



# 10

## TEN STEPS to building talent

**Your community is hungry for good workers — employees who have the knowledge, skills, and abilities that economic growth demands. As a local leader, you have a choice: You can build your labor pool the way companies and communities often do — by poaching from competitors or recruiting from far and wide. Or you can cultivate the talent you need, right in your own back yard.**

**This guide can help you do that.**



**T**here are dozens of cities and regions across the nation that build their own talent quite well. Each is unique in its approach, but they all have two things in common. First, they're guided by local partnerships that work *systemically* — and work *together*. Second, they focus on increasing the number of workers who have earned a credential beyond the high school diploma.

These hubs of talent development build their workforces by creating new systems through which businesses, educational institutions, and civic groups constantly collaborate to boost education levels. These partnerships create flexible models of teaching and learning that work throughout an individual's lifetime and that truly serve today's students — a widely diverse group encompassing virtually all ages, ethnicities, income levels, and life experiences.

Another common feature is their commitment to social justice and racial equity. Essentially, they focus on increasing attainment among those who traditionally have been underrepresented in higher education, embracing them as the future of the workforce.

In short, there's nothing magical about these talent-building communities. Your city or region can be one, too — if you follow the 10 basic steps that are listed here.

Steps 1 and 2, mentioned earlier, come first: Create a partnership and focus on increasing education attainment in your region. After that, the steps aren't necessarily sequential. In fact, to be most effective, the remaining steps should occur simultaneously and continuously.

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### Create a cross-sector partnership committed to changing systems

"We can accomplish more together than we can alone." That simple philosophy demands a new way of thinking. Talent-building communities create strong systems for scaling successful work regardless of particular individuals, organizations, or funders. Your goal is not another new program or initiative; it is a fundamental redesign of the work.

To make that redesign effort as effective as possible, you must build a coalition of committed stakeholders. Typically, this partnership will include representatives of K-12 and higher education institutions and systems, employers, workforce-development entities, policy-makers, and philanthropic and civic organizations.

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### Focus on increasing education attainment

You won't develop the talent you need if you focus only on increasing education *access*; you must also commit to improving success — that is, attainment of a credential. Note that attainment includes more than traditional two- and four-year college degrees. Talent-building sites work to ensure that people can earn other kinds of credentials as well.

Begin by setting specific attainment goals tailored to your area and the needs of your students and employers. Make sure those goals are ambitious but achievable — and that they target the right groups of students. Data will show you where the greatest potential lies, and it should drive your efforts.

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### Develop flexible models of delivery

Now that you have committed to helping students and employees overcome barriers, your colleges, businesses, and civic groups must build new structures to help them do so. That means establishing clearer pathways to degrees and offering new modes of instruction, effective advising, and flexible schedules.

Programs must become more student-centered. In general, this means students must be given more assistance as they seek their credentials. For example: accelerated programs, credit for learning acquired on the job and in other nonacademic settings, and more and better developmental education.





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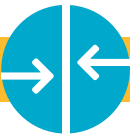


### Provide non-academic assistance

Educational success isn't limited to what happens in the classroom or lab. Students don't learn well when they are hungry or worried about child care or paying rent or where they are going to sleep. Local partnerships can help address these problems in a variety of ways. For instance, colleges can consider forgiving some student debt. Employers can alter their tuition-reimbursement policies so they provide the tuition funds up front — at the time of enrollment.

The fact is, any number of obstacles, small and large, keep students from starting and finishing a degree or certificate program. Seek out those obstacles and eliminate what you can.

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### Align employers and educators

To build talent, employers should work closely with their local colleges to make sure that programs and curriculum match workforce needs. Colleges must understand the labor market and vice versa. K-12 systems should communicate with colleges, and colleges must work with each other to improve student success and ease transfer.

This work often requires major systems change, but several clear steps can be taken, including easing the rules for transfer students, increasing opportunities for learning on the job, and aligning postsecondary and K-12 institutions.

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### Ensure that all efforts reflect a commitment to social justice and racial equity

The future of the American workforce is diverse. By midcentury, the majority of Americans will be nonwhite. Yet education attainment among students who are Black, Hispanic and Native American continue to lag significantly behind that of other demographic groups.

A key goal should be to specifically confront disparities in educational outcomes for students from these and other historically underserved and underrepresented populations, including low-income students and those from immigrant families. This isn't just the right thing to do, it's the only way to build a labor pool of the size and quality you need.



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### Test your ideas; fail fast to learn fast

To change systems, you want to learn about successes and failures quickly so that you can either scrap them or scale them up. This requires a disciplined — essentially scientific — approach. Think of these cycles as “Plan, Do, Study, Act.”

1. **Plan.** Collect data, define the problem specifically and design an intervention to test.
2. **Do.** Implement your change idea in a limited way under a finite timeline. Collect data as you do so.
3. **Study.** Analyze the data you have collected during the implementation stage.
4. **Act.** Tweak the change idea, adopt it, scale it, or start all over, depending on what you have found.

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### Ensure sustainability

Grants from philanthropic organizations can be a great catalyst for local action, but no amount of external support can substitute for the ongoing commitment of your coalition partners. The systemic change required to build an effective talent-development engine can't really be bought. And even if it could, the change won't happen overnight or during a foundation's annual grant cycle. Such change takes years to occur — and even longer to sustain.

Think about this as you form and fill out your partnership. Look for stability, steadfastness, and long-term commitment — in the partner organizations you approach and in the individuals who represent those organizations.

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### Help shape policy

Public policy is an important lever to help your community boost attainment and develop your workforce talent. As you work to change systems and test out initiatives, you can also push to change laws and policies that help or hinder that work. Your partners can have more influence on policy-makers by working together than they can alone.

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### Seek and share expertise

Take advantage of technical advisors to work through problems, improve communication, and build capacity. Tap local sources, of course, but also consider outside experts in social change.

For instance, Civic Lab, based in Columbus, Indiana, has helped many talent-focused cities navigate the process of stakeholder engagement and collaborative improvement. The Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas is a recognized leader in developing math pathways to enhance college success. And Education Design Lab, based in Washington, D.C., brings together industry, educators, and nonprofits to design new models for higher education.

### *So get started...*

These 10 steps can help your community increase economic opportunity, boost education attainment, and produce and retain the workforce you need to thrive and grow. For more about how your community can actually *take* these steps, visit our online Talent Hub guide at *[URL to come...]*. There you'll find a wealth of practical detail about each step, advice on how best to proceed, and dozens of real-life examples from talent-building cities and regions across the nation. No doubt several of those communities are very much like yours.

