Cradle-to-Career Data Governing Board Staff Report

Date Report Issued: February 20, 2026

Attention: Members of Cradle-to-Career Data Governing Board

Subject: **Update on the Strategic Planning Process, Goals, and Objectives (Agenda Item Four)**

Staff Contact: Roni Jones, Leading Resources, Inc. (LRI)

The California Cradle-to-Career Data System's (C2C) strategic planning process has been a multi-month effort that began in early 2025, informed by extensive stakeholder engagement, including input from the Governing Board (Board), Advisory Boards, and the public. At this meeting, the Board will have the opportunity to receive an update on C2C's strategic planning process, including prior and future milestones, and deliberate on the proposed goals and objectives informed by Board and Strategic Planning Committee (Committee) discussions, input from the public and Advisory Boards, and grounded in C2C's mission, vision, and values. This staff report is broken down into three main parts: section one, C2C mission, vision, and values; section two, Committee background; and section three, strategic planning process milestones.

Requested Action:

There is no requested action for this item. This is an informational item only.

Section One: C2C Mission, Vision, and Values

C2C's mission, vision, and values have informed the strategic planning process by shaping priorities, goals, and objectives around a shared framework aligned with C2C's statutory charge. This section outlines C2C's mission, vision, and values.

Section One, Part A: C2C Mission, Vision, and Values

C2C's strategic planning process is anchored in C2C's mission and vision. A mission is a statement of the organization's core purpose, describing what it does, for whom, and why. A vision is a statement describing the desired future

state or long-term impact the organization seeks to achieve. The current mission and vision are as follows:

- ❖ **Mission**: To be California's source of actionable data and research on education, economic, and health outcomes for individuals, families, and communities to expand access to tools and services to navigate the education to employment pipeline.
- ❖ **Vision**: The California C2C connects individuals and organizations with trusted information and resources, providing insights into critical milestones in the pipeline from early care to K-12 to higher education, skills training, and employment. The data system empowers individuals to reach their full potential and fosters evidence-based decision-making to help California build a more equitable future.

In addition to being guided by C2C's mission and vision, the strategic planning process is informed by the C2C values. An organization's values are the principles and beliefs that guide how the organization behaves, makes decisions, and conducts its work. The current values are as follows:

- ❖ **Advancing Equity**: Equity is our north star: At critical milestones, opportunities, and planning steps, we ask, "how can we design and focus our work to advance equity in small and big ways?"
- ❖ **Transparency**: Transparency enables us to build trust with the public and with each other.
- ❖ **Accountability**: When we experience success, we collectively acknowledge the result of our work. When we experience setbacks, we collectively solve problems.
- ❖ **Collaboration**: Multiple perspectives from each other and the public transform good individual ideas into innovative and creative accomplishments.
- ❖ **Curiosity**: When our work gets tough, we get curious.

Section Two: Committee Background
Page 18 of the Governance Manual states, "the Board is responsible for implementing Education Code Section 10866," including "set[ting], revisit[ing],

and amend[ing] the vision, mission, and strategic objectives for [C2C], particularly related to opportunity and outcomes gaps and advancing common goals." This section provides insight into the background of the strategic planning process and the February 11, 2026 Committee meeting.

Section Two, Part A: Formation of the Committee

At the November 14, 2025 Board meeting, the Committee charter was approved and five Board members were designated to form the Committee. Chair Payne is the Chair of this Committee and Board members Cochrane, Lee, and Van Natten and Designee Bjerke for Member Irwin serve on this Committee. The role of the Committee is to review and provide recommendations to the proposed strategic plan.

Section Two, Part B: February 11, 2026 Committee Meeting

At the inaugural Committee meeting on February 11, 2026, the Committee reviewed the strategic planning process and deliberated on the proposed goals and objectives that were based on themes discussed by the Board and shaped by C2C's mission, vision, and values. During the Committee meeting, Committee members identified key strengths in the proposed goals and objectives, including:

- ❖ Clear alignment between values and goals;
- ❖ Thoughtful integration of values across multiple goals; and
- ❖ Transparency in demonstrating how elements connect.

When discussing the proposed goals and objectives, the Committee encouraged:

- ❖ Maintaining visible crosswalks between values and goals in the final public-facing version;
- ❖ Reinforcing shared ownership across teams so that each goal reflects organization-wide responsibility; and

- ❖ Continuing to design the document in a way that is accessible and transparent to community members engaging in the strategic planning process.

Following the Committee meeting, the Committee Chair, LRI, and Office of California Cradle-to-Career Data System (Office) incorporated Committee feedback to the proposed strategic plan in preparation for the Board's review and deliberation at the February 25, 2026 Board meeting, which can be found in Attachment A.

Section Three: Strategic Planning Process Milestones

This section provides an overview on February 25, 2026 Board member deliberation and next steps in the strategic planning process.

Section Three, Part A: Member Deliberation

At the February 25, 2026 Board meeting, member deliberation will not focus on finalizing language in the proposed strategic plan, instead, Board members will have the opportunity to surface directions, priorities, and areas for refinement. After the presentation of each individual goal, Board members will be given the opportunity to engage in discussion and provide feedback on the goal and its objectives. Questions to consider for discussion include:

- ❖ What are your initial reflections on the proposed strategic plan language for the individual goal and its objectives, and how well does it align with C2C's mission, vision, and values?
- ❖ Does the proposed strategic plan language for the individual goal and its objectives clearly communicate its purpose and intent, and where could it be revised or updated?

After all goals have been reviewed, Board members will have the opportunity to participate in a broader discussion to provide high-level feedback on the proposed strategic plan as a whole. Questions to consider for discussion include:

- ❖ Do the goals and objectives reflect the Board's priorities and big picture concepts? Are there areas that could be revised or updated?

- ❖ In what ways does the proposed strategic plan language encourage collaboration across C2C?
- ❖ How well does the proposed strategic plan reflect C2C's value to the people of California and demonstrates C2C's current and future operational utility, as informed by public and stakeholder input?

Section Three, Part B: Next Steps

Following the February Board meeting, C2C leadership and staff will review Board comments and feedback and revise the proposed strategic plan language. Consistent with the Committee's charter, the Committee will reconvene on April 29, 2026 to review and further refine updated proposed language for specific sections of the strategic plan and to develop formal recommendations for the Board. On May 20, 2026, the Board will review the Committee's recommendations and take action on proposed updates to the strategic plan for possible adoption.

Introduction

The California Cradle-to-Career Data System is a statewide, long-term data system that brings together information on early learning, K–12 schools, higher education, social services, and employment. It provides tools and resources to help students reach their college and career goals, and delivers clear information on education and workforce outcomes. By connecting data that was once separate and difficult to access, the system allows individuals, families, policymakers, and communities to see themselves in the data and understand the factors that shape student success.

This strategic plan sets out how we will make this system even more useful, user-friendly, and accessible. We aim to put actionable information into the hands of communities, educators, and families so they can plan, make decisions, and support students at every stage of their journey. By bringing data together in one place, Cradle-to-Career helps Californians track progress, identify opportunities, and take steps to build a more equitable and thriving education and workforce system.

Goal 1: Be California's neutral, trusted source of linked, state-wide data on how education and jobs shape opportunity and well-being.

Preamble: For C2C's data insights to be useful, Californians need to trust that the information was brought together in a transparent, neutral process.

Goal: Be California's neutral, trusted source of linked, state-wide data on how education and jobs shape opportunity and well-being.

Objectives:
- Earn Californians' trust in our data stewardship by leaning on our value of transparency.
- Build Open Science best practices into how the data system is built, data reports are run, and research data requests are handled: Keep a public record of all studies done with C2C data and publicize all of the findings

(including null results and those that run counter to our own prior expectations and goals).

- Identify priority questions and data resources through Learning Agendas[1] that draw on input from communities, advisory boards, and partners.
- Maintain trust by continuing public governance processes for making decisions about the data system.
- Embed privacy, security, and responsible data use into all operations.

Values (How/Why): Our role is to provide clear, reliable information about education and workforce outcomes that Californians can trust. We do this by being transparent about the data and staying neutral. This information is useful for making decisions that improve opportunity for all Californians. We make the information available so that students, families, educators, and leaders can base their decisions on data.

Goal 2: Create data insights and tools that Californians count on.

Preamble: The C2C Data System complements existing state data systems by creating products that display linked education, social services, and workforce data over time. Through user-centered design, C2C turns data into information by creating tools like dashboards, query builders, a research request system, public reports, and others. Each tool type is a unique opportunity to make data accessible to users.

For the general public, a best use of the C2C Data System is to power interactive products that help explain state and local trends and outcomes in a context where individuals can relate personally. For practitioners, the best use of the C2C Data System is to make data readily available and easier to work with. For researchers, a best use of the C2C Data System is to enable impact and evaluation studies that can inform policymakers.

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[1] Learning agendas focus attention on building and using the research and evidence needed to solve big problems. https://www.evaluation.gov/evidence-plans/learning-agenda/ or https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/97406/evidence_toolkit_learning_agendas_2.pdf

Objectives:

- Use user-centered design to discover and create meaningful data products for the public.
- Develop and release intuitive public dashboards and data reports that tell human stories about Californians.
- Create and provide curated data sets for the public to answer questions and quantify impact.
- Enable external research through a C2C secure data enclave, where researchers can do analysis in a controlled environment that protects data privacy and security.

Values (How/Why): The C2C Data System links existing administrative data collected by the participating agencies to real individual context and outcomes. By doing this at scale for millions of Californians, the data products can be used like flashlights to make trends, gaps, and disparities visible.

Goal 3: Provide equitable access to information and tools for all Californians.

Preamble: The California Cradle-to-Career Data System links the people's data, and C2C must optimize the reach of its tools and resources by ensuring meaningful accessibility for individuals in the state. By tailoring and targeting tools and resources for the state's diverse communities, C2C works to advance data literacy — the ability to read, understand, analyze, and communicate data to make informed decisions and solve problems — for all Californians.

Goal: Provide equitable access to information and tools for all Californians.

Objectives:

- Tell a clear story about why data insights matter.
- Regularly engage stakeholders to collaboratively design products that address the needs of communities throughout California.
- Maximize reach, strengthen understanding, and expand community use of tools by implementing effective, community-defined delivery methods for California's populations.

- Develop and implement data literacy efforts that address the diverse needs of individuals across California.

Values (How/Why): The California Cradle-to-Career Data System is built by the people of California, for the people of California, using the people of California's data. To advance equity, we work to make information easy to access and understand for communities, schools, and organizations, and ensure the people whose stories are reflected in the data have access to that information in meaningful and practical ways. When data are shared openly and transparently, people can proactively plan, ask questions, and take action. Providing access to data gives communities the information they need to help students succeed.

Goal 4: Build a flexible and secure data system that continually adapts to the needs of Californians.

Preamble: The C2C Data System is built in accordance with industry best practices of well architected systems that are scalable, reliable, performant, and flexible. The system also adheres to strict security and privacy practices to protect Californians' data. This enables the rapid development of new high-quality products, compliance with changing statutory and regulatory requirements, and assurance that the system is protected.

Objectives:
- Build the data system for scale and flexibility so it answers questions today and in the future.
- Adapt to changes in laws, standards, and industry guidance so the system stays compliant.
- Routinely review and update security and privacy practices so the system is safe and secure.
- Continually review and identify gaps in data access and availability.

Values (How/Why): We create products that help Californians understand and use data easily. These tools transform complex information into clear insights that

support learning, skills training, and career pathways. Through collaboration and curiosity, we design tools that are usable, transparent, and trusted. Scalable products allow more individuals and organizations to benefit from data insights.

Goal 5: Optimize organizational and operational culture.

Preamble: With a small team of 27 authorized positions and a modest annual budget of about $15 million, C2C has to use resources effectively to achieve organizational objectives. This means getting the right people in the right roles, prioritizing spending, and meeting the administrative and legal requirements that apply to State entities.

Goal: Optimize organizational and operational culture.

Objectives:
- Recruit and retain top talent on the C2C team.
- Operationalize C2C's shared values.
- Use current and accurate fiscal and administrative data to inform resource prioritization and decision making.
- Make meaningful partnerships inside and outside of State government.
- Define outcomes and measure what matters.
- Manage risk within a complex compliance landscape.

Values (How/Why): Regular collaboration across all program areas prompts C2C team members to be curious and think innovatively about opportunities and constraints within fixed resources. These discoveries create transparency, shared understanding, and accountability for the team.

Values-to-Goals Alignment Table

Value	How the Value Shows Up in Our Goals	Related Goals
Advancing Equity	Designing data, tools, and access so all communities can benefit and reach key education and workforce milestones.	**Goal 1:** Be California's neutral source of trusted information on outcomes in education, jobs and well-being **Goal 2:** Create data insights and tools that Californians count on **Goal 3:** Provide equitable access to information and tools for all Californians **Goal 4:** Build a flexible data system that rapidly adapts to the needs of Californians
Transparency	Sharing clear, understandable, and open information so people can trust the data and how it is used.	**Goal 1:** Be California's neutral source of trusted information on outcomes in education, jobs and well-being **Goal 3:** Provide equitable access to information and tools for all Californians **Goal 4:** Build a flexible data system that rapidly adapts to the needs of Californians
Accountability	Taking responsibility for results, learning from challenges, and improving how insights and tools are delivered.	**Goal 3:** Provide equitable access to information and tools for all Californians **Goal 5:** Optimize organizational and operational culture
Collaboration	Working with partners,	**Goal 2:** Create data insights and tools that Californians count on

	communities, and each other to shape data, tools, and solutions.	**Goal 4:** Build a flexible data system that rapidly adapts to the needs of Californians **Goal 5:** Optimize organizational and operational culture
Curiosity	Asking questions, learning from feedback, and adapting when work becomes complex or challenging.	**Goal 3:** Provide equitable access to information and tools for all Californians **Goal 4:** Build a flexible data system that rapidly adapts to the needs of Californians **Goal 5:** Optimize organizational and operational culture