

Billings, Montana Talent Dividend Summit

Executive Summary

A carefully-selected group of 17 community leaders gathered in downtown Billings on June 24th, 2009 at the invitation of Chuck Tooley, Director of the Urban Institute of Montana State University-Billings and former mayor of Billings. After the presentation by Carol Coletta, conversation took a variety of turns involving the particular circumstances in Billings that might help or hinder efforts to achieve a Talent Dividend. Some of the participants were willing to move forward with involving other organizations and individuals to build a strategy for achieving the Talent Dividend. The Urban Institute is following up with education and business leaders with that aim in mind.

What do you believe is your best opportunity for achieving the Talent Dividend?

Engage employers and educational institutions

Work with the major employers and the College of Technology, MSU-Billings and Rocky Mountain College to identify possible candidates. We may be able to achieve greater economic benefit by pushing for Associate degree attainment if that is where the job opportunities will best fit. The Economic Development authority will partner on an initiative to push for higher education attainment if we can match that to future workforce needs. Some of the people who should advocate aren't doing it. Make it sustainable because if it makes sense economically it is easier to sell and be accepted. Prioritize funding for education and find the source.

What are the next three steps you need to take now to achieve the Talent Dividend for your community?

Break down the goal. For example, to attain 1,001 more 4-year college graduates:

- 10% - Keep more graduates local with job development efforts
- 20% - Economic development plan to stimulate growth in industries that require 4-year education
- 40% - "Stop-Outs" – get some of the 33,000+ with some college experience back on campus
- 20% - Get more students going on to 4-year education by
 - * H.S. graduate participation in local 4-year university/colleges
 - * Decrease H.S. dropout rates
 - * 2-year transfers – associate degrees moving on to 4-year campuses
 - * Adult Ed and GED
 - * Adult learners
 - * Addressing under-served student populations – Hispanic/Native American
- 10% - Retain existing students on college campuses

Targeting actual percentages would allow entities to accept a goal and focus on it. A college administrator might accept the responsibility to retain 100 students, as an example.

Public effort

Change attitudes of local and state elected officials and business/economic development
Community commitment through PR campaign. Social norms marketing?
Money to help get them back in school
Econ. Dev. plan that communicates the importance of education to local economy

Stakeholder effort

University commitment to retention and serving new and stop-out populations
School district commitment to dropout decreases
Adult education involvement
Develop the incentive opportunities presented by the local private college and state university for those who have some college but not a 4-year degree. Identify the best prospects, and publicize the opportunity.

What would you like to know that you don't currently know that you believe would make your Talent Dividend pursuit more effective?

What impact would it have on employers if their employees earned the 4-year degree?
What will that do to their costs and employment outlook?

Many students drop out without degrees because they are too much in debt and their ability to return is hampered by what they already owe. How would we deal with that?

Can employers ID employees in their businesses, especially those who might be willing to return if there was some tuition reimbursement from their employer?

What funding options exist for:
Tuition assistance for returning stop-out students
Academic support center staffing
Childcare and other services for the majority who are working and raising families

How do we involve the community? The data would be of interest to the business community, but the general public also has to see the benefit.

How do we effectively tie education to quality of life and show how it affects even those without children.

What can CEOs for Cities do to support your efforts?

Provide suggestions and ideas about what works elsewhere.