

NOVEMBER 2016

# COMMUNITIES THAT WORK PARTNERSHIP PLAYBOOK

AMY BLAIR, STEPHEN MICHON  
AND MAUREEN CONWAY

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# INTRODUCTION

There is growing conviction that new ways of developing skills, expanding access to jobs, and encouraging the creation of quality jobs are crucial to an economy that works for everyone, including businesses, workers, and communities. That is what the Aspen Institute and FutureWorks researchers heard from seven regional teams, part of the Communities that Work Partnership (CTWP), which is at the forefront of working across workforce development, education, economic development, and business boundaries to create new talent development approaches. These teams' efforts – some spanning years, others more recent – are exploring how regions can overcome siloed programs and disjointed efforts to develop strategies that increase the skills and earnings of workers and meet the needs of businesses.

In almost every community, in every region across the United States, people are working to build a more talented, skilled workforce. Examples of these efforts include programs that provide training and employment opportunities for youth who are both out of work and out of school, and industry sector-focused training programs that meet the needs of businesses by upskilling workers in areas that support company growth and individual advancement. Some of these initiatives operate in partnership with secondary schools and community colleges, creating opportunities for workers to earn credentials or credits toward industry-recognized certificates and degrees and to build an educational foundation that can support further advancement.

Too often, however, work happens in isolation. An initiative may serve a particular industry or occupational need, but no comparable efforts exist for businesses outside of that targeted scope. A program may serve a small set of businesses within a narrow geographic area, but not have sufficient capacity or scale to reach a broad set of companies with comparable workforce needs in the economic region. A community may have a successful program to help youth engage in the labor market, but may offer little to working people who need a better job. Workforce and economic development efforts may not be systemically connected so that investments to grow the economy and engage the workforce go hand in hand, and business leaders with the potential to both contribute to and benefit from this process may not be engaged.

CTWP teams sought to address some of these challenges to meet the workforce needs of more employers in their region

## COMMUNITIES THAT WORK PARTNERSHIP

Seven regional teams were selected competitively in July 2015 to participate in Communities that Work Partnership peer learning and leadership development work facilitated by the Aspen Institute's Workforce Strategies Initiative and FutureWorks. Teams comprise three or four leaders and, importantly, include private industry partners representing employer voice. The partners are collaborating to advance a range of different industry-led workforce development strategies, leveraging resources available through their existing funding and, in some cases, business in-kind or financial contributions. AspenWSI and FutureWorks documented their efforts in order to accelerate learning in the field that has the potential to inform public and private investments in talent development and public policy that supports promising approaches.

Descriptions of the seven partnerships and research briefs on the partners' work that informs this playbook are available at <http://www.aspenwsi.org/communities-that-work/overview/>.

and connect more of their community members to work. Leaders of seven regional partnerships – in Buffalo, New York; Phoenix, Arizona; Houston, Texas; the San Francisco Bay area in California; northwest Georgia; New York City; and Washington, DC – explored strategies aimed at developing the local workforce for different industries and occupations. Some of these partners had a significant history of working together, while others were just beginning to build collaborative practices and find the complementarities to strengthen their relationships. From late 2015 to mid-2016, representatives of CTWP teams, led by the Aspen Institute’s Workforce Strategies Initiative (AspenWSI) and FutureWorks, engaged in a program of learning activities designed to provide a forum for partnership-specific developmental work as well as cross-partnership learning and sharing. In addition, the regional partnerships invited AspenWSI and FutureWorks researchers to learn along with them, provide a sounding board for identifying and exploring actions to address challenges, and document their efforts.

The CTWP partners hail from business, economic development, secondary and higher education, workforce development, policy research, local government, worker advocacy, and philanthropic organizations. This playbook highlights key takeaways from their work together, and we hope that it will be helpful for a broad range of individuals involved in talent pipeline strategy development and planning.

## The Changing World of Work

The changing world of work presents new challenges to the practice of workforce and economic development. For one, business leaders are adopting more complex technologies in their workplaces, often leading to requirements for new, more advanced skills for their workforce. Building these skills – from operating a computer-aided device to take precision measurements in a manufacturing facility to using portable computer technology to manage and meet patient care needs in home care settings – demands closer connection between employers and education and skills training providers.

Adoption of new technologies in the workplace also can lead to reorganization and loss of jobs to automation, making what were once middle-skill jobs obsolete, while at the same time creating changes in other jobs that cause them to become higher skilled or lower skilled. The ways in which technology changes both the location of employment and necessary work skills are difficult to predict and hard to keep up with.

Other factors have contributed to changing work arrangements between employer and worker. Some estimate that more than 23 million Americans, or 15.8 percent of the employed labor force, are now part of the contingent, on-demand, or 1099 workforce.<sup>1</sup> The largest proportion of these alternative work arrangements are through temporary, part-time, and subcontracting relationships that often result in reduced job tenures and more complicated arrangements for skill upgrading. For example, employers do not (and legally cannot) invest in training for contractor-status workers. Yet many 1099 workers need training opportunities to develop skills not only to keep up with changing business needs and maintain employment, but also to navigate and manage self-employment.

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<sup>1</sup> Alan Krueger and Larry Katz, “The Rise of Alternative Work Arrangements in the United States, 2005-2015” (paper accessed August 2016 at [https://krueger.princeton.edu/sites/default/files/akrueger/files/katz\\_krueger\\_cws\\_-\\_march\\_29\\_20165.pdf](https://krueger.princeton.edu/sites/default/files/akrueger/files/katz_krueger_cws_-_march_29_20165.pdf)). This portion of the employed labor force, an estimated 23.6 million workers as of November 2015, includes contracted-out workers, independent contractors or freelancers, and workers at on-call or temporary staffing agencies.

Education requirements of employment are projected to change for some occupations. According to Bureau of Labor Statistics data, in 2014, 10.6 percent of entry-level occupations typically required education beyond high school but less than a bachelor's degree, and over 25 percent of occupations required a bachelor's degree or more. Jobs requiring postsecondary education, however, are growing faster than average, and by 2024, over 37 percent of jobs are projected to require some education beyond high school.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, despite some jobs requiring higher levels of education, a large and growing number of workers are employed in occupations that require a high school diploma or less. This includes workers who have low earnings and are employed in retail and food services, and direct health care workers, such as home-care attendants and nursing assistants. The occupational structure of career ladders for this type of work includes large numbers of entry-level jobs relative to the number of positions that pay family-supporting wages. For example, in 2014, there were over 4.7 million food and beverage service workers, with a median wage of \$9.16 per hour, but there were only 305,000 food service managers, who earned a median wage of \$23.41 per hour, for a ratio of 15 workers per manager.<sup>3</sup> Many of the jobs requiring a high school diploma or less in these sectors are part time, and it can be difficult for workers to piece together employment that adds up to full-time work. For example, the US Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that about one in three retail sales people work part time, and that many work irregular hours that include nights and weekends.<sup>4</sup> Variability in scheduling affects workers' ability not only to work multiple jobs, but also to participate in education or training programs. In these industries we need strategies for engaging employers in conversations that focus on job quality in addition to the development of workforce skills and career advancement.

In some industries employers report challenges finding workers to fill middle-skill jobs. Changes in workforce demographics may be contributing to this concern. The large "baby boom" population has begun to retire. Even industries that are not growing new middle-skill jobs must replace increasing numbers of experienced employees with new workers. By 2024, baby boomers will be ages 60-78. Many will no longer be working.<sup>5</sup>

Training and education providers need new strategies to develop and finance programs that are better linked to employment opportunities. However, many businesses need assistance identifying and describing the skills they seek or recognizing other factors that influence their ability to hire and keep talent with the skills they need (which could include issues related to compensation or workplace practices and culture). Also, many workers lack the necessary resources to invest in themselves to get ahead and frequently lack the knowledge and connections needed to chart a career path. The result is underuse of talent, which serves neither workers nor business and leads to continued reliance on the taxpayer to support the basic living expenses of working people who depend on subsidies such as the Earned Income Tax Credit, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (food stamps), and other means-tested benefits.

A range of strategies are necessary to engage the workforce and, importantly, the businesses that employ them to help workers achieve economic stability and access opportunities to build skills, be rewarded for building their skills, and contribute their fullest

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<sup>2</sup> US Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Employment Projections Program," [http://www.bls.gov/emp/ep\\_table\\_education\\_summary.htm](http://www.bls.gov/emp/ep_table_education_summary.htm).

<sup>3</sup> US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Outlook Handbook, accessed October 2016, <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/food-preparation-and-serving/food-and-beverage-serving-and-related-workers.htm>; <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/management/food-service-managers.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Outlook Handbook, accessed October 2016, <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/sales/retail-sales-workers.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> Mitra Tossi, "Labor Force Projections to 2024: The Labor Force Is Growing, but Slowly," Monthly Labor Review, Bureau of Labor Statistics, December 2015, <http://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2015/article/labor-force-projections-to-2024-1.htm>.

to our economy and society. In the current era of intense competition for scarce public resources, strategies for engaging businesses to find solutions that not only leverage public resources but also include business-based contributions to skills development are critical.

## **Disconnected Islands of Excellence Are Not Enough**

These types of changes call for different kinds of workforce development approaches than we have relied on in the past. We can no longer rely on a patchwork of disconnected programs with limited scope and duration, which are difficult to scale up to a level sufficient to have a major impact. We can no longer be satisfied that we have created a demand-driven workforce development system if it is only meeting the needs of a handful of employers, rather than the labor market as a whole. Likewise, we can no longer define success solely in terms of the outcomes of programs focused on developing workers' skills for the "good" jobs in a regional economy without also focusing on strategies that encourage businesses to engage in the talent development of their workforce. We need to move beyond disconnected islands of excellence and build toward strategies that recognize workforce development, including business community engagement in talent development, as integral to economic development.

Effectively integrating economic and workforce development requires us to work across program and jurisdictional boundaries to take more comprehensive approaches and be much more strategic in our efforts to reach scale. We need systems to better match the demands from employers and industry with the content of training and skills development programs. We also need to expand opportunity for a broader swath of the workforce so that talent does not languish in unstable, entry-level work that is not connected to a path forward.

The US Economic Development Administration describes economic development as creating "the conditions for economic growth and improved quality of life by expanding the capacity of individuals, firms, and communities to maximize the use of their talents and skills to support innovation, lower transaction costs, and responsibly produce and trade valuable goods and services."<sup>6</sup>

Yet there are a range of systemic obstacles to linking activities of workforce development and activities of economic development and to collaborating across different types of organizations on talent development strategies.<sup>7</sup> For example, workforce development agencies (including secondary schools, community colleges, and other adult education and training providers in the public workforce system) and economic development agencies and organizations (e.g., business assistance organizations, industry extension agencies, economic development districts, business or economic development councils, chambers of commerce, and other related entities) have different primary constituencies and are accountable for different outcomes. Workforce agencies' goals are to help individuals obtain jobs, retain jobs, and improve their earnings. Economic development agencies' goals, on the other hand, relate to business outcomes such as business growth, job creation, and a number of other measures that indicate business success and regional competitiveness in retaining and creating jobs.

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<sup>6</sup> US Economic Development Administration home page, accessed Oct. 9, 2016, [www.eda.gov/](http://www.eda.gov/).

<sup>7</sup> Maureen Conway, "Where Labor Supply Meets Labor Demand: Connecting Workforce Development to Economic Development in Local Labor Markets" (The Aspen Institute, Workforce Strategies Initiative, Washington, DC, 2011), <http://www.aspenwsi.org/resource/update6/>.

Other collaboration challenges that workforce and economic development leaders face relate to dramatically different time frames and funding guidelines. Investments in regional economic development may not be expected to pay off for years, while investments in skills training and job placement assistance must show results within months. Even when businesses are fully engaged in local talent development planning, predicting the right scale and timing for employment needs is difficult. The two types of agencies have specific guidelines governing how they may use their resources. This can hinder development of innovative programming, as it is challenging to weave together funding from resources that are tied to different timelines and expectations about outcomes and accountability. Compounding this is the reality that few sources of funding, public or private, allocate resources for the type of planning and relationship building necessary for developing partnerships, innovating, and testing new ideas.

## The Playbook

This playbook presents highlights of the work of seven regional partnerships engaged in CTWP, organized as “plays.” The plays describe strategies that AspenWSI and FutureWorks researchers and CTWP participants in the learning project believe will be useful for others engaged in the complicated task of creating talent development approaches that leverage the knowledge, capacity, and resources of not only education, workforce, and economic development providers, but also business partners. We developed these plays based on partners’ reflections on their experiences, as well as researchers’ observations of their work. AspenWSI and FutureWorks researchers convened two learning meetings, at which representatives from the seven partnerships shared information about their work. Researchers also conducted site visits and telephone interviews to learn firsthand about work on the ground and to engage a wider range of informants and constituents.

The following table provides information about the seven partnerships engaged in CTWP learning and research activities. The table lists the organizations engaged in CTWP; however, it is important to note that these groups are subsets of larger groups of actors engaged in regional talent pipeline development strategies in each of the communities. For the purpose of providing focused efforts that could be explored within the one-year time frame of CTWP activity, each group identified a component of their work, which we describe as “CTWP Focus” in the table. This focus does not represent the entire scope of the partnerships’ local work; the Industry/Sector Focus column briefly reflects this broader scope. For some of the partnerships, researchers did not necessarily explore all of the industry sectors listed in that column. Finally, the seven partnerships are at different stages in their work together. Thus this playbook includes information about strategies being developed and deployed by nascent as well as more mature collaborations. For more detailed descriptions and research briefs describing the partners’ work that informs this playbook, we invite you to visit <http://www.aspenwsi.org/communities-that-work/overview/>.

## COMMUNITIES THAT WORK PARTNERSHIP REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

CTWP Partnership	Partners	Industry/Sector Focus	CTWP Focus
<b>Greater Phoenix, Arizona</b>	<b>Lead Agency:</b> Arizona Commerce Authority <b>Partners:</b> Arizona Technology Council, Cox Communications	Information technology	Engaging and creating initiatives among business, education, and government to develop and retain the information technology workforce, an emerging driver of regional economic development
<b>San Francisco Bay Area, California</b>	<b>Lead Agency:</b> Bay Area Video Coalition <b>Partners:</b> City and County of San Francisco Office of Economic and Workforce Development, CBS Interactive, Work2Future/Silicon Valley/San Jose Workforce Investment Board	Information technology	Addressing challenges posed by the shift in the region's information technology sector to a largely contract-based workforce and identifying promising practices and policies to support contract workers and employers
<b>Buffalo and Niagara Falls, New York</b>	<b>Lead Agency:</b> Buffalo Niagara Partnership <b>Partners:</b> Erie County Executive Office, National Grid, Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo	Health and life sciences, advanced manufacturing, energy, tourism	Using principles of collective impact, developing a multiyear, multisector approach that knits together solutions for workforce and economic development in the region, focusing on how employers and educators can better respond to industry demands and expand access for minority populations
<b>Greater Houston, Texas</b>	<b>Lead Agency:</b> Greater Houston Partnership <b>Partners:</b> San Jacinto College, United Way of Greater Houston, Gulf Coast Workforce Solutions	Petrochemicals, construction, health care	Establishing and strengthening a collective impact approach, launching and maintaining a central platform for communicating about and marketing high-demand careers, and working with three industry sectors to achieve measureable results
<b>Greater Washington, District of Columbia</b>	<b>Lead Agency:</b> Metropolitan Washington, DC, Council of Governments <b>Partners:</b> Greater Washington Board of Trade, Prince George's County Department of the Environment, Anacostia River Initiative/Federal City Council Anacostia Waterfront Trust	Stormwater management infrastructure	Addressing current and future skill and talent needs for a \$10 billion investment in stormwater management projects in the DC Metro region over the next decade
<b>New York City, New York</b>	<b>Lead Agency:</b> National Domestic Workers Alliance <b>Partners:</b> National Employment Law Project, Hand in Hand	Domestic work	Identifying skills that employers seek among domestic workers; exploring career paths, credentials, and training; supporting employers in adopting high-road practices in dispersed, unregulated, and informal workplaces
<b>Northwest Georgia</b>	<b>Lead Agency:</b> Northwest Georgia Regional Commission <b>Partners:</b> J+J Flooring Group, Technical College System of Georgia, Greater Dalton Chamber of Commerce	Floor covering manufacturing	Engaging the floor covering manufacturing industry to explore changes in secondary school curricula, share training assets, promote industry-based career paths, and build a sustainable partnership to provide support for manufacturing, the region's largest employer base

The plays, derived from CTWP regional partnership work, provide insights for others to contemplate as they work on building **partnerships**; collect, analyze, and use **data** on workers and industries; think through the **details of skill-building** strategies; and consider needs for **integrating resources** beyond skill building to strengthen the talent pipeline in their region. Each play describes the strategy and its importance, provides at least one example from the Communities that Work Partnership initiative, and presents a set of “action steps” that serve as a guide for other regional partnerships that want to explore using the strategy as they develop a local approach to talent pipeline development.

We recognize that communities across the country are unique, with their own histories, personalities, assets, challenges, and population. Therefore, it is important to point out that building partnerships to address critical industry and worker needs and strengthen regional economies is not akin to assembling a bookcase for an empty apartment. Rather, developing an effective partnership and workforce strategy is more like building custom cabinetry for an established, one-of-a-kind home. Nevertheless, while individual regional partnerships must go through their own process of building something that fits within their community, the experiences and wisdom of others that have engaged in this type of work can offer lessons that may accelerate the process, offer cautions to help avoid pitfalls, and enhance the quality of new efforts. Thus this playbook seeks to offer key ideas, experiences, and lessons learned that readers can draw from and build on as they create their own partnerships and develop their own approaches to strategies that ultimately seek to strengthen their regional economies.

# PLAYBOOK GUIDE



## BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS

**PLAY:** Small, But Mighty: Engage the Most Motivated Stakeholders First to Start Fast

**PLAY:** Use What Is Working Now to Build Momentum and Show Your Community Potential Outcomes

**PLAY:** Plan for Sustainability *From the Beginning*



## BEYOND LMI: COLLECTING NEW DATA

**PLAY:** Useful Labor Market Data Analysis Requires Local Employer Input

**PLAY:** Include Local Workers' Perspectives in Data-Gathering Efforts to Inform Workforce Development Strategies



## BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT: BALANCING CUSTOMIZATION AND STANDARDIZATION

**PLAY:** Use Workforce "Prototyping" as a Key Strategy in Workforce Development to Speed Up Learning and then Scale Solutions

**PLAY:** Five Questions to Address Before Developing a New Credential



## BEYOND JOB-SPECIFIC SKILLS: ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING THE TALENT PIPELINE

**PLAY:** Human Service Strategies May Be Key to Unlocking Untapped Talent

**PLAY:** Navigating Today's Labor Market: Equipping Workers to Manage Their Work Lives in a Changing World of Work



## SECTION 1 BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS

The CTWP regional partnerships were intended to bring workforce development and economic development players and goals together, and to include the leadership and perspective of business in shaping the partnership strategy. Bridging the resources and experience of business leaders with the capacities of economic development leaders and the skill-building abilities of education and workforce development organizations provides a strong foundation to pursue strategies of economic growth and job creation. This type of partnership also incorporates workforce skills development that creates job connection opportunities for local residents.

Building partnerships is a valuable strategy for aligning and leveraging often limited local resources and for allowing organizations to play to their strengths. But developing partnerships may not be straightforward. Partnerships bring together individuals from different types of organizations, and finding ways to work together can often be complicated. Partners need to understand one another's motivations and goals and to build trust with each other. Often, organizations representing varied institutional types differ in their operating styles, resource constraints, accountability measures, communication styles and jargon, and organizational cultures. Bridging these divides and building trust can take time, but it is equally important to get moving in a partnership and gain momentum around shared experiences, which can help build understanding and trust. How, then, do partnerships that bring together business, economic development, and workforce development balance these competing needs and move forward?

In this section we draw on CTWP experiences in building productive partnerships. In the first play, "Small, but Mighty," we describe actions to avoid getting bogged down in the "getting to know you" stage of a partnership and move along to strategy development and implementation. In the second play, "Use What Is Working Now," we describe the value of promoting early, tangible accomplishments to raise the profile of a partnership in the community and build momentum and energy to pursue an ambitious agenda. In the third play, "Plan for Sustainability From the Beginning," we offer design ideas that can facilitate efficient use of resources and long-term growth to meet regional workforce needs over time.



# PLAY



## SMALL, BUT MIGHTY: ENGAGE THE MOST MOTIVATED STAKEHOLDERS FIRST TO START FAST

### The Strategy

In many communities, a wide variety of stakeholders see strengthening workforce skills as a strategy for improving economic vitality that has benefits for both workers and companies. Economic development leaders know that a capable workforce is essential to attracting businesses or helping local businesses grow and remain competitive. Workforce development leaders strive to prepare residents for labor market success and connect people to jobs. Leaders of secondary and postsecondary education institutions want their programs to prepare students for employment. Public agencies and social service organizations recognize that improving workforce skills and connecting people to employment or to better employment will help clients who rely on their services to achieve greater independence. And of course, the issue of workforce skills is of concern to many, many businesses. Trying to include all of these organizations in planning and developing a new regional workforce strategy can quickly become unmanageable.

Leaders who seek to involve all stakeholders in early stages of new partnerships have good intentions. However, all too often, attempting to launch new initiatives with a large number of organizations at the table makes progress difficult. It is common for many individuals to come to a kickoff meeting, but then for fewer and fewer to attend subsequent meetings. This is because some may be unsure about what role they might play or might be expected to play among people they might not know particularly well. Many may be waiting to see whether others will contribute to the partnership effort to determine if participating will be worth their energy and time. Also, the larger the group, the greater the perceived risk of being one of the “first movers.”

An alternative approach, one that may seem obvious but that requires confidence, is to start small and grow a partnership over time. Starting small has its own risks. Often, there is a concern that if a particular stakeholder is not explicitly included, then that organization will feel excluded and will not support the partnership later. Keeping a partnership “below the radar screen” runs the risk that other organizations invest in a competing effort, which can undermine the goal of work that is intended to address the challenge of fragmented efforts. Finally, many organizations have resources from funders that pressure them to reach out broadly, even in the beginning stages of a partnership. For example, an organization may be evaluated on the number of businesses or percentage of local industry included in an effort at the end of its first year funding, or it may be required to show evidence of having included a large and representative portion of stakeholders in a proposal in order to be eligible to receive funding.

While a number of pressures may work against starting small, the many benefits may warrant working through these challenges. A key benefit of a small group is that it makes it easier for individuals and organizations to get to know one another and build trust. Starting with a smaller group of partners facilitates individuals’ understanding of

one another's organizational assets, constraints, terminology, and operating and communication cultures. This helps partnerships break down silos that keep economic development, workforce development, education, and others from operating in a coordinated fashion and that keep business at arm's length. Additionally, a smaller group can more easily establish effective communications and accountability mechanisms, encouraging partners to make and follow through on important commitments.

A number of strategies can help a small team mitigate the pressures to go big too soon. Including a respected champion, such as a leading member of the business community, who is willing to be the public face of the partnership and is well-recognized as being a leader in the business community, can help work against a feeling of exclusion when not inviting all business leaders to participate in early stages of an initiative. That person can be a strong advocate to engage others to join the effort when the time is right. In addition, a clear communication strategy that is open about the work of the partnership and offers a concrete opportunity for additional members to engage in an authentic way provides a positive and constructive means of creating a feeling of inclusiveness and responsiveness to new players as the partnership expands. Starting small may mean making creative use of existing community resources rather than seeking new funding. But starting small may also require less external funding.

While a community may ultimately aim to develop a broad workforce strategy that meets the needs of a variety of employers and job seekers, engaging a small but motivated subset of employers and organizations that work with job seekers may be the best first play to get the action started. The experience of northwest Georgia offers insights on starting with a small, highly motivated group of players as a first step in working toward its broad, regionwide vision.



### **Example: Northwest Georgia Communities that Work Partnership<sup>8</sup>**

The floor covering industry is a leading employer in northwest Georgia involving dozens of manufacturers. Thus developing local talent to work in the industry is critical to the long-term economic health of the region. Like many industries, the floor covering sector slowed during the Great Recession, but business has bounced back, and the floor covering sector in northwest Georgia is thriving. Like many manufacturing industries, technology has changed the nature of floor covering production, creating new skill needs for the workforce.

The Northwest Georgia Communities that Work Partnership wanted to develop a talent pipeline for this critical local industry by creating an advanced manufacturing curriculum that included an apprenticeship component and would be delivered through the region's schools, in either college and career academies or career and technical education programs in local school districts. The 15-county region includes eight city and county school districts, five public charter college and career academies, and five local colleges. Given the demand for qualified workers among local companies, partnership leaders initially envisioned getting as many businesses and schools as possible involved in their efforts to plan and launch the curriculum.

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<sup>8</sup> For more information about the Northwest Georgia CTWP partnership's work, visit <http://www.aspenwsi.org/communities-that-work/overview/>.



Under a prior initiative, leaders planned and implemented an ambitious effort to engage a large number of stakeholders, provide a forum for the business community to raise and address challenges, identify a vision and mission to strengthen advanced manufacturing, and set goals. However, that effort struggled to move an agenda forward, and another school year was ending without an advanced manufacturing curriculum anywhere in the region's school systems.

A few stakeholders decided to take a different approach. A small group of leaders representing seven floor covering businesses collaborated with leadership at one school to establish a new curriculum. They concentrated their efforts on working out the myriad issues related to launching this program and learning from the process of design and implementation in one school, rather than attempting to create a program to meet the needs of the entire local industry and school system. This strategic decision led to success – the establishment of the Advanced Manufacturing and Business Academy at the Northwest Georgia College and Career Academy, a charter high school within Whitfield County Schools, with a goal of enrolling 200 freshmen in the program in August 2016.

Partners engaged in this effort reported that their small group size helped them keep things moving forward. Each participating business identified a key person within the organization authorized to make decisions and commitments to advance the work of the partnership. The group also established a process for ensuring accountability to one another.

Although they kept the development group small for the purposes of getting started, the original vision of engaging many more companies was not abandoned. Partnership leaders noted that since getting their one, focused effort off the ground, founding members have served and continue to serve as champions, bringing in new industry leaders and soliciting additional critical participation. The partnership identified several concrete “asks” that they make of new businesses as they seek to broaden the partnership. These include conducting manufacturing plant tours for students, parents, and guidance counselors; donating materials and equipment; and providing apprenticeship opportunities to students. These clear asks, made of business leaders by business leaders, have been useful tools for engaging other businesses and broadening the partnership with an eye toward growth.



## Action Steps for Applying This Strategy in Your Region

*As you consider this strategy for your region, explore the following action steps:*

- Assess the current state of participation and decide if you have enough key partners representing different constituencies engaged to get started. In addition to economic development, business, and education and training provider representation, ensure you have at least one partner who represents the viewpoint of the community residents you seek to prepare for jobs. Ensure no other viewpoints are lacking representation.
- Think ahead and develop an ongoing list of additional partners (and their potential roles) to engage at different stages of the work.
- Determine if business partner members represent enough workforce demand for the targeted purpose, and if not, determine whether their workforce needs can be extrapolated to a larger industry group or set of occupations.
- Reflect on your prior experiences with partnering (and those of others in your initial group) to develop a flexible organizational structure that will help keep you moving forward.
- Decide as a group what approach the partnership will take to hold members accountable for following through on commitments and who is best positioned to manage communication around follow-through.
- Build in ways to communicate about the work and progress of the partnership with other stakeholders.
- Brainstorm specific, action-oriented ways that new partners can engage in future phases of the work.



# PLAY



## USE WHAT IS WORKING NOW TO BUILD MOMENTUM AND SHOW YOUR COMMUNITY POTENTIAL OUTCOMES

### The Strategy

Leaders in a number of CTWP communities are pursuing regionwide talent development initiatives that seek new solutions to workforce skill challenges. However, none are easy, quick-fix endeavors. For example, CTWP leaders in the Buffalo-Niagara region of western New York are employing collective impact planning to change how talent development systems function to produce larger, and lasting, outcomes in workforce development. A major goal of this region's emerging collective impact work is to better link residents with a history of employment disadvantage with new jobs being generated by businesses in growth industries that are the target of public economic development investment.<sup>9</sup>

As part of their collective impact efforts, leaders are engaged in identifying regionwide goals. They then bring together leaders from an array of educational programs, community-based efforts, and business groups to facilitate development of broadly supported, sustainable solutions.

This CTWP effort is in the early stages of implementation. The partnership has been engaged in gathering data, identifying specific employment opportunities, understanding the root causes of workforce challenges in the region, and weaving together a diverse set of resources to build shared ownership among a range of partners. Like many communities, the Buffalo partnership has goals that will take time to achieve. It faces challenges that derail many long-term efforts.

A major challenge is the need for fairly quick progress, as potential partners and constituents may lose patience with long, drawn-out planning processes and become skeptics. The Buffalo partnership understands that the longer a planning process goes on without concrete success, the more likely that skeptics could turn allies into opponents.

One strategy for addressing these challenges is to seek out existing partnerships in your region and identify joint "early win" projects. The purpose of pursuing this approach is to balance planning with initial tangible progress, build momentum, and quiet the skeptics through early implementation of a project. This also strengthens partnership through shared success.

### COLLECTIVE IMPACT

Collective impact is the commitment of a group of actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a complex social problem. In addition to a common agenda, actors coordinate otherwise independent activities so that they mutually reinforce one another, commit to continuous communication, use shared measurement tools to hold one another accountable, and move efforts forward through the support and facilitation of a strong "backbone" organization.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> For more information about the Buffalo CTWP partnership's work, visit <http://www.aspenwsi.org/communities-that-work/overview/>.

<sup>10</sup> John Kania and Mark Kramer, *Collective Impact* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Social Innovation Review, Stanford University, Winter 2011).



## Example: Buffalo Communities that Work Partnership

Broad, big-vision, long-term, multistakeholder approaches take time and patience to build, but in the meantime, coalition leaders can leverage existing local efforts to make progress more quickly. During 2016, leaders of the Buffalo regional partnership chose to seek out an early win project to launch its first talent pipeline project with local businesses. The group includes the Buffalo Niagara Partnership, Erie County Executive Office, National Grid, and Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo. The group chose to leverage a well-known model effort in the city called Say Yes Buffalo to launch a related component, Say Yes Interns, a first step toward linking a successful education program to business and employment opportunities. This discrete project, which leaders determined they could implement relatively quickly, meshed with their larger, long-term regionwide collective action development goals. In addition, the project built on, promoted, and supported the successful work of others in the community (in this case, the education community), as well as grew and strengthened its regional workforce partnership through shared success.

The goal of Say Yes Buffalo is to get more Buffalo students into and through college by combining K-12 student support services with a powerful incentive to graduate – grants for postsecondary education tuition. Say Yes has achieved dramatic improvements in Buffalo high school graduation rates (a 12 percentage point increase in three years) and college enrollment rates (a 10 percentage point increase in three years).<sup>11</sup>

Building its efforts on the credibility of Say Yes Buffalo’s proven track record of success, the CTWP regional partners engaged businesses in building the new Say Yes Interns program to provide paid internship opportunities to Buffalo City Public Schools graduates. Member businesses of the Buffalo Niagara Regional Workforce Coalition provide paid internships to college juniors and seniors. Businesses are also engaged in the internship program by providing job shadow days and tours and organizing career exploration events. The initial startup of Say Yes Interns began with a manageable 13 interns in 2016. Starting small allowed the partners to learn from early experiences and quickly make any necessary program modifications. They plan to scale up the program in 2016-2017 to serve larger numbers of students working for more businesses engaged with the partnership.

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### EARLY WINS

**Early win** projects are discrete projects that leaders can implement relatively quickly and still fit into the larger, long-term goals of a regionwide workforce planning effort.

**Early wins** help balance planning with progress, build momentum, and quiet skeptics.

Joint **early win** projects, designed to build on existing capacity, can help coalesce disparate efforts into a broader regional workforce strategy.

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The new internship program offers a variety of benefits to both students and businesses. For businesses, Say Yes Interns affords employers opportunities to learn about and tap into talent from the city of Buffalo that has often been overlooked. It helps businesses establish stronger relationships with local educational institutions since the internships are generated in partnership with college-going Say Yes scholars and their institutions. This early win approach also offers businesses a tangible way to participate and explore strategies to expand employment opportunities for local residents as part of the collective impact work of the Workforce Coalition. For students, the internship program creates incentives that link high school graduation with

<sup>11</sup> Data collected by Say Yes Buffalo from New York State Education Department, Buffalo City School District Report Cards indicate that Buffalo Public Schools’ four-year high school graduation rate increased from 49 percent in 2012 to 61 percent in 2015. National Student Clearinghouse data indicate that the rate of postsecondary enrollment among Buffalo Public Schools’ high school graduates in the fall semester immediately following their graduation increased from 57 percent in 2012 (before implementation of Say Yes Buffalo) to 67 percent in 2015.



college matriculation and income [through the paid internship]. Furthermore, the businesses participating through the Workforce Coalition are in industry sectors notable for jobs that pay good wages and provide access to workplace experiences and career opportunities to which low-income Say Yes Buffalo scholars traditionally have not had access.

In addition to these early tangible benefits to businesses and students, another reason the Workforce Coalition sought out an early win through Say Yes Interns is because of the larger Say Yes initiative's track record of productive collaboration with multiple partners across systems. Leaders in the region tout Say Yes Buffalo for its transparent governance structure and its ability to develop solutions between and among many partners, including business, philanthropy, education, and government. Say Yes Buffalo has built trust among partners and achieved dramatic results where deep racial, class, and educational divisions previously blocked progress. The Workforce Coalition benefited from Say Yes Buffalo's "trust cache," which inspired confidence and enthusiasm among additional business partners to get involved in the Workforce Coalition.

Say Yes Buffalo also benefits from creating a closer, more formal relationship to the Workforce Coalition. Most directly, Say Yes Buffalo has added a new and growing employment component to its education initiatives, extending its ability to link college completion and good employment. And through this collaboration, the Workforce Coalition brings to the Say Yes Buffalo effort a stable of business leaders who are motivated and in a position to contribute to and become more involved over time in the broader inclusive economic development planning that is critical to addressing the region's opportunity disparities that underpin local talent development challenges.



### Action Steps for Applying This Strategy in Your Region

*As you consider this strategy for your region, explore the following action steps:*

- Look for a local coalition that has been successful in a related issue area [e.g., education, public health, transportation]. Identify the constituency it is intended to benefit and overlap with the job seekers, incumbent workers, or businesses that you expect to benefit from your partnership.
- Consider whether a coalition shares interest in serving a similar target population or could reasonably expand to serve your target population.
- Explore the relationships, reputations, and abilities of members of other partnerships and the potential risks and benefits of aligning to achieve an early win.
- Look for overlaps in membership between your partnership and another group.
- Identify the ways in which another initiative could help you to build and strengthen your partnership, as well as ways your engagement could also strengthen the other initiative's partnership. Think about the resources and goals of both initiatives.
- Assess the potential of an early win action aligned with an existing partnership in terms of its potential to achieve quick and measurable outcomes that build confidence and momentum.
- It may be helpful to start with early wins around issues with low levels of controversy [e.g., internships] and build trust among partners to tackle more difficult issues [e.g., racial disparities and inequality in a community]. But keep in mind that there is danger in remaining in the "safe zone" of less-controversial issues and not progressing to addressing bigger, harder challenges for which it may take longer to see results.

# PLAY



## PLAN FOR SUSTAINABILITY FROM THE BEGINNING

### The Strategy

Partnerships may start due to a particular spark, which can be anything from winning a grant to a news story highlighting a local challenge. That initial spark may be enough to impel a burst of action, but is it enough to keep an effort going and growing? Creating a strong workforce system that is responsive to business needs requires resources and sustained effort. It is thus critical to plan how to sustain an effort past its initial start and fulfill ambitions to meet the regional talent need.

In planning for sustainability, it is worth thinking about which specific activities that are part of launching an initiative must be maintained over time, and where those activities have compatibility with the work of institutions and organizations in the region. In this way, the work of an initiative may be positioned to continue to learn about both business and worker needs and build on or redirect existing resources – rather than create demand for new resources. An initiative that will require new resources to support continued operation and growth, even if it is initially successful, is much harder to sustain over time. Government grants, philanthropic resources, and other typical startup funding sources are frequently time limited, so designing for sustainability within the existing local resource pool is critical.

Sustainability, of course, is necessary only if the issue that the initiative is designed to address persists. There is no point to sustaining a solution if a problem has been resolved. So planning for sustainability requires acknowledging that the usefulness of initiatives must be assessed regularly, and implementers must remain open to discontinuing or adapting programming that has outlived its usefulness. For example, training and education programs that have ramped up capacity to meet demand for workers with a particular skill set may focus on maintaining their operations as time goes on, rather than scaling back training as demand for those skills declines or adjusting the content of curricula when local businesses change their skill requirements. Since much of this training is intended to meet the needs of business, but is supported through public or philanthropic dollars, common performance measures that are attached to these funding sources, such as program completion or credential attainment, are unlikely to reveal that the training is no longer in alignment with labor market needs. However, it is often the case that as one skill issue is resolved, another comes up. Thus developing a feedback loop that keeps an understanding of current skill needs up to date, and building and maintaining capacity to identify new issues and develop and deploy new solutions is a critical factor to consider in sustainability planning.

In economic and workforce development, this capacity for ongoing exploratory work is critical to sustainability of efforts that are solutions to current problems. Economic conditions frequently change, creating new types of work and needs for new workforce skills and abilities. Therefore, workforce solutions that can address those needs will also need to adapt. Thus designing an approach that both makes creative use of existing resources and builds adaptive capacity to check that activities remain relevant to local needs is critical to a plan for sustainability.



This approach to the challenge of sustainability is clearly easier said than done, and of course the efforts we observed within the CTWP regional partnerships have not yet stood the test of time that is the ultimate arbiter of success in a sustainability strategy. Nevertheless, we observed a strategic approach to planning for sustainability that merits attention. It involves limiting the additional resources needed to explore employment demand in an ongoing manner to inform the development of programming designed to be discontinued or adapted when employer skill needs are met or change. The Greater Houston partners crafted such an approach, one that creatively leverages existing resources, relationships, and capacities of organizations within the region; engages them around a common goal; and builds a communication and feedback loop among these organizations, thus minimizing the level of additional resources needed to move their strategy forward and maximizing the likelihood of sustainability because they are positioned for adaptive approaches and long-term job-driven workforce development.



### **Example: Houston Communities that Work Partnership**

The Communities that Work Partnership group in the Houston area includes the Greater Houston Partnership, a long-standing membership organization of business leaders focused on making the Houston region a great place to live, work, and grow a business. In 2015, the partnership launched the UpSkill Houston initiative as a business-led, communitywide, integrated workforce effort, an initiative very much aligned with the vision of the Communities that Work Partnership. UpSkill Houston focuses on several critical industry sectors, including petrochemicals. The group identified a projected skills gap in the industry – construction skills needed to build and maintain petrochemical production facilities in the region. Instead of taking that information to individual businesses and working to build a new business coalition around the workforce needs of the petrochemical industry, UpSkill Houston sought an existing entity that had already engaged and built trust with petrochemical businesses in the region. It turned to East Harris County Manufacturing Association (EHCMA), which was established in 1987 and represents the interests of manufacturing companies and some of the world's biggest petrochemical operations in the east port region of Greater Houston. Leaders of UpSkill Houston identified both how the abilities, relationships, and resources of EHCMA complemented their own and that EHCMA shared their interest in addressing the challenge of an aging workforce and impending skill shortage in petrochemicals. The two organizations mapped out a strategy to share information and collaborate on efforts to create a new pipeline of workers.

To begin, UpSkill Houston leaders focused on the opportunity in EHCMA's long-standing annual member survey. An existing survey platform offered the chance to gain input from a variety of business leaders who were accustomed to responding to EHCMA's survey, as well as the technical capacity to field and analyze the results. UpSkill Houston leaders worked with EHCMA to recraft the survey to focus on workforce issues, resulting in new information and greater detail from petrochemical businesses about the skill needs and workforce concerns in the industry. UpSkill Houston took the survey findings to its connections in the regional network of community colleges and community-based organizations to collaboratively develop a new curriculum and work-based learning opportunities, leveraging the resources of both the education and training establishments and the industry to build a workforce development strategy that is designed to be adapted as employment conditions change.

Thus UpSkill Houston is building an approach to addressing the workforce needs in its region's vital petrochemical industry with sustainability in mind. The partnership connected to the existing education and training institutions to leverage existing skill-building capacity. It also connected to an existing data-gathering forum that employers recognize and participate in to develop the capacity to track industry need. This approach helped UpSkill Houston both learn about demand expressed by EHCMA's membership with respect to job skills and explore the landscape of potential work-based learning opportunities needed to underpin effective construction skills training. The group also created connections with training providers and workforce institutions to build a regional skills system that relies primarily on existing operational resources and building the business case for employer investment. By focusing on existing networks with common interests, approaching businesses using an "insider" communication tool, and creating strategies to connect and combine existing resources in the community, UpSkill Houston aims to lead a strategy that meets industry need and can be sustained to meet changing industry needs over time.



### **Action Steps for Applying This Strategy in Your Region**

*As you consider this strategy for your region, explore the following action steps:*

- Identify the interests of not only local workforce development organizations, but also business organizations, and brainstorm ideas to engage and motivate them to contribute to the regional workforce partnership strategy. Consider the capacity of existing organizations to contribute to key parts of the strategy, such as gathering industry information, engaging specific businesses, and delivering education and training services.
- Assess potential partners for their ability and positioning to help your efforts reach the businesses and talent sources you most hope to engage. Look for partners that are trusted by their members and other important stakeholders, have a history of fiscally sound operations, and have a track record of success.
- Develop a networking strategy to connect with potential partners. One approach is to take an inventory of the initiatives, boards, and advisory groups that your partnership's leaders are engaged with and identify areas of overlap with targeted partner organizations.
- Collaborative approaches involve engaging organizations to align their resources toward a common goal, and can raise sensitive issues for some potential partners. Consider the potential benefits and costs of the work from multiple perspectives to build trust and common purpose among partners, and bring any concerns about reallocation of resources into the open so that they can be addressed.
- Keep relevant policymakers at the local, state, or even national level informed of your efforts so you can build them as an interested constituency of your work. Resources for education and skill building are often substantially influenced by policy choices, so keeping policymakers informed can build their motivation to continue to support the work or address needed policy changes.
- Create mechanisms for continued feedback among players so that an initiative achieves flexibility and adapts to regional workforce needs, and only necessary solutions are sustained.

## SECTION 2 BEYOND LMI: COLLECTING NEW DATA

The workforce and economic development fields have grown quite adept at using traditional labor market information (LMI) data sets to inform their understanding of industry needs for workforce development efforts. Over the years, a variety of tools have been developed and technical assistance offered to help organizations and agencies more easily access and use LMI data.

But information available in traditional LMI data sets cannot provide all the information needed to understand what employers and workers need from a workforce development effort. Data sets are limited to quantitative data gathered via large surveys or administrative records and organized in categories that represent industries, companies, and classes of workers defined broadly. Augmented by sources of privately collected data, such as information about job postings in a region, they are a good start for understanding a regional labor market. However, regional partnerships must dig deeper to explore aspects of sectors and workers not captured in traditional data sets or aggregated into categories that mask important nuances about the characteristics of a region's business base and workforce.

Several CTWP groups took this deeper dive. They went out into their communities and gathered their own data through customized surveys, focus groups, and interviews. They engaged directly with informants to learn very specifically about the skills and workforce they need to succeed. An important point is that they engaged both employers and workers to learn about different views and experiences. The next two plays provide examples about the ways in which two CTWP partnerships expanded on traditional LMI data analysis and gathered new data to get a better understanding of an important segment of their regional labor market.

### SOURCES OF LABOR MARKET DATA

Both the US Department of Commerce and the US Department of Labor, as well as most state departments of labor and economic development, provide access to data detailing employment and industry information and tools for compiling, viewing, and downloading data. The “Guide to State and Local Workforce Data” is a rich source of information on LMI data provided to the public by a large number of government and private organizations.<sup>12</sup> Data sources highlighted in the guide cover employment, earnings, wages and benefits, safety and health, and industry-specific resources, in addition to other topics.

<sup>12</sup> US Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, “Guide to State and Local Workforce Data,” [https://lmi.workforcegps.org/resources/2015/04/03/15/48/Guide\\_to\\_State\\_and\\_Local\\_Workforce\\_Data](https://lmi.workforcegps.org/resources/2015/04/03/15/48/Guide_to_State_and_Local_Workforce_Data). This online guide includes a brief overview of each data source, the level of geographic detail available in the source, and links to each source.



## PLAY



### USEFUL LABOR MARKET DATA ANALYSIS REQUIRES LOCAL EMPLOYER INPUT

#### The Strategy

Analyzing industry and occupation data is helpful for developing a broad understanding of a regional economy and can be useful for identifying potential areas of growth or decline in a labor market. But quantitative data, even data compiled from a variety of credible sources and analyzed with sophisticated methods, cannot alone provide the type of information needed to guide workforce development planning. In addition to well-known issues such as time lag between the collection and availability of data sources, and challenges associated with unknown factors that affect analysts' ability to make reasonable projections, industry and occupation data simply cannot provide information about or insights into the characteristics, timing, specific skill requirements, and relative urgency associated with employment opportunities. It is this type of information that is needed to identify the jobs for which workforce strategies should be developed and to inform the type of approach that a workforce strategy should take to connect people with the skills and other resources they need to get and keep those jobs.

Good strategic workforce development planning needs more than labor market data analysis to ground it in important contextual factors at play in a region. Other information-gathering strategies, such as deep industry engagement or independent research and documentation of industry practices, are essential for getting at the level of detail needed for planning and strategy development. Grounding labor market data in local reality is time and resource intensive because workforce program leaders usually must find ways to get information directly from employers.



#### Example: Arizona Communities that Work Partnership

In Arizona, a CTWP partnership led by the Arizona Commerce Authority and Arizona Technology Council is focused on developing strategies to address gaps in the state's supply of information technology (IT) talent.<sup>13</sup> IT occupations cross almost every sector of the economy, and the challenge of obtaining information about the types of IT workforce skills that Arizona businesses need, at the level of specificity needed to inform talent pipeline development, was daunting. To supplement traditional labor market analysis, the partners sought a method for understanding current and emerging skill requirements of IT talent for similar occupations in different sectors.

Because Arizona partners wanted to learn about skill needs of occupations across a large number of industries, interviews or focus groups would have been too time consuming and resource intensive. While convening large groups of employers in traditional meetings might have been more efficient, facilitating conversations that would be useful for gathering information from diverse groups while also sustaining meeting participants' attention and interest didn't seem feasible. Given that information gathering was only the first step in the Arizona partnership's engagement work with employers (they also

<sup>13</sup> For more information about the Arizona CTWP partnership's work, visit <http://www.aspenwsi.org/communities-that-work/overview/>.

planned to develop and collaborate on talent pipeline strategies), leaders wanted to make information gathering a good relationship-building opportunity.

The Arizona partners contracted a third-party facilitator to use interactive technology in an approach called “advanced electronic brainstorming” to run a series of meetings to engage large numbers of business leaders and learn detailed information about their workforce needs. More than 200 meeting attendees participated in sessions.<sup>14</sup> While most participants convened in person, interactive technology used during meetings allowed them to cover a lot of ground in a short period of time. Participants provided input to a number of questions and reviewed and anonymously prioritized the importance of input offered by others. Participants commented on their perceptions of Arizona’s workforce environment, how they characterize the talent gap in IT employment, and emerging IT skill needs at their businesses. CTWP partners noted that the technology-assisted information-gathering format allowed them to drill down to a level of specificity with employer representatives that they had not been able to capture via the more traditional labor market analysis they conducted before the convenings. In addition, having played an important role in identifying complementarities in skill needs together, business representatives were primed to continue brainstorming about strategies for addressing talent pipeline gaps and the role they could play in bridging them.



### Example: New York City Communities that Work Partnership

In New York City, leaders of the National Domestic Workers Alliance, National Employment Law Project, and Hand in Hand are exploring the potential of establishing standards for training and credentialing for nannies.<sup>15</sup> Many nannies operate in the informal economy, and few of their employers report data detailing their wages and hours to the New York State Department of Labor.<sup>16</sup> Thus traditional sources of labor market data are not useful for compiling information about the scale or characteristics of this workforce to inform strategies to assist nannies or their employers.

The partnership sought to gain more clarity about how employers and workers think about the concept of skill development, with the goals of improving job quality for nannies and improving quality of care provided to children (a common concern among employers). It also wanted to learn about how employers and nannies think about their respective responsibilities for providing and obtaining training. To learn about these issues from the employers’ perspective, the partnership leveraged what was learned about methodology, tools, and results of a survey of domestic service employers conducted by the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) for Hand in Hand, a national network of employers of domestic workers.<sup>17</sup> Based on findings from this survey, the New York City partnership developed its own survey of employers to identify the types of skills they value most in a nanny and whether they would pay a higher wage for a nanny with training or a credential. Employers reported being willing to pay for a nanny to attend professional development courses and being open to renegotiating employment terms if their nanny gained new skills. They also expressed strong interest in training in specific skills, such

<sup>14</sup> Sessions were facilitated by the Advanced Strategy Center. See <http://www.advancedstrategycenter.com/>.

<sup>15</sup> For more information about the New York City CTWP partnership’s work, visit <http://www.aspenwsi.org/communities-that-work/overview/>.

<sup>16</sup> The percentage of employers who employ domestic workers and who also report legally required wage information and pay required taxes into the unemployment insurance system is likely lower than 10 percent. See New York Department of Labor <http://www.labor.ny.gov/legal/domestic-workers-bill-of-rights.shtml>.

<sup>17</sup> UCLA Labor Center, *Profile, Practices and Needs of California’s Domestic Work Employers* (Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Labor Center, May 2016), <http://www.labor.ucla.edu/publication/domestic-employers-report/>.



as infant care. These and other findings from their research are informing the partners' developmental work on a range of types of training that are accessible to nannies and are responding to input by employers. In the short term, the partners are experimenting by piloting training based on curriculum developed by another organization. Learnings from data gathering and the pilot experience will inform additional training they are collaboratively developing in house.



### **Action Steps for Applying This Strategy in Your Region**

*As you consider this strategy for your region, explore the following action steps:*

- Look beyond traditional sources of labor market data and engage directly with industry representatives to learn their perspective on current and projected workforce talent needs.
- Explore existing industry groups' information resources before launching a new data collection effort. Even if what you learn is not sufficient to inform your planning needs, this effort may help you narrow your focus and educate you about industry terminology and culture.
- Explore the use of a third-party facilitator that has specialized skills and knowledge to convene groups from which you hope to learn. This approach has the potential to result in more engaging and productive meetings with business leaders than a workforce strategy planner usually has the skills to achieve on his or her own.
- To gather information from a large population of business representatives, consider using interactive technology.
- Partner with an expert for help designing and implementing data collection activities such as surveys, interviews, or focus groups.
- Use data as a tool to help build a shared vision for action. Information gathered directly from businesses and workers can not only underpin a credible framework of issues, but also build ownership and buy-in among those consulted (and others who identify with them).

## PLAY



## INCLUDE LOCAL WORKERS' PERSPECTIVES IN DATA-GATHERING EFFORTS TO INFORM WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

### The Strategy

Job-driven training is commonly understood as training that has been developed from research on specific skills needed to successfully perform specific jobs. Most frequently, this research is conducted with employers. However, with the changing nature of work, it is increasingly important for this research to also include the perspectives of workers. Worker perspective is important to explore as part of informing a talent pipeline strategy for any industry sector, but it is particularly relevant in informal economy industries and industries increasingly reliant on contract and “on-demand” workforces for a few reasons.

First, it is difficult to access sufficient LMI in these sectors. Data on the informal economy, such as domestic work in private households, are sparse and unreliable in traditional labor market data sets because the employers are private individuals who often do not identify themselves as employers or their homes as workplaces. These employers and employees often are not included in traditional surveys and administrative reporting mechanisms utilized by public agencies that compile and provide LMI.

Second, the nature of employment in these types of industries is different from traditional employment. Many informal economy and contract workers take on some of the risks and responsibilities that employers in more traditional employment arrangements bear, such as absorbing market fluctuations; reorganizing work, products, and services in response to fluctuations; and paying employment taxes and providing basic benefits including workers compensation and unemployment insurance. These changing roles mean that the specific skills workers need to succeed on the job go beyond job-specific technical skills. They encompass broader employment skill needs, such as how to access jobs, negotiate wage rates or fees for jobs, and discuss working conditions and terms of employment in informal contexts or with representatives of firms that manage contracts for work but are not human resources professionals.

Regional partnerships focusing on industries in which traditional LMI does not provide enough information to formulate a strategy or in evolving industries that require changing worker skill sets will need to conduct additional data collection with workers. This is a good practice for regional partnerships focused on any industry, but it is essential in the industries mentioned above. The tools used to gather information from workers regarding their employment and the skills they need to succeed are similar to the tools used to gather similar information from employers. Organizations can conduct surveys, focus groups, and interviews of representative samples of workers to gain insight into the skills and competencies workers report they need.





## Example: San Francisco Bay Area Communities that Work Partnership

The San Francisco Bay Area CTWP partnership is focused on “digital workers” who are self-employed contractors working for the region’s high-technology companies, specifically companies that use freelancers to create and edit videos, design websites, provide User Experience (UX) expertise, and develop front-end web functionality.<sup>18</sup> To better understand the training needs of these contract workers, the Bay Area partnership had to go directly to the workers. The Bay Area Video Coalition (BAVC), a key partner in the CTWP and establisher of Gig Union (GigU), a freelancer network that provides members with access to information, networking, and skills development, needed information from its members to inform program development and workforce policy recommendations, which it brings to its regional workforce board partners. Knowing that it would be difficult to get a good response by fielding an independent survey, BAVC incorporated questions into its online GigU registration. Answering the questions was the “cost” members incurred to join the organization, and BAVC collected information about the characteristics, assets, and challenges of more than 700 freelance contractors in the region. BAVC used the free online Google Forms platform, which, in addition to providing the ability to develop custom forms for collecting information, also summarizes and analyzes results. Through the survey, the partners learned that most contractors believe their technical skills in the creative digital space and in project management are strong. However, most feel they are ill prepared to be a business owner, and they would like skills training in finding consistent clients, promoting brand recognition, and networking with other freelancers, as well as information about legal employment and contracting issues targeted to their needs.

Focus groups and interviews with employers conducted around the same time found similar needs, but from the employer’s perspective. Employers expressed a need for better mechanisms for assessing contractors’ expertise in specific technical skills, strategies for maintaining a stable supply of reliable contractors, and more information on employment laws and how to properly classify and work with contractors.

In response to what they found in their contract worker-focused data collection and analysis, and reinforced by what they heard from employers, the Bay Area partnership began providing short workshops to digital contract workers on technical, networking, and business skills. They also created opportunities for contractors to network and share information with one other. By taking a deeper dive into additional data collection directly from digital contract workers (supplemented by interviews with representatives of companies that contract with them), the Bay Area partnership was able to offer relevant training to workers, which would in turn help the companies contracting for their services. Because this segment of the San Francisco Bay Area workforce is considered to be an important driver of regional business competitiveness, the partnership is exploring approaches for sustaining these services, which they developed through a time-limited Department of Labor Workforce Innovation Fund grant, by looking at how public workforce funding guidelines might be worked within or adapted to provide ongoing resources for the work.

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<sup>18</sup> For more information about the San Francisco Bay Area CTWP partnership’s work, visit <http://www.aspenwsi.org/communities-that-work/overview/>.



## Action Steps for Applying This Strategy in Your Region

*As you consider this strategy for your region, explore the following action steps:*

- Before you decide that you need to conduct a survey, think outside the box to see if you can mine what you need from existing data sources. Someone else in your region may have already collected information that informs some of your questions. Sources could include the public workforce development board, an economic development entity, business association surveys, worker associations or unions, or academic institutions.
- Determine critical questions that remain unaddressed or incompletely addressed by other sources of information in your community. Prioritize key questions and consider whom you need to question to fill in information gaps.
- Keep the target respondent in mind as you weigh pros and cons of who will actually field a survey or conduct interviews or focus groups. Respondents must be approached by an organization they trust and respect. An organization with which respondents already have a relationship, such as a membership organization, is ideal. Membership organizations may already conduct regular surveys of their members and be willing to incorporate your questions into their process. Not only will this make it more likely that individuals will respond; it also may strengthen your partnership.
- Think about messages that will motivate individuals to participate and consider how their participation in the data gathering might benefit them.
- Partnerships should think carefully about who will analyze and present findings about data collected. Analysis and reporting should be performed by a reputable source that the intended audience trusts to be candid and unbiased. An academic institution may provide this neutral, objective party role. A partnership of organizations sponsoring a data collection effort may help increase trust in the results.
- All forms of data collection require resources. These include staff time and expertise to develop contact lists and data collection tools, conduct field surveys, and then compile and analyze results. It also takes time and expertise to plan, set up, and conduct interviews and focus groups, and to analyze proceedings.
- Keep in mind that survey and focus group respondents may tire of answering questions. Therefore, it is important to engage the necessary expertise to think through data collection issues before you engage respondents, so that the results provide the information that you and your partners need.





## SECTION 3

# BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT: BALANCING CUSTOMIZATION AND STANDARDIZATION

Addressing the gaps in workforce skills can seem like a simple process. One can simply talk to employers about what they need and then design a strategy to train people in those skills. But the actual process is usually a bit more complicated. A variety of details can make a difference in how much trainees learn by participating in a workforce program, how well they can apply those skills on the job, whether employers value the skills and credentials that may result from participating in a training program, and whether those skills and credentials provide a good basis of knowledge that an individual can build on over time as he or she progresses in a career.

The following section is based on how CTWP partners thought through some of these details and answers the following questions: How do we translate job requirements into a training program? What kinds of learning experiences will help individuals master new skills quickly? What approaches engage students and encourage training completion and skill mastery? How do we know whether students who demonstrate skill in a classroom will be able to apply skills on the job? Will the training that worked well for one company work well for another? How can a company quickly understand what a training program signifies? How can we engage more communities in our region in building workforce skills?

In addressing these questions, there often is a trade-off between standardization and customization. Customization allows a training program to target specific needs of a particular employer or set of workers and tailor a strategy to meet those specific needs. Standardization facilitates quick communication and clarity about what a product or service offers, since it is always the same, and in the case of workforce training may mean that a credential is portable across employers, since it is commonly understood. Both customized and standardized approaches incur development costs, but to the extent that a standardized approach can be used to train a greater number of individuals, the development costs may be lower on a per-trainee basis. On the other hand, a standardized approach may mean that additional resources are used to teach workers skills or techniques an employer does not need, or conversely, that there could be gaps in the training.

This section includes two plays that illustrate some of these trade-offs between standardization and customization. The first play describes “prototyping,” an approach to developing new programs. Prototyping is intentional about learning by doing. New training programs are developed and then run simultaneously with real-time assessment. A prototype program is intended to meet a specific employer’s needs through customization, but it also involves a process to raise and address issues and identify

effective program components that can then be applied to meeting the needs of other employers in the industry. The second play highlights a more standardized education and training strategy – credentialing programs. This play highlights key questions that a regional partnership should explore as it considers whether designing a new credentialing program is the right way to make progress toward a workforce development goal. Taken together, these two plays provide insight into choices that partnerships must make as they seek the right balance between customization and standardization.



## USE WORKFORCE “PROTOTYPING” AS A KEY STRATEGY IN WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT TO SPEED UP LEARNING AND THEN SCALE SOLUTIONS

### The Strategy

One of the vexing issues in workforce development is the challenge of taking small successful programs to a larger scale and embedding new programming or what is learned through experimental programming into current or new talent development systems for more systemic, lasting change. Workforce prototyping is a development- and action-based learning strategy that employers, education, and community partners can use to overcome this challenge and achieve change.

In business, a prototype takes a new product idea from design phase to early implementation to mass production. For example, a petrochemical company might initiate a prototype to increase the durability of resins used in tires and develop longer-lasting automobile tires. The company uses the prototype process to test a new resin composite design, learn from results, make adaptations based on learning, and then incorporate what works into standard operational practices and processes to achieve greater production [scale].

When applied to a workforce effort, prototypes start as small efforts engaging willing business and training partners to build a customized solution to address a workforce challenge or opportunity. The partners commit to learn from early experiences; capture what works and discard what does not; and then scale the learning and benefits to change employer, education, and workforce practices. These could be changes in industrywide training or hiring practices, changes to education approaches, or a change to policy that guides employment and training providers.

The prototype approach resonates well with businesses more often than not because business leaders understand the concept behind its application and relevance. As a business concept, it also signals to business leaders that the work is designed with industry in mind.

The workforce prototype approach is experimental and conducted at a faster pace than more typical workforce pilot or demonstration programs. Rather than attempting to pilot a new approach by implementing it multiple times and then evaluating it using standard assessment methodologies, workforce prototypes encourage creativity, innovation, and quick action in an environment in which companies need skilled jobs filled quickly, and businesses engage not only in implementation, but also in real-time evaluation of



a strategy's effectiveness. To make workforce prototyping successful, partners need an entrepreneurial, fast-paced, "can do, act now" attitude.

However, the larger objective of workforce prototyping is not to focus solely on solving an immediate, one-off challenge experienced by one employer. Prototyping is intended to jumpstart learning about practices that can lead to bold changes in business, education, and workforce development approaches that will last over time. It is these changes that are embedded in new systems – such as public policy supporting worker training in a new way or a whole industry changing to build and support a new pipeline of workers – that create the lasting effect of the prototype.



### **Example: Houston Communities that Work Partnership**

UpSkill Houston used a workforce prototype approach to meet industry demand quickly while paving the way for practices that provide real economic opportunity for low-income Houston residents at risk of continuing to be left behind, even as the region's economy flourishes. UpSkill Houston, an 11-county business-led workforce collaborative effort focused on closing the skills gap in Greater Houston, has adopted or launched four prototypes in the past year.<sup>19</sup> Three of the prototypes are focused solutions to train entry-level construction workers to help address the middle-skill deficit in Houston's industrial and commercial construction industry. The fourth is focused on addressing the middle-skill shortage in the region's petrochemical manufacturing industry. UpSkill Houston's main goal is to increase the number of Houstonians trained for careers in industries critical to the growth and well-being of the region.

A skilled construction workforce is central to the growth and sustainability of the petrochemical industry – an important driver of the regional economy. The industry cannot produce without the safe maintenance and operation of the complex plants and facilities that process and refine raw petrochemical products. Demand for petrochemical products worldwide is spurring construction of new plants and facilities in the region. Business leaders note that ongoing efforts to maintain safety and efficiency of existing petrochemical facilities requires skilled construction workers. For workers, obtaining basic construction skills training can offer the opportunity to build a career with a variety of paths.

UpSkill Houston's experiences with S&B Engineers and Constructors illustrates the potential for learning and adapting new system practices through prototyping. This 4,500-employee Houston-based industrial construction firm led implementation of a Women in Construction pipefitting and safety training prototype in collaboration with the Gulf Coast Workforce Board/Workforce Solutions; the regions' workforce investment board and career centers; and the region's United Way THRIVE Workforce Connector, a network of community-based organizations that provide to residents job-readiness training, financial coaching, and life skills development.

S&B Engineers and Constructors sought to increase local hiring and workforce diversity and, over time, reduce its need to recruit workers from outside the region – a costly practice. UpSkill Houston partners recruited low-income, underemployed women – nontraditional workers for middle-skill jobs in industrial construction – and launched the training prototype to test and deliver an "earn and learn" model of pipefitting and safety training. S&B Engineers and Constructors invested approximately \$250,000 to pay for the

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<sup>19</sup> For more information about Upskill Houston and the Houston CTWP partnership's work, visit <http://www.aspenwsi.org/communities-that-work/overview/>.

training and wages while in training of an initial cohort of 20 women. Gulf Coast Workforce Solutions, in partnership with S&B Engineers and Constructors, recruited applicants through the workforce system. The 20 women were hired as full-time pipefitter helpers (at a regular full-time wage of \$16 per hour paid by the company with no public subsidy) and began their training.

Over four months, the workers alternated their time between pipefitting training in the classroom (that led to the industry-recognized NCCER credential)<sup>20</sup> and work in the field to apply their new skills. The prototype paid workers for both classroom and work hours. The workers also took part in ongoing financial coaching and life skills supports provided by a collaborative of community-based organizations through United Way THRIVE Workforce Connector. They received mentoring from other employees at S&B Engineers and Constructors. Nineteen of the 20 women received their NCCER training credential upon completion, and S&B Engineers and Constructors hired the women into permanent positions at a wage of \$18 per hour.

This training prototype has resulted in benefits for S&B Engineers and Constructors. Early results show that the company's initial investment resulted in significant net cost savings. Savings resulted from reduced per diem travel costs for workers it would have otherwise hired from outside the region, reduced costs associated with safety violations, and increased worker productivity. UpSkill Houston's parent organization, Greater Houston Partnership, is working with S&B Engineers and Constructors and other firms engaged in two additional prototypes to compile a business case describing return on investment that will inform additional companies in the region about the benefits of this approach to developing new skilled workers.

The prototype has been a catalyst for broader discussion and new practices among companies in the region's construction sector. It tested an important value proposition for the industry – demonstrating that funds that would otherwise be spent to bring in workers from outside the region could be cost-efficiently redirected toward creating the more sustainable pipeline of local workers needed to support construction in the region. The prototype also helped construction companies see that effective training for their needs incorporates both work-based apprenticeship (in which they play a critical role) and career and technical training that links to industry-recognized credentials.

## PUTTING WAGES IN PERSPECTIVE

In assessing the potential of a talent development strategy, it is important to know the wage that workers will earn if they complete a program and to consider this in relation to costs borne by both the public sector and the individuals who participate. The Houston construction prototype program positioned workers to earn \$18 per hour. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the mean wage in the Houston Metropolitan Statistical Area was \$24.92 in 2015. Massachusetts Institute of Technology researchers calculate a living wage for Harris County (where Houston is located) as \$8.78 for a single adult with no children and \$19.98 for a single adult supporting one dependent child. Therefore, the prototype program appears to have the potential to help workers move into Houston's middle class.

Sources: US Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Occupational Employment and Wages in Houston-The Woodlands-Sugar Land," May 2015, [http://www.bls.gov/regions/southwest/news-release/OccupationalEmploymentandWages\\_Houston.htm](http://www.bls.gov/regions/southwest/news-release/OccupationalEmploymentandWages_Houston.htm); Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Living Wage Calculator, <http://livingwage.mit.edu/counties/48225>

<sup>20</sup> The NCCER pipefitting credential is an industry-accredited standardized curriculum issued by NCCER, the new brand for the former National Center for Construction Education and Research.





## Action Steps for Applying This Strategy in Your Region

*As you consider this strategy for your region, explore the following action steps:*

- As you talk with business partners about long-term talent development, productivity, and retention issues, ask questions to gauge their interest in accelerating pipeline development by experimenting collaboratively with prototyping a new approach toward addressing one or some of their needs.
- Reflect on your partnership's analysis of regional industry needs not addressed by existing local capacity and work to identify a new workforce program or practice on which you can collaborate with businesses and other partners to test.
- Vet prototyping opportunities with an eye toward identifying approaches that have the potential to be implemented at larger scale.
- Identify untapped populations of workers to find new avenues for talent sourcing in the region and build relationships with leaders of community-based organizations who have knowledge about the types of barriers these individuals may face to obtaining employment in your focus industry.
- Target and test new training linked with employer-based workforce practices on a small scale.
- Talk with business leaders about the type of information and level of rigor they need to understand the return on investment of a prototype. Business leaders typically make decisions about the effectiveness of a change based on data that reasonably indicate progress or cost savings.
- Recognize up front that prototyping will likely lead to learning that some approaches are more effective than others. Strive to cultivate a decision-making culture within your partnership that recognizes some practices will be abandoned and others deemed worthy of tackling at a larger scale.

# PLAY



## FIVE QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS BEFORE DEVELOPING A NEW CREDENTIAL

### The Strategy

Bureau of Labor Statistics data clearly show that workers with higher levels of education have greater success in the labor market [see graph]. Likewise, regions with higher educational attainment among the population are generally more prosperous.<sup>21</sup> Creating and supporting education and training programs that lead to education and skill credentials can be an important tool to worker, business, and regional prosperity.

In theory, all education and skill credentials represent “signaling mechanisms” that are increasingly critical to well-functioning labor markets and that equally benefit employers and workers. By carefully inspecting and exploring the full range of credential strategies, and the pros and cons of each, regional economic and workforce development leaders can avoid potential pitfalls and take advantage of available opportunities to increase employer, worker, and regional prosperity. A credential is valuable only to the extent that it is valid, shared, and transparent among partners (both workers and employers). To be valuable, a credential must attest that individuals earning it have the necessary knowledge and skills for a job or occupation. Employers must understand or interpret the credential in more or less the same way. In addition, it must be clear to workers and employers both how the credential is earned and how it relates to employment opportunity.

However, credential-based strategies for some industry sectors and occupations should be approached with caution. The experiences of the Communities that Work Partnership sites offer a number of lessons for regional leaders to consider as they explore whether to pursue credentialing as part of a workforce development strategy. We have organized lessons learned around a set of five questions that leaders should ask to frame this exploration.

### EARNINGS AND UNEMPLOYMENT RATES BY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT, 2015



Note: Data are for persons age 25 and over. Earnings are for full-time wage and salary workers.  
Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey.

<sup>21</sup> Extensive research establishes the significant labor market returns to educational attainment. A recent compilation of some of this research related to postsecondary education can be found in The Aspen Institute, “From College to Jobs: Making Sense of the Labor Market Returns to Higher Education” (The Aspen Institute, College Excellence Program, Washington, DC, 2015). Related research to certificates can be found in Complete College America and FutureWorks, “Certificates Count: An Analysis of Sub-Baccalaureate Certificates” (Complete College America and FutureWorks, December 2010). Related research to licenses and certifications can be found in Stephanie Ewert and Robert Kominski, “Measuring Alternative Educational Credentials: 2012” (US Census Bureau, Washington, DC, January 2014).



The first question relates to the need to survey the regional landscape of existing educational and skill credential programs before developing a new credential to fit your partnership's regional workforce development needs: ***Does a credential program related to these skill development needs already exist in my region?*** If one does exist, leaders should seek to understand why businesses do not know about or value the credential, or why workers have not pursued earning the credential in the numbers needed by companies in the region.

A credential in your labor market may be underutilized because it is not creating value for businesses or workers, or there may be other barriers to its adoption. Rather than building a new credential program, a more suitable response may be to focus on improving the curriculum content of the existing credential (e.g., making it more relevant to employers and workers), diversifying the delivery methodology (e.g., applying workplace and adaptive learning techniques or encouraging completion strategies), or removing access barriers that prevent its uptake (e.g., assessing program cost, transportation and mobility access, prerequisites, and scheduling conflicts).

The second question is the following: ***Does the credential in demand correspond to the skill needs of the job, or is it a proxy for something else employers want?*** Some credential requirements serve as “screeners” for skill sets that employers have difficulty articulating or identifying in job applicants. In other cases, as some researchers have identified, the practice of “credential inflation” by employers can spur ever higher credential thresholds that create artificial barriers to jobs.<sup>22</sup>

For example, employers may note a requirement for a bachelor's degree in its want ads and job postings, but the advertised position might call for competencies that can be acquired through a one- or two-year technical education program. Employers may add these educational requirements during periods when they are flooded with job applicants. Requiring a credential is an easy way to narrow the applicant pool. When the labor market tightens, employers may need assistance in determining what kind of credential would be a better match with their skill needs. Probing to learn about the competencies needed by employers, and whether a particular program of study teaches these, can help determine whether a credential strategy has the potential to widen rather than narrow the talent pool.

## WHAT IS A CREDENTIAL? A Typology for the Field

**Degrees:** Two-year, four-year, and postbaccalaureate awards granted by postsecondary institutions by states or the federal government acknowledging completion of a specific program of postsecondary study.

**Certificates:** Nondegree credentials generally issued by state-approved and nationally accredited postsecondary institutions acknowledging completion of a discrete program of study leading to employment. Prebaccalaureate certificates are vocationally or occupationally focused.

**Certifications:** Awarded by third-party, standard-setting bodies – not academic institutions – based on an assessment process that recognizes competencies in a particular occupational specialty as measured against a set of standards, usually set through an industrywide process.

**Licenses:** Awarded by a regulatory authority and may be required for an individual to work in certain occupations or perform certain job tasks. Acquiring a license may require examination by a licensing board of experienced practitioners. It often requires that the applicant complete a prescribed course of study and present a certificate or degree attesting to that completion.

**Digital badges:** Online record of accomplishment, skill, experience, or even simple interest granted without standardized assessment.

<sup>22</sup> Burning Glass Technologies, One Faneuil Hall Market, “Moving the Goalposts: How Demand for a Bachelor's Degree Is Reshaping the Workforce” (Burning Glass Technologies, One Faneuil Hall Market, Boston, MA, September 2014). See also: Katherine S. Newman and Hella Winston, *Reskilling America: Learning to Labor in the 21st Century* (New York City: Metropolitan Books, 2016).



## Examples: New York City and Prince George's County, Maryland Communities that Work Partnerships

Examples from the Communities that Work Partnership offer additional perspectives for framing issues related to the remaining three questions and thinking through the development of a credential-based strategy.



Two partnerships grappled with question three: *Will credential requirements lead to unintended barriers to work for certain groups of workers in the labor market?* While a credential requirement may signal an increase in worker skill level to an employer and thus increase access to jobs for some workers, it could also exclude other groups of workers for reasons unrelated to their ability to develop the skills needed for the job.

This was a concern for two CTWP partnerships, New York City's National Domestic Workers Alliance effort that explored developing a credential for nannies and Prince George's County's efforts that explored creating a new credential for large numbers of laborer jobs emerging as part of a regionwide public investment in stormwater management construction projects.<sup>23</sup> CTWP leaders of both the New York City and Prince George's County efforts determined that the adoption of a formal or even implicit requirement for credential attainment among these workforces would likely narrow the opportunity for employment among large swaths of workers who have traditionally relied on employment in each sector and have proved capable of competently performing the work.

For New York City's domestic nanny workers, CTWP leaders determined that a formalized credential could create cost, language, and regulatory barriers that would be difficult for current workers to overcome. Similarly, in Prince George's County, leaders determined that requiring a credential of workers seeking entry-level laborer jobs might create new, possibly unnecessary, skill requirements for construction jobs. In both cases, promoting a credential-based strategy to develop the workforce would also have created significant preemployment training costs that would be unaffordable for the targeted entry-level worker population.

In developing a new credential, it is important not to overlook design elements that affect individuals' ability to earn the credential and bring newly developed or enhanced skills to the targeted occupation. For example, the customary approach for assessing whether a trainee has learned a new skill is a written test. For trainees whose first language is not English, who have been out of school for a significant period of time, or who have not had successful school experiences, passing a written test to earn a credential can be a challenge. Similarly, many occupational credentials require an individual to spend considerable unpaid time in a classroom and studying. While tuition is often recognized as a barrier for low-income populations, the cost of unpaid class time or transportation and child care expenses incurred to be present in a classroom are sometimes overlooked or discounted. These costs can keep some of the intended beneficiaries of a program from participating and thus from having access to work.

On the other hand, design elements that allow training to be integrated with work, so that individuals can earn income while they learn, or that allow for skills assessment through demonstration, can overcome some of these challenges. The Houston partnership, for example, took an earn-and-learn approach in developing its workforce strategy for industrial construction.

<sup>23</sup> For more information about the New York City and Prince George's County, Maryland, CTWP partnerships' work, visit <http://www.aspenwsi.org/communities-that-work/overview/>.



The fourth question to ask before developing a credential is the following: ***Will training that does not result in a credential address the current need?*** Partners in New York City found that nannies appreciated and would participate in opportunities to build their skills. As they explored the value of credentialing, the New York City partners learned that workers and employers believe that training and skill building have the potential to improve the quality of service for the employer, the care received by the child, and the satisfaction of the worker (who likely has a less stressful and more satisfying work experience when he or she feels able to perform the job competently), but that the creation of a credential might lead to the idea that it is a requirement. This could be counterproductive to the goal of offering opportunities for continued skill development for nannies who are already working. Neither employers nor workers viewed the achievement of a credential as necessary to encourage workers to participate and improve their skills.

The final consideration for a credentialing strategy is to think not only about entry-level workers or job seekers who may need skills to enter a new field, but also about the needs of middle-skill workers, supervisors, and managers who may need to add to their skill sets as business conditions change. The fifth question relates to this consideration: ***For which level of employee in the industry would a credential be most useful?*** Again, the experience of the Prince George's County partnership is instructive. The construction of stormwater management projects has the potential to create many jobs for residents, and a number of community partners have been keen to work with the county to train job seekers. As the process of designing and implementing the many stormwater management projects has unfolded, partners have learned that they first need to prepare local minority- and women-owned small businesses in the methods of stormwater abatement so that they can compete successfully for construction projects and keep work in the region. In this case, a training or certification program might be better targeted toward supervisors and managers in small companies, rather than toward unemployed job seekers. This strategy requires a different approach than traditional preemployment training strategies, which often require trainees to participate during normal working hours and use job placement as a primary measure of success. In the case of Prince George's County, the alternative approach needs to be clearly adapted to working people and schedules, and the main student interest may be in how a training certification can help a company win contracts and grow – an outcome that many workforce training providers, who are under pressure to place people in jobs, would not be rewarded for. Recognizing and resolving these tensions among partners is critical so that training resources can support both business growth and job creation as well as job access.



## Action Steps for Applying This Strategy in Your Region

*As you consider this strategy for your region, explore the following action steps:*

- Determine if a credential program related to the targeted skill development needs already exists in your region. Ask questions to learn about industry knowledge relating to the program and what value it places on the credential. Probe your employer partners to explore whether they may be expressing a need for a credential as a proxy for other skills or experiences they require of their workers.
- Ask questions to learn about workers' experiences with the credential. Try to obtain information about how many students are pursuing it and completing it, as well as information that would help you understand whether completers gain employment that requires the skills they learned.
- Engage in discussion with business and education providers about how an existing credential program determined to be valuable to business and workers might be expanded to increase enrollment and what issues this might entail. If businesses do not consider that an existing credential program to prepare graduates for employment in their industry meets their needs, try to learn (in very specific terms) why this is the case.
- Learn when community college-based credential programs undergo formal review. Most regions have a regular review schedule, and this is a good time to provide input on issues related to curriculum, instructors, teaching methods, equipment needs, and so forth that you learn through your research.
- Ask questions of businesses, workers, and leaders of community-based organizations that will help you understand whether requiring a new credential might create barriers to the labor market for specific groups of workers.
- Determine with your business and education partners if a new credential is needed to address an identified workforce skills gap or if a shorter-term training program would be sufficient.
- If a credential is the right route, conduct more research to determine how it should be designed to best fit the people who want to earn it. Consider the design, timing, cost, and length of the program; how completers demonstrate competence (i.e., written exam, completion of a program, or competency-based); and the design of supportive elements that could be necessary to ensure workers are successful (e.g., child care, transportation).
- Consider how credentials programs (either existing or new) incorporate strategies that help students make connections to employment, potentially through work-based learn-and-learn approaches such as internships or apprenticeships.





## SECTION 4

# BEYOND JOB-SPECIFIC SKILLS: ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING THE TALENT PIPELINE

The nature of work is changing, and many workers need to learn new skills in order to succeed in today's world of work. But for regions considering how to support workers seeking to learn and apply new skills, some complementary efforts may be needed.

Effectively reaching and connecting untapped sources of labor to work requires understanding the full range of barriers that individuals face, as well as expanding how the responsibility for talent pipeline development is considered. Because the types of resources and actions needed to help businesses build and maintain a qualified, stable workforce go beyond what the public sector can reasonably be expected to supply, engaging business in creative thinking about approaches to address its workforce challenges is the only approach that has the potential to succeed at any scale or over time in changing labor market conditions.

Organizations with expertise in identifying individuals' barriers to obtaining and retaining employment can be critical partners in helping surface challenges and identify needs and potential resources and solutions. Businesses also have a critical perspective on how these issues play out at work, what they mean in terms of business expense, and how businesses can contribute to a shared solution. Partnerships that bring employers together with workforce and community-based organization leaders can both ensure that limited public resources are combined and deployed in ways that are not duplicative, and maximize deployment of local workforce talent.

This section highlights two plays based on Communities that Work Partnership experiences. The first play explores the role of human services in helping people manage their lives and support successful transition to work. Many people struggle with limited resources, and sometimes a minor amount of assistance with child care, living expenses, or other issues can make a major difference in a person's ability to learn and connect to work successfully. Regions that offer training opportunities but do not go the extra mile to make sure that these skills can actually be connected to companies that will value them may be leaving pools of talent untapped.

The second play explores the issue of the changing economy and the rise of independent work. For many workers, this means needing not only skills upgrades to remain relevant, but also a variety of business skills to keep themselves working and build a sustainable career.

In both of these plays, we highlight the need for an integrated approach that pulls ideas from many different actors to address a critical workforce need and move business, workers, and the regional economy forward.



## HUMAN SERVICE STRATEGIES MAY BE KEY TO UNLOCKING UNTAPPED TALENT

### The Strategy

Workforce skills are an essential component of employment success, and most talent development strategies understandably focus on helping individuals build skills and qualify for jobs. In some cases, however, strategies to help workers build skills might not be enough to develop effective talent pipelines. Transportation challenges, lack of access to affordable child care, and other barriers can keep skilled workers from bringing their talents to work. Workers who have experienced unemployment or who are new to the workforce frequently have little in the way of savings or personal support networks that can provide support. Without a financial cushion or friends or family who can help, a seemingly minor life event such as a brief illness, a flat tire, an increase in bus fare, or a change in school schedule can easily derail an individual's transition to work. Thus many workers who come from poor communities may not be able to manage a setback and retain a new job. Helping businesses recognize that the workforce they want to access may have broader needs than skills development is an important step toward developing talent pipeline strategies that have the potential to meet the needs of both businesses and local community residents.



### Example: Houston Communities that Work Partnership

Many community leaders seeking to connect local residents to good jobs recognize the challenges that low-income workers and job seekers face in managing transportation, housing, child care, and other basic expenses. However, these issues are usually seen as something to be addressed by social services agencies, rather than discussed with employers and dealt with in the context of a workforce strategy. The Communities that Work Partnership in Houston,<sup>24</sup> however, took a different approach. As described in the “Use Workforce Prototyping” play earlier in this publication, UpSkill Houston, a business-led workforce effort focused on training Houstonians for careers in industries critical to the region's economy, developed a prototype workforce approach to address talent pipeline needs for a large industrial construction firm.

Training was of course a key component of preparing new workers for unfamiliar work, but in order to successfully bring in the local workers they sought, the partners recognized the need for additional strategies. They combined public and nonprofit resources together with employer resources in a complementary way to develop a new, successful talent pipeline. The workforce agency used its resources and community-based networks to quickly recruit and screen residents to find those who were a good fit for the opportunity. The United Way THRIVE Workforce Connector was engaged to integrate financial coaching and counseling into the program to help trainees manage their income and make financial plans for saving to build a financial cushion for emergencies. In addition, the United Way brought connections to a collaborative network of nonprofits that could

<sup>24</sup> The Communities that Work Partnership in Houston included the Greater Houston Partnership (a leading business organization in Houston and home to the UpSkill Houston initiative), the United Way of Greater Houston, San Jacinto College, and Gulf Coast Workforce Solutions.



offer personal counseling and emergency assistance with a variety of needs as the participants progressed through the four months of integrated training and work.

The result was an approach that offered not only high-quality training, but also necessary income and access to emergency supports, which helped with both training and, importantly for the employer, employment retention. The focus on financial skills development is hoped to position the trainees for long-term success.



### **Example: Prince George's County, Maryland Communities that Work Partnership**

In Prince George's County, Maryland, the Clean Water Partnership has a goal of connecting county residents, in particular unemployed young adult and formerly incarcerated residents, with jobs that are being created as the county makes a significant investment in building the infrastructure needed to protect the Chesapeake Bay from pollutants in stormwater runoff. Initially, partners considered building a training program, perhaps in collaboration with the local community college, to teach the skills needed for the jobs created by local businesses contracted to do abatement projects. However, in working with community groups, partners have learned that assistance with challenges that keep residents from being work-ready may be more critical than training for many of the new construction laborer jobs. For example, workers need help to purchase work boots and appropriate clothing, to access transportation to and from job sites, and to access health care services.

Although skills training may be useful for workers who seek higher-level employment in abatement work, there appears to be demand for large numbers of new workers who are fit for general labor and can be trained on the job. Requirements for technical training could, in fact, present a new barrier to individuals who lack the language, literacy, and numeracy skills or the financial resources to persist and succeed in an unpaid classroom-based program. Developing a partnership that includes employers who are specific about work requirements and community partners who articulate the challenges residents might face in succeeding in new work has been key to developing and implementing an effective workforce development strategy.

The county is currently working to estimate the number and types of jobs that will be created as the infrastructure projects roll out, as well as the timing of these projects, so that they can phase and scale an appropriate workforce strategy. The county is also considering how to address the issues that keep residents from obtaining and retaining employment. For example, while it is now better understood among project partners that many returning citizens lose access to medical care and prescription medicines when they leave prison, partners have not yet found a community partner or funding source that can help fill this gap so that formerly incarcerated individuals can maintain their health and connect to and retain work. Challenges in finding resources for these types of supports are common to many communities, but recognizing and communicating about the challenge among project partners who are interested in the success of the effort is a first step toward finding a solution.



## Action Steps for Applying This Strategy in Your Region

*As you consider this strategy for your region, think about the following action steps:*

- Ask questions to learn from businesses, in very specific terms, about their interest in expanding their talent pipeline to include populations they might be unfamiliar with or have had limited success employing in the past.
- Provide a forum for understanding the different motivations of partners as an important first step toward developing a shared agenda based on realistic expectations about contributions necessary to develop effective talent pipeline solutions.
- Work with community-based organization leaders to develop an understanding of non-skill-related factors that affect new workers' performance and retention.
- Talk with business partners about the challenges they have with workers. Try to take a “deep dive” with them to surface what might be root causes of these challenges. For example, a common problem such as poor attendance or punctuality by a new worker could be the result of a number of issues, including something as simple as misalignment of work start times with public transportation schedules.
- As you discuss these types of challenges, discuss whether there are factors that businesses might play a role in addressing. Determine whether there are other community actors who could be involved in designing and implementing solutions. Explore the types of resources that are available in your region to finance solutions.
- While public and community-based leaders have a strong interest in promoting employment of local residents, keep in mind that developing a stable and qualified workforce is ultimately a business problem. Therefore, solutions that involve public investment should be designed not only with an eye to how they help promote opportunity for local residents, but also with a focus on helping businesses understand how and why they should contribute.
- It is important to help businesses understand and articulate costs related to managing their workforce. Activities related to managing employee turnover, such as recruitment and training, have financial costs, but they also affect productivity. This is the context within which businesses consider the potential benefits of investing in workforce development strategies.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Detailed information and tools to guide discussion with business leaders about the costs associated with their workforce challenges and potential value of workforce services are available at <http://www.aspenwsi.org/research-resources/value-to-business/>.





## NAVIGATING TODAY'S LABOR MARKET: EQUIPPING WORKERS TO MANAGE THEIR WORK LIVES IN A CHANGING WORLD OF WORK

### The Strategy

In addition to equipping workers with the specific skills they need to succeed in a job, workforce development strategies should also help workers build the skills they need to both find a job and build relationships and professional networks that will help them maintain employment. Important labor market navigation skills vary depending on the industry or occupation that is the particular focus of a workforce strategy. For example, in construction employment, workers frequently move from job to job and may also have periods of unemployment between jobs. In response, thoughtful workforce development strategies include services designed to teach participants how to understand the different hiring processes construction firms may use, how to build good relationships within the context and culture of a construction job site, and strategies for managing income variability. These skills are important to a construction worker's ability to maintain employment. Similarly, initiatives focused on health care jobs or IT jobs will provide guidance about how to find jobs, maintain employment, and build a work life in those industries. Given that we no longer live in a world in which an individual will spend most of his or her working life with one company, helping workers develop their capacity to not only find a job but also find subsequent jobs is an important part of a regional workforce strategy.

While labor market navigation skills have been growing in importance for the past several decades, recent growth in alternative employment arrangements are elevating the importance of these skills. On-demand or 1099 employment is a growing segment of the American labor market and is changing the way millions of Americans work. Estimates vary widely, but recent research by economists Alan Krueger and Larry Katz reports that 15.8 percent of the workforce is made up of contingent workers such as contract workers, freelancers, and workers at on-call or temporary staffing agencies.<sup>26</sup> Recognizing the growing importance of this segment of the nation's workforce, the US Bureau of Labor Statistics announced that it will include a focus on contingent workers in a 2017 survey and has hopes to continue gathering data about contingent workers beyond 2017.<sup>27</sup>

Given that contingent, 1099, and freelance workers in the United States do not have what we traditionally think of as an employer, they need skills that are more often associated with entrepreneurship to find and maintain work. For example, workers need to be able to promote their services and market themselves, explaining to potential employers how they can provide value. They need to understand tax obligations and reporting requirements, and other legal issues that are relevant to this type of work. They also need to understand how to predict costs and predict revenues, and how to negotiate a price for their work.

<sup>26</sup> Alan Krueger and Larry Katz, "The Rise of Alternative Work Arrangements in the United States, 2005-2015" (paper accessed August 2016 at [https://krueger.princeton.edu/sites/default/files/akrueger/files/katz\\_krueger\\_cws\\_-\\_march\\_29\\_20165.pdf](https://krueger.princeton.edu/sites/default/files/akrueger/files/katz_krueger_cws_-_march_29_20165.pdf)).

<sup>27</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics Commissioner, "Why This Counts: Measuring 'Gig' Work," announcement on Bureau of Labor Statistics website, March 3, 2016, <http://blogs.bls.gov/blog/tag/contingent-workers/>.

The incidence of freelance or independent work varies across industries, with some industries having a particularly high reliance on this form of work. In the Communities that Work Partnership, two sites focused on industries that have large numbers of independent workers. In San Francisco, the partners focused on IT-related employment, much of which is done by independent workers. In New York City, partners focused on caregivers, and specifically nannies, who frequently work independently for private individuals. While these occupations are very different in terms of the technical skills and the conditions of the work, some of the labor market navigation skills, and the need to be able to manage oneself as a business, are similar.

If employment trends continue, more and more workers will fall into the category of contract, contingent, or 1099 employment in the future. In addition, as workers change jobs, some may go in and out of contingent work arrangements. Likewise, businesses may increasingly rely on contract or contingent workers for certain kinds of work. Thus, while the need for labor market navigation and entrepreneurial skills among freelance workers may seem particularly acute, some of the same skills could have relevance for a broader set of workers.



### **Example: San Francisco Bay Area Communities that Work Partnership**

In the San Francisco Bay Area, IT firms rely heavily on freelancers, and leaders of the public workforce system are collaborating with community-based organizations and business to explore how the public sector can adapt to meet critical skill development needs. The issue of skills development for freelancers working in the IT sector is the focus for the Communities that Work Partnership in the San Francisco Bay Area, and partners engaged in this work include BAVC, the San Francisco Office of Economic and Workforce Development, Silicon Valley/San Jose Workforce Investment Board, and CBS Interactive.

As described above in the play “Include Local Workers’ Perspectives in Data-Gathering Efforts,” CTWP partners in the Bay Area conducted extensive data gathering with both freelancers and the companies that hire freelancers, and they learned that most freelancers understand that they need business skills but report feeling ill-prepared to be a business owner and would like help with branding, networking, and maintaining consistent work. Freelancers also report being uncomfortable with their knowledge of the legal “ins and outs” needed for negotiating contracts.

Bay Area partners have also learned that the go-to tools of the public workforce system, such as preemployment job search assistance, Individual Training Accounts for skill development, and incumbent worker training services designed for traditional W-2 employees, do not fit the work situations of freelance workers. However, the partners’ experiences with a pilot project they conducted with a flexible Department of Labor Workforce Innovation Fund (WIF) grant are instructive.

Work funded by the WIF included workshops developed by BAVC on technical, networking, and business skills, and facilitating informal networking events through a Nerd Underground program that offered freelancers opportunities to build new contacts, meet collaborators, learn about local business opportunities, and share information about managing freelance self-employment. Based on these experiences, Bay Area partners are developing short “boot camp”-like training workshops that will be easier to fund within



the current public funding structure. In addition, they are considering reengineering job placement, retention, and advancement services such as job fairs, job developer referrals, and alumni support groups (that are allowable under current guidelines) into the type of informal networking events that freelancers have noted are helpful. The pilot experience was important for learning about how to design services specifically to meet the new kinds of labor market navigation needs of workers without a formal employer. It offered useful insights for how some of those elements can be sustained within current funding guidelines while also offering policymakers insights about what skills workers might need to find and maintain employment in a changing world of work.



### **Example: New York City Communities that Work Partnership**

In New York City, a partnership made up of leaders from the National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA); the National Employment Law Project; and Hand in Hand, a national network of employers of domestic workers, is building workforce development strategies to improve job quality for nannies who work in private households.

CTWP collaboration began when these organizations worked together to advocate for passage of the New York State Domestic Workers Bill of Rights, which granted domestic workers the right to overtime pay, a day of rest every seven days, and other labor protections from which they had previously been excluded. Although the law was key in advancing public understanding of the importance of quality working conditions for caregivers, partners recognized that enforcement of the regulations would be quite challenging. Given that dynamic, the partners focused on workforce development-based approaches that support both nannies and their employers in achieving greater clarity on employer and worker responsibilities and improving both job quality and the quality of child care delivered.

Partners worked to provide training and tools to nannies to work toward these goals. Included in the training were workshops NDWA developed that help nannies develop skills in negotiating their employment terms and working conditions. These sessions also help nannies develop the confidence and communication skills they need to articulate their value to employers. NDWA provides tools such as sample contracts to nannies, and it helps them understand the laws that regulate their employment. While these activities are geared toward helping nannies, they also help employers, many of whom report feeling awkward when discussing employment terms and are also unclear about what rules apply to this employment situation. In fact, an important goal of Hand in Hand's work is to develop strategies to promote understanding among employers of domestic workers that they are in fact employers and their homes are workplaces.

While understanding caregiving techniques and how to improve as a caregiver is also supported by the partners in New York City, CTWP partners report that the skills of negotiating employment terms and communicating the value of the services one provides have been important to developing successful employment situations for care workers in New York.



## Action Steps for Applying This Strategy in Your Region

*As you consider this strategy for your region, explore the following action steps:*

- Identify the strategies that workers in your region will need to get a first job and a subsequent job, and to maintain employment in a target industry. To what degree will workers need to market their skills and abilities on a regular basis? What do they need to know about setting prices or legal issues that may need to be managed?
- Get a sense of the number and type of contingent or contract workers you have in your community. Develop a forum or mechanism through which these workers can express what they need from workforce and economic development service providers.
- Identify organizations with expertise in working with entrepreneurs in your region. Consider partnering with a small business development or microenterprise organization to design workshops, tools, and services geared toward contract workers' needs.
- Think broadly about the types of skills that might help a contract worker. In addition to business management skills, they need to develop financial management skills and access to appropriate financial products so they can manage income volatility, as well as training to manage the requirements associated with estimating taxes, preparing tax returns, and understanding reporting requirements associated with being a 1099 worker.
- Engage businesses that contract with 1099 workers in your region. Identify any concerns they may have regarding this workforce and engage them in building solutions that work for their businesses and the freelance workforce.



## FINAL THOUGHTS

The purpose of this playbook is to advance a field of practice – developing talent pipelines that support economic development of regions, industries, and people. This playbook compiles distinct strategies, or plays, based on the experiences of seven regional teams working to align and advance their economic development and workforce development efforts as part of the Communities that Work Partnership. The seven teams include relatively new collaborations, as well as groups that have been working together for a number of years. Our economy and society are changing, and with those changes come new and different challenges that workforce and economic development organizations must respond to. Thus the plays are reflective of the experience in an evolving and changing field of practice.

The work of these local partnerships could not be more important. Building the conditions for companies and regional economies to thrive and connecting people to work that provides an opportunity to connect to the economy and build a successful livelihood are the central concerns of many leaders across the country, who are worried about the current economic state. The issues are often discussed nationally, but the work of these partnerships highlights the specific details and challenges that must be dealt with locally to create the conditions to move ahead.

The work of these partnerships does not address every issue or challenge that will arise in building successful workforce development and economic development partnerships, but rather offers experiences that can be built on as the work moves forward and continues to respond to a changing economic and social landscape. We hope you use the playbook to advance your own local work toward creating a strong, prosperous economy that works for everyone, and that you find the plays supportive of your efforts. If you have experiences to share that would benefit others engaged in this important work, we are eager to hear about them. You can contact us at [wsj@aspeninst.org](mailto:wsj@aspeninst.org).





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