



Maryland
GWDB CTE COMMITTEE



The Blueprint for Maryland's Future Career Counseling **Best Practices Report**

Governor's Workforce Development Board
Career and Technical Education Committee

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Executive Summary

Maryland's Career Counseling Initiative, established under the *Blueprint for Maryland's Future*, is built on a partnership—consisting of local education agencies, local workforce development boards, and community colleges—charged with delivering individualized career guidance through formal MOUs. Since 2023, jurisdictions have transitioned from planning to implementation to deliver career counseling to middle and high school students. As a partner and technical assistance provider for the Governor's Workforce Development Board, Jobs for the Future (JFF) hosted focus groups with 69 participants across all local partner organizations and jurisdictions in Maryland. This report centers the input of local stakeholders to elevate strengths, challenges, and opportunities of current career counseling implementation efforts. Across these conversations, local partners emphasized their commitment to collaboration while also identifying concrete ways that state-level guidance, standardization, and infrastructure could enable more consistent and equitable implementation statewide.

The experiences and efforts of local jurisdictions to date provide valuable insights for state leaders responsible for implementation of the career counseling program established under the *Blueprint*. This report synthesizes key themes of stakeholder feedback through the lens of **Solutions** and **Challenges**. In each section, specific examples and anecdotes underscore each theme. Finally, a **Stakeholder Guidance** section proposes near and long-term actions for **local and state** leaders to promote successful implementation. In brief, the report identifies the following over-arching opportunities to improve statewide implementation:

- **Clarifying roles and responsibilities among local implementation partners;**
- **Supporting jurisdictions with early and consistent guidance around metrics and professional expectations;**
- **Reducing career counseling staff turnover and standardizing onboarding;**
- **Enabling reciprocal data sharing for local implementation partners; and**
- **Building local capacity and expertise through sustained professional development and guidance**

Purpose

The Best Practices Report, a required deliverable under Maryland statute, is designed as a stand-alone companion to the [*Maryland Career Counseling Implementation: Summary Analysis \(November 2025\)*](#). The following resources across all Maryland jurisdictions were reviewed to surface statewide implementation patterns for the *Summary Analysis*:

- Executed MOUs and addenda
- 2025 annual reports, and
- Spring 2025 AIB check-in notes.

Building on the foundation of the *Summary Analysis*, this report synthesizes insights from 11 focus groups with 69 participants representing every Maryland jurisdiction convened October-November 2025. Participants included career counselors and representatives from community colleges, LEAs, and LWDBs. Participant names and jurisdictions are not listed in this report to protect confidentiality.

What this report does: The analysis explicitly compares focus group insights to the patterns identified in the *Summary Analysis*. For each connection, the relevant pattern is restated in plain language and with relevant comments from Maryland stakeholders. The links and explanations are self-contained; reading the *Summary Analysis* is not required but recommended.

Who this report is for: State and local leaders across LEAs, LWDBs, and community colleges working together to implement the Blueprint's career counseling vision and strengthen collaboration, service quality, and equity.

Please note: This *Best Practices Report* is not a formal program evaluation and does not estimate causal impact. The report intends to connect common trends and recommendations of Maryland stakeholders captured across required annual reports and optional focus group engagement.

This report does not capture subsequent, critical work undertaken by the State Leadership Group to increase collaboration between the partners at the state level and respond to emerging needs for local implementation, such as clarifying definitions and providing metric examples. Finally, please note that this report does not capture professional development offered by MSDE in the 2025-2026 school year.

Language clarification: Throughout this report, the term "jurisdiction" refers to a formally designated local partnership responsible for delivering career counseling services under Maryland's Blueprint within a geographic area, which may span multiple counties or cities.

Local Implementation

Since the launch of the career counseling model, Maryland jurisdictions have collaborated to build local implementation designs to fulfill the goals of the vision for all Maryland students in grades 6-12 to engage in meaningful career counseling. As with any new initiative, challenges have emerged, with some specific to individual jurisdictions and some more widespread. Similarly, innovative solutions and ideas to address challenges emerged throughout the focus group discussions.

Figure 1 (below) summarizes the overall challenges of early implementation alongside solutions that are in progress or suggested by focus group participants. This list offers insight for state and local leaders as they consider future professional development, updates to MOUs, and development of guidance tools and resources. Some challenges are experienced more widely across the state, and similarly some solutions have more widespread adoption. These are described with more depth later in this section.

Figure 1. Summary of challenges and reported solutions or guidance surfaced through stakeholder engagement.

Challenge	Solutions offered from the field
Role ambiguity/unclear responsibilities	<p>Establish a backbone/facilitator entity to provide dedicated support across all partners.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish clear “lanes” for each role and partner in MOU Identify a rotating chair or identify a point person per partner <p>Plan collaborative events and initiatives with clear timelines, shared responsibilities, and feedback loops.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hold regular, structured local partner meetings (often biweekly/monthly; some with external facilitation) Create an escalation process for shared challenges or blockers, supported by a simple, shared documentation owned by the career counselor/coordinate(s) to ensure timely resolution of conflicts or unclear responsibilities
Late/shifting state guidance on metrics	<p>Provide clear, early, and consistent guidance on metrics and reporting requirements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utilize assessments on technology platforms to quantify exposure and activities; complement with brief student impact surveys on awareness, interest, and “day-in-the-life” understanding after events Establish state-wide data definitions and reporting requirements Track nearer-term work-based learning drivers while longer outcomes mature (e.g., number of new employer partners, apprenticeship placements, and business engagement attributable to the partnership)
Staff turnover/onboarding issues	<p>Use tiered professional development and onboarding to address varying staff experience levels and turnover.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Run an annual summer onboarding conference Develop a career counselor curriculum/playbook (e.g., learning outcomes by grade, lesson templates) supported by instructional designers; keep materials in a shared online repository

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formalize onboarding/separation protocols (e.g. communication to principals, access, space, handoff) to reduce disruption during career counselor changes
<i>One-way data sharing/lack of transparency</i>	<p>Develop a statewide data sharing platform or intranet for continuity of student support and cross-jurisdiction collaboration.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grant limited SIS access to all parties with written guardrails Use a shared platform, shared storage, and build role-based dashboards <p>Formalize reciprocal data sharing agreements and ensure regular, actionable reporting.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Add a “collaborative data reporting” clause that defines who compiles elements, sources of truth (SIS/CCR lists/platforms), and cadence Develop data sharing agreements with data elements and lawful use (e.g., CCR eligibility lists, transcripts, contact fields, activity logs), request process via a single point of contact with SLAs and approved channels <p>Pilot light-touch longitudinal tools (e.g., low-cost platforms to track evolving student interests) so career counselors can personalize advising over time without adding heavy data entry burdens.</p> <p>Establish structured reciprocal data routines (e.g., periodic reports aligned to feedback loops to support partner collaboration) so partners who share data receive timely, actionable insights in return.</p>
<i>Capacity constraints (staffing, funding, event planning)</i>	<p>Support statewide conferences and professional learning communities to foster best practice sharing and build shared language.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hold weekly cross-partner operational meetings with a standing agenda and vote on shared purchases Plan one year ahead, back-map field trips and events, and maintain a shared calendar Centralize visit requests to avoid overloading programs Replace single large “all schools” events with smaller, repeatable activities (e.g. targeted program tours) <p>Engage parents, community organizations, and employers to expand student opportunities and support equity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allocate rollover funds jointly Identify a lead for engaging employees Offer virtual professional development and employer talks to supplement in-person activities Use a “menu based” access model (e.g., push-in lessons, small group sessions by interest, and targeted one-to-one advising) to tier support efficiently when counselor caseloads are high

SOLUTIONS WITH BROAD ADOPTION

This section highlights four solutions and innovative ideas that are more broadly enacted across the jurisdictions. This report does not seek to evaluate the effectiveness of these solutions, but rather to surface how the field is responding to various challenges.

Each solution includes:

- **What it looks like:** a brief description of key points shared by focus group participants to illustrate the identified solution
- **Why it matters:** a brief note about why this solution positively impacts career counseling implementation
- **Spotlight:** highlights specific feedback from focus group participants regarding the impact of the solution

The solutions identified below are more commonly adopted across the state as tactics to address the challenges named in Figure 1. The focus on these solutions reflects the priorities raised in focus groups including the call for regular convenings, embedded career counseling, and collaborative planning to strengthen day-to-day implementation across jurisdictions.

Figure 2. Summary of Widely Observed Solutions

Solutions with Broad Adoption	Count of jurisdictions reporting the solution
Annual onboarding and ongoing, tiered professional development	10+
Regular, structured local partner meetings (often biweekly/monthly; some with external facilitation)	8
School-system embedded career counselors	7
Collaborative event planning (e.g., career fairs, career "takeovers," joint industry days)	7

ANNUAL ONBOARDING AND ONGOING, TIERED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR CAREER COUNSELORS

What it looks like:

- Annual summer onboarding for new and returning staff, followed by quarterly professional development sessions; content intentionally blends technical topics (e.g.,

data privacy, platform use) and relational practice (student engagement, classroom management).

- Tiered sessions differentiated by experience level and role (career counselor, school leader, workforce, college liaison).

Why it matters:

- Jurisdictions with recurring, cross-partner professional development report better consistency amid turnover and clearer shared language around expectations.

SPOTLIGHT

- One jurisdiction's summer conference equips career counselors with tools for school-year launch, which serves as comprehensive onboarding for new hires while reconnecting returning staff. Participants described it as essential for building relationships across schools, learning about new resources and labor market data tools, and establishing shared language around advising practices before the school year begins.
- Another jurisdiction aligns professional development to a locally defined scope-and-sequence for advising to reinforce common practices across sites.

REGULAR, STRUCTURED MEETINGS BETWEEN LOCAL PARTNERS

What it looks like:

- Standing biweekly or monthly meetings between the community college, LEA, and LWDB with clear agendas, shared facilitation, and follow-ups assigned to named leads. These meetings create space to hold each other accountable for shared goals.
- Use of shared calendars, running notes, and subcommittees to keep work moving between full-group meetings.
- In some cases, an external facilitator is engaged to balance roles and ensure all partners feel heard.

Why it matters:

- Jurisdictions report faster issue resolution and better role alignment when these routines are in place between the community college, LEA, and LWDB.
- External facilitators may not be a sustainable practice. If an external facilitator is not feasible, jurisdictions could designate a rotating facilitator from the local partners to fill this role with an agreed upon agenda to ensure a consistent process for moving forward on action steps.

SPOTLIGHT

One jurisdiction meets biweekly with an external facilitator with subject matter expertise; the team credits this cadence with maintaining alignment through staffing transitions and keeping decisions on track.

SCHOOL-SYSTEM EMBEDDED CAREER COUNSELORS

What it looks like:

- Key practices for embedding career counselors, regardless of employer, include:
 - Integrating career counselors into daily school schedules and routines
 - Facilitating regular collaboration with teachers and participation in staff meetings
 - Establishing clear referral and support pathways for students
 - Providing access to student data/schedules, resources, and professional development opportunities

Why it matters:

- The most impactful career counseling models emphasize the degree to which career counselors are embedded in the school environment. This is not about requiring career counselors to be school employees, but a deep focus on integration into the student daily routine and access to school staff to build collaboratively and best support students.
- While many jurisdictions have found success with school-employed career counselors, stakeholders consistently note that the benefits stem from the level of embedding and integration, not the employment arrangement itself. In fact, several focus group participants suggested that LWDB-hired career counselors can achieve similar outcomes when supported to become true members of the school community. All models of career-counseling staffing are fully compliant with best practice when all partners meet defined access and integration standards.
- Career counselors who are fully integrated into campus routines—participating in staff meetings, collaborating with teachers on push-in lessons and small-group advising, and engaging in student support systems—are best positioned to build strong relationships and provide consistent access for students. Clear referral pathways for one-on-one support further enhance their effectiveness.
- Importantly, integration should support career counseling functions, not dilute counselor capacity through non-counseling assignments in the school.
- Stakeholders consistently describe stronger relationships, easier navigation of school systems, and more consistent access for students when career counselors are embedded in the school system.

SPOTLIGHT

- One jurisdiction reported that embedding career counselors enabled on-the-spot classroom integration and quicker approvals for field trips and employer visits. Additionally, this gives career counselors better access to school systems, enables participation in staff meetings, and facilitates coordination with teachers and counselors in ways external contractors cannot achieve.

COLLABORATIVE EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT AND EVENT PLANNING

What it looks like:

- Local partners co-plan employer events across a region, share timelines, and assign outreach leads, reducing duplication and employer fatigue.
- A workforce partner or designated “backbone” function may maintain a shared employer list to streamline coordination.

Why it matters:

- Shared planning expands student access, balances capacity across schools, and improves employer experience.

SPOTLIGHT

- A regional team coordinated a “career carnival” by aligning school-day schedules and transportation to reach more students while minimizing employer burden.
- One jurisdiction assigned a single partner to steward a joint employer list and manage outreach sequencing, preventing multiple uncoordinated asks to the same businesses.

CHALLENGES

This section describes challenges that emerged most consistently across jurisdictions, including how these challenges manifest day-to-day and how they impact equitable and effective career counseling implementation. These challenges emerged consistently across both the focus group conversations and the Summary Analysis of MOUs, implementation plans, and check-in notes, demonstrating alignment between documented agreements and lived implementation experiences. See Figure 3 for a breakdown of the most frequently identified challenges across focus group conversations.

Each challenge includes:

- **What it looks like:** a brief description of key points shared by focus group participants to illustrate the identified challenge
- **Why it matters:** a brief note about the impact this challenge has on implementing career counseling
- **Example:** highlights specific feedback from focus group participants regarding how this challenge shows up in their work

Figure 3: Summary of Widely Observed Challenges

Challenges	Count of jurisdictions reporting
Data Systems and Accountability: State Guidance on Metrics	10
Reciprocal Data Sharing	7
Partnership Structure and Role Clarity	9
Staff Turnover	8
Geographic and Capacity Constraints	8

DATA SYSTEMS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

What it looks like:

- Ten or more jurisdictions expressed frustration that guidance on required metrics arrives late in the implementation cycle and shifts over time, creating rework and confusion. Unclear metrics and limited access to timely, student-level data further hinder outcome measurement and continuous improvement.
- Seven or more jurisdictions report ongoing challenges with reciprocal data sharing across all three partners. Although data sharing agreements are in place, they are inconsistently implemented across jurisdictions and frequently limit access to shared systems or student-level information needed to target supports and interventions. As a result, partners that contribute data rarely receive timely, reoccurring actionable reports or feedback in return.

Why it matters:

- One-way data flows and uneven or restricted access to data erodes trust between partners who invest time and resources in collecting and sharing information but receive nothing in return
- Late or shifting guidance on required metrics leads to rework that wastes limited staff capacity and slows implementation.
- Platform incompatibilities and access constraints force manual workarounds that are time-consuming and error-prone, pulling career counselors away from direct student services.
- Without consistent data definitions, reciprocal access, and shared data visibility, partners cannot effectively monitor program quality, demonstrate impact, or make data-informed improvements.

Examples:

- One focus group participant captured the challenge that they "have a data sharing agreement, but data only flows one way. We never receive a report," suggesting a partner invests resources in providing student data to others but gains no actionable insights in return.
- The burden of platform incompatibility is evidence by one stakeholder's experience of spending "hours each week manually entering the same information into three

different systems: one for the school, one that the workforce board requires, and one that tracks my own caseload—and none of them talk to each other."

PARTNERSHIP STRUCTURE AND ROLE CLARITY

What it looks like:

- Role ambiguity persists even as jurisdictions celebrate the overall value of career counseling.
- Across nine or more jurisdictions involved in focus groups, overlapping or undefined duties between LEAs, LWDBs, and community colleges create confusion in career counseling implementation. Stakeholders feel uncertainty about which partner holds final decision-making authority, creating challenges to defining responsibilities for workforce boards and community colleges specifically.
- Turnover and inconsistent messaging disrupt progress even when communication tools are in place. While shared calendars, running meeting notes, and subcommittees help, they don't fully overcome personnel changes.
- Difficulties in aligning outreach efforts among LEAs, LWDBs, and community colleges persist, with multiple agencies sometimes approaching employers simultaneously without coordination.

Why it matters:

- Unclear responsibilities specifically impact working relationships, coordination speed, and staff morale. Without clear decision-making authority and defined roles, implementation slows down even when partners are committed to the work.

Examples:

- One participant described how "differing work styles and organizational cultures, including individual leadership styles, slowed coordination and impacted scheduling group meetings," with the lack of clarity about who held final decision-making authority creating delays in moving forward even on seemingly straightforward decisions.
- Another participant shared frustration about employer outreach coordination, explaining that without clear protocols about which partner leads employer engagement, multiple partners were sometimes reaching out to the same businesses with similar requests, creating confusion for employers and making it harder to secure work-based learning opportunities for students.

STAFF TURNOVER, ONBOARDING, AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

What it looks like:

- Persistent barriers related to staff turnover affect eight or more jurisdictions. Career counselor retention challenges are linked to compensation misalignment, lack of role clarity, and organizational fit mismatches.
- LWDB-staffed models face particular challenges if there is not close collaboration with the LEA, as career counselors hired by workforce boards are not school staff with

the inherent understanding of school-based systems and norms. Partnership with the LEA is necessary to provide LWDB-hired career counselors access to students and classrooms.

- Career counselor qualification varies across jurisdictions, from associate's degree to licensed teacher/school counselor requirements. Professional development also varies significantly across jurisdictions, ranging from ad hoc workshops to industry-recognized credentials, with no consistent tiered or standardized training approach to address varying qualifications and experience levels.

Why it matters:

- Career counselor attrition disrupts service delivery and requires repeated relationship-building with students and staff.
- Many stakeholders felt that variation in training, inconsistent onboarding, and wide-ranging responsibilities without clear boundaries impacted both the effectiveness and longevity of the career counselor role.

Example:

- Onboarding is key regardless of which partner hires the counselor. When career counselors don't have proper onboarding to school culture and school operations, including "school schedules, how to work with teachers, or even basic things like how to request access to a classroom," the lack of training impacts integration and effectiveness of the role.

GEOGRAPHIC AND CAPACITY CONSTRAINTS

What it looks like:

- Eight or more jurisdictions cite capacity constraints regarding staffing, funding, and event planning.
- High counselor caseloads limit the feasibility of providing one-on-one sessions for every student. Caseloads vary; some jurisdictions' budgets cover only one career counselor while others have larger teams. Time allocation challenges vary widely, with counselors reporting spending 70-84% of time with students in some models but only 50-60% in others, with the remainder devoted to administrative tasks.
- The access to career counseling may vary by school leadership buy-in and master schedule flexibility; push-in services and multi-tiered support depend heavily on principal support and schedule accommodation, especially in high school settings.
- Transportation barriers are more frequently cited in rural areas, restricting access to work-based learning, experiential opportunities, and dual enrollment opportunities. Even more, limited local industry diversity in rural jurisdictions reduces employer partnership options.

Why it matters:

- Resource disparities across jurisdictions translate directly into varying student access, with counselor caseload ratios determining whether students receive individualized

attention or only group sessions. Work-based learning participation depends on both transportation access and local employer availability.

- Capacity constraints and competition for limited work-based learning opportunities mean that students often fall through the cracks and miss out on the valuable career exploration experiences they need most.

Example:

- With potential caseloads of hundreds of students across multiple schools, one participant shared how they could only provide one-on-one meetings to students already identified as at-risk, meaning that other students who would benefit from more career counseling never received it.

Stakeholder Guidance

Across the focus groups with stakeholders, several areas emerged for additional guidance. Guidance can be organized in three primary categories: stakeholder groups, state-level entities, and local partners. While local partners have worked to create potential solutions for some of these areas as referenced in the local implementation section above, there is still significant need for additional guidance through professional development, MOU templates and policy to support local implementation. As identified from focus group participants, some areas require more immediate attention while others are focused on long-term system building.

PERSPECTIVES ACROSS STAKEHOLDER GROUPS

Across stakeholder groups, feedback revealed a shared set of core needs, especially around high-quality professional development, clear guidance on metrics and expectations, and data systems that enable effective coordination. These partners are not merely stakeholders in the system but statutorily required co-owners of this work, underscoring that responsibility for implementation is distributed across partners. Within this broad alignment, each group also emphasized particular nuances based on their roles.

LWDBs most frequently cited the need for statewide best practice sharing mechanisms, clear state guidance on partnership structure and roles, support for capacity building related to staffing and funding, and improved outcome measurement tools and definitions.

LEAs emphasized reciprocal data sharing rather than one-way flows, clear and early state guidance on metrics and expectations, support for embedded career counseling models where feasible, and professional development for career counselors.

Community colleges stressed the importance of better integration mechanisms with K-12 and workforce partners, clarity on their role within the local partner structure, data systems that support tracking and coordination, and consistent outcome measurement approaches.

Career counselors shared about the need for robust onboarding for new career counselors given turnover challenges, ongoing high-quality professional development, tools and support for effective student engagement, and clarity on metrics and outcome expectations.

GUIDANCE FOR STATE-LEVEL ENTITIES

SHORT-TERM

Ten or more jurisdictions called for the state to provide clear, early, and consistent guidance. Participants emphasized the need to deliver guidance on metrics, reporting requirements, and definitions, such as "career ready" and "individualized counseling," earlier in the planning cycle. Participants want the state to establish and communicate standards for quality expectations while preserving local flexibility.

An equally strong call from ten or more jurisdictions was for the state to develop statewide communication and learning solutions. This could include establishing strategic communication solutions including email newsletters, conferences, and in-depth communities of practice. Jurisdictions are looking for mechanisms for them to learn from each other's innovations and to facilitate regular convenings for peer learning and coordination.

MID-TERM

Eight or more jurisdictions are looking for standardized training and professional development. This standardized training could focus on data sharing and data use, collective impact practices, school operations and culture, graduation requirements, and partnership roles and responsibilities.

LONG-TERM

Nine or more jurisdictions cited the need for integrated data sharing systems. Participants want clear guidance on compliance to streamline data-sharing, establishment of data governance standards covering data ownership, access, and use, and systems that enable tracking of students' evolving career interests over time across jurisdictions.

GUIDANCE FOR LOCAL JURISDICTIONS AND PARTNERS

SHORT-TERM

Eight or more jurisdictions cited the need for implementing tiered professional development locally. Tiered professional development and onboarding could address varying experience levels of career counselors, account for staff turnover with robust onboarding processes, provide ongoing learning opportunities beyond initial training, and create peer learning opportunities within and across jurisdictions.

MID-TERM

Nine or more jurisdictions called for formalizing reciprocal data sharing at the local level. These reciprocal data sharing agreements, rather than the common one-way flows currently, would ensure regular, actionable reporting back to all partners contributing data and create feedback loops, so data informs continuous improvement.

LONG-TERM

Focus group participants called for expanding community and employer engagement. It may take time and continued effort to build longstanding, trusting partnerships with community organizations and employer partners. However, some of this engagement and partnership building can happen in the mid-term through collaboration on events and smaller initiatives. Focus group participants emphasized planning collaborative events and initiatives with clear timelines, shared responsibilities, and feedback loops, and coordinating career fairs, career takeovers, and industry experiences across agencies.

Conclusion

As the *Blueprint*'s career counseling initiative moves from early implementation to a more developed practice, this report underscores how local partners—LEAs, local workforce development boards, and community colleges—are working together to translate a shared vision of individualized career guidance for every student in grades 6–12 into a day-to-day reality. Drawing on focus groups with stakeholders from every jurisdiction, this report elevates both the strengths of current models and the challenges that come with building a new, collaborative program at scale. The challenges and innovation solutions highlighted here offer state and local leaders a roadmap for strengthening governance, professional learning, data systems, and student engagement so that career counseling can be delivered equitably and consistently across Maryland. By continuing to invest in clear roles and shared accountability, robust onboarding and tiered professional development, and integrated, reciprocal data systems, partners can ensure that all Maryland students graduate with meaningful exposure to careers and the support they need to confidently navigate their postsecondary paths.

Appendix A: Methodology

EVIDENCE SOURCES AND DESIGN

This report links two complementary evidence streams:

- Document review (the *Summary Analysis, November 2025*): Executed MOUs and addenda for all Maryland jurisdictions, 2025 annual reports, and Spring 2025 AIB check-in notes were analyzed to surface statewide patterns in governance, staffing, training, delivery models, and early indicators related to data and industry partnerships.
- Stakeholder focus groups: In October–November 2025, JFF convened 11 focus groups with representatives from every jurisdiction (69 total participants) including Career Counselors (12), Community Colleges (20), LEAs (15), and LWDBs (22). Sessions probed implementation wins, challenges, and recommendations to inform this Best Practices Report.

Figure 4: Representation by Geographic Region

Geographic Region	Count of Participants
Western	6
Central	24
Eastern	35
Capital Area	20
Southern	4

Figure 5: Representation by Population Density / Development

Population Density / Development Area	Count of Participants
Large Suburban	18
Suburban/Rural Mix	27
Urban	3
Rural	40

Note: This table uses Maryland's tourism website (<https://www.visitmaryland.org/>) for the geographic regional breakdown.

ANALYTIC APPROACH

- The focus group transcripts were synthesized and anonymized using AI and human verification to identify recurring practices, implementation challenges, and guidance recommended across the four domains (local partnership governance and role clarity, staffing models and professional learning, data use, sharing, and outcome measurement, and student engagement and equity).

- To show how widespread each theme is, we report the number of jurisdictions where it appeared (e.g., “10+ jurisdictions”). This reflects the breadth of agreement or shared experience with each practice and challenge.
- Findings from the focus groups were then compared with themes from the *Summary Analysis (November 2025)* to validate alignment and surface areas where the field’s experience suggests a need for greater clarity or support (for example, data definitions, role clarity, and training expectations).
- Terminology: Consistent with the Summary Analysis, the term “career counselor” is used as an umbrella term and encompasses local variations such as “career coach,” “career advisor,” and “navigator.”
- Specific participant names and jurisdictions are not listed in this report, in order to encourage candor in focus group conversations and protect confidentiality.

LIMITATIONS

- Focus group insights reflect the perspectives of participating stakeholders and, while inclusive of all jurisdictions, are not statistically representative of all Maryland stakeholders.
- Maryland’s career counseling initiative is in early implementation; available outcome data and shared definitions are still evolving across jurisdictions and platforms, which constrains statewide aggregation and impact statements at this time.

Appendix B: The Blueprint for Maryland's Future Career Counseling Implementation: Summary Analysis of MOUs

The Maryland Governor's Workforce Development Board will add a link to this first report once published.



Maryland

GWDB CTE COMMITTEE

Governor's Workforce Development Board
Career and Technical Education Committee

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