**COLLEGE EXCELLENCE PROGRAM**

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Developing Responsive Employer Partnerships: Lessons from the Aspen Workforce Playbook

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Who We Are

The Aspen Institute's College Excellence Program aims to advance higher education practices, policies, and leadership in ways that help institutions of higher education make the choices that matter most to improving student outcomes in four areas:

Completion

Equity

Labor Market

Learning

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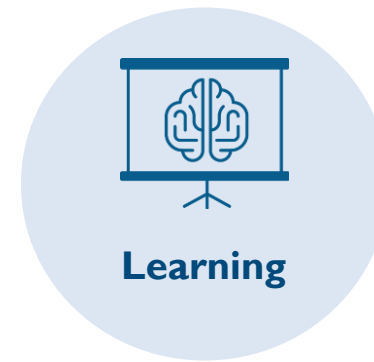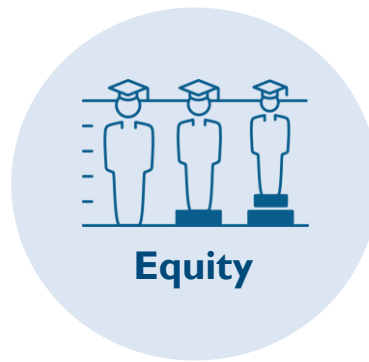
Why do community college student graduation and employment outcomes matter so much for our communities?

For the nation?

Many People Remain Left Out of the Broader Economy

4.6 million youth between the ages of 16 and 24 are disconnected from work and school.

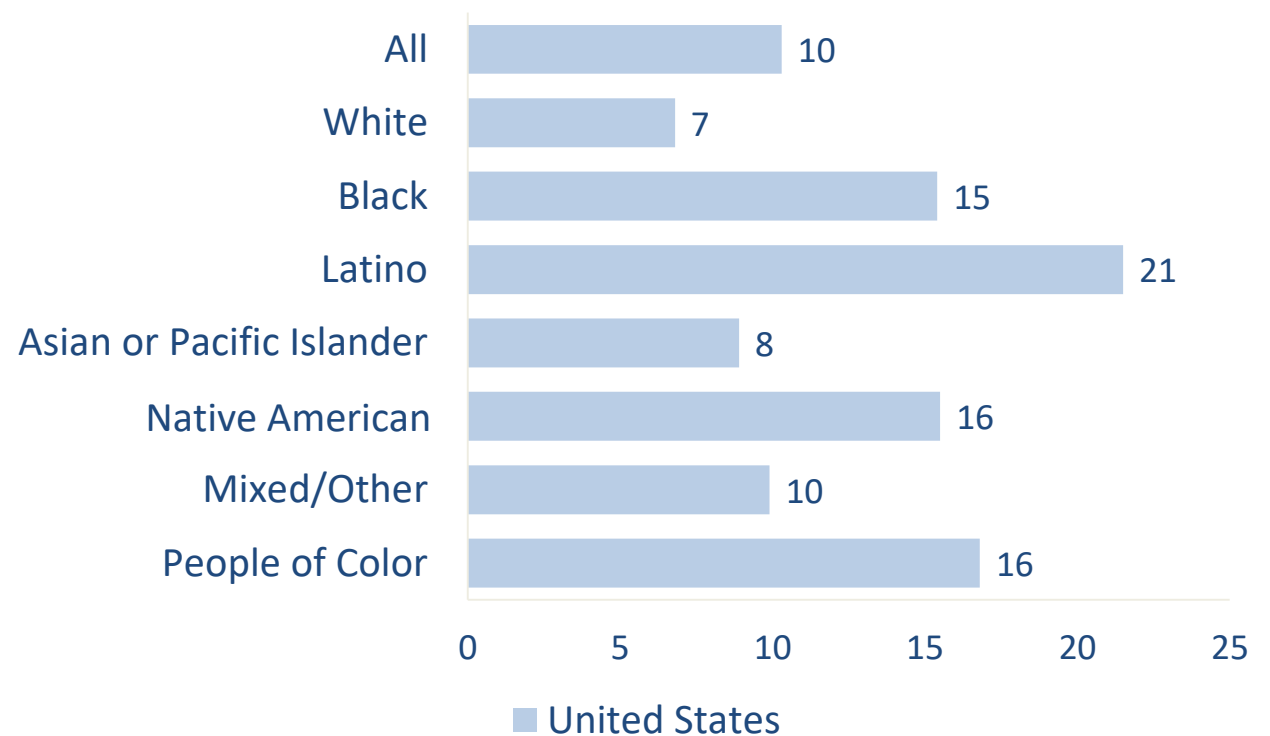Source: Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions, 2018

27 million adults 24 – 66 who are not working or in school, including "discouraged workers" who would like a job but have stopped looking.

Source: American Community Survey, 2017

Working Poor by Race/Ethnicity (%)
200% of federal poverty line, 2017

Race/Ethnicity	United States
All	10
White	7
Black	15
Latino	21
Asian or Pacific Islander	8
Native American	16
Mixed/Other	10
People of Color	16

■ United States

Source: National Equity Atlas, 2017

And There is a Mismatch Between Employer Needs and the Opportunity Community Colleges Provide

The number of good jobs for workers with associate's degrees **grew by 83%** between 1991 and 2016.

"We need more workers, but we already work with two community colleges, each with their own systems and quirks, and **we can't duplicate our investments endlessly**…"
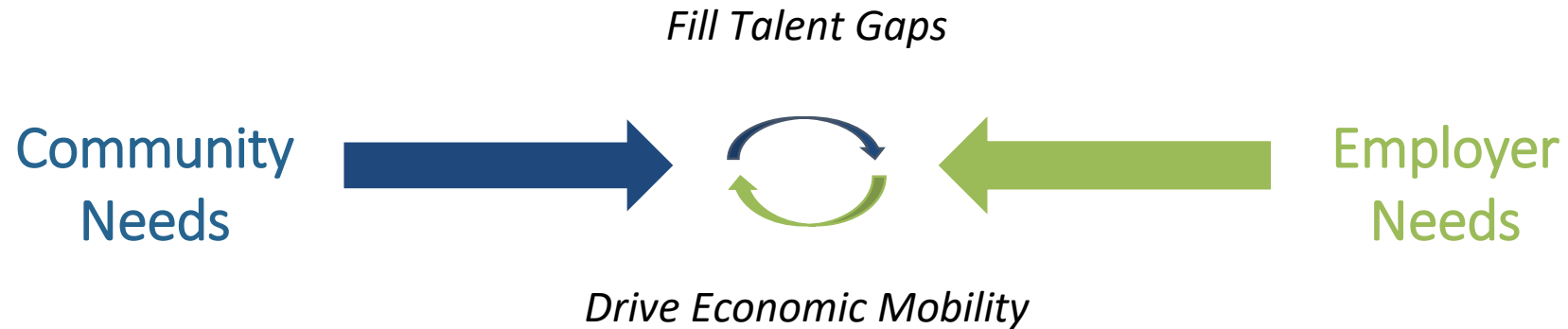
Yet more than **half** of all workers without a BA don't have good jobs.

"We hear their asks, but **the college budget is tight**. We simply can't expand capacity without significant resources from employers…"

Source: Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce, 2017.

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Community Colleges Are Essential to Economic Mobility and Talent Development

Fill Talent Gaps

Community Needs → ⟳ ← **Employer Needs**
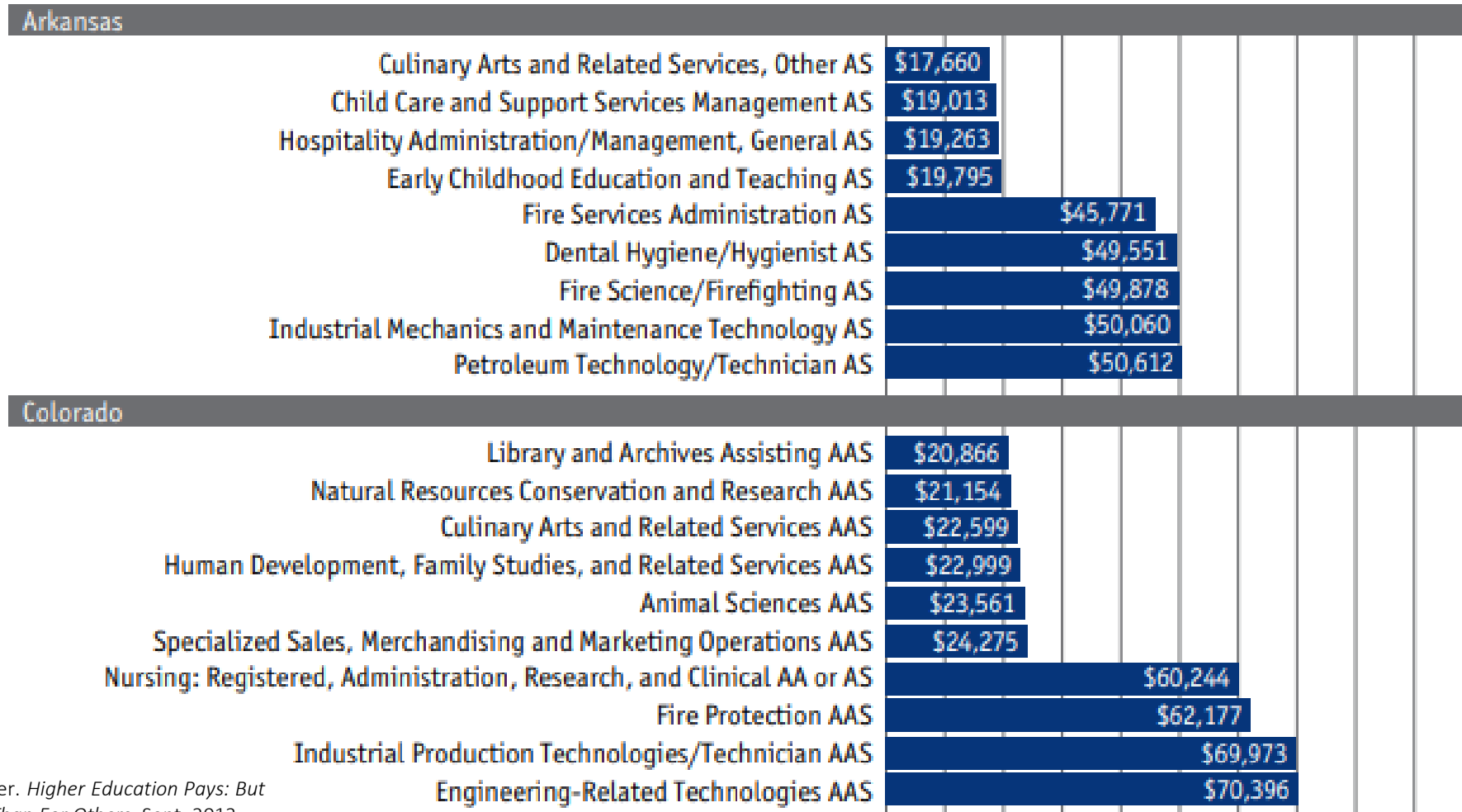
Drive Economic Mobility

~50% of **students of color** start at community colleges

~44% of all **low-income students** start at community college

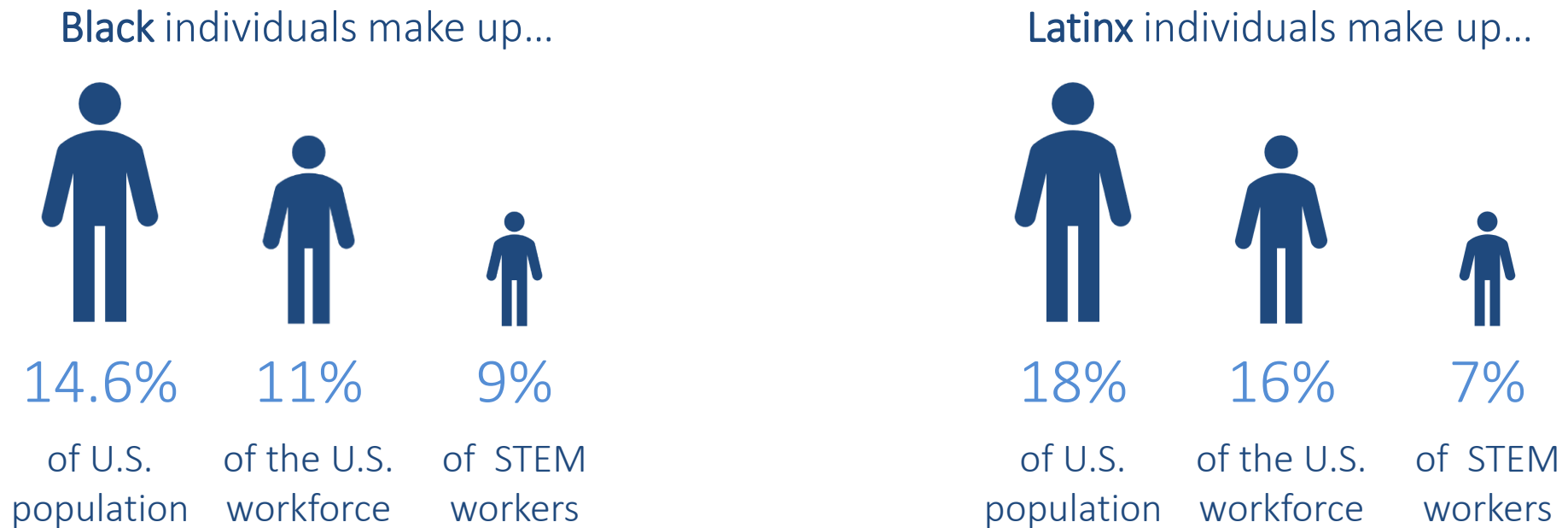**10.3M** students, or **~45% of all undergraduates**, are enrolled in public community colleges

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But Not Every Credential Leads to Strong Outcomes

Arkansas

Program	Value
Culinary Arts and Related Services, Other AS	$17,660
Child Care and Support Services Management AS	$19,013
Hospitality Administration/Management, General AS	$19,263
Early Childhood Education and Teaching AS	$19,795
Fire Services Administration AS	$45,771
Dental Hygiene/Hygienist AS	$49,551
Fire Science/Firefighting AS	$49,878
Industrial Mechanics and Maintenance Technology AS	$50,060
Petroleum Technology/Technician AS	$50,612

Colorado

Program	Value
Library and Archives Assisting AAS	$20,866
Natural Resources Conservation and Research AAS	$21,154
Culinary Arts and Related Services AAS	$22,599
Human Development, Family Studies, and Related Services AAS	$22,999
Animal Sciences AAS	$23,561
Specialized Sales, Merchandising and Marketing Operations AAS	$24,275
Nursing: Registered, Administration, Research, and Clinical AA or AS	$60,244
Fire Protection AAS	$62,177
Industrial Production Technologies/Technician AAS	$69,973
Engineering-Related Technologies AAS	$70,396

Source: Mark Schneider. *Higher Education Pays: But a Lot More for Some Than For Others.* Sept. 2013.

And Many Populations Continue to Be Underrepresented in Good Jobs, and the STEM Programs that Lead to Them

People of color are underrepresented in STEM majors that lead to high median wages.

Black individuals make up…

14.6%
of U.S. population

11%
of the U.S. workforce

9%
of STEM workers

Latinx individuals make up…

18%
of U.S. population

16%
of the U.S. workforce

7%
of STEM workers

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2017 Report, Pew Research Center

What Went Into *The Workforce Playbook*?

Data Analysis

- Labor market outcomes, including earnings and employment
- Regional context
- Institutional data

Literature

- Expert testimonials
- Case studies
- Prior research

Interviews

- College leaders
- Students
- Employers
- Policymakers
- CBOs
- K-12/4-year partners

The Workforce Playbook Domains

1. **Advance a vision** for talent development and economic mobility

2. **Deliver high-quality programs** aligned to regional needs

3. **Support students' career goals** from pre-matriculation through post-graduation

4. Build responsive, mutually beneficial **employer partnerships**

Build Responsive, Mutually Beneficial Employer Partnerships

Build responsive, mutually beneficial **employer partnerships** centered on honest feedback and reciprocal support

- Target and engage employers based on their goals, common purpose, and honest, data informed conversations

- Create inviting on-ramps for engagement

- Establish business-friendly systems to track and communicate with partners

- Convene industries to scale for broader/regional impact

Success Stories: Employers Partner With Innovative CCs to Develop Talent

Northern Virginia
Building BSN Programs

- High churn rates and growing nursing vacancies impede quality healthcare

- NOVA President convenes educators, hospital heads; calls for expansion of BSN pathways

- 5 institutions and 6 health systems increase annual number of graduates by 70%

Rochester, NY
Just-In-Time Solution

- Data shows multiple small businesses have need for injection molding

- Monroe VP Todd Oldham convenes 11 companies, expresses that "training 15-20 is more efficient than training 1-2"

- Created 120-hr injection molding program based on just-in-time demand; 30 new hires to-date

Orlando, FL
A College Program On Wheels

- Valencia leaders noted need for advanced construction skills, but students were far from campus

- Valencia officials partnered with construction companies to develop series of short courses

- Acquired two mobile units to deliver training on concrete finishing, heavy equipment operations, etc. Trained 761 students in 8 locations

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However, Not All Community Colleges and Partnerships Excel

There are several **common pain points** in community college – employer partnerships.

Initial Outreach

Employers reach out to college leaders, only to be **re-directed multiple times**.

"I reached out to the Dean of the Business College and got the runaround. It's frustrating to figure out who the real decision makers are."

Partnership Initiation

Colleges hesitate to start new programs; employers become frustrated with colleges' lack of responsiveness

"We asked to develop an associates degree program, and got immediately into conversations about accreditation limitations ."

Ongoing Collaboration

Employers attend advisory board meetings but program graduates continue **to lack full spectrum of skills** needed for the job.

"We go to the 'bi-annual chicken dinner' and they talk at us about the program, and then we go home."

Scaling

Colleges and employers struggle to find and produce the **quantity of graduates** needed to fill regional workforce need.

"We just can't find enough people for these positions. With a lot of our employees retiring, it's a big issue."

Selecting and Engaging Employers

What Questions Do Colleges Need to Ask?

1

What is my regional economy and how is it changing?
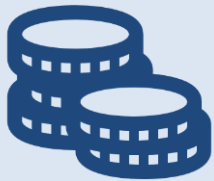
2

Who are my populations and how are they changing?

3

Is my institution aligned with the economy and populations?

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And What Should Colleges Consider in Potential Partners?

Who should you talk to?

- Leadership
- Human Resources
- Frontline Managers
- Recent Grads
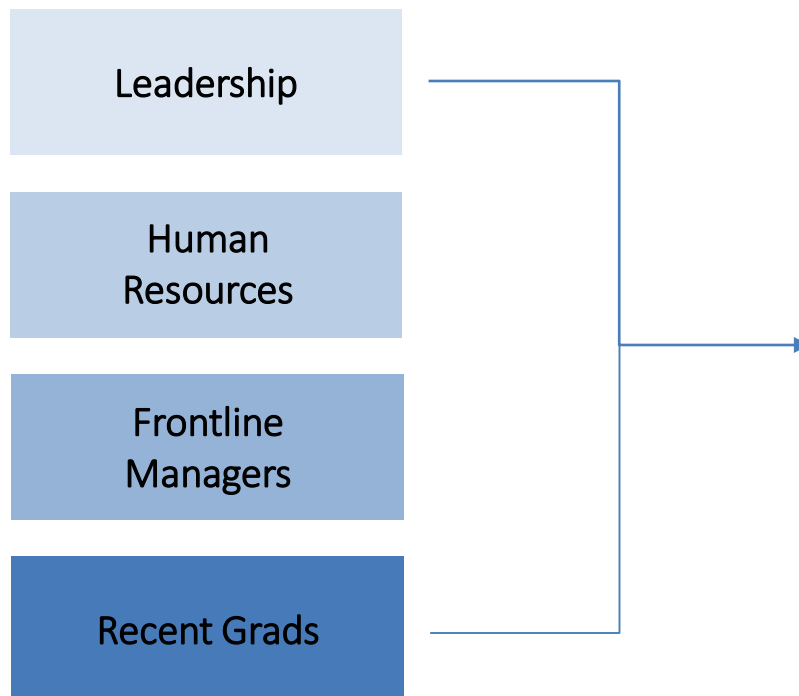
What should you ask?

- What are your goals? What talent capacities do you need for those goals?

- What are your biggest concerns or barriers to reaching those goals?

- What strategies are they currently using to solve for those issues?

- To what extent are those solutions working, and how do they know?

See Table 5 in
The Workforce Playbook

Key Metrics To Seek Out

- Gaps in skills & quantity of workers
- How long it takes to onboard/train employees

- Existing employer training costs
- Churn rates
- Recruitment costs and timelines

Develop Feedback Loops

Impactful Program Review

Timing: Conduct program reviews annually.

Participants: Include employer, faculty, and advisor perspectives.

Transparency: Create conditions for honest feedback by owning challenges and sharing data.

Data: Make disaggregated data easy to interpret for stakeholders. Include supply and demand across region (not just the institution).

Close the Loop: What indicators will show that decisions or actions have intended outcomes?

Mechanical Engineering Technologies

Leveraging Earnings Benchmarks at Monroe Community College

$35.97

Total Workforce Wages (represents 6,802 workers).

Class of 2011/12 Earnings

$25.36

$25: Self-sufficiency standard for 2 adults + 1 preschooler (Monroe County, NY)

Yr. 4: $27.04

Yr. 3: $20.55

$18: Self-sufficiency standard for 1 adult + 1 preschooler (Monroe County, NY)

$16.48

Yr. 2: $14.77

Yr. 1: $12.14

Hourly Wage

Median Hourly Compound Growth Rate: **30.6%**

n=14

Entry Level Wage 10th Percentile

Median Wage 50th Percentile

High Wage 90th Percentile

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Case Studies: Impactful Program Review

Valencia College

Intentionality and a Culture for Improvement
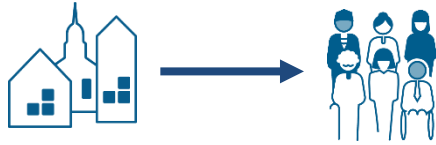
Intentional practices in program review improves course success rates

- **Annual cadence** with all relevant stakeholders involved

- **Honest dialogue** to address challenges and promote improvement; transparency of standardized outcomes data

- Resulted in more collaborative course sequencing and scheduling, capstone courses

Lake Area Technical College

Data Dashboard for Program Review
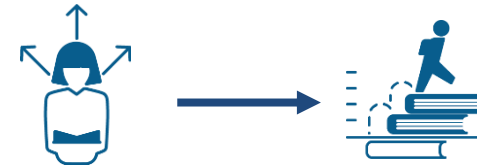
Using a dashboard to show trends and outcomes for both students and employers

- **Key metrics**: budget, capacity, enrollment, satisfaction of both students and employers

- **Both institution and employer** partners can assess whether the school is achieving its mission

- Clearly identify areas of strength, opportunity, and improvement

Sample Tool: Data Visualization at Lake Area Technical College
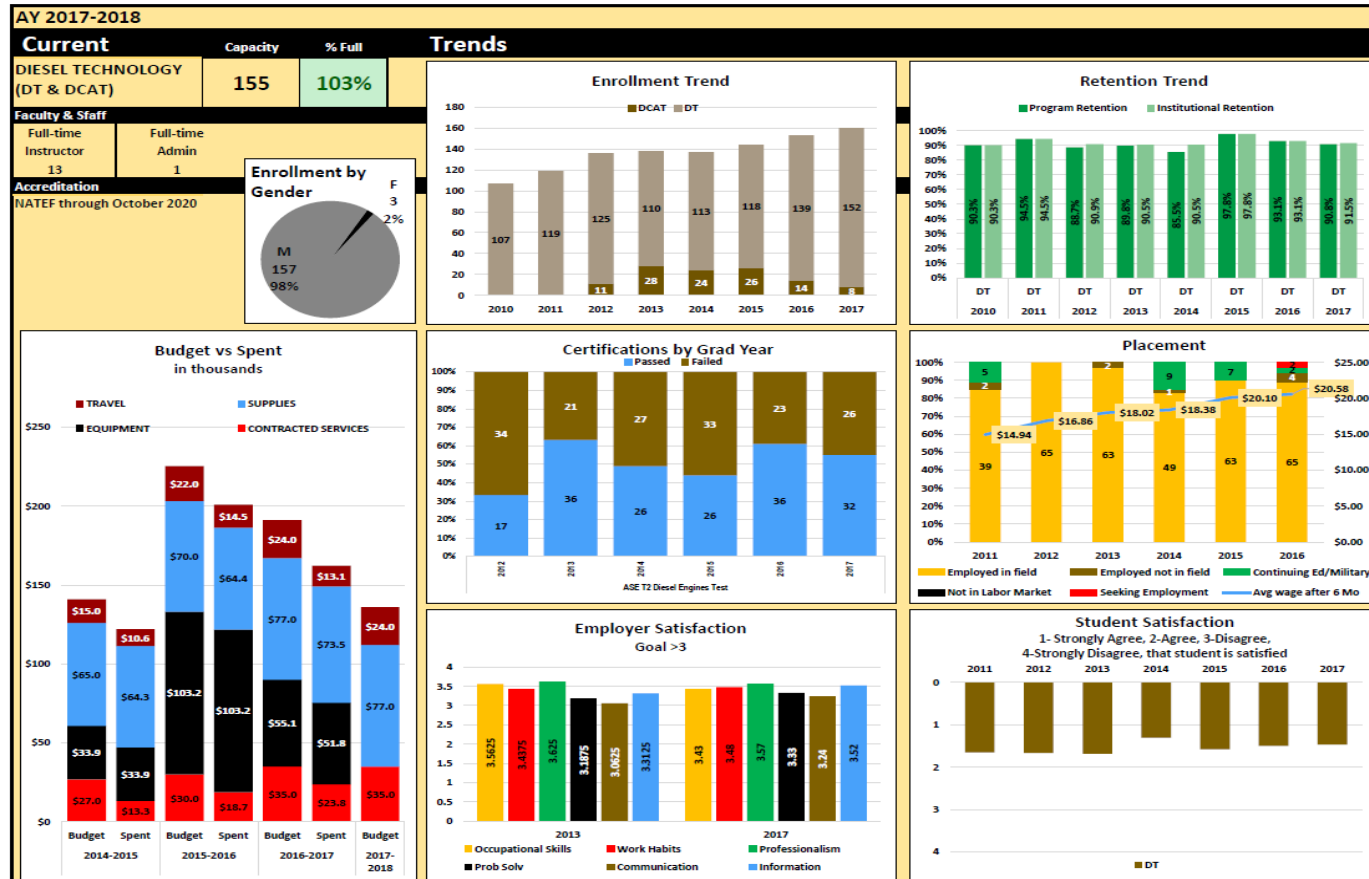
Transformative Advisory Board Meetings

Problem-solve: Use meeting time to discuss challenges and opportunities, not updates.

Participants: Include a diverse, rotating mix of attendees.

Follow-through: Keep advisors aware of key developments between meetings and engage with employer partners to ask if time has been well-spent.

Confidentiality: Create channels, like surveys and conversations outside of formal meetings, to glean sensitive information from advisors.

Available Talent: Initiate conversations with employers about the perspectives and priorities of diverse talent within the region.

Strengthening Feedback Loops

How do you ensure that conversations in advisory board meetings allow for open feedback?

At Lake Area Technical College, former president Deb Shephard noticed relationships between college program leads and industry advisory board members became **so close that honest feedback was difficult**…

… so she would **actively recruit new advisory board members** to introduce new voices in the conversation and allow for fresh, candid insights.

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Colleges Are Uniquely Positioned To Share Insights With Employers

"The difference between a good college partner and a great one is that while the good ones will listen and work with us to deliver solid skills training, the great ones actually **push us to be better**. They know things about the students and **see things within our own organization that we just don't**…"

"…It's not just about us giving them feedback about their program. They listen and give us feedback too."
— Kelley Maxwell, Global Learning, Caterpillar

Case Study: When Students Aren't Getting To Employers

Columbus State Community College and Honda North America

Developed Manufacturing Program

Columbus State and Honda formed a partnership based on:
- A demonstrated workforce need
- Honda's strong reputation
- Prospective students who seemed excited about the opportunity

Recognized That Students Weren't Getting in the Door

College representatives reviewed job postings and realized they listed that positions required a bachelor's degree.

"Why would a student choose to go into our associate's program if they are being told in the job posting that they need a B.A.?" – President David Harrison

Co-Created on Solution That Worked for Both Partners

- Honda and Columbus State amended the job postings to align with the position needs and program requirements.
- Recruitment for the program increased and both partners.

What They Did That Works

- Created honest, two-way feedback channels
- Proactively addressed challenges in the partnership
- Worked together to create a solution that addressed both partners' needs

Create Easy On-Ramps To Partnership

Case Study: Lake Area Provides A Menu of Options to Solve Business Problems

Wanted to market partnership opportunities to multiple regional employers…
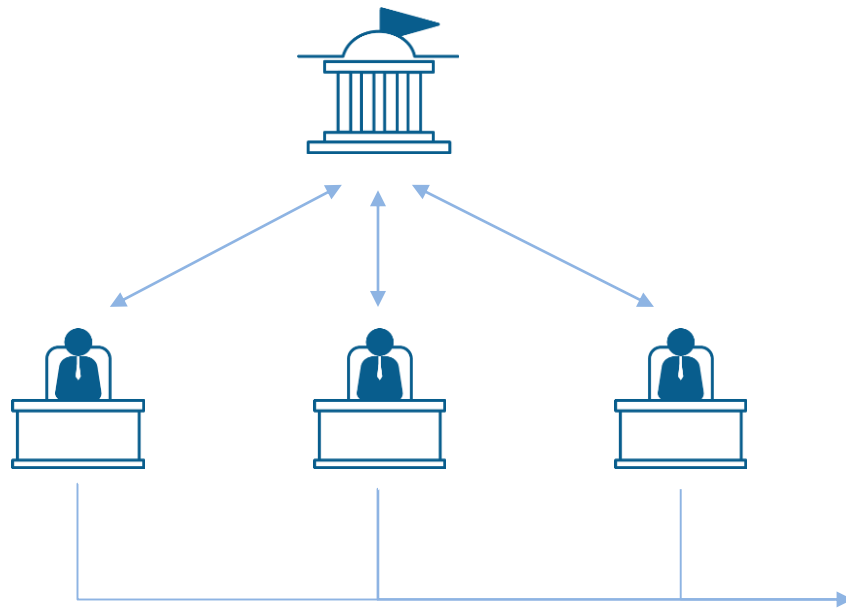
… And created a professional brochure that outlined challenges for local employers and potential solutions

THE SOLUTION

What employers can do to be proactive in creating/finding skilled employees:

1. **Develop relationships with Lake Area Tech students:**
   - Speak to classes about your business practices.
   - Participate in Lake Area Tech job/career fairs.
   - Hire Lake Area Tech students for part-time/summer employment or an internship.
   - Scholarship a student in exchange for employment after graduation.
   - BRAND your company through equipment donations.
   - Actively serve on Lake Area Tech Advisory Boards.
   - Consider joining the Business Partner Program or Build Dakota Scholarship Stretch the Million through Lake Area Tech Foundation.
   - Partner with Lake Area Tech on grant requests and implementation.

2. Work closely with Lake Area Tech Corporate Education to develop customized training to up-skill your current employees.

3. Analyze how best to present your business image and the skill sets your business needs.

4. Offer incentives for current employees to locate individuals who are willing to pursue selected degrees.

5. Offer workshops/open houses for K-12 teachers so they can see the work environment and hear about the important opportunities for young people.

6. Consider assisting in Dual Credit opportunities to expose students to Career and Technical Education.

Key Elements
- Includes multiple partnership options with varying **levels of commitment**
- Explains each option **succinctly**
- Presents options as helpful **suggestions** rather than a direct solicitation

Convene Industries and Partners for Scaled, Regional Impact

Case Study: Addressing a Changing Economy at Monroe Community College
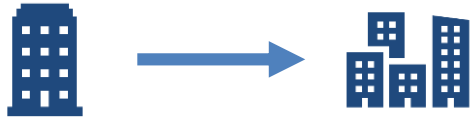
Regional economy moves from reliance on Kodak and Xerox to 97% of companies being small businesses with fewer than 100 employees; many workers laid off

Studied data to determine biggest industry clusters; convened employers by industry to supplement with qualitative input

Monroe VP Todd Oldham convened 11 companies with similar skills needs, expressed that "training 15-20 is more efficient than training 1-2"

Created 120-hour injection molding program based on just-in-time demand; 30 new hires (largely adults) to date; evolved into LadderzUp; now used to recruit other employers to area

Case Study: Sectoral Approaches Help Tackle Persistent Skills Gaps

When One Institution-One Employer Isn't Enough

For years, the Orlando region struggled to build a sufficient pipeline of nurses. Throughout the community, entities operated in competition with one another:

- **$1 One-Upmanship:** Short-staffed, hospitals attempted to out-bid one another for talent

- **Siloed Enrollment Battles:** Colleges independently lobbied individual hospitals for resources; tensions around "turf"

- **The Blame Game:** Employers blamed colleges for producing ~1000 fewer graduates than needed each year; Colleges blamed funding/employers for capacity constraints
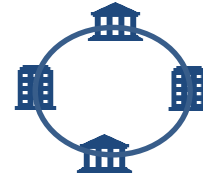
Leveraging an industry veteran to serve as a neutral moderator, colleges and all hospitals came together to collectively address the talent shortage:

- **Data-Driven Constituent Meetings**: Churn rates, wage trends, and historic and projected skill gap data helped convince stakeholders that a new approach was needed

- **Summit:** College presidents and hospitals CEOs gathered to discuss how to align curriculum and expand capacity

- **Continuous Collaboration:** Department heads and faculty continue to meet throughout the year, providing a forum to continue to build consensus around shared goals, share best practices

Goals & Progress

109% Since 2016, the Orlando region has **opened three additional post-licensure BSN programs**, representing capacity for a 109% increase in BSN admissions, or a total of 6,600 students, within the next five years.

Employers needed to understand what it takes for colleges to ramp up programs.

Colleges needed to understand how to frame partnership through a business perspective

Key Takeaways: Asking the Right Questions

Every employer relationship will have different demands, but there are several common questions you might ask:

- What data do you need to know?
- Where are there gaps or changing data?
- How might this be challenging for your college?

- What is the conversation you need to have?
- What partnerships might need to be brokered?
- How could your college serve as a solution provider?

- What strategy might you ultimately pursue?
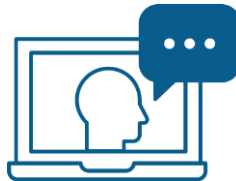- What is one next step you could take to implement this strategy?

Questions?

Thank You!

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