



# **Aligning Workforce Development, Postsecondary Education and Economic Development: A National Perspective**

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## The Current Context: Recession and Recovery

- This has been the nation's longest recession with the highest unemployment rate in 30 years.
- A skilled workforce is essential for long term economic competitiveness and growth.
- Employers continue to demand employees with cross-cutting knowledge, skills, and abilities, including:
  - Critical Thinking and Problem Solving
  - Effective Communication
  - Collaboration and Team Building
  - Creativity and Innovation
  - Math/Science/Engineering/Technology Skills

# Aligning Postsecondary Education and Workforce Development with Economic Development Goals

- Postsecondary education should be the foundation of a state's workforce development efforts.
- Workforce development and postsecondary education should be connected with economic development and employer needs.
- Several states are redefining the role of postsecondary education to include being accountable for aligning with—and helping drive—economic prosperity.

## Promising State Efforts

- States are developing comprehensive postsecondary education strategies that:
  - Are grounded in the use of intelligence about the labor market and changing employer needs;
  - Enhance curriculum to reflect the requirements of the global economy;
  - Measure success in terms of the impact of education on students' employment outcomes and the ability of postsecondary education to serve the region's employers; and

# Action 1: Setting Goals

Several states have set clear goals for postsecondary education that include preparing students for jobs in high-wage, high-skill industries.

- **Ohio:** The Governor's TurnAround Ohio initiative, committed to making higher education key to improving the state's economy, created a coordinated University System, a cabinet-level Chancellor, and a far-reaching 2008 Strategic Plan.
- **North Carolina:** The 2007 UNC Tomorrow process developed a shared vision for increasing the UNC system's role in economic development, making the system more demand-driven, and preparing graduates with education and skills needed by the state's key industries.
- **Washington State:** The state's Strategic Master Plan for higher education focuses on expanding opportunity for residents and driving greater economic prosperity through talent development.

## Action 2: Developing Better Labor Market Intelligence

Leading states are moving to incorporate both data and direct knowledge of employer needs into higher education planning processes. These include:

- **Minnesota's** state college and university system uses data analyzed by an in-house labor market expert and qualitative information on employer needs to identify regional high-growth industries and their workforce needs.
- **Washington State** requires a Biennial Assessment of Employer Demands, which compares type and number of expected education and training credentials against forecasted employer demands.

## Action 3: Reforming Curricula

States are developing policies to reform curricula based on labor market data, regional employer needs, opportunities to advance key industries, and inclusion of global knowledge economy skills.

- **North Carolina:** The UNC System required that the state's 17 public 4-year schools develop a plan to integrate “soft skills”—critical thinking, problem solving, teamwork, communication, entrepreneurship—into curriculum for all students, regardless of major.
- **Ohio's** Strategic Plan encourages each university to have a distinctive mission, and forges new collaboration with Department of Development and the business community to encourage internships, recruit international students, and promote foreign language study.
- **Minnesota, Washington and Ohio** have established Centers of Excellence to serve as state sector leaders.

## Action 4: Tracking Progress

Several states are measuring progress by developing data systems and identify key metrics.

- The **Florida** Education and Training Placement Information Program (FETPIP) longitudinal data system tracks the long term education and employment outcomes of high school and college students.
- The **Minnesota Measures** system presents data on effectiveness of postsecondary education in meeting talent needs and benchmarks the state to other states and countries.
- **Ohio** has identified 20 metrics for higher education that focus on Access, Quality, Affordability and Efficiency, and Economic Leadership, with current levels and 2017 targets.

# Conclusions / Recommendations

- Articulate goals for postsecondary education and workforce development to contribute to state's economy
- Develop regular system of information on labor market and changing employer skill needs; disseminate broadly so students, faculty and staff, and policymakers can make decisions.
- Identify and track appropriate measures of alignment that demonstrate progress toward meeting strategic goals and create longitudinal data systems to determine employment outcomes of students.
- Ensure funding formulas reward performance in the areas of access, attainment and alignment, and award competitive funds to educational institutions that develop curricula to meet needs of key industries.

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