

**CA GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

# Community Reskilling

How Public-Private Partnerships Are Creating  
New Pathways to Economic Mobility



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# Foreword

By Lisa Lewin



I joined General Assembly because education was the driver of economic mobility in my family. Over the course of four generations, our story became a textbook example of the potential of postsecondary learning — from no college, to HBCUs and private colleges, to the Ivy League.

But stories like these, rooted in so-called “traditional” pathways to economic mobility, are now the exception rather than the rule. The college degree has become table stakes for success in today’s economy, even as the cost of higher education continues to rise beyond many families’ ability to afford it.

Further, the pandemic has deepened stark and persistent disparities in educational attainment — and with it access to capital, opportunities to invest in businesses, build equity, and invest in future generations. As a result, we now face renewed urgency to acknowledge that this aspirational narrative no longer matches the reality of so many individuals and families struggling to make their way up the economic ladder.

But for all the upheaval caused by the pandemic, we’ve also seen the past two years surface new opportunities for public, private, and social sector interventions —

and cross-sector collaborations — with the potential to address these systemic gaps that have hampered economic mobility for so many Americans. Covid-19 has caused what our partners at the Adecco Group have termed a “**great re-evaluation,**” one in which private and public actors alike have begun to rethink their respective roles in bridging the gap between learning and working, between educational experiences and economic opportunity.

Over the past two years, General Assembly has been at the front lines of this re-evaluation. We’ve launched a series of ambitious partnerships in cities across the country, working with partners from across a diverse range of sectors (local employers, education providers, public workforce agencies, community-based nonprofits) on an initiative we’ve begun to call community reskilling. The goal is nothing short of building resilient economies with talent

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pools ready to meet the rapidly changing needs of employers.

Early indications suggest that the model has promise, and is already working for many. And as the current Administration prepares to make historic investments designed to catalyze federal, state, and local coalitions that can source talent from communities, now is the time for us to build on what we’ve learned to create training pathways into high-wage, high-growth careers, and engage employers to send market signals and hire from new talent sources.

We hope this white paper can serve as a blueprint for policymakers looking to make investments, businesses looking to strengthen regional talent economies, and nonprofits and workforce development organizations looking to accelerate mobility in their communities. Our goal is to share what we’ve learned in service of supporting the innovations emerging in post-COVID landscape to ensure equitable economic recovery and prepare the workforce for an increasingly complex and dynamic future.



**Lisa Lewin (she/her)**  
CEO, General Assembly



# Introduction

Two years ago, employers and policymakers alike were grappling with the tightest labor market in fifty years. Conversations about the shrinking shelf-life of skills and the accelerating pace of technological change dominated the headlines.

Nearly two years later, we are in a radically different economic reality. Today, we are navigating an uncertain road to recovery in the wake of the pandemic, and the country is grappling with the latest incarnation of an **increasingly familiar paradox**: millions of open positions, but employers across the country say that they cannot find the talent to fill their most in-demand roles. Among the **many complex forces** driving this new normal include the accelerating integration of technology into all facets of the enterprise; a wave of resignations and retirements; shifting policies and priorities around remote work; and a mass rejection of jobs that do not provide a living wage, health care benefits, and other quality of life supports core to the vision of the **“new social contract.”**

But against the backdrop of a changing labor market, this may be a case in which a time of crisis also presents an opportunity for substantive change. The pandemic underscored the reality that work was no longer tied to the traditional office — and,

in doing so, created a moment of significant physical mobility and increase in remote work for knowledge economy jobs. In a job-seeker’s market, employers — especially large regional employers outside of the coasts — are now in a fierce war for talent on a national scale. Facing the prospect of a future that is increasingly remote and technologically driven, business leaders recognize the need to rethink talent pipelines and pursue new approaches that can build a more resilient talent ecosystem and end the **costly “zero sum game”** of poaching top talent.

In the wake of the pandemic, General Assembly has participated in a growing number of regional reskilling efforts led by coalitions of employers, elected officials, workforce leaders, traditional higher education institutions, and nonprofits to co-create pathways into skilled jobs for workers displaced by Covid-19. The underlying principle behind these initiatives was that no one entity could solve a once-in-a-generation economic crisis alone. By bringing together training providers, business leaders, and

public-sector organizations, these community reskilling initiatives are tapping into the unique strengths of each partner to build a regional workforce infrastructure that is more resilient, more equitable, and more future-proof than before the pandemic.

At the outset, this work was made possible in large part by a million-dollar commitment from the Adecco Group Foundation to accelerate community reskilling opportunities in multiple regions. Thanks to that investment, General Assembly was able to rapidly expand the reach of its collaborations at the city and regional levels, supporting partners across the country during a time of uncertainty and turmoil across the global economy. In the words of Joyce Russell, president of the Adecco Group Foundation, “Unprecedented challenges require an unprecedented response. As workers and employers alike continue to navigate the impact of the past two years, it’s incumbent upon the business community to play a leading role in helping regional economies chart a path to recovery.”

To date, these initiatives have reached **nearly 4,500 individuals**, many of whom have gone on to higher-wage careers in fast-growing industries. They have also surfaced unique challenges, from access to capital to candidate sourcing to the complexities of training delivery in an all-remote environment.

As we continue to navigate these challenges and opportunities, it’s clear that demand for tech skills will continue to skyrocket. New investment, both from businesses and from government, will continue to enter the system. As these programs continue to grow, the goal of this white paper is to apply the best of what we’ve learned through these efforts to help local and regional leaders across the country navigate their own community reskilling efforts.

The three case studies below outline what might be called a blueprint for digital transformation — a road map for community leaders seeking to support displaced workers and revitalize regional economies. It is rooted in the idea that there is no one-size-fits-all solution, but also that it is possible for regions to learn from one another’s successes, adopt best practices, and avoid pitfalls and challenges.

We hope this is the beginning of an ongoing conversation about the role of new partnerships and community-based collaboration in meeting an ever-changing labor market and preparing workers and job-seekers alike for an increasingly uncertain and volatile future of work.





# The Community Reskilling Model

Fundamentally, the term “community reskilling” refers to public-private partnerships that help the residents of a specific region learn the skills needed for emerging or in-demand jobs.

The public entities often include mayors’ offices, local economic development agencies, or public institutions of higher education. On the private-sector side, partners almost always include local employers, for whom these efforts serve as a way to build stronger pipelines of local talent in fast-growing jobs. A third category of regional tech or business nonprofits and community-based organizations provide necessary local context. Skills training providers can act as the connective tissue bringing together all of these disparate groups, helping each to advance its own priorities while also contributing to the shared goal of building more resilient and equitable local economies.

Many of these partnerships were built in response to economic conditions created by the pandemic — and all of them have,

of course, been impacted by the economic upheaval of the past two years. In the coming months and years, digital skills will remain in demand, and ongoing community reskilling efforts can play a critical role in helping maintain, or even strengthen, these newly created pathways to economic mobility. The challenge that many communities face now is to understand not just how these models have helped them navigate the turmoil of Covid-19, but how they should play a role in “future-proofing” local economies for the unexpected events that are still to come.

The three case studies below provide snapshots of what this approach looks like in practice, as well as the early outcomes that are demonstrating the potential of community reskilling as an engine of equitable economic recovery.



**Case Studies**

# Community Reskilling in Practice





## Louisville, KY

# Strengthening Local Talent Pipelines

Even before the outbreak of Covid-19, the city of Louisville was laying the foundation for one of the earliest success stories in community reskilling. In January of 2020, Louisville Mayor Greg Fischer **told the area business journal:** “We’re at the forefront of a new wave of technology, where many companies and many cities are trying to figure this out right now.”

Mayor Fischer’s words came as leaders across the region were joining forces to build a unique public-private partnership designed to revitalize the region’s economy. Known as the Future of Work Initiative, the effort brought together Humana, the healthcare giant that is one of the region’s largest employers, and Louisville Metro government along with other partners — including Microsoft, the University of Louisville, the Louisville Healthcare CEO Council, General Assembly, and Louisville Forward (the area’s economic development agency).

Initially, these groups united to advance a shared goal of building local talent for digital jobs — in ways that would also help them achieve their own individual missions. Humana is headquartered in Louisville and has a particular interest in investing in the local community to keep up a robust pipeline

of tech talent. For national employers like Microsoft, the effort was an opportunity to tap into often-overlooked communities. For the city’s public agencies and local education providers, the **Future of Work Initiative** represented an unprecedented investment in preparing the region for an increasingly digital world of work.

Then, the pandemic struck. And in the spring of 2020, the initiative’s leaders faced a choice: put the program on hold, or keep pushing forward?

Ultimately, they chose the latter. “As we look to the long-term impacts of the pandemic, our team is taking some lessons from the last recession,” **said Humana’s Roger Cude.** “The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated Humana’s need for employees who can analyze big data and create

predictive models; quickly develop artificial intelligence (AI) solutions that assist our customers in accessing our services more efficiently; and help us recognize opportunities to apply digital solutions to revamp internal processes that affect our customers.”

In order to reach underemployed workers located in the Louisville metro area, General Assembly kicked off a local marketing campaign specifically focused on attracting those whose jobs were most impacted by the pandemic (including hospitality workers, those in arts and culture industries, and others). Nearly 1,000+ Louisville residents were given access to short-form and self-paced classes and workshops, which covered introductions to Digital Marketing, User Experience, Data Analytics, and Software Engineering. These courses then served as a bridge for 100 driven individuals to enroll in part-time, more immersive courses in the aforementioned topics. The part-time programs, in turn, gave students the opportunity to explore an early transition into a new field, and acquire some of the baseline skills needed for consideration in entry-level roles. As **Cude put it**, “By providing both financial support and job search guidance, we’re reducing the barriers to reskilling for digital jobs and helping Louisville residents earn credentials that will have high demand now and for the future.”

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Just as importantly, the success of the initial program has led to its continued expansion. Local employers like Interapt have embraced the approach with enthusiasm, building their own internal apprenticeship-style programs specifically geared towards preparing Louisville residents for the tech industry. “One of the most considerable challenges that businesses face in Kentucky (and in cities around the globe) is finding skilled talent for their high-tech roles,” **said Interapt CEO Ankur Gopal.** “It’s not enough just to acknowledge the skills gap we’re seeing in today’s labor market — we need increased buy-in from higher education institutions, businesses and industry partners in order to create new educational pathways and opportunities for our residents and our economy.”

Since April 2020, 3,300+ local residents have participated in General Assembly virtual programs and workshops in data, software engineering, user experience design, and digital marketing. Of the 100 learners enrolled in General Assembly’s part-time programs, 70% graduated those programs, leaving with job-relevant skills that have prepared them to enter the city’s growing tech industry. As one learner put it, “I ended up starting a new job shortly after I started my course, and [...] the timing couldn’t have been better as the job is with a media company that does a lot of both traditional and digital marketing and advertising for its clients. There is so much connectivity between what I am learning at work and what I learned in class.”





## Sacramento, CA

# Designing for Equity

If Louisville's community reskilling effort exemplifies a pandemic pivot, Sacramento's initiative highlights a drive to recover stronger after Covid-19. The program was spearheaded by the Greater Sacramento Economic Council (GSEC), which sought to provide those impacted by Covid-19 with opportunities to reskill for career tracks in the tech industry that have strong long-term prospects, and to build a diverse talent pipeline to attract tech jobs to Sacramento. In the words of Mayor Darrell Steinberg, "The great debate in our city is whether the city should invest directly in the economic future of our neighborhoods and our people. This was our signature opportunity to answer that question: Yes."

For GSEC, the opportunity to put this plan into action came when the federal government passed the CARES Act, which infused billions of dollars into state and local economic recovery efforts. "This was an aspiration prior to COVID, and after COVID, it became a necessity," **said GSEC's Barry Broome**. That funding sparked a partnership between GSEC and the Greater Sacramento Urban League (GSUL), which acted as a sourcing partner to help direct displaced and unemployed workers toward a new set of skills training programs.

As a stipulation of federal funding through the CARES act, students needed to be

enrolled and graduate from the program by the end of 2020. To meet that ambitious timeline, in a roughly 16 week window beginning early September, General Assembly, Merit America, GSEC, and the Greater Sacramento Urban League (GSUL) were able to partner together to recruit, screen, and admit 40 students into immersive Data Analytics and IT Professional track, involving 9-weeks of sponsored full-time education.

To bridge the gap between interest and career opportunity, GSEC and GSUL tapped both General Assembly and the national nonprofit Merit America to offer two



different career tracks for potential students. General Assembly's track trained students through an immersive Data Analytics program with job placement support, and Merit America's track helped students secure Google's IT Professional Certificate and connect with entry-level roles in IT.

Thanks to the combined efforts of GSEC and GSUL, Sacramento's program directed its efforts toward serving displaced workers, with a focus on Black and Latinx Sacramentans, providing clear connections between partner organizations.

For the organizations involved, the effort also provided an opportunity to build deeper internal connections — in ways that made use of each group's unique capabilities and relationships. "The partnership with GSEC was an opportunity to demonstrate the catalytic impact and economic benefits of innovative public-private partnerships which combine private sector technology with public sector incentives and how inclusive community engagement planning ensures full access and participation in economic prosperity," said GSUL's DeNelle Ellison. "It also highlighted the critical need for engaging a trusted community partner like the Urban League and how such a partnership significantly improves the return on investment for local economies looking to increase access to and the quality of infrastructure services for under skilled and

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unemployed workers plus the overall social transformation that occurs when successfully closing the affordability gap of advanced digital skills training.”

In total, 40 students were enrolled in these intensive training programs, 20 in Merit America’s track and 20 in General Assembly’s. For many learners, the results were transformative. “I’m seeing myself for the first time ever as so successful,” **said Justo, 32.** “Not having to use my credit card to pay for groceries, because I had the money, that was amazing,” said Sunsarae, 38. “I didn’t have a reason not to go forward, because they provided me with tools to go forward.... Now, I’ve been working since Dec. 21 and I haven’t missed a beat... I’m really enjoying it.”

Justo and Sunsarae’s experience reflects the positive initial outcomes of the program as a whole. In total, 36 students graduated the Digital Upskilling program (a 90% completion rate), and 81% of students were hired for full-time roles as of the most recent update. Those graduates were earning an average annual salary of \$46,000 in their new roles, at organizations including Accenture, AT&T, and California Volunteers.

What’s next for the effort? According to GSUL’s Cassandra Jennings, this initial success is just the beginning. “This is an opportunity to recreate, reimagine, think a little bit out of the box... It’s an investment. It’s not risk,” she says. “We don’t want this to be a project. We want this to be a program.”



## Buffalo, NY

# Catalyzing the Regional Economy

Headquartered in Buffalo, NY, M&T Bank, one of the top 20 full-service U.S.-based commercial banks, has a vested interest in creating a tech and digital talent pipeline in Buffalo and Western New York while investing in the local economy. With strong competition for technology workers, especially in tech centers on both coasts, M&T sees an opportunity to develop and grow a technology workforce directly within the communities the bank serves.

To that end, M&T unveiled a 330,000 square foot Tech Hub in the spring of 2021. The space serves as a new collaborative workplace for M&T's 1,500 Western New York-based tech team members, with plans to hire an additional 1,000 technologists in the next 3-5 years. As part of this larger effort to recruit and develop diverse tech talent, M&T created a Tech Academy to strengthen and grow the region's tech workforce and enable the community to access tech skills training with an emphasis on communities underrepresented in STEM fields.

In the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, the bank's leadership recognized an urgent need to contribute to the region's economic recovery — and decided to play a central role in bringing together a community reskilling effort. “So

many of our friends, family members and neighbors have experienced economic hardships amid the pandemic,” said M&T's Chief Information Officer Mike Wisler. “We need to rally together as a community to provide opportunities that foster an inclusive recovery.”

Drawing on their understanding of the local dynamics among training and workforce providers, M&T Bank convened a coalition of regional organizations, including Buffalo-based tech nonprofit TechBuffalo and the statewide economic development organization Empire State Development to stand behind a community reskilling effort they named the Western New York Tech Skills Initiative. As is often the case in community reskilling efforts, the initiative helped each of these individual groups



advance their own missions while also contributing to a broader systemic project.

Reflecting on the partnership, TechBuffalo's President and Chief Executive Officer Sarah Tanbakuchi said "TechBuffalo was honored to be a part of leading an effort that aligned so well with our mission to create a more inclusive and accessible tech ecosystem that improves our area's ability to retain, attract and foster technology talent in Buffalo and Western New York. This initiative helped spark the regional economy by giving community access to the tech and digital skills that have the power to change their lives."

As the initiative's training partner, General Assembly offered open access to short-form and self-paced classes and workshops to create opportunities for career exploration and build a pipeline for enrollments into part-time skill building classes. To date this work has reached nearly 800 students across all training formats, with a focus on underemployed workers located in Buffalo — and of the 104 seats available in the part-time instructor-led classes, 56 students have graduated. Those who complete the program become eligible for subsequent training, including virtual upskilling programs and career readiness support to help participants access technology jobs in the region.

As part of a broader effort to build a sustainable pipeline to tech and digital jobs,

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The reskilling efforts we started in the community in partnership with General Assembly have laid the foundation for an understanding of basic tech and digital skills for community members and sparked a real interest in tech and digital careers in Buffalo and Western New York.





M&T Bank and TechBuffalo have joined forces, along with four other regional employers, to co-create an immersive 12-week training opportunity in data analytics to launch in January 2022. Many of the students who participated in the WNY Tech Skills Initiative's part-time skill building classes are considering this "tech bootcamp" program as a next step in their reskilling journey. The bootcamp is an unprecedented collaboration in the region across employers, nonprofits and training providers and will connect students directly with a job at the end of the 12-week program. General Assembly will provide the training for the program.

Employer partners have committed to hiring graduates of the bootcamp and are working

together, in partnership with General Assembly, to align resources to support students during the program and in their transition to a career after graduation.

"The reskilling efforts we started in the community in partnership with General Assembly have laid the foundation for an understanding of basic tech and digital skills for community members and sparked a real interest in tech and digital careers in Buffalo and Western New York. We are now able to build on that foundation with other skills programs that facilitate talent pipelines and connect people to in-demand jobs," said Lindsay Aleshire, Program Manager at M&T's Tech Academy.



# The Building Blocks of Community Reskilling

From the outside, an effective community reskilling project may look like it is set in stone. The reality, of course, is that all these initiatives are living entities that continue to evolve to meet the needs of both learners and employers. In every case, though, successful community reskilling work depends on a few core building blocks. We've outlined some of those foundational points below.







## Proven Hiring Demand

The effectiveness of community reskilling programs depends, first and foremost, on the existence of a destination at the end of the journey. In Louisville, Humana and Interapt are working to ensure that those who complete their training have a clear and streamlined pathway into a job that makes use of their skills; Microsoft, in turn, has provided funding to support staff infrastructure and program longevity. In Buffalo, M&T Bank is offering everything from strategic leadership to use of their physical space as a training hub, while also acting as the coordinating body to bring other partners to the table. In each case, the employers are not supporting reskilling programs as an act of charity. They're making specific, strategically driven investments in partnerships that help them strengthen their own talent pipelines and enable them to compete in an increasingly dynamic labor market. They're also leading by example — influencing other local and regional employers to rethink their own hiring practices.

For those interested in launching new projects, here are a few key principles to keep in mind:

- Securing commitment from regional business leaders to developing and/or hiring local talent, non traditional talent and/or diverse talent
- Working with employers to understand skill gaps, and using that information to strengthen curricula
- Gauging interest in building apprenticeship or internships to build additional connections to learning and on-the-job experience
- Encouraging employers to offer salaries and compensation that align with industry standards, building equitable pathways for new and emerging talent to earn family sustaining wages in technology roles





## Building Talent Pipelines with Community Leaders

Just as importantly, community reskilling cannot take an “if you build it, they will come” approach by standing up a flashy program and hoping for the best. The most effective initiatives are those that engage early and deeply with existing organizations who work within the communities they hope to serve and are trusted locally. Rather than reinventing the wheel to identify prospective candidates for training, any organization launching a community reskilling effort should focus on integrating into the existing infrastructure of social and economic support.

Here’s what that work can look like in practice:

- Working proactively with organizations who could be strong champions locally, serve as referral partners, or offer wraparound support services expertise:
- Digital skills/literacy organizations
- Community-based organizations providing education and workforce development programming
- Economic mobility and social justice organizations with a commitment to lifting up diverse communities
- Social service and financial empowerment agencies
- Groups focused on increasing diversity in the tech industry
- Engaging with a broad range of training providers (including bootcamps, community colleges, regional four-year institutions) to ensure that learners have access to whatever pathway best fits their needs and career aspirations





## Establishing Local Buy-In and Support Pathways

Local partners also have a critical role to play in providing learners with the support to not just find and enter a program, but also persist in their educational journey and complete that program. Here are a few key ways we've worked with on-the-ground organizations to help navigate the path through training and toward job opportunities for enrolled learners:

- Securing buy-in from local partners who can support students with wrap around services and referrals to additional services that help students enroll, graduate and have stability in the job search.
- With an eye to building networks and outcomes support, elevate the effort for government stakeholders — including workforce development boards, offices of workforce development, local economic councils — as well as business organizations, like local chambers of commerce and technology councils.



## Spotlight

# Microsoft Accelerate

In June 2020, as the lasting impacts of the pandemic began to take shape across the world, Microsoft launched a project known as the Global Skills Initiative, which made thousands of hours of free online learning content available worldwide. But making those resources available was only the first part of the equation. It was just as important to provide the sort of digital literacy needed to make the most of the wealth of opportunities available online.

With that goal of expanded access in mind, Microsoft joined forces with General Assembly to provide hands-on digital learning opportunities, with an explicit focus on learners who aspired to careers in technology but whose communities were more likely to be underserved by existing resources or more traditional educational models. This combined effort, Microsoft Accelerate, is enabling learners from these underserved communities to access hands-on learning tailored to high-growth careers in their area.

Below, we've taken excerpts from an interview with Lina Feng and Kalin McKenna, Microsoft leads for the Accelerate program.

### **GA: What is Microsoft Accelerate, and why are you doing it?**

**Kalin McKenna:** In June 2020, Microsoft released its Global Skills Initiative with the intention of giving thousands of hours of online learning content—for free—to the world. Accelerate is a way for Microsoft to take our Global Skills Initiative into

communities in the US where we knew people were trying to return to the workforce. Accelerate was one of the ways Microsoft set out to support those impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting (but not unanticipated) acceleration of technology.

We first released thousands of hours of online, on-demand content which helped students learn at their own pace. However, we found a certain level of digital fluency is needed for someone to even start looking for online skilling resources. People need access to a computer and the internet, which is not something everyone has. So, what we really aim to do with Accelerate and learning partners like GA is connect with communities and reach folks who don't have the resources to fully take advantage of our on-demand learning.

We partnered with General Assembly to provide learners access to instructor-led, hands-on courses. GA joined Accelerate in Atlanta in 2021 and we've since expanded to other markets.

**Lina Feng:** I want to emphasize that Accelerate is designed to

support individuals from underserved communities and nontraditional candidates. The instructor-led experience, whether in person or online, really completes the full journey for a learner by providing technology training as well as coaching for "soft skills" — interviewing, business attire, teamwork, etc. It goes beyond certification to help candidates be hire-ready.

### **GA: How do you approach rolling out Accelerate to different communities?**

**Kalin McKenna:** We know each market has unique needs. What LA communities need to access skilling might look different from Chicago or Atlanta. The local organizations we partner with are trusted by the communities and often vary by location. We want to be respectful of that.

When we are thinking about what the job market looks like in those locations, it's possible that one city is going to be hiring for a certain set of tech skills, and in another city, it could be totally different. We make sure that the learning content lines up to where the job market is.

**GA: You have a very intentional local, coalition-based approach. Can you talk a bit about why that approach works?**

**Lina Feng:** Accelerate's coalition approach is a deliberate perspective on what it takes to move the needle on job growth in any given market. As we kick off these digital skilling and job placement efforts, we bring together a broad and diverse set of stakeholders to shape the program. For something as challenging as digital skilling for the future workforce, it takes industry, civic, and community partners to achieve sustainable growth.

**GA: Microsoft is a very data-driven company, so we'd love to hear how you're thinking about what success looks like.**

**Kalin McKenna:** The north star of the program is that our students are hired. So we're always talking with our employer network to make sure expectations are aligned and then making changes to the program to ensure we're providing candidates that meet their needs. A student being offered a job that launches a new

career in tech — that's what success looks like to us.

We try to do the best for our learners. We want to treat our learners and employer network like our best customers, so it's really all about doing the best for each of them throughout the process.

**Lina Feng:** There is an organizational culture element in terms of the jobs outcome that we're seeking, specifically moving towards skill-based hiring. One of the successes that we're looking to come out of Accelerate is encouraging more and more employers to focus on skills and less on hard credentials. That will definitely open up opportunities for nontraditional candidates.

**GA: Can you share some learner success stories with us?**

**Kalin McKenna:** We talked to one learning partner, Upwardly Global, who works specifically with different immigrant populations. A gentleman joined one of their cohorts who had never actually typed on a computer keyboard before. Upon completing their program, he was able to get a



coding job at a professional services firm. I think that really speaks volumes to the misconception that there's a lack of talent in these communities. It's a lack of opportunity. If you can provide the opportunity, you'll reach the talent, and then you can truly see incredible things happen.

**Lina Feng:** There are so many stories. One that comes to mind is the young mom who participated in our first instance of Accelerate in Atlanta, who went through a skilling cohort and got certified in Azure cloud fundamentals. She landed a job in a large professional services firm and shared extensively how transformative the experience was.

It proves that there are so many people who are a great fit for a lot of tech jobs, it's just a matter of how we get them access to skilling, the right skilling environment, and subsequently getting an employer to take a chance on a nontraditional candidate.

**GA: What advice would you give to leaders who want to embark on this work but don't know where to start?**

**Kalin McKenna:** The first thing I would say is you're not the first ones going out on this journey, whether you're a single parent looking to shift your career or you're an HR manager looking to change the way you think about hiring. No matter what side you fall on, there are companies who have achieved notable success hiring underserved, nontraditional talent.

I think a lot of times when we get overwhelmed, it's because we're looking at a blank slate, but in this case, it's not. Talk to the folks committed to hiring talent from nontraditional backgrounds, look at the proven successes of those companies who have pursued diverse hiring, get insight into how you might want to shape your program. When you can partner with someone and build upon the work of others, it's a lot less daunting.



## Conclusion

# Lighting the Spark

The core tenet of community reskilling is that no organization can, or should, go it alone. It takes a set of partners with a common goal to achieve impact. Successful programs depend on the coordination of many different players, and the complex management of relationships and objectives that any such coalition entails. But with so many competing priorities during this dynamic period of economic recovery, it's not always easy for employers, public economic development agencies, or local nonprofits to take a leadership role in starting such intricate initiatives. How can we help light the spark to make such programs possible?

That's where leadership, both public and private, must come into play. The federal government has an opportunity to galvanize community reskilling with investment in economic recovery efforts, such as the current administration's Good Jobs Challenge. Local employers have a leadership role to play as well, as engines of funding and strategic guidance that can help motivate their public-sector partners. While

community reskilling programs ultimately depend on the contributions of many organizations, they often rely on the passion and commitment of one group that helps the others align towards a shared mission.

In the months and years to come, it's likely that the role of local and regional workforce development efforts will only grow more important as an engine of broader growth.



We've already seen the ways in which community reskilling initiatives can both help employers solve near-term talent shortages while also laying the foundation for economic opportunity and resilience

more broadly. How can the success of these programs serve as a model for other community leaders looking to chart a course to a stronger and more inclusive labor market?





