

How Collaboration Creates Opportunity in Connecticut

Thomas Phillips

CAPITAL WORKFORCE PARTNERS

A combination of workforce experts and private-sector and government organizations are helping bring low-literacy adults and disconnected youth into the workforce.



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There is a well of hidden talent in New England, and through convening the region's workforce development boards in collaboration with education, economic development, and community-based partners, the people comprising this untapped resource are getting the attention they need to round out their skills and connect to sustainable careers. Employers often disregard individuals with low literacy rates, urban high school teens, and youth who have disconnected from school and work, viewing them as too risky to employ.

Yet these groups represent a significant portion of our population in New England. In 2014 in Connecticut alone, 15,329 adults were enrolled in adult education and were either unemployed or not receiving livable wages.¹ Connecticut's Department of Education noted in its 2014 statewide profile that more than 11,000 adults enrolled in classes in citizenship and English as a second language.² Over 30 percent of the youth population (ages 16–24) in Hartford lack a high school diploma or have a diploma but are not in college or working.³ (See "New England's Vulnerable Working-Age Population.") Converting these populations from existing, perceived liabilities to assets in the workforce should be an economic imperative. It is a heavy lift, however, and one that requires systemic changes through collaboration.

Collaboration—partnerships between the public and private sector—can support multiple strategies and approaches. Oz Griebel, the president and CEO of the MetroHartford Alliance, said it best in a recent *Hartford Business Journal* article: "At a time when every state faces economic volatility, underfunded retiree pension and healthcare benefits and growing municipal deficits, Connecticut's greatest advantage lies in the powerful combination of private-sector and government leaders working imaginatively and collaboratively to fix our state's finances and to restore private-sector confidence."⁴ Griebel pointed to Atlanta and Oklahoma City as examples of vibrant metro areas that benefit from strong private-public partnerships.

In north central Connecticut, Capital Workforce Partners and other collaborative organizations are using many approaches to stoke the pipeline with skilled talent in areas of current or expected business demand through a web of integrated partnerships.

Move UP! Collaborative

Move UP! is providing leadership in the development of a regional adult-literacy system in the capital region of Connecticut. The collaborative includes 26 adult-education providers, workforce training programs, and community colleges. Move UP!'s partners envision a regional adult-literacy system that offers:

- A coordinated continuum of literacy services that can meet the education and training needs of all adult learners.
- Connections to and support from supportive services such as childcare, counseling, and other social services.
- Career pathways that lead to jobs with sustainable wages.
- Coordination, communication, and collaboration among all providers of adult literacy services, employers, and business leaders.

The collaborative's leaders believe that coordination, networking, professional development, and other supports will create a stronger adult-literacy system and better outcomes for learners. Raising literacy levels is a first step toward improving hard and soft skills, the development of which will eventually position these individuals to be assets in the workforce.

Hartford Opportunity Youth Collaborative

The Hartford Opportunity Youth Collaborative includes leaders in education, youth development, and workforce development committed to addressing the needs of 16- to 24-year-olds who are not in school, not working, and who have no high school diploma. The collaborative helps them obtain their high school diploma, explore careers, continue their education, and eventually find employment.

With financial support from the Aspen Forum for Community Solutions, Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, and the Social Innovation Fund (as a subgrantee of Jobs for the Future), the collaborative has developed a full-scale, multiyear comprehensive plan. Several youth-centered programs are under way, including college and university partnerships, career-based contextualized learning, youth leadership development training, and Opportunity Works Hartford, a full-pathway approach that includes postsecondary/career bridging, technical training, and job experience. The Oppor-

tunity Works Hartford model will be built out to other cities and towns, as there are nearly 20,000 opportunity youth in Hartford County, with over 6,300 in the city of Hartford alone. Given the US decline in growth rate of working-age people, especially in New England, equipping our youth for the future is key.

Hartford Student Internship Program

In 2012, the superintendent of Hartford Public Schools convened a public-private work group charged with linking secondary education and workforce development. It includes the City of Hartford, Capital Workforce Partners, MetroHartford Alliance, and Connecticut Business and Industry Association, along with Hartford Public Schools. The program employs rigorous standards and offers meaningful internships at worksites that have included law firms, banks, insurance companies, health care institutions, nonprofits, and production facilities.

To date, nearly 200 high school juniors and seniors have benefited from rewarding after-school and summer internship opportunities. The Hartford Student Internship Program is part of the larger Summer Youth Employment Program, funded by the State of Connecticut, City of Hartford, and philanthropic organizations, which has provided an additional 1,980 teens from throughout the north central Connecticut region with summer jobs.

B.E.S.T. (Bringing Every Stakeholder Together) Summit

In November 2015, 175 key Connecticut leaders convened for a first-ever economic summit collectively organized by the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM), the Connecticut Business and Industry Association (CBIA), and the Connecticut AFL-CIO. These are unlikely bedfellows, more often seen lock-

ing horns over diverging ideologies and approaches to policy-related workforce issues. The three statewide organizations partnered for the first time, along with key business, government, labor, education, and social service leaders to brainstorm the best pathways for Connecticut's economic future. Summit participants proposed speaking with one coordinated voice to address unfunded state mandates and to press for more equitable funding formulas. They also supported more collaboration between education and business.

All of these initiatives share one common thread—collaboration. In the months ahead, it will take all community stakeholders working together to ensure there are enough people trained and ready to work in the jobs that are in demand today and will be in demand tomorrow. It will take public-private partnerships to guarantee that the education system is preparing youngsters with the mastery they will need to be successful in their career pathways. And it will take groups with differing ideologies continuing to convene until as much common ground can be identified as possible for progress.

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Endnotes

¹ "Adult Literacy," Move UP! website, <http://moveupct.org/adult-literacy>.

² Ibid.

³ "Our Youth," Hartford Opportunity Youth Collaborative, <http://youthreconnect.org/our-youth/>, and data from the 2009–2013 American Community Surveys, public-use files.

⁴ Oz Griebel, "Time for Public-Private Partnerships to Drive CT's Economic Growth, Development," *Hartford Business Journal*, November 23, 2015, <http://www.hartfordbusiness.com/article/20151123/PRINTEDITION/311209940/time-for-public-private-partnerships-to-drive-ct>.

New England's Vulnerable Working-Age Population

Amy Higgins

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Compared with other New England states, Connecticut has the second-highest percentage of foreign-born population as well as the second-highest percentage of population speaking a language at home other than English. Connecticut's unemployment rate for individuals ages 25–64 years old and lacking a high school degree is the highest in the region, as is the unemployment rate among those with an associate's degree or some college. Among the New England states, Connecticut has the lowest percentage of skill underutilization. Finally, the percentage of youth not employed and not attending school is the second-highest in the region.

State	Population	Percentage foreign born	Percentage speaking a language at home other than English, age 5 and up	Unemployment rate, age 16 and up*	Unemployment rate, ages 25–64, lacking a high school degree	Unemployment rate, ages 25–64, with a high school degree or GED	Unemployment rate, ages 25–64, with an associate's degree or some college	Unemployment rate, ages 25–64, with a bachelor's degree or higher	Percentage of skill underutilization, age 25 and up**	Percentage of youth ages 16–24 not in school and not working***
CT	3,596,677	13.7	21.8	6.6	13.0	9.0	7.1	3.8	17.6	10.6
ME	1,330,089	3.7	6.8	5.7	11.1	7.0	5.2	2.3	20.6	9.8
MA	6,745,408	15.7	22.6	5.8	11.9	8.6	6.6	3.3	17.7	9.8
NH	1,326,813	6.0	7.5	4.2	8.3	6.2	4.5	2.5	18.6	10.1
RI	1,055,173	13.4	21.0	7.7	12.5	9.7	6.5	3.0	19.0	12.4
VT	626,562	4.1	5.0	3.7	12.0	7.2	4.9	1.9	18.7	8.9

Data Sources: With the exceptions noted below, all statistics come from the One-Year 2014 American Community Survey Estimates.

*From the Bureau of Labor Statistics 2014 Local Area Unemployment tables, <http://www.bls.gov/lau/#tables>.

**From Migration Policy Institute data, <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/state-immigration-data-profiles>. Skill underutilization is defined as individuals with a college degree who are either unemployed or employed in low-skilled jobs.

***From Opportunity Nation Opportunity Index, <http://opportunityindex.org/#4.00/40.00/-97.00/>.