

Northeast Ohio Talent Dividend Summit
Executive Summary & Preliminary Action Plan
October 2009

Meeting Summary

On Wednesday, September 23, 2009, 35 regional leaders convened at Corporate College East for the Northeast Ohio Talent Dividend Summit. This was CEOs for Cities' first Talent Dividend meeting that embraced a region (as opposed to an individual city, metropolitan area or county). The event was co-hosted by the Northeast Ohio Council on Higher Education ("NOCHE"), the Fund for Our Economic Future, and Forest City Enterprises, with local sponsorship by the Regional Talent Network.

Representatives of the co-hosts—Bob Reffner (Chair, NOCHE; Vice President-Legal, FirstEnergy), David Abbott (Chair, the Fund for Our Economic Future; Executive Director, The George Fund Foundation) and Chuck Ratner (Member, CEOs for Cities; President and CEO, Forest City Enterprises)—opened the event by sharing their commitment to and enthusiasm for engaging leaders in the discussion about how to increase Northeast Ohio's educational attainment levels and, as a result, improve the region's economy.

Carol Coletta of CEOs for Cities offered a presentation on the Talent Dividend for Northeast Ohio. In this region, an increase of 1% in educational attainment (from 25.2% to 26.2%) would result in approximately 26,000 more college graduates and a corresponding economic boost to Northeast Ohio of \$2.8 billion. The presentation was followed by an overview of the Northeast Ohio talent landscape by Ann Womer Benjamin, Executive Director of NOCHE, and facilitated discussion led by Brad Whitehead, President of the Fund for Our Economic Future.

Attendees agreed on the importance of this dialogue and the implementation of a course of action to achieve the Talent Dividend for Northeast Ohio. Whereas talent development is a key goal of the region's economic development strategy (e.g., Advance Northeast Ohio), and while many initiatives are underway, there is a need for leadership among stakeholders (including members of the business, higher education, philanthropic, and public sector communities) and coalescence around a strategy to achieve gains in educational attainment.

What are Northeast Ohio's best opportunities for achieving the Talent Dividend?

Several of the comments elicited during the facilitated discussion related to the following four "Strategy Buckets" identified in Coletta's presentation: (1) re-engage adults with some college/no four-year degree, (2) increase transfer rate of students in two-year institutions to four-year institutions, (3) retain current students for timely completion, and (4) increase college readiness of high school students.

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- **Re-engage adults with some college/no four-year degree.**

Significant interest and discussion centered on how to engage the target population of people with “some college/no four-year degree.” In Northeast Ohio, the number of people estimated in this category exceeds 675,000 residents. To engage this population, Northeast Ohio first needs to learn more about this group (e.g., the demographics of this group (especially their age and where they live); what percentage of people in the “some college/no four-year degree” category have an Associate’s degree, because they are more likely to continue on to get a four-year degree; and what delivery mechanisms will work to bring this population “back in”).

A new initiative led by WCPN/WVIZ Ideastream, in partnership with NOCHE, seeks to develop a multi-media, multi-channel presence that would offer educational, informational, and job-seeking opportunities via a combination of TV, radio, and Internet channels to serve this population. Greater understanding about the “some college/no four-year degree” population will assist that and other initiatives in tapping into this large pool of potential four-year college graduates.

- **Increase transfer rate of students in two-year institutions to four-year institutions.**

The group discussed efforts at the state level by the Ohio Board of Regents and the Ohio General Assembly to improve the ease of transfer from two- to four-year institutions. Community colleges in the region have taken a leadership role in this effort, and the group recognized that although work still remains to be done, major breakthroughs regarding two- and four-year credit transfer agreements have occurred in Ohio.

- **Retain current students for timely completion.**

The topic of retaining students for timely completion of a four-year degree was raised by several attendees, who noted the need for improvement in five-year graduation rates at four-year institutions, the cost of higher education in Ohio, and financial aid opportunities later in a college career (i.e., scholarships often are front-loaded to get students into college but are not available when a student needs help to complete a degree). Other attendees noted that in terms of retention/completion, the system of education delivery needs to be reformed and policy issues are significant in successfully changing the system.

- **Increase college readiness of high school students.**

College readiness was a common theme in the facilitated discussion. A recent local study of underserved high school students in Northeast Ohio revealed that *aspiration* is high, with 90% of students stating that they want to go to college. However, the markings of college preparation were not as high, with survey results showing that less than one-half of

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surveyed students had talked to someone at their high school about courses needed for college, and only one-half of surveyed students had taken or registered for a college preparatory exam by the 10th grade.

Likewise, in terms of college readiness, the region has a marked difference in high school graduation rates between Cleveland and surrounding suburbs. Participants recognized that the education “needle” *can* move forward, but it requires that groups work together collaboratively.

What are the next three steps Northeast Ohio needs to take now to achieve the Talent Dividend?

1. Convene a smaller group of key stakeholders in Northeast Ohio who are committed to leading this effort.
2. Assess the “landscape” and arm stakeholders with data to develop a strategy to move forward.
3. Identify attainable goals (such as the four goals identified in the “Strategy Buckets”) and develop recommendations for action to achieve them.

What would Northeast Ohio leaders like to know that would make pursuit of the Talent Dividend more effective?

Who makes up the “some college/no four-year college degree” group? For example, where do they live and how old are they? How many already have an Associate’s degree? What delivery systems are needed to bring this group back into the higher education environment?

What are the key benchmark(s) to track improvement in educational attainment?

What can CEOs for Cities do to support Northeast Ohio’s efforts?

Northeast Ohio has many higher education initiatives underway. To assist in the region’s efforts, an expert (e.g., Public Agenda) that could help to convene and guide the discussion would be welcome. Moreover, data on the above-noted population (some college/no four-year degree) would be helpful. Finally, the region would like to be made aware of “best practices” in other areas of the country seeking to achieve the Talent Dividend.