

CAREER CLUSTERS INITIATIVE

In September 2002, a team of six individuals attended the Career Clusters Initiative Debut in Charleston, South Carolina sponsored through a U.S. Department of Education Grant administered by the National Association of State Directors of Career and Technical Education Consortium. These individuals included:

- John Cech, Dean, College of Technology MSU Billings
- Jim Wenderoth, Associate Dean, College of Technology, UMT Missoula
- Christine Kowalski, Allied Health Department Chair, MSU-Great Falls College of Technology
- Rick Gray, Associate Dean, Helena College of Technology
- Mac McGahan, Director of the Billings Career Center, Billings School District
- Sandy Merdinger, Perkins Grant Manager and Accountability Specialist, Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education

As a result of attending this meeting, the team members are working together to share the information and resources with their respective institutions. In addition, the team is working with the program planning committee for the two-year conference to establish Career Clusters as the overarching theme for the January 2003 Two-Year Conference.

What is a Career Cluster?

A Career Cluster is a grouping of occupations and broad industries based on commonalities. Career Clusters identify pathways from secondary school to two- and four-year colleges, graduate school and the workplace. The Cluster Level represents the skill and knowledge, both academic and technical, that all students within the cluster should achieve regardless of their pathway. The Pathway Level represents the skill and knowledge, both academic and technical, necessary to pursue a full-range of career opportunities within a pathway from entry level to management, including technical and career specialties. Career Specialties represent the full-range of career opportunities within each pathway.

What are the Mutual Benefits?

Use of Career Clusters has the potential to create partnerships among educators, employers, state agencies and other stakeholders to create curriculum guidelines, academic and technical standards, assessments, and professional development materials. Career Clusters are of direct benefit to students in that they provide guidance counselors the tools to help them understand the academic, technical and college requirements needed for a wide range of careers.

What are the Next Steps?

- Introduction of the Clusters Framework at the Two-Year Conference in January
- Coordinate efforts with the Regional Clustering Study conducted through the Governor's Economic Development Opportunity Office
- Work collaboratively with Tech Prep to determine feasibility of utilizing career clusters for articulated courses and/or programs