



Observations on Colorado's Workforce Efforts

Colorado has been a leading state in bringing its workforce into the digital age. The state's leadership team, including the governor, has asked the Markle Foundation to discuss the importance of the initiatives they have undertaken. The Markle Foundation, through its [Skillful Initiative](#), has been working closely on these efforts with the governor, multiple state agencies and businesses, community organizations, and educators throughout Colorado. Through this first-hand experience, we have witnessed the commitment to, and impact of, these programs that are preparing the Colorado's workforce for the rapidly changing economy.

The leadership of Colorado understands that the forces of globalization and technology that are disrupting our labor market also can provide the tools and markets needed for system-wide change that benefits everyone. Achieving this is challenging and requires strategies that integrate into an effective network all sectors that make up the labor market so that employers can open up career opportunities for many more people, trainers can help provide the skills needed and job seekers can pursue productive paths. It is for this reason that the state has embraced Skillful and is leading innovations that can be replicated throughout the nation.

Skillful, a Markle Foundation initiative, launched in in 2016 with Colorado's leadership team as an integral participant in this overall effort. Working in Colorado's unusually collaborative environment, Skillful's integrated model brings together all stakeholders and leverages the technology and tools that are disrupting the economy to build a workforce ecosystem that works for all, especially for the middle skill jobs and job seekers that are vital to a growing economy. Skillful provides Colorado employers the templates, tools and resources to help transition their businesses to skills-based talent practices which emphasize workers' skills, training and experience over traditional hiring filters such as college degrees or work history. Skillful supports job seekers by providing them with tools and information to help them explore career paths, find training, search for the right job and connect with employers and educators. Skillful also provides tools to support career coaches who are critical resources for individuals during their journey to better jobs.

Another element of Colorado's integrated, ambitious vision for developing the workforce of the future is [CareerWise](#), the non-profit charged with building Colorado's youth apprenticeship system by aligning business and education. An initiative of the state's Business Experiential Learning (BEL) Commission, CareerWise starts in middle school by teaching students about career opportunities. By 11th grade students can participate in a paid apprenticeship with two days in the classroom and three days in a business or training center, linking classroom learning with hands-on experience. Each apprenticeship centers on a curriculum developed jointly by businesses, colleges and K-12 schools. Upon high school graduation, apprentices have the option of continuing on to a postsecondary degree or completing their apprenticeship and gaining access to a job in high-growth fields including information technology, financial services and advanced manufacturing.





Skillful has worked with CareerWise from its planning stage in identifying the skills apprentices need to learn and helping employers apply these tools not just to their apprenticeship programs but across employees' career pathways. In 10 years, Colorado has targeted a goal of more than 20,000 students in apprenticeships earning wages and college credit in fields such as software development, accounting and cybersecurity.

The Colorado Department of Labor and Employment's (CDLE) Employment and Training's Work-Based Learning Unit partners with CareerWise, overseeing several work-based learning initiatives for youth and adults. An outstanding example of Colorado's commitment to pairing workforce development with solid sector partnerships, the Innovative Industry Internship, another CDLE program, has partnered with 131 companies in eight growth industries, such as aerospace, advanced manufacturing and IT, placing 290 interns. Addressing the construction and energy labor shortage, the CDLE's WORK Act trained 1,393 individuals through pre-employment boot camps and apprenticeships, with 939 work seekers obtaining jobs.

The Colorado Workforce Development Center (CWDC), a business-led public-private board, is another in the state's integrated set of programs to facilitate and sustain a talent development system. Working with Skillful and others, it brings together the work of education, training, economic and workforce development to anticipate, and then meet, the needs of businesses, workers, job seekers and students.

To make the most of resources and to assure alignment of the state's goal to build a skills-based labor market focused on hiring and training by skills, rather than traditional credentials such as degrees or work history, the CWDC, state agencies, CareerWise and Skillful are also collaborating on the following:

- **Using real time labor market** demand data to focus education and training on businesses' needs.
- **Fueling industry collaboration through CWDC's sector partnerships.** Businesses are expanding work-based learning opportunities with input from CareerWise and the Work-Based Learning Unit while Skillful is developing tools to assist businesses in hiring by competency rather than principally degrees or industry experience.
- **Identifying critical occupations in key industries and the skills necessary** to be successful in those occupations using labor market data. This criteria cascades into actions by job seekers, training guides for businesses and curricula for educators, as well as job descriptions and resume tools for the labor market.
- **Governor's Coaching Corps:** This intensive leadership program – a partnership between Colorado and Skillful – is a highly innovative investment in frontline career coaching professionals. The Corps will be made up of 30 exceptional career coaches from public workforce centers, community colleges, and non-profit organizations who will work in teams to develop new practices and deploy new technology to improve career services by coaches throughout the state, while sharpening their own expertise in skills-based coaching for job seekers.





Colorado is setting a high bar with innovative and aligned initiatives that are preparing its residents and businesses to thrive now and in the future.

All Americans deserve to find a meaningful place in this new economy. We encourage Amazon to set the standard for the nation by emphasizing a state's deep commitment to preparing its workforce for the jobs of the future.

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