

CALIFORNIA CRADLE-TO-CAREER DATA SYSTEM

2026-31 STRATEGIC PLAN

JULY 2026

— 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 Cradle-to-Career Data System connects individuals and organizations with trusted information and resources. It provides insights into critical milestones in the pipeline from early care to K-12 to higher education, skills training, and employment. It empowers individuals to reach their full potential and fosters evidence-based decision-making to help California build a more equitable future.

Goal 1

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

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

OBJECTIVES

- » Earn Californians' trust in our data stewardship by leaning on our value of transparency.
- » Build Open Science best practices and transparency 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.

Goal 2

Create data insights and tools that Californians count on.

The C2C Data System complements existing state data systems by creating user friendly products that display linked education, social services, and workforce data over time. Through user centered design, C2C makes data tools and resources for a variety of decision-making audiences, including the general public, practitioners, researchers, and policymakers. For each audience, C2C's aim is to make data readily available and easier to work with.

OBJECTIVES

- » Use user-centered design to discover and create meaningful data products for the public.
- » Develop and release useful public dashboards and data reports that tell human stories about Californians.
- » Create and provide curated data sets for the public to solve specific problems in their lives and work.
- » Enable external research through a secure virtual environment, where researchers can do useful analysis that benefits the California public.
- » Help Californians move into college and careers by incubating and accelerating collaborative projects.

Goal 3

Provide equitable access to information and tools for all Californians.

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.

OBJECTIVES

- » Tell a clear story about why data insights matter.
- » Regularly engage community partners to collaboratively design products that address needs throughout California.
- » Maximize reach, strengthen understanding, and expand community use of tools by implementing effective, community-driven delivery methods for California's populations.
- » Develop and implement data literacy efforts that address the diverse needs of individuals across California.

Goal 4

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

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, guidance, and industry best practices 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.
- » Reduce the administrative, technical, and operational burden of sharing data between state entities.

Goal 5

Optimize organizational and operational culture.

With a small team and a modest annual budget, 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.

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.