

Public-Private Partnerships for Workforce Development

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November 7, 2019



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Roundtable Overview

In May 2019, the Regional Economic Studies Institute (RESI) of Towson University released research on disparities across Maryland. These findings illustrated the widely different realities that residents experience from one neighborhood to the next. The disparities in Maryland's workforce are the result of many interconnected factors. RESI convened roundtable discussions in fall 2019 to discuss four of these issues:

1. Education
2. Food insecurity
3. Access to employment
4. Transportation

Participants in the session focused on access to employment represented private business, local nonprofits, and county agencies. Participants identified a number of issues keeping Baltimore area residents from realizing their full potential. For example, participants were concerned that workers often felt stuck in a given career, when there are employment shortages and immediate needs in a number of industries. This concern was not limited to the access to employment roundtable; participants in the education roundtable worried that students were not aware of the full breadth of available jobs and the level of education necessary to obtain those jobs. Participants in these roundtables stressed that state agencies and county governments should focus on communicating the available jobs in the region, and what skills workers need to be successful.

"People get pigeonholed into very specific careers and are not ever made to think beyond that."

-Roundtable Participant

However, counties typically have limited budgets to work with to implement job training programs, and in some cases are heavily reliant on a few funding streams. One solution participants noted was the adoption of more Public-Private Partnership (P3) programs, which allow local governments to partner with area businesses. Participants wished they had more examples of successful programs from across the country to emulate. As a result, RESI conducted a review of successful workforce development-related P3 programs. Ultimately, RESI selected four programs to examine in case studies. These particular programs were chosen because of their relatively high success rates, as well as their ability to reach a sizeable and diverse population. These programs are a unique sample that align the technical needs of private industry with the personal and professional development needs of the potential workforce.

The Center for Workforce Innovation—Atlanta, GA

Housed at Atlanta Technical College, the Center for Workforce Innovation (CWI) is a newly implemented jobs training program. CWI seeks to provide outcomes-based education for job fields that are in high demand. The program is the result of a Public-Private Partnership between the City of Atlanta, Atlanta Committee for Progress, and Atlanta Technical College.

Public-Private Partnerships for Workforce Development RESI of Towson University



Five corporations based in Atlanta, including Delta Airlines, The Home Depot, SunTrust, Intercontinental Exchange, and Georgia Power, have provided initial funding of \$2 million towards hiring faculty and staff, maintaining facilities, providing course materials, and offering auxiliary services.

Additional financial support has been received from McKinsey & Co. and other Atlanta-based institutions. Nonprofit organizations Year Up Atlanta and Per Scholas are also involved to help ensure that CWI students obtain meaningful outcomes from the program.¹

Students accepted into the program can choose between three tracks: Aviation (Aircraft Technical Skills), Information Technology (IT Support, Networking, Cloud Technologies), and Skilled Trades (Carpentry, Electrical, Plumbing, HVAC, Welding). At the start of the Fall 2019 semester, 200 inaugural students were enrolled in the program.²

In Atlanta, anchor employers support workforce training tailored specifically to their needs; local government and nonprofits help individuals succeed in these educational programs.

This P3 combines expert instructors, a tuition forgiveness program, and auxiliary services, such as transportation vouchers. Additionally, WorkSource Atlanta, the City of Atlanta's workforce development agency, will provide tuition assistance of up to \$10,000 to qualified students who have previously been laid off from their jobs.³ All students will also be eligible for extra funding through the HOPE Career Grant.⁴

The curriculum offers support from industry leaders, including on-campus career development coaching and apprenticeships/internships for students. CWI's objective is to give students the necessary skills that make them competitive hires, while also gaining them exposure to potential jobs and careers post-graduation. Many of the available programs can be completed

¹ Pamela Miller, "Atlanta establishes Center for Workforce Innovation," *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, November 28, 2018, accessed October 21, 2019, <https://www.ajc.com/news/local/atlanta-establishes-center-for-workforce-innovation/ha6U90ezE6CvCBZwu2hdyl>.

² Atlanta Technical College, "Center for Workforce Innovation," accessed October 21, 2019, <https://atlantatech.edu/centerforworkforceinnovation>.

³ City of Atlanta, "Education and Training Services," accessed October 31, 2019, <https://www.atlantaga.gov/government/mayor-s-office/worksource-atlanta/education-and-training-services>.

⁴ Marshall Latimore, "Atlanta Mayor, Atlanta Technical College launch job readiness pilot program at Center for Workforce Innovation," *The Atlanta Voice*, August 16, 2019, accessed October 21, 2019, <https://www.theatlantavoices.com/articles/curating-the-path-to-success-atlanta-mayor-atlanta-technical-college-launch-job-readiness-pilot-program-center-for-workforce-innovation>.

within two semesters, making CWI an efficient and affordable way for students to gain professional experience in a variety of technical fields.

CWI hopes to provide underprivileged students with the opportunity to earn a higher wage, while also becoming part of a sustainable economic ecosystem. Through public and private funding, companies are investing to help develop a pool of specially trained talent that can find employment in key business sectors.

Though CWI is a new program with its first students recently enrolled, its emphasis on providing job seekers with the skills that Atlanta's private-sector anchor institutions need is an important component of the P3.

Project QUEST—San Antonio, TX

For over a quarter of a century, Project QUEST (Quality Employment Through Skills Training) has been offering educational and financial support to those who need it most. Based in San Antonio, Project QUEST is a nationally recognized workforce development initiative that implements training programs to help students find professional, high-paying jobs. To date, over 7,700 individuals have participated in the program, which boasts an 89 percent completion rate.⁵



Project QUEST is a 501c(3) nonprofit organization that is funded by the City of San Antonio, Bexar County, the State of Texas, and the U.S. Department of Labor. In addition to these local, state, and federal backers, Project QUEST depends on the support of dozens of individual and corporate donors. Project QUEST pinpoints the most in-demand occupations in collaboration with Workforce Solutions Alamo, the City of San Antonio, and Bexar County Economic Development Departments, as well as local business leaders. They have a wide-reaching recruitment drive through churches, libraries, public schools, and community organizations.⁶

Project QUEST provides significant wraparound support services, ranging from guidance counseling to utility assistance and childcare, as participants work towards in-demand employment.

First and foremost, Project QUEST is a jobs-driven program. Their training focuses on careers that generate family wages and advancement opportunities. They offer placement in college-based studies, most of which are aimed toward earning an associate degree through accredited institutions. Partner schools include Alamo College, the University of Texas Health Science Center, and the Baptist School of Health Professions.⁷

⁵ Project QUEST, "Our Mission," accessed October 21, 2019, <https://www.questsa.org>.

⁶ Project QUEST, "Investors," accessed October 21, 2019, <https://www.questsa.org/invest-2019>.

⁷ Project QUEST, "Skills Training," accessed October 21, 2019, <https://www.questsa.org/skills-training>.

A wide variety of programs are offered, including Manufacturing, Logistics & Trades (aircraft mechanic, construction technology, electrical trades), Healthcare (dental hygienist, licensed vocational nurse, physical therapy assistant), and Information Technology (computer programming, cybersecurity, network administrator).⁸ For all of these tracks, Project QUEST offers financial aid to help cover educational expenses. Their mission is to enroll students who are interested in furthering their technical education but lack the financial resources to do so.

Upon admission, all participants receive individualized case management, which includes guidance and career counseling. A QUEST Prep supplemental education program is offered for those applicants who score below the college level on placement exams. Weekly VIP (Vision, Initiative, and Perseverance) meetings offer work readiness skills training, such as time management, financial planning, and goal setting. Additional support services include:

- Childcare,
- Transportation allowances, and
- Utility assistance.

After completing the program, which generally takes one to two years, graduates are given job search and placement assistance in coordination with Project QUEST's established employer partners. After securing a job in their chosen field, graduates are required to work for at least 18 months.

On average, those who complete their professional training through Project QUEST experience a 90 percent placement rate. Their wages increase by 230 percent, with graduates earning an average \$22.38 hourly wage.

The benefits of this P3 are clearly reciprocal. When a single QUEST graduate finds sustainable employment, community partners are rewarded with a skilled and dedicated workforce, ultimately boosting the wider regional economy and narrowing the wage gap.

Johns Hopkins Project REACH – Baltimore, MD



Established in 2004, Johns Hopkins Project REACH (Resources and Education Advancement of Careers at Hopkins) is a local example of internal workforce development made possible by a Public-Private Partnership. Project REACH was federally funded by a grant awarded under the President's High Growth Job Training Initiative, which was implemented by the U.S. Department of Labor. The \$3 million grant was matched with

⁸ Project QUEST, "Skills Training."

\$3.3 million from Johns Hopkins Health System of Baltimore, Maryland (JHHS).⁹

This career acceleration program was designed to help current Hopkins employees gain the necessary skills and knowledge to fill critically understaffed healthcare positions within the organization. The program was operated by the Office of Strategic Workforce Planning at Hopkins, in association with the Johns Hopkins Medicine Strategic People Priority. Between 2004 and 2006, over 400 employees entered into the program.¹⁰

Current Hopkins Health System employees were eligible to apply. Most of those accepted into the program were entry level incumbent workers. In particular, Project REACH was designed to support employees who had limited work scheduling flexibility, and who had specific interest in upgrading their skills to acquire advanced positions in occupations with chronic staff shortages.

Project REACH offered five distinct training programs:

- 1) Retention and growth of at-risk workers.
- 2) GED and diploma preparation.
- 3) Retraining of employees in declining jobs for emerging jobs.
- 4) High-potential worker assessment and skills training.
- 5) Upgrade training of incumbent workers into critical skills shortage positions.

Through a process of intake, assessment, and career planning, applicants were screened and placed in appropriate tracks. Educators, managers, and recruiters in various departments at Hopkins collaborated to assist candidates in finding the best path. Another major partner was the Mayor's Office of Employment Development (MOED), which provided the project with two assessment facilitators, who helped plan and conduct the initial assessment of potential candidates. Assessments were used to highlight employment readiness, occupational skills, and barriers to employment success.¹¹

Upon acceptance into the program, career coaches were assigned to each participant. These coaches enabled participants to understand how their pre-existing skills and interests could fit into a new career. Besides providing academic and career guidance, coaches assisted students with finding additional support services to overcome non-academic barriers, such as childcare and transportation. Frequent and individualized coaching sessions were cited as paramount to the program's success.¹²

⁹ Johns Hopkins Health System, "Project REACH 11th Quarterly Report on Activities and Outcomes," accessed October 22, 2019, https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/human_resources/_docs/education_programs/project_reach_qr11_report.pdf.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Johns Hopkins Health System, "Project REACH Assessments," accessed October 22, 2019, https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/human_resources/education_programs/employees/job_training_project_reach/retrospective/assessments.html.

¹² Ibid.

For those applicants who were found to lack educational experience during assessment, a Skills Enhancement Program was offered. This provided courses in math, reading, computers, and college prep. Additionally, accelerated GED courses were an option for applicants without high school degrees. Besides fully funded tuition, a Salary Release program provided opportunities for full-time employees to maintain their wages and benefits, while working part-time (24 hours) in their respective departments. Their remaining time (16 hours) was dedicated to attending classes.¹³

The Salary Release component of Project REACH allows current Johns Hopkins Health System employees to maintain their current income level while they gain skills for higher paying jobs in roles with critical shortages at Hopkins.

Those who completed the program saw average annual wage gains of \$9,800-\$11,300.¹⁴ Graduates often found themselves working in their desired field with better hours and higher pay. For JHHS, the benefits were multifold as well. The organization was able to engage, develop, and ultimately retain their best employees. Critically understaffed departments were also alleviated by the program, which pinpointed and subsequently trained internal hires to fit those open positions. In filling these urgently needed vacancies, the entire community has been provided with a wider-reaching and specialized healthcare workforce.

Project REACH is largely employer-driven in terms of technical training. Additionally, the schedule flexibility and salary release aspects of the program are important to its success.¹⁵ Local government expertise in workforce development helped to strengthen the program in identifying which participants had the most potential for progress.

Colorado Workforce Development Council—State of Colorado



Colorado Workforce
Development Council

Since its inception, the Colorado Workforce Development Council (CWDC) has been connecting job seekers to employers throughout the state. Established under the federal Workforce Investment Act of 1998, CWDC's mission is to close the skills gap between in-demand jobs and prospective employees. Combining state, national, and local industry partners, CWDC assists a broad

range of individuals, including students, workers, and employers.

¹³ Johns Hopkins Health System, "Project REACH Assessments."

¹⁴ Johns Hopkins Health System, "Project REACH 11th Quarterly Report on Activities and Outcomes," accessed October 22, 2019,

https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/human_resources/_docs/education_programs/project_reach_qr11_report.pdf.

¹⁵ Johns Hopkins Health System, "Salary Release and Backfill," accessed October 25, 2019,

https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/human_resources/education_programs/employees/job_training_project_reach/retrospective/pre-training.html.

To date, over 750 businesses have partnered with CWDC. These partnerships are divided into sectors, such as industry, retail, manufacturing, and IT, as well as food and agriculture.¹⁶ These businesses provide internships, apprenticeships, and other forms of learning to increase the pipeline of trained employees. CWDC keeps these industries firmly at the center of operations—they design their own agenda and establish their own workforce needs.

A variety of public partners, such as universities, trade schools, and other community and government organizations, focus their educational and training programs to address the demands of private partners. The goal is to provide these businesses with a skilled workforce, who in turn are given access to meaningful employment, resulting in a sustainable economic ecosystem.

CWDC utilizes state resources and data on employment trends to help match employers with their potential workforce. They also assist job seekers with technical and soft skills necessary for the workforce.

CWDC acts as a central hub to convene these partners at the local, regional, and state level. CWDC is able to help leverage resources, while removing communication and regulation barriers that could stymie job growth. CWDC has accomplished this in part by establishing dozens of Workforce Centers statewide. These Workforce Centers offer a host of free services to employers and job seekers alike, providing job listings, computer/internet access, career counseling

and training, recruitment and referral services, and tax credits for employers.¹⁷ CWDC also operates TalentFOUND, a development network comprising every system, partner, program, and initiative that offer educational and jobs training services.¹⁸

The CWDC model is unique in that it is a competency-based approach to educating, training, and hiring employees. This model helps to ensure that participating individuals gain the skills that are needed in the private sector.

The Colorado Department of Labor and Employment pinpointed a rise in the skills gap of Colorado's workforce—jobs anticipated to emerge in the coming years were expected to go unfilled due to a deficiency in skilled labor.¹⁹ CWDC has addressed this skills gap through their Public-Private Partnerships. Partners not only determine what jobs are needed, but also the necessary skill sets for employees. CWDC then facilitates educating, training, and hiring based on that knowledge. Doing so opens up new, untapped talent pools, closing the skills gap and maintaining a highly trained, diverse workforce in-state.

¹⁶ Colorado Workforce Development Council, "Sector Partnerships," accessed October 22, 2019, <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cwdc/sector-partnerships>.

¹⁷ Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, "Workforce Centers," accessed October 22, 2019, <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdle/wfc>.

¹⁸ Colorado Workforce Development Council, "TalentFOUND," accessed October 22, 2019, <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cwdc/talentfound>.

¹⁹ Colorado Workforce Development Council, "Career Pathways," accessed October 22, 2019, <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cwdc/career-pathways>.

Conclusion

In examining the role of Public-Private Partnerships in workforce development, several trends emerge. Particularly when conducting retraining programs, the availability of non-academic support services is crucial for the success of program participants. These barriers, such as childcare, transportation, and inflexible work schedules, are a priority to ensure that participants are able to commit to the training program and are able to succeed.

After enrollment in a program, academic obstacles can also prove challenging. Many participants enter programs with a lack of formal educational or technological experience, putting them at an immediate disadvantage. However, providing proper advising and counseling, coupled with academic prep services, can have a large impact on student success.

Successful P3 workforce development programs can feature:

- **Industry involvement for specific job skills,**
- **Holistic wraparound services,**
- **The ability for participants to continue to support themselves while in the program,**
- **Centralized avenues to connect job seekers with employers, and**
- **Training in technical and soft skills.**

Another common thread evident in these case studies is the partnership of multiple entities. A P3 can certainly contain only two partners, but a diverse workforce has diverse needs. Besides offering greater financial support, having more partners provides a wider array of services and resources. The P3s examined in this brief have engaged a range of partners, from large anchor institutions to small businesses. Large anchor institutions are able to provide more funding and resources, offer a more reliable hiring base, and bring instant name recognition to a new effort. However, small businesses can support a broader range of industries. Understanding how the available partners will match up with existing job openings is critical when launching a new P3.

Local governments can contribute to successful P3s by providing knowledge of local trends and assistance with program administration. While the private sector knows the skills it needs in its workforce, local governments' role in P3 can be in helping to provide these skills, convening educational/training opportunities with those who need them, or providing wraparound services that help individuals find success.

State governments can provide funding, resources or programming from state higher educational institutions, and insight on the state economy. In addition, state governments can create or expand databases (such as Maryland Workforce Exchange) on existing programs so that citizens and employers can be connected.

Finally, the organizations in these case studies offer a variety of programming for participants. Those who enroll can choose from numerous tracks—healthcare, manufacturing, IT, etc. Allowing the freedom of choice for individuals who are seeking to advance their careers can help balance the skills gap across fields. Building off a person's previous skills and interests can result in higher program completion rates. Ultimately, if a P3 can produce mutual and sustainable benefits for all parties involved, it is a worthwhile investment for everyone.

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