



Capitalizing on Post-High School Education To Develop In-State Talent

A Transition Memo for Governors





Overview

In the next decade, the U.S. economy will require many more people with college degrees, certificates, or other credentials of value beyond a high school diploma. As a governor, you can meet this labor market and societal demand by taking steps to boost the share of people in your state with quality credentials. In doing so, you will join a national movement for 60 percent of working adults in the United States to realize the life-changing benefits of building workforce-relevant knowledge and skills.

Better-educated, better-trained people, whether Black, white, or brown, launch and attract businesses, generate better health outcomes, contribute to lower crime rates, and help ensure increased economic opportunity and social mobility for everyone.

Among today's college students, nearly half are the first in their families to pursue formal education or training after high school. Forty-two percent of college students are students of color. Nearly one-fourth care for children. More than a third do not know where their next meals are coming from. Many students regularly encounter unstable housing situations. Almost 40 million people are 25 years old or older, have some college experience, and have stopped out without earning a degree or other credentials. These conditions present opportunities and challenges for the newly elected statewide official.

As you begin your term as governor, Lumina Foundation, along with some of its grantees and partners, provides you with the following advice.



Spark Action

Call a meeting of the state's top employers, the Chamber of Commerce, and the community and technical college system to focus on high-demand fields, identify potential options for meeting talent needs, and settle on a plan of action that coordinates skills development efforts across state government.

Through effective leadership, you can champion a talent development agenda comprising 1) affordable, widely available options for education and training, 2) fair and just outcomes among people of color, people from low-income households, and other residents whom colleges and universities poorly serve, and 3) thoughtful approaches to developing people's knowledge and skills that support their aspirations and the state's specific workforce needs. Investments in higher learning can drive economic and social returns for graduates, residents, and industries within the state. A better-educated population also can signal the state is open for business.



Create Opportunity

Build on the strengths of state residents. Get people to high school equivalency if they have dropped out. Identify adults with college credit who should finish their degrees. Better align pathways from high school to workforce and college programs that improve labor market outcomes and create opportunities for more learning. Develop incentives for higher ed institutions and companies to create convenient, flexible workplace-based education and training for adults.



Scan the Landscape

Increasing the share of state residents who earn degrees, certificates, industry-recognized certifications, or other credentials has never been more critical for individuals and society. At the same time, undergraduate enrollment has declined since the pandemic's onset. College attainment rates aren't rising fast enough in many states (or nationally). Many degrees and other credentials do not align with in-demand, well-paying work, and the public is increasingly questioning the price tag of a college education when compared with other choices. The pandemic exacerbated injustices many people experience, especially people who are Black, Hispanic, Latino, and Native American. However, the pandemic also sparked progress at colleges and universities in more rapidly meeting students' needs and developing better approaches to learning for today's students. To assess the state's strengths and work areas, Lumina offers in-depth, state-by-state comparisons of progress toward the 60 percent attainment goal in [A Stronger Nation](#), an online data visualization continually updated by our data, evaluation, and research team.



Improve Outcomes

Increasing the share of growing populations of adults who are Black, Hispanic, Latino, and Native with education or training after high school is essential. Nationally, the percentage of working-age adults in the United States with associate and bachelor's degrees is 44 percent. Among Black adults, however, 32 percent have college degrees. And the attainment rate among people who are Hispanic and Latino is 26 percent or 18 points below the national average.

Many governors hear from business leaders and hiring managers that colleges are not graduating people with workforce-relevant knowledge and skills. To address these concerns, plain talk and a firm commitment to aligning programs offered by the state's colleges and universities are essential. Your transition team should identify leaders to assist you who can assess talent development efforts, grasp policy and budgetary challenges, make actionable recommendations, and effect change. What local, state, and federal funds are available to develop the talent of state residents? How much spending flexibility do you have? Do the state's financial aid programs benefit those with the greatest needs? How does the state compare nationally on K-12, higher ed, and workforce outcomes? What can you do to improve the affordability and accessibility of education and training? How is federal COVID relief being spent, and what are the funding consequences when this money runs out?

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Build Support

Meet the academic and business leaders of public and private colleges and universities to share your vision and build understanding and support. Expand your network to include informed business, K-12, economic development, foundation, and nonprofit leaders.

After your leadership team has mapped the state's talent assets, understands how the state is positioned relative to others nationally, and delivered initial findings, conclusions, and recommendations, the work begins. You should clearly understand opportunities on the horizon and who's doing what to build people's knowledge and skills. Your vision should be bold and ambitious; it should incorporate measurable outcomes. Engage a wide variety of potential supporters through your State of the State address and other speeches, policy forums and the use of task forces, and quiet persuasion in small-group meetings.

Align the efforts of the state's K-12, higher education, workforce, and economic development agencies through regular cabinet-level interaction and other processes structured to deliver statewide goals. Set the pace of work by emphasizing the importance of improving the workforce and seeking status updates regularly.



Key appointments

Most governors appoint education and workforce/economic development policy advisors; these individuals must work together to further your vision. Select aides with credibility with the principals in the state higher education and workforce training systems who can execute your plans with fidelity. In addition, budget agency leaders will influence the allocations of state-level financial aid and higher ed operating and capital appropriations.



Harness Your Talent

Surround yourself with “critical friends” who have deep knowledge of the higher ed landscape and the state’s needs. Make sure agency leaders have the right teams in place, including staffers with records of accomplishment in state government.

You will also appoint representatives to state higher ed governing or coordinating boards, which in turn hire the state’s higher education executive officer (SHEEO). Meet with this executive, who is likely to remain in the position until you make a new appointment, and with current board members.

Evaluate current board appointees with particular attention to those awaiting reappointment or whose terms are about to expire. These boards often regulate higher education and have the potential to be champions of a robust policy agenda. Such boards also approve programs and present capital and operating budget requests to legislative committees with appropriating authority, often working closely with state budget agency officials.

You also may appoint public college and university board trustees and regents. These appointments are highly prized. Most statewide and institutional boards don’t proportionately represent the racial, ethnic, and gender diversity of the students whose interests they serve. Ensure your appointments include diverse voices and perspectives that can help build support for an inclusive higher ed and workforce agenda.

Thoroughly vet appointees to ensure they share your vision. They will play a significant role in ensuring that the state ends up with a higher percentage of residents with degrees and other credentials and helping eliminate educational disparities across racial, ethnic, and income groups. When you interview candidates, they should commit to serving the public by focusing on education and training after high school to meet workforce demand, instead of solely representing the wants and desires of their specific higher ed institutions.



Beyond the Numbers

People in communities across the state often grasp trends that breathe life into data or even go beyond what data reveal. Also, to establish context, you should work with policy advocates and researchers from higher ed, labor, and workforce agencies.

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Resource

Lumina's **State Policy Agenda** recommends ways states can spend resources so more adults can earn credentials with workplace value. We believe race and ethnicity should not determine educational outcomes. And we believe barriers—in the form of beliefs, policies, and practices—must be removed to ensure individuals are prepared for informed citizenship and success in a global economy.

Lumina's policy agenda makes a case for the following:

- Public financing of colleges, universities, and training centers that serve the most significant numbers and highest percentages of today's students. These students are Black, Hispanic, Latino, and Native American, are from low-income families, are the first in their families to pursue education and training after high school, and are working-age adults.

Action:

Evaluate data describing how public funding is appropriated across public institutions within the community college and four-year sectors. This analysis can help reveal and address funding arrangements that disadvantage public colleges, universities, and training centers serving students who require higher financial and non-financial support to succeed.

- Comprehensive student financial aid programs that serve students, especially students of color, in greatest financial need.

Action:

Examine data by race and ethnicity, age, immigration status, enrollment status, and other characteristics to determine how well the state's financial aid system serves different types of students. Prioritize students who would most benefit from financial aid and are poorly served.

- Quality education and training create value for students and the economy. Such programs should offer fair, consistent ways of meeting people where they are by assessing and validating what state residents know and can do, hastening progress toward degrees and other credentials.

Action:

Adopt criteria for evaluating the quality and value of short-term credentials such as college certificates and industry-recognized certifications. Hold colleges and other training providers accountable. Guarantee the availability of income-based financial aid for students in programs that lead to upward mobility.

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Next Steps

Lumina works with governors and other state policymakers through Strategy Labs, a platform for providing technical assistance, opportunities for peer learning, and nonpartisan research and analyses. [Learn more here.](#)



About Lumina Foundation

Lumina Foundation is an independent, private foundation in Indianapolis that is committed to making opportunities for learning beyond high school available to all. We envision a system that is easy to navigate, delivers fair results, and meets the nation's need for talent through a broad range of credentials. Our goal is to prepare people for informed citizenship and for success in a global economy.

To learn more about Lumina Foundation and Strategy labs, visit us online.

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