# Cradle-to-Career Data Strategic Planning Committee Report

Date Report Issued:      February 3, 2026

Attention:      Members of the Strategic Planning Committee

Subject:      **Strategic Planning Process, Goals, and Objectives (Agenda Item Two)**

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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. In accordance with the Strategic Planning Committee (Committee) charter, at this meeting, the Committee will review the strategic planning process, including past and future milestones, and deliberate on the proposed goals and objectives, based on themes discussed by the Board and are shaped by C2C's mission, vision, and values. The strategic plan will guide C2C's work over the next five years and reinforce C2C's role as a source of neutral and trusted information. This staff report is broken down into three main parts: section one, background; section two, C2C mission, vision, and values; and section three, proposed strategic planning goals, subgoals, and objectives.

## Requested Action:

After review and consideration of the scope of work in the Committee charter and the proposed strategic planning goals and objectives reflected in this staff report, Staff recommends that the Committee approve the proposed items.

- ❖ Move to approve the proposed strategic planning goals and objectives as specified in the staff report, and if needed, authorize the Committee Chair, LRI, and the Office of Cradle-to-Career Data System (Office) to incorporate any additional amendments proposed by the Committee in preparation for presentation to the Board at the February 25, 2026 Board meeting.

## Section One: Background

Stakeholder engagement has guided the strategic planning process by informing how C2C can continue to be useful and provide what is needed to make C2C's data, tools, and resources more user-friendly and accessible. This section provides insight into the background of the strategic planning process, including how stakeholder engagement has informed the strategic planning process, the Committee charter, and goals for the strategic planning process.

### Section One, Part A: Strategic Planning Process

At the November 14, 2025 Board meeting, the Board had the opportunity to receive a high-level overview of the key big picture concepts that emerged from prior Board deliberations at the May and August Board meetings, how those big picture concepts are shaping C2C's strategic priorities and guiding the work of the Office, and how the strategic planning process will use emerging patterns to inform collective priorities. Specifically, at the November Board meeting, the Board reaffirmed the following three big picture concepts:

- ❖ Securing the Office's position as a neutral source of trusted and reliable information.
- ❖ Focusing on the prioritization of the most useful and necessary data.
- ❖ Defining a broad understanding of the work of C2C and providing clarity on C2C's current and future operational utility.

The Office prioritizes community voice and engagement in the development of its tools and resources, with user-centered design written in statute. With the start of a new strategic planning process, the Office requested feedback from key stakeholders on the sentiment and messaging that resonates with the public. On January 20, 2026, the Office held a Community Conversation where members of the public shared insights about the messaging and sentiment that resonate with them when engaging with C2C. The public shared that the Office's commitment to transparency resonated with them, as did C2C's focus on providing valuable data insights for all Californians. Additionally, the Office received feedback from Advisory Board and Board member exit interviews that

highlighted C2C's commitment to advancing equity, transparency, and collaboration values.

## Section One, Part B: 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 the C2C, particularly related to opportunity and outcomes gaps and advancing common goals."

At the November 14, 2025 Board meeting, the Board established the Strategic Planning Committee. This included the approval of a charter and designation of five Board members to be a part of this Committee. The charter sets forth the purpose, duration, scope of work, and activities of the Committee. The charter gives the Committee the authority, during the first Committee meeting, to provide recommendations to the strategic plan.

## Section One, Part C: Context into the Strategic Planning Process

A strategic plan is a multi-year roadmap that defines an organization's direction, priorities, goals, and measures of success. The goals contained in a strategic plan are broad, long-term priorities that describe what the organization intends to achieve over the life of the strategic plan. Each goal has associated objectives that are specific, measurable, and time-bound results that indicate progress toward achieving a strategic goal.

The current strategic plan was not organized to focus on individual functions and does not reflect the levels of deep coordination required to accomplish the mission and vision of C2C. As a result, one goal for the C2C strategic planning process is to move to a more integrated, cross-cutting strategic plan. An integrated strategic plan emphasizes shared priorities, coordinated implementation, and system-level impact, ensuring that all parts of an organization work together toward common outcomes. This model is an approach to organizational planning that aligns goals, initiatives, and resources

across multiple functions or departments, rather than treating them as separate, siloed efforts.

A strong integrated strategic plan sets goals and objectives that will require the broad experiences and expertise of all staff, enabling a coordinated approach to complex and interconnected challenges. Given C2C's complex and interconnected work, and its focus on meeting the needs of individuals, families, policymakers, and communities, the goals and objectives of C2C's integrated strategic plan should reflect this breadth. Another goal for C2C's strategic planning process is to continue to foster meaningful engagement by incorporating goals and objectives that will allow stakeholders to see themselves in the data and understand the factors that shape student success.

## Section Two: 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 Two, 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 Three: Proposed Strategic Planning Goals, Subgoals, and Objectives

This section provides an overview and context for the proposed strategic planning goal and objectives.

## Section Three, Part A: Proposed Strategic Planning Context, Goals and Objectives

One of the first goals of an integrated, cross-cutting strategic plan is to develop core themes, which provide the connection between data, insights, and action - past, present, and future. In addition to the process described in Section One, Part A, Strategic Planning Process, C2C leadership and staff have been working since early December to draft proposed practical strategic plan language that avoids overly abstract or consultant-driven terminology. Starting with draft language proposed by staff when developing a strategic plan is important for

several practical and strategic reasons. As staff are closest to the day-to-day work, constraints, and opportunities, staff are well situated to draft strategic plan language that:

- ❖ Reflect what is feasible, not just aspirational;
- ❖ Incorporate lessons from previous implementation, funding cycles, and statutory requirements; and
- ❖ Help avoid goals that sound compelling but are difficult to execute.

C2C's draft strategic plan can be found in Attachment A. In addition to a short introduction describing the purpose of the strategic plan, each of the five goals identified in the draft strategic plan include a succinct preamble and description of how the goal connects to C2C's purpose. The preamble describes the context and intent of the goal that follows and helps the reader understand how to read and interpret that goal. Each goal includes three to six objective statements, which are specific, measurable results to indicate progress toward a goal. Following the objective statements, the values provide a clear explanation for not just what C2C aims to achieve but also why the goals matter. This section is important to ensure that what the organization does is aligned with what it stands for. This connection strengthens the clarity, credibility, and impact of the goals.

The draft strategic plan concludes with a Values-to-Goals Alignment Table, which provides a simple, clear map that shows how each value directly connects to one or more strategic goals.

## Section Three, Part B: Member Deliberation
At the February 11, 2026 Committee meeting, member deliberation will not focus on finalizing language in the draft strategic plan, instead, Committee members will have the opportunity to surface directions, priorities, and areas for refinement. After the presentation of each individual goal, Committee 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 draft 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 draft 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, Committee members will have the opportunity to participate in a broader discussion to provide high-level feedback on the draft 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 draft strategic plan language encourage collaboration across C2C?
- ❖ How well does the draft 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 C: Next Steps

Following the February 11, 2026 Committee meeting, C2C leadership and staff will consider the comments and feedback provided and will make revisions to the draft strategic plan language. At the February 25, 2026 Board meeting, the Board will receive an update from the Committee and provide feedback on the updated draft strategic plan. In alignment with the Committee's chartered activities, the Committee will meet again on April 29, 2026, to review and refine updated draft strategic plan language pertaining to specific sections of the strategic plan and prepare formal recommendations for Board consideration. On May 20, 2026, the Board will review and take action on the Committee's recommended updates to the strategic plan for potential 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 source of trusted information on outcomes in education, jobs, 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 source of trusted information on outcomes in education, jobs and well-being.**

**Objectives:**
- Earn Californian's trust in the data we steward 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.

- Identify priority questions and data resources through Learning Agendas 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, a 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.

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

**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.
- Maximize reach, strengthen understanding, and expand community use of tools.
- 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 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.

**Goal: Build a flexible data system that rapidly adapts to the needs of Californians.**

**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.

**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<br>**Goal 2:** Create data insights and tools that Californians count on<br>**Goal 3:** Provide equitable access to information and tools for all Californians<br>**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<br>**Goal 3:** Provide equitable access to information and tools for all Californians<br>**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<br>**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<br>**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<br>**Goal 4:** Build a flexible data system that rapidly adapts to the needs of Californians<br>**Goal 5:** Optimize organizational and operational culture |