



Strong Talent Drives Strong Economies

The Role of Talent, Innovation and Collaboration

It's no secret that a strong workforce, equipped with relevant skills for the jobs of today and tomorrow, is critical to developing a vibrant economy. But ensuring workers have the right skills is easier said than done. It's a hurdle many state and local leaders must overcome to position their communities to thrive now and in the future.

Economic woes of the last several years have put even greater pressure on government agencies and workforce investment boards to solve these challenges and to work together to implement workforce initiatives that spur economic development.

The keys to success lie in strategic thinking, innovation and collaboration among education, government and the private sector, but no single group holds the key to prosperity.

Recently, Governing hosted a workforce and economic development summit in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, to discuss the challenges that come with developing a robust workforce that is armed with the skills to ensure a strong local economy. This and other meetings led to the development of this issue brief, which provides examples of programs, innovative uses of technology and successful collaboration.

Aligning Workforce and Economic Development Strategies

Simple fact: Workers need to have the right skills and experience for the jobs offered by employers. This definition of workforce alignment seems obvious. But at the point where open jobs meet potential applicants, that alignment doesn't always come easily.

An innovative and collaborative effort is essential to help serve the needs of local employers and to attract new business to a community. "It's about marketing job opportunities in your own backyard and about changing perceptions on the skills and demand in the jobs available," says Bob Lanter, executive director of the California Workforce Association.

The Arizona Commerce Authority presents an innovative example of a collaborative development initiative. As the state economic development agency, the Authority leverages real-time labor market information (LMI) and analytics. These tools and training are provided to local economic and workforce development entities, including community colleges, universities, workforce development boards and economic development departments. This sharing of information and resources is key to keeping the state's economic development strategy moving forward.

Using Real-Time Labor Market Information for Better Decision-Making

Effective alignment of workforce talent with employers' needs isn't possible without real-time LMI and collaboration. Good data helps job seekers find work more quickly, including jobs that better match their skills. It also helps employers gain intelligence about what talent is out there and available for them to tap.

Good data also establishes common knowledge that helps local higher education institutions, workforce boards and economic development agencies collaborate more

effectively in developing targeted training and placement programs. By combining online job listings with online data collection tools and analytics, LMI is available immediately, enabling public and private sectors to make better, more educated decisions.

The New York City Labor Market Information Service (NYCLMIS), a nonprofit research organization that tracks real-time data on hiring patterns and occupational trends to help align workforce and education efforts within the city, uses labor data in new ways. In monthly job reports, NYCLMIS identifies top employers and occupational profiles that help departments and schools in the City University of New York (CUNY) system, local workforce boards, government agencies and nonprofits respond quickly to new job trends and training needs.

In the past, organizations such as NYCLMIS have relied on traditional LMI for their reporting and research needs. However, in this era of instant, digital information, traditional LMI can't track constant market changes and provide the data to help answer critical questions. These organizations need to know what is happening now, not just what is being reported annually or quarterly.

“Economic and workforce development requires a continuum of efforts and passing the torch over time, because nothing meaningful can get accomplished in just one election cycle.”

— *Mick Cornett, Mayor, Oklahoma City*

For CUNY, NYCLMIS produces monthly real-time job reports, which include top employers based on number of advertisers and percentage of job ads based on sector. They are also able to provide occupational profiles, which can identify hiring difficulty, volume of jobs according to city and even the most common credentials required. CUNY leverages this information to target job and program development efforts. To better prepare students for job success, NYCLMIS supports educational institutions like CUNY by identifying new fields or course curriculum to aid those students in finding jobs after graduation.

CUNY benefits from this data by helping students with job placement and anticipating decreased demand for current training programs, as well as emerging demand for training in new skills and certifications. “We recognize that creating or changing a training program can take time,” says Ronnie Kauder of NYCLMIS. “But it is important for educational institutions to align with labor market demands, even if the effort takes a year or two.”¹

Sparking Innovation by Using Online Technologies and Tools

Taking advantage of innovative online technologies to connect workers and employers is a new emphasis in many workforce development efforts. By doing so, local workforce projects can “ensure that opportunities are created by design, that they don't just happen incidentally,” says Richard Verches, executive director of the Los Angeles County Workforce Investment Board.

Online technologies also improve efficiency and produce cost and time savings for employer recruiting. Organizations can utilize online technologies and tools to help deliver better placement by matching candidate skillsets with available job opportunities and develop internal and external talent networks.

The State of Ohio Office of Workforce Development operates OhioMeansJobs.com, a statewide, online job matching system. The website allows employers to search for resumes, post jobs, communicate with applicants and learn about job incentive programs. For job seekers, the site provides extensive job listings and search functionality, as well as information about training and recruitment events.

Filling Skills Gaps

It is well known that employers often say they are ready to hire more workers — if only they could find qualified applicants. Oftentimes, there is a large disconnect between jobs that are available and the skills of the people who could potentially fill those jobs.

Broadening Advanced Technological Education Connections (BATEC), a technology education nonprofit, is one organization that is working to address these challenges through collaborative research and discussions. Located in Boston, BATEC is conducting a research study of four metro areas to identify entry-level jobs and long-term career pathways for students graduating with associate's degrees in IT disciplines to help solve the skills gaps.



**Richard Verches,
Executive Director of
the Los Angeles County
Workforce Investment
Board, speaks at the
Governing event.**

Another activity is mining the data in job descriptions to identify opportunities for discussions with employers about talent needs in a particular career area. Results will be used by many colleges and employers to discuss new directions for training programs and how to bring the match between jobs and degrees into reality. The eventual goal is to encourage employers to look to the community colleges as a source of workforce-ready talent.

“Local employers and students benefit when the educational institution is empowered with the current profile of needed technical skills and professional competencies,” says BATEC Director Lou Piazza.²

Developing Talent Pipelines

Building a resilient economy means focusing on every aspect of the talent pipeline. This starts with early childhood education; continues with strong high school programs in science, technology, engineering and math; and leads to good community college programs for vocation-specific training or a four-year college program.

In some jurisdictions, workforce boards have facilitated partnerships between community colleges and businesses to align training programs with the specific skills and knowledge needed by employers to compete effectively in the global economy.

The coordinated efforts of local school systems and higher education institutions with employers is a vital component to addressing challenges facing many communities: How can you have sustainable economic development if young people feel they need to leave the area to find a job?

One nonprofit organization in Michigan, Kalamazoo Promise, answers this question with an innovative approach. Kalamazoo Promise pays college tuition and fees for all eligible students who graduate from the Kalamazoo Public School District. The scholarship covers up to a four-year bachelor’s degree at selected colleges and universities in Michigan. The program has served nearly 4,000 students, 25 percent of whom have stayed in the Kalamazoo area after graduation.

“We need to get all players of the community involved in the talent pipeline, including educators, families, policymakers and community members,” says Kalamazoo Promise Executive Director Emeritus Dr. Janice Brown. “No one player is more important than another and no one is solely responsible. All are responsible and accountable to the community at large.”

Employing and Training Veterans

With more than one million service members expected to leave the military by 2018, veteran employment will continue to be a significant issue across the country. Communities



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that develop strategies for employing more veterans (and in many cases, their spouses) will see the long-term benefit of a strong, dedicated and talented workforce that is recognized as an advantage by existing businesses and those attracted through economic development efforts.

In an annual survey of veterans, 73 percent felt the skills they obtained while in the military are relevant to civilian careers, yet 65 percent also feel that hiring managers and recruiters don’t understand their skills.³ Many military service members land back in civilian life with great discipline and determination instilled by the military, but perhaps no more formal education than a high school diploma. They have many questions: Will I be able to find a good job? How can I translate my military skills into a civilian career? How can I make the best use of my education benefits under the GI Bill?

Employers have questions too: How do we evaluate military experience in light of our current job needs? How do we reach out to veterans when we’re recruiting and how do we retain them once hired?

One innovative online tool can help link military skills with those needed by employers in the workforce. A military skills translator, such as the tool available free of charge to veterans on Military.com, converts military job codes and experience into civilian skills, occupations and jobs — making it easier for veterans to identify the best career opportunities for their skills.



Bob Lanter, Executive Director of the California Workforce Association, speaks at the Governing event.

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Although many well-established veteran employment and training programs exist today, traditional funding category limitations have often fragmented their ability to deliver services efficiently. “Employers and veterans may be eligible for programs focused on economic development, workforce development, veterans and social services,” says David Hunn, executive director of the Northern Virginia Workforce Investment Board.⁴ “State and local governments that administer these multiple types of veterans employment and training programs in a holistic way can make service access efficient and seamless for both the veterans and prospective employers.”

A new veteran employment initiative led by the Northern Virginia Technology Council (NVTC) helps connect veterans to local information technology jobs, as well as internships, mentorships, and training and certification programs. The NVTC veteran employment initiative encompasses partnerships with private employers, veteran service organizations, regional colleges and universities, the local workforce board and other nonprofit organizations.

The NVTC veteran employment initiative also helps its member companies develop appropriate processes and activities for recruiting and retaining veterans as employees. This program includes an exclusive online community

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where veterans can search for open jobs at NVTC member companies, while employers can search a resume database of more than 800,000 veterans.

Innovation is Key to Solving Workforce and Economic Development Issues

Of the successful examples discussed at the Governing summit and other meetings, several key themes emerged: innovative thinking, the use of technology and a collaborative spirit. Aligning workforce and economic development efforts isn’t easy, but it’s critical for communities to develop prosperity. By looking to the many programs, resources and models developed in other jurisdictions, local stakeholders can find productive, long-term ways to continue the dialogue; define locally relevant strategies and take the actions that help employers, workers and communities flourish.

Resources

1. Veterans Talent Index: www.about-monster.com/content/veterans-talent-index
2. Military Skills Translator: www.military.com/veteran-jobs/skills-translator/
3. Regional Labor Market Insights Reports: <http://monstergovernmentolutions.com/markets-solutions/state-local/products/real-time-labor-intelligence-sl>
4. Arizona Commerce Authority: www.azcommerce.com
5. New York City Labor Market Information Service: www.urbanresearch.org/about-cur-components/new-york-city-labor-market-information-service-nyclmis
6. Northeast Indiana Fund: www.neindiana.com/about-us/northeast-indiana-fund
7. Ohio Means Jobs: <http://ohiomeansjobs.com/omj/>
8. Kalamazoo Promise: www.kalamazoopromise.com
9. BATEC: <http://batec.org>
10. Northern Virginia Technology Council: <http://nvtc.org/index.php>
11. Strong Talent Drives Strong Economies: www.governing.com/events/webinars/Strong-Talent-Drives-Strong-Economies-A-Webinar-on-Workforce-and-Economic-Development.html

Endnotes

1. Response to questions provided by email, October 31, 2013
2. Response to questions provided by email, October 29, 2013
3. Veterans Talent Index, Monster Worldwide and Military.com, www.about-monster.com/sites/default/files/MonsterVeteranTalentIndex_Nov2013.pdf
4. Interview with David Hunn, October 25, 2013

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