



## Make Data Work for Our Workforce

Business leaders understand the power of data. Every day, they rely on a range of information to guide their decisions. A successful company would never overhaul a product or launch a new service without reliable information to support those choices. We must apply the same type of data-driven decision making to the challenge of building our nation's talent pipeline.

### Postsecondary investments should be data-driven

Currently, there are significant gaps in public data about workers, education and training, and the economy. This missing information makes it difficult to determine whether postsecondary programs are giving our nation's workforce the skills they need for today's in-demand jobs. Which in turn makes it difficult for individuals, businesses, and policymakers to determine how to best invest private and public training dollars.

### Data can only drive investments if it's accessible

We don't necessarily need more data: a full range of postsecondary education data is currently collected by those public agencies that provide federal and state funding for education and training. But what's missing is a way to both safely and publicly aggregate, compare, share, and use this data. Without this frame in place, all the data that's currently being collected gets underutilized, leaving key stakeholders with an inability to make informed decisions about how to invest in education, and leaving regions without the talent pipeline that local industries demand.

### Who are the customers for postsecondary outcomes data?

Postsecondary education serves as a key advancement tool to a range of individuals, institutions, and economies. Accessible data on postsecondary outcomes would ensure all entities have the information in hand so that they can be strategic when it comes to their postsecondary education investments, including:

- **Business leaders** struggling to find skilled workers and attempting to navigate which education and training programs are preparing prospective employees to meet the needs of their industry;
- **Students and workers** trying to choose promising career paths and identify which education and training programs will help them to achieve their goals;
- **Educators** at education and training programs who want to know the education and employment outcomes of their graduates, so they can continually improve their curricula; and
- **Policymakers** who want to invest taxpayer dollars in education and workforce programs that successfully place people in jobs.



With a tight labor market and more than half of all job postings requiring some sort of postsecondary training or degree, you'd expect postsecondary graduates to have their pick of jobs; **but not all degrees and certifications are created equal in metro Atlanta.** The type of degree or certification is just as important as "education attainment" itself, **but many times this information isn't clear to students** until they've completed their training and struggled to find a well-paying job. **Making this data available at the front-end of postsecondary education will increase the number of students pursuing fields that employers desperately need.** – Amy Lancaster, Metro Atlanta Chamber

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Demand for postsecondary education continues to grow nationally — in the foreseeable future, 80 percent of all jobs in the United States will require some sort of education past high school. Currently federal and state policymakers are grappling with ways to modernize our education and training policies to reflect this structural shift in our current and emerging labor markets. It is critical that a navigable data system — a system that actually provides postsecondary education customers with a clear picture of expected outcomes for their investment — be a part of this modernization process. Congress can do this both securely and transparently by:

- **Measuring outcomes to ensure program quality.** Investments in postsecondary education often pay off for students and businesses, but we lack detailed data on individual programs to understand what's working and what's not. Congress should adopt employment, earnings, and credential attainment metrics so we can

measure returns on investment and support program improvements.

- **Providing information to help customers make informed decisions.** College is a huge investment, and students need reliable information to choose a program that helps them meet their goals. Congress should support a policy that facilitates the availability of user-friendly information about college costs, graduation rates, and post-college employment.
- **Protecting privacy and keeping the data secure.** Trustworthy, transparent data is a cornerstone of good policymaking and individual decision making, but it is equally imperative that privacy rights are protected. Congress should support a data policy that includes up-to-date security standards and penalties for illegally obtaining information, prohibitions on collection of sensitive information, and strong limitations on disclosing any information about individuals.



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*Business Leaders United for Workforce Partnerships (BLU) is the national voice of small and medium sized businesses who are concerned about filling skilled positions at their companies and want to develop public-private partnerships in their communities to better meet their skilled workforce needs.*