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Investing in Community: A Playbook for Connecting Economic and Skills Development

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W.E. UPJOHN INSTITUTE
FOR EMPLOYMENT RESEARCH

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We are pleased to share with you “Investing in Community: A Playbook for Connecting Economic and Skills Development,” the second annual report of the Upjohn Institute’s place-based research initiative. This report was completed a few short months ago, in what seems like a different world, but the imperative for communities to create effective economic and skills development is greater now than ever.

Recessions hurt communities and limit resources for governments and local organizations to create broadly shared prosperity. Fortunately, many ideas presented in this report are inexpensive to pursue, even in the current budget environment. Existing economic development programs can refocus on sectors likely to expand because of the pandemic, for example.

Our proposals for better linking jobs and skills development—whether through information provided to students in place-based scholarship programs, via K-12 career-oriented programs, or through customized job matches for unemployed workers—cost relatively little and offer high expected benefits. Smart zoning and the freeing up of usable land can also be done with shifts in policies rather than new expenditures.

Some investments do cost more, such as creating place-based scholarships and customized training to attract high-tech business. In those cases, clever use of federal pandemic legislation may help state and local governments pay for these investments. In Michigan, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer proposed using federal pandemic assistance to help essential workers without degrees pay for community college. Other states are using the funds to train and pay contact tracers, which helps combat the spread of COVID-19 while providing jobs that could launch health careers.

A wise federal government can help, offering flexible aid to local economies and targeting job-creation policy to communities that need it most. But state and local governments must judiciously use whatever aid they receive to enhance their own prosperity. The value of locally driven efforts is that they can build on a community’s own assets and be tailored to that community’s own needs. Our playbook is meant to help with these goals.

Sincerely,

Tim Bartik, Brad Hershbein, and Michelle Miller-Adams
Co-directors of Upjohn Institute’s Investing in Community initiative

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PROMISE
INVESTING IN COMMUNITY

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About the Research Initiative

In 2018, the Upjohn Institute launched an initiative to explore how communities can create broadly shared prosperity by helping residents get and keep good jobs. Our initiative brings together two areas of Institute expertise: place-based scholarships that help local residents increase their skills and economic development policies, such as tax incentives and customized business services, that directly target local job creation. We take a holistic approach, linking two types of strategies: encouraging firms to create good jobs while providing residents with the skills and supports needed to access good jobs. Our approach focuses on strategies communities themselves can deploy. While federal and state support can help, we believe local efforts lay the groundwork necessary to create vibrant local economies that benefit everyone.

In this second annual summary of our work, we provide practical advice for community leaders and policymakers around four critical issues. First, how should local needs be defined? Chapter 1 argues that data about local economies can show whether communities are best served by creating new jobs, strengthening tech clusters, boosting education or training, or expanding housing supply. In Chapter 2, we explore a range of approaches for linking job creation and skills development. To enact these strategies, strong local leadership is needed, and Chapter 3 addresses how best to mobilize the right kind of local leadership. In Chapter 4, we emphasize the need to understand if place-based strategies are working. Rather than viewing evaluation efforts as a "secret sauce" added at the end of an experiment, we urge leaders to integrate data collection, tracking, and evaluation into their community initiatives during the planning stages.

We hope this report generates new thinking about how communities can pursue a jobs-based strategy for local prosperity by simultaneously investing in the skills of residents and providing targeted support to business. If well executed, place-based strategies can yield both private and public gains. Residents will benefit from enhanced human capital, better jobs, and higher incomes; employers will have access to better-trained workers and other forms of support; and communities will enjoy more overall prosperity.

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Chapter 1
Defining Local Needs

Building community prosperity is best done with a strategy that is tailored to a specific place. One size does not fit all.

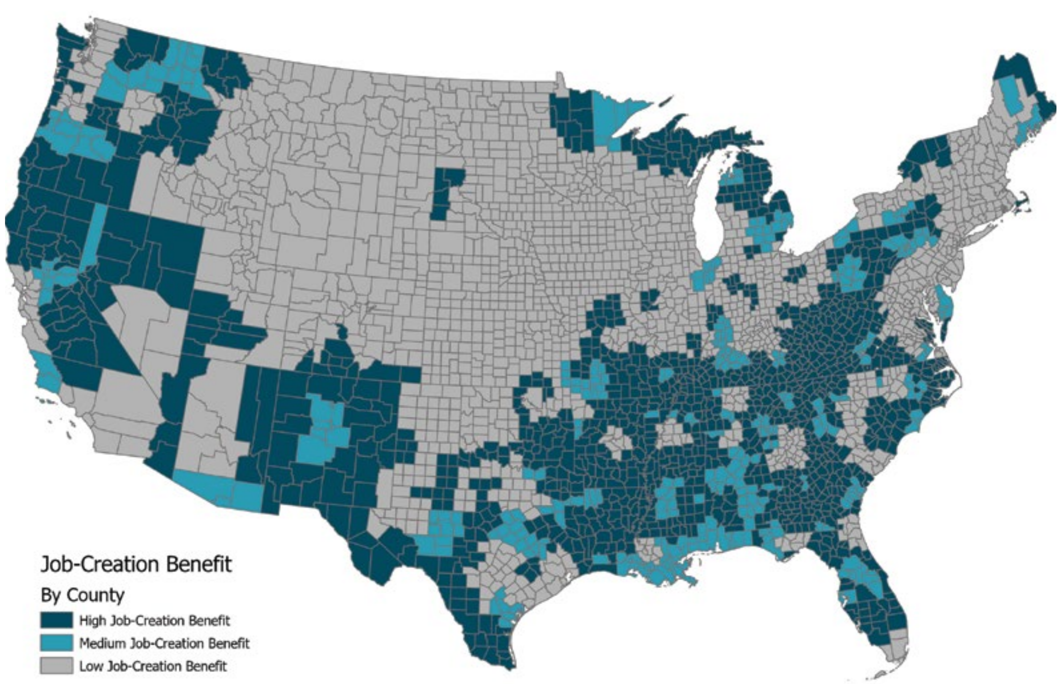
Our goal is for all residents to have access to good jobs in an affordable community. This goal, however, may be impeded by factors such as a lack of jobs, skills, or housing supply. In turn, the forces affecting these factors vary from place to place. Local solutions thus depend on correctly identifying local problems.

Which places should focus their resources on creating new jobs?

The benefits of job growth depend on the local labor market. In communities that already have high employment rates, boosting job growth mostly increases in-migration. In communities with low employment rates, on the other hand, more new jobs go to residents. Studies have shown that the proportion of new jobs that go to residents is over two-thirds greater in distressed communities than in booming communities.[1]

What is a local labor market? Local labor markets comprise groups of counties where the most commuting flows take place. Job creation—and even wage growth—in one part of this area can influence job creation and wages in another part. It may seem intuitive that a job created in the Chicago Loop will be more valuable to a resident there than a job created in one of the suburbs. However, because the Loop and the suburbs are part of the same labor market, a job created in the suburbs still could—and often does—affect workers living in the Loop. For example, the suburban job may be taken by someone who otherwise would have competed for the Loop job, or the employer for the latter may feel the need to raise wages to stay competitive.

The map below shows how the benefits of job growth will vary by county. It is based on Upjohn Institute research on how county job growth affects the share of an area's people who are employed, depending on baseline employment rates, both in the county and in surrounding areas.[2] High job growth benefits occur in the darker-shaded areas: Appalachia; the rural Deep



South; upstate New York; Detroit and Flint; parts of the upper Midwest in Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota; the Rio Grande Valley in Texas; inland California and other parts of the rural West; and Oregon and Washington outside of Portland and Seattle. More modest job growth benefits occur in suburban areas adjacent to distressed counties, such as the greater Detroit area, as job growth in rich suburbs provides some spillover benefits for the distressed central county.

In many big cities—such as New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, the Twin Cities, and Boston—the key problem is not a lack of jobs. Many residents of these cities are in poverty; however, faster job growth in these places primarily boosts in-migration rather than helping existing residents become employed. Benefits of job growth for residents are also slight in most of the Plains states, where large shares of the population are already employed.

Which communities benefit most from high-tech jobs?

Specific types of jobs, such as high-tech jobs, may bring higher benefits—although this also depends on the community's characteristics. Local job growth yields greater benefits if the types of jobs created have higher local job multipliers.

The local jobs multiplier is the ratio between the total number of local jobs ultimately created, either as a result of some public policy assisting businesses (e.g., tax incentives, manufacturing extension, business incubator) or a "natural" business expansion occurring without direct government assistance, and the jobs created directly by the assistance or hiring expansion. For example, a local business may create 10 new jobs directly due to an incentive program, but these direct local jobs may lead to additional new jobs in local suppliers to the first business, as well as in local retailers that serve the business' workers. If the number of these indirectly created jobs is 10, then the jobs multiplier is 2: 20 total jobs divided by the 10 direct jobs.

Higher multipliers occur for high-tech firms—and even more so for communities with an above-average size of their high-tech sector—because of knowledge spillovers. High-tech firms are more likely to have both deeper and longer supply chains and greater flows of workers and ideas from one business to another. Knowledge spillovers are larger when there are more high-tech firms encouraging other firms to expand; this can lead to what are sometimes called "high-tech clusters." Based on recent research, there is a sweet spot before diminishing returns kick in.[3] A high-tech cluster needs a minimum size to have a larger multiplier, but beyond a certain size, the multiplier does not grow with further cluster expansion. Any productivity advantages from larger clusters are outweighed by increases in traffic congestion, housing costs, and other expenses. Consequently, high-tech multipliers are not appreciably higher in Silicon Valley than they are in Minneapolis and Denver, or even Nashville and Kalamazoo.

Smaller or rural communities are less likely to benefit from a strategy to promote high-tech firms. As prominent researchers at MIT and the Brookings Institution have argued, however, many midsized (or larger) communities—even those that are relatively distressed—have a sufficiently large high-tech cluster that can benefit from strategies to further grow this sector.[4]

Which communities benefit most from skills development for residents?

Creating local jobs will be more effective in promoting local prosperity if an area's residents have the skills to fill those jobs. Developing the skills of residents improves their access to good jobs. It also helps the entire community: greater skill attainment often translates to a more diverse mix of jobs that spills over into greater earnings for all residents.

One approach for increasing residents' skills is a place-based scholarship or Promise program. These programs can increase a community's skills not just by allowing residents to pursue postsecondary education and training and retaining them

Creating local jobs will be more effective in promoting local prosperity if an area's residents have the skills to fill those jobs.

Reproduced by permission of Richmond Promise.

locally, but also by helping the community attract more families that value education.[5]

Promise programs, like other skills development programs, are best targeted at communities with relatively low levels of education. Such communities have greater scope for increasing residents' skills. When targeted in this way, skills programs can also help increase equity. For example, many Promise programs are found in lower-income cities that have experienced middle-class flight to their wealthier suburbs. A Promise program in such a setting can increase the attractiveness of the urban core relative to surrounding suburbs, reversing the trend of out-migration and promoting socioeconomic integration that brings educational benefits to all.[6]

Targeting low-income school districts for Promise programs can also catalyze cultural change. Low-income school districts send fewer of their students to postsecondary education, in part due to limited resources to help students make the successful transition from high school to college. Often, these districts lack meaningful college and career awareness programs, effective support for completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), ample advanced placement opportunities, and adequate counseling staff. In such an environment, many students conclude that postsecondary education is out of reach.

By providing resources (and peer role models in the form of successful students), a Promise program can help generate a college-going culture. These cultural changes are not always costly; schoolwide conversations about college can be carried out for free, and improved FAFSA completion rates depend more on outreach than on expensive programs.

Which communities need more housing to boost prosperity?

A healthy housing market is key to local prosperity, with affordable housing for people with diverse needs and prices that do not rise faster than incomes. To meet this goal, it is crucial to build new houses and apartments, both to accommodate demand increases and to replace dilapidated structures.

Such housing policies can interact with labor demand policies to create jobs and labor supply policies to improve local labor quality and promote the development of good jobs. If we try to promote local prosperity by creating more jobs, or more good jobs, and most or all of the benefits are capitalized into higher property values or higher rents, then the policy is indeed boosting "local prosperity," but only for those fortunate enough to already own property. More broadly shared local prosperity requires that housing policies sufficiently accommodate the local creation of more good jobs by expanding housing supply.

Barriers to new housing development vary across places. In some cases, restrictive zoning or "not-in-my-backyard" opposition are the largest barriers. In these areas, housing prices

escalate well above the cost of new construction.[7] Allowing more housing units to be built—even market-rate units—can yield more affordable housing for lower-income residents as others trade up, and, according to new research, can do so without causing gentrification.[8] Both Minneapolis and the state of Oregon have moved in this direction by recently eliminating single-family-housing-only zoning.

In some smaller communities or rural areas, on the other hand, zoning or permitting may not be a problem, although higher construction costs due to lack of building trade workers could still raise housing prices. In such areas, expanded training in the building trades can both hold down housing costs and provide jobs for trainees.

In other communities, the housing problem is a consequence of low earnings. Even if housing prices are tied to stable and reasonable construction costs, some households may spend too much of their incomes on housing simply because their earnings are low. This type of problem is really a jobs problem and best addressed by the economic development and skills development programs discussed above.

Local context matters

How do leaders determine which of these strategies, alone or in combination, are best for their community?

- For communities with low employment rates, job creation should be the priority.
- For communities with an above-average number of high-tech firms, efforts to create more jobs in this sector are more likely to bear fruit than in other communities.
- If a community already has high employment rates, skills development for residents should be a priority.
- If a community has low postsecondary enrollment rates, changing the college-going culture should receive attention.
- If a community is facing problems due to rapidly rising housing prices, a housing supply strategy should be considered, with tactics focusing on housing regulations or alleviating construction sector skills' shortages, depending on the root of the problem in that community.

Whether the key problem in a local community is a lack of good jobs, a lack of adequate skills, or problems with housing supply, any strategy to boost local prosperity should consider both the demand and supply sides of the labor market. In other words, local prosperity is likely to be better promoted by linking skills development and economic development. Some of our ideas along these lines are presented in the next chapter.

Allowing more housing units to be built—even market-rate units—can yield more affordable housing for lower-income residents as others trade up.

Chapter 2
Linking Job Creation and Skills Development

Leaders in distressed places sometimes assume that simply creating new jobs will spark community prosperity. As we have written elsewhere, new jobs are often filled by in-migrants, and opportunities for upward mobility will not always reach the residents of low-income neighborhoods.[9]

Policy matters for whether growth is inclusive. If policies help a community's residents increase their skills—both job skills and soft skills—such human capital investments will make residents more competitive when seeking available local jobs. Such investments in local human capital will also make the area more attractive for firms considering location or expansion decisions.

Economic development and skills development should go hand in hand. Skills programs will be more effective when they are linked to employers who can share their talent needs. Local economic development programs will better promote job growth and boost local earnings per capita when they help firms access local workers.

However, organizations that support economic development and those that focus on skills development usually exist in silos, making their integration difficult. Economic development programs reside with city planners, regional or local economic development organizations, and the business community, while skills development has long been the purview of educators and workforce development agencies. In this chapter we examine some strategies that can create and strengthen linkages between these two spheres.

Promise programs and pathways to employment

We have written previously about the potential for place-based scholarship programs to increase the human capital of residents. Research shows that generous, simple Promise programs can lead to increased educational attainment across all racial and demographic groups.[10] If communities are to further benefit from their investments in Promise programs, it is imperative that they develop mechanisms to connect scholarship recipients to employment opportunities in the local economy.

We are just beginning to look at the long-term workforce outcomes of place-based scholarship programs in early-adopting communities. For example, we have surveyed the first three classes of Kalamazoo Promise recipients 10 years after their high school graduation, as well as a few pre-Promise classes to provide a benchmark.

These surveys suggest that 10 years after the Promise, 57 percent of Kalamazoo graduates live within the community, compared to 36 percent for pre-Promise classes. This is an increase of more than 20 percentage points, or more than 100 additional graduates living nearby from each class. Moreover, students who attended college with Promise funding have substantially less education debt: while the median pre-Promise graduate borrowed $42,000 (including any debt from graduate school), the median Promise graduate borrowed less than half that, just $20,000. In today's climate, when there is ample worry that young people are crushed with debt and unable to accumulate assets, it is telling that one-half of Promise graduates, 10 years after high school graduation, reported no monthly student loan payments, compared to only one-quarter from the earlier classes.

Despite this improvement in their financial picture, there is no guarantee that Kalamazoo Promise graduates' employment prospects have also necessarily improved. To examine these outcomes, we have matched scholarship recipients to employment and earnings data collected by the state's unemployment agency, and analysis is underway with preliminary results expected by summer 2020. There is reason for cautious optimism. Researchers at the University of Tennessee have studied Knox Achieves, precursor of the Tennessee Promise and a model for community-college place-based scholarships, and so far they have found encouraging results. Specifically, since Knox Achieves became available, the county's graduates—regardless of whether they used the scholarship—have seen their earnings on average increase by 3–5 percent, relative to graduates from neighboring counties, by the time they reach their mid-twenties. For students actually using the scholarship, the increases are much greater: roughly 20 percent, with these gains coming predominantly from individuals becoming more likely to work at all. Moreover, when they do work, graduates of Knox Achieves are less likely to be employed in low-paying industries, such as retail and food services.[11]

In addition to the Kalamazoo Promise and Knox Achieves, studies of workforce outcomes are also underway for Promise programs in Pittsburgh and Denver. Later this year, we expect to know more about how these different programs are affecting graduates' employment and earnings.

Catalyzing cooperation between education and business

Place-based scholarships often include local economic development alongside the goal of boosting education and skills. Attracting and retaining families certainly helps, but it is also important to retain students who received scholarships within the local workforce and not lose them to job opportunities elsewhere.[12] This outcome is more likely when deliberate connections are forged between the education and employment spheres.

Linking skills development with real job openings can help both scholarship recipients and local employers. Several Promise communities have strengthened relationships with employers to promote local career pathways for Promise scholars. For example, the New Haven Promise, which focuses on higher-achieving students, has developed a Careers and Civic Launch Internship Program, a partnership among the school district, hospital system, leading employers, and Yale University to create paid internships for Promise recipients. More than 100 students currently benefit from the program, now in its fourth year.

Detroit skyline at night (photograph by Kathy Olsen)

Linking skills development with real job openings can help both scholarship recipients and local employers.

The Detroit Regional Chamber of Commerce, having been deeply engaged with the Detroit Promise from its inception, demonstrates a different kind of partnership. The Detroit Promise provides a last-dollar scholarship to any Detroit high school graduate at one of five regional community colleges.[13] By piloting an intrusive coaching model for student support, the Chamber has helped design a program that serves individuals likely to stay in the area (as most community college students do) and increase their chances of completing a degree or certificate with valuable workforce skills needed by local employers.[14]

In Nashville, the Chamber has also played an important role in connecting workers to new educational opportunities offered by Tennessee Reconnect, the statewide scholarship program for adults without college degrees.

Collaboration between the Kalamazoo Promise and local employers, although minimal at first, has also grown over time. In 2017, the Kalamazoo Promise hired a director of workforce strategy and business collaboration to foster communication among businesses, educators, local economic and workforce development agencies, and students.

Since then, new pathways from education to work have been implemented, such as the Kalamazoo Promise Manufacturing Pipeline Program. This program offers high school seniors at Kalamazoo Public Schools the opportunity to participate in a paid mentoring and summer internship program with local manufacturing businesses. Mentors help students set goals, introduce mentees to other employees, share company culture, provide work-based learning, and help students develop work identities. If the placement is a mutual fit, students are offered full- or part-time employment after the internship, and they can use Promise funds to continue their education while working.

Other recent employment-related Kalamazoo Promise initiatives include partnering with neighborhood centers, training institutions, and trade groups to offer Promise recipients options for training in certified nursing assistant, Google IT Support Professional Certificate, and apprenticeships, all of which are designed to allow job ladders for subsequent employment.

Relationships such as these do not spring up overnight but must be built intentionally and cultivated over years. Early and ongoing discussions between business leaders and educators make it more likely that employers will be able to communicate the skills they need in new hires and educational institutions will be able to develop programs that impart them.

Tailoring training to employer needs

Greater cooperation between the organizations that demand skills—employers and economic developers—and those that supply them—schools, training providers, and nonprofits—is possible even without a Promise program. Here are examples of five strategies that can help meet this goal. The first three begin with training programs and seek to link them more closely to employers and their job needs. The last two strategies begin with economic development programs and work to connect the jobs created to residents who need them.

Wherever such policies begin, these examples suggest that successful labor market programs address both labor supply and demand. This is best done locally, in programs to build place-based prosperity through the labor market.

1) Public-private training programs. Businesses, schools, and local governments can cooperate to create guided pathways into the workforce for students. One successful example of this strategy is the Pathways in Technology Early College High School (P-Tech) model, begun in 2011 in New York City as a collaboration among the school system, City University of New York, and IBM, and subsequently spread to over 100 schools across eight states. In P-Tech, students take high school and college courses simultaneously, at no additional cost, generally in STEM fields, while also building work experience through mentored, paid internships in IT, health care, or manufacturing.

In practice, P-Tech programs tend to locate in areas with large concentrations of disadvantaged youth and employers with middle-skilled STEM needs. Studies of the effectiveness of the six-year program are still underway, but compared to the national average, the first cohort was more than four times as likely to finish with an associate degree, and most were hired into full-time positions.[15]

2) Apprenticeships. Apprenticeship programs developed by local workforce agencies in collaboration with area employers are an ideal strategy through which to connect residents with in-demand jobs. Business and industry increasingly view apprenticeships as a tool to upskill their workforce and recruit talent. Apprenticeships can serve to prepare the next generation of workers and also prepare for impending retirements. Employers comment that as their commitment to employees is signaled through apprenticeship offerings, employee retention also improves.

Do apprenticeship programs work? Research evidence is generally favorable. For example, research at the Upjohn Institute has found that apprenticeships can boost long-term average annual earnings by over $14,000 (2019 dollars).[16] The program's benefits are high enough that the government would make money from an apprenticeship program, as the increased tax collections and reduced need for government benefits exceed program costs.

3) Integrating tech into job search. For all the advantages of apps that help people manage their finances, track their diet and exercise, or meet new friends, all customized to individual preferences, it is surprising how little this technology has spread to job search, especially for lower- and middle-skill jobs. Although there are some third-party job search apps, few, if any, rely on the personalization inherent in, say, dating apps, and the application of such technology in public workforce development and employment services has been even more rare.

However, a new pilot project may change that. Researchers at the University of Illinois and George Washington University have partnered with the workforce development agency in southwest Michigan to develop an app designed to match job seekers with employment opportunities in their area. Individuals seeking employment services at the local one-stop service center complete an electronic intake form that collects information on their skills, job history, and work preferences. The app syncs to a real-time database of job postings and provides tailored matches based on each individual's skills, job history, and preferences relative to the job requirements. This allows service center staff to provide enhanced employability skills and individually customized job-matching services.

Although the app is still being tested, an evaluation will show if it is effective in helping applicants find good jobs and earn higher wages. Moreover, since some of the job seekers retain eligibility for Kalamazoo Promise funds for continued education, there is the potential to leverage this form of financial aid for additional training—whether it be a college degree or an industry certification—specific to in-demand jobs that are good fits for the job seeker. Eventually, apps such as this one could help ensure that students benefiting from place-based scholarships know which pathways are likely to lead to good jobs.

These three strategies make assistance to workers more effective by linking it to the openings that employers have and the skills they need. In turn, assistance to firms will be more effective when it is tied to unemployed or underemployed local workers through, for example, the next two strategies.

4) First-source hiring. Economic development programs to create jobs, such as business tax incentives or manufacturing extension programs, often do not specify from where the businesses need to hire, and, as a result, many businesses do not always hire local workers. However, research shows that these programs produce greater local benefits if more of the new jobs go to residents.[17]

Under first-source hiring agreements—used in many local jurisdictions, including Pittsburgh, Portland, and San

HireReach: Better Fit. Less Turnover. More Diversity.

HireReach is an initiative designed to help employers make better hiring decisions through data-driven techniques. With the assistance of on-site consultants, participating employers evaluate job candidates' skills, knowledge, and abilities and narrow the candidate pool solely through these traits. The process evaluates candidates holistically, targeting skills relevant to each job and reducing potential unconscious bias. Not only can this approach improve the quality of hires and reduce first-year turnover, but it also has the potential to dramatically increase workforce diversity. The first large business to adopt the principles of HireReach—Mercy Health, a hospital network in west Michigan—has seen its

- first-year turnover of new hires drop by 23 percent,
- time to hire a candidate drop by 16 percent, and
- share of minority new hires more than double.

HireReach, currently operating in the Grand Rapids metropolitan area, represents a scaled-up version of Mercy Health's pilot designed to replicate the diversity and retention results at other employers. The initiative's organizers, a collaboration between Talent 2025 and West Michigan Works!, funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and the Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation, select interested employers from different industries based on a readiness rubric. While results from the scaled-up program are not yet available, the hope is that employers will be better able to meet the perennial challenge of finding and retaining talent and that workers benefit as more stable and inclusive hiring translates into jobs with growth opportunity. Evidence-based hiring thus has the potential to help communities decrease disparities in job growth, improve the quality of the workforce, and promote access to good jobs for disadvantaged groups.

Francisco—a firm receiving economic development assistance agrees to use the local workforce system as a "first source" in hiring workers for entry-level jobs.[18] In modern incarnations, there is no quota: the firm is not required to hire a certain number of local residents but rather to cooperate with the local workforce agency in considering residents for jobs. To the extent that economic development programs can be geared toward businesses likely to hire workers with skills possessed by locals, such a system will amplify the job-creating impacts of the programs.

5) Customized job training. Many businesses struggle to find qualified workers. Customized job training relies on a third party to provide free worker screening or training services specific to the needs of the individual firm.[19] Sometimes this third party is a community college, sometimes a nonprofit or even for-profit training provider,[20] and sometimes it is a joint public-private partnership (see Box on HireReach).

When communities deliberately include such customized training within economic development plans, businesses are more likely to both hire locally and hire residents who are unemployed or underemployed.[21] This gentle carrot can complement the gentle stick of first-source hiring.

These ideas are not exhaustive; rather, they present a range of strategies through which all communities can tighten linkages between business and education to create more good jobs for residents. Because these strategies build on local assets and circumstances, the right balance will vary across places. Determining that balance will require careful assessment of needs and dedicated leadership from within the community. How do communities find these leaders?

Chapter 3
Finding the Right Leaders

Communities need leadership, yet leaders can be hard to come by. The typical community seeking to create local prosperity has been hard hit by structural trends, including deindustrialization, middle-class flight, school segregation, and the hollowing out of its urban core. Another structural development, corporate consolidation, is less well understood, yet it has had profound impacts on the health of local communities. As corporate concentration has grown, often through mergers and acquisitions that have absorbed formerly local companies, banks, and newspapers, many communities have also lost the people and organizations who served a critical leadership role and strengthened the social fabric of their hometowns.

For an example we need look no further than Kalamazoo, where the acquisition of the locally headquartered Upjohn pharmaceutical company by larger multinationals led to a dramatic shift in the city's leadership paradigm.[22] Fortunately for our hometown, new corporate and individual leaders have stepped up,[23] although decision-making has become more fragmented and challenging.

What kind of leadership does a community need if it is to promote local prosperity, and do so in a way that is broadly shared? A community needs leadership that can look beyond the needs of its particular jurisdiction, whether business or city, to the overall economic prosperity of the entire local labor market.

Leaders focused only on their company's interests—especially if these ultimate decision-makers do not live locally—are less apt to have such a broad perspective. Leaders focused only on their immediate municipality's interests, without regard to the broader area's labor market, are also less likely to make investments with payoffs that accrue broadly to those working or living nearby. Leadership groups from a single ethnic group or economic class are unlikely to seek growth opportunities that equitably benefit all ethnic groups and economic classes.

Leaders need not only a broad perspective, but also a long-term one, which requires looking beyond what the community currently is and does to what, with the right allocation of resources and leadership, it might be and do in the future.

Leaders need not only a broad perspective, but also a long-term one.

How does a community cultivate the leadership needed to make the strategic decisions on which local prosperity rests? The leadership landscape will take different forms depending on a community's assets and history. Leaders may be homegrown or attracted to a community by its job offerings and amenities. In some cases, leaders are people who grew up in a place and left it, only to return years later. (Mayor Pete Buttigieg is the best-known example of a current generation of mayors who returned to their struggling hometowns, in his case, South Bend, Indiana.)

Beyond the elected officials who make up a community's formal governance structure, there are at least four sectors on which communities can draw for local leadership.

1) Businesses. Every community has a business sector. It may involve a single large employer, like the town of El Dorado, Arkansas, where Murphy Oil Company has been involved in a range of transformative investments, from funding the El Dorado Promise to creating the Murphy Arts District, an arts and entertainment area intended to drive local economic development.[24] Or it may look more like Detroit, Austin, or Nashville, where large and diverse business sectors have come together through Chambers of Commerce to engage in issues that go well beyond traditional business concerns.

Reproduced by permission of Murphy Arts District, El Dorado, Arkansas.

Whatever the size and organization of a community's business sector, businesses represent a valuable source of community knowledge, investment, and leadership. Those that serve the local labor market—banks, retailers, real estate firms—may be particularly important, as they have a stake in the community being prosperous, even if it requires changing the area's historical business strengths. And businesses with historic roots in an area may feel a greater commitment to the future vitality of their hometown than those based elsewhere.

2) Colleges and universities. Not every community is home to a college or university, but those that are benefit in many ways. Colleges and universities contribute to economic vitality by bringing new income to a community. They attract students, faculty, and staff; improve the skills of local residents, assuming some of the institutions' graduates remain local; support the creation of new businesses or technologies through research; and put upward pressure on wages throughout the local area as regional employers compete for employees.[25]

There can be downsides as well: "town-gown" divisions may arise, a university's expansion can contribute to gentrification, and higher ed institutions are tax exempt and thus do not pay local property taxes.

Nonetheless, colleges and universities are an asset to community prosperity in another way—through their people, students and staff alike, who serve on local nonprofit boards, volunteer their time to support socially beneficial causes, and participate in community-wide initiatives. Colleges and universities are relatively sheltered from economic downturns and can serve as "anchor" institutions that have an enduring presence in a community. Even if specific leaders or staff move on, the institution and its reserves of human capital will remain.

3) Philanthropies. Most communities have a philanthropic sector, whether a United Way (with over 1,000 local chapters nationwide), a community foundation (more than 800 at latest count), a family or corporate foundation, faith-based organizations, or a pool of volunteers. Philanthropy is an important source of community leadership in many places. Not only do philanthropies provide financial resources for local initiatives, such as Promise programs, but also their leaders, staff, and volunteers can help the larger community understand its needs and assets.

In Grand Rapids, for example, major philanthropists coordinate their work through a political action committee that allows them to claim additional resources for infrastructure projects from state government while serving as an unofficial leadership board for downtown development. In Kalamazoo, local philanthropists have made transformative investments in the city by funding the Kalamazoo Promise and the Foundation for Excellence, a fund that supports the city budget, poverty reduction initiatives, and an across-the-board property tax rollback. In the small town of Buchanan, Michigan, a single bequest to the tiny community foundation secured a generous scholarship program for the town's high school graduates. In Flint, Michigan, large foundations, half of them local, have coordinated their giving to support health, education, and economic development initiatives.[26]

Some communities that have experienced substantial disinvestment are still home to vibrant, well-funded philanthropic entities. Toledo, for example, has a first-class zoo, orchestra, and art museum despite having lost population and jobs over the past 40 years.

4) Residents. All communities have talented residents, and the potential for engaging them as community leaders is tremendous. The challenge is broadening the pool beyond an area's more-affluent members who traditionally constitute the leadership class. Efforts to make nonprofit boards more representative of the populations they serve and to build leadership capacity in low-income neighborhoods show potential.

For example, the Detroit-based Skillman Foundation has invested in the capacity of neighborhood organizations to develop leaders who can create positive change in their own neighborhoods.[27] In the Cody Rouge neighborhood in western Detroit, residents are rebuilding neighborhood amenities, increasing neighborhood safety, and promoting home ownership and a strong sense of community.[28] In the tiny town of Hamilton (population 1,800) near Kansas City, the Doan family leveraged the family matriarch's quilting talents and YouTube following into the $20 million-a-year Missouri Star Quilt Company, becoming the largest employer in the county and drawing thousands of tourists monthly.[29]

Cooperating for future prosperity

While leadership may come from any of the sectors mentioned above, effective strategies will generally require collaboration across sectors. Leaders will have an easier time if different sectors of the community are aligned in their vision for its future. If a collaborative culture does not already exist, it can

Reproduced by permission of Cody Rouge Community Action Alliance, Detroit.

Mountain biking in Cuyuna. Reproduced by permission of Explore Minnesota.

be cultivated through small-scale cooperative ventures leading to increased trust and more ambitious efforts. Community initiatives can founder on turf wars, political conflict, and institutional competition, but they can also serve as tools for bringing partners to the table and fostering a more collaborative culture.

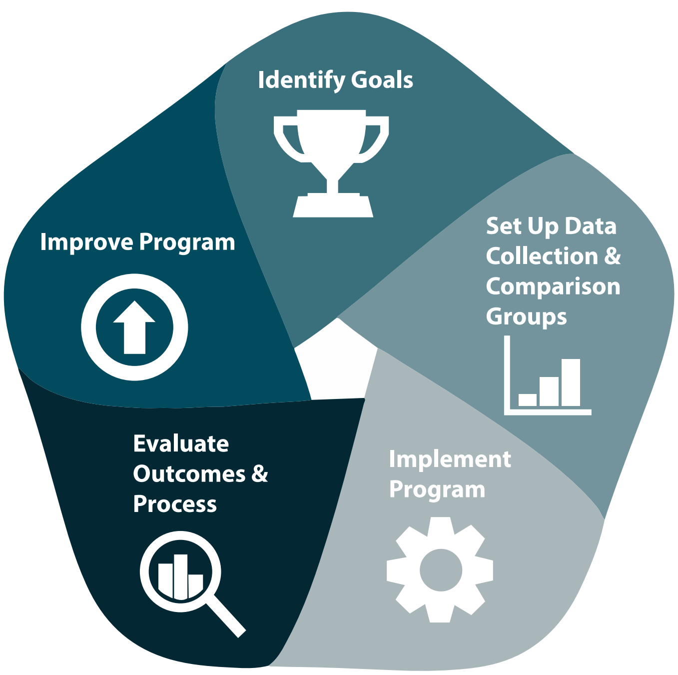
In Buffalo, Say Yes to Education (essentially a place-based scholarship coupled with support services for students) created incentives for cooperation between entities, such as the school board and the teachers union, that had historically been at odds with each other. The Say Yes framework created incentives for different groups to work together around a common set of goals and unleashed the untapped energy of new groups of leaders, including parents and businesspeople.

Cooperation can be challenging when stakeholders disagree about their community's future. Success may be easier if stakeholders understand that looking forward does not necessarily mean rejecting a city's history or its local assets. One alternative is to invest resources in new industries that build on the past. On Minnesota's Iron Range near the twin cities of Crosby and Ironton, where the last mine closed in 1984, the Cuyuna Country State Recreation Area was created by a broad group of public and private actors on 5,000 acres of land abandoned by mining companies. Since then, mountain bikers have flocked to the area to ride its network of trails. This has reenergized the towns, which now have new restaurants, a brewery, and stores, with job growth twice that of the surrounding region.

There is no single path to prosperity for all communities, and leadership structures will look different depending on a community's assets. Leaders should look to the community's history and attributes to determine which investments will best catalyze more jobs and higher wages for residents. In executing these strategies, leaders must recognize that community prosperity will rest not only on good ideas but on the common effort of multiple actors and coordinated investments of time, talent, and money.

Chapter 4
Evaluating Impact

To increase a community's prosperity through the kinds of strategies discussed in Chapter 2, it is crucial to evaluate one's efforts. Developing an evaluation framework helps a community set and clarify program goals from the outset. Surveys, interviews, and focus groups with program participants help facilitate program improvements. A well-designed impact study of how program participants fare relative to a close comparison group gives program funders—whether taxpayers, philanthropists, or business groups—objective evidence on whether a program is achieving its goals. Given the importance of evaluation to creating an effective program, evaluation needs to be built into program design from the very beginning.



Evaluation for program design

Thinking about evaluation should begin when a program is still in the development stage. Communities must understand their own critical needs in order to choose the design elements that will help achieve them. Questions like, "What is our community seeking to change with this program?" and "Over what time frame will these changes materialize?" are crucial for program stakeholders to consider.

Evaluation needs to be built into program design from the very beginning.

If possible, this phase should involve trained evaluators who can help communities assess what data need to be collected, how baseline or comparison groups can be constructed, and which strategies might permit an impact study. These evaluators need not be paid consultants; often faculty and graduate students at a state university have experience in program design and evaluation and may be willing to help for free.

Such evaluators can guide communities through design appropriate for their needs. For an apprenticeship program, for example, it would be important to address questions such as, "What is the level of demand for skilled workers in a given field?" and "What are reasonable expectations about the number of trainees who can be served through such a program?" Evaluators can also help connect with other states or communities that have successfully implemented economic development or skills-training programs. Nationwide convenings such as those organized by PromiseNet or Forward Cities (formerly CEOs for Cities) can provide opportunities for rapid learning and networking.

Early conversations with evaluators are likely to reveal goals that may inform possible evaluation designs. The program may try to address a particular need, which may suggest targeting certain types of communities, specific geographies, or populations within a community. For example, a state may want to direct its job-creating economic development programs toward communities with low employment rates or encourage the creation of Promise programs in places with low college attainment. Within a community, an economic development program may want to focus on creating certain types of jobs, or a Promise program may want to help a struggling central city or reach first-time college students.

Process evaluation to improve effectiveness

Even early in a program's lifetime, evaluation can contribute to its success by collecting a variety of data that provide feedback on the effectiveness of the program and creating opportunities for continuous improvement. This is known as formative or process evaluation. Process evaluation questions focus on whether various interventions are achieving their aims, and if not, how they can be adapted. Are program rules clearly understood by the target audience? For example, in the case of Promise programs, are students making use of available support services? Are specific interventions, such as those around FAFSA filing or high school course of study, gaining traction? Is uptake of program services where leaders want it to be?

As another example, some of the most potentially cost-effective economic development programs are those that provide individual businesses, particularly small businesses, with needed customized services. This may include job training programs through which community colleges screen and train workers to meet a firm's needs; manufacturing extension services that provide smaller manufacturers with advice on improving their competitiveness; or business development centers that help new or small businesses start up or expand. Relevant questions are whether local businesses are aware of these services when they're available, why firms take advantage of them or why not, and what difficulties are experienced while taking part.

Some answers to these and the previous example's questions can be found through surveys and focus groups of the respective parties—business managers and owners, training providers, students, parents, and others. These ways of soliciting feedback from the groups receiving (or providing) the assistance can provide useful feedback on program implementation and whether it is following the design as intended. Other questions may require administrative data collection and analysis. Take-up rates, for instance, require data tracking not just participants but all those eligible to participate. For businesses, this may require a tally of firms meeting specific criteria in the area, provided by government or private sources. For student intervention, it might require data that follow individual students over time, from K–12 to higher education and even into the workforce. Data-sharing agreements across institutions—such as school districts, scholarship administrators, postsecondary institutions, and state workforce agencies—may be needed.

Evaluation to gauge impact

This is the final type of evaluation and the one in which technical assistance from evaluators or researchers is likely to be most important. Determining whether the outcomes sought by program stakeholders are actually being met requires looking not just at raw numbers or trends, but also at some kind of comparison group. This is essential to ensure that what is being detected is the impact of the program itself rather than some other factor, such as changing economic conditions. For a skills development program, comparison groups might consist of neighboring school districts, similar communities, or student populations from before the time the program was introduced. For an economic development program, a comparison group might consist of similar firms that are ineligible for assistance or those applying for it while just missing required cutoffs. These comparisons, however, must be made carefully and in a controlled fashion if real impacts are to be detected.

The targeting of interventions on certain types of communities or particular groups of students can make these comparison-based impact analyses quite feasible. For good reasons, policymakers might want to concentrate a program in local areas that are the most distressed or that already have the beginnings of a high-tech cluster. Or a state might want its skills development programs to focus on communities with low levels of educational attainment but well-developed plans, perhaps through a competition, to provide support services for students.

Although these targeting decisions are often made subjectively, they also can be made using a system that scores candidates based on how closely they meet the desired targeting criteria. The total score can then be used to decide which places are eligible for the program or programs.

This assignment mechanism allows rigorous evaluation. The places that score just high enough to receive assistance will in most cases be similar to the areas that score just below the assistance cutoff. Subsequent differences between areas just above or below the cutoff—in job growth or educational attainment, for example—are very likely caused by the program assistance.

A recent example of such an evaluation concerns a job creation credit in North Carolina, which divides its counties into three tiers based on quantitative distress criteria. The most distressed county tier is eligible for more incentives than the second tier, and the second tier is eligible for more incentives than the bottom tier. These tiers are regularly redefined as county economic fortunes change. Using the comparison strategy described above, the evaluation found that the greater incentives received by more distressed counties led to larger decreases in the unemployment rate and larger gains in employment.[30]

Even if this strategy is not feasible, one can often gauge impacts by comparing firms or persons that received assistance to those that did not, both before and after program implementation. Although the Kalamazoo Promise was a near-universal program, scholarship assistance was conditioned on the student being continuously enrolled in the district since the beginning of 9th grade. By comparing students who enrolled in the district before 9th grade to those who enrolled in 10th grade or later, both before and after the Promise's implementation, researchers were able to estimate that the Promise had increased college graduation rates by about one-third.[31]

Evaluation is within reach

We hope that this chapter has allayed some common myths about evaluation:

Myth 1: Evaluation is technical and complex. While sometimes this is the case, especially when it comes to quasi-experiments, other kinds of evaluation are quite straightforward, consisting of data collection, tracking, surveys, and focus groups.

Myth 2: Evaluation requires expensive outside experts. Some interventions may benefit from having an independent, third-party evaluator, but many other evaluation activities can be carried out by program managers themselves. Evaluation resources also can often be found in one's own community, at a local college or university.

Myth 3: Evaluation takes place when a program has ended. Thinking about goals and how they are to be measured is something that should happen at the beginning of an intervention, rather than evaluation being added as a "secret sauce" when a program is wrapping up. Evaluators can help shape program design in a way that makes it easier to see if goals are being met.

Myth 4: Evaluation will conclusively tell you if a program has succeeded or failed in meeting its goals. While occasionally this may be true, more often evaluation will help stakeholders understand what worked and what did not and provide insights into how programs can be improved.

It is our hope that place-based strategies to build local prosperity will proceed holistically, with economic development and skills development integrated, with clear goals from the beginning, and with a plan to measure results.

Endnotes

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