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## The Eight Key Distinguishers

1. **Collaborative design**  
Institutional design, opportunities, and programs are created with input from all relevant partners.
2. **Partnerships**  
Stakeholders continue to work together on the execution of work-based learning through formal structures and processes.
3. **Staffing and infrastructure**  
Work-based learning is integrated into the culture and mission of the participating institutions. This is reflected in staffing, training for mentors and other professionals engaging with youth, dedicated physical spaces, and other necessary resources and infrastructure.
4. **Data and accountability**  
Work-based learning is guided by student interest, labor market, and other relevant data. Stakeholders collect and utilize information on participation, experiences, and outcomes of young people.
5. **Student career success**  
Young people are prepared for career success through development of a holistic sense of self-identity, agency and voice; exploration of their interests, strengths, and career options; and through relevant and progressive work experience.
6. **Credit for learning from work**  
Work experiences are paid and lead to academic credit and/or an employer-valued credential.
7. **Social capital**  
Young people meet, learn from, and build authentic relationships with professionals, and expand their social and professional networks.
8. **Competencies for family-sustaining careers**  
Work-based learning opportunities focus on skill development for careers that employers and labor market data show to be in high demand.

## The Key Distinguishers: BRAIDING LEARNING FROM WORK INTO ACADEMIC PATHWAYS

### Why we need the Key Distinguishers

To create a thriving, inclusive economy—in which all New Yorkers have an opportunity to succeed and contribute to the city’s growth—we must reinvent our system of youth talent development. Education and employment should go hand-in-hand, with learning from and about work integrated into every student’s academic experience.



A youth talent development system that braids learning from work into academics will require alignment to a vision for what that system looks like. The Key Distinguishers (KDs) reflect a core set of principles that help everyone involved in youth talent development—young people, schools, community-based organizations, and employers—unite in meeting shared expectations for a high-quality, impactful system that works for ALL students, employers, and the economy.

The Key Distinguishers framework provides guidance for high schools, postsecondary programs, and employers on how to ensure that paid work experiences and other forms of work-based learning are of maximum value and benefit to all involved. The Key Distinguishers can play an important role in shifting the paradigm across the youth talent development landscape by:

**Establishing shared language,** standards of practice, and understanding of what constitutes—and what it takes to implement—high quality integrated work-based learning;

**Facilitating more efficient and productive partnerships,** which are integral for braiding learning from the workplace with academic learning; and

**Informing and guiding policy,** uncovering and tackling barriers, building the case for advocacy, and increasing resources, at both institutional and systemic levels



## Roadmap to a New Youth Talent Development System

Developing the Key Distinguishers is one step of a roadmap that can take us from defining what an equitable youth talent development system looks like to the wide scale implementation of such a system. The steps and signals of success along this roadmap are:

- **Define the Key Distinguishers:** Develop and refine the core principles and essential features of high-quality work-based learning; surface practitioner examples of KDs in action; identify barriers and opportunities to using the KDs; determine key metrics and measures of success for career pathways.
- **Develop Practitioner Resources:** Develop additional resources and materials [e.g. stakeholder specific guides and case studies] for practitioners to create and improve high-quality opportunities and programs; raise resources to support the KDs in action.
- **Advocate, Iterate, and Adopt Widely:** Activate a collective policy agenda, with the KDs as a tool to increase institutional support of work-based learning experiences citywide; further iterate the KDs, collect data and conduct research to advance the work; encourage and compel more stakeholders to use the KDs to drive braided, high-quality work-based learning.
- **Reach tipping point:** A critical mass of institutions and practitioners embrace the KDs to braid learning from work into academic pathways; the KDs influence policy regulations, design of workforce systems, and funder initiatives toward universal work-based learning.
- **New, equitable youth talent development system:** The KDs are embedded across systems, institutions, and policies to transform the way the youth talent development system functions. Institution and program quality is measured by student career success, particularly for BIPOC students, with embedded systems in place to capture necessary data. Stakeholders system-wide have the framework and resources needed to meet requirements for high-quality, impactful system.

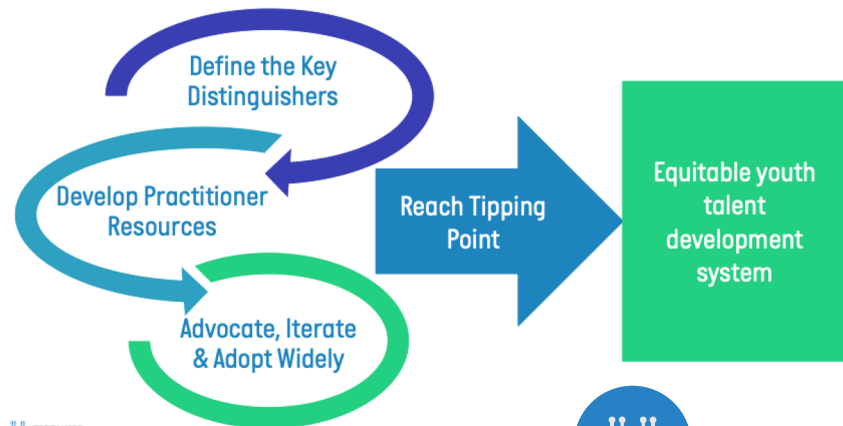
### Using the Key Distinguishers

The Key Distinguishers are meant to be used by practitioners, employers, and other stakeholders who are implementing work-based learning, as well as philanthropic organizations, city agencies, and others involved in decisions around funding, partnerships, and contracts.

In the summer of 2020, HERE to HERE used the Key Distinguishers as part of an RFP to support organizations and schools offering remote work-based learning experiences in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Key Distinguishers served both as a tool for practitioners designing new models of work-based learning that were responsive to the challenging circumstances, and for the committee evaluating applications.

In 2021, HERE to HERE convened a task force with over 100 participants—including students, educators, CBO partners, employers, funders, and field experts—to further refine the Key Distinguishers; surface examples of the KDs in action; and discuss challenges to more widespread and systemic braiding of work and learning. Following the work of the task force, HERE to HERE released an RFP for applicants who were already engaging in exemplary practice or designing new ways of braiding work and learning within their institutions in alignment with the Key Distinguishers. The grantees will participate in a Community of Practice that will allow them to share best practices and approaches for implementing high quality work-based learning.

### Road Map for the Key Distinguishers



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HERE to HERE champions young people by working to redefine the systems that unfairly burden Black and Brown students as they pursue their career ambitions. We understand that the issues are complex and interrelated. That's why we create effective partnerships, prioritize the thoughts and opinions of young people, and mobilize people and organizations—demonstrating how our collective efforts to create a just and inclusive talent system will create lasting change. How we reinvent these systems determines our future.

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