of the EPIS framework. It outlines considerations for assessing factors that may influence implementation and inform decisions about whether and how to proceed [Exploration]; resources to support implementation planning [Preparation]; strategies for identifying and addressing challenges once Pathways is implemented [Implementation]; and guidance for sustaining the program over time [Sustainment].

Further, in line with the concepts underlying the EPIS framework, this guide emphasizes that implementation is shaped by inner and outer contexts – organizational factors and external system conditions, respectively – that can impact practicing the model with fidelity. This guide identifies organizational, funding, and other contextual factors that organizations should monitor throughout implementation and helps organizations recognize conditions that may support or hinder implementation and adopt policies and practices that strengthen implementation of the model.

This guide supports implementation of Pathways in a range of settings, including county child welfare agencies, Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) providers, and other community-based organizations serving youth at risk of or experiencing homelessness. It draws on lessons from Colorado's statewide implementation — including interviews with supervisors, Navigators, and the project management team — to highlight common barriers, promising practices, and strategies for adapting Pathways to local contexts while maintaining fidelity to its core components.

Key Considerations for Organizations Implementing Pathways

This guide provides concrete recommendations and practical considerations for implementing Colorado Pathways to Success. Although it addresses each phase of the implementation process, several core elements of the Pathways model should be prioritized throughout planning and implementation. These elements provide organizations with a consistent framework for making organization-level implementation decisions. They are:

- **Pathways shifts the traditional service model:** rather than positioning providers as the primary decision-makers, it puts youth in charge of setting and pursuing their own goals, while staff offer support, resources, and guidance. This reflects a core assumption of the model — that youth are capable of identifying their own needs and leading decisions about their support.
- **Pathways was created with youth input**, and involving youth voice at every stage of implementation — planning, delivery, and reporting on outcomes — is critical to practicing the model effectively.
- **Pathways is an intensive, novel case management model** built around a unique approach to engaging youth: "Engaging Youth in a Coach-like Way" (EYCLW). Case managers, called Navigators, must be trained in EYCLW and given ongoing support to practice these skills, especially when other providers may not use the same approach.

How to Use This Guide

Each section of this guide is designed to help identify key decisions, anticipate challenges, and strengthen the conditions needed to implement Pathways effectively.

The guide covers, in order:



RESOURCES

For the exploration phase, through organizational readiness



PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION²

Including launching and scaling; partnerships and engagement; staffing, training, and practice requirements; and technical assistance and data monitoring



FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

Considerations for sustaining the program and technical assistance and data monitoring

The guide can be used in two ways:

1

Sequentially, moving from early exploration through sustainment

2

As a reference, returning to individual sections as specific questions arise during any phase of implementation

² These sections span both phases because activities in Preparation (e.g. planning for training and practice) lay the groundwork that is then carried out during Implementation, where the focus shifts to execution and troubleshooting issues as they arise.

Colorado Pathways to Success Model

Pathways is a short-term, intensive case management intervention designed to prevent and address homelessness among youth aging out of foster care. Though developed within child welfare, it can be adapted by any organization working with young people at higher risk of homelessness. The model targets outcomes in five areas: housing, education, employment, health and well-being, and permanent connections.

“We are not there to tell our clients what to do. We are there to hear their goals and help them reach them . . . Coaching is a mentality that youth are creative, resourceful, and whole. It’s solution-focused, the idea that a client has everything they need to make decisions for themselves.”

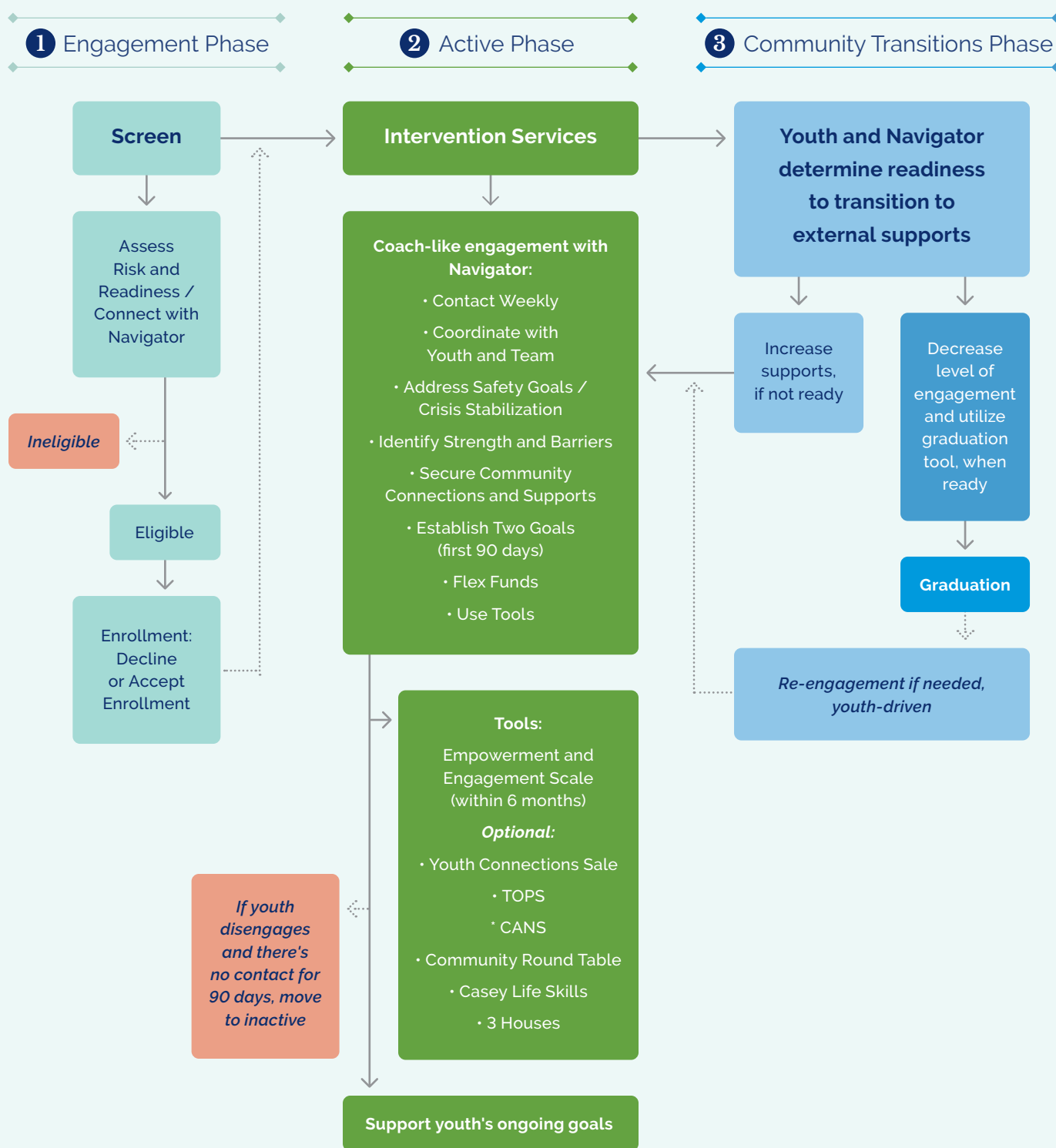
— PATHWAYS NAVIGATOR

Pathways shifts the traditional service model: rather than positioning providers as the primary decision-makers, it puts youth in charge of setting and pursuing their own goals, while staff offers support, resources, and guidance. This reflects a core assumption of the model — that youth are capable of identifying their own needs and leading decisions about their support. Case managers, called Navigators, put this into practice through a youth-driven, relationship-focused engagement strategy called “Engaging Youth in a Coach-like Way” (EYCLW).³ Navigators use EYCLW to provide regular support and crisis stabilization, while drawing on tools such as flex funds and community referrals to meet each youth's unique needs and goals.

Youth move through Pathways in three stages: screening for eligibility, active services to set and work toward goals, and graduation to community supports (Figure 1). For a full description of the model and the evidence behind it, see the [Pathways to Success Intervention Manual](#).

³ EYCLW adapts the coaching models developed by [Co-Active](#) and the [International Coaching Federation \(ICF\)](#) to meet the needs, strengths, and circumstances of youth and young adults who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

Figure 1. Pathways to Success Flow Chart



Determining Organizational Readiness

In EPIS, the Exploration phase is where organizations assess whether and how a new program fits their needs, capacity, and context before committing to implementation. Organizations should use this time to assess their readiness to support the model. Understanding the key elements of successful implementation — and where your organization currently stands in each — helps build a strong foundation for sustainable program delivery.

Key Elements for Successful Implementation

While readiness looks different across organizations, there are six key elements organizations should focus on to prepare for implementation. Each is described below.

- **Organizational Culture and Leadership Buy-In:** Pathways requires a culture that gives youth autonomy and authority as experts in their own lives. Leaders and staff need to buy into that culture to support both youth and Navigators.
- **Youth in Decision-Making Positions:** Pathways was developed with youth as key stakeholders and decision-makers. Implementation should continue this legacy by meaningfully including youth voice in planning, implementation, and improvement efforts.
- **Funding and Resources:** Pathways implementation requires flexible resources to support youth-defined goals, relationship-building, housing stability, and responsive service delivery.
- **Staffing and Training:** Successful implementation depends on staff with the time, skills, supervision, and training needed to deliver Pathways with fidelity — including smaller Navigator caseloads and intensive training. This is supported by supervisors and coaches who provide ongoing technical assistance in coach-like engagement to Navigators.

- **Partnerships and Collaboration:** Pathways relies on strong partnerships to connect youth to housing, education, employment, health and well-being supports, permanent connections, and community resources. Partners need to understand the culture underlying Pathways in order to effectively collaborate.
- **Fidelity Monitoring and CQI:** Pathways implementation requires data collection and a planned continuous quality improvement (CQI) process that supports fidelity monitoring and program improvement. Data should be collected, analyzed, and reviewed on an ongoing basis to ensure the model is implemented and achieving pre-defined outcomes.

The checklist below offers an initial assessment of these conditions; later sections describe each element in more detail and offer strategies for strengthening readiness.

Organizational Readiness Checklist

The checklist below covers the six key elements of implementation readiness, scored across three levels of organizational capacity:

1

GETTING STARTED

Your organization is in the early stages of developing capacity in this area. Key infrastructure, processes, or resources are limited or not yet consistently in place.

2

BUILDING CAPACITY

Your organization has some capacity in this area, but additional development and resources would strengthen readiness for implementation.

3

IMPLEMENTATION READY

The organizational structures, processes, and supports for this area are well established and are likely sufficient to support implementation of Pathways..

To use the checklist, rate your organization's current level in each area. You don't need to be fully "Implementation Ready" everywhere before beginning — but areas marked "Getting Started" or "Building Capacity" should shape your implementation planning, technical assistance needs, and early CQI priorities.

	GETTING STARTED	BUILDING CAPACITY	IMPLEMENTATION READY
Organizational Culture and Leadership Buy-In	 Leadership/staff have limited familiarity with Pathways or youth-led practice. Policies may be provider-directed or compliance-focused.	 Some buy-in exists, and the organization is identifying policies or practices that may conflict with youth-led, flexible service delivery.	 Leaders, supervisors, and staff support Pathways values and are prepared to advocate for youth-led practice, flexible progress, and Navigator support.
Youth in Decision-Making Positions	 Youth voice is not part of organizational or program-level decision-making.	 Youth are consulted, but their roles may be informal, inconsistent, or advisory, without decision-making authority.	 Youth have formal, compensated roles in planning, implementation, and improvement efforts, and staff are prepared to work collaboratively with them.
Funding and Resources	 Funding is limited, restricted, or not yet identified. Flexible funds, housing supports, and other youth resources are inconsistent or uncoordinated.	 Potential funding sources and community resources have been identified, but gaps remain or approval processes limit timely use.	 Flexible funding, housing supports, and clear processes are in place to support youth-defined goals, staffing, training, supervision, and data collection.
Staffing and Training	 Staffing roles, caseload expectations, supervision capacity, and training needs are not yet clearly defined.	 Staffing and training plans are being developed to support manageable caseloads, EYCLW training, supervision, and ongoing practice.	 Navigator and supervisor roles are clear; staff have protected time for training, manageable caseloads, regular coaching, and ongoing learning opportunities.
Partnerships and Collaborations	 Key partnerships across the five targeted outcome areas (housing, education, employment, health and well-being, and permanent connections) are limited, informal, or not yet mapped. Referral pathways are unclear.	 The organization is mapping partners, developing referral processes, and educating partners about Pathways and youth-led service delivery.	 Strong partnerships and referral pathways are in place across housing, education, employment, health and well-being, and permanent connections.
Data Collection and CQI Capacity	 Data collection and CQI processes are limited, informal, or not connected to decision-making.	 Key data elements, documentation expectations, and review processes are being developed.	 Clear tools and processes are in place to track fidelity; data are regularly used for CQI, supervision, training, and sustainability planning.

Launching and Scaling the Model

Planning to launch and scale Pathways begins with the preparation phase and carries through implementation as the model is put into practice. This section covers the internal organizational factors (inner context) and external conditions (outer context) that shape the successful implementation of Pathways. It also discusses common barriers and facilitators to implementation and provides guidance for adapting Pathways to your organization's needs.

Logistical, Organizational, and Policy Considerations

Successful implementation of Pathways requires more than training staff or adopting new procedures—it requires organizational, logistical, and policy changes, along with a genuine commitment to youth-led practice. These changes depend on both the internal conditions within an organization and the external environment surrounding it—described in EPIS as inner context and outer context factors.

- Inner context factors are internal organizational conditions that affect how Pathways can be introduced, including: caseload size; training capacity; internal approval, documentation, and compliance processes; organizational culture; and leadership and staff buy-in.
- Outer context factors are external conditions that shape implementation from outside the organization, including the broader resource landscape, buy-in from partner organizations, and the availability of funding to support small-scale financial assistance for youth.

The questions in this subsection are intended to help organizations identify the logistical, organizational, and policy conditions—both inner and outer context—that may support or complicate implementation of Pathways. Before launching the model, organizations should use these questions to examine where existing practices align with the Pathways model, where policies or procedures may need to shift, and what supports are needed to implement the model with fidelity.

Logistical Considerations

Pathways' approach to case management requires organizations to consider several logistical factors, including capacity for training and supervision and readiness to implement other model tools. These factors fall within the inner context—the internal organizational conditions that shape how effectively Navigators can be prepared to practice the model. To prepare, consider the following questions:

Do you have the staffing required to implement Pathways?

- Navigators need smaller caseloads — roughly 12 active cases at a time — to deliver this intensive model with fidelity. How will you balance that requirement against the number of youth who need support?

PRACTICE TIP

Some sites have found it useful to designate a subset of staff to deliver the full Pathways intervention, while training the rest of the team in EYCLW to provide lighter-touch services — preserving fidelity without requiring every worker's caseload to shrink.

Do staff have the capacity to undergo the training required to practice the model?

- Do staff have protected time to build skills, reflect, and integrate the model into daily practice?

PRACTICE TIP

Sites should treat monthly coaching calls as protected time for Navigators to practice and build skills (see Staffing and Training). Consistent attendance strengthens skill development, so project staff reinforce the expectation that Navigators take part. Occasional absences are unavoidable; however, supervisors can support by monitoring attendance patterns and keeping the calls a visible priority.

- How will you support staff in practicing coaching skills while maintaining current caseloads?
- Can you plan for the several months it typically takes staff to become comfortable and competent in EYCLW?

Do supervisors have the capacity and buy-in to actively support implementation?

- Can they provide consistent coaching, observation, and feedback?
- Will they model coaching principles and reinforce them in team meetings and 1:1s?
- Do they have time to prioritize skill development and coaching conversations over administrative tasks?

There are logistical outer context factors to consider when implementing Pathways as well. When implementing Pathways, consider the following outer context factors.

How does your organization's size, setting, and resource landscape shape the support you can provide?

- How do your size and setting (rural vs. urban, small vs. large system) affect caseload capacity and service demand?
- What resources are realistically available in your community, and how does that impact what Navigators can offer?
- Are there service gaps in your area (e.g., limited number of service providers available in your area, or limited resources for housing, education, employment, transportation, or child care) that affect your capacity?

How will collaborating organizations' referral and service coordination practices affect Pathways service provision?

- Will your partner organizations support this kind of case management when coordinating services?
- How can you educate referral partners so they understand the model?

How will Navigators access tools built into the model?

- **What housing supports** — such as vouchers — can your organization offer, and how do their requirements interact with the model?
- **Flex funds** — small-scale financial assistance that helps youth maintain stability and progress toward their goals — are a core Pathways tool. What funding structures does your organization have to support flex funds, and how do their requirements affect their use? For a full description of Navigator tools, including flex funds, see the [Pathways to Success Intervention Manual](#).

Organizational and Policy Considerations

Pathways is grounded in the assumption that youth are “naturally creative, resourceful, and whole individuals who are capable of identifying and advocating for their needs.”⁴ Organizations implementing the model need to be prepared to let youth make decisions — and sometimes fail — which requires a cultural shift from traditional case management. Implementing Pathways therefore raises many questions about an organization's internal policies and culture, or inner Context, that should be considered before implementation begins. These questions include:

Does your organization's philosophy support youth-led work?

- Is your organization prepared to treat youth as decision-makers, or do your policies still assume staff know better?
- Are there requirements (e.g., court mandates) that restrict youth-defined goals? How can Navigators be empowered to help youth navigate these requirements while still working to achieve their self-defined goals?
- Do policies allow for non-linear progress?

How will your organization support youth graduating from the model?

- The final stage of the Pathways model is graduation, transitioning youth to community supports. Are staff willing and able to let youth transition out of their care? How can you build a culture that trusts youth to move on from Pathways' supports, while remaining open to them returning if needed?

PRACTICE TIP

Youth rarely progress through the model in a straight line. They may cycle between active services, crisis, and graduation, and a graduated youth may need to re-enter active engagement—making caseloads harder to predict. Discussing graduation criteria earlier in training, and reinforcing them throughout, can help sites navigate this ambiguity. Navigators should also have access to additional supports that empower them to let youth make decisions about moving between stages, along with the flexibility to accommodate that movement.

Where might bureaucracy limit flexibility?

- Do approval processes or documentation requirements prevent staff from responding to youth needs and goals efficiently and effectively?

⁴ Colorado Child Welfare Training System. (2016). *Engaging Youth in a Coach-like Way Learner Guide*.

- Can staff adapt support based on individual youth needs, or are they bound to standardized procedures?

Do the outcomes your organization measures align with the Pathways model?

- Do your outcomes and compliance measures prioritize inflexible metrics, or can outcomes be measured in youth-defined progress and engagement?

Where will implementation likely face resistance within your organization?

- Is your administrative and financial staff able to support a more flexible form of engagement?

Common Barriers and Facilitators for Implementation

The figure below highlights common barriers and facilitators to implementation — factors such as organizational policy, staff capacity, and resource availability that can support or challenge service delivery. While not exhaustive, it offers practical insight for anticipating obstacles and identifying key supports.

✓ Facilitators

Organizational leadership buy-in is essential for effective implementation of this model. Leadership who support the model will provide navigators with opportunities to practice their coaching skills and will advocate for staff when the flexibility of the model conflicts with rigid policies or organizational partners.

Training capacity is helpful in implementing Pathways. The model promotes a new way of interacting with youth that requires a lot of practice to fully understand.

The Pathways model emphasizes **flexibility and adaptability**. It requires a paradigm shift in how services are provided to youth. Organizations that are open and nimble are better positioned to make this cultural shift successfully.

✗ Barriers

Complex bureaucratic policies can limit navigators' ability to support youth in real time. For example, at sites with lengthy, intensive approval processes for disbursing flexible funds, youth have reported that these funds often do not meet their needs or original requests.

Large case loads are a real concern in an intensive model such as this one. Navigators cannot effectively meet with youth and provide coach-like engagement with case loads over 15 young people.

Staff turnover is common in human services but can severely limit the ability of an organization to implement Pathways to fidelity.

Adapting the Model

Pathways was developed for child welfare agency and runaway and homeless youth service provider settings. However, it was designed to be flexible and adaptable across a range of settings serving transition-age youth. This flexibility allows implementers to tailor delivery to local contexts while maintaining fidelity to its core components. At the core of the model is a coach-like approach to engaging youth. Beyond this, Navigators draw on a range of tools to support their engagement, which can be customized to align with the needs, strengths, and resources of each organization.

Pathways can be adapted for RHY providers, McKinney-Vento liaisons, and other settings serving youth at risk of or experiencing homelessness. Adaptations should modify the tools and supports available rather than how Navigators deliver services. Organizations should ensure that Navigators can meet regularly with youth and remain responsive to youth-guided goals while adjusting staffing structures and engagement tools to fit available resources. Adaptations should also account for the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the youth and families served.

EXAMPLE OF ADAPTATION OF PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS — THE PATHWAYS PREVENTION MODEL

The Pathways Prevention Model adapted Colorado Pathways to Success as a prevention approach for Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) providers. The adaptation expanded the target population beyond youth with foster care involvement to all youth ages 12–21 at risk of homelessness across rural Colorado.

The Pathways Prevention model does not require youth to be child welfare involved. It kept the Colorado Pathways to Success' core coach-like engagement approach while adding a youth peer-to-peer mentorship component and expanding flexible cash assistance to fit the broader population and available resources.

Key Partnerships and Engagement

As noted above, partnerships and collaboration are part of the outer context in EPIS, a key domain that influences implementation at every phase of the process.⁵ This is especially true in Pathways, as Navigators need strong relationships with state and local agencies, nonprofit partners, homeless youth providers, and local landlords to secure the supports youth need — relationships that also give youth a network of support after graduation. This section covers the types of partnerships that help, how to leverage existing relationships, creating partnerships with youth with lived experience, and best practices for partnership management.

Types of Partnerships

Pathways implementation is strengthened by partnerships across the model's five targeted outcome areas: housing, employment, education, health and well-being, and permanent connections. The table below gives examples of key partnerships in each area.



⁵ Aarons, G. A., Hurlburt, M., & Horwitz, S. M. (2011). Advancing a conceptual model of evidence-based practice implementation in public service sectors. *Administration and policy in mental health*, 38(1), 4–23. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-010-0327-7>.

Outcome Area	Key Partnerships
 HOUSING	• Local Landlords and Housing Providers including RHY providers to expand available housing options, including units that accept vouchers or subsidies. • Public Housing Authorities — HUD-funded local authorities that provide affordable housing options. • Emergency Shelters, Hotels, Transitional Housing Providers • Continuums of Care (CoCs) — HUD-funded community partnerships supporting emergency, transitional, and permanent housing for people experiencing homelessness.
 EMPLOYMENT	• Local Workforce Centers, Vocational Rehabilitation, local employers, and local unions and apprenticeships.
 EDUCATION	• School districts and McKinney-Vento liaisons, Community Colleges, Technical Colleges, Public Libraries, Head Start (for young parents), and local after-school and tutoring organizations.
 HEALTH & WELL-BEING	• Local clinics, Mental Health Partners, Behavioral Health Partners like community mental health centers • Public Benefit Programs — caseworkers who help youth access TANF, SNAP, and Medicaid. • Anti-Hunger Organizations and Food Pantries — food access and nutrition support.
 PERMANENT CONNECTIONS	• Faith-based groups, Recreational Programs, Neighborhood Associations, and Child Care Assistance Organizations.

Organizations should also build relationships with other agencies youth may interact with — juvenile justice, schools, and other homeless youth providers — focused on streamlined referrals, coordinated services, and shared resources. Existing interagency collaboration teams can be a helpful entry point for building these partnerships.

Existing Partnerships

Most organizations already have relationships with many of the partners described above. Alongside building new partnerships, take stock of the relationships you already have and strengthen them to maintain these critical partners:

- Explicitly map current relationships to identify gaps and opportunities for collaboration.
- Use Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) or other formal agreements to formalize roles and expectations.

- Maintain regular communication and check-ins to keep partnerships active and to address any communication issues affecting service delivery.
- Use data and outcomes to regularly report back to key partners on the successes of the Pathways program.
- Educate partners on the culture underlying Pathways so they can effectively refer and coordinate services.

“It seems to me that's kind of one of the bigger struggles that we have in [our organization], at least, is a lot of youth are being referred to the program with professionals giving them kind of false ideas of what the program is going to be or look like or not fully understanding the program.”

– PATHWAYS NAVIGATOR

Partnerships With Youth with Lived Experience

Pathways was created with youth input, and involving youth voice at every stage of implementation — planning, delivery, and reporting on outcomes — is critical to practicing the model effectively.

Agencies should follow the best practices outlined below to engage youth in Pathways implementation and ongoing program support.

- To identify youth, partner with organizations that regularly consult youth, or connect with organizations that have youth action or advisory boards.
- Ensure youth have a safe space to share their perspectives.



- Build this safe space through transparency about expectations, a trauma-informed approach to sensitive topics, and genuine recognition of youth expertise.
- When asking youth about their experiences and perspectives, approach questions with curiosity and take care with your words.
- Obtain informed consent: youth should know what they're being asked, that responses are confidential, and that participation is voluntary with no pressure to share more than they choose.
- Be responsive and address youth concerns with care and in a timely manner.
- Thank and compensate youth for their time and expertise — food, snacks, and transportation assistance support ongoing engagement.
- Support a range of youth voices by seeking input across racial, ethnic, age, and geographic groups.
- Provide youth with feedback and share how their input was used to shape the program, policy, or activities they are consulted about.

For more recommendations on engaging youth, see [Building a Sustainable and Replicable Approach to Estimating Youth Homelessness: A Community Guide](#),⁶ or to assess your organization's current inclusion of youth voice, use the [Assessment of Youth Voice at the Agency Level \(Y-VAL\)](#).⁷

6. Davis, L., Versen, E., McLagan, A., LeBoeuf, W., Belcher, C., Wickerham, E., & Christiani, K. (2024). Building a Sustainable and Replicable Approach to Estimating the Prevalence of Youth Homelessness: A Community Guide to Linking Administrative Data. Center for Policy Research.

7. Walker, J. S., Masselli, B. M., Blakeslee, J., Baird, C., & Thorp, K. (2018). Development and testing of an assessment of youth/young adult voice in agency-level advising and decision making. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 94, 598-605.

Staffing, Training, and Continued Practice Requirements

Successful implementation depends on having the right staff in place and ensuring they get the training and support needed to deliver the model effectively. In Pathways, this is especially true because the model places Navigators at the center and requires them to have a strong set of coaching skills that can only be strengthened by continued practice with ongoing supervisor support and monthly practice sessions. This section outlines the key roles necessary to implement Pathways, the support required, and the training staff need to deliver it with fidelity.

Staffing

Pathways is a culture shift and modification to staff approach to serving youth. Pathways can be implemented within current staffing arrangements and with existing resources. Key roles and responsibilities needed for implementation, and the specific staff who fill them, will vary by organization, but the general structure is outlined below.

Project Management Team:

Key staff who oversaw project operations, training, and management at the system level.

PROJECT DIRECTOR

A state-level employee responsible for overseeing project operations at the division level, securing funding, and providing organizational and structural support.

PROJECT MANAGER

An independent contractor with child welfare and youth homelessness experience who maintained project funding, supported reporting requirements, and facilitated cross-site outreach and learning.

LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT SPECIALIST

A state-level employee with expertise in child welfare and coaching models, who trained site supervisors and Navigators, led monthly coaching practice sessions, and supported sites in building their EYCLW knowledge.

PERFORMANCE MONITOR/EVALUATOR

A program-level data analyst or independent organization with experience evaluating homelessness prevention and child welfare programs, providing technical assistance, data monitoring, and quality assurance support.

At the program level, two roles are essential: Navigators and supervisors.

NAVIGATOR

Navigators are at the center of the model, using EYCLW to support youth. For a full description of the Navigator role and required competencies, see the [Pathways to Success Intervention Manual](#).

PRACTICE TIP

Staff (Navigator) turnover disrupts relationship continuity and requires ongoing investment in training and onboarding new Navigators. Support retention by addressing common drivers of burnout, such as competitive compensation and consistent supervisory support. When turnover does occur, a standardized onboarding process can help new Navigators step in and build new relationships with the youth.

SUPERVISOR

Supervisors are equally essential for two reasons. First, coach-like engagement requires intensive training and regular practice, which supervisors can support through weekly meetings and coaching supervision. Second, because Pathways requires a cultural shift in how services are provided, other staff and partner organizations not immersed in the model may not fully embrace its philosophy. Navigators in Colorado's pilot frequently reported pushback from collaborating agencies and their own organization's administration — supervisors play a critical role in helping Navigators navigate that pushback and advocating for the model with those around them.

“It feels like it's like us against everyone to change or make this whole movement. And sometimes the whole department or admin or deputy directors are not on board.”

— PATHWAYS NAVIGATOR,
ON WHY THEY NEED SUPERVISOR ADVOCACY TO SUPPORT THEIR WORK

Training

Practicing EYCLW requires both a philosophical shift and a set of practical skills that take time and ongoing support to develop. Organizations should be intentional about how they train staff and should build in regular opportunities for Navigators and their supervisors to practice and strengthen their EYCLW skills. The [Pathways Intervention Manual](#) includes an example training schedule from Colorado's implementation. It's a starting point to adapt to your own needs, staffing structure, and resources — not a prescribed schedule. Since a sample schedule already exists there, this section instead outlines key considerations for planning training and ongoing practice — drawn from technical assistance with Colorado sites and the perspectives of Navigators, supervisors, and Pathways leadership.

Pathways has a steep learning curve and requires an “Aha” moment for staff to fully embrace the model, which can take time.

Coaching is a process, and developing the skills that support this model takes time and practice. Many Navigators described the learning process as long and intensive — initially seeing EYCLW as similar to services they already provided and struggling to balance training with their caseloads. One Navigator shared that the model “just really didn't make sense” at first. But with sustained commitment, staff who kept showing up and practicing eventually reached a turning point — an “Aha” moment — where the model clicked for them and became more distinct from their previous approaches.

This underscores the importance of regular learning opportunities; organizations need to provide ongoing chances to practice the model, and the support staff need to attend them alongside their other responsibilities. Create multiple opportunities to experience coaching—as a coach, a coachee, and an observer—to support skills development through practice.

PRACTICE TIP

Additional opportunities to deepen learning include:

- Office hours: have facilitators available to provide support through 1-on-1 discussions outside of monthly coaching calls
- Book club: create regular meetings for a deeper dive into coaching skills using the Co-Active book. Discuss up to one chapter per month.
- Peer-to-peer learning: create a space for Navigators to meet to explore applying coaching approaches to specific examples.

In-person training is helpful for staff to embrace the model.

Navigator Training Preference: Hybrid Structure

- 1 BEGIN** with about one week of in-person training at the organization level.
- 2 PROVIDE** follow-up training and support virtually across agencies.
- 3 BUILD** in regular in-person opportunities to meet with experts and peers.
- 4 USE** annual or recurring sessions to practice coaching skills, troubleshoot implementation challenges, and deepen understanding of the model.

Colorado's statewide expansion launched in 2020, at the height of COVID-19, so all training was held virtually. Before that, training had been in person. Navigators later shared that they may have reached their "Aha" moment sooner with in-person training — describing Zoom-based sessions as impersonal, which made it harder to connect with the model's relational philosophy and practice.

Pathways can sometimes feel abstract; trainings need to be grounded in the practical tools and processes that support its implementation.

Pathways promotes a cultural shift in how services are delivered. As a result, initial EYCLW training focuses heavily on philosophy and skills, but the model also includes concrete components — a standard progression from intake to active services to graduation, and a set of tools Navigators use to support youth toward their goals.

Introduce concrete tools like the Pathways flow chart and graduation checklist early in training, alongside the model's philosophy and skills. Pairing conceptual learning with tangible references from the start helps staff grasp the model faster and build fidelity sooner.

To sustain this understanding, reinforce these tools consistently throughout training and ongoing supervision. Regularly revisiting how youth progress through the model and actively monitoring graduation criteria during supervision keeps the framework top of mind and prevents key practices from being overlooked as staff and sites turn over.

Monthly coaching cohorts are essential opportunities for staff to deepen their understanding of EYCLW, expand their coaching skills, and learn from one another's experiences.

Monthly coaching cohorts typically include three to five Navigators, supervisors, and organizational leadership with a facilitator experienced in the coaching model. They follow a structured format that reinforces learning and creates space for reflection and peer feedback. Navigators who attend regularly tend to show stronger EYCLW skills and greater fidelity to the model.



Fidelity Monitoring and Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI)

Implementation and ongoing program delivery should be monitored regularly to confirm that Pathways is being delivered with fidelity before the program transitions to the Sustainment phase. Drawing on the EPIS framework, the California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse developed a four-step process to guide planning for monitoring and maintaining fidelity.⁸ This section applies those recommended steps to Pathways and illustrates each one with examples from the model's implementation in Colorado.

STEP 1:

Determine who has long-term responsibility for assessing, reviewing and reporting fidelity.

Each implementing site should determine who is responsible for maintaining fidelity to the model, reviewing data, and making program decisions locally. In Colorado, during the launch of Pathways, the project hired an outside evaluator to assess program fidelity and outcomes. This evaluation partner used a form of data monitoring called Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) to support fidelity because it uses real-time data and regular reporting to monitor key service and outcome metrics, allowing leadership and sites to assess effectiveness, identify gaps, and make timely adjustments. For key metrics, measurement tools, and data monitoring processes, see the [Pathways to Success Intervention Manual](#).

STEP 2

Identify costs associated with fidelity monitoring, reporting and ongoing review.

The costs associated with maintaining fidelity for the Colorado implementation of Pathways were twofold: Pathways evaluation partner designed an online case management system to record data to support the evaluation and to monitor and report on fidelity measures.

⁸ The California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare. (2026). Maintaining Fidelity [PDF]. <https://episframework.com/resources/maintaining-fidelity>

STEP 3:

Determine the range of acceptable fidelity adaptations and monitor fidelity scores through routine review and reporting.

For a discussion of data measures and their indicators, see the "Measuring Program Performance and Fidelity" section of the [Pathways Intervention Manual](#).

STEP 4:

Create a plan to improve fidelity if it is not being adhered to within an acceptable range.

Pathways evaluation partner hosted regular technical assistance calls with sites to discuss CQI measures and problem-solve when the data identified clear departures from fidelity. For example, in Pathways, a major aspect of coach-like engagement is supporting the youth in developing self-defined goals. During the course of implementation, the evaluation partner noticed that many youth in their database were missing goals; they held meetings with each Pathways site to discuss this omission from the database and emphasize the importance of goal setting to the model.

Sustainability

The final stage of implementation is sustainability. Sustaining Pathways beyond initial implementation requires integration into existing systems, along with sustained commitment of leadership, funding prioritization, and policy alignment.

Integration Into Existing Systems

Embedding Pathways into existing referral pathways, policies, and service arrays helps ensure the model outlasts any single grant cycle or champion. This includes formalizing Pathways as a standard referral option for eligible youth, aligning documentation and data systems with existing organizational infrastructure, and building Navigator and supervisor roles into ongoing staffing plans.

Long-Term Funding Strategies

Organizations should identify a mix of internal funding, grants, and partnerships to sustain Pathways over time, rather than relying on a single funding source. This might include braiding multiple grant sources, building Pathways costs into existing program budgets, or partnering with other agencies to share the cost of shared roles such as coaching and data support.

Policy and Procedure Alignment

Sustained delivery depends on organizational policies that support, rather than conflict with, Pathways' youth-led approach — including flexible documentation requirements, approval processes that allow timely use of flex funds, and outcome measures that reflect youth-defined progress.

Final Thoughts

In a panel on youth experiences with Pathways to Success, one youth shared some thoughts that underline many of the considerations at the heart of implementing this model. He described going through Pathways as a process: his Navigator gave him space to make his own decisions—and his own mistakes—while remaining present to help him figure out next steps, whether those decisions succeeded or failed. His final recommendation was "Be patient with us," which is something that needs to be remembered both when coaching youth within the model and when implementing the model itself.

For more information on Pathways to Success, or if you have questions about adapting and implementing the Pathways model in your agency, visit centerforpolicyresearch.org/projects/youth-at-risk-of-homelessness-yarh-colorado-pathways or contact Lanae Davis, Co-Director, at ledavis@centerforpolicyresearch.org.