



## The Opportunity Challenge

Memphis, TN  
February 2011

*Imagine a community where all citizens have the opportunity to develop all of their talents and put all of their talents to full use. Where everyone is the CEO of his or her own career, and the community communicates the value of learning every day in every way? Where one's "portfolio of work" is made up of multiple sources, some paid, some unpaid, that evolves and adapts throughout life to changing circumstances? What would this mean to the ability for all people to climb the economic ladder?*

Human capital development has taken on new meaning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Whereas once we could count on 12 years of schooling being enough for life, now, the need to develop one's talent and gain new skills continues throughout life. The local implications of this shift are profound.

The places that thrive today are those with the highest velocity of ideas and the highest density of talented people. Indeed, 58 percent of a city's success as measured by per capita income is explained by the percentage of its population with a four-year college degree. In most metro areas, the economic value of increasing local college attainment rates by just one percentage point is worth more in additional personal income annually than the payroll of the largest local private employer.

But when it comes to identifying talent and its potential, college attainment is a convenience at best. Does anyone still believe that talent development begins and ends with schools? Furthermore, conventional thinking assumes "talent" refers to a special class of people, while a fully developed and imaginative talent agenda assumes *all* human beings have talent.

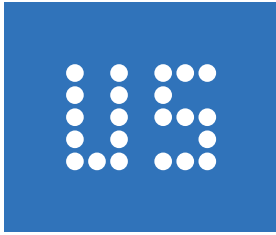
Developing talent in the fullest sense is not just the result of schools or early childhood education or workforce development. It is also the result of intense practice with the prospect of failure, taking risks, trying new things, putting one's talent to work in new and unfamiliar settings, the provision of opportunity, a whole web of public amenities such as libraries and community services, and the culture of a place. But these links are not often enough made, and further, these areas of specialty don't function as a system with a common goal. As a result, there is no sense of what each is supposed to produce in support of an overall talent agenda for a community.

### **Creating cities that are of, by and for us**

Imagine a community taking up this challenge to develop all of its talent and putting all of its talent to work. What would full engagement look like? What would be an effective quick start strategy? Where are the early wins? And how would a community know when it is succeeding?

Those are the questions we will tackle as part of the Opportunity Challenge. It is one of five big challenges that are part of a new initiative organized by CEOs for Cities and its network of partners who represent 31,500 businesses in 45 of America's largest communities. We call it the US Initiative – an initiative to build and sustain the next generation of great American cities that are of, by and for us.

CEOs for Cities is launching the US Initiative now for one reason: We continue to build too many of our communities – physically, economically, and socially – on an outdated set of beliefs. This is expensive, wasteful and puts us way over due for a new version of the American dream.



The purpose of the US Initiative is to bring into very clear focus how communities can deliver on five big (very big) ambitions that, together, can define a new American dream. We hold these values to be self-sustaining:

- Livability** We will all have access to beauty, art and nature every day.
- Community** We can all participate in a robust public life.
- Connectivity** We can meet our daily needs without owning a car.
- Opportunity** We will develop all of our talent and put all of our talent to work.
- Optimism** We believe that the future can be better for each of us and all of us.

The US Initiative is:

- 200+ civic partners across
- 45 cities committed to a
- 5 year campaign to innovate the future of cities through
- 6 rallying “Brain Trust” events, celebrating the work of
- 52 innovators changing the urban condition at
- 5 Local Challenges to bring new thinking into action inviting
- 1000’s of people to create new images of the future collected in
- 1 book documenting the movement and digitized available to
- 1,000,000’s of people interested in the future through the web

## The Memphis Opportunity Challenge

In February 2011, CEOs for Cities and Mayor AC Wharton will host the Opportunity Challenge in Memphis. One of a series of US Initiative Challenges in five cities, the Opportunity Challenge will ask urban leaders in Memphis to imagine the future of opportunity as expressed in the Declaration of Interdependence: *We can develop all of our talent and put all of our talent to work.*

Working with a team of national opportunity experts led by Bruce Mau, author of *The Third Teacher* and principal of Bruce Mau Design, CEOs for Cities and the City of Memphis will seek to determine what it takes to develop a compelling vision and practical strategies to determine what it takes to develop Memphians’ talent to the fullest extent.

In addition to producing big ideas and quick-start strategies for Memphis, results of the Opportunity Challenge will be reported nationally as part of the US Initiative.