

BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT IN EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

WHY THIS MATTERS FOR COLORADO

Colorado businesses are ready to lead, but current systems make it hard for them to engage meaningfully in talent development. Effective employer engagement is the backbone of a responsive education-to-employment pipeline. By creating structures that invite, support, and scale employer leadership, Colorado can strengthen regional economies, reduce workforce shortages, and prepare learners for in-demand jobs.

BY THE NUMBERS: KEY DATA ON COLORADO'S TALENT SYSTEM



27%

Colorado high school graduates go on to earn a postsecondary credential within six years

**145,000
JOB OPENINGS**

In March 2025, Colorado job openings, a rate of 4.7%, above the U.S. average of 4.3%

6 MAJOR SECTORS

- ▶ Healthcare & Social Assistance
- ▶ Professional & Technical Services
- ▶ Aerospace
- ▶ Energy
- ▶ Construction
- ▶ Transportation



\$1.7 BILLION FY 2025-26 budget for higher education operations and student financial aid, a 2.5% increase from the previous year

\$264 MILLION Annual budget across WIOA programs and state partner initiatives to support employment and training services

\$1.4 BILLION Colorado's investment in federal recovery funding over 4 years directly to support education and workforce-related functions

5,300 PROGRAMS Colorado's Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) list

4,000 RETIREMENTS Colorado's expected retirements over the next decade, alongside declining high school graduates

5 STATE AGENCIES Administer funding programs for postsecondary and workforce initiatives

OPPORTUNITY FOR GUBERNATORIAL LEADERSHIP

- 1 Colorado's talent shortages and misalignment aren't just economic; they're structural. Business engagement is fragmented across education, workforce, and economic development agencies.
- 2 No statewide strategy exists for business-led innovation in education and training that can respond to evolving sector needs.
- 3 The state has invested in local and regional partnerships and many are strong, but lack the shared infrastructure to scale what works.
- 4 Addressing future workforce challenges will require employer-driven ownership, strong quasi-governmental intermediaries, and aligned funding tied to clear goals and measurable outcomes for talent development.

THE VISION

COLORADO ESTABLISHES A QUASI-GOVERNMENTAL TALENT DEVELOPMENT ENGINE, BUSINESS-LED, DATA-DRIVEN, AND PUBLICLY EMPOWERED, THAT CONNECTS LOCAL INNOVATION TO A STATEWIDE SYSTEM

Imagine a state system, governed by a public-private board, where:

- ▶ Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and state funds are pooled into regional and sector-based collaboratives.
- ▶ Industry coalitions define priorities, approve training investments, and shape credential development with institutions of higher ed and training providers.
- ▶ Data flows in real time from labor markets and longitudinal systems to inform local decisions, training solutions, and signal statewide trends.
- ▶ Accountability is built in, with clear return-on-investment metrics tied to employment, equity, and economic impact.
- ▶ Responsiveness meets coherence: local leaders innovate, but statewide partners provide infrastructure, policy alignment, and shared goals.

WHAT THIS UNLOCKS

- ▶ **Put Employers in the Driver's Seat:** Shift from advisory input to shared decision-making by creating a business-led coordinating body with real authority.
- ▶ **Simplify the System:** Build a single, visible entry point for businesses to engage with talent efforts, no more fragmented programs or duplicative asks.
- ▶ **Align State Strategy with Local Action:** Set clear statewide goals and incentives, while letting regional leaders and employers tailor solutions to local needs.
- ▶ **Make It Last:** Replace short-term pilots with a permanent, cross-agency structure backed by stable funding.
- ▶ **Connect the Dots with Data:** Leverage real-time insights and AI tools to better match programs with workforce demand and reduce friction for employers.

THREE STATE MODELS TO LEARN FROM

KENTUCKY

The Kentucky Chamber Foundation, through its Center for Workforce Development, plays a central role in aligning business needs with public workforce investments. Here's how:

- ▶ The Chamber directly manages WIOA funds under the governor's direction, leading talent pipeline, credential, and sector strategy efforts.
- ▶ It organizes employer-led collaboratives across key industries to define skill needs and shape education and training programs.
- ▶ As a business-led but publicly aligned intermediary, it earns trust from both employers and policymakers.
- ▶ It leverages labor market data to identify gaps, recommend solutions, and ensure public investments deliver economic returns. A separate state entity, KYStats, provides reliable workforce data to support accountability and decision-making.

CONNECTICUT

Connecticut's Office of Workforce Strategy (OWS) is a model for elevating workforce development as a statewide priority by embedding strategic coordination and employer leadership directly within the Governor's Office. This model:

- ▶ Coordinates across K-12, higher education, workforce, and economic development to address both immediate and long-term labor needs.
- ▶ Has clear decision-making authority over key priorities and programs, unlike traditional advisory-only structures, and is built for accountability, with a mandate to track outcomes and sunset ineffective programs.
- ▶ Drives integration across funding streams and agencies, helping to unify siloed efforts under shared goals.

INDIANA

Indiana's 2023 legislation reimagines the high school experience by embedding work-based learning (WBL) and employer engagement as core functions of the state's talent development system. Supported by the Indiana Chamber of Commerce, the model:

- ▶ Formally recognizes workforce intermediaries as key partners in coordinating Career Scholarship Accounts (CSAs), which provide funding for students to access work-based learning, career and technical education, and career coaching.
- ▶ Requires high schools to embed career awareness instruction into the curriculum and ensures approved training programs, including those led by employer intermediaries, count toward new high school diploma options.



Photo by Allison Shelley/Complete College Photo Library

HOW COLORADO SUCCEEDS IS LEADING

Colorado Succeeds works at the intersection of business and education. We have supported regional talent development across K-12, higher education, and the workforce, launched sector-based communities of practice, and helped design career-connected learning systems with employer-led partnerships. We can advise the administration on vision, structure, funding models, and tactical steps to ensure Colorado becomes the national leader in employer-driven talent development.

► **Validated Tools & Resources:**

Colorado Succeeds provides practical, field-tested resources to help employers and intermediaries engage more effectively in talent development. These include templates, strategy guides, and examples from regional work that support partners in building clearer, more coordinated, and outcomes-focused pathways.

► **Network Coordination:**

Through regular communications, mapping of ecosystem partners and outcomes, hosting relevant learning opportunities, and strategically bringing partners together for collective impact.

► **Training & Engagement:**

Utilizing the Talent Pipeline Management® framework, Colorado Succeeds can help design and execute employer collaboratives that drive towards measurable talent pipeline outcomes, while training intermediaries through communities of practice and Talent Academies.



See how we're transforming the landscape through [Project SCALE](#) and the [Colorado Talent Academy](#).

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