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Making Higher Education Policy Work for The Untapped Workforce

Who are America's Untapped Workers?

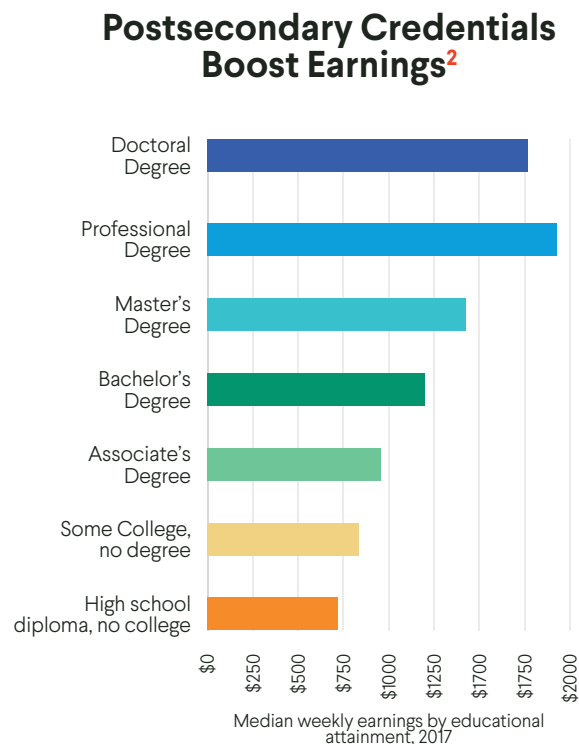
A growing number of employers identify difficulty hiring highly qualified workers as their top competitive challenge. **Roughly 75 million Americans could meet these employer needs but currently lack the skills or supports to do so.**

This is America's untapped workforce—the many people who do not have the work or wages they need to get by, but who can become the talent we need.

Untapped Workers Need Access to Postsecondary Education Programs

The percentage of jobs requiring at least some postsecondary education and training is expected to reach new highs in 2020. At the same time, the United States already faces severe shortages of workers with associate's degrees, bachelor's degrees, and technical credentials.¹

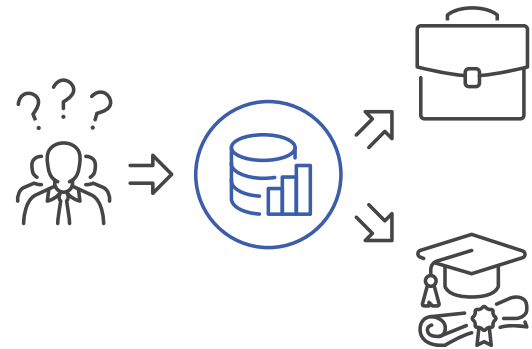
It is critical to change the way we build the skills of our workers to benefit both employers and individuals seeking careers. This is especially important for the untapped workforce, which includes many people from population groups underserved in postsecondary education and high-demand industries.



Transform Higher Education Policy to Harness the Potential of the Untapped Workforce

Improve Data

Untapped workers need better information about the education and labor market outcomes of postsecondary programs, so they can choose the ones that meet their needs. Policy should enable the development of easily accessible, understandable systems that link education and workforce data. Policy also should enhance career navigation systems that make it easier for individuals to find accelerated routes to industry-recognized postsecondary credentials and good jobs.

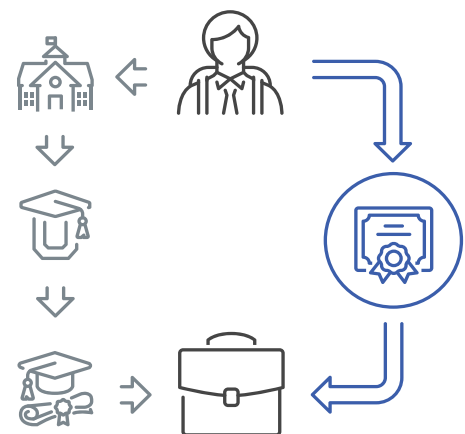


Make Financial Aid Flexible

Untapped workers need flexible financial aid policies that make it easier to apply for aid and ensure aid covers costs of postsecondary education beyond tuition and books. Students also need less restrictive scheduling rules.

Expand Accelerated Pathways

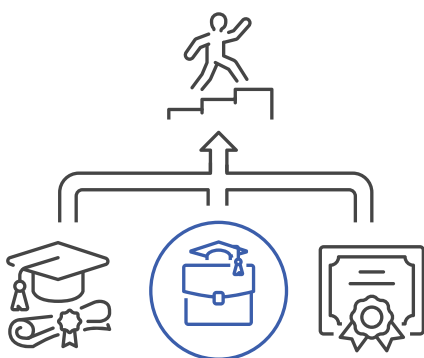
Untapped workers don't have time to waste. Policy should encourage acceleration strategies for helping them to meet their career goals efficiently. These include guided pathways models that map the fastest paths to credentials, credit for prior learning and experiences, competency-based models that focus on skill attainment, and high-quality short-term programs that lead to industry recognized credentials and build toward higher-level credentials and degrees.



How to Transform Higher Education Policy to Harness the Potential of the Untapped Workforce

Strengthen Supports

Untapped workers are juggling many demands, including part-time jobs and family responsibilities. Policy should ensure that they have the guidance and supports they need to succeed in postsecondary education, such as access to affordable child care, transportation, food, and housing.



Focus on Work

Untapped workers need work experiences that can serve as a springboard to their next career step, and allow them to continue earning while attending classes. Policy should expand equitable access to high-quality, relevant work-based learning experiences, including apprenticeship and work-study opportunities.

Enable Innovation

A higher education system designed for a different era and economy can't help the untapped workforce meet the skill demands of the future of work. Policy should enable systems to become more innovative, flexible, and responsive in a rapidly changing world while maintaining a strong focus on student supports and outcomes.



Endnotes

1. James Manyika et al., *Jobs Lost, Jobs Gained: What the Future of Work Will Mean for Jobs, Skills, and Wages* (New York: McKinsey & Company, 2017), <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/jobs-lost-jobs-gained-what-the-future-of-work-will-mean-for-jobs-skills-and-wages>.
2. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Median Weekly Earnings & Unemployment by Educational Attainment, 2017," April 2018.