



Future Ready: Creating a Coherent Career Advising Strategy at The Denver Scholarship Foundation

Citation

Burton, Ryan. 2025. Future Ready: Creating a Coherent Career Advising Strategy at The Denver Scholarship Foundation. Doctoral Dissertation, Harvard University Graduate School of Education.

Link

<https://dash.harvard.edu/handle/1/42719886>

Terms of use

This article was downloaded from Harvard University's DASH repository, and is made available under the terms and conditions applicable to Other Posted Material (LAA), as set forth at

<https://harvardwiki.atlassian.net/wiki/external/NGY5NDE4ZjgzNTc5NDQzMGIzZWZhMGFIOWI2M2EwYTg>

Accessibility

<https://accessibility.huit.harvard.edu/digital-accessibility-policy>

Share Your Story

The Harvard community has made this article openly available.

Please share how this access benefits you. [Submit a story](#)

**Future Ready: Creating a Coherent Career Advising Strategy at
The Denver Scholarship Foundation**

Doctor of Education Leadership (Ed.L.D.)

Capstone

Submitted by

Ryan Burton

To the Harvard Graduate School of Education
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education Leadership

April 2025

© 2025

Ryan Burton

All Rights Reserved

Acknowledgments

To my site supervisor and Denver Scholarship Foundation Chief Impact Officer, **Nate Cadena**, for always making time to process my experiences, allowing me to learn from your brilliance, for the thoughtful reflections and laughs, and for making my residency experience possible.

To Denver Scholarship Foundation CEO **Lorii Rabinowitz**, thank you for modeling compassionate leadership, sharing your wisdom, granting me access to many meetings and opportunities, and being a fantastic mentor throughout my residency.

To the **Denver Scholarship Foundation Team** for welcoming me with open arms, allowing me to lead my project, and connecting me to our schools and students.

To my faculty advisor, **Irvin Scott**, for inspiring me and pushing my thinking through your outstanding teaching, authenticity, reflections on education leadership, and capstone feedback.

To my professor, **Alexis Redding**, for being an incredible instructor in student development and a warm, inspiring source of support on my capstone committee and beyond.

To my Harvard instructors and affiliates, **Frank Barnes, Monica Higgins, Deborah Jewell-Sherman, Jen Cheatham, Paul Reville, Mary Grassa O'Neill, Jal Mehta, Drew Echelson, Liz City, Candice Crawford-Zakian, Lisa Lahey, Francesca Purcell, Jim Honan, Karen Flood, Kristopher Hall, Monisha Lozier, Samantha Cohen**, and **Russell Booker**, for being exceptional teachers and contributing to the transformational growth I experienced.

To the Harvard staff, including **Margarita Ruiz** and **Matt Rose**, for your support throughout my residency matching process and my Ed.L.D. journey; to **Clara Lau**, for answering my questions and providing administrative support; and to **Dinesh Thapa**, for always being a welcoming presence in Gutman Hall.

To **Cohort 12**, for being a constant source of inspiration, friendship, and fun during my doctoral journey. You are each exceptional in your unique ways and have been a critical piece of my personal and leadership growth. I am forever grateful that we have each other in our lives.

To **Mom and Dad**, thank you for emphasizing the importance of education and always believing in me and what is possible for my future.

To my **siblings**, thank you for your encouragement, being some of my best friends, and laughing by my side throughout countless adventures.

To my wife, **Danielle**, for supporting me throughout this journey and being my greatest inspiration and support.

To my daughter, **Isabelle**, for being a light in my world and the greatest gift I have ever received.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	v
Introduction, Context, and Problem of Practice.....	1
Introduction	1
Context	4
Problem of Practice	10
Review of Knowledge for Action	11
The Content: Theories and Best Practices for Career Advising Programs	12
Organizational Change Models	25
Theory of Action	30
Description, Evidence, and Analysis of Strategic Project	31
Description	31
Evidence	48
Analysis	57
Implications and Conclusion.....	69
Implications for Self	69
Implications for Site	73
Implications for Sector	82
Conclusion	87
References.....	92
Appendix.....	101

Abstract

Higher education in the United States is at a crossroads. College enrollment rates have declined for the past 15 years, and many question whether a four-year degree is worth the time, money, and sacrifice it takes to persist to graduation. Most students cite securing a good job as their primary reason for pursuing higher education, illustrating an evolving education landscape where career conversations and programming must be increasingly prevalent to meet individual student and broader economic needs.

Colorado has a unique education paradox, as it leads the nation in post-secondary education attainment. However, Colorado's high school graduation and college matriculation rates are below national averages, as a significant portion of its highly educated professional workforce is imported from other states. Post-secondary credentials are required to earn a living wage in Denver, making it crucial to strengthen the state's education-to-career pipeline to fill available jobs. The context above informed my residency at The Denver Scholarship Foundation (DSF), which was created in 2006 to help make college possible for Denver Public School (DPS) students.

My capstone illustrates my effort to develop a coherent career advising strategy that prepares high school and college students for professional success. By creating psychological safety, focusing on organizational learning, and employing a facilitative leadership approach, I strived to create the conditions for future career advising success at DSF.

During my residency, I analyzed the nonprofit career advising landscape. I also conducted background research on theories and best practices for career advising, including career theory, mentorship and social capital formation, career exposure and experiences for high school students, the role of college internships in helping students avoid underemployment, and career metrics. In addition, I evaluated DSF's existing career programming and reported on stakeholder insights to inform future program design.

I conclude with recommendations for DSF to clearly define career advising, build staff capacity, create more work-based learning and mentorship opportunities, and implement career metrics. I also share relevant sector-wide implications, such as embracing holistic advising and college student success coaching, strategically collecting and using student career data, facilitating transformational partnerships, and providing affordable pathways through postsecondary education.

Introduction, Context, and Problem of Practice

Introduction

Is College Worth It?

Higher education in the United States is at a crossroads. At a time when tuition continues to rise, student loan debt burdens millions, and college is increasingly politicized, many students question whether a four-year degree is worth the time, money, and sacrifice that it takes to persist to a diploma (Cruzvergara, 2024). Enrollment rates have declined since 2010, and only 61.4% of high school graduates started college in the fall of 2023. That percentage is the lowest college enrollment rate in thirty years. Men make up only 42% of the college student population today, and a recent study found that one million fewer men enrolled in college in 2024 compared to 2011 (Bennett, 2024). Young men who are Black and Hispanic are among the highest subgroups not pursuing higher education.

When most people consider the value of college, they look to securing a good job as a measure of their return on investment (Cruzvergara, 2024). A recent Pew Research Center survey found that as little as one in four adults believe a four-year degree is “extremely” or “very important” to earn a well-paying job in today’s economy (Fry et al., 2024). Although many people start college, only 37.7% above the age of 25 have graduated with at least a bachelor’s degree (Census Bureau, 2023).

Despite the disillusionment many feel, research consistently shows that a post-secondary degree or credential pays off. According to the Lumina Foundation (2023), four-year college graduates make over \$1,000,000 more in a lifetime than students who stop pursuing their education at high school. However, it takes more than graduating with a post-secondary credential or a bachelor’s degree for most students to gain a strong employment outcome,

especially early in their careers. The United States education landscape has evolved, and integrating conversations and programming about careers and the workforce has become an increasingly prevalent aspect of PK-12 and higher education.

This higher education context and questions about the role institutions and organizations should play in student career development were a backdrop during my Doctor of Education Leadership (Ed.L.D.) residency at the Denver Scholarship Foundation (DSF). My capstone is a story about how I led the development of an organization-wide career advising strategy at DSF as they considered the role they should play in supporting Denver Public School (DPS) students and alumni with their career development. In addition, my capstone project provides insight into my personal leadership journey as I synthesized highlights from previous professional experiences, my values, Ed.L.D. resources and tools, and lessons learned during my residency.

What Brings me to This Work

As a Black male who grew up in Colorado and believes in the power of higher education, doing this work felt particularly meaningful to me. Growing up, I experienced the transformational impact that higher education can have on a family. My parents lived through an era of desegregation. As first-generation college graduates, they had more professional choices and opportunities than my grandparents, who did not have the chance to attend college. For myself, a college degree granted me access to classroom learning and out-of-classroom experiences, which allowed me to explore my passions and potential professional pursuits. My college education and co-curricular experiences inspired me to pursue a year of service at a Boston Public Middle School through City Year after graduation, which solidified my education and nonprofit leadership career pathway. Because college transformed how I saw the world and nurtured my passions, it always felt “worth it” to me. I feel determined to use my educational

privilege to empower others so everyone can access their desired pathways, regardless of zip code or identity status.

Before starting the Ed.L.D. program, I worked as a Success Program Director for a Massachusetts college completion nonprofit that supported more than 2,000 first-generation students. Through this work, I experienced firsthand how powerful the career curriculum was for students. Earlier in my career, I managed a scholarship program at a large private foundation in Colorado while completing a leadership development fellowship. During that time, I witnessed how philanthropy can remove barriers, allowing students to pursue their desired college and career pathways. Returning to Colorado to lead this capstone project was an opportunity to build on my previous professional experiences in service to the future of Denver's workforce. I was determined to take what I learned as an Ed.L.D. student to help DSF develop a strategy that would allow them to continue assisting DPS students in graduating from college while also building employability skills to help them flourish beyond graduation.

In the following background sections, I introduce the specific context of student career development in Colorado and the city of Denver. Next, I outline the organizational context by sharing the history and structure of DSF and my role as a resident. Understanding how the state and city context could impact DSF was vital for me, as nearly all DSF scholars remain in Colorado for their careers. Then, I introduce my problem of practice as a key question that constitutes the starting point of my strategic project.

Context

State Context: The Colorado Paradox

Colorado has three key challenges in its education-to-career pipeline: low high school graduation rates, low college matriculation rates, and the requirement for post-secondary credentials to earn a living wage in Denver. DSF helps address these problems.

According to the Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE), Colorado leads the nation in educational attainment, with 62.9% of the population having a post-secondary credential (Colorado Department of Higher Education, 2024). In addition, 42.7% of the state's population has a bachelor's degree or higher, which is second in the country (Educational Attainment, 2024). Colorado has the country's ninth-lowest high school graduation rate, as 83.1% of its students earn a high school diploma (the national average is 86%) (High School Graduation Rates by State, 2024).

Regarding college matriculation, slightly under 50% of recent Colorado high school graduates (49.9%) in the class of 2021 pursued higher education after college in 2021, which is far below the national average of 61.8% (CDHE, 2023). For comparison, in 2009, 58.8% of Colorado high school graduates pursued college after graduation (CDHE, 2023).

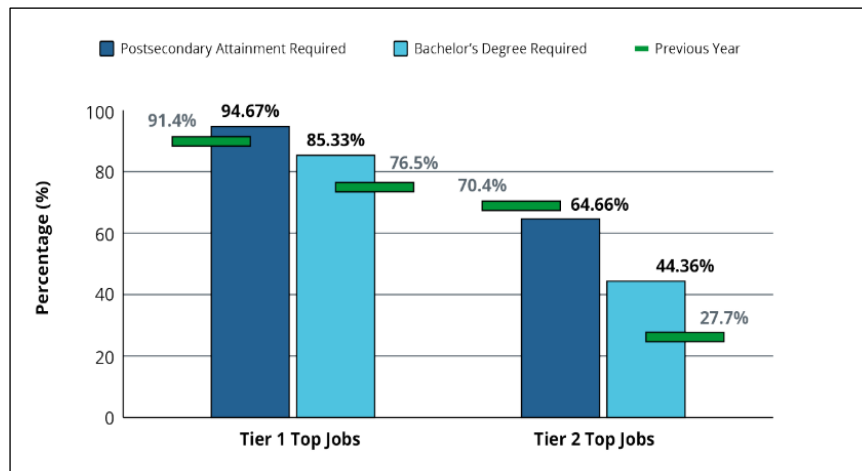
Most of Colorado's adult population (those above age 25) were born in another state (Colorado Department of Local Affairs, 2021). Half of the residents who moved to Colorado in 2010 and 2019 had at least a bachelor's degree, compared to 33% of adults born in Colorado. The discrepancy between educational outcomes for the adult and youth population (those educated in the state's K-12 system) in Colorado persists since many college-educated professionals move to the state for their careers due to its quality-of-life measures and strong economy. This gap is known as the Colorado Paradox.

Once in college, 59.1% of Colorado’s high school students from the class of 2018 graduated within six years (Brundin, 2024). Colorado’s college completion percentage is slightly below the national six-year college completion rate of 61.1% (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2024). In addition, Colorado’s 2024 college completion rate is its highest since 2007 (when the Clearinghouse began collecting data), but it still ranks 33rd nationally (Brundin, 2024).

Providing more pathways for post-secondary success is urgent, as the annual *Colorado Talent Pipeline Report* (2023) found that nearly 85% of “tier one jobs” in Colorado require a bachelor’s degree, and almost 95% require a post-secondary credential. A “tier one job” is defined as a living wage job that can support two adults and one child (a \$77,480 per year threshold) (Colorado Workforce Development Council, 2023). (See Figure 1). Colorado is also projected to be the state with the highest percentage of jobs requiring at least a bachelor’s degree in 2031 (CDHE, 2024). As birth rates decrease and migration to Colorado slows down in the coming years, Colorado must increase its college completion rates for its K-12 graduates to fill those roles (CDHE, 2023).

Figure 1

Postsecondary Attainment Requirements for Top Jobs in Colorado, 2023 to 2022 Comparison



Note: From *2023 Talent Pipeline Report Released* | Colorado Workforce Development Council, p. 27. <https://cwdc.colorado.gov/blog-post/2023-talent-pipeline-report-released>. Copyright 2023 by the Colorado Workforce Development Council.

Learning about Colorado's opportunities to strengthen its high school and college graduation outcomes and career pipeline made me feel a sense of urgency during my project. System-wide interventions must occur for in-state students to access the number of skilled jobs available in the coming years. In addition, because my work was anchored in Denver, Colorado's largest population center, I was excited about the role the city could play in influencing education throughout the entire state.

City Context: An Evolving Denver Public School System and Funding Landscape

Within the context of the State of Colorado, the city of Denver has dynamics that are characterized by an evolving public school system and funding landscape. For DPS, this manifests as better high school graduation rates, the challenge of race and class segregation, and resource philanthropy for scholarship providers from the Prosperity Denver Fund.

DPS serves over 89,000 Denver students across 207 schools (Denver Public Schools, 2024). DPS has significantly increased its high school graduation rates in recent years. The four-year graduation rate for the class of 2023 improved by 2.5% and is now at 79% (the highest rate in the district's history) (Pribble, 2024). In addition, high school graduation rates increased for Black and Hispanic students (Pribble, 2024). DPS also reported that 63 fewer students dropped out in the 2022-2023 academic year compared to the previous school year (Pribble, 2024).

Despite these improvements, DPS remains a highly segregated school system. DPS is one of Colorado's most socioeconomically and racially diverse school districts, with one of the state's largest percentages of students of color (Niche, 2025). More than 62% of DPS students are on free and reduced lunch (DPS, 2024). DPS has a student body that is 25.5% White, 13.4% Black, 3% Asian or Pacific Islander, and 52% Hispanic or Latino (DPS, 2024). However, between 20 and 50% of schools in DPS are segregated by race or class (Strong & Pena, 2023). A recent study on segregation in DPS found that DPS schools with more White and wealthy students than the district average have high school completion rates that range between 10-40% higher than the schools that are more racially segregated with students of color. This discrepancy has significant implications for DPS and DSF, as high school graduation rates and college-going rates vary significantly within the district ([Appendix D](#)).

In the city's funding landscape, the Prosperity Denver Fund (PDF) provides financial reimbursement to select Denver nonprofits offering college scholarships to students (Prosperity Denver Fund, 2024). PDF recognizes the role that colleges play in helping students develop workforce skills and was passed by Denver voters in a 2018 ballot initiative ordinance that asked for a 0.08% sales tax to support these organizations via reimbursement. PDF is a standalone 501c3 nonprofit that monitors the distributions (PDF, 2024). PDF reimbursements currently

make up one-third of DSF's revenue, and the sales tax ordinance that funds PDF will be voted on by Denver residents again in 2028.

Organization Context: Making College Possible for Denver Students

The Denver Scholarship Foundation began in November 2006 as a pilot college access program serving three Denver Public Schools. DSF started because Denver philanthropists Tim and Bernadette Marquez had a personal connection to the cause and were inspired to increase college attainment in Denver (Denver Scholarship Foundation, 2024). As a DPS alum, Tim wanted to give back to his home community. After the initial startup funding, former Denver Mayor (and current US Senator) John Hickenlooper and then DPS Superintendent Michael Bennet (also a current US Senator) facilitated the creation of DSF to make higher education possible for all DPS students. DSF has thrived in its 18-year existence, and 80% of scholars in its 2018-2023 cohort have graduated or persist in college ([Appendix A](#)). DSF defines college as four-year institutions, community colleges, and technical schools. More than 90% of DSF's Scholars attend four-year institutions, but DSF is also committed to supporting its graduates who want to earn associate degrees or certificates. DSF currently offers three programs:

- **College Access:** This program begins in 9th grade and supports DPS high schoolers through DSF Future Centers in 15 DPS high schools. DSF chose its 15 Future Centers based on what DPS leadership identified as the district's high schools with the most significant opportunities to improve their college enrollment rates. Each school is a "traditional" secondary school, and DSF has not yet placed a Future Center within a district charter or innovation school. These Future Centers provide DPS Seniors with advising and college access services. DSF supported 59% of DPS seniors and served over 3,500 high school students and their families in the 2022-2023 school year

(DSF, 2024). DPS and DSF have a \$1.5 million annual service contract, which allows DSF to provide its technical services.

- **Scholarships:** DSF provides need-based scholarships to DPS graduates attending college or technical school in Colorado (DSF, 2024). In the 2022-2023 school year, DSF granted more than \$7 million in scholarships to DPS students (2022-2023 Annual Report, 2023) (see [Appendix B](#) for more details about the scholarship program).
- **College Success:** DSF partners with 30 higher education institutions in Colorado to provide DSF Scholars with ongoing support and extra financial aid throughout their college career (DSF, 2024). Nearly 50% of DSF college students attend Denver's Auraria Higher Education Campus, which consists of the Community College of Denver, the University of Colorado-Denver, and Metro State University ([Appendix C](#)). Auraria is the most diverse college campus in the state. Through a state Colorado Opportunity Scholarship Initiative (COSI) grant, DSF provides direct college advising services to students attending an Auraria institution. DSF partners with staff members at Colorado's other higher education institutions to ensure non-Auraria students meet yearly requirements to maintain their scholarships.

On average, DPS high schools with DSF Future Centers attend college at a rate that is 14 percentage points higher than non-Future Center schools (DSF, 2024) ([Appendix D](#)). Future Centers strengthen college-going rates, but the outcomes mirror the segregation noted within DPS.

DSF has more than 90 employees across five departments: Executive, Program and Administration, TRIO Talent Search, Development, and Marketing and Communications. Led by

CEO Lorii Rabinowitz, DSF's staff has nearly tripled in size and revenue since the start of her tenure in 2017 (allowing DSF to support more students). Lorii was selected as one of the "most admired CEOs" in Denver by the city's business journal in 2023 (McConnell, 2023). The DSF Governing Board has 32 members, including the DPS Superintendent, Dr. Alex Marrero. DSF is known for its positive staff culture and has consistently been named one of the best places to work in the region by the *Denver Post* (Villegas, 2023).

Last year, DSF achieved a 94% employee retention rate and experienced no turnover in its college or campus advisor staff, ensuring students maintained continuity with their advisors. As DSF has grown, an opportunity for improvement that the staff shared was to continue building its data infrastructure and systems. DSF integrated Salesforce during the 2023-2024 academic year, which led to some internal growing pains. However, Salesforce will enhance the organization's data and reporting infrastructure, which in turn will provide the program team with the tools to more strategically support its students and to better manage toward outcomes.

As an Executive Doctoral Resident, I reported to DSF's Chief Impact Officer, Nate Cadena. As the Chief Impact Officer, Nate oversees DSF's program team. In addition to weekly meetings with Nate, Lorii has been a mentor during my residency, where our check-ins focus on my learning, DSF strategy, and executive leadership. The access I was granted across DSF helped me understand the organization holistically and provided an ideal authorizing environment to learn about organizational leadership and execute my project.

Problem of Practice

The context above informed and shaped the key question in my strategic project:

How can the Denver Scholarship Foundation understand its unique value add to DPS students and graduates, opportunities for improvement, and strengths while exploring

whether it is feasible (and necessary) to build on its current career programming and develop an organization-wide career strategy that ensures its scholars are best positioned to flourish in Colorado's economy and land a tier one job?

Because career success begins far before one graduates high school or college, it is crucial to understand where there are opportunities to strengthen career programming and student outcomes at both levels. I strove to evaluate the impact of DSF's offerings to help determine future DSF program opportunities by analyzing strengths, opportunities for improvement, and potential areas for expansion. I hoped to build upon the excellent career advising work DSF has started and use my learning to help define its future career strategy.

Review of Knowledge for Action

This "Review of Knowledge for Action" (RKA) section outlines the career advising research literature and knowledge that informed my project, incorporating many of the best practices and considerations for practitioners leading career advising programs. Thus, regarding content, I included research on career development theory and social capital, the importance of exposure to career pathways, the role of internships in helping students avoid underemployment, and career metrics and competencies. In addition, to help structure my process of leading change, I examined relevant frameworks that could help me bring together a large and diverse team to work towards developing a strategy. Each fund of knowledge and my previous leadership experiences informed my Theory of Action (TOA) for this change effort. (See Table 1.)

Table 1*RKA Content, Process, and TOA*

Content	Process	Theory of Action
• Career Theory • Mentorship and Social Capital • College Internships and Avoiding Underemployment • Career Competencies and Metrics	• PELP Nonprofit Coherence Framework • Organizing to Execute vs. Organizing to Learn • Psychological Safety • Facilitative Leadership	Informed by the content and process sections of my RKA, and outlines the actions I took throughout my strategic project at DSF.

The Content: Theories and Best Practices for Career Advising Programs

Regarding content, I explored two categories of theories: Career Theories and Mentorship and Social Capital Theories. I also explored three types of best practices: career exposure for high school students, career internships for college students, and career competencies and metrics.

Career Theory

To begin, I explored the family of career theories. Traditionally, DSF's formal programming ended at college graduation. DSF has helped DPS students with one transition (high school to college) and is now supporting them with another (college to career). The transition from the college classroom to a career may be even more challenging for most students, and it is vital to recognize the psychosocial aspects of change. For instance, The Bridges Transition Model (1988) notes that transition goes through three phases: 1) Endings, 2) Neural Zone, and 3) New Beginnings.

Practitioners must understand the challenges that can come with endings and the in-between "neutral zone" before accepting the identities that come with new beginnings (Bridges Transition Model, 2024). Nancy Schlossberg's (1989) transition theory notes that "People in

transition often feel marginal and that they do not matter” (p. 6). In addition, Schlossberg (1989) noted that “every time an individual changes roles or experiences a transition, the potential for feeling marginal arises” (p. 7). When students feel marginalized, they feel left out of a community and isolated. Because of this, it is essential to recognize students’ social, emotional, and cognitive development as we build our career readiness work (Bouffard & Savitz-Romer, 2012). It is also important that the job is done in partnership with students and that their voice is at the forefront as they work toward graduation and begin exploring career pathways.

Beyond the process phases, another critical element within career theories relates to student identity and personality. Students are more likely to persist to college graduation if they are engaged on campus and interested in their academic major (Killam et al., 2017). John Holland’s Theory of “Person-Environment-Fit” suggests that career choices represent an individual’s personality (Francis, 2024). This theory illustrates six personality types: Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional (See Figure 2), and shows how one’s personality may align within a particular work environment (Killam et al., 2017). Holland’s theory is often used in the “Strong Interest Inventory” assessment, which assigns students a “code” and reveals extracurricular activities, academic majors, and potential career opportunities that students may want to pursue during college based on their personality and interests. The “Strong Interest Inventory” can help DSF students understand themselves and their personalities, as many do not know which careers and majors may fit their personalities.

Figure 2

John Holland's RAISEC Hexagon



Note: From *Who Do You Think You Are?* 2024, June. Center for Career Engagement | Washington University in St. Louis. <https://careers.wustl.edu/who-do-you-think-you-are/>. Copyright 2024 by the Washington University in St. Louis Center for Career Engagement.

It is important to note that career tools like the “Strong Interest Inventory” should only be used as a starting point for students beginning to learn about themselves and potential career pathways (A. Redding, personal communication, January 9, 2025). Career interest inventories do not account for future growth or how one’s interests may evolve (French, 2022). Most young people are not yet self-authoring (defining their own beliefs and values, separate from those of their family, friends, and society), and interest inventories can feel prescriptive and limiting (A. Redding, personal communication, January 9, 2025). In addition, career interests do not always

align with a student's abilities and can reinforce gender stereotypes (French, 2022). First-generation college students are also more likely to pursue vocational and pre-professional career pathways, even if they do not interest them, to increase the likelihood of financial stability (Girardin, 2024). However, research consistently shows that individuals are more motivated and have higher job satisfaction when their career aligns with their interests (Career One Stop, 2025). Because of the complexity and various considerations involved with choosing a career that "fits," students need to evaluate their career interest inventory results with the guidance of an advisor or mentor who can help them process their results in a deeper context that aligns with their unique situation.

Mentorship and Social Capital Formation

The second category of theoretical frameworks relates to Mentorship Theories, which also connects to Social Capital formation. An essential aspect of career development is receiving support from mentors who can help students more successfully transition from college to career (Hill & Redding, 2021). In *The End of Adolescence: The Lost Art of Delaying Adulthood* (2021), Hill and Redding researched the college experience across multiple generations. They found that mentors can take three forms: "mirrors," "windows," and "guiding lights."

"Mirrors" are mentors who "help students see themselves" (Hill & Redding, 2021, p. 110). Hill and Redding noted that "As students attempt to match their interests to career paths, they need people who can help them see themselves and their interests more clearly" (p. 110). They also noted that people who serve as "mirrors" for students often know them best, like family members. "Mirror" mentors are particularly valuable for first-generation students as they empower the roles that friends and families in their communities play in their career

development. The “mirror” mentor role is essential for DSF and other organizations exploring the families’ role in career advising.

“Windows” are mentors who “broaden the sense of possibilities” for students (Hill & Redding, 2021, p. 112,). These mentors “serve as windows to help students understand how to reach their goals and prepare for challenges they may face along the way” (p. 112). The authors noted that windows are significant for students who have not seen many examples of people in their community who work in their desired field. In addition, Hill and Redding shared that windows take on the following three forms: 1) Informants: Share their own experiences, 2) Firsthand exposure: Experiences that offer work opportunities that give students the chance to see for themselves what a specific job entails, and 3) Role models: Mentors who show that people like themselves are welcomed and can succeed there.

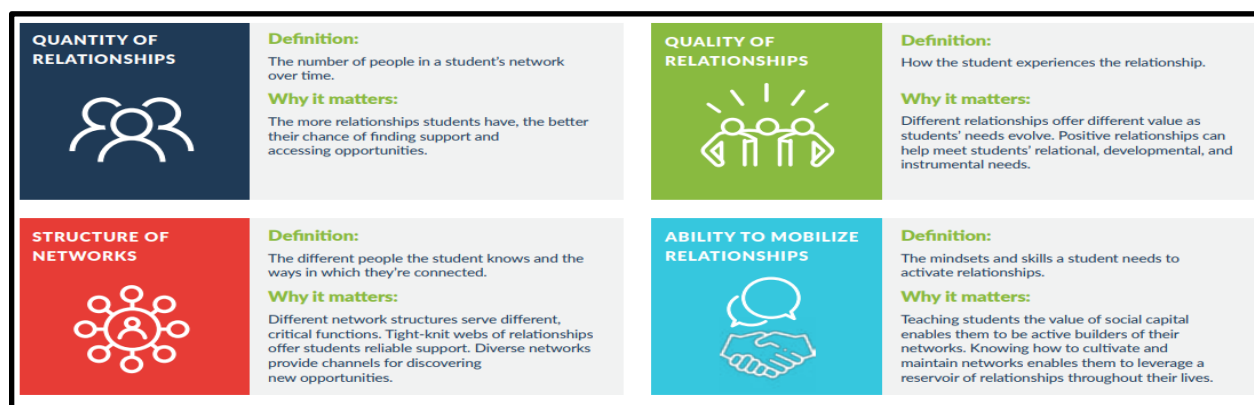
Finally, “guiding lights” are “authentic mentors who illuminate the path” (Hill & Redding, 2021, p. 123). “Guiding lights” use their insider knowledge and expertise to show specific steps their mentee must take to succeed in a desired career path. For example, a student pursuing medical school would receive specific tips on navigating the pre-medical curriculum, preparing for the MCAT, and getting relevant physician shadowing experiences that would help bolster the competitiveness of their application.

Although each form of mentorship is important, “mirrors and windows” might be most appropriate for DSF high school students, first-year students, and sophomores in college who are just starting their career exploration and looking to deepen their self-knowledge and be exposed to more possibilities. “Guiding lights” would be most impactful for college juniors and seniors at DSF (or students who feel more settled in their career pathway) looking for more in-depth tips about their career pathways.

The three types of mentors underscore the importance of social capital formulation for students, which is particularly valuable for first-generation students from low-income backgrounds who may not have the same access to information networks that can support their career growth. Charania and Fisher (2023) from the Christensen Institute described social capital as “students’ access to and ability to mobilize relationships that help them further their potential and their goals” (p. 3). Although leaders who work with young people recognize the importance of social capital, very few schools and organizations measure their students’ social capital. The Christensen Institute’s research on social capital built a framework that outlines how organizations can measure how students experience their relationships across four dimensions: 1) Quantity of relationships, 2) Quality of relationships, 3) Structure of network, and 4) Ability to mobilize relationships. (See Figure 3.)

Figure 3

A Four-Dimensional Framework for Measuring Student’s Social Capital



Note: From Charania, M., & Fisher, J. F. (2023). *The Missing Metrics*: p. 10, 2023.

https://www.christenseninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/THE-MISSING-METRICS_update_2023.pdf. Copyright 2023 by the Christensen Institute.

The authors note that social capital helps “students demonstrate increased long-term well-being and expands career options” (Charania & Fisher, 2023, p. 5). However, only 45% of K-12

youth report having strong relationships with adults. In addition, less than half of post-secondary students have a mentor in college. Furthermore, students of color are less likely to have mentors than White students. An article citing a 2023 Gallup Poll found that only 38% of students from low income backgrounds had any type of career mentor (Mowreader, 2023). Harvard's "Making Caring Common Project" (2024) provides tools for educators to help students map their adult relationships and identify students who may not have positive relationships with adults so they can help foster one. Beyond just providing connections, having at least one positive relationship with a caring adult helps improve youth mental health outcomes. By capturing students' current networks and aiding in the personal understanding and strengthening of DSF student networks, educators can help youth improve their mental health and maximize their desired postsecondary and career choices and opportunities as they transition into adulthood. Mentors and advisors can also help expose students to career pathways and provide career-relevant experiences.

Career Exposure and Experiences for High School Students

One way to provide high school students with career experiences is through state and district-led 1) career and technical education, 2) dual enrollment offerings, or 3) early colleges. Some of the offerings within these programs allow high school students to earn college credits and gain work experience through apprenticeships (longer-term career experiences that usually incorporate classroom learning and lead to a credential) or internships (Colorado Department of Education, 2025). These pathways allow students to earn a post-secondary credential and save money (CDHE, 2023). When advising students, organizations should note the differences between career and technical education, dual enrollment, and early college programs.

Career and technical education programs prepare students (often those not pursuing college) to enter the workforce directly. Students in Colorado enrolling in career and technical

education are more likely to identify as male (75% of participants) and come from low-income backgrounds (CDHE, 2023). One criticism is that, historically, many students who enrolled in career and technical education were “tracked” into these programs based on their social class and race (Smith, 2019). Often, the job opportunities from these programs were not competitive and did not lead to better career prospects. However, DPS has been recognized for having an innovative career and technical program that is culturally aware and rigorous and provides opportunities for students to work in industries that lead to economic mobility.

Dual and concurrent enrollment programs are offered at every DPS high school and allow high school students to enroll in post-secondary coursework while still enrolled in high school (CDHE, 2023). A total of 85% of dual enrollment students earned college credit in the 2020-2021 academic year. Students who complete dual or concurrent enrollment programs in Colorado are much more likely to enroll in post-secondary education than career and technical education students (64.6% versus 50.9%).

Early College is another pathway for Colorado students to pursue meaningful postsecondary credentials that support their career development. An Early College is a high school that provides a curriculum that allows students to complete the requirements of a high school diploma and an associate degree or postsecondary certificate within the traditional four years of high school (CDHE, 2023). Colorado currently has 18 designated Early Colleges, including two DSF partner schools.

Community partners should be aware of these resources and connect students as appropriate. According to the Colorado Department of Education (2025), high school students with career-relevant work experience earn better post-secondary grades and make more money at the age of 23. However, connecting back to career theory, high school students are at a very early

exploration stage and are just starting to make meaning of their identities and learn about themselves (O'Rourke, 2020). They may not understand which careers align best with their needs and values. Because of that, there are risks with students focusing too heavily on career experiences at the early exploration developmental stage. One way to still give high school students meaningful career exposure is through programming that allows them to understand their values and interests and develop essential skills to help them succeed in any career. Practitioners can also expose students to career pathways through classroom activities, panels, and workshops.

College Internships and Avoiding Underemployment

College graduates are considered underemployed if they are in a job that does not require a bachelor's degree (Talent Disrupted, 2024). Research from Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce found that first-generation, low-income, and students of color have more difficulty finding their first job out of college and are at greater risk for underemployment (Fischer, 2022). According to the nonprofit, Braven (2024), only 30% of the first-generation college student population will graduate and secure a strong first-destination post-college. The other 70% face underemployment. Overall, 52% of college graduates are underemployed in their first job one year after graduation (Talent Disrupted, 2024). Underemployed students experience significant long-term financial costs. Researchers from the Burning Glass Institute and Strada Education Foundation found that 73% of graduates who start underemployed remain so 10 years after college graduation. Conversely, 86% of graduates who start in a college-level occupation remain in one 10 years later.

Underemployment rates vary by major (Talent Disrupted, 2024). College students with quantitative degrees (computer science, finance, accounting, engineering, etc.) experience the

lowest underemployment rates. Underemployment rates are also low for in-demand fields like education and nursing. Graduates in general business fields such as marketing, wellness studies, recreation, public safety, and security experienced the highest underemployment rates. Science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) provide strong pathways, but underemployment rates vary within STEM fields. Students with degrees in computer science, math, and engineering experienced the lowest underemployment. In contrast, those in the life sciences, such as biology, have higher underemployment rates within STEM. However, it is important to note that the odds of underemployment are much lower for college graduates who completed at least one internship while enrolled in school. Students who complete an internship are 48.5% less likely to be underemployed than those who did not have an internship.

Internships are crucial for college students looking to enhance their employability, as many employers see them as a significant part of their talent acquisition strategy (National Association of College and Employers, 2025). The Gallup-Purdue Index College Graduate Study (the most extensive study of college graduates in United States history) found that college graduates who completed an internship during college doubled the likelihood of having a “good job” after graduation (Busteed, 2024). In addition, the study noted that “employers cite internship experience as the top deciding factor between two similarly qualified college graduate job applicants” (para.4). This study suggests that although some academic majors reduce the likelihood of underemployment, many employers view industry credentials and relevant work experiences through internships as more important than academic majors.

A 2023 study by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) found that 62% of college students had at least one internship during their college career. Of college students who interned, 59% completed paid internships. Students of color are less likely to

participate in career-building activities that often lead to employment opportunities, such as networking and internships (Fischer, 2022). A 2023 Gallup report found that only 27% of first-generation students participated in college internships. One important barrier to acquiring internships at the college level for first-generation students is whether they are paid or not. Whether an internship is paid or not is an essential factor in underemployment, as paid internships correlate to higher starting salaries for graduates and more job offers (Gatta, 2023). In addition, a 2016 NACE study found that first-generation students received lower salary offers (around \$5,000 less) than non-first-generation students (Eismann, 2016). The Economic Policy Institute found that, on average, Latino college graduates make \$0.85 for every \$1.00 made by White graduates and that Black college graduates make \$0.78 for every \$1.00 (Fischer, 2022). In addition to racial pay disparities, gender pay disparities exist for college graduates (DeCourcy & Gould, 2023). Although women earn more college degrees than men, they, on average, earn 70% of what men with college degrees earn.

Finding the time to engage in activities that build one's social capital can be difficult for students with family and job responsibilities, as is the case for many first-generation students from low-income backgrounds (Fischer, 2022). NACE believes that all internships should be paid to promote fairness and equity (Gatta, 2023). This research underscores why it is important for community organizations like DSF and educational institutions to support students with their career development. Based on this research, I aimed to collect data on completed internships from DSF college students to identify which students may require additional support in finding career-relevant experiences during their college years. Determining what career experiences, metrics, and competencies are most important for a student population is essential when structuring a program.

Career Competencies and Metrics

Nationally, career advising is supported by organizations like NACE, which provides career service professionals with knowledge through its research publications. NACE shares best practices for career metrics that organizations like DSF can use when supporting students during their college years. NACE developed a set of eight career readiness competencies in which students should demonstrate satisfactory skills to be prepared for a successful entry into a career across many kinds of jobs (NACE, 2024). The eight NACE competencies are: 1) Career and Self-Development, 2) Communication, 3) Critical Thinking, 4) Equity and Inclusion, 5) Leadership, 6) Professionalism, 7) Teamwork, and 8) Technology.

In addition to those competencies, the National College Attainment Network (NCAN, 2023) shares the following career metrics for students enrolled in postsecondary education: 1) Career Exploration and Awareness, 2) Career Exposure and Preparation, 3) a Career Toolbox, and 4) Student Outcome Data. To measure career growth, organizations should develop “milestones” (goals) or metrics that track student progress. Table 2 includes some sample career milestones that NCAN recommends organizations track per category:

Table 2*NCAN Career Categories*

Career Exploration and Awareness	Career Exposure and Preparation	Career Toolbox	Student Outcome Data
• Complete a career interest assessment • Complete a career plan	• Internship completion • Participation in career panels and fairs • Building career competencies • Making a professional connection	• Complete a resume • Prepare for an interview • Create an elevator speech • Create a LinkedIn profile	• Landing a first job related to career pathway • Tracking graduates' salary over time

Storing student career progress in a centralized database, such as Salesforce, Power BI, or Excel (NCAN, 2025), is crucial as it allows practitioners to analyze trends by student and subgroups. NCAN also notes the importance of being aware of trends in the local labor market, and working with partners who can help provide workplace opportunities. Developing these competencies and metrics is necessary, as in 2018, only 43% of graduating college seniors reported feeling prepared for their future careers (NACE, 2022). In a survey of more than 200 employers across the country, 46% said they needed to provide remedial training to their college graduates, and one in five employers reported that college graduates needed workforce readiness training. Because of this, I captured data on DSF students' comfort level in essential skills and career competencies as part of my evaluation.

My previous program leadership experience also underscored the importance of career metrics. When I directed the success program at Bottom Line, we tracked employability milestones for college students in areas such as job search tools, professional relationships, and career experiences. We learned that graduates who completed at least 60% of the employability milestones landed higher paying salaries in their first destinations post-graduation (NCAN,

2025). In addition, by collecting this data, we could strategically advise students who needed extra support, help facilitate valuable professional connections, and ensure that our students were making progress toward their desired career pathways. Data collection is essential for career advising, and the data systems allowed the organization to have more authentic relationships with students and advise them more strategically.

Organizational Change Models

When thinking about the opportunity to lead change during my strategic project at DSF, I reflected on recurring themes that came up in initial conversations with team members. The consensus was that the most significant improvement opportunities were for more communication, clarity around career advising expectations, and developing a shared vision to align career advising across the organization. This reflection helped me identify three organizational change models that informed my thinking throughout this project. *The Public Education Leadership Program's (PELP) Nonprofit Coherence Framework* felt like a powerful theoretical tool that could be leveraged at DSF to help create change. In addition, I reflected on the importance of creating learning opportunities for the entire organization in a *Psychologically Safe* environment where employees are not punished for making mistakes or asking for help (Edmonson, 2008). Finally, I anchored my organizational change experiences in *Facilitative Leadership* and leveraged these skills to support the team in a developmental and community-driven manner.

PELP Nonprofit Coherence Framework

The Nonprofit Coherence Framework helps nonprofit leaders guide and align the actions of individuals to support an organizational strategy. Childress and Grossman (2008) noted, “To attain high performance, a nonprofit organization must have all its organizational elements –

culture, structure, systems, resources, stakeholders, and the operating environment – working to drive strategy” (p.1). Each aspect of this framework illustrates interconnected links that can be leveraged to achieve a desired outcome. (See Figure 4.)

Figure 4

PELP Nonprofit Coherence Framework



Note: From Grossman and Childress (2008, August). *Note on the Nonprofit Coherence Framework*. Harvard Business School. Copyright 2008 by Harvard Business School.

- **Mission:** A nonprofit organization’s mission is “the stated purpose for an organization’s existence.” Additionally, “All activities of a nonprofit organization should be unrelentingly focused on the most effective means for achieving its mission” (p. 2).

- **Theory of Change:** A theory of change shows the “causal relationships between certain actions and desired outcomes” (p. 2).
- **Strategy:** A strategy is the actions an organization takes to achieve its mission. The authors note that the organization’s strategy should center on the mission and theory of change.
- **Organizational Elements:** Childress and Grossman listed five organizational elements: culture, systems, structures, stakeholders, and resources. Each aspect is foundational to the success of a nonprofit organization’s strategy.
- **Environment:** Finally, these elements fit within a broader environment, “the outermost layer,” which includes the government, peer organizations, and the capital market.

Organizing to Execute vs. Organizing to Learn

An important lesson I learned as an Ed.L.D. student is that although individuals learn naturally, organizations do not (Edmondson, 2015). When leading change and trying to facilitate organizational coherence, it is essential to create systems that allow for collective learning across the organization. In “The Competitive Imperative of Learning,” Edmondson (2008) illustrated how to lead a process that allows for feedback and collaborative learning. In addition, Edmondson explained the importance of creating psychological safety for team members and valuing learning over efficiency. Edmondson noted that focusing too much on execution and efficiency can prevent learning, which is critical to the organization’s long-term performance. Creating systems where formal leaders are the only ones providing the answers and one-way feedback can lead to a culture where team members feel unsafe. These environments make implementing change challenging.

Psychological Safety

Edmondson (2008) noted that to create a learning space for organizations, leaders must create *Psychological Safety*. A psychologically safe environment is one where employees are not punished for making mistakes or asking for help. Although some professionals believe that fostering psychological safety can hinder performance and prevent accountability, organizations can create spaces where employees are held to high standards while emphasizing openness and flexibility. Edmondson argued that psychological safety is a prerequisite for high performance and interdependence, as it enables organizations to improve through bi-directional feedback and difficult conversations that only occur when a foundation of trust is in place.

In my work at DSF, I created learning opportunities to ensure the team and stakeholders felt safe during my residency. One way I strived to achieve psychological safety was through *Facilitative Leadership*. My facilitative leadership approach was cultivated throughout my professional career and anchored in my values of learning, compassion, and community.

Facilitative Leadership

Fogarty (2019) defined *Facilitative Leadership* as “successfully losing the ego of the leadership role” (para. 3). Fogarty stated that facilitative leaders “leverage a collective willingness to work toward common goals” (para.3). During my time as DSF, I executed facilitative leadership by supporting the team around me through authentic *relationships*, consensus-building (*process*), trust (*psychological safety*), and inclusivity (*person-centered communication*) (see Figure 5). This differed from more “top-down” approaches to leadership, where people used their formal authority to dictate actions.

Figure 5

Facilitative Leadership Model



Note: From Fogarty, N. 2019, *Facilitative Leaders*. Para. 1.

<https://www.neilfogarty.com/facilitative-leaders/>. Copyright by Neil Fogarty.

My facilitative leadership approach was honed during my time as a people manager. As a nonprofit program leader, I built strong relationships with direct reports by giving them time to reflect during each check-in, having consistent opportunities for bi-directional feedback, and helping them identify and work toward various professional development goals. In addition, I created a culture of appreciation for our team by celebrating wins, collecting and sharing thank you messages from their students, and building rapport through a fun activity every few months. I focused on *consensus-building* by sharing leadership and providing opportunities for other team

members to facilitate meetings and share their opinions on topics impacting our program or their specific job responsibilities.

One specific example happened during my year of service at City Year. I created and oversaw a student leadership committee at the middle school I served. The committee had bi-weekly meetings and served as a forum for students to discuss topics that mattered to them. Reflecting upon that experience, I realized it was impactful because I only empowered the students to lead. I learned that much of leadership is about giving people the tools to empower themselves. From the beginning of my effort at DSF, I held onto that ethos when attempting to lead change. I facilitated and designed opportunities for team members to share the change they wanted to see. These intentional leadership processes illustrated person-centered communication and helped people feel psychologically safe.

Theory of Action

The noted research and change models shaped the development of the following TOA for my strategic project. (See Table 3.)

Table 3*Theory of Action (TOA)*

If I...
● Identify where career programming is already occurring at DSF ● Research leading career readiness programs and models for organizations supporting first-generation students (i.e., <i>career theory</i>, <i>mentorship</i> and <i>social capital</i>, advising models, and <i>competencies</i>) and state and national initiatives and policies shaping the broader PK-16 career environment ● Lead a <i>facilitative</i> process with DSF's internal Career Council, Advisor Strategic Project Working Group, and Chief Impact Officer to develop stakeholder surveys and interview questions ● Gather data and insights from DSF internal stakeholders (students, staff members, and alumni) and external stakeholders (DPS and corporate partners)
Then...
● We will better understand DSF's needs for future career programming. ● We can develop recommendations for DSF's leadership team to consider in the future
So That...
● DSF can implement a <i>coherent</i> career strategy that aligns with its organizational mission and allows all career programming to work toward defined goals ● More DSF students will have access to career programming that helps them develop essential skills informed by student needs and the Colorado market ● More DSF students will feel motivated to persist toward college graduation ● DSF can better prepare all its college graduates to find fulfilling career opportunities after graduation and meet the demands of Colorado's economy by working on the path to a Tier One Job

Description, Evidence, and Analysis of Strategic Project**Description**

I started my residency in July of 2024; Table 4 describes a high-level description of my strategic project. The subsequent sections outline key milestones and experiences in each phase, beginning with my entry into DSF. During my strategic project, I evaluated DSF's past and current career programming and learned about internal and external stakeholders' career programming preferences and goals. After gathering and summarizing data, I helped set the conditions for DSF to define its approach and future career strategy by working with the team and key stakeholders to co-create a coherent vision for career advising across the organization.

My work was informed by the learnings captured in my “Research of Knowledge for Action” section and coincided with the steps shared in my TOA.

Table 4

Project Phases and Goals

Phase	Timeline	Goals
0. Orienting	July	● Learn about DSF’s history, culture, programs, stakeholders, and strategic priorities ● Start building relationships across the organization
1. Learning	August	● Capture current career programming and adjacent work happening at DSF ● Identify nonprofits that have successfully developed and integrated career programming for first-generation students ● Create a DSF Advisor Strategic Project Working Group ● Draft some initial ideas and garner feedback from the Advisor Strategic Project Working Group, Career Council, and Chief Impact Officer on critical survey and interview questions and buckets
2. Preparing	September	● Share the strategic vision with the Advisor Strategic Project Working Group and DSF Career Council ● Select change management and capstone frameworks ● Identify internal and external stakeholders for program evaluations ● Design a survey for program evaluations ● Identify stakeholder groups for focus groups ● Design a survey to capture Scholar career interests, experiences, and future programming preferences
3. Evaluating	October-November	● Visit DSF Future Centers and Auraria Campus ● Attend existing DSF career programs ● Conduct program evaluation surveys ● Conduct the Scholar career interest survey ● Conduct focus groups and interviews ● Calculate the feasibility and potential costs of potential DSF career staff and programming
4. Synthesizing	December-January	● Summarize research ● Identify themes and key ideas from the research ● Share initial findings with the DSF Career Council
5. Recommending	February-March	● Share future recommendations and options for DSF career programming and strategy with DSF Career Council and leadership
6. Transitioning	April	● Create transition documents for future team members

Phase 0: Orienting (July)

During my Ed.L.D. coursework, we discussed a core ethos of Jentz and Wofford's (2012) book, *The Entry Plan Approach*: "Hit the ground learning." When starting my residency at DSF, I knew it would be essential to channel that philosophy and actively listen to stakeholders. I believed that focusing on learning more about team members who held expertise in their work and DSF as an organization was essential for me as an outside person entering a new environment. Since I was starting a time-limited ten-month residency, it felt crucial to prioritize relationships as my project was broad in scope and would cross many different organizational departments. In addition, this aligned with my professional values as a relational and facilitative leader. I wanted to get to know my colleagues as people to set the foundation for our work dynamic. So, before diving into the specifics of my strategic project at DSF, I focused on connecting with team members.

I scheduled and enjoyed more than 20 coffee chats in the orientation phase with staff members across all DSF departments. In interviews and conversations, I mainly focused on connecting on a personal level and learning about the individual work of the people I met. Through anecdotes that were shared, I gained strategic insights into how I could approach my career advising work. For example, from the Senior Program Director, who has been with the organization since its inception, I learned more about the informal history of DSF and previous attempts to develop career programming. I was oriented to how DSF programming had evolved throughout its existence and how each DSF high school and college partner had unique needs and different operations.

During these meetings, I also learned more about informal networks within DSF, which I needed to be mindful of as I began this work. This learning connected to the organizational elements and environment “layer” that Childress and Grossman (2008) noted in the PELP Coherence Framework. Childress and Grossman wrote that the informal structures of an organization are “the way decisions get made or the way people work and interact outside of formal channels” (p. 7). They added that these informal structures “can be as or even more powerful than formal” ones (p. 7). Formal power is based on position, while informal power is usually “earned through tenure, expertise, or competence” (p. 7). At the same time, those with informal authority can use their expertise to influence organizational change, regardless of their position. Knowledge of these informal networks, which was only possible because I took the opportunity to listen, would be essential to developing a career advising strategy at DSF.

Phase 1: Learning (August)

The learning phase of my project consisted of three distinct parts: 1) Learning about career programming at DSF and how it could fit within our overall strategy, 2) identifying nonprofits that had successfully developed career advising for similar student populations via a landscape analysis, and 3) collecting critical data to demonstrate the importance of career programming.

Career Programming at DSF and Fit Within Overall Strategy. To help execute the strategy, I needed to capture current and historic career advising programs and resources that DSF created and how my efforts fit into DSF’s three-year strategic plan. Doing this was a foundational piece of creating organizational coherence with career advising. In my initial interviews, I learned there were opportunities to ensure everyone knew what was happening across programs (DSF access and success) and administrative teams. To help facilitate this

knowledge-sharing and organizational learning, I created a shared Microsoft Word learning summary document with team members. I included headlines from my research and summarized DSF's current and historical career programming. Doing this was especially important because the staff is physically dispersed across 15 different DPS high school Future Centers, the three higher education institutions on the Auraria Campus, and DSF headquarters. I wanted my learning to be DSF's learning so that staff could access my project's progress in real-time. I would continue updating this learning summary throughout each phase, which created transparency from start to finish.

During this part of the learning phase, I conducted an internal program audit and learned of DSF's career programs, resources, and opportunities during the 2024-25 academic year ([Appendix O](#)). DSF's Career and Applied Pathways Manager, who started in this new role in 2023 after serving as a campus advisor, was essential in developing many new career resources and pilots.

In addition to the current learning of DSF programming, it was important to me to capture our secondary and higher education partners' career advising work. Because we work in partnership with DPS, 30 higher education institutions in Colorado, and corporate partners, I wanted to ensure we were aware of these partners' most critical efforts so we could adequately uplift and supplement their programming. During this process, I learned that as part of their DPS curriculum and graduation requirements, all DSF students participate in quarterly Individual Career and Academic Plan lessons from middle to high school. A school counselor typically teaches these lessons and helps students participate in goal setting and explore college and career options. One way to supplement that work was to review the results of those lessons in greater

depth during advising meetings. At the higher education level, DSF scholars must fulfill requirements (such as maintaining satisfactory academic progress and enrolling full-time).

For the first time, DSF program leaders encouraged higher education partners to consider adding a career-focused student success requirement. Eight partners integrated a career requirement in the DSF Scholarship renewal process. Examples of those requirements included attending a DSF or campus career event, attending office hours with a professor and asking questions about their chosen career pathway, or completing a career assessment. Finally, during this phase, I learned that DSF corporate partners have supported high school students and college Scholars in some of the following ways: making donations to DSF (including named scholarships), career panels, speed networking, and office tours, as well as occasional connections with students (like informational interviews). During this process, I also learned that one of the corporate partners hosted a career fair in a corporate space for the first time during the spring of 2024, and 15 companies were represented. This career fair was a first for DSF and was an opportunity that could lead to more strategic partnerships and work with corporations hoping to support the students.

Finally, during this process, I read DSF's strategic plan to ensure my evaluative work in defining the career strategy was well aligned. I learned that DSF had the following key priorities in its 2022-2025 strategic plan (DSF, 2024). (See Table 5.)

Table 5*DSF 2022-2025 Strategic Plan*

Priority	1. Expand Support	2. Increase Scholarships	3. Leverage Partnerships
Description	“Lengthen the timeline of student and scholar support by deepening early connectivity to students and families and extending into alumni and early career.”	“Serve more students and scholars through expansive scholarships with increased awards and specialized funding that promote greater reach, persistence, and graduation.”	“Expand and optimize long-lasting corporate and community partnerships for joint and reciprocal impact on students’ and scholars’ lifelong success.”
Metrics	● Increase overall college enrollment from Future Center-served schools by 5%. ● Increase success rates by 3%. ● Reengage at least 10% of our 3,664 alumni.	● Increase years of eligibility for DSF scholarships. ● Increase the yield of students applying for a DSF scholarship by 8%. ● Create at least three supplemental scholarships (above and beyond DSF’s standard awards).	● Leverage 10 external partnerships to provide additional support services for DPS students, DSF scholars, alums, and families. ● Work with corporate partners to offer at least nine internships to DSF Scholars.

My project aligned well with the “Leverage Partnerships” section of the strategic plan. When I engaged the team about corporate partners, I learned that the organization had not yet developed internships with any corporate partners. I also learned that the organization was beginning a new three-year strategic plan that was led by an outside consultant. I was impressed with DSF's progress in developing career resources and left with a deeper understanding of the partners' work.

Career Advising Landscape Analysis. As part of my learning, I researched local and national nonprofits that support first-generation students from low-income backgrounds and provide career readiness advising or resources as part of their model. I captured the programmatic models, highlights of their career readiness approach, and key statistics about their impact. I focused on fellow Prosperity Denver Fund recipients and out-of-state and national

organizations. I learned that career advising models at out-of-state and national college attainment nonprofits with similar budgets and complexity provided more relevant models to consider and learn from than those based in Denver. Although the Denver organizations operate within a similar social and political context, DSF is much larger and serves more students than other Prosperity Denver Fund recipients. In addition, I learned that it was rare to find organizations that provide college access, success coaching, scholarships, and career support. Although my national landscape analysis profiled nonprofits that do some career programming along with access, success work, and scholarships, those organizations were not common. Most of those organizations also did not have scholarship programs as extensive as DSF's model. Many more nonprofits, even large ones like DSF, provided only college access support, success coaching, scholarships, or career work (or maybe two of the above). Based on what I gathered, I assumed this was due to limited staff capacity or resources. I was mindful of this as I strived to see where DSF was best positioned to impact the career space in alignment with its resources and capacity.

Within organizations that provided advising of a similar scale to DSF, I learned about innovative ways they offered hands-on career experiences for students, such as internships, and partnering with corporations. I also captured examples of career staffing models, curricula, and the impact of their programs. These examples provided helpful context for DSF as it considered expanding its programming.

Collecting Critical Career Advising Data. After conducting a landscape analysis, I built a case for an enhanced career advising strategy by collecting key statistics about career advising at the city, state, and national levels. Collecting this data (which was integrated into my problem of practice and review of knowledge for action) provided me with key talking points

when engaging with stakeholders about career advising. This analysis was critical in the formal structures of my project, as it helped me have a strong “why” for the work I was leading.

Combating potential misinformation about the return of various post-secondary and career pathways with the data was also valuable for the entire team as they could point to research that showed its importance.

Phase 2: Preparing (September)

During this phase, I sought to help set the conditions for data collection and the overall success of this strategic project. Throughout my early tenure and initial conversations with team members, I gained more insights into the essential role of DSF advisors in students' success through their coaching services. Because of their instrumental role, I wanted to uplift their voices throughout my project. I developed an Advisor Strategic Project Working Group to provide feedback on the design of data collection instruments, get early looks at the collected data, and provide perspective on future career advising strategy recommendations. This approach aligned well with my TOA and desire to build collaborative and inclusive processes. In addition, having an Advisor Strategic Project Working Group was foundational to my facilitative leadership approach and organizational coherence. As front-line internal stakeholders executing the programmatic work (and future career advising strategy), they could provide additional insight into the five *PELP* organizational elements (culture, systems, structures, stakeholders, and resources) that Childress and Grossman (2008) said are needed for organizational coherence.

I received positive responses when sharing information about the opportunity to join a project working group via a program-wide Microsoft Teams channel. A mix of five college and campus advisors joined the group, which provided good representation across our high school

access and college success teams. The group committed to the meeting schedule shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6

Advisor Strategic Project Working Group Meeting Schedule

Working Group Meeting Overview [‡]			
Date	Modality	Topic	Goals
Due by September 12, 2024, at 10 am	Self-Paced	Project Overview	Review the draft Strategic Project Learning Summary and phase one findings to orient yourself
September 12, 2024 at 10 am	Teams	Introductions and Stakeholder Engagement	- Review group norms and share personal working group goals - Give feedback on stakeholder groups and questions
October 2024 TBD	In-Person	Working Group 1:1 Check-Ins and Interviews	Provide feedback on your current career advising experiences and preferences for future programming
December 9, 2024, at 10 am	Teams	Initial Research Findings	Grapple with initial research findings and begin synthesizing data
January 16, 2025, at 1 pm	Teams	Potential Recommendations	Review data synthesis “headlines” and potential programming recommendations
February 2025 TBD	In-Person (Optional)	Working Group 1:1 Debrief and Reflection	Engage in an optional debrief about the working group experience

[‡] All meetings (including the self-paced overview) will be no longer than one hour

During the first Advisor Strategic Project Working Group meeting in September, I learned more about what brought the advisors to the group and what they wanted to accomplish. Many noticed opportunities to build better career systems and support for students in the current higher education landscape. Some reflected on their difficulties navigating career advising as students or DSF advisors and wanted to help work toward solutions. Working Group members also stated that DSF had grown quickly and needed help solidifying processes and defining a strategy for career advising. After that discussion, the group established norms and strived to have opportunities throughout sessions for access and success advisors to learn from each other and maintain a growth mindset.

I decided to collect data through quantitative and qualitative methods to gain a more comprehensive understanding of career advising needs and experiences at DSF. The Advisor Group, along with the Program Directors and Chief Impact Officer, provided feedback on the surveys ([Appendix H](#) and [J](#)), interviews ([Appendix K](#) and [L](#)), and focus group questions I drafted ([Appendix I](#) and [M](#)). I also drafted language and shared tools for our MSU-Denver, CU-Denver, and Community-College of Denver advising teams to help recruit student participants for the focus groups. Similarly, those teams also shared the Scholar Career Advising Survey. The Alumni Manager invited graduates of the program to participate in interviews with me, and I followed up with more information about the opportunity.

In addition, I created an engagement map to identify stakeholders. In consultation with the Chief Impact Officer, I identified individuals on the advisor team, program directors, alumni, and students to collect data from October and November. The staff survey was sent to all 92 DSF team members.

Phase 3: Evaluating (October-November)

During the evaluation phase, I collected evidence on the strengths, challenges, and impact of the current career programming. In addition, I received feedback on how stakeholders would like the future career advising strategy to be structured. During the evaluation phase, I administered a DSF scholar survey, three college scholar focus groups on the Auraria Campus, program director interviews, advisor interviews, alumni interviews, and a TRIO high school student focus group. I shared the questions that I wanted feedback on from stakeholders in advance, so they had time to gather their thoughts before meeting with me. In addition to those formal data collection methods, I attended and volunteered at multiple DSF career events to observe the programming. I presented an overview of my project to several groups of external

partners, and the subsequent conversations with them provided insight into how they were grappling with the work. Finally, I worked with the Human Resources Director to analyze the total costs of hiring potential career advising team members at the organization.

DSF College Scholar Survey. Instead of surveying our entire DSF college scholar population, after consulting with our Success Program Director, I only surveyed students on the Auraria Campus. Only our Auraria Campus students receive direct advising services from a DSF advisor (the rest work with one of our campus partners). Because of that, the organization has the most direct impact with career advising on students attending one of those institutions. I worked with the lead DSF advisors at MSU-Denver, the Community College of Denver, and CU-Denver to distribute the survey to students. I provided draft blurbs and messages they could copy and paste to students via email or text. After two weeks of messages and follow-ups, 40 students completed the survey out of the approximately 1,000 on campus. After reviewing the respondents' demographic information, I saw that half of those students were first-year students. For a more representative sample size, I asked the Lead Advisor team for reports that included junior and senior students. I followed up with those groups, and ended up with 19 more responses from upperclassmen, with 59 total responses. Of those respondents, 22 were first-year students, 12 were sophomores, 12 were juniors, and 13 were seniors. CU-Denver had the most respondents, with 36 students; MSU-Denver had 14, and the Community College of Denver had nine. Although the responses fell short of my goal of 100 students, I am happy that I received data from a wide range of student years and racial, ethnic, and gender representations comparable to the DSF Scholar population at large.

Auraria College Scholar Focus Groups. I facilitated three separate student focus groups on the Auraria Campus during late October and early November. As with the surveys, I emailed

prepared blurbs that campus advisors could copy and paste to share the opportunity with students. In addition, DSF allowed me to purchase pizza for students to help entice attendance. I set a goal of having at least five students in each focus group, and exceeded expectations as a total of 20 students attended the focus groups, with six or seven students at each one. These focus groups allowed me to assess strengths and challenges across institutions while learning more about unique opportunities for career advising. For example, scholars at CU-Denver and MSU-Denver noted that they did not know many other DSF scholars on campus, particularly those in their major or career pathway. This feedback made me think of Auraria scholars' unique opportunity to connect across institutions as they share a campus. It also connected to my learnings on social capital, and how peers are essential to one's professional network. Inspired by this feedback, I co-led the design of a workshop for DSF scholars at the annual summit in March, where they could connect with peers in their designated career pathways to build their student networks.

Program Director, Advisor, and Alumni Interviews. I successfully interviewed all 12 program and assistant program directors, as well as the career and applied pathways manager. I also interviewed all five advisors in my project's working group. I included an overview of the interview process via email and provided the team with a calendar link to sign up for the opportunity. I shared the questions in advance and practiced deep listening during each session. After each session, while analyzing the interview recordings, I pulled out themes and charted whenever a central idea was shared. This allowed me to identify the most common feedback. I also worked with the alumni manager to distribute the feedback opportunity to the alumni advisory committee, and three signed up. Although it was a smaller sample size, I was satisfied that the participants ranged from recent graduates to those several years removed from college.

TRIO High School Student Focus Group. I conducted a focus group with 18 TRIO (an acronym representing three federal outreach programs: Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Student Support Services) high school students who attended six different Denver high schools (see [Appendix M](#)). During this process, I readily connected with these students, as it was easier to gain research approval from TRIO than the district. Although some students had engaged with DSF at their Future Centers, we discussed their overall experience with career programming and advising within their respective high schools and community-based organizations (not just DSF). I also learned more about the kinds of career programming they would like to experience.

Career Event Volunteering and Observations. Given the nature of my project, it was important to me to experience DSF career advising events in real-time to get a better sense of their impact. I had collected data through many formal mediums, and now I wanted to collect “street data.” (Safir & Dugan, 2021). In *Street Data: A Next-Generation Model for Equity, Pedagogy, and School Transformation*, Safir and Dugan described this form of research as the qualitative and experiential data that emerges at eye level and on lower frequencies when we train our brains to discern it. These data are asset-based, helping educators look for what’s right in our students, schools, and communities instead of seeking out what’s wrong. (p. 57)

My street data process was observing and learning more about the stories and experiences of students closest to the work.

The first event I attended was a College and Career Fair at a DPS high school organized by a DSF college advisor. I worked at a DSF table throughout the career fair, connected with students, and observed how students engaged with various college pathways and work opportunities. Similarly, I attended a DPS apprenticeship fair at one of the early college high

schools. I observed how a high school with a significant focus on career knowledge and practical skills approached career work. Many of these students were interested in non-four-year college career pathways. Conversely, I attended a DSF financial services networking event at a well-resourced DPS high school. At this event, several students were academically advanced and in the school's International Baccalaureate program. Many were focused on applying to some of the country's most selective institutions and top business programs. They came to the networking event very career-focused and asked in-depth questions about college coursework and networking. These experiences reminded me how uniquely each of the partner schools and Future Centers operates, given each school's various student populations and missions. In addition, a local regional bank (and one of the corporate partners) hosted a second annual corporate partner career fair for about 20 students. I had lunch with a small group of students before they engaged with the 10 corporate partners in attendance. I reminded students to be themselves, let them brainstorm potential questions to ask the companies with me, and celebrated the exciting step they were taking in their career development. Leading up to this event, I appreciated how intentionally DSF supported the students in attendance. DSF hosted a networking prep session for students before entering the career fair so they could get comfortable introducing themselves to attendees and asking questions about their companies. During the event, my team members and I hosted a "DSF Hype Table" (something team members had done in the past) in the middle of the fair that students could visit if they needed encouragement, had questions about how to engage a partner, or simply wanted to take a break from networking. Finally, during the winter holiday season, I served as DSF's mascot, "Future" the Mountain Goat, at one of our corporate partner holiday parties where they honored the foundation. Wearing

the mascot outfit was a fun way to connect with corporate partners and hear about their experiences with DSF and why they felt it was important to support the student population.

External Partner Presentations. During this evaluation phase, I started presenting high-level overviews of my project to the partners. I provided between five and 15-minute presentations in many settings. I presented at the annual campus partner meeting at one of the private higher education campuses and an individual fall partnership meeting at a Denver community college. I also presented in front of the Board Program and Scholarship Committee and the entire Board of Directors. I structured my talk in a slightly different manner based on the audience. With the Board groups, I focused more on how this would impact DSF scholars and built a case for the enhanced career strategy. With the higher education partners, who I presumed were more familiar with the career challenges facing students, I focused more on my project's process and how it could supplement and support the work already happening on campus.

Total Compensation Analysis. Thinking ahead, I predicted that recommendations from stakeholders could include hiring more full-time staff members to focus on career advising at the organization. Because of that, it was essential to analyze the total cost of potential advisors, coordinators, assistant directors, and director-level positions at DSF. I worked with the Director of Human Resources and learned how much salaries, benefits, recruitment, and onboarding would cost DSF if the organization added staff. I believed this would be important in making future recommendations so the team could connect the costs to the budget.

Phase 4: Synthesizing (December-January)

During the synthesizing phase, I segmented the most essential data collected from my focus groups, interviews, and surveys by each program and the three Auraria institutions. After identifying the themes and key findings, I developed reports that summarized feedback in each

data collection method. I also created additional reports for the team that integrated findings by program and institution. Each report included an executive summary, an overview of current career advising strengths, success enablers, challenges, the impact of current career programming, and recommendations for future strategy by program or stakeholder group. I also explained where there were incongruencies across the feedback, such as if two participants cited an event, but one had a positive experience and another had more constructive feedback.

Once the data were analyzed, I shared the reports with program team members and also embedded them in my DSF learning summary (see [Appendix N](#) for a sample report executive summary and section). I also had 1:1 check-ins with the Success, TRIO, and Access Program Directors about the learnings most relevant to their programs. In addition, I had 1:1 meetings with the lead advisors at Metro State, CU-Denver, and the Community College of Denver. Finally, I met with the senior director of programs to share the most important headlines from the aforementioned groups.

Afterward, I shared highlights from the content section of my RKA so they could access the theories and best practices in my learning summary. I also synthesized and shared DSF career advising strengths and challenges across programs, which were determined by the most common and significant feedback I received during the evaluation phase. The evidence section of my capstone highlights data supporting the outcomes from these findings.

Phase 5: Recommending (February-March)

After synthesizing the data, I made recommendations for DSF's future career advising strategy in these four areas: 1) define career advising; 2) build staff capacity for career advising; 3) create more opportunities for scholars to have work-based experiences and receive mentorship; 4) implement career metrics and evaluate outcomes.

I knew that change could not and should not happen all at once. I developed a timeline for each DSF recommendation area, categorizing immediate actions (within six months), medium-term actions (over the next one to two years), and long-term actions (two or more years away). Structuring my recommendation in this manner would also align with the new DSF three-year strategic plan, which is set to begin on July 1, 2025. I felt the immediate recommendations could set a good foundation for that effort, while the medium and long-term recommendations were items that DSF could work towards. The “Implications for Site” section provides a more in-depth analysis of the recommendations.

Phase 6: Transitioning (April)

During this phase, I prepared transition documents for DSF’s career and applied pathways manager and Chief Impact Officer that outlined the key action steps for career programming implementation and centralized the resources I developed. In addition, I met with DSF’s strategic planning consultant and shared highlights and findings from my work so they could be integrated into the strategy.

Evidence

This section re-visits my Theory of Action and shows evidence of the work I completed during my career advising strategic project. Table 6 captures the *outputs* from the “if” statements in my Theory of Action and the outcomes from the “*then*” part. I also included a column that illustrates my overall progress toward my goals by illustrating if work is “complete,” has “some progress,” or has “not started.”

Table 6

Project Outputs and Outcomes

Outputs (If...)	Evidence from Strategic Project	Progress
Identify where career	● Conducted an internal program audit and	Complete

Outputs (If...)	Evidence from Strategic Project	Progress
programming is already occurring at DSF	developed a document listing DSF's current career programs and resources (Appendix O)	
Research leading career readiness programs and models for organizations supporting first-generation students (i.e., <i>career theory</i> , <i>mentorship</i> and <i>social capital</i> , advising models, and <i>competencies</i>) and state and national initiatives and policies shaping the broader PK-16 career environment	● Met with Harvard Graduate School of Education Librarian for leading national sources in career advising ● Read The Colorado Workforce Development Council's <i>Talent Pipeline Report</i> and CDHE's <i>Pathways to Prosperity</i> to learn about PK-16 career initiatives and policies ● Learned more about PDF reimbursements from DSF senior leaders ● Reviewed relevant coursework from Ed.L.D. electives for career models and theories ● Conducted a landscape analysis of in-state and national organizations that provided career advising services to first-generation students ● Used highlights from research in project overview presentations with the DSF Board, Board Program and Scholarship Committee, Higher Education Partners, and leaders from one of our community college partners.	Complete
Lead a <i>facilitative</i> process with DSF's internal Career Council, Advisor Strategic Project Working Group, and Chief Impact Officer to develop stakeholder surveys and interview questions	● Created an Advisor Strategic Project Working Group with five participants across DSF Access and Success teams ● Asked the Advisor Strategic Project Working Group and Chief Impact Officer for feedback on the draft survey, focus groups, and interview questions I developed, and integrated their feedback	Complete
Gather data and insights from DSF internal stakeholders (students, staff members, and DSF's board) and external stakeholders (DPS and corporate partners)	● Received 30 DSF staff survey responses ● Interviewed 17 DSF staff members ● Received 59 DSF Scholar survey responses ● Conducted three separate Auraria Scholar Focus groups with a total of 20 students ● Conducted a TRIO high school focus group with 18 students ● Led three Advisor Strategic Project Working Group meetings	Some Progress
Outcomes (Then...)	Evidence from Strategic Project	Progress
We will better understand DSF's needs for future career programming.	● Created a report with DSF career advising strengths, success enablers, key factors leading to challenges, most impactful programming and resources, and potential metrics by data collection method and DSF program.	Complete

Outputs (If...)	Evidence from Strategic Project	Progress
We can develop recommendations for DSF's leadership team to consider in the future	• Developed future DSF career advising recommendations based on feedback from the evaluation • Included an implementation timeline with the recommendations to help DSF prioritize the work.	Complete

Outputs From the Theory of Action. I leveraged DSF people, events, and artifacts for the first output to identify current career programming and resources. I initially researched internal resources to capture the career programming that is currently offered. I also asked program leads to share information about upcoming events and workshops for the academic year. Once I compiled the programming, I shared it with DSF program leads to confirm if this was all of the career offerings. Having this information in a centralized location helped the team understand where we stood.

Outputs from my second goal of my TOA, researching leading career readiness programs and models, were incorporated throughout my capstone introduction and RKA. There are also artifacts from this data in project presentations I conducted in front of external groups and my project's learning summary. Immediately leveraging my findings in presentations helped create a strong "why" for the project and sparked conversation.

Evidence from my third output, leading a facilitative process with internal stakeholders to develop surveys and interview questions, was displayed in my meeting materials for the Advisor Strategic Project Working Group. In the September meeting, I asked the group what they liked about the data collection tools I developed, what they would like to change, what they would consider removing, or anything they would like to add. Their feedback allowed me to remove a couple of questions that were confusing and validated my initial thoughts about keeping the survey around 10 to 15 minutes to complete. In addition, in my staff and Scholar survey, I asked

respondents to describe the qualities of a DSF career-ready college graduate. A total of 30% of staff respondents wrote “confident” and 17% wrote “ready.” For scholars, 29% wrote “prepared” as their leading descriptor and 24% wrote “confident.” I used “confident” and “prepared” to describe how DSF wants scholars to feel after participating in the programming in a career advising visual I developed later in my project.

I successfully gathered data and insights from DSF stakeholders through my evaluation for the final outcome. However, I only collected data from rostered college scholars, alumni, and staff due to a delay in research approval from the district, which prevented me from engaging more externally.

Outcomes From the Theory of Action. Tables 7 and 8 illustrate the most significant organization-wide career advising outcomes from my evaluation, the key success enablers for this work, and the most critical career advising challenges facing the organization. Each theme is connected to context and data supporting the identified theme. Although the learning summary report includes more comprehensive data, in the interest of brevity, I included one piece of evidence in this document through direct quotes that came from focus groups, interviews, or surveys. After the post-evaluation summary tables, I share evidence of the implementation timeline I developed based on the recommendations I shared.

Table 7*Career Advising Successes at DSF*

Success	Context	Evidence Supporting This Success
1. Providing consistent college advising and financial aid that helps Scholars persist to college graduation	Helping students persist to college graduation helps facilitate career success, as college graduates make, on average, over \$1 million more in their lifetimes than students with a high school diploma (Lumina Foundation, 2023). In addition, graduating from college allows students to be competitive in Colorado's economy, as a postsecondary credential is a requirement for "Tier One" jobs in the state and earning a living family wage (Colorado Workforce Development Council, 2023).	"DSF has been the most helpful in giving me financial aid to work towards achieving my goals for my career." - DSF Scholar
2. DSF's new visual career resources (Pathway Park, career posters, and stackable credentials)	Actionable career posters and visuals were cited in 50% of staff interviews as a career programming strength.	"These posters have actually been super helpful in terms of when a student doesn't know what they want to do. I just say, okay, look at the posters up there. Which one catches your attention?" - DSF Advisor
3. Hosting career events (panels, fairs, networking events, the gala, and Scholar career requirements) that help students learn about different pathways and expose them to professionals in the field	At least one of the aforementioned career events was noted as "impactful programming" in nearly every staff interview or student focus group.	"I think they do a really good job of, you know, giving you events, providing resources for you to either attend to or learn from. And that's just something that they can help, that you can personally build off of it if you want to pursue any kind of major, whatever career you want surrounding your major." - DSF Alum
4. DSF offers early intervention by exposing students to careers starting in 9th grade	Early career exposure helps students better understand themselves and their interests and become better prepared to contribute to the needs of the future economy (Colorado Workforce Development	"The expansion of having almost every Future Center with 9th through 12th grade advising is a strength that's new to us...I think that's huge because so much of what you can do as a 12th grade advisor is limited to

Success	Context	Evidence Supporting This Success
	Council, 2023).	one year and one year of knowing a student. But when you have access over four years, you can do more.” - DSF Advisor
5. Supplementing our career work with the career efforts of our district and campus partners	Due to large caseloads, most district and higher education career advisors cannot address the complete needs of students at their schools.	“One of the strengths is the effort to align with DPS...So I really appreciate that because then we’re not really duplicating services with regards to career advising.” - DSF Director/Assistant Director
6. Connecting our career advising work to needs specific to Colorado	For the past four years, DSF has shared the most important findings from the <i>Colorado Talent Pipeline Report</i> with staff members to help inform advising.	“I would say that one of our greatest strengths is we really try to hone in locally...and while...different folks are involved and intentional about trying to get a pulse of what’s happening nationwide, I think the details and the specifics are Colorado focused.” - DSF Director/Assistant Director

Sharing these successes with the team helped many staff members reflect on how much progress had been made in career advising at DSF over the last several years. In addition, it validated how much DSF’s foundational work, providing scholarships to DPS students and alumni, helps reduce the financial burden that allows DSF scholars to work toward their career goals. It was also encouraging to see how many of DSF’s new efforts, like the career posters, were highlighted. This showed that DSF was heading in the right direction for their career-connected conversations.

Table 8

Career Advising Success Enablers at DSF

Success	Evidence Supporting This Success
---------	----------------------------------

1. Our funding streams have allowed us to invest more in career advising	“I think that the Prosperity Denver Fund allowed us to hire more people...I think that freeing up that money and the reimbursement we get allows us to use the money more strategically.” - DSF Advisor
2. Career advising buy-in from senior leadership	“Leadership from a programmatic standpoint at the top, coming from our Senior Program Director and Chief Impact Officer, have led the push in the last few years. Our CEO has led this push for more career conversations being at the forefront of our advisors advising as well...I’ve been to various conferences over the past three years, and you know, have kind of heard the message of if we don’t have a career in mind then what are we actually doing” - DSF Director/Assistant Director
3. Having a full-time career and applied pathways manager	“Having that person solely focus on career readiness has definitely helped DSF. He’s been able to bring a lot of good material, good resources.” - DSF Director/Assistant Director

Asking questions about success enablers during my qualitative data collection was important, as it allowed team members to reflect on the most impactful actions that facilitated the work. People recognized the impact of increased funding from PDF, the alignment and buy-in from senior leaders, and having a full-time role dedicated to this work, which allowed DSF to make more progress, especially within the last year. (See Table 9.)

Table 9

Career Advising Challenges at DSF

Challenge	Context	Evidence Supporting This Challenge
1. DSF has not clearly defined career advising for the Access and Success programs	The lack of a career advising definition at DSF was cited in 50% of Director/Assistant Director interviews.	“I think one of our biggest challenges is...we have not clearly explained, we have not clearly demonstrated, we have not clearly articulated what career advising is.” - DSF Director/Assistant Director
2. Lack of accountability, consistency, and standardization with career advising	The lack of accountability, consistency, or standardization at DSF was cited in 50% of Director/Assistant Director interviews and 40% of Advisor interviews.	“I think the biggest challenge is that nothing is standardized right now...so it’s not always emphasized with every student we’re working with, whereas I feel like if we were to standardize it, then every student would at least get exposure to that. So right now, I can’t say with confidence that every student is exposed to it.” - DSF Director/Assistant Director
3. DSF career	The lack of career advising	“It’s not tied to any metrics. Advisors are

Challenge	Context	Evidence Supporting This Challenge
advising is not tied to any specific metrics	metrics at DSF was cited in 50% of Program/Assistant Director interviews. Having career metrics is considered a best practice by NACE so students can show they have the satisfactory skills needed to succeed in the workplace (NACE, 2024).	evaluated on the number of students enrolled, at least on Access, the number of students applying to college, getting accepted to college, completing financial aid, applying for financial aid, submitting DSF. And so that's what they focused on, because that's what they will be evaluated on....And so in a world where everything is a priority, what you're going to be evaluated on in your performance is going to take priority." - DSF Director/Assistant Director
4. Advisor apprehension with career advising and the lack of capacity for career advising with other competing priorities	Advisor apprehension or lack of capacity for career advising was cited in 41% of Director/Assistant Director interviews and 40% of Advisor interviews.	"We're still growing and breaking out of that mindset that we're just college advisors and that we're just a college access organization." - DSF Director/Assistant Director
5. Each DSF Future Center and Auraria partner school is unique and has varying student career advising needs	Each high school or college being different was cited as a challenge by 60% of interviewed Advisors and 25% of interviewed Program/Assistant Directors.	"Another issue that comes up a lot is the diversity of schools. And so it makes it very hard to provide direction, and, like, programming that fits with every school...Because if I share with you, like, a practice that's working at my school, you may try to implement it at your schools, and it's like the culture of the school just doesn't fit in there." - DSF Director/Assistant Director
6. DSF lacks a formalized internship program for Scholars or built-in opportunities to gain career-relevant experiences	Internships double the likelihood that students avoid underemployment after college graduation (Busteed, 2024). DSF does not currently offer formalized internships or hands-on career experiences with corporate partners. A total of 54% of surveyed DSF scholars have not had an internship during college.	"I haven't had much experience with DSF about internships, but I would suggest providing more information on different internships and sites where previous DSF scholars worked." - DSF Scholar

The challenges that came up consistently in interviews, and the overarching themes reflected my initial hunch that there were opportunities for more career advising coherence. It also made me reflect on how important it was for my recommendations to address the challenges named directly. (See Table 10).

Table 10*Factors Leading to Career Advising Challenges at DSF*

Challenge	Evidence Supporting This Challenge
1. We only have one person focused on career advising full-time	“I think we have one staff member, right, that actually, like, focuses on career...and he's doing that not only for college access, but also for success. So I think, like, limited staffing definitely impacts it.” - DSF Director/Assistant Director
2. Denver’s economy has made the job search more competitive	“The growing economy of Denver, just the amount of people. Another side of it that I thought of is the rising cost of housing. So needing a job and particularly a higher paying job is that much more necessary. So students are asking questions like ‘What jobs are going to provide me an income sufficient enough to help my family, help myself, and help me move forward?’ ” - DSF Advisor
3. Making a mindset shift to career advising has been challenging for some advisors	“To make, like, a bigger culture shift if we want to commit to the career advising, career programming. If we want to make that a priority. I think there has to be some sort of cultural shift of how we view advisor performance. How we motivate staff. To implement this, because especially on the access team, we have some advisors who have been here like, five to ten years who are, like, in their mind, this is what the job is like. I know how to do it. So there's a lot of resistance to changing.” - DSF Director/Assistant Director

Finally, unearthing the factors that have led to the challenges was also important. The factors listed above were internal (lack of capacity), external (Denver’s economy), and psychological (mindset shift). From an adaptive leadership (Heifetz & Laurie, 2001) standpoint, I realized my change effort had technical challenges (such as defining the work and creating metrics) and adaptive challenges as well. The thought of shifting one’s advising process (or even the perception that work was changing) meant that some beliefs that people held about the role of a DSF advisor and the programmatic model were being challenged. However, now, it was unclear what would be changed, as part of my work would be helping DSF understand what should remain consistent but perhaps needed to be enhanced or better defined so they could decide that for themselves.

With team members I perceived to be more concerned about potential changes to the advising model, I leveraged Heifetz and Laurie's (2001) recommendation of creating a holding environment where people could share concerns and perspectives. I held check-ins where I shared successes, enablers, challenges, and factors leading to the challenges and potential recommendations I was considering for the enhanced career advising model based on the feedback I received. Providing an inclusive space for those team members to share initial reactions was a follow-through on my commitment to psychological safety and facilitative leadership. As noted in Table 10, some long-term team members had several years of experience in their roles, and changes in their day-to-day responsibilities may have felt jarring.

It is also worth noting that the final aspect of my Theory of Action (the "So That..." stage) will occur after the duration of my residency. Because of that, I expect that the team can evaluate if DSF career advising reaches a level of coherence that allows DSF students to develop skills that would enable them to be on the path toward a Tier One job in Colorado.

Analysis

By the end of my residency, I had completed the following:

- Strategic career advising recommendations with a suggested implementation timeline
- A roadmap for DSF career services across programs
- Resources to help DSF tell its career story and define itself
- A draft of a potential DSF career program coordinator job description and a budget outlining the cost of other possible career team employees
- Analyzed data outcomes from all six project phases, including a complete summary of career advising strengths, success enablers, challenges, factors leading to

challenges, potential recommendations, and metrics by data collection method, DSF program, and each of the three Auraria institutions

Although I accomplished most of what I strove to do throughout my Theory of Action and what my supervisor wanted regarding deliverables, I have reflected on how I could have done more to help the team. In this analysis section, I reflect on why aspects of my project were successful: 1) leading with data, 2) organizing to learn, and 3) having a strong authorizing environment. In addition, I share what could have been better when striving to execute my Theory of Action: 1) testing solutions, 2) engaging with more DSF family members, 3) sharing tools for “scaling,” and 4) sharing strategic PK-16 (pre-kindergarten through college) approaches. Throughout my analysis, I also share the strengths and limitations of the coherence, facilitative leadership, and “organizing to learn” organizational change models that guided my process. In the challenges section, I note additional frameworks that may have also been helpful to my process.

Successes

Leading With Data. Focusing my Theory of Action on first understanding DSF and its current career offerings and then the local, state, and national career landscape influencing the work allowed me to learn and share data-driven facts about career advising when engaging with stakeholders. Within the PELP Nonprofit Coherence Framework (2008), I successfully focused on the model’s inner layer (mission). Then, I zoomed out to the outermost layer (environment) to inform the strategy (see Figure Four). Each step in the framework provided me with data that built a strong “why” for the project that I led to try and create coherence.

Starting with the mission in early conversations taught me how career advising is connected to it. For example, I realized that DSF’s founder aspired to prepare DSF scholars to

serve Denver's workforce. In addition, I learned that DSF's success program was intentionally called "success" instead of "college success" to help scholars find success not only through college but also post-graduation.

Reviewing and sharing important data and facts about the local, state, and national career landscape (environment) was crucial in helping to create a broad scope for the work. Childress and Grossman (2008) noted that organizations must know how the government, other organizations, and capital markets can bolster or hinder a nonprofit's strategy. Because of this, I realized that the environment would impact my actions and DSF's ability to act on recommendations. Researching the environment illustrated a clear need for this work, as it allowed me to explain why career advising was necessary for high school and college students in Denver, Colorado, and across the nation, and how specific approaches could lead to better outcomes for students. My previous leadership within the career advising environment was also beneficial. I could point to data from my work that illustrated how achieving career advising milestones correlated with higher post-graduation salaries. Further implications of the success of capturing career advising for the team have also been incorporated in other areas of DSF. For example, what I shared on underemployment and the importance of college internships started being used in grant applications and conversations with prospects and funders.

Finally, when I evaluated DSF's current career offerings, I ensured that every main idea and takeaway shared was grounded in evidence from my RKA or evaluation process. My ultimate strategic recommendations pointed to specific evidence from the evaluation. They were created to address the most significant career advising challenges cited by team members, staff, students, and alumni. Childress and Grossman (2008) stated that "gaining coherence among organizational elements at the headquarters and unit level will make an organization's chosen

strategy more effective, sustainable, and scalable” (p. 3). Because I had the privilege of focusing deeply across the organization during my project and connected with both front-line staff members and senior leaders, I was able to help bridge the gap throughout my process.

Organizing to Learn. I strategically leveraged Edmondson’s (2008) “organizing to learn” approach during my strategic project and the four steps Edmondson suggested to help organizations reach “execution-as-learning” (evaluating activities and finding ways to improve) faster: 1) Provide process guidelines, 2) Provide tools that enable employees to collaborate in real-time, 3) Collect process data, and 4) Institutionalize disciplined reflection. In the following paragraphs, I share why these steps allowed me to develop deeper insights into DSF career advising and contributed to creating the foundation for DSF career advising moving forward.

Edmondson (2008) noted that developing standard processes helps organizations work faster toward “execution-as-learning.” I ensured that my processes were agreed upon by the Advisor Strategic Project Working Group and DSF’s Chief Impact Officer. Once that was decided, I ensured that my approach to data collection, every single focus group, survey, and interview, followed standard processes, which helped make it easier for data to be analyzed and compared across groups. Although each institution and population is different, because each group examined had standard procedures, it made it easier for leaders to review comparative data and make better sense of where the gaps lie. For example, I created a table comparing career data for DSF first-year students versus seniors at each Auraria school. The team found this helpful because it allowed them to quickly learn more about their students. I would often log on to my shared reports or learning summary and see various team members working through different parts of the document.

Providing opportunities for DSF employees to collaborate in real-time helped lead to my project's success because it allowed team members to share their thoughts on initial findings before I made strategic recommendations. For example, in a meeting, I created an opportunity for Advisor Strategic Project Working Group members to break out into small groups and reflect on the initial quantitative Likert Scale Scholar essential skills and job search tool ratings and focus group feedback before it was published more broadly. During this session, advisors made connections about best practices to better support their students in developing competencies with essential skills and job search tools. This learning during the Working Group was an example of how I used my convening ability to allow advisors to have a chance to focus on better ways to provide career support.

In addition, as I noted in my project description, I intentionally created transparency throughout my project by having a shared project learning summary that outlined my process and learning headlines from each phase. Edmondson (2008) wrote that “execution-as-efficiency focuses on performance data, which capture what happened. Execution-as-learning pays just as much attention to process data, which describe how work unfolds” (para. 36). Having my process data available to the team created learning because it outlined steps in this career advising project that DSF can use in future years or for other aspects of their programming.

Finally, “institutionalizing disciplined reflection” was a big part of my process at DSF. I began the 1:1 check-ins, small group discussions, and presentations about my work with the disclaimer that this was a conversation and that I wanted to create a space for team members to learn and process their work. Allowing team members to share their feelings about career programming and reflect on what was captured in subsequent check-ins allowed them to make more sense of the work and what was captured. This approach was successful, as multiple

advisors shared that the career reflections I facilitated across Access and Success Advisors helped them learn more about what students experience when transitioning to college.

The goal of “organizing to learn” was to first focus on building internal capacity and setting the conditions for psychological safety and the initial outputs and outcomes in my Theory of Action (Edmondson, 2008). The organizing-to-execute aspect of my strategic project aligns with the aspirational “so that...” section that will occur after the duration of my residency (see Figure 7 for a breakdown). I expect that these steps make executing that aspect of the work more manageable due to the increased capacity and the knowledge gained during my residency.

Figure 7

Organizing to Learn vs. Organizing to Execute Within TOA

If I...	
• Identify where career programming is already occurring at DSF • Research leading career readiness programs and models for organizations supporting first-generation students (ex, <i>career theory</i>, <i>mentorship</i> and <i>social capital</i>, advising models, and <i>competencies</i>) and state and national initiatives and policies shaping the broader PK-16 career environment • Lead a <i>facilitative</i> process with DSF’s internal Career Council, Advisor Strategic Project Working Group, and Chief Impact Officer to develop stakeholder surveys and interview questions • Gather data and insights from DSF internal stakeholders (students, staff members, and alumni) and external stakeholders (DPS and corporate partners)	Organizing to Learn
Then...	
• We will better understand DSF’s needs for future career programming. • We can develop recommendations for DSF’s leadership team to consider in the future	
So That...	
• DSF can implement a <i>coherent</i> career strategy that aligns with their organizational mission and allows all career programming to work towards defined goals • More DSF students will have access to career programming that helps them develop essential skills informed by student needs and the Colorado market • More DSF students will feel motivated to persist toward college graduation • DSF can better prepare all its college graduates to find fulfilling career opportunities after graduation and meet the demands of Colorado’s economy by working on the path to a Tier One Job	Organizing to Execute

Having a Strong Authorizing Environment. Although there were many leadership moves and decisions that I noted that helped me succeed during my strategic project, the most critical aspect that facilitated my success was the supportive authorizing environment at DSF. Every request I made to observe a meeting, visit a Future Center school, travel to the Auraria campus, collect data from scholars, or volunteer at an event was granted during my residency. The DSF team and broader community welcomed me with open arms, allowing me to implement the vision I sought for this project and implement my Theory of Action. Without their cooperation, I would not have been able to connect in the way I did. I recognize that DSF's senior leadership set me up for success.

Furthermore, DSF's reputation and strong partnerships with DPS and higher education institutions in Colorado allowed me to access what I needed since I was a team member. Before residency, being in a supportive environment with willing mentors was one of my top priorities. The organization's leadership offered more than I could have ever asked for to allow me to lead this project.

Opportunities for Improvement

Creating Opportunities to Test Solutions. Although "organizing to learn" helped build DSF's capacity for expanded career advising in the future, that approach had some limitations. Upon reflection, it may have been beneficial to test some of my assumptions about career programming during my residency (even if it was on a small scale). One methodology that comes to mind is "design thinking," pioneered by David Kelly at Stanford University's Design School, who incorporated the process at the design firm IDEO (Stanford Online, 2025). The design thinking process has five stages (Dam, 2024, para. 3): 1) Empathize: "Research your users' needs;" 2) Define: "State your users' needs and problems;" 3) Ideate: "Challenge

assumptions and create ideas;” 4) Prototype: “Start to create solutions;” and 5) Test: “Try your solutions out.”

The five stages in design thinking do not have to be linear (Dam, 2024). Adding a “test” or pilot in my initial Theory of Action may have allowed me to “make alterations and refinement to rule out alternative solutions. The ultimate goal is to get as deep an understanding of the product and its users as possible” (para. 16). Design thinking also helps increase creativity, since it is an iterative process that encourages innovative ideas and learning from failure (Liedtka, 2018).

For example, I recommended that DSF create more opportunities for DSF scholars to have work-based experiences and receive mentorship based on the substantial feedback from stakeholders and the best practices I identified in the research literature. That recommendation is an example of *defining* a problem and *empathizing* from the design thinking model. Developing an opportunity for five scholars to have a short-term winter job shadow (*ideate* and *prototype*) with a corporate partner would have allowed DSF to *test* the approach and create stronger solutions based on the feedback received. This missed opportunity occurred to me as I got closer to the recommendations stage of my project, as I recognized that a pilot would have provided additional data points to strengthen my argument.

Engaging With DSF Family Members. One important stakeholder group that I did not connect with during my evaluation was DSF family members. Conducting parent and family focus groups could have provided insights into ways to better inform and support them as their students pursue career pathways. During my evaluation, “help parents and family members learn more about career pathways” was an important theme. One advisor said in an interview, “I think there could be a more in-depth connection to getting our parents and families involved in this

process and understanding what it means for a student to transition out of college into the working world.” Another Advisor shared,

Students are getting information from their parents about what they should or shouldn’t be doing... not just career-wise, but some parents are telling their kids to just go to work, and so I think that’s a big part of this, too.

This feedback made me reflect on how much a family impacts a student’s career choice, especially because most students are not yet self-authoring and are likely to listen to their parents’ advice. In addition, because many first-generation students work to support their families while in college, learning more about family needs would have been useful.

The U.S Department of Education (2023) recommends that strong family engagement practices related to career support include creating resource hubs, giving families the opportunities to attend career exploration events, and providing parent or guardian workshops. DSF has a Parent and Family Engagement Committee, and one part of my short-term recommendations in the “define career advising category” is for the committee to share career pathways and resources with DSF parents and family members at the beginning of the 2025-26 academic year. A medium-term recommendation was to develop a career event for DSF families. As noted in my RKA, there are also opportunities for DSF families to support their scholars as “mirror mentors” if they are provided with the appropriate resources to help guide conversations.

Sharing More Tools for “Scaling Up.” DSF has tripled in staff and revenue over the past eight years. In addition, DSF has committed to scaling its commitment to career advising, and my project and the work I led will help DSF take steps forward in that regard. One additional best practice or framework that could have been integrated into the Theory of Action is strategies for organizations like DSF looking to scale a program or implement additional programming.

Coburn (2003) noted that four interrelated dimensions must be created to facilitate lasting change when scaling (p.3): 1) Depth (nature of change); 2) Sustainability (endurance over time); 3) Spread (norms, principles, and beliefs understood by greater numbers of people); and 4) Ownership (shifts in reform ownership to implementers).

Diagnosing the depth of change at the outset would have provided DSF with opportunities to clearly outline who is impacted by the change and who is responsible for it (Coburn, 2003). Structurally, having this kind of diagnosis helps create ownership and manage expectations. The sustainability of change is essential as “reforms mature and initial energy, personnel, and funding dissipate” (p. 4). Identifying the spread and ownership of change ensures that many people are engaged in moving the work forward. Coburn stated that “If the leader is the only one who owns the change, it is unlikely that it will be sustained past the leader’s tenure. It is the old notion that people will support what they help to create” (p. 5).

Although I knew there was buy-in from senior leadership for career advising, and I engaged staff members across the organization throughout my process, providing these dimensions to the team may have also helped DSF further understand all that must be in place to ensure success with career advising and other initiatives. In addition, scaling does not always involve getting larger. Anderson et al. (2004) noted the importance of defining whether social innovation is scaling the organization, program, or principles. Some of the career advising work that DSF is scaling is related to its program (such as potentially increasing career success coaching in the future). Other aspects concern principles, such as how DSF defines itself and the advisor's role in career advising.

Sharing Strategic PK-16 Approaches. My research outlined challenges and resources for Colorado high school and college students and Denver’s landscape. I also shared national

best practices for organizations supporting high school and college students. However, I did not outline steps for organizations hoping to effectively bridge the entire PK-16 space through initiatives and partnerships, which I strived to do in my Theory of Action. Higher education often operates in silos, and it can be hard to stay abreast of all that is happening on one's campus (let alone across multiple partners). One of the most effective strategies that allows communities facing complex challenges to cut through silos (like Denver's education-to-workforce pipeline) is through the collective impact model. Kania and Kramer (2011) noted that collective impact has five conditions: 1) A common agenda (a shared vision for change); 2) Shared measurement systems (agreement on how the work will be measured and reported); 3) Mutually reinforcing activities (stakeholders agreeing on a shared set of activities); 4) Continuous communication (regular meetings and updates); and 5) Backbone support organizations (a separate organization managing the initiative).

DSF is a service provider for DPS high school students and alumni and does not fit the criteria of a PK-16 backbone organization. Although DSF is a significant convener for DPS students, high schools, and higher education institutions in Colorado, it does not have the capacity or infrastructure to bring together all the stakeholders supporting its student population. In fact, no single organization that provides direct services can effectively lead such an effort. PK-16 systems change takes a community intervention and an outside backbone organization within that community, as noted in the collective impact strategy.

Collective impact has been successfully used by backbone organizations building cradle-to-career pathways (another way to think about PK-16) by coordinating systems and resources for students across educational institutions and community organizations from birth through college and starting their careers (Policy Link, 2025). Backbone organizations are often (but not

always) funders like community foundations or United Ways and have full-time staff members who focus on seeing the entire cradle-to-career system in a community and hosting convenings across stakeholders. For example, the Spartanburg Academic Movement, which works with seven school districts, business leaders, and South Carolina higher education institutions, has developed an advocacy agenda to support their youth across the school-to-career continuum (Spartanburg Academic Movement, 2025). Organizations like the Harlem Children’s Zone have successfully used this approach to address poverty and to achieve large-scale change for youth and families (Policy Link, 2025). Strive Together, and the Harvard EdRedesign Lab collaborate with and support backbone organizations like the Spartanburg Academic Movement, leading collective impact and cradle-to-career efforts nationwide. Shifting from organizations working in isolation or at some levels of partnership to collective impact requires mindset shifts from practitioners and system leaders.

Revised Theory of Action

After diagnosing the successes and opportunities for improvement with my career advising project, I developed this revised TOA, adding testing solutions, family engagement, and research on scale in underlined text. (See Table 11.)

Table 11

Revised Theory of Action (TOA)

If I...
● Identify where career programming is already occurring at DSF ● Research leading career readiness programs and models for organizations supporting first-generation students (i.e., <i>career theory</i>, <i>mentorship</i> and <i>social capital</i>, advising models, <u>programmatic scaling</u>, and <i>competencies</i>), and state and national initiatives and policies shaping the broader PK-16 career environment ● Lead a <i>facilitative</i> process with DSF’s internal Career Council, Advisor Strategic Project Working Group, and Chief Impact Officer to develop stakeholder surveys and interview questions ● Gather data and insights from DSF internal stakeholders (students, staff members, and <u>DSF families</u>) and external stakeholders (DPS and corporate partners) ● <u>Test a proposed career advising solution</u>
Then...
● We will better understand DSF’s needs for future career programming. ● We can develop recommendations for DSF’s leadership team to consider in the future
So That...
● DSF can implement a <i>coherent</i> career strategy that aligns with their organizational mission and allows all career programming to work towards defined goals ● More DSF students will have access to career programming that helps them develop essential skills informed by student needs and the Colorado market ● More DSF students will feel motivated to persist toward college graduation ● DSF can better prepare all its college graduates to find fulfilling career opportunities after graduation and meet the demands of Colorado’s economy by working on the path to a Tier One Job

Implications and Conclusion

Implications for Self

During my strategic project at the Denver Scholarship Foundation, I deepened my self-knowledge as I grew as a leader. When reflecting on my time at DSF and “implications for self,” 1) seeing the system from the “balcony” and the “dance floor,” 2) focusing on creating the conditions for change first, and 3) owning my personal power feel the most relevant for me and my future as an education leader.

See the System From the Balcony and the Dance Floor

To use an adaptive leadership (2002) analogy, one cannot fully “see the system” from the dance floor as it does not allow one to see the complete picture. It is also impossible to fully understand the work necessary to lead change if one only considers the efforts from the balcony, as it is far removed from the action on the dance floor (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). Heifetz and Linsky noted the importance of leaders moving back and forth between the balcony and the dance floor to truly understand what is happening with an initiative.

My residency at DSF was a gift to my learning, mainly because it allowed me to lead strategic work while consistently reflecting on it from multiple vantage points. I treasured having the chance to be on the “dance floor” through my interviews and focus groups, visits to partner high schools and the Auraria Campus, and the volunteer work that I did at DSF career events. Through my capstone research, writing, and feedback process, I also valued how I moved back to “the balcony” to adjust or develop better processes to support DSF. During my weekly check-ins, I had a container to reflect on my leadership decisions and my progress with the career advising strategy. My research process, capstone writing, and feedback touchpoints with my committee were additional opportunities to implement learning in real-time, which allowed me to integrate evidence and learning that DSF had access to in real-time.

It can be challenging for busy practitioners to slow down and lead with data, given their many responsibilities. Although I have prided myself on being a reflective and process-driven leader, I had not had a leadership opportunity until residency where I was granted so many built-in opportunities to process my learning in real-time. In my experience as a practitioner, finding time to slow down and collect extensive evidence on the programs I worked on and the broader system I operated in was often challenging with all the competing responsibilities. I embraced

having the opportunity to play that role for the DSF team. This experience allowed me to see what it felt like to stop and process learning and my experiences. Even though I may not have a structure set up like the Ed.L.D. residency in future leadership, building consistent opportunities to move between “the balcony” and the “dance floor” will make me a more strategic leader for the teams and youth I strive to serve.

Focus First on Creating the Conditions for Change

During one of my first-year classes, Harvard Professor Jal Mehta noted that leaders have choices beyond sticking with the status quo or driving change (J. Mehta, personal communication, November 9, 2022). He shared that focusing on changing the environment helps make people want to work toward change. I believe in Jal’s reflection, and have focused on creating positive environments for success throughout my professional career. A core part of my residency was creating a positive environment for change through psychological safety. I leveraged psychological safety to help build the conditions for DSF to work toward the career advising change they would like to see.

I helped create the conditions for change at DSF by convening the community, asking questions, and listening more than I spoke. One of the most satisfying moments in my residency came during 1:1 check-ins with team and program leads, where I shared compiled findings from my project. What made this so gratifying was that they were not caught off guard by any feedback or recommendations. I created a system where progress was communicated throughout. The ultimate career advising recommendations and resources that I developed were based on the most pressing feedback that scholars, staff, and alumni shared and what the team felt they needed. They were grateful that it was captured on paper, and I reflected on how they felt about

the career programming. I used my role to uplift their voices and capture the change they voiced in combination with the best practices I learned.

So much of leadership is about managing change and all the joys and fears and everything in between that comes with it. Although there are times when leaders may make a decision that does not align with the majority based on organizational needs, it is still essential to be aware of where stakeholders stand on the issue at hand. I learned that creating an environment where one uplifts the team's voices helps people feel validated and creates more buy-in with the change occurring.

Own Your Personal Power

Lingo and McGinn (2020) noted that individuals have three sources of power: relational, positional, and personal power. Much of my residency was about leading with informal authority. As I shared in the coherence section of my RKA, formal power is based on position, while informal authority is usually “earned through tenure, expertise, or competence” (Childress & Grossman, 2008, p. 7). Relational power is based on coalitions and how one interacts with others (Lingo & McGinn, 2020). Personal power comes from individual attributes, characteristics, and background (M. Higgins, personal communication, September 22, 2022). As a relationship-driven professional, I am comfortable exercising my relational power and building strong partnerships. During my time in Ed.L.D. and my residency with DSF, I found myself more engaged with my personal power, which has traditionally been less comfortable for me. I did that at DSF by bringing my expertise to what I led and integrating my experiences into the research and conversations with team members.

As much as my doctoral journey has been about acquiring skills and synthesizing learning, it was equally about letting go. And while I have held on to many valuable resources

and approaches that have shaped my learnings and approach to leadership, I have also strived to release limiting mindsets and behaviors that may have served me in previous capacities but needed to be forgotten to reach my potential. Progress is never linear, and there have been moments when I have done a better job in this capacity than others. But at its core, that approach to holding on to what serves me and letting go of what does not, was necessary for me to embrace my personal power and the unique skills I bring to leadership and my communities.

In addition, I leaned into Ganz's (2012) "Public Narrative, Collective Action, and Power" and the three elements (plot, character, and moral) of a public story when connecting my own professional experiences and DSF's mission. I experienced how powerful it was to connect my personal narrative and personal power to the career advising project and DSF's mission. In addition, in my experience, I can usually tell when one is deeply connected to the work. This capstone helps illustrate the leader I am now and the one I strive to be in the future. Continuing to embrace my personal power and center my other power sources will help aid that growth.

Implications for Site

During my strategic project at DSF, I developed four recommendations for the Foundation's future career advising strategy to help address the key challenges found in my evaluation. I expand on these recommendations in greater detail with concrete steps and a proposed timeline throughout this section. All organizations have opportunities to improve, and I expect that these recommendations will help DSF strengthen its program through enhanced career advising in the future. In addition, I have already developed two resources in the "define career advising" category that I feel are "quick wins" to begin this process. These recommendations and concrete steps can help promote future conversations and action steps as

DSF further develops its programming. These recommendations build on each other and should help lead to coherence across the program. (See Tables 12 and 13.)

Table 12

DSF Career Advising Recommendations Summary

Recommendation	Challenge(s) Addressed
1. Define career advising	● We have not clearly defined career advising ● Lack of accountability, consistency, and standardization with career advising
2. Build staff capacity for career advising	● We only have one person focused on career advising full-time ● There is advisor apprehension with career advising and lack of capacity for in-depth career advising with other competing priorities ● Every DSF and Auraria partner school is unique and has varying student career advising needs
3. Create more opportunities for scholars to have work-based experiences and receive mentorship	● DSF lacks a formalized internship program for scholars or built-in opportunities to gain career-relevant work experiences
4. Implement career metrics and milestones and evaluate outcomes	● DSF career advising is not tied to any metrics

Table 13*Define Career Advising Implementation Summary*

Recommendation	Short-Term (Within Six Months)	Medium-Term (Within One to Two Years)	Long-Term (Two+ Years)
1. Define career advising	• Share career advising behaviors and services with DSF access and success students at the beginning of the 25-26 academic year, including how they can receive general career support from DSF advisors and more specialized coaching from DPS or campus partners • Share career pathways and resources (in English and Spanish) with DSF parents and family members at the beginning of the 25-26 academic year	• Develop a career event for DSF parents and guardians	• Evaluate how stakeholders define and have experienced DSF career advising to see if there is alignment

Define Career Advising. The opportunity to clearly define career advising came up in half of my DSF director and assistant director interviews, and is foundational to creating coherence with future programming. After learning about some communication gaps with DSF’s role in career advising during the academic year, the Foundation made more explicit connections about the role career support plays in DSF programming on its website (DSF, 2025). As a “quick win,” before the conclusion of my residency, I listed the services and behaviors that constitute career advising to help provide clarity for scholars and staff since many team members were unsure when they were career coaching ([Appendix P](#)). I also created a roadmap that listed the categories under which services and career advising behaviors could potentially help inform future program evaluation ([Appendix Q](#)).

An important implication for DSF is further defining expectations for Advisors supporting high school students at DPS Future Centers versus those supporting college students

on the Auraria Campus. I suggest that DSF focus high school (access advising) on helping students discover strengths, values, and interests and explore career pathways. This recommendation is based on the career resources already available at DPS and where students are in their developmental stages. In addition, because resources are limited, I recommend that if high school students are interested or prepared to have hands-on career experiences, they pursue them through career and technical education, dual enrollment, early college, or other existing district opportunities. With DSF college students (success advising), I recommend that they continue discovering their strengths, values, and interests and exploring career pathways. Many college students also feel pressure to select their career pathways quickly but should remain open to exploration (especially at the beginning of college) (Hill & Redding, 2021). An important benefit of college is learning about oneself and one's interests through coursework and other experiences. However, college students should also have more opportunities to develop job search skills, make professional connections, and engage in hands-on career experiences if they are to be competitive for “tier one” employment in Colorado after graduation. In some conversations with DSF team members, they noted that nearly all of success advising is career advising. I agree with that sentiment, as coaching at the college level should be connected to helping students achieve their goals.

I recommend that DSF share the proposed career advising behaviors and services with DSF access and success students at the beginning of the 2025-26 academic year, so they understand the support they can receive from their DSF Advisor. This resource, which should be developed as a handout and available online, should also outline that DSF advisors are career generalists and not trained in the intricacies of every pathway. These resources should also include more specialized career resources available at their high school or college.

In addition to sharing career advising behaviors with students, I recommend that DSF share the pathways developed with parents and family members at the beginning of the academic year. As noted by the feedback I received, there are more opportunities to engage families with career work. Sharing information about the different career pathways and the education needed to pursue various occupations (which is information DSF has already developed) can help community members be more included in the process. DSF has developed bilingual resources for families to help support financial aid and its annual scholarship renewal process. I believe that doing the same for career pathways will help increase access and accessibility, as many DSF scholars come from Spanish-speaking homes. I recommend that DSF develop a career event specifically for DSF parents and guardians. In the long term, DSF should evaluate its new career advising definition and push to see if stakeholders are more knowledgeable about the career services that DSF offers. For example, developing a pre and post-test with families before and after resources are shared could be one way to measure impact.

Table 14

Build Staff Capacity for Career Advising Implementation Summary

Recommendation	Short-Term (Within Six Months)	Medium-Term (Within One to Two Years)	Long-Term (Two+ Years)
2. Build staff capacity for career advising	• Hire a career program coordinator	• Evaluate career staff and capacity	• Consider maintaining the current career staff size or adding another staff member to support work

Build Staff Capacity for Career Advising. The lack of capacity for career advising, with other important advising responsibilities, was a prevalent theme in my evaluation. Staff members recognized the importance of career advising, but also noted how difficult it was to

incorporate at times when students approached them with important needs, like financial aid renewal. My expectation is that clearly defining career advising expectations for access and success staff will help. However, because DSF has expressed a desire to commit more deeply to the career space, hiring another full-time member to support career initiatives will go a long way to helping career work grow. I drafted a DSF career coordinator proposal with an attached budget and job responsibilities that are being considered during this personnel budgeting season. This job would support DSF career advising through event planning and coordination, supporting the further development and expansion of the career success coaching program, developing and maintaining career resources, and co-developing work-based learning experiences with DSF program leads and the career and applied pathways manager.

I listed hiring a career program coordinator as a short-term priority, as it will be hard to address future desired programming and expansion without extra support. In the medium and long term, DSF should review the impact of hiring another role to see if they should maintain a potential two-person career team, increase the staff size further, or consider building a department. Before DSF grows any further, it may be important to engage with other nonprofits that have a career team (such as those listed in my landscape analysis) to determine the best organizational structure. (See Table 15.)

Table 15*Create More Work-Based Learning and Mentorship Opportunities for Scholars Implementation**Summary*

Recommendation	Short-Term (Within Six Months)	Medium-Term (Within One to Two Years)	Long-Term (Two+ Years)
3. Create more work-based learning and mentorship opportunities for Scholars	• Scale the career success coaching pilot program from 20 scholars to 30-50 • Define work-based learning expectations for corporate partners and develop a document with shared agreements • Develop a toolkit with resources and best practices for corporations looking to develop new internship programs	• Email a survey to corporate partners and DSF alums about work-based learning opportunities for scholars, and see if any would consider specialized application links and providing internships through named scholarships • Develop a scholar internship workshop or boot camp • Develop paid micro-internship opportunities with corporate partners • Develop paid semester and summer internships with corporate partners	• Scale career success coaching to 50 to 100 scholars

Create More Work-Based Learning and Mentorship Opportunities for Scholars.

DSF has strong corporate partners that have hosted panels, invested in named scholarships, provided other funding to support the Foundation's mission, and even lent their facilities for career fairs. The next opportunity for DSF is to leverage its corporate partners and other business leaders to create more work-based learning (such as internships, apprenticeships, and job shadows) and mentorship opportunities for scholars. As emphasized in the theories and best practices session for career advising in my RKA, mentorship helps students build social capital

(Charania & Fisher, 2023). In addition, college internships help students avoid underemployment (Talent Disrupted, 2024). Building partnerships that allow for these types of experiences will best position DSF scholars for success in Denver's competitive economy.

DSF took a positive step in helping students build their social capital this year through its career success coaching pilot program that supported 20 college students. Gradually scaling that pilot over the next two years can help more students receive valuable professional connections. With work-based learning opportunities, DSF should start by clearly defining expectations for potential partners and listing shared agreements around compensation, scholar supervision, and the duration of possible opportunities. These expectations with corporations are particularly significant now, as many have distanced themselves from programming that may be perceived as diversity, equity, and inclusion in the current political environment. However, many corporations still view recruiting diverse populations for internships as a key part of their talent strategy and organizational values. Taking time to understand whether there is alignment should happen before any partnerships are developed.

I also recommend that DSF survey its current and potential partners to determine what internship opportunities already exist. One possible strategy for developing new programs is to see if partners will consider designating a certain number of internship slots for DSF Scholars or if they will highly consider DSF applicants. As DSF learns about these opportunities, it should consider developing pre-internship workshops to help prepare students for these roles and also provide access to ongoing coaching and support from staff members throughout the program. I also recommend that DSF see if any corporate partners are interested in developing specialized application links for existing internship programs, or if any partners giving named scholarships are interested in providing internships to students as part of their partnership.

Paying students to participate in these internships will also be an important component, as unpaid internships can be a barrier for many students (NACE, 2023). I also recommend that DSF start small with job shadows and micro-internships, which can last between two days to a week, before developing longer-term semester or summer internships. (See Table 16.)

Table 16

Implement Career Metrics and Evaluate Outcomes Implementation Summary

Recommendation	Short-Term (Within Six Months)	Medium-Term (Within One to Two Years)	Long-Term (Two+ Years)
4. Implement career metrics and evaluate outcomes	● Review NCAN’s career evaluation categories and select the most important metrics to measure for DSF scholars ● Develop career outcome data questions for scholar alumni survey six months post-graduation	● Integrate career evaluation categories into the DSF advising model ● Integrate career metrics and milestones into Salesforce ● Evaluate scholar career milestones and progress ● Evaluate alumni career outcome data	● Evaluate completed milestones since implementation and other key outcomes over multiple academic years

Implement Career Metrics and Evaluate Outcomes. Half of the program and assistant directors cited not having career metrics as challenging. I shared some of NCAN’s best practices for metrics for DSF to consider. I recommend DSF’s metrics align with the career advising services and behaviors that DSF advisors are already conducting. For example, having a metric that students complete a career assessment aligns with services that advisors already provide. The metric can fit within the five support categories I suggested, or DSF can adjust to fit exactly with NCAN’s or something similar.

Another important component is developing career outcome data questions for scholar alumni six months post-graduation. Some metrics that could be important to evaluate include the percentage of students employed or involved with continuing education, and those employed in their career pathway. For older alumni, it could also be important to measure job satisfaction.

After the metrics are developed, they must be incorporated into DSF's Salesforce system. This approach will allow program leaders to view program-level dashboards that measure progress. It will also allow program leaders to see student career progress at an individual level and coach team members who have students who need to make more progress in each category or toward a specific metric.

Implications for Sector

My project has many implications for the PK-12 and higher education sector. I share these implications for the sector for organizations aiming to develop or enhance their career advising programs. I propose that organizations 1) embrace career-connected advising and student success coaching, 2) collect and use student career data strategically, 3) facilitate transformational (not transactional) partnerships, and 4) provide affordable pathways to and through postsecondary education. I include relevant examples from other educational institutions and nonprofits in this section.

Embrace Holistic Advising and College Student Success Coaching. Advisors can impact a student's career growth and trajectory. Students must meet with different advisors at many institutions and organizations for financial aid, academics, and career support, which can be burdensome. Part of what makes DSF's advising model so successful is that it is holistic. Although DSF advisors are generalists and refer students to other district or campus resources when more specialized support is necessary, they are trained to support students with financial

aid, academics, (and now) career development, allowing students to have a one-stop shop for their needs. In recent years, more evidence has emerged to support the benefits of holistic advising (U.S. Department of Education, 2024). The City University of New York (CUNY) developed an Accelerated Study in Associate Program (ASAP) where participating students received extensive support with financial aid, academic pathways, and career development. ASAP participants (many who are first-generation students) graduated from CUNY at a rate that was 18 percentage points higher than students who did not participate in the program. Institutions nationwide that have replicated the CUNY ASAP model have seen improved graduation rates after implementation. Whenever possible, allowing students to remain with their same advisor until graduation can help promote continuity and student engagement. This approach also helps provide students with a critical trusting adult relationship in their network.

Another consideration with holistic advising is connecting students with a faculty mentor. Clemmer College at East Tennessee State University (ETSU) allows students to remain with a single advisor throughout their time in college and connects students with a faculty mentor once students begin their junior year (ETSU, 2025). Faculty mentors supplement the advice students receive and help them find internships, explore their professional field, and hold career conversations (ETSU, 2025). This approach helps increase student social capital while also connecting them to critical professional opportunities that can help students achieve strong post-graduation outcomes. Higher education can be very insular, but having strong connections between advising teams and the faculty can help create strong outcomes.

During my residency with DSF, I saw how holistic advising can strengthen relationships with staff members. Consistent touchpoints allow for more opportunities to build trust. Holistic advising can also serve as a strategic retention tool for students. Students are more likely to

persist if they have strong relationships with adults who help them feel a greater sense of belonging (Goplan & Brady, 2019).

Collect and use Student Career Data Strategically. As I recommended to DSF and noted in my best practices, organizations and institutions helping students explore career pathways must collect career data to provide the strongest possible coaching. Career data allows practitioners to disaggregate information by demographic groups, which can help organizations make strategic decisions and necessary adjustments to their programming (NCAN, 2025). Career data can also help organizations develop individualized career advising plans, which is particularly beneficial for students who have struggled to achieve career milestones. In addition to having goals in categories such as career exploration and job search tools, organizations should also be aware of the local labor market and student outcome data (NCAN, 2025).

By having career data, organizations can more intentionally set students up for success. If the data is housed in a database such as Salesforce, leaders can run reports that segment students by their selected pathway. These career reports can then be used to share opportunities like industry panels and work-based learning for students within their desired pathway, which should help increase event attendance and student engagement.

Facilitate Transformational (Not Transactional) Partnerships. DSF has some of the strongest and most collaborative partnerships I have seen in my professional career. It has a full-time employee dedicated to district and campus partnerships and two employees working with corporate partners. Intentionally investing in strong partnerships helps create a collective good for the youth we serve across the education ecosystem (Scott, 2021). Practitioners can have a deeper impact if they work intentionally across parts of the ecosystem. All aspects of the education ecosystem (investors and foundations, research and evaluation organizations, PK-12

systems, business and corporations, technical assistance nonprofits, and policy and advocacy organizations) have a stake in career success.

For community-based organizations like DSF that support students attending partner high schools and colleges, data-sharing agreements with district and campus partners can reduce the replication of services and help amplify the impact of career advising. The challenges facing career outcomes are too complex for a single entity, program, or institution to solve in isolation. As noted in my opportunities for improvement section of my analysis, leveraging community-driven collective impact strategies and having a separate backbone organization that convenes key stakeholders across the entire continuum is an evidence-based approach to address large-scale PK-16 career pathway issues facing a community as a whole. Collective impact has been used in many cities in the United States to improve career outcomes, but it is still missing in several major areas. The Rocky Mountain Partnership is a cradle-to-career partnership serving a multi-county area outside the county where Denver is located, but not DPS (Rocky Mountain Partnership, 2025). Given the challenges in Dever's education-to-workforce pipeline, the city would benefit from a similar effort.

DSF has successfully developed Memoranda of Understanding and contracts for the services provided to high school students at district Future Centers and on college campuses. DSF campus and district-based staff also have monthly touchpoints with key school partners, such as principals and counselors. In addition, DSF convenes all its campus partners each semester for organization-wide updates (like my career advising project).

The American Talent Initiative (2020) developed a three-step framework for community-based organizations and colleges to strengthen partnerships:

1) **Initiate:** Develop a process to “match organizations based not only on their ability to realize the institution’s goals, but also on criteria such as location and support of students in a demonstrated area of focus” (p. 5).

2) **Implement:** “Designate a point of contact to manage the emerging relationship and ensure accountability for the goals set, whether they were outlined in a formal memorandum of understanding or in informal conversations” (p. 5).

3) **Improve:** “Continually evaluate the efficacy of the partnership, using data systems to track students...and make adjustments to ensure they can meet their goals” (p. 6).

Adopting this approach can improve opportunities for all young people and be valuable for partners. Districts and higher education institutions often see community-based organizations as valuable partners because they frequently engage with students of color and those from low-income backgrounds who are underrepresented in higher education, help supplement gaps in campus advising, and provide essential resources that help students succeed academically (April et al., 2020).

In addition to partnering with community-based organizations and school partners, my capstone has emphasized the importance of establishing transformational partnerships with corporations to help students have valuable career-relevant experiences. Again, finding partners that share similar values and equity goals is essential. I recommend that organizations and educational institutions provide different entry points for corporate partners to engage with their students, such as through service (mentorship, panels, info interviews), philanthropy (giving students scholarships), hands-on work experiences (paid internships and job shadows), and storytelling (social media stories, videos, and other features). Giving corporate partners multiple

options can help increase the breadth of partnerships. Starting with one entry-point can lead to deeper engagement in the future.

Provide Affordable Pathways to and Through Postsecondary Education. My final implication for the sector goes back to a key foundation of college access and success: providing affordable pathways through degree or credential completion. In my conversations and surveys with Denver Scholarship Foundation students, several noted that a critical aspect of DSF is making college more affordable through its scholarship, which helps students have the resources they need to pursue college. Throughout my project, I learned much about the importance of career advising. While developing or expanding important career programs, organizations and institutions must remember to meet those initial needs first. Students have trouble focusing on careers and their next steps if a bill is overdue, and they cannot access their transcript or enroll in classes. Continuing to provide those resources is essential for students, as the rising cost of school is one of the leading factors that cause college students to drop out. Although helping a student graduate may not lead to a job, it is the most important step students can take to help set them up for career success.

Conclusion

Will Enhanced Career Advising Make College Worth it?

I started this capstone by asking a big question: Is college “worth it?” Throughout my residency with DSF, I explored how enhanced career advising can make college “worth it” by helping students understand themselves and career pathways in secondary education. I also argued that students should continue that self-exploration and pathway exposure throughout higher education while engaging in more hands-on career-relevant experiences that can increase their competitiveness and pathways to the workforce.

At the beginning of my project, I shared information about the Colorado education paradox and the need for state's K-12 graduates (especially Black and Hispanic students who are graduating from high school and enrolling in college at lower levels) to persist through higher education to help land the projected jobs available for those with a bachelor's degree in 2031. I also shared Denver's evolving education context and DSF's approach to supporting DPS graduates through college access, scholarships, and success coaching. After providing that context, I highlighted theories and best practices for career advising programs by outlining career theory, mentorship and social capital, the importance of college internships in avoiding post-graduate underemployment, and sample career metrics to measure impact. I also outlined my process of leading change through a coherence framework, steps to help an organization learn, and helping team members feel safe through my practice of facilitative leadership. That process informed my Theory of Action, where I shared my vision for leading change by conducting an internal evaluation that would help DSF understand its needs for career programming and ultimately develop recommendations that would enhance the organization's advising model. My goal was to create coherence and provide more opportunities for DSF students to access programming that will encourage them to persist to graduation and be better prepared to meet the demands of Colorado's competitive economy and land "tier one" jobs.

Throughout my process, I strove to execute my Theory of Action by building foundational relationships with staff members upon my entry, learning about DSF and the broader landscape, and getting feedback on my change process from an Advisor Strategic Project Working Group that I developed to uplift staff voice. Once those conditions were set, I spent two months listening. I conducted focus groups with high school students and DSF college scholars, interviewed DSF staff members, conducted staff and student surveys, and then evaluated and

synthesized the data. In addition, I volunteered at DSF career events to learn and observe current programming firsthand. After my data collection process, I synthesized key themes and learnings and made reports available by program, higher education, institution, and data collection method. Throughout my project, I made what I had learned available to the team through a shared document that outlined my process and findings in real-time. In addition to my learning summary, I developed strategic career advising recommendations for DSF, a roadmap for DSF career services across programs, resources to help DSF tell its career story and define itself, and a draft of a potential career program coordinator job description with a budget.

I was mostly successful in executing my vision for the project. In the future, DSF will learn if the enhanced resources help lead to the desired future state in my Theory of Action where more DSF students have access to programs, persist to graduation, and feel prepared to pursue fulfilling career opportunities. Regardless, the research and tools I provided will help DSF continue to be even more intentional about career advising for their students. I am excited about the future possibilities for DSF and the city of Denver as more students receive coaching on the tools they need to thrive in the workforce.

I did not complete my strategic project in isolation. Fortunately, my residency was in a positive learning environment with a supportive supervisor and team who granted me access to their knowledge, DPS, and the Colorado higher education community. DSF is a leader in Denver's nonprofit sector, and I experienced the organization's positive culture, strong programming, and talented staff throughout my residency. Working with the amazing DSF team during my residency was an enriching experience that allowed me to collect the evidence I needed to create recommendations and resources for DSF's enhanced career advising strategy and deepen my knowledge of organizational leadership.

When thinking about the future, there are many unique challenges DSF will navigate during an uncertain time in both secondary and higher education. Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) has started to play a more significant role in career advising, and some DSF partner institutions have begun providing AI career advising and coaching tools and resources for students (University of Denver, 2025). Helping students understand how AI can supplement and not replace the more nuanced and personalized career advising services is an important step. There has also been a dramatic shift in education policy over the last few years. In the summer of 2023, affirmative action was struck down by the Supreme Court of the United States, making it illegal for colleges and universities to factor race in admissions decisions (Totenberg, 2023). Most recently, education funding from the federal government has been threatened. DSF is funded through a mix of private and public sources, and receiving federal TRIO funds has allowed DSF to advise thousands more DPS high school students. DSF Scholars also receive federal Pell Grants that provide much-needed funds to help them persist to and through college. Continuing to receive both of those sources of funding is important for DSF as an organization and for its scholars. Also, as noted in my context setting, the Prosperity Denver Fund (PDF) provides one-third of DSF's revenue and has helped support the organization's growth. PDF will again be voted on by Denver residents in 2028 and is another important revenue stream that is instrumental to DSF's success. DSF will work with its Board and other like-minded organizations to advocate for protecting those vital funding sources, allowing them to counsel DPS students and alumni at the scale it does. These resources are crucial for giving Denver students the essential career advising services recommended in my project. Although DSF's scholarship is based on DPS affiliation and financial need (not race), recent federal changes impacting diversity programming on college campuses potentially hinder vital recruitment and

retention services that have long supported DSF's population (Gonzales, 2025). DSF has strong allies and partners who champion its mission; the broader community needs to continue ensuring DSF students and all the youth, nonprofits, and education institutions nationwide have the resources they need to thrive.

In closing, I am grateful that DSF has become a part of my professional leadership journey. My time at DSF was a gift, and I look forward to supporting students and organizations in Denver and beyond through nonprofit and education leadership. As someone who deeply believes in the power of higher education to change the world, I always want college to be a valuable and viable pathway for students. Intensive and intentional career advising can provide the support and guidance students desire as they leverage their education to pursue their professional dreams and aspirations. If the government, educational institutions, businesses, and nonprofit organizations commit to supporting those engaged in career advising, it is possible to ensure that all students are ready for the future.

References

2023-24 Data At A Glance | Denver Scholarship Foundation. (2024, December 19).

<https://denverscholarship.org/about-us/our-approach/at-a-glance/>

2023 Talent Pipeline Report Released | Colorado Workforce Development Council. (2023,

December 15). <https://cwdc.colorado.gov/blog-post/2023-talent-pipeline-report-released>

About Rocky Mountain Partnership Cradle to Career™—Rocky Mountain Partnership Cradle to

Career. (2021, August 9). <https://rmpartnership.org/vision-and-mission/>,

<https://rmpartnership.org/vision-and-mission/>

Advancing Racial Equity in Career and Technical Education Enrollment. (2019, August 28).

Center for American Progress. [https://www.americanprogress.org/article/advancing-](https://www.americanprogress.org/article/advancing-racial-equity-career-technical-education-enrollment/)

[racial-equity-career-technical-education-enrollment/](https://www.americanprogress.org/article/advancing-racial-equity-career-technical-education-enrollment/)

Anderson, B. B., Dees, G., & Wei-skillern, J. (n.d.). Scaling social impact: Strategies for spreading social innovations. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*.

https://ssir.org/pdf/2004SP_feature_dees.pdf

April, J., Chitwood, J., L., Fresquez, B., & Rabinowitz, A. (2020, August). *Better together:*

Expanding access and opportunity through community-based organization and college

partnerships. [https://www.aspeninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/CEP-Better-](https://www.aspeninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/CEP-Better-Together-FINAL.HiRES_8.7.pdf)

[Together-FINAL.HiRES_8.7.pdf](https://www.aspeninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/CEP-Better-Together-FINAL.HiRES_8.7.pdf)

Artificial Intelligence (AI) for Career Development. (n.d.). *Career & Professional Development* |

University of Denver. [https://career.du.edu/channels/artificial-intelligence-ai-for-career-](https://career.du.edu/channels/artificial-intelligence-ai-for-career-development/)

[development/](https://career.du.edu/channels/artificial-intelligence-ai-for-career-development/)

Bennett, G. (2024, June 25). *Why fewer young men are choosing to pursue college degrees* | PBS News. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/why-fewer-young-men-are-choosing-to-pursue-college-degrees>

Best practices for internship programs. (n.d.). NACE. <https://www.nacweb.org/talent-acquisition/internships/2bad225d-2977-476a-99dd-d8b7638ade1a>

Brady, S., & Gopalan, M. (2019, December 24). *College students' sense of belonging: A national perspective*. *Sage Journals*, 49(2). <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X19897622>

Bridges Transition Model. (n.d.). William Bridges Associates. <https://wmbridges.com/about/what-is-transition/>

Brundin, J. (2024, December 5). Community college graduation rates increase in Colorado. Colorado Public Radio. <https://www.cpr.org/2024/12/05/community-college-graduation-rate-increase/>

Bureau, U. C. (2023, February 16). *Census Bureau releases new educational attainment data*. Census.Gov. <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2023/educational-attainment-data.html>

Career advising for college students: Assessing impact and sustainability. (n.d.). National College Attainment Network. https://www.ncan.org/page/CareerAdvising_Assessment

Charania, M., & Fisher, J. F. (2023). *The missing metrics*. The Christensen Institute. https://www.christenseninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/THE-MISSING-METRICS_update_2023.pdf

Colorado college-going rates continue to decline but at a slower rate. (2023, May 1). | Colorado Department of Higher Education Home. <https://cdhe.colorado.gov/news-article/colorado-college-going-rates-continue-to-decline-but-at-a-slower-rate>

Colorado leads all 50 states in educational attainment. (n.d.). Colorado Department of Higher Education Home. <https://cdhe.colorado.gov/news-article/colorado-leads-all-50-states-in-educational-attainment>

Cradle to career. (2025). Policy Link. <https://www.policylink.org/resources-tools/tools/all-in-cities/homegrown-talent/cradle-to-career>

Cruzvergara, C. Y. (2024, August 26). Colleges must do more for their grads to make higher ed worth the investment. *Forbes*.
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/christinecruzvergara/2024/08/26/colleges-must-do-more-for-their-grads-to-make-higher-ed-worth-the-investment/>

Curtis, D., & Marken, S. (2023, August 16). *Four in 10 college students have had internship experience*. Gallup.Com. <https://www.gallup.com/education/509468/four-college-students-internship-experience.aspx>

DeCourcy, K., & Gould, E. (2023, March 29). *Gender wage gap widens even as low-wage workers see strong gains: Women are paid roughly 22% less than men on average*. Economic Policy Institute. <https://www.epi.org/blog/gender-wage-gap-widens-even-as-low-wage-workers-see-strong-gains-women-are-paid-roughly-22-less-than-men-on-average/>

Denver Public Schools. (n.d.). *Facts and figures*. <https://www.dpsk12.org/page/facts-figures>

Denver Public Schools—Colorado. (n.d.). *Niche*. <https://www.niche.com/k12/d/denver-public-schools-co/>

Denver Public Schools. (n.d.). —U.S. News Education.
<https://www.usnews.com/education/k12/colorado/districts/school-district-no-1-in-the-county-of-denver-and-state-of-c-112125>

- Dugan, J., & Safir, S. (2021). *Street data: A next-generation model for equity, pedagogy, and school transformation*. Corwin.
- Edmondson, A. C. (2012). *Teaming: How organizations learn, innovate, and compete in the knowledge economy*. Harvard Business School.
<https://www.hbs.edu/faculty/Pages/item.aspx?num=42298>
- Edmondson, A. (2008, August). *The competitive imperative of learning*. Harvard Business School. <https://hbr.org/2008/07/the-competitive-imperative-of-learning>
- Educational attainment*. (n.d.). Metro Denver EDC. <https://www.metrodenver.org/regional-data/demographics/educational-attainment>
- Eismann, L. (2016, November 1). *First-generation students and job success*. NACE.
<https://www.naceweb.org/career-development/special-populations/1c98fc42-7945-4f63-805b-048544848da3>
- Fischer, K. (2022, May 5). *The uneven climb from college to career*. The Chronicle of Higher Education. <https://www.chronicle.com/article/the-uneven-climb-from-college-to-career>
- Fogarty, N. (2019, September 14). *Facilitative leaders*. <https://www.neilfogarty.com/facilitative-leaders/>
- Francis, A. (2024, February 10). *John Holland's theory of career choice*. MBA Knowledge Base. <https://www.mbaknol.com/human-resource-management/john-hollands-theory-of-career-choice/>
- French, E. (2022, January 13). *What is an interest inventory and why aptitude assessments matter more for secondary students?* YouScience.
<https://www.youscience.com/resources/blog/what-is-an-interest-inventory/>

Fry, R., Braga, D., & Parker, K. (2024, May 23). *Is college worth it?* Pew Research Center.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2024/05/23/is-college-worth-it-2/>(PDF)

Ganz, M. (2012). *Public narrative, collective action, and power*.

<http://marshallganz.usmblogs.com/files/2012/08/Public-Narrative-Collective-Action-and-Power.pdf>

Girardin, M. (2024, January 31). *First-generation college student career barriers (and how to overcome them)*. Forage. <https://www.theforage.com/blog/basics/first-generation-college-student>

Gonzales, J. (2025, February 25). *As CSU Fort Collins makes changes in response to the Trump administration, others stay put*. Chalkbeat.

<https://www.chalkbeat.org/colorado/2025/02/26/college-reactions-to-trump-dei-dear-colleague-letter/>

Grossman, A., & Childress, S. (2008, August). *Note on the nonprofit coherence framework*. Harvard Business School.

Heifetz, R., & Laurie, D. L. (2001, December). *The work of leadership*. HBR.org.

<https://hbr.org/2001/12/the-work-of-leadership>

Heifetz, R., & Linsky, M. (2002, June). A survival guide for leaders. <https://hbr.org/2002/06/a-survival-guide-for-leaders>

High school graduation rates by state 2023. (n.d.). Wisevoter. <https://wisevoter.com/state-rankings/high-school-graduation-rates-by-state/>

Hill, N. E., & Redding, A. (2021). *The end of adolescence: The lost art of delaying adulthood*. Harvard University Press.

How SAM works | Empower student success. (n.d.). Spartanburg Academic Movement.

<https://learnwithsam.org/how-sam-works>

Our impact. (n.d.). Braven. <https://braven.org/impact/>

Inc, G. (2023). *Education for what?* Lumina Foundation. https://www.luminafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Education.for_.What_.pdf

Interest Assessment.. (n.d.). | CareerOneStop.

<https://www.careeronestop.org/ExploreCareers/Assessments/interests.aspx>

Jentz, B., & Wofford, J. (2012). *The entry plan approach: How to begin a leadership position successfully.* Leadership & Learning.

Kania, J., & Kramer, M.. (2011, Winter). *Collective impact.*Stanford Social Innovation Review.

https://ssir.org/articles/entry/collective_impact

Killam, W.K., Wise, S.M., & Weber, B. (2017). *College student development: Applying theory to practice on the diverse campus.* Springer Publishing.

Learn design thinking straight from the source. (2022, May 3). Stanford Online.

<https://online.stanford.edu/learn-design-thinking-straight-source>

Liedtka, J. (2018, October). *Why design thinking works.* Harvard Business Review.

<https://hbr.org/2018/09/why-design-thinking-works>

Long Lingo, E., & McGinn, K. (2020, August). A new prescription for power. Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2020/07/a-new-prescription-for-power>

McConnell, S. (2023, November 17). *Most admired CEO winner: Lorii Rabinowitz.* Denver

Business Journal. <https://www.bizjournals.com/denver/news/2023/11/17/most-admired-ceo-winner-lorii-rabinowitz.html>

More than half of college class of 2023 grads took part in internships—The majority were paid.

(2023, July 27). NACE. <https://www.nacweb.org/about-us/press/b75773e6-def0-4df8-9c6d-8416df61dba1>

Odugbemi, S., & Lee, T. (2011). *Accountability through public opinion: From inertia to public action*. The World Bank. <https://doi.org/10.1596/978-0-8213-8505-0>

Office, C. S. D. (n.d.). State Demography Office. Colorado Demography. Colorado.gov. <https://demography.dola.colorado.gov/crosstabs/>

O'Rourke, D. (n.d.). *ProjectMe: An approach to career exploration in high school*. https://www.ncda.org/aws/NCDA/pt/sd/news_article/332478/PARENT/CC_layout_details/false

Coburn, C. E. (2003, August). Rethinking scale: Moving beyond numbers to deep and lasting change. *Sage Journals*, 32(6). <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X032006003>

Pribble, S. (2024, January 9). *Denver public schools sets new high mark in graduation rates*. Denver Public Schools. <https://www.dpsk12.org/article/1500554>

Prosperity Denver Fund (n.d.). *Funding for Denver education nonprofits*. <https://www.prosperitydenverfund.org/about/>

Relationship mapping. (2024). *Making caring common*. <https://mcc.gse.harvard.edu/educators-relationship-mapping>

Savitz-Romer, M., & Bouffard, S. M. (2012). *Ready, willing, and able: A developmental approach to college access and success*. Harvard Education Press.

Scott, I. L. (2021, February 9). *A new PK-12 education ecosystem framework for a new normal*. Harvard ALI Social Impact Review.

<https://www.sir.advancedleadership.harvard.edu/articles/a-new-pk-12-education-ecosystem-framework-for-a-new-normal>

Strong, K. C., & Craig, P. (n.d.). *Resegregation in Denver Public Schools: Student success and advisement Clemmer College*. <https://www.etsu.edu/coe/student-success/advisement.php>
Support College-Career Pathway Success. (2023).

<https://www.ed.gov/sites/ed/files/documents/family-community/support-college-career-pathway-success.pdf>

Talent Disrupted: College graduates, underemployment, and the way forward. (2024, February).
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6197797102be715f55c0e0a1/t/65fb306bc81e0c239fb4f6a9/1710960749260/Talent+Disrupted+03052024.pdf>

The class of 2023: Inequity continues to underpin internship participation and pay status. (2023, August 8). NACE. <https://www.nacweb.org/tag/graduate-outcomes/6415e45a-e573-4a59-85c4-8cb28aa4a5d4>

Totenberg, N. (2023, June 29). *Supreme Court guts Affirmative Action, effectively ending race-conscious admissions*. <https://www.npr.org/2023/06/29/1181138066/affirmative-action-supreme-court-decision>

Villegas, K. (2023, August 17). *DSF named top workplace in 2023*. Denver Scholarship Foundation. <https://denverscholarship.org/dsf-named-top-workplace-in-2023/>

What is career readiness? (n.d.). NACE. <https://www.nacweb.org/career-readiness/competencies/career-readiness-defined>

Who Do You Think You Are? (2024, June 21). Center for Career Engagement | Washington University in St. Louis. <https://careers.wustl.edu/who-do-you-think-you-are/>

Who we are. (n.d.). Denver Scholarship Foundation—Denver, CO. (

<https://denverscholarship.org/about-us/who-we-are/>

Work experiences in high school. (n.d.). | CDE.

<https://www.cde.state.co.us/concurrentenrollment/workexperiences>

Yearly progress and completion. (n.d.). National Clearinghouse Research Center.

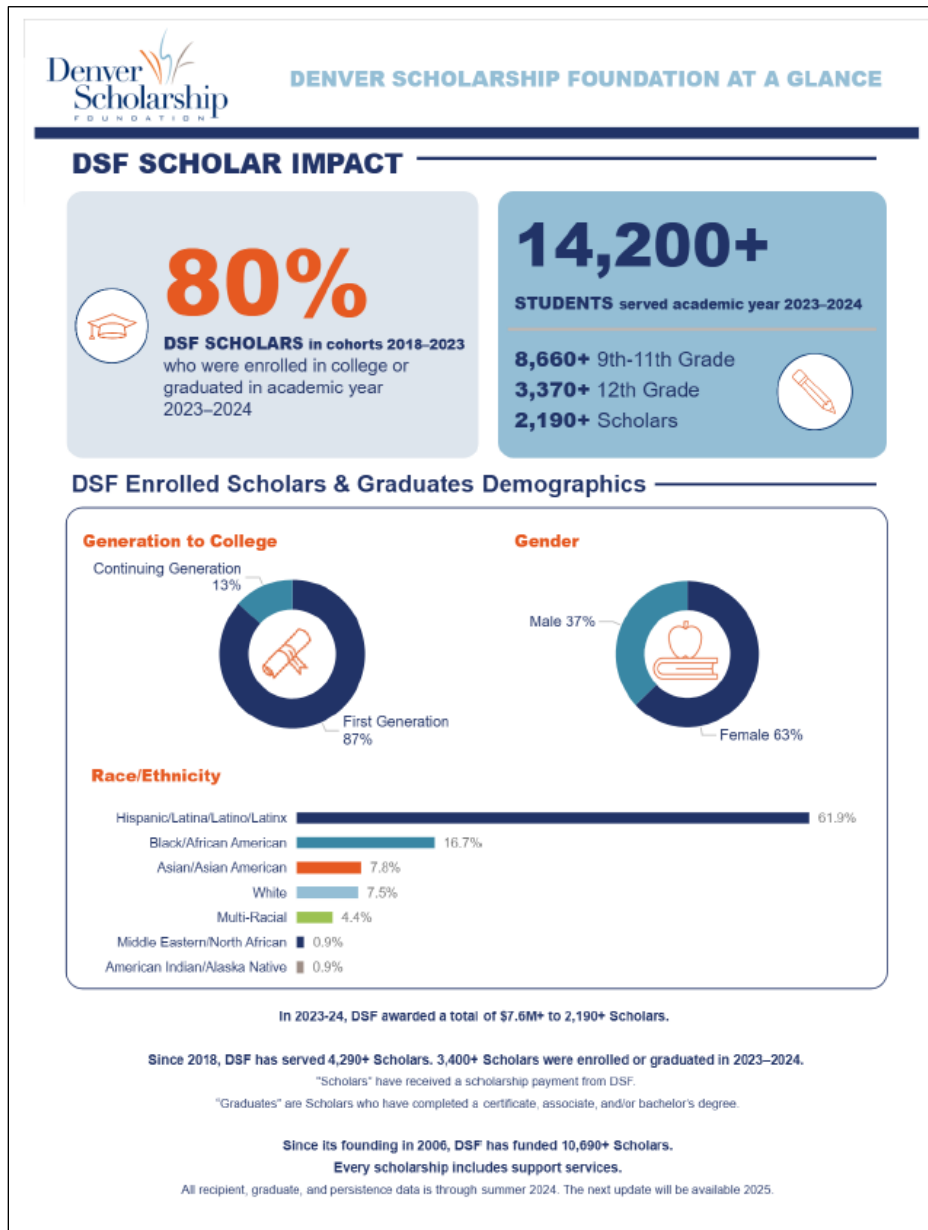
<https://nscresearchcenter.org/yearly-progress-and-completion/>

Your college major is minor compared to this. (2024, June 28). Forbes.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/brandonbusteed/2024/06/28/your-college-major-is-minor-compared-to-this/>

Appendix

Appendix A: Denver Scholarship Foundation Scholar Demographics



Note: From 2023–2024 Data at a Glance | Denver Scholarship Foundation, p. 1.

<https://denverscholarship.org/about-us/our-approach/at-a-glance/>. Copyright 2024 by the Denver Scholarship Foundation.

Appendix B: Denver Scholarship Foundation Scholarship Overview

DSF SCHOLARSHIP



WHAT WE OFFER

Denver Scholarship Foundation (DSF) offers scholarships to graduates of Denver Public Schools (DPS) who meet eligibility requirements as described below and attend one of DSF's 30 college partners in Colorado. The scholarship is available for up to 5 consecutive years. Visit denverscholarship.org/dsf-scholarship for details.



SCHOLARSHIP ELIGIBILITY

To receive a DSF Scholarship, you must meet the following requirements and complete the application process within one year of your graduation from high school:

- ☐ **Complete the DSF Application by May 1** including applying for three additional scholarships or two additional scholarships and a campus student support program.
- ☐ **Attend a DPS High School for all four consecutive years** before graduation, unless you moved to Colorado during high school. Visit denverscholarship.org/eligibility for details.
- ☐ **Graduate with the required minimum high school GPA** to qualify at your intended college type (see chart below).
- ☐ **Complete the FAFSA, CASFA, and/or other financial aid application** as required by your college.
- ☐ **By July 15, complete any additional financial aid requirements** as determined by your college's financial aid office.
- ☐ **Demonstrate financial need** with a final Student Aid Index (SAI) of \$16,640* or less.
- ☐ **Meet requirements for Colorado residency** for in-state tuition or state aid.
- ☐ **Attend a DSF College Partner and enroll in 12 or more credit hours per term.** You must complete Student Success Requirements (SSRs) and meet Satisfactory Academic Progress standards while you're enrolled.

COMPLETE LIST OF DEADLINES & REQUIREMENTS: [DENVERSCHOLARSHIP.ORG/DSF-SCHOLARSHIP](https://denverscholarship.org/dsf-scholarship)





IMPORTANT

To ensure that you qualify for all possible state, federal, and institutional aid, complete all required financial aid applications (FAFSA, CASFA, or other) by your college's priority deadline.

2024-25 ANNUAL AWARD AMOUNTS BY COLLEGE TYPE	REQUIRED HIGH SCHOOL GPA	ANNUAL AWARD AMOUNT	ELIGIBLE YEARS
TECHNICAL COLLEGE	2.0	\$1,700	2
COMMUNITY COLLEGE	2.5	\$1,700	3
COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY	2.75	\$3,600	5

The table above is based on full-time enrollment (12 or more credits per term); award amounts will be divided equally will be divided equally per semester/quarter for the fall/winter/spring terms of each academic year. Summer awards are available for qualifying DSF Scholars.

* 16,640 represents 250% of the 2023-24 maximum SAI to qualify for a Pell Grant and is subject to annual adjustment. SAI is a new term introduced by Federal Student Aid for 2024-25 and replaced the previous term, Expected Family Contribution (EFC). Visit studentaid.gov/help-center/answers/article/what-is-sai for details.

HIGH SCHOOL GPA REQUIREMENT

You must have at least a 2.0 high school GPA to be eligible for the DSF Scholarship. Your final cumulative high school GPA (weighted or unweighted, whichever is higher) will determine the college type(s) where you are eligible to receive the DSF Scholarship. Visit denverscholarship.org/hs_gpa for details.

IF YOUR FINAL HIGH SCHOOL GPA IS:	YOU ARE ELIGIBLE FOR THE DSF SCHOLARSHIP ONLY AT THE FOLLOWING COLLEGE TYPE:	WHEN YOU SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETE YOUR PROGRAM:
2.75 OR HIGHER	Any College Partner: - College/University - Community College - Technical College	You will continue to be eligible at any college type within your years of eligibility (or through completion of your first bachelor's degree, whichever is first).
2.5 - 2.749	- Community College - Technical College	You will be eligible at a four-year college/university within your years of eligibility.
2.0-2.49	Technical College	You will be eligible at a community college or four-year college/university within your years of eligibility.



DENVER SCHOLARSHIP FOUNDATION COLLEGE PARTNERS

The DSF Scholarship is available to qualifying DPS graduates who enroll in one of 31 College Partner schools, which include technical, community, and 4-year colleges. These colleges provide additional support such as mentoring, tutoring, and special workshops to ensure the success of all DSF Scholars.

Technical Colleges

Emily Griffith Technical College
Pickens Technical College

Community Colleges

Arapahoe Community College
Colorado Mountain College
Colorado Northwestern Community College
Community College of Aurora
Community College of Denver
Front Range Community College
Lamar Community College
Otero College
Pikes Peak State College
Red Rocks Community College

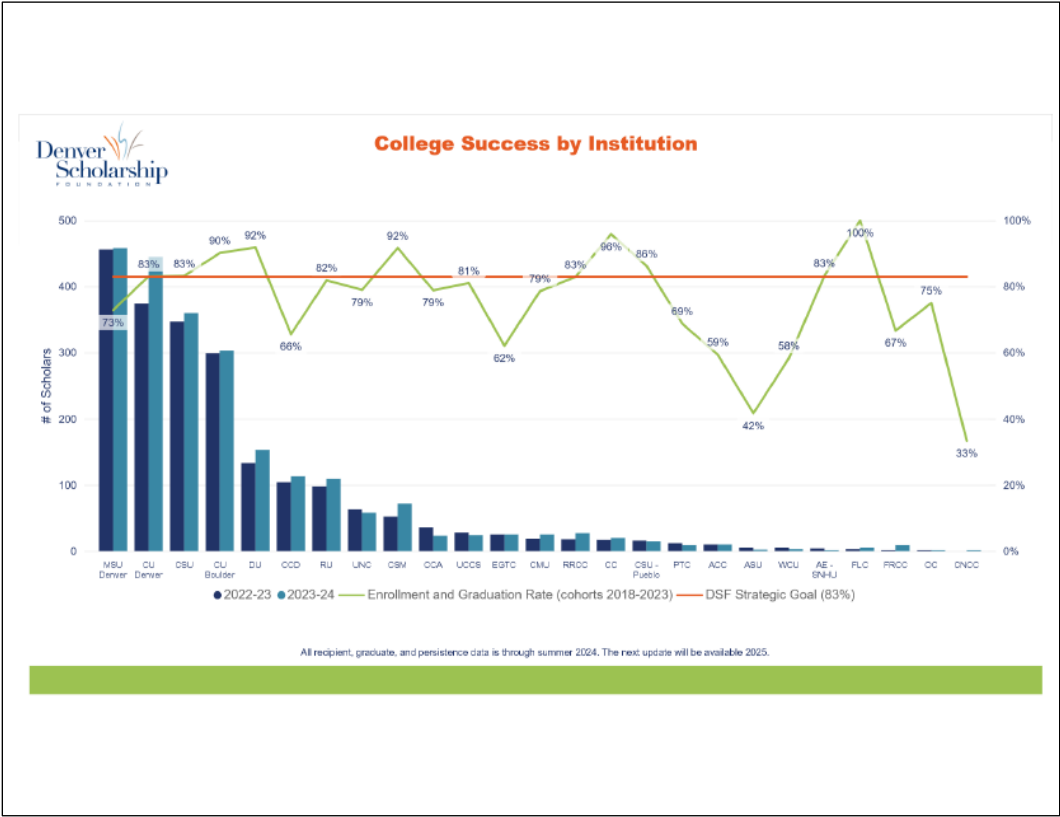
Colleges & Universities

Adams State University
Colorado Christian University
Colorado College
Colorado Mesa University
Colorado School of Mines
Colorado State University
Colorado State University Global (including partnership with AdvanceEDU)
Colorado State University Pueblo
Fort Lewis College
Metropolitan State University of Denver
Naropa University
Regis University
University of Colorado Boulder
University of Colorado Colorado Springs
University of Colorado Denver
University of Denver
University of Northern Colorado
Western Colorado University

FOR MORE DETAILS ABOUT OUR COLLEGE PARTNERS, VISIT:
[DENVER SCHOLARSHIP.ORG/COLLEGES](https://denverscholarship.org/colleges)

This information is current as of 1/2/2024 but is subject to review and may be changed at any time at the discretion of the Denver Scholarship Foundation.

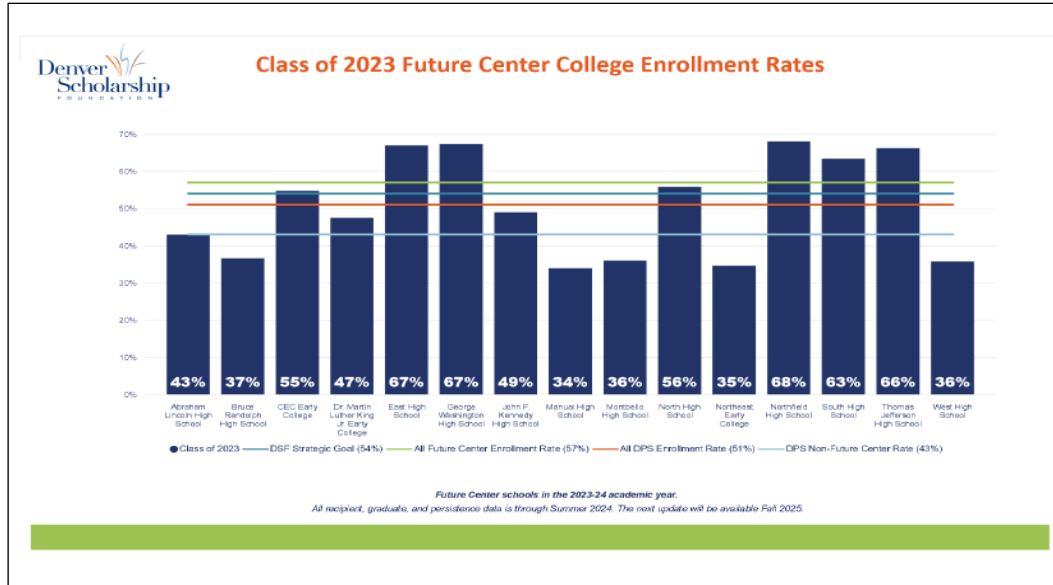
Appendix C: Denver Scholarship Foundation College Success by Institution



Note: From 2023-2024 Data at a Glance | Denver Scholarship Foundation, p. 2.

<https://denverscholarship.org/about-us/our-approach/at-a-glance/>. Copyright 2024 by the Denver Scholarship Foundation.

Appendix D: Denver Scholarship Foundation Future Center (High School) College Enrollment Rates



Note: From 2023-2024 *Data at a Glance* | Denver Scholarship Foundation, p. 3.

<https://denverscholarship.org/about-us/our-approach/at-a-glance/>. Copyright 2024 by the Denver Scholarship Foundation.

Appendix E: Fall 2024 Career Exposure Events

	FALL 2024 CAREER EXPOSURE EVENTS		
Speed Networking and Career Panels In-person at Future Centers DPS High School Students • Marketing and Communications Career Panel ◦ Abraham Lincoln High School ◦ Wednesday September 25th ◦ 12:05-12:50 p.m. • Engineering Career Panel ◦ South High School ◦ Tuesday November 12th ◦ 3:50-4:50 p.m. • Technology, Business, and Healthcare Speed Networking ◦ East High School ◦ Monday November 18th ◦ Time TBD • Business Career Panel ◦ Thomas Jefferson High School ◦ Thursday November 21st ◦ 11:04 a.m. - 12:04 p.m. • Creative Arts Career Panel ◦ George Washington High School ◦ Wednesday December 4th ◦ 9:56-11:21 a.m. • Energy/Sustainability or Financial Services ◦ Northfield High School ◦ Date and time TBD	VIP's Virtual Insight Panels DSF Scholars, Alumni & DPS High School Students • Mental Health ◦ Tuesday September 10th ◦ 11:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.  • Business and Entrepreneurship ◦ Wednesday October 16th ◦ 11:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. 	DSF Scholar and Alumni Career Exploration Events DSF Scholars and Alumni • Virtual Series - Degrees of Success: Andrea's Journey ◦ Via Zoom ◦ Thursday September 26th ◦ 5:30 - 7:00 p.m.  • Virtual Series- Degrees of Success: Miguel's Journey ◦ Via Zoom ◦ Tuesday October 8th ◦ 5:30 - 7:00 p.m.  • Fall Career Networking Fair ◦ Vectra Bank ◦ Friday October 18th ◦ Time TBD 	

Appendix F: Sample DSF Career Posters

HEALTHCARE



ALLIED HEALTH

Dental Hygienist
\$98,260 ASSOCIATE

Occupational Therapist
\$93,180 MASTER'S

Athletic Trainer
\$63,660 MASTER'S

Dietitian & Nutritionist
\$66,450 BACHELOR'S

Radiologic Technologist
\$77,970 CERT. ASSOC.

Respiratory Therapist
\$70,970 ASSOCIATE

Sonographer
\$101,640 ASSOCIATE

Physical Therapist Assistant
\$65,140 ASSOCIATE



Healthcare offers numerous opportunities for those passionate about helping others, from contributing to patient well-being to advancing medical research.

Scan the code for details about healthcare career pathways.



\$ Salary number represents the median salary earned by a given title in the Denver area.
 Source: careeronestop.org; Colorado Department of Labor & Employment (CDLE)
 🎓 Degree tier represents the recommended credential needed to secure a given job title. Additional certifications may be needed.

Poster updated July 2024

NURSING

Certified Nurse Aide
CERTIFICATE \$38,270

Registered Nurse
ASSOC. BACH. \$82,710

Nurse Practitioner
MASTER'S \$121,200

PHYSICIAN

Physical Therapist
DOCTORATE \$98,850

Physician Assistant
MASTER'S \$122,670

Physician
DOCTORATE \$239,200

Surgeon
DOCTORATE \$239,200



DSF ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

JESUS MEDRANO

Travel Pediatric Nurse

“Picking the health field was easy for me thanks to the right guidance and mentors. However, becoming a nurse was probably one of the toughest journeys I’ve endured, but knowing that I can now contribute that knowledge into saving another child’s life day by day makes it all worthwhile. Now I get to travel and do what I love. Remember, every defeat becomes an opportunity to learn and grow.”

🎓 BACHELOR'S OF SCIENCE Nursing (BSN)
Denver College of Nursing

🎓 BACHELOR'S OF SCIENCE Biology / Chemistry Minor
University of Northern Colorado

🎓 HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA
Denver School of Science and Technology (DSST)

Appendix G: Stackable Pathway Posters

STACKABLE PATHWAY BUSINESS	Master's Degree - Adams State University - Colorado Christian University - Colorado Mesa University - CSU - MSU-Denver - Regis University - CU-Boulder - DU - UNC - UCCS - CU-Denver	Jobs & Careers - Consultant - Marketing Manager - Certified Public Accountant - Financial Advisor - Financial Analyst - Investment Fund Manager - Program Manager/Director - Operations - Certified Financial Planner - Banker - Chief Executive Wage Range \$75,000-\$140,000++
	Bachelor's Degree - CU-Boulder - MSU-Denver - Adams State University - Colorado Christian University - Colorado College - Colorado Mesa University - CMC - CSU - Regis University - UCCS - CU-Denver - UNC - Western CO University	Jobs & Careers - Consultant - Marketing Manager - Certified Public Accountant - Financial Advisor - Financial Analyst - Investment Fund Manager - Program Manager/Director - Operations - Certified Financial Planner - Banker - Chief Executive Wage Range \$70,000-\$140,000
	Associates of Applied Science - Arapahoe CC - Community College of Denver - Red Rocks CC - Front Range CC - Pikes Peak State College	Jobs & Careers - Accounting Clerk - Management - Administrative Assistant - HR Coordinator - Sales Manager Wage Range \$40,000-\$80,000
	Certificate Programs - CCD - Front Range CC - Pikes Peak State College - CCA - Arapahoe CC - Red Rocks CC - Pickens Tech. College - Lamar CC	Jobs & Careers - Bookkeeping - Real Estate - HR Assistant - Bank Teller - Entrepreneur Wage Range \$36,000-\$75,000

Entry & Exit Points

- Can enter or exit at any step but must have a Bachelor's to get Master's
- To sit for CPA exam students must complete 150 credit hours and have a BA degree
- CFP also requires a bachelor's degree and passing an exam. Before you take the exam you must complete coursework

Sources: Colorado Collegiate Handbook, Career One Stop, City and County of Denver Jobs Board



Appendix H: Scholar Survey Questions

24-25 DSF Auraria Scholar Career Interests and Experiences Survey

Dear DSF Scholars,

We are collecting data on DSF Scholar career interests and experiences to help inform our organization's current and future career programming.

To guide this process, we have prepared a brief survey. Your responses will help DSF staff members develop recommendations and shape future career strategies. This survey will take about 10-15 minutes to complete, and your honest feedback is greatly appreciated.

We are very grateful for your time and consideration. If you have any questions about this process, please email rhutten@aurariascholars.org

Section One: Demographic Information

1. Please type your full name *

2. What is your school email? *

3. What are your current major(s) or minor(s) (please write undecided if you have not yet declared a major)? *

4. What is your current academic year? *

- ☐ Freshmen
- ☐ Sophomore
- ☐ Junior
- ☐ Senior

5. Please select the college you attend *

- ☐ Community College of Denver
- ☐ Metro State University Denver
- ☐ University of Colorado - Denver

6. What best describes your gender identity? *

- ☐ Woman
- ☐ Man
- ☐ Non-Binary/Non-Conforming
- ☐ Transgender
- ☐ Prefer not to say

7. What best describes your race/ethnic identity? Please check all that apply. *

- ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
- ☐ Asian or Asian-American
- ☐ Black or African-American
- ☐ Hispanic or Latino/a
- ☐ Middle Eastern or North African
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- ☐ White or European
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Section Two: Work Experiences in College

8. How many internships, work-study roles, or jobs have you had in a potentially desired career field during college? *

- ☐ 0
- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4+

9. Are you currently employed? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

10. If you currently have one or multiple jobs, is your total employment full-time or part-time?

- ☐ Full-Time (30+ hours per week)
- ☐ Part-Time (Less than 30 hours per week)

Section Three: Career Interests

11. Which of the following career pathways best represents your current top career interest *

- ☐ Business (Ex: General sales, marketing, finance, general management)
- ☐ Education (Early childhood education, K-12, higher education and beyond)
- ☐ Engineering and Architecture
- ☐ Hospitality (Travel and lodging, restaurant, food and beverage)
- ☐ Community and Human Services (Counseling, social work, government and public administration)
- ☐ Industrial (Construction, manufacturing, transportation and distribution)
- ☐ Healthcare (Allied health, nursing, physician)
- ☐ Technology and Multimedia Design (IT and cybersecurity, development, media)
- ☐ Public Safety (Criminal justice, fire and rescue)
- ☐ None of the Above
- ☐ Undecided

12. If applicable, which of the following career pathways best represents your secondary career interest (optional question)?

- ☐ Business (Ex: General sales, marketing, finance, general management)
- ☐ Education (Early childhood education, K-12, higher education and beyond)
- ☐ Engineering and Architecture
- ☐ Hospitality (Travel and lodging, restaurant, food and beverage)
- ☐ Community and Human Services (Counseling, social work, government and public administration)
- ☐ Industrial (Construction, manufacturing, transportation and distribution)
- ☐ Healthcare (Allied health, nursing, physician)
- ☐ Technology and Multimedia Design (IT and cybersecurity, development, media)
- ☐ Public Safety (Criminal justice, fire and rescue)
- ☐ None of the Above
- ☐ Undecided

13. If you selected none of the above for either of the previous questions, what is your current career interest?

Section Four: Job Search Tools, Career Readiness, and DSF Career Support

14. Please rank your current comfort level with the following job search tools or skills *

	Extremely not Confident	Somewhat not Confident	Somewhat Confident	Fair
Resume	☐	☐	☐	
Cover Letter	☐	☐	☐	
LinkedIn	☐	☐	☐	
Networking	☐	☐	☐	
Interviewing	☐	☐	☐	
Internship Search	☐	☐	☐	
Post-College Job Search	☐	☐	☐	

15. Please rank your current comfort level with the following essential skills in the workplace *

	Extremely not Confident	Somewhat not Confident	Somewhat Confident	Fair
Critical Thinking	☐	☐	☐	
Problem Solving	☐	☐	☐	
Written Communication	☐	☐	☐	
Verbal Communication	☐	☐	☐	
Collaboration	☐	☐	☐	
Adaptability	☐	☐	☐	
Organization/Time Management	☐	☐	☐	
Computer Literacy	☐	☐	☐	
Leadership	☐	☐	☐	

16. ***Seniors Only*** Do you feel prepared for your future career?

☐ Yes

☐ No

17. If you are a senior and answered "no" to the career readiness question, why don't you feel prepared?

18. Where has DSF been most helpful in your career development and post-collegiate planning? *

19. How could DSF be more helpful in your career development and post-collegiate planning? *

20. Please finish this sentence with words/short phrases to describe the competencies, skills, behaviors, character traits, and/or values that describe, in your opinion, a career-ready DSF college graduate (list at least three words or phrases).

A DSF career ready college graduate is... *

21. Is there anything else that you would like to share (optional)?

Appendix I: Scholar Focus Group Questions

DSF Career Readiness Project Focus Group Structure and Outline

DSF Auraria Student Focus Group (55 Minutes)

Pre-Work

- **Work With Success Team to Identify Participants (5-8 students)**
 - All Three Auraria Institutions (Three Separate Focus Groups if possible)
 - Once participants are identified, work with the Success team to identify students a specific time to conduct the focus group
- **Share the Purpose of the Focus Group With Students**
 - We are collecting data on DSF Scholar career interests and experiences to help inform our organization's current and future career programming.

To guide this process, we are conducting student focus groups. Your responses will help DSF staff members develop recommendations and future career strategies. Each focus group will last 55 minutes, and food will be provided.

We are very grateful for your time and consideration. If you have any questions about this process, please email rburton@denverscholarship.org.

- **Identify a Notetaker**

Structure/Outline

Introduction (15 Minutes)

- **Welcome**
 - Welcome participants and thank them for their participation and engagement
 - Introduce yourself as a facilitator and introduce the notetaker
 - Share the purpose of the session and how the data will be used
- **Ground Rules**
 - Everyone will have a chance to participate
 - Confidentiality
- **Icebreaker**
 - What was the worst job you ever had? What made it so frustrating?
 - (Time Permitting) What inspired you to pursue your current career interest?

DSF Career Programming Strengths (10 minutes)

- What kind of career exploration work have you done with your DSF Advisor?

- What supports from DSF have been the most helpful (example: DSF Career posters, career fairs, career exposure events, coaching from DSF advisor, etc.)? Why?

DSF Career Programming Challenges (10 minutes)

- What gaps exist in our current career readiness support?
- Are there any barriers that make accessing DSF career coaching services difficult?

Future Career Readiness Strategy (10 minutes)

- How can DSF better help you prepare for a future career?
- What specific career advising strategic priorities or initiatives should DSF focus on in the next three years?

Closing Thoughts and Next Steps (10 minutes)

- We will analyze the notes from this focus group and develop a summary
- We will use your feedback to develop future recommendations
- Thank you

Appendix J: Staff Survey Questions

24-25 Career Readiness Strategic Project Staff Survey

Dear DSF Team,

As part of my strategic project, I am evaluating DSF's past and current career programming and learning about internal and external stakeholders' career programming preferences and goals. After gathering data, I will help set the conditions for DSF to define its approach and future career strategy by working with you and other key stakeholders to co-create a coherent vision and goals for DSF student career readiness across the organization.

To guide this process, I've prepared a brief anonymous survey. Your responses will be used to help DSF staff members generate recommendations and shape future career strategies. This survey will take about 10-15 minutes to complete, and your honest feedback is greatly appreciated.

I am very grateful for your time and consideration. If you want to discuss this effort further, please get in touch with me via Teams or at burton@denverscholarship.org.

required

Section 1: Demographic Info

1. Please select the category that best represents your role at DSF *

- ☐ Executive Team
- ☐ Administration
- ☐ Program Director/Assistant Director
- ☐ Campus Advisor
- ☐ College Advisor
- ☐ Program Advisor
- ☐ Scholarship
- ☐ Development
- ☐ Marketing and Communications
- ☐ Other
- ☐ Prefer Not to Share

Section Two: DSF's Role in Career Readiness

As DSF strives to define its career readiness strategy, it is important to understand staff awareness of the career work currently being led at the organization. It is also important to reflect on where DSF is best positioned to provide potential future support and programming. Since DSF is currently exploring the role that staff members and volunteers could play in this strategy, please share your thoughts on the following questions.

2. How familiar are you with the following career programs that DSF offers? *

	Not at all Familiar	Slightly Familiar	Somewhat Familiar	Modi
Career Success Coaching Pilot Program	☐	☐	☐	
Career Exposure Events at Future Centers	☐	☐	☐	
Career Fairs with Corporate Partners	☐	☐	☐	

3. How familiar are you with the following career resources that DSF offers? *

	Not at all Familiar	Slightly Familiar	Somewhat Familiar	Modi
DSF Career Resource Guide	☐	☐	☐	
DSF Career Posters and Stackable Pathways	☐	☐	☐	
DSF Career Council	☐	☐	☐	

4. How familiar are you with the following career resources that DSF partners offer? *

	Not at all Familiar	Slightly Familiar	Somewhat Familiar	Modi
DPS Individual Career and Academic Plan Lessons	☐	☐	☐	
DPS MAIA Learning Platform	☐	☐	☐	
Career-Focused Student Success Requirements	☐	☐	☐	

5. What are some career-focused **access** program metrics that DSF should consider implementing (optional)?

6. What are some career-focused **success** program metrics that DSF should consider implementing (optional)?

7. What are some career-focused **development/corporate partnership** metrics that DSF should consider implementing (optional) (Ex: __number of corporate career fairs hosted each year)?

8. Should DSF focus more of its efforts on helping students develop essential skills that are valuable in the workforce (ex: critical thinking, communication, time management, problem-solving, collaboration, etc.), job search tools/skills (resume review, LinkedIn profiles, interviewing, networking, etc.) or both equally? *

- ☐ Essential Skills
- ☐ Job Search Tools
- ☐ Both Equally

9. What level of support should DSF **staff** provide in supporting students in the following job search categories? *

	No support	Share resources
Resume	☐	☐
Cover Letter	☐	☐
LinkedIn	☐	☐
Networking	☐	☐
Interviewing	☐	☐
Internship Search	☐	☐
Post-College Job Search	☐	☐

10. If you are in a student-facing role, please rank your comfort level in supporting students in the following job search categories

	Extremely not Confident	Somewhat not Confident	Somewhat Confident	Fair
Resume	☐	☐	☐	
Cover Letter	☐	☐	☐	
LinkedIn	☐	☐	☐	
Networking	☐	☐	☐	
Interviewing	☐	☐	☐	
Internship Search	☐	☐	☐	
Post-College Job Search	☐	☐	☐	

11. What level of support should DSF volunteers or partners (DPS, higher ed institutions, other nonprofits, etc.) provide in supporting students in the following job search categories? *

	No support	Share resources
Resume	☐	☐
Cover Letter	☐	☐
LinkedIn	☐	☐
Networking	☐	☐
Interviewing	☐	☐
Internship Search	☐	☐
Post-College Job Search	☐	☐

12. What kind of staffing roles, resources, or structure should DSF explore to help support this strategy? What would be most helpful (optional)?

Defining Career Readiness at DSF

Your answers will help DSF describe, in specific terms, its career success strategy moving forward.

13. Do you think DSF college graduates are well prepared for a career after graduation? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

14. Please provide more context, to the extent that you are comfortable, your perception of the career readiness of DSF college graduates (optional).

15. Where do you think DSF programming or resources have been most helpful in student career development and post-collegiate planning (optional)?

16. Where do you think DSF programming or resources could be more helpful in student career development and post-collegiate planning (optional)?

17. Please finish this sentence with words/short phrases to describe the competencies, skills, behaviors, character traits, and/or values that describe, in your opinion, a career-ready DSF college graduate (list at least three words or phrases).

A DSF career ready college graduate is... *

18. Is there anything else that you would like to share (optional)?

Appendix K: Staff Interview Questions

DSF Career Readiness Strategic Project Internal Interview Questions

Program Directors, Advisors, and Board

Career Advising Strengths

1. What are the greatest strengths of DSF's current career readiness programmatic model and offerings?
2. What has enabled the career readiness success DSF has experienced?

Career Advising Challenges

3. What are some of the most significant challenges of DSF's career program model?
4. What internal factors have impacted DSF's career readiness programming and strategy?
5. What external factors (financial, political, social, etc.) have impacted DSF's career readiness programming and strategy?

Impact of Current Career Programming

6. Which of DSF's current career initiatives or resources (career exposure events at Future Centers, Career Success Coaching Pilot, career fairs with corporate partners, career resource guide, career posters, etc.) have been the most successful, and why?
7. Are there any efforts that should be reconsidered? If so, why?

Future Career Advising Strategy

8. What specific career advising strategic priorities or initiatives should DSF focus on in the next three years?
9. What are some potential career-focused metrics that the access program should consider implementing? What about success? Corporate partnerships?
10. What will be critical to enabling DSF's success in the career readiness space?

Closing Thoughts

11. Is there anything else you want to share about DSF's career readiness strategy moving forward?

Appendix L: Alumni Interview Questions

DSF Career Readiness Strategic Project Interview Questions

Alumni

Career Advising Strengths

1. What are the greatest strengths of DSF's current career readiness programmatic model and offerings?
2. What has enabled the career readiness success DSF has experienced?

Career Advising Challenges

3. What were some of the most significant challenges of DSF's career program model that you experienced as a Scholar?

Impact of Current Career Programming

4. Which of DSF's current career initiatives or programs significantly impacted you as an alum?

Future Career Advising Strategy

5. Are there offerings you wish you had as a DSF Scholar?
6. What specific career advising strategic priorities or initiatives should DSF focus on in the next three years?
7. What role(s) would you like DSF alums to play in our future strategy?
8. What will be critical to enabling DSF's success in the career readiness space?

Closing Thoughts

9. Is there anything else you want to share about DSF's career readiness strategy moving forward?

Appendix M: TRIO High School Focus Group Questions

TRIO High School Focus Group Structure/Outline

Introduction

- Welcome, ground rules, and icebreaker

Career Programming Strengths

- What kind of career exploration work have you done in high school with TRIO, DSF, or other organizations?
- What career supports have been the most helpful? Why?

Career Programming Challenges

- What gaps exist in career readiness support?
- Are there any barriers that make accessing career advising difficult?

Future Career Readiness Strategy

- How can community-based organizations better help you prepare for a future career?
- What specific career advising strategic priorities or initiatives would like community-based organizations like DSF to focus on?

Closing Thoughts and Next Steps

- We will analyze the notes from this focus group and develop a summary
- We will use your feedback to develop future recommendations
- Thank you

**Appendix N: DSF Scholar Career Advising Focus Group Executive Summary
and Sample Report Section**



Career Advising Strategic Project

Auraria Scholar Focus Group Summary

Ryan Burton

Fall 2024

Executive Summary

In October and November 2024, I conducted DSF Scholar Focus groups at our Auraria Campus partner institutions: MSU-Denver, CU-Denver, and the Community College of Denver. Twenty students across academic years participated in the three focus groups. These themes derived from the conversations:

Career Advising Strengths

MSU Denver

- DSF Advisors are always available to help and are very resourceful
- DSF Advisors help Scholars feel a deeper sense of community at MSU
- DSF Advisor emails and texts are very detailed

CU-Denver

- DSF Advisors are always available to help and are very resourceful
- *DSF offers a wide variety of career events*

The Community College of Denver

- Career-focused SSRs have helped students learn more about potential pathways and themselves
- *Advisors provide helpful reminders about deadlines*

Career Advising Challenges

MSU Denver

- Advisor turnover led to some communication and relationship-building challenges
- Not enough emails about opportunities within desired career pathways from DSF
- Lack of career exploration with DSF Advisors in earlier academic years
- The volume of students at The Future Center made it hard to find quality time with DSF Advisor

CU-Denver

- Career events can be challenging to attend with students' busy schedules
- *There are not as many events for less popular career pathways*
- Lack of proactive and consistent check-ins outside of when requirements are due

The Community College of Denver

- DSF Advisors are generalists and not as knowledgeable about certain fields, like STEM
- CCD does not have a career center, so the DSF advisor is the primary career resource
- There are only two DSF advisors at CCD, and the transition for some students from a CCD to a DSF Advisor has been challenging

- Technical and communication issues have impacted some advising meetings
- Career events can be challenging to attend with students' busy schedules

Impact of Current Programming

MSU Denver

- Career Fairs that DSF or MSU hosts are always very helpful and provide opportunities to connect with professionals

CU-Denver

- The gala can lead to impactful professional opportunities

The Community College of Denver

- N/A

Future Strategy

MSU Denver

- DSF could help connect Scholars to others within their career pathway to build more DSF student networks
- Older DSF students or alums could support first-year students

CU-Denver

- Share how DSF can support Scholars with post-college jobs or graduate school exploration
- Connect Scholars to alums and share how current Scholars can remain involved with DSF as alums
- Continue emailing career opportunities to students
- More personal check-ins with Scholars
- DSF could help connect Scholars to others within their career pathway to build more DSF student networks

The Community College of Denver

- Consider having a dedicated DSF career professional to support CCD students
- Proactively share career events with students
- Provide opportunities for students to receive hands-on career-relevant experiences
- Hire more CCD Advisors

Incongruencies Across the Data

Note: Two themes from the focus groups had incongruencies. Although CU-Denver students noted there are many DSF career events, some felt like there were not as many for less popular pathways. In addition, CCD's role in providing helpful reminders about deadlines was incongruent among

participants. Two Scholars felt their CCD Advisor provided helpful reminders, while three students did not.

Themes Mentioned in Multiple Focus Groups

- Peer networking with students who share similar career pathways (CU-Denver and MSU Denver)
- DSF Advisors are very resourceful (CU-Denver and MSU Denver)
- Emails are very detailed and helpful (CU-Denver and MSU Denver)

Career Advising Strengths

MSU Denver

DSF Advisors are always available to help and are very resourceful

- "Everybody's really helpful. I really can't say who's been most helpful because they're just always resourceful. So I don't know. They've all been the same."
- "I didn't really have any gaps or, like, anything I was missing from them. They're really resourceful."

DSF Advisors help Scholars feel a deeper sense of community at MSU

- "I think building community, specifically because MSU is a commuter campus, so building a community can be difficult sometimes when you're not here all the time or people in your class are different ages. But DSF, I think, does a good job of hosting space where it's inclusive. Like, I've gone to events where it's kind of like a communal thing where all we do is, like, draw and paint and ask questions about, like, the semester or other resources we can get."

DSF Advisor emails and texts are very detailed

- "They're very detailed. When I received the text message, I received, like, the time, the place, you know, it was very easy for me to find the place."

CU-Denver

DSF Advisors are always available to help and are very resourceful

- "They send out a lot of emails of, like, events. Like, I know a lot of the fairs I learned about from them. And for me specifically, like, one with like, my advisor... she kind of went through the process with me of why I wanted to change my major. I think just having someone to talk to about it and just help you, guide you and point in the right direction, filling out certain forms and just deadlines and stuff was really good and just have someone to connect to about that."
- "I think just all the knowledge and like, the resources she has, like, show all the connections and like, having them know, like, certain, like, resources... on campus that I didn't even know about."
- "I think they do a really good job of, you know, giving you events, providing resources for you to either attend to or learn from. And that's just something that they can help, that can help you personally build off of if you want to pursue any kind of major, whatever career you want surrounding your major."

DSF offers a wide variety of career events

- "I think they do a really good job of, you know, giving you events, providing resources for you to either attend to or learn from. And that's just something that they can help, that can help

you personally build off of if you want to pursue any kind of major, whatever career you want surrounding your major."

- "A lot has been helpful, especially career fairs."
- "The variety of events is really good."

Community College of Denver

Career-focused SSRs have helped students learn more about potential pathways and themselves

- "Well, they have a requirement where we're supposed to go to one career workshop. I went to...I think it was called like the Hispanic Leadership Panel or something like that. It was pretty eye opening. I liked it. I actually went with my class and because the event was during my class so I wouldn't have been able to go had we not all just gone. It was pretty good...it taught me more about myself."
- "I also did like a workshop with one of the requirements and they had us do like this test, like questions were like Myers Briggs test. And they asked you different questions on how you would like your job environment to be different activities you like to do. And that placed you with certain personality traits that would fit careers. I feel like that really helped me out because it's like I started majoring in accounting without like knowing much about it. But like through that test I figured out that like, because of the way, like I like to work and my personality, like, that's a good career for me."

Advisors provide helpful reminders about deadlines

- "She's so good at reminding me when I need to turn in my assignments. And that is like the final due date because the final due date to turn in all the events and the careers that events and careers that we attended by November 1."
- "I would say when she ran me through all the requirements I would need...we ran a degree check and looked at my schedule, looked at what classes I needed to take, and I'm working on a lot of them now. I'm about to start my first pathway class next semester."

Appendix O: Current Career Resources and Programs at DSF

Current Career Programming at DSF	
Program	Overview
Career Success Coaching Pilot Program	- DSF piloted a Career Success Coaching Pilot during the 2024-25 academic year, matching 20 DSF Scholars (college students) with 20 professional volunteers. - The program aims to help DSF Scholars grow professionally by matching them with volunteer coaches who will support them in gaining the skills needed to be more confident and competitive in the job search process.
Career Exposure Events at DSF Future Centers	- DSF Career Exposure Events provide exploratory opportunities for DSF Scholars and DPS high school students to learn about different career pathways. - During the fall of 2024, DSF hosted 11 Career Exposure Events at partner DPS high schools or virtually via Zoom. The events included speed networking, career panels, and insight events on specific topic areas (e.g., business and entrepreneurship). Appendix E provides more information on these events.
Career Fairs	I also learned that many DSF College Advisors took the initiative to develop career fairs in partnership with DPS to expose students to various career pathways.
Current Career Resources at DSF	
Resources	Overview
Career Resource Guide	The DSF Career Resource Guide, new for the 2024-25 academic year, includes tools Advisors can use to support students with their job search, assessments, and sample career paths.
DSF Career Posters and Stackable Pathways	- DSF Career Posters (see Appendix F) were newly updated for the 2024-2025 academic year and are shared directly with students and placed in the 15 Future Centers. - The career posters outline career pathways, average salaries, and the education required to attain a position. - They also profile a DSF alumnus, which helps students visualize themselves on their desired pathway. - The Stackable Pathway Posters (Appendix G) help students see the many options they can pursue within a given industry and which partner institutions provide educational opportunities.
DSF Career Council	- The DSF Career Council started in 2020 (and was reviewed in the 2022-2023 academic year) to help the DSF team updated on career trends, data, and resources to support career conversations with students. - Like other DSF staff committees, the Career Council comprises a cross-section of team members interested in supporting career programming and strategies across the organization.

Appendix P: Draft Career Advising Behaviors and Services at DSF

1. Define Career Advising				
Sample communication with Scholars/Advisors: "DSF Advisors can provide general career advising in the following ways. For more specialized coaching along various career pathways, your DSF Advisor can help connect you to _____ at DPS or _____ on your college campus."				
← Success Career Advising →				
← Access Career Advising →				
Discovering Strengths/Values/Interests	Exploring Career Pathways	Developing Job Search Skills	Making Professional Connections	Engaging in Career Experiences
• Interest assessments • Self-exploration exercises • Completing career advising self-reflection questions • Completing career vocabulary activity	• Reviewing career pathway tools (Colorado Career Advising tool, O'Net, Career One Stop, etc.) • Reviewing DSF's Career posters • Reviewing DSF's Stackable Credentials • Financial literacy coaching • Researching different careers • Helping students select or assess their major and colleges that offer it • DSF VIP events, career panels, and career fairs	• Resume coaching • Cover letter coaching • LinkedIn support • Mock interviews • Informational interviews • Job internship/apprenticeship/application coaching • Graduate school search support • Salary negotiation coaching	• Helping Scholars find or identify... • Mentors • Professional connections	• Sharing opportunities or helping Scholars apply for • Job shadows • Internships • Apprenticeships

Appendix Q: Draft Career Advising Roadmap at DSF

