# Rural Pathways Project Institute 4
# October 28-30, 2026
# Renaissance Dallas Addison – Dallas, TX

***Strengthening the Community College Role in Bachelor's Completion and Post-Baccalaureate Success***

## AGENDA

## Wednesday, October 28th

**9:30am - 12:30pm** — **Orientation for Implementation Coaches, Partners and NCII Team (breakfast at 9:00)**
***Crystal I***

**12:30 - 1:30pm** — **College Team Leads/Coach Prep Meeting (Lunch Provided)**
***Only for the Identified College Leads and Project Coaches***
***Crystal I***

**1:30 - 2:00pm** — **Ballroom Doors Open/Snacks Provided**
***Please see the sign outside of Crystal IV-V to find your team table. Name badges and college materials will be on your table.***
***Crystal IV-V***

**2:00 - 2:15pm** — **Welcome and Institute Overview**
*Gretchen Schmidt, Senior Fellow, NCII*
***Crystal IV-V***

**2:15 – 4:15pm** — **Bachelor's Degree Attainment and Alignment to Good Jobs Workshop**
*Kathy Booth: Senior Director for Economic Mobility and Educational Data Systems, WestEd*
*Sterling Smith: Senior Research Associate, WestEd*

*The Center for Economic Mobility at WestEd has been working alongside National Association of System Heads (NASH) to analyze labor market data so institutions can better align their undergraduate programs and bachelor's degrees with high-demand careers, ultimately improving economic mobility for graduating students. Kathy and Sterling will lead a workshop focusing on a skills-based approach to pathways that will help students practice, communicate, and apply their skills in ways that connect to real-world opportunities. This reframing broadens the focus from*

*programs and jobs toward the relationship between students and employers. In this model, colleges are not only providers of education; they also help students translate skills, navigate opportunities, and connect learning to real workforce contexts.*

***Crystal IV-V***

**4:15 – 4:45pm** **The Bachelor's Degree: Rethinking Pathways for Students in Rural Communities**

*Davis Jenkins: Senior Research Scholar, CCRC*
*Rob Johnstone: Founder and President, NCII*

*Building on the Inside Higher Education article provided for advance work, Davis Jenkins will highlight success structures and models for bachelor's degree attainment for community college students. Rob will then discuss how to connect those bachelor's degree pathways that lead to living wage jobs to the labor market data available to the colleges.*

***Crystal IV-V***

**4:45 – 5:00pm** **Transition to Team Time**

**5:00 - 6:00pm** **Team Time #1 – Skills Mapping in Transfer Pathways**

***See Page 7 of agenda to find your team time room assignment***

**6:00 - 7:00pm** **Opening Reception**

***HOSTED BAR AND HORS D'OEUVRES***

***Garden Court I-II***

**7:00pm** **Dinner on your own**

# Thursday, October 29th

**8:00 - 8:45am** — **Breakfast**
***Crystal IV-V***

**8:45 – 9:45am** — **Translating General Education to Meet Employer Needs**
*Chris Baldwin: Senior Fellow, NCII*
*Erica Orians: Vice President, Michigan Community College Association*
*Kevin Stotts: President, TalentFirst (MI)*

*The Michigan Community College Association, in partnership with NCII, interviewed Michigan employers and workforce partners about the skills that students need when they enter the workforce and the gaps that employers are finding with newly hired employees. The panel will explore ways to integrate these employability skills into the students' programs and ideas about how to document the applicability of these skills for the hiring process.*
***Crystal IV-V***

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**9:45 – 10:00am** — **Table Discussion**

**10:00 – 10:15am** — **BREAK**

**10:15am - 12:15pm** — **Cross-college Working Sessions – Opportunities and Barriers to Bachelor's Degree Attainment**
*Working sessions in coaching teams in team time rooms – round-robin structure with questions*

*These cross-college discussions within coaching groups allow for a structured time to learn from the practices at other institutions and also to strategize about how best to address challenges to bachelor's degree attainment for students in the college's respective region.*

**12:15 – 1:15pm** — **Lunch**
***Crystal IV-V***

**1:15 – 2:15pm** — **Democracy's Campus 2036 – The Work of the Alliance for Higher Education**
*Mike Gavin: President and CEO of the Alliance for Higher Education*

*The Alliance for Higher Education is a coalition uniting all of higher education to defend and improve the field as a foundational pillar of democracy. In February 2026, the Alliance convened more than 50 cross-sector organizations and institutions to begin developing a forward-looking vision and blueprint that reaffirms higher education's role as an engine for democracy. Mike will provide an overview of the work thus far and how the soon-to-be released recommendations from the working group could impact higher education in the coming months and years.*
***Crystal IV-V***

**2:15 – 2:30pm** **Transition to Team Time**

**2:30 – 3:30pm** **Team Time #2 – Revisiting Program Enrollment and Completion Data with a Focus on Bachelor's Completion**

***See Page 7 of agenda to find your team time room assignment***

**3:30 - 3:45pm** **Transition to Main Room**

***Snacks Provided***

***Crystal IV-V***

**3:45 – 4:15pm** **Embedded Applied Learning and the Impact on Students**

*Hana Lahr: Assistant Director of Research and Director of Applied Learning, CCRC*

*In More Essential than Ever, the authors dedicated an entire chapter to the importance of applied learning opportunities to student learning as well as to overall retention and completion. Hana will provide an overview of the research from that chapter along with insights on how colleges can integrate applied learning outside of traditional CTE pathways like nursing, allied health and manufacturing.*

***Crystal IV-V***

**4:15 – 4:45pm** **Integrating Applied Learning Experiences into Transfer Pathways**

*Kelly Harper: Director, Career Center, Cincinnati State Technical and Community College (OH)*
*Cassandra Segura: Director of District-wide Career Resources & Services, Alamo Colleges (TX)*

*Both Cincinnati State and Alamo have developed a robust culture for applied learning at their institutions. Cincinnati State has long had a co-op program that aligns with their main transfer partner, the University of Cincinnati. Kelly will provide details on how their applied learning integration has expanded beyond the co-op to include multiple methods of applied learning integration in both applied and transfer pathways. Cassandra will provide an overview of the AlamoEXPERIENCE and Alamo's model for transcripting career readiness and soft skills gained through applied learning experiences.*

***Crystal IV-V***

**4:45 – 5:45pm** **The Transfer Behind Transfer**

*Patricia Parker: Project Director, SOVA*

*SOVA has been leading national and state policy conversations on improving transfer since 2020 when the Beyond Transfer project began. This year, Patricia co-authored a publication titled "Best Bets for Transfer and Learning Mobility". Patricia will highlight her team's research and share lessons on learning mobility that colleges in the project can integrate into conversations with their transfer partners.*

***Crystal IV-V***

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| **6:00 – 7:00pm** | **Presidents' Reception**<br>***Crystal I*** |
| **6:00pm** | **Dinner on your own** |

# Friday, October 30th

**7:30 - 8:30am** — **CEO Breakfast**
***Pick up breakfast at Crystal IV-V***
***Crystal I***

**7:30 - 8:30am** — **Breakfast**
***Crystal IV-V***

**8:30 - 9:15am** — **Transfer among Rural Learners in California**
*Darla Cooper: Executive Director, RP Group (CA)*
*Dr. Daisy Segovia: Associate Director of Research and Visualizations, RP Group (CA)*

*The RP Group in California is investigating the factors influencing transfer decisions to address the unique challenges faced by students living in rural areas with limited higher education options. The goal of the research is to gain a clearer understanding of the experiences of rural learners with intersecting identities by exploring the specific barriers posed by distance and other obstacles, identifying strategies that facilitate their transfer, and examining how resources provided by colleges and communities in rural university deserts impact students' likelihood of and experiences with transfer. Lead researchers on the project will share the results and highlight learnings that are generalizable outside of California.*
***Crystal IV-V***

**9:15 - 9:30am** — **Transition to Team Time**

**9:30 - 10:45am** — **Team Session #3 – Identifying and Planning for Next Steps**
***See Page 7 of agenda to find your team time room assignment***

**10:45 – 11:00am** — **Break and Transition to Main Room**
***Snacks provided***
***Crystal IV-V***

**11:00 - 11:50am** — **Innovative Rural College Transfer Partnerships**
*Tiffany Blackwell: Dean of Enrollment Pathways, Tri County Technical College (SC)*
*Shadi Kilani: Executive Vice President, Arizona Western*
*Kate Mahar: Associate Vice President and Strategic Initiatives, Shasta (CA)*
*Moderator: Chris Baldwin: Senior Fellow, NCII*

*This panel will explore innovative transfer partnerships. Representatives from three rural community colleges will provide an overview of their university partnerships and discuss the advantages for and impact on their students.*
***Crystal IV-V***

**11:50 - 12:00pm** — **Closing Thoughts, Next Steps and Evaluation**
***Crystal IV-V***

| *College Name* | *Table Assignment* | *Implementation Coach* | *Team Time Room Assignments* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Bay de Noc | 1 | A. Forgette | Crystal VIII |
| Central Carolina | 25 | R. Johnstone | Crystal II |
| Central Texas | 19 | K. Jones | Lalique I-II |
| Colorado Mountain | 17 | H. Lahr | Lalique I-II |
| Columbia Gorge | 26 | R. Johnstone | Crystal II |
| Davidson – Davie | 13 | S. Sutton | Crystal III |
| Edison State | 20 | K. Jones | Lalique I-II |
| Grays Harbor | 11 | O. Lawrence | Crystal VI |
| John Wood | 21 | L. Rittner | Crystal I |
| Kilgore College | 15 | E. Orians | Crystal III |
| Linn-Benton | 9 | E. Bowling | Crystal VI |
| Marion Tech | 5 | A. Buchele | Crystal VII |
| McLennan | 14 | S. Sutton | Crystal III |
| Missoula | 16 | E. Orians | Crystal III |
| Montcalm | 23 | M. Karp | Crystal I |
| Mountain Gateway | 10 | E. Bowling | Crystal VI |
| North Central State | 24 | M. Karp | Crystal I |
| Northeast Nebraska | 3 | J. Walsh Portillo | Crystal VIII |
| Patrick & Henry | 18 | H. Lahr | Lalique I-II |
| Reedley | 4 | J. Walsh Portillo | Crystal VIII |
| San Juan | 27 | V. Torres | Crystal II |
| Southwestern Oregon | 22 | L. Rittner | Crystal I |
| Temple | 12 | O. Lawrence | Crystal VI |
| Tillamook Bay | 7 | C. Wikstrom | Crystal VII |
| UACCB | 6 | A. Buchele | Crystal VII |
| Washington State - Ohio | 28 | V. Torres | Crystal II |
| West Virginia Northern | 2 | A. Forgette | Crystal VIII |
| White Mountains | 8 | C. Wikstrom | Crystal VII |