Talented, Educated People

In an increasingly competitive and knowledge-based economy, communities must provide a skilled, educated workforce in order to remain competitive. Many businesses – and not just those in traditional white-collar sectors – now consider talent to be the most important factor influencing their location decisions. And on an individual level, there is clear evidence to suggest that as a person's level of educational attainment increases, they become more likely to earn a higher wage and less likely to be unemployed.

Further underscoring the need for top talent, in February 2014, the annual Corporate Survey results in Area Development magazine reported that "availability of skilled labor" topped the list of most important site location factors for the first time in 27 years. With the line between "economic development" and "workforce development" increasingly becoming blurred, it is readily apparent that the region needs to make a significant investment in education in order to increase the area's competitiveness and improve the region's future economic opportunities for wealth creation.

Findings from research clearly demonstrate that educational attainment rates in Greater Columbus are lagging behind, and the region must make significant improvements just to keep up with national trends. Simply put, any effort to increase levels of prosperity in the region must involve across-the-board improvements to its talent base. This will require a comprehensive approach that focuses on optimizing the region's ability to produce "homegrown" talent, retaining skilled and educated workers who already live in the region, and attracting new ones who do not.

KEY FINDINGS FROM RESEARCH AND INPUT:

- Greater Columbus' workforce is not in dire straits, but the proportion of adults with a bachelor's degree or higher is well below the national average and last among a competitive set of 10 Southeastern metros. The community also has elevated levels of adults who started but did not finish college or have a high school diploma or less.

- If current trends hold, Greater Columbus will fall even further behind on the educational attainment metric, as its younger residents are relatively less educated than their counterparts nationwide and the region is not attracting new residents in significant numbers to account for the difference.

- The region's core PK-12 education system, the Muscogee County School District (MCSD), enjoys a tremendous level of community support and does a good job of graduating students relative to peer systems.

- But MCSD students are relatively less likely to enroll in college and succeed once there, and performance within the system is uneven. Input participants noted that many students would benefit from additional intervention and assistance at various stages of their academic lives.

- The region has strong higher education institutions, but retaining graduates – and attracting more students from outside Greater Columbus to them in the first place – is critical to a healthy talent pipeline.

- Greater Columbus is not a strong attractor of outside talent, and data and anecdotal evidence suggests the region is losing many residents to markets such as Atlanta.

OBJECTIVE 1.1: ALIGN OUR EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE SYSTEMS

As the research phases of this process demonstrated, there is a critical need to grow and develop a skilled and talented workforce in Greater Columbus. Fortunately, the community already has many organizations that are dedicated to improving residents' educational outcomes, increasing community involvement, and providing important social services. These organizations are already making strides towards improving educational attainment levels and opportunities in the community, but stakeholder feedback revealed that many organizations are "working in silos." In order to maximize the impact of these efforts, Greater Columbus should ensure that these organizations and their work is aligned, coordinated, and optimized.

1.1.1 **Create a comprehensive cradle-to-career (C2C) partnership to align education, training, business, and social services around increasing talent levels in Greater Columbus.**

There are multiple models that Greater Columbus could adopt or emulate to align its talent efforts, such as the "Alignment" program that was first applied in Nashville and the "Strive Partnership" model that began in Cincinnati. These systems generally follow the "collective impact" model wherein government entities, non-profit organizations, and the private sector work together on a common agenda – in this case aligning and improving educational and training services with which individuals interact "from cradle to career." Participating organizations come together under a professionally staffed "backbone" entity that is responsible for aligning the existing efforts of its various members and identifying ways in which services can be improved. This backbone organization might include multiple "committees" that tackle a specific issue, such as early childhood education or dropout prevention. Many of the other proposed tactical recommendations in this strategy should be advanced by this new partnership, potentially through a dedicated committee, and the Chamber's Partners in Education (PIE) activities could also fall under this umbrella. The cradle-to-career partnership will be tasked with tracking performance metrics in order to gauge the impact of programs and adjust focuses accordingly to maximize their effectiveness and improve outcomes.

Potential Actions:

- Work with educational providers, nonprofits, and the business community to research C2C and other "business education partnership" models to identify the appropriate fit for Greater Columbus

- Formally establish a partnership "backbone" entity and pursue public and private sources of funding to ensure that it is professionally staffed and operated

- Recruit a broad network of organizations to join the partnership

- Identify an initial set of focus areas inclusive of the tactical recommendations in this strategy and any other issues deemed appropriate by the relevant partners (potential examples could include parental advocacy programs, expanding dual enrollment, etc.)

BEST PRACTICE: Alignment Nashville (Nashville, TN)

OBJECTIVE 1.2: DEVELOP HOMEGROWN TALENT

Research revealed that Greater Columbus is a less educated place relative to its peer communities, and if the status quo holds, this gap is highly likely to grow. Reversing this trend will be critical to the future health of the region, and doing so requires a multi-pronged approach of talent development, retention, and attraction. But among these, producing "homegrown" talent is particularly important. Educational attainment is one of the top factors influencing a person's lifetime earning potential and economic opportunities. Ensuring that the community's residents have access to and are engaged in high-quality educational experiences is vital to reducing poverty and securing a strong economic future. Educational outcomes are influenced by many factors, and the C2C partnership (see 1.1.1) may choose to focus on a wide range of initiatives. The tactical recommendations proposed in this objective represent a handful of high-impact initiatives that can address specific needs identified during the research phases of the process.

1.2.1   Ensure that three- and four-year-olds have access to high-quality early childhood education.

The importance of high-quality early childhood education is supported by a growing body of research. Studies have shown that Pre-K programs produce higher standardized test scores and narrow the "achievement gap," with program participation having a larger effect on student outcomes than race, family income, and parental educational attainment. Children who participate in Pre-K are more likely to graduate high school, own a home by age 27 and earn higher wages, and they are less likely to be incarcerated or unemployed. As such, Greater Columbus can make long-term investments to improve the likelihood of addressing many of its most significant challenges by ensuring that high-quality early childhood education programming is available to all three- and four-year-olds in the region.

<u>**Potential Actions:**</u>

- Work with relevant partners including MCSD and other school districts to identify additional services needed, e.g. expansion of enrollment slots at Early Success Centers or creation of new centers

- With relevant partners, develop messaging and an outreach strategy to communicate the importance of early childhood education to elected officials, C-level executives, and other senior leadership

- Take a multi-pronged approach to pursuing funding, including lobbying at the state level for additional Pre-K program funding, seeking grants from the federal government and national foundations, working with local philanthropic organizations, and potentially identifying an additional local public revenue stream

- Partner with other early childhood service providers such as the Ferst Foundation for Childhood Literacy to expand opportunities for childhood learning beyond Pre-K programs

1.2.2   Ensure that infants, toddlers, and expecting parents have access to comprehensive child development and family support services.

The phase from a child's time in the womb to his or her fourth birthday is a critical span for development, as the child builds social and emotional skills, learns to talk and count, and develops problem-solving skills. Research from the National Center for Infants, Toddlers, and Families shows that developmental delays emerge as early as 9 months and that "by age 2, toddlers in the lowest socioeconomic quintile are behind all other children in

measures of cognitive skills and emotional attachment."[1] Greater Columbus suffers from a high child poverty rate, with nearly one third of children between the ages of five and 17 (the age group for which statistics are available) living in households below the poverty line. It stands to reason that the rate is similarly high for the region's youngest residents. Stakeholders also noted that poverty in the region tends to be generational. Breaking this cycle requires a multi-faceted approach, but a key area of focus should be on supporting very young children and their parents given the importance of this time in an individual's life.

Potential Actions:

- Evaluate the viability of increasing the availability of Early Head Start programs in Greater Columbus and pursue an Early Head Start Grant and other state, federal, and philanthropic funding to start the program if warranted

- Work with social service providers and other relevant entities to identify existing resources, specific areas of need, and potential funding sources

1.2.3 Expand efforts to introduce students to education and career possibilities from a young age.

Many organizations in Greater Columbus are working to ensure that young children are introduced to career and educational opportunities from a young age. These include the Chamber of Commerce's Partners in Education program and summer camps such as CSU Activ8 and Summer Camp Benning. But stakeholders familiar with the region's K-12 education systems expressed a desire for the community to go even further in exposing children to career opportunities, the work required to achieve them, and the value in doing so. Input participants said this is an important task given the pervasiveness of generational poverty in the community, as children from low-income households may not be aware of opportunities or view them as unrealistic.

Potential Actions:

- Incorporate opportunities for exposure to potential careers into elementary school curricula, including online and hands-on learning experiences, in-class presentations, off-site travel, and other programs

- For middle and high school students, facilitate tours of college and university campuses in and around the region, and continue classroom discussions and goal-setting exercises throughout the year

- Conduct regular field trips to a variety of workplaces to demonstrate the benefits of aspiring to and completing post-secondary education; work with Partners in Education and other private-sector partners to facilitate these tours

- Tie in expanded internship and apprenticeship opportunities (see 1.3.2) with work at the high school level to demonstrate the immediate availability of opportunities

- With community non-profits and service organizations, expand the availability of summer camps and other summer programming for low-income students

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[1] "Putting Infants and Toddlers on the Path to School Readiness: An Agenda for the Administration and 113th Congress." Zero to Three: National Center for Infants, Toddlers and Families. 2013.

1.2.4   Leverage existing programs to coordinate a community-wide mentoring program for at-risk K-12 students.

Keeping students engaged and on track in their studies will be critical to raising the region's educational attainment levels and ensuring that future generations have opportunities to succeed. Accordingly, stakeholders should pursue a community-wide mentoring program that connects volunteers with K-12 students who are at risk of falling behind, struggling, or dropping out. Greater Columbus has many existing programs that engage in some type of youth mentoring, including Girls, Incorporated of Columbus, the Literacy Alliance, Empowered Youth of Columbus, Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Chattahoochee Valley, and many others. A community-wide mentoring program would not replace or duplicate any of these initiatives but would instead begin with an assessment of existing programs and a determination of whether existing capacity is needed. The ultimate goal of the program should be making a mentor-mentee relationship available to all interested students through the coordination of existing programs and – potentially – the creation of new ones. Given the collaborative nature of such an effort, it represents an ideal opportunity for coordination through the C2C.

<u>**Potential Actions:**</u>

- Bring together existing organizations providing mentoring services with representatives from schools and school districts, businesses and nonprofits to assess existing programs and capacity

- Pursue the widespread availability of programs that seek commitments of up to three years for monthly meetings and weekly check-ins to ensure the at-risk students receive needed engagement

- With the help of the private sector, community and faith-based organizations, and other nonprofits, issue a community-wide call for volunteers

- Begin the program at the middle school level and gradually expand to other grades

BEST PRACTICE: Cincinnati Youth Collaborative (Cincinnati, OH)

1.2.5   Launch a broad-based adult education campaign to connect individuals who did not complete high school or college coursework with opportunities for advancement and employment.

Increasing educational attainment must be about more than just the K-16 degree pipeline and talent attraction efforts. Communities must also focus work to ensure that adults are aware of and capitalizing on opportunities to receive high school equivalency degrees and post-secondary training as needed. Generally speaking, for each additional level of educational attainment an individual obtains, he or she is more likely to earn a higher wage and less likely to be unemployed. Additionally, changes in technology and the global economy are eliminating many traditional positions such as those that involve repetitive manual labor or technology services that can be sourced overseas. Jobs in the modern economy – even those in traditionally "blue collar" sectors – will increasingly go to individuals with more advanced skills and training. But research and stakeholder input noted that many adults in Greater Columbus may not fall into this category. Relative to both the nation and the state of Georgia, the region had elevated levels of adults without high school diplomas, had never attended college, and who have attended some college but have not received a degree award. There are roughly 140,000 individuals over the age of 25 in Greater Columbus who have not received a college degree, and there are certainly many more between the ages of 18 and 24 who have not completed high school or have not enrolled or stayed on

track in a post-secondary program. To address this issue, the region should launch a major campaign to re-engage adults with opportunities for educational advancement.

Potential Actions:

- Work with a range of partners including K-12 school systems, higher education institutions, community organizations and foundations, faith-based groups, and private-sector leadership to oversee a broad-based campaign to boost adult educational attainment and training levels

- Secure significant commitments from public, private, and philanthropic funding sources to advance a variety of initiatives and provide subsidized entry/testing fees and tuition

- Expand enrollment in the Catapult Academy for high school dropouts and other high school equivalency programs to boost diploma and equivalency attainment; offer tuition subsidies or forgiveness to qualifying students who enroll in and complete programs

- Work with area colleges to identify and reach out to former students who began but did not complete a degree or certificate program; offer expedited re-enrollment procedures and waive application fees, etc.

- Work with employers to offer workers incentives, including flexible work hours around class schedules, guaranteed raises upon employment, etc., to complete high school equivalencies and enroll in and/or complete certificate and degree programs

BEST PRACTICE: Graduate! Philadelphia (Philadelphia, PA)

OBJECTIVE 1.3: RETAIN OUR BEST AND BRIGHTEST WORKERS

Just as producing homegrown talent is important, so too is retaining educated workers who already live in the community. Evidence indicates, however, that Greater Columbus is losing residents to Metro Atlanta and other nearby markets. According to stakeholders who participated in the input process, many of these out-migrants are recent college graduates and talented young professionals. Many of the tactical recommendations in this strategy are aimed at improving quality of life and boosting levels of community attachment in Greater Columbus, but the following initiatives are aimed specifically at strengthening job opportunities and professional and social networks for talented individuals, ultimately reducing their incentive to leave the community.

1.3.1 **Connect business and education providers to develop post-secondary programs and high school curricula that support target business growth and introduce young people to job opportunities.**

One prime opportunity for alignment through a C2C partnership (see 1.1.1) is identifying the specific needs of employers in key local business sectors and evaluating whether existing programs at higher education institutions and K-12 schools are generating graduates with the appropriate degrees, certificates, or skill sets. Before proceeding, it should be noted that while a region's educational systems are sometimes referred to as a "talent pipeline," this is not at all to suggest that these institutions exist simply to supply local businesses with talent. Instead, the term is intended to highlight the fact that these providers are the region's most important source of talented, educated workers, and that creating additional synergies between their programmatic offerings and the needs of local businesses can be mutually beneficial to employers, educational institutions, and

the local populace who make up the majority of their student bodies. Stakeholders should coordinate communications between the private sector and various education partners to identify additional training and education opportunities that can support target sector growth.

Potential Actions:

- Working with employers in identified target business sectors, identify specific degree and certificate programs that are absent or in need of further development and to build awareness about existing programs

- As part of business retention and expansion (BRE) activities (see 2.1.1), survey local employers across a broad range of business sectors to determine the existing programs that support their workforce and what types of post-secondary degrees, certifications, and skill sets they must recruit from outside the region or otherwise have difficulty finding

- Share findings collectively with the region's higher education providers and develop strategies for implementing programs when warranted and eliminating or refocusing underutilized programs

- Work with the University System of Georgia's Cybersecurity Initiative Consortium to secure funding for and maximize the potential of the TSYS Cybersecurity Center for Financial Services to support talent development for the finance and insurance sectors

- Convene private-sector partners, higher education institutions, and K-12 school systems to ensure that existing and emerging STEAM programs (science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics) are optimized; additionally, ensure that all programs properly emphasize arts and other forms of creativity

1.3.2 Challenge the region's business community to leverage, expand, and develop internship and apprenticeship opportunities for high school and college students.

Internships are an effective way to retain college students by helping them to establish professional networks and ties to full-time employers. A 2015 survey of businesses conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers indicated that more than 50 percent of all interns accept full-time employment with the company where they completed their internship. Creating internship opportunities for high school students could have a similar impact on community attachment. Many regional employers – notably manufacturers – also noted difficulty in finding qualified workers, in part because many young people do not view careers in manufacturing as desirable or viable. Offering internships and apprenticeships for manufacturing and other trade jobs could help address this issue by exposing more young people to career opportunities in an important sector of the regional economy.

Potential Actions:

- Work with employers and existing student-employment efforts at higher education institutions to create an inventory of existing internship and apprenticeship opportunities and publish via an interactive website, updated regularly as new opportunities come online

- Informed by the inventory, issue a challenge to all regional employers to develop internships and/or apprenticeships for both high school students and college students and graduates

- Encourage companies to make internships and apprenticeships paid and part-time; consider offering subsidies to firms that could not otherwise make these commitments

- Work with higher education institutions to expand or establish cooperative education programs

BEST PRACTICE: Greater Grads (Oklahoma City, OK)

1.3.3 Develop a formal retention program for individuals retiring from or exiting the military.

The presence of Fort Benning benefits Greater Columbus' workforce in a variety of ways. One of the biggest is the supply of work-ready individuals who retire from or exit the military while stationed at the base. Many stakeholders expressed a desire for the community to take more proactive steps to tap this valuable resource and influence more soldiers to remain in the community. Stakeholders acknowledged that there are already systems in place to connect individuals tied to Fort Benning with local employers, such as the Soldier for Life Job Transition Summit hiring fair and other initiatives. But input participants also said that there is a knowledge gap that must first be closed before the region can pursue an effective talent retention strategy.

Potential Actions:

- Convene Fort Benning and private-sector leadership to determine the skill sets that exiting soldiers (and their family members) possess

- Begin by working with base leadership to determine specific skill sets, demographics, etc. of exiting soldiers

- Determine factors influencing the location decisions of soldiers exiting the military, including leveraging existing research and national data from the Solider for Life Transition Assistance Program

- Evaluate whether an assistance program for military spouses and partners in finding employment or acquiring state-specific certifications (e.g. teaching) would aid in retention efforts

- Work with base leadership including the Soldier for Life Center to devise a survey of soldiers, veterans, retirees, and spouses/family members to obtain data specific to Fort Benning and Greater Columbus; leverage the next Soldier for Life Job Transition Summit as a contact point for conducting a survey

- Utilize findings to develop a formal attraction and retention program in cooperation with base leadership and the private sector

1.3.4 Welcome and engage new residents who move to Greater Columbus with a relocating family member.

To find workers with the most specialized skill sets or experience, many firms must conduct talent searches that spread well beyond the borders of their home region. This is especially true in Greater Columbus, which has a high concentration of major corporate operations relative to its size and levels of educational attainment. According to stakeholders familiar with recruitment and human resources matters, attracting these individuals is only half the challenge. The community must also seek to retain these workers by ensuring that they and their families are happy and engaged in their new home region. According to the input participants, this means connecting the spouses and partners to jobs and opportunities for social engagement – and doing so quickly.

Greater Columbus should therefore develop a formal program to welcome and integrate relocating families into the community.

Potential Actions:

- Work with public- and private-sector employers to develop a one-stop resume-matching database capable of connecting individuals with available jobs based on skill sets; this database would also have utility for existing residents of Greater Columbus and would not necessarily be limited to any one group, though it would be most useful for individuals without roots or connections in the community

- Create a volunteer network of human resources managers and corporate executives to meet informally with new job-seekers who have followed a relocating family member to the community to help these individuals learn about the job market in Greater Columbus and begin developing a professional network

- Develop an attractive, user-friendly, and regularly updated "welcome website" with information on community programs, youth sports leagues, parks, utilities, religious organizations, etc.; this website would also be useful as a talent and business recruitment tool to highlight the region's quality of life to prospective new residents or companies

BEST PRACTICE: Connect Sixty-Four (Kalamazoo, MI)

BEST PRACTICE (TALENT MARKETING WEBSITE): CarpeDM (Des Moines, IA)

OBJECTIVE 1.4: ATTRACT TALENTED INDIVIDUALS TO GREATER COLUMBUS

Growing and retaining talent in Greater Columbus is critical to the region's future, but strategies to improve educational outcomes can take years or even decades to pay dividends. In the meantime, many firms in Greater Columbus have immediate needs for talented workers. Additionally, the community's younger residents are relatively less educated than those in many similar communities. In other words, Greater Columbus isn't just playing "catch-up" – it must attract new educated residents just to keep pace with its peers. But research revealed that Greater Columbus has consistently low levels of in-migration, and the competition for talent among regions is only growing more intense. Greater Columbus must face the reality that it is competing against much larger metro areas with more diverse and faster-growing job markets yet similar cost-of-living and quality-of-life advantages. In this environment, a general talent attraction campaign aimed at any individual would be a poor investment. Greater Columbus should instead focus on a targeted effort geared toward people who already have a connection with the region in addition to leveraging the ability of the region's four-year universities to attract talented newcomers.

1.4.1   Attract educated expatriates back to Greater Columbus through a "boomerang" marketing program.

In order to maximize its return on an investment to attract new workers to the region, Greater Columbus should focus on a "boomerang" talent marketing campaign that targets educated individuals who already feel a connection with Greater Columbus. The region also has a strong value proposition for individuals who have started families or are thinking of doing so. Stakeholders said that many of these individuals feel "pulled home"

during this time in their life, and may generally prefer a smaller, more family-friendly community to larger metros where commutes are longer, housing markets are more competitive, and so on. As such, the region should focus on individuals who may have been out of the community for a number of years in addition to recent college graduates who attended high school in Greater Columbus or moved away after graduating from a local college or university. There will be some challenges to overcome in order to do so. According to young professionals in the region contacted through the input process, many individuals who have moved away still think of the region as being "old Columbus" and may have limited awareness of the many positive changes that have occurred in the region in recent years. Changing these perceptions will be an important task.

Potential Actions:

- ✍☞ Convene relevant partners, including private-sector representatives, the Young Professionals organization, colleges and universities, and K-12 school systems to develop and oversee the campaign

- ✍☞ Sustain and support the growth of the Young Professionals organization and leverage the group's capacity and expertise for the marketing program and to host/influence relocation candidates

- ✍☞ Partner with area higher education institutions and alumni associations to identify individuals from institutions such as Columbus State and Troy University who have moved to other markets

- ✍☞ Work with K-12 school systems to identify top college-bound students to establish communications and relationships to maintain their connection to Greater Columbus regardless of where they attend school; maintain these contacts even after the students graduate to create an ongoing list for focused advertisements, etc.

- ✍☞ As part of internship programming (see 1.3.2), challenge local employers to open up opportunities to local and out-of-region students with a connection to Greater Columbus; develop programming and other career-focused resources for winter and summer breaks

- ✍☞ Develop a targeted advertising campaign for alumni publications and websites for selected colleges and universities in Alabama and Georgia (e.g. Auburn, UGA, Georgia Tech, etc.), including profiles of successful alumni in Greater Columbus

- ✍☞ Coordinate with CSU Alumni and Friends to develop one-off or quarterly networking events in Metro Atlanta and, potentially, other markets of size, for CSU alumni; promote Greater Columbus through word-of-mouth marketing at these events and through follow-up communication with attendees

- ✍☞ Promote Greater Columbus at high-value job and career fairs

1.4.2   Support the promotion of Columbus State and Troy University's Phenix City campus as schools of choice for students from outside the region.

Another way in which Greater Columbus can address its low levels of educational attainment and in-migration is by attracting more individuals from outside the region to attend Columbus State University and Troy University's Phenix City campus and connecting them to quality employment upon graduation. Research revealed that slightly more than half of entering freshman at Columbus State were from the Greater Columbus region while just 16.6 percent of students were from Metro Atlanta. By contrast, 40.9 percent of freshman at Georgia Southern University were from Metro Atlanta while just 16.4 percent were from the Savannah and Statesboro areas. (Data

for Troy's Phenix City campus was not available.) While it is certainly a good thing that Columbus State is serving so many graduates of local high schools, attracting more outsiders to local institutions will broaden the pool of individuals with connections to the region who might be tempted to stay upon graduation or return at a later date. The timing is perfect to promote these institutions outside the region. Columbus State's "First Choice" capital campaign is underway and has the goal of improving the university's academic and collegiate environment in order to make it a preferred destination for students and faculty. CSU has also made significant investments in its RiverPark campus, is transforming the former Ledger-Enquirer building and relocating the College of Education and Health Profession to Uptown Columbus, and is expanding its cybersecurity training capacity with the TSYS Cybersecurity Center for Financial Services. Meanwhile, Troy University has already transformed the riverfront in Phenix City with its new campus, and additional expansions are planned.

Potential Actions:

- Support Columbus State and Troy's Phenix City campus in promoting the schools through a variety of channels (social media, advertisements, college fairs, etc.) in other markets such as Metro Atlanta

- Ensure the successful completion of the First Choice Campaign

- Work to integrate the universities into the region's talent marketing (see 1.4.1) and earned media campaigns (see 5.2.1)

- Evaluate expanding out-of-state tuition waivers for Columbus State beyond Russell County