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Talent Pipeline Management® (TPM)

TPM RESOURCE GUIDE:
Connecting Opportunity Population Talent
to Better Career Pathways

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Introduction

Welcome to the Talent Pipeline Management® (TPM) Resource Guide for Connecting Opportunity Population Talent to Better Career Pathways. The intended audience of this resource is organizations, their associated professionals, and their employer partners that serve opportunity populations—a term used to describe people who experience barriers to employment. Other stakeholders interested in TPM may also benefit from the resources here.

The purpose of this guide is to bridge the communication divide between opportunity population-serving organizations (OPSOs) and the business community by providing each with more information on the other. Another goal is to demonstrate how employers and OPSOs can leverage TPM to modify their processes in ways that make their partnerships more successful; shift employer perspectives and behavior; and ultimately promote greater workforce diversity, equity, and inclusion. It is our hope not only that this resource guide serves as an introduction to the TPM framework but that more OPSOs can begin leveraging and benefiting from this authentically employer-led movement.

What is TPM?

Led by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, TPM is designed to be a scalable, authentically employer-led solution designed to close the skills gap in ways that generate shared value and a return on investment (ROI) for employers as well as learners, education and workforce providers (including OPSOs), and the communities in which they reside. This systemic approach unlocks employer leadership and engagement in a novel way by speaking the language of—and leveraging strategies and practices associated with—supply chain management.

Taught through the TPM Academy® and supported by the TPM Academy curriculum and web tools, the TPM system provides a structured process that facilitates employers engaging in collective action; producing primary source data about their workforce needs and challenges; and designing and implementing solutions that address their most pressing workforce shared pain points. Launched in 2014, the growing TPM movement is now in 33 states, D.C., and Canada, with hundreds of active employer collaboratives involving thousands of employers.

Who Are Opportunity Population Talent?

Opportunity populations refer to people in America who have had limited access to educational and professional opportunities and who face barriers to employment and career advancement. They may include but are not limited to:

- Opportunity youth: young adults age 17–24 who are out of school or out of work
- Members of the LGBTQ community
- Members of the immigrant or refugee populations
- Formerly incarcerated individuals
- Members of Indigenous communities
- People with disabilities (physical and/or cognitive)
- People without a high school diploma
- People with limited English proficiency
- People who are (or who have been) homeless

Not all members of these groups experience barriers to employment; individual circumstances including family background, race, geography, and other factors play a significant role in one's access to opportunity.

Why Create a TPM Resource Guide for Opportunity Populations?

In good economic times or bad, employers compete on talent. Employers in a variety of industries face chronic skill shortages and explore many strategies to work with education and training partners to address talent attraction, sourcing, retention, and diversity and equity needs.

Learners also must be effective in their pursuit of career awareness and exploration activities and in connecting their education, training, and credentialing to employment. Workers too must find, access, and complete upskilling opportunities to achieve upward economic mobility.

Moreover, community-based, nonprofit, and other OPSOs are exploring new strategies that improve their responsiveness to employer needs and abilities to train, support, and retain opportunity population talent. Complementing this objective is the increasing interest among employers to diversify their talent pipelines and create more inclusive and equitable workplaces.

Strengthening relationships between employers and OPSOs—which benefits opportunity population talent—is more important now than ever before. But even as the

self-evident need for stronger partnerships grows, major systemic challenges remain when it comes to engaging employers and sustaining these partnerships at the scale needed.

TPM is a field-tested and proven solution that was built by the business community based on its own best practices for partner engagement; these resources include examples of how TPM has been implemented in communities large and small, as well as examples outside of the TPM network that showcase some of the key principles and processes. To date, business associations and employers that have been trained on the TPM approach have applied it to a wide variety of partnerships, including those with OPSOs; however, not until this point have we developed a set of resources and support materials that are specific to opportunity populations.

TPM is a system and process that can be leveraged in ways that enhance the employer role in these opportunity population partnerships, by moving employers from an advisory capacity to an end-customer role. TPM can be used to strengthen opportunity population pipelines in two major ways:

- **The TPM framework:** TPM provides a framework and shared language for improving understanding and communication between employers and OPSOs.

- **TPM strategies:** TPM offers a set of strategies, tools, and resources that can be used to improve how employers and OPSOs work together to develop career pathways; address barriers to success; and structure wraparound services to get better results for opportunity population talent, employers, and OPSOs.

Whether you are someone who supports opportunity population talent, an employer looking into TPM and how to better access opportunity population talent, or an existing member of the TPM National Learning Network—this resource is for you.

What is Included in the Resource Guide?

This guide provides a set of resources that can be used to explore how TPM can be leveraged—as a framework as well as a set of strategies—to build stronger employer and opportunity population partnerships. Creating successful partnerships requires employers and OPSOs to develop a mutual understanding of each other's worlds and the roles that different professionals and organizations play in making partnerships work. The guide is designed both to introduce newcomers to TPM and to enhance the existing TPM movement. In addition to this introduction, the guide has three core resources:

- **Resource 1: Opportunity Population-Serving Organizations (OPSOs) Orientation to Employers—** This resource is intended to better orient opportunity populations serving organizations and their associated professionals with the employer community and the professional roles therein.

- **Resource 2: Employer Orientation to the Opportunity Populations Community—**This resource is intended for the employer community as an orientation to better understand opportunity population serving organizations, the professional roles therein, and the services they provide, as well as opportunity population talent, their strengths, and the barriers to employment they face.

- **Resource 3: Leveraging TPM to Achieve Better Outcomes for Opportunity Populations—**This resource describes how to use TPM to improve employer engagement with opportunity population serving organizations (OPSOs) and therefore achieve better outcomes for opportunity population talent. It (1) provides an orientation to TPM as a framework for organizing employers and their talent supply chain partnerships to unlock a dual bottom line; (2) explains how TPM can be used to improve communication and promote shared understanding between employers and OPSOs; and (3) describes how TPM can be leveraged by employers and OPSOs to modify their processes in ways that make their partnerships more successful, shift employer perspectives and behavior, and ultimately create a more inclusive workforce.

Each resource guide offers recommended actions with questions to consider.

How to Use the Resource Guide

This guide is flexible in design to support a range of uses. The resources can be used as stand-alone documents or bundled together, depending on your needs or the needs of your audience. The following are examples of how you can use the documents together or separately.

- **Getting the Word Out:** The resources can be distributed via email, embedded in a newsletter, or used as collateral at related events in order to help socialize TPM with potential employer partners or with OPSOs and practitioners.

- **Meetings/Presentations:** The resources can be used as preliminary reading or as a resource to have on hand during one-on-one or group meetings, such as with chambers of commerce or with nonprofit or community-based organization boards. They can also be highlighted in or used to inform a presentation on TPM, opportunity population talent, or employer engagement best practices.

- **Workshops/Orientations:** The resources can be used to guide a workshop with employers, OPSOs and TPM practitioners to explore best practices for employer engagement or utilization of the TPM framework. They can also be used or featured during an in-person or virtual TPM orientation.

- **TPM Academies:** Should you choose to participate in or design your own TPM Academy, these resources can be embedded in the instruction of the TPM Academy curriculum. They can also be used to help recruit participants in a TPM Academy.

Further Exploring TPM and Opportunity Populations

Again, whether you are a leader within an OPSO, an employer looking into TPM and how to better connect to opportunity population talent in your community, or an existing member of the TPM National Learning Network— the Talent Pipeline Management® (TPM) Resource Guide has something for you. Not all partners will start from scratch; TPM can be used to add value to existing collaborations between employers and OPSOs to build stronger partnerships with an outcomes-focused approach. If this is your first exposure to TPM, we encourage you to follow up with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation team, our TPM Fellows, or any current or past TPM practitioner to learn more.

In addition to this resource is a growing body of work around TPM that is available and waiting for you. We encourage you to explore the TPM Academy curriculum to unpack and learn the many strategies that make up the TPM system and approach (https://tpmacademy. uschamberfoundation.org/the-curriculum/). We also encourage those of you who are interested to begin exploring how you can start or join a TPM Academy.

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Resource 1:
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Resource 1: Opportunity Population-Serving Organizations (OPSOs) Orientation to Employers

This resource is an orientation to the employer community for OPSOs and professionals or practitioners—that is, those serving people who experience barriers to employment. It is part of a set of resources that, when combined with the Introduction, make up the TPM (Talent Pipeline Management®) Resource Guide: Connecting Opportunity Populations to Better Career Pathways. Building strategic and successful relationships to support opportunity populations requires employers and OPSOs to develop a mutual understanding of each other's worlds and the roles that different professionals and organizations play in making partnerships work.

The objective of this orientation is for OPSOs and their practitioners to better connect their value proposition to employer needs, resulting in more effective partnerships. By working directly—and differently—with the employer community, opportunity population practitioners and those for whom they provide services will benefit by accessing enhanced work-based learning opportunities and jobs. In addition, with clearer communication and a better understanding of one another's needs, challenges related to training, hiring, retaining, and upskilling opportunity population talent can be addressed in ways that result in shared value for all partners.

Orienting Opportunity Population-Serving Organizations to Employers, Employer Organizations, and Professional Roles

OPSOs and their practitioners seeking to engage the employer community in a partnership should start by understanding the employer ecosystem, how employers are organized and operate, where and how to engage effectively with their professionals at every level, and the importance of a compelling value proposition that will speak to employers. As a practitioner, you have likely worked with a range of employer partners, so the sections below are intended to provide a holistic understanding of the employer from which practitioners can review as needed to supplement their own knowledge and experiences.

Employers are in both the public and private sectors.

People think of employers as primarily for-profit employers in the private sector; however, an employer is any person or organization that employs people through a variety of employment relationships ranging from regular full-time employment to contractual employment. Employers are in both the public and private sectors. They can be for-profit businesses, nonprofit organizations, and government organizations, including the military, schools and colleges, as well as community-based organizations. Private sector employers can be registered as U.S. companies or as companies from other countries with locations in the United States.

Key Takeaways

Do not forget about employers in the public and nonprofit sectors. State and local agencies, schools and colleges, and community-based organizations are also employers that face their own workforce challenges.

Employers in the private sector are usually classified by industry and size with one or more physical locations or establishments.

In the private for-profit sector, employers vary widely in their size and the types of economic activities they carry out (e.g., manufacturing food products), the goods they produce, and the services they provide—across one or more physical locations. These types of economic activities and goods and services produced are called industries (e.g., manufacturing, healthcare). Physical locations that carry out one or more economic activities are called employer establishments (e.g., store, factory). Small employers—which are the largest job producers in the United States—typically carry out one major economic activity (e.g., food service) at one establishment (e.g., restaurant) within one geographic area (e.g., county). However, larger employers in the private for-profit sector, sometimes called business enterprises, carry out multiple economic activities through multiple firms with many different establishments around the world and across states, counties, and cities.

Employers in the private nonprofit sector also can vary widely. Nonprofit employers are in a wide variety of industries including education, healthcare, and social services. They can be large, diverse organizations spanning multiple industries with multiple establishments, or they can be smaller organizations with specialization in one industry and with only a single establishment.

In describing the private sector employer community, many refer to small, mid-size, or large employers based on the amount of sales and/or number of employees. There are no widely accepted definitions for sales or

number of employees to be classified in each category for specific industries in the United States. The Small Business Administration (SBA) generally refers to small businesses as those with fewer than 500 employees. Employer size is frequently reported based on the number of employees at a specific business establishment.

The North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) is the coding system used by government statistical agencies in classifying business establishments according to their primary economic activity and goods and services they produce. This system was developed for the purpose of collecting, analyzing, and publishing statistical data related to the U.S. business economy; however, it is used for a range of administrative purposes, including data collection for unemployment insurance and to produce labor market information (LMI) for employment trends and projections at the state and regional levels.

Employers use their own language when describing their industry or industry sector, based on what they consider their primary economic activity. For example, some employers refer to themselves as "manufacturers" even though they have a variety of business establishments carrying out other primary economic activities, including transportation and distribution, information technology, and research and development. They may also have talent management professionals (e.g., human resources) focusing on different business functions and jobs tied to different economic activities that are relevant to them. For example, some professionals may focus on management and professional jobs at corporate headquarter facilities, while others may focus on front-line manufacturing jobs at a single manufacturing plant.

Key Takeaways

The employer community is incredibly diverse and heterogeneous. When working with larger and more diversified businesses, it is important to understand who you are working with; it can be beneficial to use language that employers themselves use. This includes identifying the workforce needs tied to a primary economic activity associated with a NAICS code, specific to a physical location (i.e., establishment), and within a geographic area (e.g., county). You also want to know the number of employees at these establishments (i.e., size) to better understand the potential scale of career opportunities provided by the employer.

Employers vary in how they organize work and how they define their critical jobs.

Employers—even in the same industry and of the same size—differ in how they organize the work to be performed. These differences show up most often in how they divide this work between different jobs, job titles, and job descriptions, with distinct levels of compensation. As a result, employers in the same industry vary significantly in how many positions (number of people employed and openings) they have for what types of jobs and with what range of compensation. For example, some healthcare providers have a coordinated care model with advanced practice nurses and registered nurses playing larger roles. This results in higher proportions of nurses relative to doctors and other allied health jobs compared with other hospitals. Another example is a manufacturer that chooses to automate its facilities, requiring higher concentrations of cross-functional maintenance technicians with higher skill requirements relative to those of production workers.

In some cases, employers from different industries may share common business functions and jobs that may be organized similarly or differently. For example, employers in healthcare, manufacturing, and retail may share similar information technology jobs in cybersecurity and network management. They may also choose to work together in addressing their similar workforce needs in these shared jobs.

The Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) system is the coding system used by government statistical agencies in classifying business establishments according to their primary work tasks. As with NAICS, this system was developed for the purpose of collecting, analyzing, and publishing statistical data. Although SOC information is useful in understanding some of the common work tasks and skill requirements for job families, it is important to understand both the similarities and the differences in how employers define their own jobs.

Even employers that similarly organize work, define jobs, and determine staffing patterns may still differ in how they define their most critical business functions and jobs. Critical jobs are those that are most important to the competitiveness and performance of employers at the enterprise and establishment levels.

Employers also differ in how they define and prioritize their pain points for these critical jobs. Pain points refer to the different types of talent management challenges and priorities such as unfilled job openings; onboarding, training, and upgrading costs; career advancement, turnover, and retention; and increasing the diversity of a workforce. Some employers may have greater challenges in recruiting qualified talent and filling job openings, whereas others have more trouble retaining employees. Other employers may face greater challenges in recruiting and retaining a more diverse workforce to reflect the diversity of their customers and communities where they are located.

For example, two manufacturing businesses define their most critical business functions as engineering and machining, with the most critical jobs identified as mechanical engineers and machining technicians—despite their largest number of jobs and job openings in warehouse and distribution operations. Although the two businesses agree on their critical jobs, each ranks them differently in terms of pain point priorities that must be addressed in pursuing workforce initiatives and partnerships. One business has more difficulty recruiting qualified applicants for unfilled job openings for machining technicians, whereas the other faces the most difficulty in increasing the diversity of its engineering workforce.

Employers also may differ in how clearly they are able to define and prioritize their challenges. In some cases, employers have done a comprehensive analysis of their needs and priorities and are ready to discuss them with partners. In other cases, employers need to work with partners to review their own data and to set priorities. For example, employers may focus initially on filling open positions but then realize that many of these openings are the result of growing retention problems, which should be addressed first.

Key Takeaways

Not all employers in the same industry organize and define their most critical jobs the same way, even when they use similar job titles. Always assume that how employers organize work and define jobs will change constantly in a dynamic economy and labor market. In addition, it is unlikely that employers in the same industry agree on their most critical jobs and pain points in pursuing workforce partnerships. Also, employers may differ in how clearly they have defined their most critical pain points as starting points in developing partnerships with OPSOs.

Employers vary widely on how and where they recruit talent for their most critical jobs.

Employers—especially larger employers with establishments in different states and countries—carry out talent sourcing at various levels of their organization across different geographic areas for different critical jobs. For example, larger companies use human resource (HR) professionals and recruiters at the corporate level to hire executives and upper-level professionals after a global or national search. In contrast, these same companies may decentralize the hiring of mid-level and front-line employees at their different establishments. This sourcing is overseen by HR professionals and recruiters working out of each business establishment who may recruit within more constrained geographic areas based on assumed commuting patterns or where their current employees live. For example, an employer with a manufacturing establishment located in an urban county recruits for the establishment's welders within that county, whereas another employer in the same county adds the larger metropolitan area to its recruitment base. An additional example is a hospital that recruits nurses exclusively within a metropolitan area, whereas another recruits on a statewide or national basis.

These significant differences in talent sourcing are often lost in the LMI that education and workforce professionals use in determining employer workforce needs. Government industry and occupational projections are developed for labor market areas based on average commuting patterns between home and work. They may not reflect the talent recruiting reach of some employers, especially for higher-wage jobs or those with remote work. In addition, government statistics developed for specific service regions may not reflect the geographic areas employers use to recruit talent for jobs addressed by schools and colleges within these service regions. It is very rare that additional training providers (e.g., community-based organizations) would be included.

Key Takeaways

Not all employers with establishments located in your area recruit primarily from your area, no matter what is assumed in government LMI. And do not conclude that employers with establishments outside your area are not potential partners. Employer partnerships should be based on geographic areas defined in cooperation with employers based on where they recruit and source talent for their most critical jobs.

Employers utilize professionals in multiple roles for recruiting and developing talent.

Employers, especially large employers, utilize a variety of professionals who assume different roles in addressing their workforce needs. These professional roles go by many job titles, but include:

- **Executive Leadership**. Chief executive officers and other upper management professionals are increasingly working with HR professionals to develop strategies and initiatives to recruit, develop, and retain the best talent for their most critical jobs. This executive leadership is critical in gaining the buy-in and resources needed to establish and sustain partnerships carried out by other lower-level professionals.

- **Government and Community Relations.** These professionals take the lead roles in working with federal, state, and local governments as well as community leaders. They are typically the major points of contact for government and community initiatives, including those in workforce and education.

- **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).** These professionals lead employer initiatives that are charitable or that focus on community or social impact. In some companies the CSR role—sometimes referred to as a corporate citizenship role—encompasses or relates to education and workforce efforts that involve direct employer and/or employer foundation funding. These initiatives can be designed with a charitable purpose or linked to a company's business strategy (see following section on CSR).

- **Human Resource (HR) Professionals.** HR professionals are responsible for managing and coordinating core HR functions at the corporate and establishment levels, including recruiting, hiring, and onboarding new employees. They are also responsible for administering compensation and employee benefits, including employee tuition aid programs as well as training and professional development. HR professionals usually work directly with hiring managers to determine the company's workforce needs.

- **Recruitment and Screening.** These professionals are responsible for supporting HR by marketing career opportunities, working with talent sourcing partners, identifying and recruiting applicants, and managing the application and applicant tracking and screening process for HR professionals and hiring managers. These professionals can work directly for an employer or with a recruiting company that is under contract with an employer.

- **Hiring Managers.** These managers have the responsibility for determining the hiring needs and requirements for critical jobs they manage and supervise. Hiring managers typically make the final decision on hiring and career advancement.

- **Training and Development.** These professionals are involved in the onboarding and development of new hires as well as the upskilling and career advancement of existing employees. This category includes professionals who manage specific training programs, such as apprenticeship programs.

- **Other Subject Matter Experts.** This refers to employees who are considered experts in the performance of critical work tasks and in understanding the knowledge and skills required to perform these tasks at elevated levels of proficiency. These experts are usually the most experienced and highest-performing workers employed in critical jobs and are consulted by hiring managers or HR professionals when setting hiring requirements.

- **Employee Support Professionals.** These professionals—either employed by the company or retained on contract—provide a variety of support services to current employees to improve job performance, career advancement and retention, and employee satisfaction. They are sometimes employed by a third-party partner who works directly with employees on a confidential basis on matters such as housing, financial literacy, transportation, and childcare. These professionals are particularly important to support opportunity population talent.

Many times, the varied categories of professionals are engaged with employer CSR, recruitment, and hiring initiatives at distinct stages of the pipeline. For example, one professional team is involved with high schools, colleges, and universities for addressing specific hiring

needs, while another works with community-based organizations and nonprofit partners, while still others work on career advancement for front-line personnel. It is common for these activities to be funded, supervised, and operated independent of one another.

In addition to people working in these professional roles, employers often encourage employees to engage in volunteer programs. Some employees volunteer to get involved in community initiatives that include education and workforce partnerships. Other opportunities include aiding career exploration activities, serving as mentors, or participating in advisory groups. Most of the time these volunteers are participating as community members and are not operating in any official capacity on behalf of the employer.

Finally, it is important to understand how the size of a business (i.e., small, mid-size, or large) determines with which professional you will likely engage and the kinds of partnership that company can or will provide. Depending on how a company is organized, it could be that numerous teams or divisions should be involved. Professionals in small and mid-size companies have multiple roles and chiefly look to education partners to assume critical training and development functions. In addition, top executives and managers are likely more directly involved in education partnerships. For larger employers, top executive and HR leadership buy-in is critical, but these individuals may not get directly involved in partnerships. Also, top executive and HR leadership at the local establishment level (e.g., manufacturing plant managers, retail store managers) may have to get higher-level buy-in from their corporate headquarters to establish partnerships.

Key Takeaways

Except for small employers, there is rarely a single point of contact inside a company who can address and represent the full range of workforce needs a company may have. When developing partnerships with employers, always make sure to work with the right professionals or team of professionals.

Employee support professionals are critical players in partnerships with OPSOs and should be thoroughly involved. Having the right professionals involved can enhance the partnership's ability to meet more of the company's needs while also improving the experience of opportunity population talent.

Employers directly engage in workforce initiatives and partnerships as well as with trusted intermediaries, including business associations.

Employers directly engage in national, state, and local initiatives and partnerships to address their workforce needs as well as with a variety of industry and professional organizations and other public and private intermediaries. Many of these organizations are based on a membership model in which companies pay dues and expect value; others have employers engaged as one of many partners or in an advisory capacity. Examples include:

- **National, state, regional, and local chambers of commerce**. Chambers are the most widespread business-led associations in the United States and the world, but they are also incredibly diverse. They are independent business entities, but some chambers belong as members to other chambers and form what is commonly referred to as a "federation." For example, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce has a federation of more than 1,500 state, regional, and local chambers as dues-paying members. Chambers are organized in many ways and play many distinct roles. Their primary membership is the business community in their defined geographic footprint, but they can include other community partners and leaders as well (e.g., area schools and colleges). Their missions vary, but most typically focus on growing and improving their community, supporting pro-business policies, serving as the "voice" of the business community on issues of importance to companies, and networking.

- **Industry sector organizations.** These are business associations that represent employers in specific industries or sectors. These associations can be national or regional (e.g., state-based) in scope. Some examples include the National Association of Manufacturers, the Illinois Manufacturers' Association, and the National Retail Federation.

- **Professional associations and unions**. Many times, employers and employer organizations partner with professional associations and unions to address workforce needs. These associations represent people working in specific trades and professions, such as HR professionals, engineers, real estate agents, and electricians. An example is the Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM).

- **Special purpose employer organizations.** These are organizations that employers join for specific purposes, such as veterans-hiring initiatives or opportunity-youth initiatives.

- **State, regional, and local economic development organizations.** These public and quasi-public organizations promote economic development and work with employers to improve their competitiveness and growth, including improving the workforce.

- **Other intermediaries**. Examples include public and private intermediaries, such as workforce boards.

These organizations frequently serve as conveners; they host events related to education and workforce topics (e.g., addressing a skills gap or closing an achievement gap). Their role is primarily to elevate awareness of an issue but not necessarily become the lead organization when it comes to implementing a solution. The convener function is usually executed in ways that drive up business-member interest and engagement in a new partnership or initiative that is led by others.

In addition to convening employer members, intermediaries also engage directly in original research (i.e., publishing reports with new data), or they launch education and workforce initiatives. An example of the latter is when companies coalesce around a tutoring program in a high school; sponsor a mentorship program for those involved in the criminal justice system; or establish a career awareness communications campaign to address misperceptions about or stigmas associated with opportunities in their industry.

It is common for these organizations also to be recruited as members of advisory boards or to play a role in initiatives tasked with engaging employers. Typically, these intermediaries are involved in a similar fashion to how employers are engaged but are presumed to speak on behalf of their membership and to be able to coordinate requests back to them (e.g., an increase in the number of internship offerings). Business associations are often asked to weigh in on industry workforce needs, skills and credentials requirements, labor market forecasting, etc., even if they themselves are not an employer engaged in the primary economic activity and work that is of interest to the advisory board or partnership.

It is important to note that while some business associations have an education or workforce mission and a dedicated staff for education and workforce policy and programming, this is by no means the rule. Business associations vary in terms of their capacity and willingness to engage on these issues.

It is also important to note that employers are repeatedly asked by different state education and workforce agencies, schools and colleges, and nonprofit organizations to participate in major initiatives, sector partnerships, and advisory groups. This results in employers being pulled in many different directions without knowing how these different partners work together to address their needs. Business and industry associations can play a role in organizing and coordinating employer engagement in ways that can provide benefits to both employers and OPSOs.

Key Takeaways

Many employers address their workforce needs by coordinating their efforts through a business association. These organizations vary, and some have an explicit education and workforce mission—with supporting staff—while others do not. When possible, engage them in a partnership but be sure to identify what role they can play (e.g., convener versus implementer). Associations do not always have the ability to speak directly for their members when it comes to workforce issues; however, these organizations have the potential to be valuable partners for organizing employers in trusted and sustainable workforce partnerships.

The role of corporate social responsibility (CSR) differs dramatically across companies.

Increasingly, particularly within larger companies, there are dedicated staff members who address a company's CSR efforts. Engaging with a firm's CSR professionals can be a helpful start to initiating a partnership that will benefit opportunity populations. How these professionals are organized and how a company connects its CSR efforts to its business strategy varies from one company to the next.

As stated above, initiatives linked to the CSR arm of a company are frequently designed with a charitable purpose in mind and without any direct benefit of the company itself; however, this is not always the case. What drives companies to develop or expand their CSR-focused activities varies from giving back to the community to building a positive brand around their company to attracting top talent to strengthening their business.

Rather than focus on what a company calls its approach to engaging in social initiatives, concentrate on what is most important: the outcome of this engagement.[1] It is advantageous to fully understand a company's approach to CSR-related efforts. Whereas corporate philanthropy may be less focused on the benefits to the company, CSR has more of a dual role of improving the community where a company is located and the company's profitability. What should be avoided is developing an initiative as a one-off project for a company leader that will not last beyond their tenure nor get the kind of traction that can lead to shared value for all partners involved. Partnering with those companies whose CSR missions are intrinsically linked to their business strategies and core missions will likely result in a more

productive and sustainable relationship, providing better short- and long-term outcomes for opportunity populations.

Therefore, for OPSOs and their practitioners, an analysis of how CSR is activated and how it connects with a company's overall business strategy is critical for a successful partnership. In addition, helping the company connect the dots for how CSR efforts can also produce return on investment for the business can be instrumental in making a strong value proposition for collaboration to support opportunity populations' hiring and retention.

Smaller companies, while less likely to have a dedicated CSR professional, should not be counted out. Small companies are engaged in CSR activities but perhaps less formally than their larger counterparts. They can be more agile in the company culture they create. With fewer people, it is easier to ingrain a culture of CSR in all business activities that produce community benefits as well as value for the business.

It is important to note that there is a blending of roles and responsibilities between CSR and HR professionals, particularly as it relates to diversifying a company's workforce and creating an inclusive workplace environment. HR strategies to create more diverse and inclusive workforce environments naturally overlap with CSR initiatives that are intended to achieve similar outcomes. Due to the value-add of increasing a workforce's diversity, more companies are looking to this strategy. As these two efforts form a closer link, employers are interested in being recognized as leading opportunity employers—those that proactively recruit, retain, and advance opportunity populations.

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[1] https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK395637/#sec_000031

Key Takeaways

Do your homework on how a company views and engages its CSR arm or professionals, including how its HR and CSR efforts overlap, to ensure the efforts are integrated in the company's business strategy. This can ensure better outcomes and longer-term engagement than one-off projects driven by the interest of one executive.

Employers also vary widely in how they approach diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives.

Employers vary in whether they make DEI initiatives a major workforce priority. In some cases, this will not be a major priority for either CSR or workforce initiatives, or it may be a priority for only some professionals at one company location. In other cases, it will be a major priority of top leadership across the entire company and will involve clear and measurable goals with dedicated resources to get results.

Employers also vary widely in their level of experience and expertise in addressing DEI as a priority. Some employers are pioneering best practices; they are reengineering their outreach and recruitment practices and are making their workplaces more inclusive. Many of these best practices are highlighted in Resource 2. Other employers have more limited experience and expertise and are still learning which practices are the best fit for their companies. In both cases, employers can benefit from partnerships with OPSOs in developing and carrying out DEI initiatives.

Key Takeaways

Employers vary widely in their levels of commitment to DEI, how they organize and manage DEI initiatives, and their levels of experience and expertise in carrying them out. One critical issue is whether DEI is a clearly defined goal by the organization's top leadership and whether front-line professionals have the time and resources to achieve results with their partners.

Employers seek a clear value proposition.

Increasingly, employers recognize that a diverse workforce, such as one that includes opportunity population talent, results in significant business advantages including but not limited to better representation of their customer base, increased hiring efficiencies, more innovative thinking, boosted productivity, higher retention, and greater brand recognition and loyalty.

Opportunity population practitioners considering the value proposition for employers to partner with them should focus on outcomes that are of value to the employee and the employer. These should be mutually agreed upon and reflect advantages for all parties involved, which is not always the case for outcomes-focused information. For example, if a measure of success for opportunity population practitioners is job placements, but retention of those hires

is low, then job placements would not be a good measure to determine a successful partnership. A compelling value proposition will connect proposed measures of success to the employer's pain points.

Particularly when speaking to employers about potential employees, employer interest will be piqued by an individual's strengths, not the deficits. Employers will need to be aware of challenges that opportunity populations face (hence the companion resource that orients employers to OPSOs), but the focus of these partnerships is to create shared value for all parties. If the emphasis is placed on the obstacles that employers may encounter, then it is more difficult to make a compelling value proposition. The value proposition concept, and how to make a compelling one, will be further explored in Resource 3: Leveraging TPM to Achieve Better Outcomes for Opportunity Populations.

Figure 1.1 Value Proposition Template and Sample Language

Speak to the employer pain point first and how solutions may involve opportunity population hiring strategies.	Employers—like you—in our area continue to express problems with finding a diversified and qualified workforce for jobs that are critical for your company to grow and remain competitive. We recognize there are often costly problems with recruiting, onboarding, and unwanted turnover as well as with upgrading the skills and credentials of existing workers.
Acknowledge what they are doing now with you and others; use this time to thank them.	I know you and other employers have tried a lot of different ways to address your talent needs and have partnered in many of our local initiatives. And you serve on several advisory groups. We greatly appreciate the leadership roles you are playing.
Suggest the idea to start a new effort or strengthen the employer's role in an existing initiative.	We aim to work more effectively together to achieve shared value for those we provide services to and to you to better address common workforce needs. We want to leverage a systematic approach to (1) start a new employer-led initiative to address your needs, or (2) strengthen the leadership role of employers in an existing initiative.
Ask what success looks like for them.	When thinking about your current pain points, what does success in addressing them look like for you? What goals are your seeking to set to address your current pain points?
Explain potential benefits to employers (i.e., what is in it for them), using asset-based language to describe opportunity population talent and a focus on outcomes.	Based on what you have shared about your biggest talent challenges and those indicators that constitute a successful partnership, here are ways hiring opportunity population talent can help you overcome those obstacles (e.g., better representation of their customer base, increased hiring efficiencies, more innovative thinking, boosted productivity, higher retention, greater brand recognition and loyalty, or be even more specific about the assets of the opportunity population talent targeted for this partnership). Here are ways we can mutually measure that we are on the right track should we decide to partner.
Get agreement to attend the first meeting.	Would you be willing to attend a meeting with our team to discuss our respective goals and how to get started?

Recommended Actions for OPSOs and Practitioners

1. **Gather Information about Employer Talent Sourcing Practices and Leverage Existing Employer-Led Initiatives.** Gain insight into how employers currently source talent for the jobs (i.e., via local versus regional or national/global, traditional and/or nontraditional provider partners) that are most critical to their competitiveness. Conduct a review of existing employer-led initiatives (e.g., sector initiatives)—particularly those that have expressed increasing workforce diversity as a priority—before engaging individual employers in partnerships.

   Questions to Consider:

   a. Which talent-sourcing practices do employers in my area currently use?

   b. For which jobs do employers source opportunity population talent in my area? Include both nontraditional and traditional providers.

   c. Which initiatives or partnerships are employers currently bought into that would be a good place to start, and are they using the TPM Framework?

2. **Explore Employer Association Partnerships.** Contact employer associations in your state and local area to identify existing employer-led initiatives. Explore their willingness and capacity to establish partnerships with multiple employers that are willing to work together to address shared needs.

   Questions to Consider:

   a. Which employer associations (e.g., chambers of commerce, sector associations) have the credibility to organize multiple employers in a workforce partnership?

   b. Which employer associations, if any, have a history of organizing employers successfully or are currently organizing employers that have an interest in working with opportunity population talent?

   c. To what extent are these associations familiar with or making use of the TPM Framework?

3. **Engage the Right Employer Professionals.** When engaging employers, ask employer representatives about their role in their organizations and make sure you have the buy-in and support of higher-level executives and the right professionals at the table who have the decision-making responsibility necessary for effective partnerships. Also, establish who would be the major point of contact for partnerships and which professionals should be engaged when addressing specific issues or priorities, including how well equipped the organization is to support opportunity population talent.

Questions to Consider:

a. Have I secured the buy-in and support of senior leadership at one or more companies? If so, how do I know?

b. For those employers where I have gained the buy-in and support of senior leadership, who is my point of contact and what professional role does this person play in the company?

c. Does my point of contact have the support of a team inside the company, and if so, what are their respective professional roles? What training has been or could be provided to supervisors who will oversee opportunity population talent? Are there any potential gaps that need to be addressed?

d. Does the company have third-party employee support professionals? If so, what role do they play?

e. Can TPM provide a more streamlined approach for coordinating teams of professionals within multiple companies through a single point of contact at an association?

4. **Get the Facts Straight First: Gather Data Directly from Employers on Their Needs and Priorities.** Supplement government and other available LMI by working directly with employer association partners and the right employer professionals to identify the most critical jobs, pain points, the scale of their needs (e.g., projected job openings), and what prioritization has been given to increasing workforce diversity. Determine whether the level of need and criticality of the openings warrant establishing or expanding a program in partnership.

Questions to Consider:

a. Am I using data to guide planning and decision making, and what is the source and assumptions underlying that data?

b. What data, if any, are coming directly from the companies I plan to partner with (e.g., job projections, in-demand competencies and skills), and who is supplying these data within a company?

c. For the critical jobs that are of most interest to the companies I am partnering with, is there a sufficient and consistent level of need to warrant establishing or expanding a program or partnership?

d. If there is not a sufficient level or need, what would have to change (e.g., increase in demand by adding more employers to the partnership, or changing the focus)?

e. If the employers and employer association(s) we are partnering with are not using TPM, can it be a useful framework to get clearer, more granular information about employer needs and priorities?

5. **Determining Partnership Fit:** When determining if a partnership with an employer or a group of employers is a good fit, leveraging the answers from the previous questions will position OPSOs and practitioners to enter negotiations with a better understanding of how all parties can benefit through shared value. Knowing the employer's perspective on and experience with opportunity populations can result in a more effective partnership.

Questions to Consider:

a. What is the company's overall mission? As it relates to opportunity populations? How does that play out in the context of their hiring, onboarding, retention, and career advancement activities and practices?

b. What is the role of CSR within the company? How does it connect to the company's overall business strategy, including but not limited to HR functions?

c. Has the company previously sought to attract opportunity population talent as employees? If so, was it successful? Were there challenges, and if so, what was done to overcome them?

d. Can TPM provide a framework for scaling best practices between OPSOs and practitioners and employers in ways that make jobs more accessible and sustainable for opportunity population talent?

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TPM RESOURCE GUIDE:
Connecting Opportunity Population Talent
to Better Career Pathways

U.S. Chamber of Commerce
Foundation

Resource 2:
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Resource 2: Employer Orientation to the Opportunity Populations Community

This resource provides employers an orientation to opportunity populations—that is, those individuals who experience barriers to education and employment—and the organizations that serve them. It is a part of a set of resources that, when combined with the introduction, make up the TPM (Talent Pipeline Management®) Resource Guide: Connecting Opportunity Populations to Better Career Pathways. Strategic and sustainable partnerships between opportunity population serving organizations (OPSOs) and businesses start with both parties developing a mutual understanding of each other's roles, needs, and respective value propositions.

This orientation aims to help employers better connect their own pain points to the services and expertise provided by OPSOs, to create more effective, long-term partnerships. It also introduces readers to opportunity population talent and outlines some of the assets these individuals bring to the workforce—and obstacles they face when trying to access education, employment, and career advancement. By working directly with OPSOs, employers can more effectively find new, previously untapped sources of talent and build robust, sustainable talent pipelines for the future. In addition, with clearer communication and a better understanding of each other's needs, all partners can share in the value that comes from training, hiring, retaining, and upskilling opportunity population talent.

Orienting Employers to Opportunity Populations

Employers of all sizes and industries can build with OPSOs successful partnerships that lead to new sources of talent, increased diversity and inclusion, and community impact.

The term *"opportunity gap"* refers to the systemic barriers that prevent opportunity populations from accessing economic opportunity, stability, and/or mobility.

The terms *"opportunity divide"* and *"opportunity gap"* are often used to describe the lack of equitable access to education, employment opportunities, and career advancement that a variety of populations in America face. Factors contributing to limited economic opportunity can include educational background or lack of social capital and professional networks, as well as broader systemic and/or generational barriers related to poverty, gender, and race. Many opportunity populations face persistent gaps in three key areas: (1) accessing a good job with a livable wage; (2) connecting with the necessary supports such as housing, transportation, and childcare to be able to keep and thrive in the job; and (3) pursuing skill development and advancement opportunities at a low cost and with adequate mentorship and coaching. By forming intentional talent pipelines and pathways for opportunity populations in their communities, employers can play an essential role in closing the "opportunity divide" and creating a more equitable and inclusive society.

Becoming an inclusive employer can lead to dual bottom-line benefits that drive both business and social impact.

Inclusive employers proactively recruit, retain, and advance opportunity populations. Through strategic talent investments, these employers can realize what is sometimes referred to as a "dual bottom line" or "shared value." This shared value refers to multiple layers of impact for businesses that adopt inclusive practices in recruitment, hiring, onboarding, training, upskilling, retention, and advancement. Employers are increasingly recognizing that a diverse workforce—one that includes opportunity populations—results in significant business advantages including, but not limited to, better representation of their customer base, better hiring efficiencies, more innovative thinking, boosted productivity, enhanced retention and employee loyalty, as well as greater brand recognition and value among consumers. For example, research from the Center for Talent Innovation shows that when workplace teams reflect their target customers, the entire team is more than twice as likely to innovate effectively for their end users.[1] Inclusive employers often achieve bottom-line benefits while also making a social impact by helping underserved Americans achieve financial stability and economic mobility.

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[1]   https://www.talentinnovation.org/_private/assets/IDMG-ExecSummFINAL-CTI.pdf

Opportunity populations are those individuals who experience barriers to education and employment.

Opportunity populations refer to people in America who have had limited access to educational and professional opportunities. Though not exhaustive, the list below gives some of the subgroups represented in opportunity populations who have traditionally lacked access to economic opportunity, stability, and mobility. It is important to note that not all members of these groups experience barriers to employment; an individual's circumstances—such as family background, race, geography, and other factors—also play a significant role in one's access to opportunity.

Moreover, many individuals experience barriers to employment but are not part of an opportunity population subgroup. For example, some veterans may face challenges finding employment when returning to civilian life, due to difficulty in translating their military experience into civilian roles; however, not all veterans are opportunity talent. Finally, it is important to note that these groups are not static—people may fit into one or more of these subgroups at any given time. Some common subgroups within opportunity populations can include:

- Opportunity youth: young adults ages 16 to 24 who are out of school or out of work
- Members of the immigrant or refugee populations
- Individuals impacted by the criminal justice system
- Members of indigenous communities
- People with disabilities (physical and/or cognitive)
- People who have limited English proficiency
- People who are (or who have experienced) homelessness

In addition, both systemic and institutional racism in America continue to negatively and disproportionately influence the experiences of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC[2]), often making access to economic opportunity and mobility—and enjoying a sense of belonging and inclusion in the workplace—more difficult for these communities.

The size and characteristics of opportunity populations will look different in every community. If you are considering building a talent pipeline that includes opportunity populations, it is important to understand the makeup of the opportunity populations in your community. Several resources are available to support this kind of analysis, including local labor market data and various online tools such as The Opportunity Index[3] and The Opportunity Atlas.[4]

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[2] https://www.dictionary.com/e/acronyms/bipoc/
[3] https://opportunityindex.org/
[4] https://www.opportunityatlas.org/

Key Takeaways

Opportunity populations refer to a large, diverse group of people who have traditionally lacked equitable access to good jobs with livable wages and career progression opportunities. Inclusive employers intentionally invest in these untapped sources of talent, often through strong partnerships with OPSOs. It is important for employers to first gain an understanding of the opportunity population and the OPSOs in their communities.

Opportunity populations are often an untapped source of talent in the community who bring a unique perspective and skillset to the workplace.

Opportunity populations can bring a wealth of experience and unique strengths to the workplace; however, certain employment practices, such as requiring a four-year college degree or sourcing candidates primarily through employee referral networks, can limit an employer's access to this talent pool. Research from Harvard Business School, Accenture, and Grads of Life shows that for many entry- and middle-skill roles, employers pay on average 11% to 30% more for four-year college graduates, despite reporting no meaningful difference in productivity between those with and those without a four-year degree.[5] Inclusive employers take a proactive approach to mitigating degree inflation and other practices that can lead to bias, and instead consider how diverse opportunity populations could become assets in their workforce.

Here are some examples of unique strengths that opportunity populations bring to the workplace:

- Opportunity youth are highly adaptable and are likely to have life experiences that translate well in the workplace. For example, many opportunity youth juggle multiple responsibilities—they are students, take care of family members, and volunteer or have after-school jobs. For a further introduction to the opportunity youth talent pool, browse these 7-second video résumés (https://7seconds.gradsoflife.org/) of real opportunity youth describing the strengths they have developed through their life experiences.

- People whose second (or third) language is English are fluent in another language and are bicultural. They know how to adapt, learn quickly, and can offer a cross-cultural or global perspective to the business.

- Many people who have been impacted by the criminal justice system are highly motivated to perform, and they are adept at overcoming challenging circumstances—often leading to lower turnover rates among this population.[6]

Gap Inc. is an example of a leading inclusive employer that has taken a proactive approach to building a diverse opportunity population pipeline. Gap's This Way Ahead initiative (https://www.gapincsustainability.com/people/talent/way-ahead) is a partnership between Gap and local nonprofits placing young adults ages 16 to 24 in a summer internship with a local Gap store. Since 2007, more than 3,800 teens have participated in the program, and Gap is on track to hit 10,000 by end of 2020. Gap has found that program graduates hired into jobs, 98% of whom are young BICOP stay with the company twice as long as their peers. The initiative has been so successful that Gap has committed to hiring at least 5% of all new entry-level store employees from This Way Ahead by 2025.[7]

Opportunity population talent, like other employees, face several barriers that inclusive employers can recognize and sometimes help address.

Just as various communities of opportunity talent have unique and enduring strengths, they also face some challenges outside of the workplace. Below are some of the most common barriers that these subgroups face, with some suggestions of how employers can support their employees as they navigate these challenges. Finally, it is also important to note that many employees (not just those broadly defined as opportunity talent) may also face one or more of the following barriers.

- **Orientation to workplace norms:** Many opportunity populations are new to the formal workforce. Employers can optimize their investment in opportunity populations by providing job-shadowing opportunities or internships before hiring, and thoroughly setting expectations in the onboarding process on topics like professional dress, working hours, breaks, and best practices in workplace communication. OPSOs often provide professional skills or "soft skills" training to individuals in preparation for employment. Through effective partnerships, employers can often influence that training such that it best aligns with their unique culture and needs.

5 https://www.hbs.edu/managing-the-future-of-work/Documents/dismissed-by-degrees.pdf
6 https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/field_document/060917-trone-reportweb_0.pdf
7 https://gradsoflife.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/GoLWorkforceWinsWhitepaper_2.5.18.pdf

- **Transportation support:** Many people in America do not own cars and do not have instant and easy access to reliable public transportation. Employers interested in helping opportunity talent grow in the workforce may need to help team members navigate transportation issues, including offering vouchers, subsidies, or flexible spending accounts.

- **Financial instability:** The Federal Reserve found that approximately 40% of Americans cannot afford an unexpected expense of $400.[8] Employers that successfully support opportunity talent have mechanisms in place to help employees navigate unexpected expenses—for example, through an employee assistance and financial wellness program and/or cash advances on paychecks.

- **Food insecurity:** In 2018, approximately 11% of people in America faced food insecurity, which refers to an uncertainty about where/when their next meal would come from.[9] Although it is typically not an expectation that employers provide basic needs such as food, it can be helpful to understand the challenges that employees may be facing outside of work in order to help troubleshoot and connect workers to external supports. Some employers develop informal food banks for their employees: employees donate food when they can, and team members are able to access the pantry if and when they need it.

- **Housing instability:** There may be times when some employees face housing instability due to life circumstances such as the death of a loved one, financial challenges, an abusive relationship, the incarceration of a loved one, and so on. Employers can be supportive of opportunity talent through this kind of challenge, via partnerships with local government or nonprofits, financial assistance, and/or mental health services.

- **Trauma:** Many employees, including those from opportunity populations, have experienced challenges throughout their life that have led to long-term mental and physical health consequences, such as post-traumatic stress disorder or anxiety and depression. An emerging best practice among inclusive employers is to provide frontline managers with trauma-informed management training to be able to best recognize and address when employees may need additional support in order to continue thriving professionally.

- **Involvement in the criminal justice system:** Research shows that nearly 75% of formerly incarcerated individuals are still unemployed one year after release from prison.[10] Opportunity populations with criminal records face significant barriers in accessing employment, due to both restrictive hiring policies and social stigma; however, members of this community are typically highly motivated to succeed and often have higher-than-average retention rates. For more information about this talent pool and the unique barriers they face, consider exploring Dave's Killer Bread Foundation (https://dkbfoundation.org/), a national organization that helps employers understand how to engage in effective second-chance hiring.

- **Care for family members:** Many people—not just opportunity talent—care for loved ones such as young children, senior citizens, and/or relatives with a disability. Inclusive employers try to ensure consistent and predictable scheduling for team members so that they can balance these family responsibilities, and these employers may also offer health benefits and/or emergency assistance to help support employees through a crisis.

It is worth reinforcing that many of these issues are endemic in America and not uniquely associated with opportunity talent. Many employees may not feel comfortable disclosing or speaking openly about some of the life challenges they face. Often, OPSOs offer added value to employers by serving as a community connector and ongoing resource for graduates of their programs. In some cases, employers may choose to directly hire a full-time employee (commonly called a *resource navigator*) who sits within the company

8 https://www.federalreserve.gov/publications/2019-economic-well-being-of-us-households-in-2018-dealing-with-unexpected-expenses.htm
9 https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/ag-and-food-statistics-charting-the-essentials/food-security-and-nutrition-assistance/
10 https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/field_document/060917-trone-reportweb_0.pdf

and helps employees connect with community and social services as needed.

Finally, inclusive employers that invest in supportive practices and policies such as those listed above are likely to experience a powerful "Curb Cut Effect"[11]—that is, by investing in things that help opportunity populations, all employees stand to benefit and overall employee health and wellness is likely to increase. Finally, it is important to note that employers that develop inclusive practices and support networks will likely see improvements in staff morale, retention, and performance over time.

Key Takeaways

Opportunity populations can face challenges outside of work that impact their health and well-being and can be sources of stress. Creating strong partnerships with OPSOs can be a great way to offer additional supports to employees; many of these organizations can provide ongoing assistance and connections to community resources.

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[11] https://www.policylink.org/resources-tools/curb-cut-effect#:~:text=The%20Curb%2DCut%20Effect%20is,we%20rise%20or%20fall%20together.

Orienting Employers to OPSOs

A variety of organizations serve opportunity populations, and these nonprofits can be valuable, strategic, and long-term talent partners for employers.

OPSOs can provide employers with several unique assets: access to a diverse talent pool, demand-aligned training and upskilling of employees, post-hire support services to employees, and overarching strategic guidance on becoming a more inclusive employer. Creating partnerships with these organizations can offer a way to access, train, and hire opportunity population talent at a lower risk to the employer. Many organizations, for example, serve as the employer of record (and sometimes pay wages) while their trainees are performing internships or job-shadowing experiences with a firm, reducing the liability for the employer and allowing for a trial period of training, exposure, and orientation for the candidate. In other cases, employers can access government subsidies or take part in innovative "pay for success" models that lower the risk and/or cost of hiring certain populations.

For example, Roca is a nonprofit organization in Massachusetts that runs the nation's largest Pay for Success project to date.[12] Through the model, philanthropic organizations provide upfront capital to Roca, which provides employment training and placement services to high-risk young men exiting the criminal justice system. The initial investors are reimbursed by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts only once successful outcomes in employment and retention have been achieved. This model allows incentives to be aligned by all parties and enables employers to tap into programs that are being held accountable for measurable, positive outcomes. Because this kind of model is still new to the field, it is being tested on a variety of fronts. Consequently, this model may not be replicable in every industry or locale.

Alternatively, employers have also explored (and used) a "reimbursement model" to workforce programs when an employee meets or exceeds predetermined outcomes for retention, performance, and/or advancement. The key in both models is to make sure that the employers' and the providers' incentives are aligned ahead of time.

OPSOs typically fall into a handful of categories based on the kinds of support they offer, their business models, funding sources, and governance structures. Many of these organizations work in concert with one another to serve their communities. Outlined below is an overview of the range of organizations that serve opportunity populations.

High Schools: High schools have myriad programming and educational philosophies. Career and technical (CTE) high schools and programs have specific career tracks where students learn industry skills and may be able to earn industry-recognized certifications. Many high schools have CTE programs as part of their curricula. CTE programs may also have additional programming and supports for students with disabilities or for other special populations. Several national, networked organizations focus on creating strong internship programs between high schools and employers, including National Academy Foundation, Cristo Rey Network, Jobs for America's Graduates, and Urban Alliance. In addition, adult high schools focus on providing GED, skill development, and industry training to those 18 and older.

- **What they offer:** High schools offer a range of services and programming for young people, from career exposure (hosting guest speakers, organizing site visits, and job shadows) to career preparation (industry-recognized certifications, internship programs, and job training programs). Every high school is unique, so it is important for employers to investigate (and connect with) those schools that have the kinds of programming that complement their needs.

- **Typical challenges they face:** The staff who work in high schools serve many student needs (academic, social/emotional, health and safety, etc.) and may often offer some wraparound services to families (after-school programming, food drives, GED/night school, etc.) Though they have direct access to a large number of young people interested in career pathways, high schools may not always be attuned to employer needs in the local market. Forging proactive partnerships with high schools to begin workshops, career exposure, and internships is a good way to start building an early talent pipeline in the community.

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[12] https://rocainc.org/work/pay-for-success/

Community Colleges: Like high schools, community colleges serve a vast number and range of students across an equally large spectrum of programming. These institutions likely have a standard range of academic programs, but they may also have CTE offerings, industry-recognized certification programs, and "nontraditional" courses of study (internships, apprenticeships, entrepreneurship incubators, etc.).

- **What they offer:** Community colleges may have both "for-credit" workplace readiness programming, such as certification courses and CTE tracks and degrees, as well as "noncredit" offerings, including business roundtables, shadow experiences, mentoring opportunities, and noncredit classes. These programs can offer excellent sources of entry-level talent for middle-skill roles, but they can also be excellent sources of support for existing employees who would like to seek additional training and upskilling opportunities.

- **Typical challenges they face:** Community colleges are often large (some serve tens of thousands of students a year) and dispersed (they may have numerous smaller satellite campuses within a region). Moreover, they may offer a considerable range of programs and services across many academic disciplines and industry tracks. Finding the right staff member(s) who can coordinate relevant programming can often be a challenge.

Four-Year Colleges/Universities: Like community colleges, colleges and universities also offer a large array of academic and nonacademic programming to a diverse student population. These institutions are often better funded than their community college peers, so they also have special programming (fellowships, paid internships, industry partnerships, etc.) and/or research hubs and think tanks that fuel innovation.

- **What they offer:** Colleges and universities offer a variety of degrees, courses of study, and programs to a highly skilled group of students. They are also drivers of economic activity and innovation within their communities. They are natural hubs to find and recruit talent as well as to build the skills of existing employees. Finally, it is important to note that colleges and universities have a wealth of knowledge about people, systems, education, health, and mental health. To find ways to improve the culture and climate of the organization, employers may want to partner with colleges and universities to gain insights into best practices around such topics as labor and training, online upskilling, mental health programming, accommodations for people with disabilities, and people management.

- **Typical challenges they face:** Many colleges and universities have decentralized governance and programming, and their funding streams are enormously complex. Consequently, many colleges and universities move slowly on new initiatives.

Community-Based Organizations That Provide Education and Employment Training: These organizations comprise both national networked or federated organizations, such as Goodwill Industries and Boys and Girls Clubs of America, as well as local, independent organizations with a single location. These organizations are mission driven and can serve a wide range of opportunity populations. Some focus specifically on one subgroup of opportunity populations, such as opportunity youth or individuals with disabilities, while others serve multiple populations or are open to all job seekers.

- **What they offer:** Community-based organizations have deep expertise in—and a passion for—the populations with whom they work, including their strengths and talents, career interests, and life backgrounds. They also have strong ties to other community members who provide essential resources to such populations. Many of these organizations offer some degree of pre-employment training and may also provide some social services, such as housing support and mental health counseling. Within their pre-employment training programs, they may offer general professional readiness training, such as résumé development and mock interviews, industry-specific training, credential-bearing opportunities, and connections or pathways to degree-bearing programs—though most of them do not grant degrees directly. A growing number of nonprofit organizations also provide post-hire services to support employers with ongoing retention, skill development, and advancement of employees. These services can include counseling and coaching, connections to community resources, training and upskilling programs, and management of education benefit programs.

- **Typical challenges they face:** Community organizations can sometimes be stretched thin given the needs of the populations they serve. Many are juggling multiple programs at a time and managing a constant stream of incoming clients who urgently need their support. These organizations often have limited budgets and need to regularly reapply for funding throughout the year to maintain operations—a task that takes up time and resources from their staff.

Social Service Organizations: Social service organizations focus many of their efforts on immediate and pressing community needs, such as food, shelter/housing, clothing, harm reduction (violence prevention, suicide prevention), counseling services, and safe spaces (community centers, after-school programs, and women's/family shelters). They generally do not have the broader programming that community-based organizations possess (such as job training or adult education programs) because they are focused on the immediate needs of their communities.

- **What they offer:** Many of these organizations often have established, long-standing connections throughout the community as well as deep ties and trust among the stakeholders they serve. The people who work in these organizations are mission driven and know their communities well; in fact, many of them often bring deep subject matter expertise to bear (in areas like hunger, mental health, violence prevention, individual or family counseling, trauma-informed practices, crisis supports, etc.). They can be excellent ancillary partners to augment an opportunity populations strategy, especially if your primary organization partner focuses mostly on employment training and less so on more holistic needs. These organizations can offer critical support to opportunity population talent as they progress throughout their careers.

- **Typical challenges they face:** Many of these organizations operate with small budgets and have very little margin for error. They serve high-needs communities with complex challenges; therefore, the organizations (and staff) may often work both inside and outside of their core competencies to help their communities. People in these organizations often wear many "hats" and juggle several job responsibilities.

Governmental Agencies: Governmental organizations and their departments cover an enormous range of community services, and there is typically considerable variation in how these departments are structured and resourced at the local level. Employers might intersect with the board of education, the department of corrections, the office of workforce development, the mayor or governor's office, and/or the department of labor and training.

- **What they offer:** Governmental departments contain deep subject matter expertise, access to funding, a broad and deep reach across the community, and a corps of committed civil servants. Many local chief officials (e.g., governor, mayor, county executive) are tightly connected to community-based organizations and can play a connector role between groups. It is common for these offices to also run their own employment training programs for opportunity talent; summer internship programs have been growing in popularity in recent years. Further, these agencies and the people within them sometimes represent important power brokers in the community who can bring the right resources and/or people to the table. Having local governmental agencies involved in an opportunity populations strategy as a resource or advising partner can be helpful to unlock knowledge about the local landscape that may not be easily searchable on one's own.

- **Typical challenges they face:** Governmental organizations and their departments do not always communicate with one another, which may create confusion about the various initiatives and relationships within a local context. In addition, the pace of activity and decision making can sometimes be slower among government agencies given complex layers of approval and competing priorities. Finally, transitions between administrations can sometimes lead to changing priorities and budget shifts that make long-term partnerships more challenging to maintain.

Other Organizations That Serve Opportunity Populations:
In addition to the entities listed above, many of which focus mostly on providing education and employment training, many other organizations likely interact with and support opportunity populations. Broadly, these organizations can be categorized into the following:

1. Organizations that provide housing support
2. Organizations that provide transportation assistance
3. Organizations that offer health, wellness, and recovery services
4. Faith-based organizations
5. Organizations that provide infrastructure, technology, and information services in the community
6. Organizations focused on public policy reform

These organizations will be able to help employers assess their capabilities and build new competencies. They can also offer direct services and support to a wide range of employees with an equally diverse array of needs.

Key Takeaways

Organizations that serve opportunity populations have enormous diversity in terms of size/budget, mission, scope of work, populations or regions served, and programming; however, they all possess deep subject matter expertise within their areas of focus, and they address the pressing social, emotional, educational, and developmental needs of their clients. Employers will need to research and partner with those organizations whose missions, visions, values, and programming best align with the talent needs of their workplace.

Organizations that serve opportunity populations sometimes form networks to organize their services.

In a growing number of communities across the country, groups of organizations that serve opportunity populations are forming networks and collaboratives in order to better organize their activities, share knowledge and expertise, fill holes in one another's programming, interact with the employer community, and ultimately increase their collective impact. These groups are sometimes known as "communities of practice," whereby organizations meet regularly to learn from each other and improve their approaches to serving their stakeholders. In some markets, these collaboratives are highly structured, with a clear backbone organization serving as the funder and lead facilitator. Sometimes the backbone organization will also play a leading role in communicating with employer networks in the community to help the organization group speak as one voice. In other markets, the groups may be less formal and not have a clear structure, meeting cadence, or facilitator. It can be helpful to research whether your community has an existing network that serves opportunity populations; such networks can speed up your due diligence on the key players in your market.

Some examples of national associations/networks of OPSOs are Jobs for the Future's Young Adult Talent Development network, a coalition of national organizations that train opportunity youth for employment; STRIVE, a national network of programs that use common programming for career development and placement of opportunity populations; and Catalyst Kitchens, a national network of organizations that use food service and preparation as a vehicle for employment and skills training of opportunity populations. Local examples include the EMPLOY Collaborative in New Orleans, the Philadelphia Youth Network, and the Opportunity Youth Partnership in Santa Clara County, California.

Key Takeaways

Many practitioners are starting to form groups with other like-minded organizations in their community. Researching these groups can be a helpful place for employers to start engaging the practitioner community and get an efficient and comprehensive "lay of the land."

OPSOs utilize professionals in multiple roles for supporting opportunity population talent.

In preparing to engage with organizations, employers will find it most helpful to have a sense of the common roles and responsibilities that personnel involved in the partnership will likely have; this way, employers can work most effectively with their partners and reap the benefits of their knowledge, expertise, and ongoing support.

- **Executive team:** The executive team/executive director is responsible for the financial sustainability of the organization and the quality of outcomes. They will not (likely) be deeply involved in the day-to-day management of the initiative, but they are important stakeholders because they will help set up the program, resource it appropriately, and provide executive support and oversight. Executives at nonprofits and community-based organizations have deep subject matter expertise and are also strong, strategic managers. They can help employers envision new programs, develop ways to assess the success of these programs, and build sustainable business models over time.

- **Employer engagement:** Most (though not all) organizations will have an external relations manager (or team) that oversees employer partnerships and may also be responsible for marketing and/or communications related to the initiative. It is likely that a person from this team will oversee the development of your partnership and day-to-day operations of the initiative. The point person for the employer will likely work very closely with a person in this role on the initiative from day 1.

- **Program operations:** The team of people involved in the operations of the program (i.e., providing training and other services to the opportunity population talent) will have deep subject matter expertise. They will likely be consulted about the structure and timeline of the program, especially if the organization's training will be modified to meet your needs as an employer. It is likely that the point person for the employer partner will meet with a representative group of programmatic team members from time to time to review outcomes and think of ways to improve the experience for all stakeholders involved.

- **Fundraising and marketing/communications:** Organizations often have dedicated staff members (sometimes only one or two people) who are focused exclusively on fundraising and grant reporting, which is usually critical to financial sustainability. In very small or resource-constrained organizations, the executive director may take on most of this role and serve as the external face of the organization. Sometimes, fundraising (also known as development) personnel are also responsible for marketing and communications activities. In other cases, organizations will have separate staff members who focus on external communications, including material development, event planning and participation, social media, and so on. It is worth noting that marketing is often not an area where organizations can afford or prioritize significant investment, so you might find more budget-conscious approaches to materials, websites, videos, and other externally facing content. As an employer, you will likely interact with communications personnel over time as the organization seeks to tell the story of your partnership—something that can be beneficial for your own stakeholders as well.

- **Monitoring and evaluation:** Occasionally (and much less likely for smaller organizations), organizations may have dedicated staff who focus on, research, and analyze programmatic outcomes over time. These staff are often trained in evaluation methods and come up with various methods for analyzing an organization's impact, which can include following up with program participants, capturing data, or engaging in more formal research studies in partnership with funders or other agencies. Most independent organizations (those not associated with a larger national network with multiple office locations) do not have dedicated staff who focus on monitoring and evaluation, and therefore other staff members, including employer engagement, program operations, and the executive team, can often take on the additional role of outcome measurement and assessment.

- **Additional support staff:** Most organizations have personnel devoted to additional support for clients, including connections to community resources and social services. Typical job titles for these individuals include "case manager," "community liaison," and/or "client services manager." It is less likely that you will have regular contact with these staff members, although your point of contact may pull them in for discrete recommendations about specific participants. They are a great resource should you have any specific questions about the range of supports available to opportunity populations served by the organization.

Key Takeaways

Most practitioners in your community will have an executive director as well as employer engagement, fundraising, and program operations teams that run the day-to-day business. Depending on organizational size, structure, and budget, other roles may include communications, monitoring and evaluation, and additional support staff. Your point person will likely be on the employer engagement team, and that person will bring in additional stakeholders as needed.

OPSOs have varying business models and funding streams.

OPSOs access funding according to their structure, needs, goals, and geography. The section below outlines common funders and the structures of these funding streams.

Funders: Below are the most common funders of organizations that serve opportunity populations and their work.

- **Government:** By far, the biggest funder of workforce development programming is government (federal, state, and local). Government funding comes in a wide variety of forms, from educational/workforce programs such as AmeriCorps and the state-college system to partnerships with businesses and nonprofits, to government-sponsored grants and funding streams, such as the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act. State agencies often coordinate the flow, distribution, and monitoring of federal workforce–related funding at the local level.

- **Philanthropy:** Philanthropic organizations and individual donors often try to fill the "holes" in government funding by investing in "innovation," "venture-philanthropy," or unique cross-sector partnerships. Consequently, they rarely fund operational expenses over the long term. Rather, many philanthropies will fund innovation, specific programs, or critical infrastructure for the future.

- **Employers:** Employers and industry associations also fund workforce-readiness initiatives throughout the United States. The type of programming and funding will depend on the needs of employers within a given industry or locale.

Structures of Funding Streams:

- **Grants:** Grants are funding sources developed by government or philanthropic organizations that encourage organizations to develop solutions to an identified issue, apply for funding, and then run the program and evaluate the results. Grant funding comes with rigorous and standardized reporting and key performance indicators (KPIs) as well as regular reporting periods. Many governmental funding streams offer the potential for ongoing operational funding (assuming the requirements of the grant are met each cycle). Many organizations depend on year-over-year governmental funding to help finance their operations.

- **Outcomes-Based:** Recently, funders have been developing "outcomes-based" funding streams that provide revenue for an initiative if the program meets the outcomes requirements. Common outcomes requirements are contingencies like a recruited employee staying for a set amount of time or a team member meeting certain performance conditions. Outcomes-based funding has been developed to align the incentives for organizations and employers.

- **Social Impact Bonds:** These bonds are a form of outcomes-based funding, but they may have a broader lens and/or timeframe for securing the outcomes. For example, an outcomes-based initiative may focus on helping opportunity talent secure employment for at least six months post-hire, while a social impact bond might track the growth of a person's W-2 over two or more years.

- **Fee-for-Service:** Some nonprofits develop fee-for-service arrangements with businesses. These agreements can be mutually beneficial because both parties' incentives are aligned. Employers can push for outcomes-based results (e.g., well-trained employees staying on the job for a specific time period), while organizations can secure a stable and ongoing source of revenue. Some organizations further diversify their revenue streams through additional business models, such as Goodwill, which runs retail stores as supplemental income, or by renting their buildings as event spaces during off-hours.

- **Hybrid Models:** Most organizations pull together a variety of funding streams to help build and run their programs. It is not uncommon for a single program to have government funding that covers some operations, philanthropic funds to cover new initiatives or pay for equipment, and a fee-for-service component with an employer partner. Hybrid funding models give organizations flexibility to innovate and work with a variety of stakeholders, but they are not without challenges. The reporting requirements for these types of initiatives are diverse and multifaceted, and organizations must manage the needs of a wide array of diverse stakeholders (governmental agencies, philanthropic organizations, clients, and employers).

Key Takeaways

Organizations access a diverse array of funding streams to cover their operating expenses as well as new initiatives. Each funding stream has its own unique reporting requirements, KPIs, reporting timeline, and critical stakeholders. As an employer, it is important to remember that organizations have often fully allocated their resources according to their various income streams at any given moment. Therefore, determining together new potential funding streams to cover any additional costs of partnership with you is an important step in building a strong partnership.

There are best practices to follow—as well as common pitfalls to avoid—when partnering with OPSOs.

There are thousands of partnerships between employers and OPSOs all over the United States (and globally), from local partnerships in just one location to national and international partnerships that span multiple states and even countries. Learning from these models and what has made them successful can be a helpful start in pursuing your own partnership strategy. Below are examples of key drivers of success as well as common pitfalls of such partnerships.

Best Practices

- **Getting internal buy-in:** The most successful partnerships start with strong buy-in within an employer for building opportunity population talent pipelines at multiple levels. It is important that, to the greatest extent possible, senior executives such as the Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO) or Chief Operating Officer (COO) as well as frontline staff who will be directly managing opportunity talent are aware of and supportive of pursuing new partnerships to access untapped talent. The TPM model—described further in Resource 3—can provide a pathway for employers to bring the right stakeholders to the table and align parties toward common goals.

- **Adopting a pilot approach:** Framing your internal communications with an innovation and testing mindset can help free up creative thinking and reinforce a long-term perspective on the partnership. Thinking of the partnership as a learning process that you improve upon over time will help create realistic, short-term goals, and it allows you to pivot as necessary along the way.

- **Designating clear ownership and roles**: In many successful partnerships, one specific person, usually in human resources (HR), owns accountability for success with opportunity population hiring and advancement. Just like specific HR personnel are responsible for campus recruiting at universities and play the role of liaising with those institutions, placing students into roles, monitoring performance, and so on, designated HR team members who will manage opportunity population partnerships and their outcomes are key to success.

- **Analyzing your internal policies and practices with an equity lens:** In most successful partnerships, employers take a proactive approach to evaluating their practices, policies, and culture with a view to equity and inclusion. Reviewing and assessing things like the environment and mindsets within your workplace, barriers that might be limiting your talent pool in the hiring process, and your hiring, pay, and promotion rates by race and gender will help you become a more inclusive employer and ensure that opportunity populations can grow and thrive in your company. Your opportunity populations partner can often be a great resource in helping you to evaluate your internal systems and policies and suggest evidence-based strategies for building in equity and inclusion best practices.

- **Developing metrics of success:** Successful partnerships between employers and OPSOs usually agree on metrics together (this topic is discussed further in Resource 3), and these metrics are driven by both partner goals and funding/reporting requirements.

  Some examples of metrics include:

  – Rates of hire/placement from partnership (including interns converted to full-time employees);

  – Retention and performance of opportunity talent at three months, six months, and 12 months;

  – Culture and climate survey data at three months, six months, and 12 months from the launch of the partnership (this information can help employers and organizations adjust their work with opportunity populations to ensure that the program is working as intended);

  – Employer, organization, and trainee/employee satisfaction with the partnership; and

  – Community impact measured by number of target population trained or employed, reduction in recidivism, local economic growth, and so on.

Common Pitfalls

- **Staff Turnover.** Working across organizations is complex work that requires strong communication and ongoing collaboration. The departure of key staff members can slow or stall an initiative. Organizations that manage successful cross-organizational partnerships work diligently to involve a core team of stakeholders who become deeply involved in the work, rather than handing all responsibility to one person. That way, if a team member moves on, the rest of the team can continue the work.

- **Lack of a Clear Communication Plan.** A lack of clear (and ongoing) communication can also derail a project. Every organization has strengths, growth areas, and "blind spots." Unless the cross-organizational team clearly outlines the communications plan and the roles and responsibilities of each team member, the broader team may make assumptions about the flow of information and the project can lose momentum. Developing a communications plan and agreeing on frequency of touchpoints can be a helpful way to mitigate this issue.

- **Underestimating Resources Needed.** Helping opportunity talent become part of the overall fabric of a high-performing organization is complex and multilayered. It involves a mixture of training and development; organizational culture and practice change; and new infrastructure to support this work. Although it is always important to be efficient and conserve resources, carefully and realistically think through the resources required of you and your partner in order to be successful. Come up with a contingency plan for when things change or milestones miss expectations. Reaching clarity with your partner at the outset about how problems will be addressed will help you tackle unforeseen challenges as a team.

TPM integrates these best practices (and more) into a structured framework and provides more guidance on how to operationalize a partnership strategy with OPSOs. Resource 3 of the TPM (Talent Pipeline Management®) Resource Guide: Leveraging TPM to Achieve Better Outcomes for Opportunity Populations offers an overview of the TPM model and how it can be leveraged to activate strong, scalable partnerships that lead to shared value.

Key Takeaways

There are many things you can do internally, prior to an engagement, and as you begin to develop partnerships to set the stage for an effective long-term collaboration. Gaining buy-in and having a pilot mindset are helpful places to start. As you build and strengthen partnerships, set clear expectations about communication, metrics, and contingency planning—especially related to staffing—as these are especially important steps for long-term success.

Recommended Actions for Employers

Employers should consider the following actions in working with OPSOs:

1. **Engage in an internal assessment and/or reflection process.** If you are looking for a place to start, consider exploring the Opportunity Navigator (https://opportunitynavigator.org/), a self-assessment tool for employers that covers best practices in hiring, retaining, and advancing opportunity populations.

   Questions to consider:

   a. What is your corporate culture like (e.g., norms, behaviors, mindsets), and how might it affect the success of opportunity population talent?

   b. How might your current recruitment and hiring policies be limiting access for opportunity population talent (e.g., degree requirements, partnerships with four-year colleges)?

   c. What resources are available for employees to help with access to housing, transportation, childcare, and other basic needs? How might an OPSO provide access to these services?

   d. What systems are in place to support coaching, mentorship, and advancement of employees, including opportunity talent?

2. **Consider your business and social impact goals to evaluate how opportunity populations can be a solution.** Gather stakeholders internally from HR, corporate social responsibility or social impact and the executive team to align on the double bottom-line outcomes you are seeking to achieve by building new talent pipelines.

   Questions to consider:

   a. What kinds of opportunity populations exist in your community?

   b. What strengths could they bring to your workforce, and what unique barriers might they face? How will you support opportunity populations in navigating those barriers?

   c. How might opportunity populations best fit into roles and talent needs at your company?

   d. What goals or commitments do you have for diversity, equity, and inclusion?

   e. What goals do you have for community leadership, impact, and brand, and how might this initiative help support those goals?

   f. What are some outcomes that would help you achieve a double bottom-line impact (e.g., increased diversity, stronger retention, increased brand recognition)?

3. **Explore the local landscape of organizations that serve opportunity populations and set up discussions to learn more.** Research the OPSOs in your area, shortlist those that appear best aligned to meet your needs, and engage in initial dialogue to further explore a partnership.

Questions to consider:

a. Are there any existing national or local networks of organizations in your community?

b. What are the range of organizations in the community that help connect opportunity populations to employment?

c. Have you worked with these organizations before?

    i. If so, what was your experience like, and what do you hope will be different this time?

    ii. If not, why not? Are there organizations you have not considered yet that could be helpful in achieving your goals?

d. Are there any influencers in the community whose perspectives would be useful as you pursue outreach and/or who could connect you to resources or specific people?

4. **Be mindful of best practices and common pitfalls as you explore potential partnerships.** Review case studies of partnerships that have worked well (in your industry or others). Set up the internal systems necessary for success and prepare for effective conversations with potential partners.

Questions to consider asking:

a. Do you have buy-in at multiple levels of the company?

b. Have you designated clear owners with accountability for success?

Questions for OPSOs:

a. What kind of support is offered to trainees in advance of employment? What kinds of support could you offer post-employment?

b. When have you successfully worked with employer partners in the past, and what were some of the best practices from this initiative?

c. How do you measure your outcomes? What data do you have that demonstrates your organization's success in supporting populations beyond job placement?

d. Who will be my point of contact for this partnership, and how often should we plan to communicate?

Talent Pipeline Management® (TPM)

TPM RESOURCE GUIDE:
Connecting Opportunity Population Talent to Better Career Pathways

U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation

Resource 3:
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Resource 3: Leveraging TPM to Achieve Better Outcomes for Opportunity Populations

This resource describes how to use TPM to build better partnerships that result in improved outcomes for opportunity populations, defined as those who experience barriers to employment. It is part of a set of resources that, when combined with the Introduction, make up the TPM Resource Guide: Connecting Opportunity Populations to Better Career Pathways.

This document (1) provides an orientation to TPM as a framework for organizing employers and their talent supply chain partnerships in order to unlock a dual bottom line; (2) explains how TPM can be used to improve communication and promote shared understanding between employers and opportunity population-serving organizations (OPSOs)—that is, those that serve people who experience barriers to employment; and (3) describes how TPM can be leveraged by employers and OPSOs to modify their processes in ways that make their partnerships more successful, shift employer perspectives and behavior, and ultimately create a more inclusive workforce. TPM delivers better diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) outcomes, creating shared value for opportunity population talent, OPSOs and their associated practitioners, as well as employers.

The value-add of increasing workforce diversity means that more companies are identifying this area as a critical pain point that requires attention and committed resources. Addressing this issue effectively and creating more equitable workplace environments are not easy tasks, and many existing employer practices will require modifications. OPSOs are natural partners for employers that wish to act on these priorities.

TPM Organizes Employers and Their Talent Supply Chain Partners to Unlock a Dual Bottom Line

At its core, TPM is a systematic approach for getting employers to engage in collective action through a structured process of data collection and decision making. The result is authentically employer-led partnerships that unlock a dual bottom line (i.e., financially and socially), activating enhanced employer leadership and engagement in sourcing of opportunity population talent.

TPM is both a framework and a process. It is a framework in that it provides clear roles and direction for all stakeholders in the talent development ecosystem, with an emphasis on how employers need to get organized at scale. It provides a process for employers to repeatedly produce high-quality, primary source data about their workforce needs and challenges. TPM is the mechanism by which this information is shared with preferred and trusted partners, including those that serve opportunity populations, to inform co-designed talent solutions. These solutions, which can include wraparound services, result in better outcomes for opportunity populations and serve as a catalyst for changed employer perspectives and behaviors, leading to a more inclusive workforce as well as shared value for all parties.

Efforts that do not result in shared value typically lead to short-term engagements and one-off projects. In addition, employer engagement is made increasingly difficult by employer partnership fatigue. Frequently, the same employers are being asked to play different consultative roles as advisors not only for community-based organizations but also for traditional education and workforce partners, such as schools, colleges, and workforce boards.

Through TPM, employers are organized into a collaborative—hosted by an organization of their choosing—that can serve as the employer committee for one or more advisory groups and sector partnerships with which employer collaboratives choose to work. Host organizations are typically—but not exclusively—a business association like a chamber of commerce, sector association (e.g., a manufacturing partnership), or economic development organization.

Individual employers, especially larger employers, may choose to implement TPM by themselves; however, there are many advantages for employers to work together: higher visibility, shared expertise and peer learning, streamlined solutions, and greater scale (e.g., number of job openings) and leverage when working with partners. As a result, employers, especially small- to mid-size employers, may elect to be part of a collaborative. In our experience, even large firms see the benefits of working in collaboration with other employers rather than going it alone.

TPM is systematic in how it uses information to co-design talent pipelines that are consistent with career pathway models and in how it provides the context for coordinating complementary initiatives. By simplifying outreach and establishing better organization efforts, this approach can help OPSOs overcome employer engagement challenges.

Once organized, employers are guided through a six-strategy process, which establishes a talent supply chain approach that allows for achieving a positive *financial* and *social* return on investment (ROI). The six strategies are described below:

Strategy 1: Organize Employer Collaboratives— A group of employers form an employer collaborative around one or more shared pain points and determine the critical business functions and occupations they will work together to address. Shared pain points can include improving the qualifications of new job applicants, reducing onboarding and training costs, improving retention and career advancement opportunities, and increasing workforce diversity. Business functions can include workforce roles such as nursing, machining, and software development, which allows employers to focus on the core work requirements without getting caught up in the complexities of differing job titles.

Strategy 2: Engage in Demand Planning— The employer collaborative produces data on projected new and replacement positions for the targeted jobs based on their workforce planning activities and business assumptions. This information—primary source data—is specific to the collaborative; as a result, it will often stand in contrast to data pulled from government occupational projections or data produced by analyzing job postings.

Strategy 3: Communicate Competency and Credential Requirements— In addition to collecting data on new and replacement positions, the employer collaborative develops a shared language to describe required and preferred hiring requirements for its target business functions or occupations. As part of this process, the employers in the collaborative revisit their current hiring requirements and revise them to be more competency- and skill-based. They also make important decisions about proxies such as required or preferred credentials and experience that could be constraining their ability to tap into available talent pools.

Strategy 4: Analyze Talent Flows— The last part of the collaborative's data collection efforts includes analyzing the current talent sourcing patterns of the employers and from where they could get talent in the future. For external pipelines, this strategy involves employers looking at the education, training, and credentialing source(s) for those workers who either applied or were hired, so they know where their current workers come from. For internal pipelines, it can be used to identify how talent within a company can be upskilled to fill needed jobs. This strategy also encompasses analyzing the capacity of current talent sources in order to answer questions like, "Can my current talent sourcing partners meet our projected demand given our current utilization of those sources (i.e., the number or percentage hired or upskilled by the collaborative from those sources)?" It also offers an opportunity to examine demographic characteristics and determine if new partnerships with providers can support efforts to diversify the talent pipeline.

Strategy 5: Build Talent Supply Chains— Using the primary source data organized by the collaborative through Strategies 2, 3, and 4—and the pain points arrived at in Strategy 1—the employers make decisions about the type of talent pipeline that is best suited to their needs (i.e., upskill existing workers, focus on external hires, or both) and with whom they will work to co-design and implement their solution(s). The data are put into action and used to co-design a talent pipeline that can meet the projected needs of employers while delivering a quality education and training experience to learners that results in employment or career advancement opportunities. Strategy 5 also allows for back-and-forth discussion between the employer collaborative and its talent sourcing partners on matters such as the required and preferred competencies and credential requirements and which partner—including the employer—is responsible for addressing them. It is also an opportunity to determine what types of supports and services offered to opportunity population talent, as well as what employer-facing services, will produce the envisioned shared value for all partners and a dual bottom line.

Strategy 6: Continuous Improvement— After implementing a solution with preferred and trusted partners, the employer collaborative collects and uses agreed-upon performance data to identify continuous improvement opportunities. This includes reviewing both leading indicators, such as enrollment and completion data, but also lagging indicators that are important to employers, such as improving the

yield rate of qualified job applicants, reducing turnover, and enhancing upskilling options. Through TPM, both the employer collaborative and its talent pipeline partners are given a process to analyze the data, identify root causes, test solutions, and scale what works—all with an eye toward improving the ROI for employers, opportunity population talent, and OPSOs.

As an end-to-end talent supply chain solution, TPM offers a framework to achieve DEI goals more effectively while integrating a dual bottom line. TPM encourages employer collaboratives to include workforce diversity as a major talent pipeline issue and to focus on expanding career opportunities for targeted populations and demographics. Throughout the TPM framework and process, employers are challenged to get their facts straight both internally but also as an employer collaborative so that they can send

clearer signals and ultimately be better partners. Companies that have established DEI goals may have divisions across the company that are not in sync with one another. For example, a company's human resources (HR) strategies to create more diverse and inclusive workforce environments naturally overlap with corporate social responsibility initiatives that are intended to achieve similar outcomes, but these two teams are not always working together. TPM is a team sport in many contexts and can help uncover inconsistencies and gaps.

Success Story:
Kaiser Permanente Innovates with Opportunity Populations

In 2017, Kaiser Permanente, one of the largest health care systems in U.S., needed to complete construction on a hospital in South Sacramento, California. The hospital's CEO told the general contractor that they would gladly pay overtime to get the project completed. But the contractor couldn't accelerate the project because there were not enough skilled workers available to do the job.

Kaiser recognizes that the construction industry has good jobs, but the existing workforce development process is ambiguous and as a result, the pipeline is more accessible to people already in construction or with family ties to the business. The current process is neither centralized nor clearly publicized. There is no concrete pipeline for others to enter the construction trades in northern California, so there are relatively few minorities in the field, in the most multicultural state in the US. The healthcare giant wants to change this.

Kaiser has over $1 billion of construction projects planned in California in the next few years. As in everything they do, their mission is to provide as much access as possible to all communities in their service area. Kaiser even created its own construction company to help meet the demand for new facilities, which has been little impacted by COVID-19 disruptions. But the shortage of construction workers, including plumbers, electricians, carpenters and HVAC technicians, is a much broader problem in California.

In August 2019, Kaiser brought together eight general contractors to see if they would collaborate on solutions for the workforce shortage. A major focus of the new construction collaborative, which has grown to 12 companies, is broadening access to opportunity populations who historically have been excluded from the industry. Specifically, Kaiser wants to extend the pipeline to recent high school grads in low income neighborhoods throughout Sacramento region and citizens returning from incarceration.

Key Takeaways

A key differentiator for TPM is that it encourages employers to get organized and work together to achieve the scale necessary for establishing effective partnerships between employers and OPSOs. This results in a dual bottom line.

TPM also enables employers to collaborate to get the facts straight prior to engaging their talent-sourcing partners. When employers organize to produce primary source data about their shared workforce needs, they can better co-design solutions to meet those needs. This is what makes TPM a powerful value-add to any partnership with OPSOs and their practitioners.

Employers also must be thoughtful about why they are prioritizing opportunity population talent and gauge which populations and opportunity population talent organizations they have access to.

TPM Improves Communication and Promotes Shared Understanding Between Employers and OPSOs and Practitioners

TPM is a useful framework for employers to develop a shared language and understanding as they collaborate as a team. What is more, TPM can help bridge the divide between employers and OPSOs by opening new lines of communication with more consistent, higher quality data backed by stronger, more sustainable employer leadership. In addition, shared understanding among partners leads to an enhanced ROI because all parties are working alongside one another to achieve the same goals. Below are just a couple examples of how TPM, through improved communication, helps promote shared understanding between employers and OPSOs and practitioners:

TPM organizes employers around critical jobs using trusted employer associations or other intermediaries.

TPM encourages employers to organize collaboratives when building a talent supply chain solution. TPM provides the collaborative with a structured end-to-end process to clearly define their most pressing workforce pain points, their critical jobs, and the geographic areas they will start with when working alongside their education and workforce partners. These partners include OPSOs such as nonprofits, community-based organizations, and staffing agencies, as well as traditional education providers (i.e., schools, community colleges, and universities).

Employers use trusted employer associations—as previously mentioned, the host organization—to implement the TPM process. This includes aggregating their primary source data, facilitating decision making among the collaborative members, and managing the resulting relationship(s) with education and workforce partners. The host organization that is staffing the employer collaborative can serve as its spokesperson, resulting in more consistent and higher quality communication while also greatly reducing the time and costs associated with engaging employers in these partnerships.

TPM is an employer-led process that develops the information that OPSOs need in order to start new or to improve existing relationships, creating career pathways for opportunity population talent.

Critical pieces of information gathered directly from employers can result in more effective partnerships with OPSOs. These partnerships better equip opportunity population talent to gain and sustain employment as well as to access career advancement opportunities.

TPM employer collaboratives do more than just identify the most critical jobs—they also provide information on projected job openings that can complement more traditional government labor-market information. Through TPM, employer collaboratives develop a shared language to describe similarities and differences in hiring requirements. For example, employers examine closely their competency and credential requirements enabling them to better communicate the right information and expectations for their most critical roles to OPSOs and identify items that may be limiting their talent pool.

TPM prepares employers for how to work productively with their education and workforce partners to co-design talent pipelines that have clearly defined roles at different stages and an agreed-upon set of performance metrics. The step-by-step process gathers needed information, which is then used to develop career pathways that allow employers to be more proactive in working with OPSOs to determine each other's respective roles. It also helps identify what employer roles or engagement opportunities are most important in producing results.

In addition, TPM provides a framework for working with OPSOs to better align resources and incentives; this improves the delivery of training and support offered to opportunity population talent and boosts employee performance.

Key Takeaways

TPM can be a powerful tool to help bridge the communication divide between employers and OPSOs. It can also promote shared understanding between the two sides. When leveraged in the right ways, TPM can scale and sustain employer engagement with OPSOs as well as significantly improve both the quality and the level of that engagement. A shared understanding of one another's roles results in saved time and resources—and better outcomes for all stakeholders.

Using TPM to Modify Processes Among Employers and OPSOs

As previously presented, TPM offers a framework and shared language for improving understanding and communication between employers and their education and workforce partners, including OPSOs and their associated practitioners.

We now explore how the TPM strategies can accomplish this aim by improving specific processes, such as (1) removing bias and barriers in hiring requirements; (2) analyzing talent flows to untapped hidden talent; (3) co-designing talent supply chain solutions and integrating wraparound supports across a value chain; and (4) measuring impact to improve performance. When these modifications are combined, the results are more successful partnerships between employers and OPSOs, a shift in employer perspectives and behavior, and ultimately a more inclusive workforce. This process creates shared value for opportunity population talent, OPSOs and the practitioners that serve them, and employers.

First and foremost, companies need to be thoughtful about why they are prioritizing workforce diversity. Several common reasons are better representation of their customer base, increased hiring efficiencies, more innovative thinking, boosted productivity, higher retention, and greater brand recognition and loyalty. Implementing successful processes that intend to increase workforce diversity should be pervasive throughout the company's practices, not just in HR processes. Part of this consideration involves employers identifying the job opportunities within their companies—specifically, their critical jobs, or those that are most important to their firms' competitiveness and performance.

The TPM Orientation, an educational opportunity to share far and wide across your community, aims to lay the groundwork for the following activities and processes; this exercise of self-evaluation is a helpful entry point. This will be further explored in the earliest stages of actual TPM implementation once employers collectively identify their pain points, of which expanding workforce diversity is an increasingly prioritized focus.

Success Story:
Vermont Manufacturers Target Opportunity Populations

Like most states in the U.S., manufacturers in Vermont suffer from a chronic labor shortage.

Before the COVID-19 recession, this worker shortage was limiting the growth of manufacturers. Employers would turn down contracts due to capacity limitations. Chronic "no shows" in the manufacturing workforce made it difficult to plan workflow or to meet customer's delivery deadlines.

In 2018, to address these problems, the Vermont Business Roundtable's TPM initiative, VTPM, organized a collaborative of 35 Vermont advanced manufacturers. Using the TPM framework, they surveyed participants, asking them to forecast their workforce needs two years out. Employers said they needed 1,600 workers to fill production jobs alone. Since this was a survey of just 35 employers, collaborative organizers knew the actual demand among Vermont's manufacturers would be much greater.

This workforce need couldn't be met through traditional channels, such as hiring recent graduates from high school CTE programs, since there programs varied in content and delivery. So the collaborative had to communicate with hard-to-reach populations who weren't aware of the high paying production job opportunities available with the right training.

"It's no good identifying the job and career ladder opportunities if you have no one to tell this to," said Mary Anne Sheahan, executive director of the Vermont TPM Program. "We needed to communicate with opportunity populations. This is the untapped audience we knew employers needed to reach."

To start, the collaborative partnered with the Vermont Community Foundation to get the message about employment opportunities out to organizations that would be most receptive, such as Vocational Rehabilitation, and Corrections, both divisions of Vermont's Agency of Human Services and to work-based learning coordinators in schools. VTPM also reached out to non-profits like Vermont Works for Women, Refugee Resettlement and ReSource Vermont.

These organizations successfully communicated about the career opportunities along with funded regional training resources. In addition, Working Bridges of the United Way of NW Vermont also provides businesses with wraparound services to give employees support to overcome personal barriers to work.

Key Takeaways

At the onset of organizing and implementing the TPM framework, TPM can improve practices by:

TPM Orientation: Analyzing TPM's fit for an organization's DEI goals and how they fit within the broader business strategy. Learning about the role of OPSOs in making talent pipelines work, as well as identifying potential partners that serve the targeted opportunity population.

Strategy 1: Establishing and understanding those employer collaborative's pain points that center on workforce diversity and inclusion.

Strategy 2: Providing detailed information on what jobs are in critical demand and more accurate job projections.

Removing Bias and Barriers in Hiring Processes and Requirements

Once employers have a clear focus on their DEI-related pain points, the points' relation to critical jobs, and a targeted opportunity population talent pool, TPM offers a powerful framework and set of tools for employers to identify hiring requirements for these jobs, including competencies and credentials that are required or preferred. What is so important about this part of the TPM process is that it presents an opportunity for employers to examine how their hiring requirements may be limiting them from potential talent, either for individual candidates or from talent sources (e.g., OPSOs) more generally. This includes how jobs are described and how applications are reviewed.

Job Descriptions: The language used in a job description—both in the job title as well as the key words associated with the skills required to perform the job—can dramatically influence which candidates apply. Although job description bias is typically associated with gender, it can also be applied more broadly to opportunity population talent. For example, specific verbs and adjectives may deter opportunity population talent if they do not see themselves as "competitive" in the workplace or having "managed" projects or other people. In addition, credential requirements that may not be necessary to perform the key skills prioritized in a critical job can filter out otherwise qualified candidates. For example, if the targeted opportunity population talent is less likely to have obtained a four-year degree in computer science but has performed well as part of a short-term coding boot camp, then employers seeking entry-level employees for coders should make changes to their hiring requirements.

In particular, the TPM process can be used to right-size hiring requirements, which often means reducing the number of requirements or changing some requirements to preferred competencies, credentials, or experiences. Further, employers can use this process to begin to think about their role throughout the talent pipeline. Reviewing what employers prioritize as most critical to their targeted jobs gives them an opportunity to take on more of the responsibility in ensuring that the signals they send to their partners reflect the necessary requirements of the role. Ultimately this provides a greater value for all involved.

Application Review Process: How an organization goes about hiring can have a significant impact on who is ultimately selected to fill a job. Informal processes that are not standardized across applicants can unintentionally filter out qualified applicants by allowing implicit bias to seep into the review. For example, hiring managers often rely on an unstructured interview process to organically reveal the qualifications of a job candidate, but this approach will not prove consistently effective to identify strong applicants. And if an organization mostly relies on referral hiring from an already nondiverse workforce, then it is unlikely that employers will secure a diversified workforce.

To remedy these common missteps, employers should work with hiring managers as well as those who currently fill critical jobs to better capture the most prioritized competencies and skills. Bringing in subject matter experts to inform the discussion and challenge long-established thinking is a useful internal exercise. In addition, to overcome bias in the application review process, employers should consider the use of software tools that identify biased language and offer neutral language suggestions. They should also consider a structured application review and interview process that is more focused on competencies and ability to complete work tasks.

TPM promotes a focus on competency- and skill-based hiring. It provides a value-add in that it creates a structured process by which employers can challenge their prior assumptions about what competencies are needed for critical jobs and improve their ability to signal these needs to OPSOs and those they serve. Employers need to consciously examine how attaching "required" to competencies or credentials in a job description can eliminate qualified applicants, including but not limited to opportunity population talent.

The strength of a TPM collaborative is that employers can learn from their peers, who will go through a similar exercise of closely examining their hiring requirements—which are preferred versus required skills—and how implicit bias must be discovered and addressed. External partners, including OPSOs, may prove beneficial to better understanding what explicit and implicit biases are weeding out potential talent.

Success Story:
Greyston Bakery Reimagines Hiring

When people are offered a job at Greyston, there is no interview, resume or drug test involved. Instead of screening potential employees out, Greyston hires and retains good workers by investing extensively in hard and soft skills training, as well as wraparound services. Employees with health, housing, child care and transportation needs are connected to resources they need to keep them employed.

The bakery, which is the global supplier of brownies for Ben & Jerry's ice cream, has virtually no hiring costs and invests about $1,900 in training new bakers. It began scaling it's mission by creating the Center for Open Hiring. One of the first companies to adopt Open Hiring principles was The Body Shop. With coaching from the Center and Greyston executives, they piloted the open hiring process in one of their distribution centers.

The Body Shop hires 200 seasonal employees to handle the holiday rush and it was always a struggle to find workers for the Raleigh site. Adapting the Open Hiring approach they simply asked people three questions: (1) Are you legal to work in the U.S.? (2) Can you stand on your feet for 8 hours? And (3) Can you lift up to 50 pounds?

And the results? Body Shop executives said they reduced recruiting resources and time by 50%. Turnover among the seasonal workers was down 53% over the previous year, and the center had higher production. It was considered the best hiring season in the distribution center in years. The Body Shop plans to expand this innovative hiring practice to other entry level positions in the future.

Key Takeaways

Strategy 3: Understanding how HR practices and processes may unintentionally limit your talent sources. This can include what hiring requirements are included in a job description to attract and evaluate candidates. Employers can use this part of the TPM process to reevaluate which hiring requirements are most critical and then potentially eliminate or shift a requirement to a preferred demonstration of skill or experience. It could also be that employers need to evaluate their hiring process, such as better assessing competencies.

Analyzing Talent Flows to Tap into Hidden Talent

TPM can be leveraged to perform a more accurate supply-and-demand analysis, which can be used to benefit opportunity population talent's inclusion in the pipeline. The TPM approach encourages employers to identify their current source(s) of qualified applicants—a process called back mapping—and is agnostic as to whether these sources are part of traditional education and workforce systems or from more nontraditional systems, both of which serve opportunity population talent. OPSOs can also be partners to more traditional talent sourcing providers to enhance access and success of those populations with eventual transition into the workforce.

If a business has not yet determined if it will target specific opportunity populations (e.g., opportunity youth, people with disabilities), it is important to gain a better understanding of the makeup of opportunity populations in your community, which practitioners serve them, any particular assets those populations offer, and how they match with your company's goals and critical jobs. Employers can survey the regional landscape for OPSOs and learn about the kinds of aid they offer to opportunity population talent.

In addition, the TPM back mapping process allows employers to uncover demographic characteristics for talent, which can assist company efforts to expand workforce diversity. Employers are sometimes surprised as to where their best talent comes from—perhaps a staffing agency, a community-based organization, or even a short-term training program provided by one of those partners, any of which could be an OPSO.

TPM is also used to better determine whether employers with critical in-demand job openings are hiring talent from OPSOs—or even if these firms are aware that OPSOs are as a potential talent source. If employer demand outweighs current supply—or if a company's existing talent suppliers do not offer the diversified candidates that employers have prioritized—it is a good opening for OPSOs to demonstrate their ability to meet projected future demand while positively contributing to a firm's DEI efforts.

This process is not limited to first-time, entry-level hires. TPM also encourages using supply analysis to examine internal pathways that demonstrate career advancement opportunities. By identifying jobs that feed into targeted critical jobs, employers can better sync upskilling opportunities for opportunity population talent. Here, OPSOs can play a critical role in identifying and offering support services that increase retention and career advancement; this will be discussed more in the subsequent section.

Success Story:
Building Pathways for Women in Construction

Memphis is a fast-growing city that is trying to reskill its workforce to meet the evolving needs of its major employers. A critical area of focus is the construction industry, which is facing a shortage of about 2,000 workers and desperately needs to attract people into the building trades. This led to the formation of the "We Build 901" collaborative based on the TPM methodology of construction companies, which includes 50 companies, contractors and subcontractors in the region.

Through discussions of employers in the collaborative it became apparent that there are relatively few women in construction and few pathways for them to enter the field. For example, FedEx a major employer in the region, employs 700 skilled trades people but only two percent are women, says Kit Crighton-Smith, project management advisor for FedEx properties and facilities and oversees their construction operations in Memphis. This led to the development of an additional collaborative of which Crighton-Smith now leads called "Women Build 901 Too."

Women Build 901 Too aims to address the fact that young women are overlooked as a prime source of talent in the region for construction and therefore are not being targeted through most outreach efforts. As a first step, they identified key community and talent partners such as the Tennessee Department of Human Services department and Agape a local nonprofit that provides holistic services for low-income families to obtain economic self-sufficiency.

The collaborative is also working with the local school district to reach middle and high school young women and share information on promising career options in construction and connect them with a female mentor if they choose to move forward in the industry.

Key Takeaways

Strategy 4: Understanding the makeup of opportunity populations in your community as well as those organizations that serve them. Analyzing talent flow to identify and tap into sources of hidden talent from nontraditional providers.

Co-Designing Talent Supply Chain Solutions and Integrating Wraparound Supports Across a Value Chain

To co-design talent supply chain solutions effectively, TPM creates a process for preferred provider designation—that is, those partners recognized by an employer collaborative as being able to meet employer requirements. Employers establish standards and subsequently identify those partners that produce results; this transparent approach better allows OPSOs to connect those they serve with job opportunities. Earning the preferred provider distinction is typically based on a partner's performance addressing the employer's pain point; capabilities and expertise to play a role in the talent pipeline; and leadership commitment to play a role in the talent pipeline and co-design solutions with employers.

Many OPSOs are unaccredited. Having a preferred provider status is a powerful incentive and can allow them to be more discoverable to other employers, policymakers, and others that are similarly trying to achieve better outcomes for targeted opportunity populations. Even accredited organizations can benefit from having this added employer recognition.

Once preferred providers are selected, the aforementioned employer-driven data contribute to the co-design process in which the collaborative and OPSO engage. Solutions are meant to directly address the skills and credential requirements for the identified critical jobs so that opportunity talent is well equipped to succeed in those roles. Importantly, this co-design approach should also establish the accommodations needed to tackle barriers to access and success—which might include education,

training, and support services once opportunity talent is hired, not just at the onset of employment.

TPM establishes the role of employers at different stages of the talent pipeline and clarifies what the employer commitment is and the resources they bring to the partnership, such as career preparation and pre-employment training, onboarding, career coaching, and upskilling opportunities (see Figure 1: Basic Value Stream Map). As mentioned, when employers review and prioritize the skills most critical to their targeted jobs, they assume more of the responsibility in advance of actual employment, which can lower barriers to entry. These priorities may be discovered by the OPSOs, but they are similarly co-owned by the employer partners. OPSOs and their practitioners will be armed with the knowledge of how they can fill any gaps or holes that employers do not feel they can sufficiently provide to support opportunity talent.

Employers and their OPSO partners can leverage this exercise to identify what kinds of support should be offered by the employers and at what stage, and how those activities complement any services offered by OPSOs and their practitioners; it provides a way to clearly signal the roles and responsibilities of all partners. As mentioned, this exercise is not just for the onset of employment, nor just for entry-level hires. A value-add of the TPM process is that it gives partners a framework to identify and integrate education, training, and support throughout all stages of the pipeline. These offerings can include case management services such as transportation, childcare, and housing support that can be arranged directly through OPSOs to protect employee privacy. It can also include pre-employment training for new hires or employee assistance

Figure 1: Basic Value Stream Map
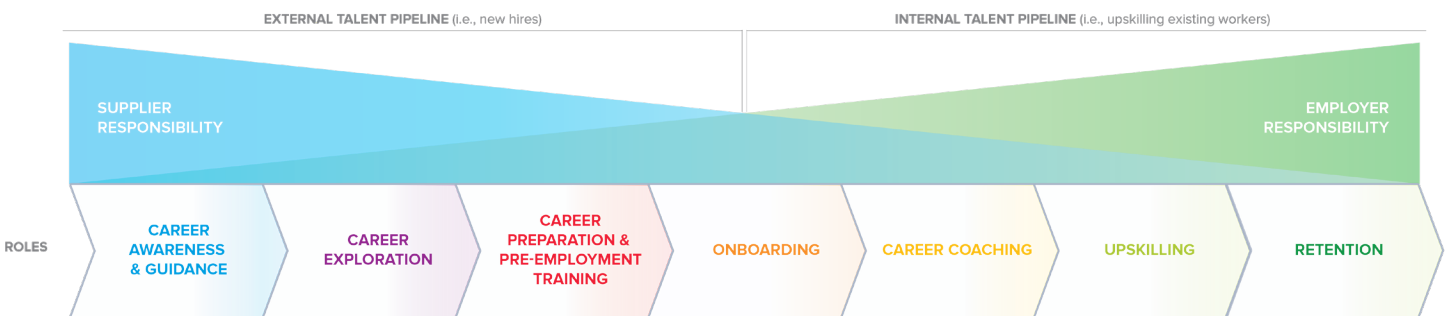
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services, such as financial wellness or literacy training, for those employers interested in upskilling. Alignment between the two partners can result in opportunity talent feeling more comprehensively supported and better equipped to become high-performing and retainable workers. It also speaks to the value creation that initiated the employer-OPSO relationship.

As mentioned, TPM incorporates a value-stream mapping process whereby employers and their preferred providers understand talent development from start to finish. What is more, it is an agile and dynamic process that allows for employers and their partners to continually revisit the talent supply chain and make needed adjustments based on changing conditions, thereby maintaining their relationship over the course of the opportunity population talent's employment. For OPSOs and their practitioners, this will include both services provided to opportunity population talent (e.g., pre-employment training, counseling services, financial wellness, literacy) as well as to the employers themselves (e.g., supervisor training, monitoring, and evaluation).

And finally, the TPM framework allows employers and their partners to align their incentives. In TPM, incentives come in many different forms and go beyond the usual funding incentives provided on the public side (e.g., competitive grants). Many OPSOs have experience with braiding public funding streams to bring together the right mix of services and outcomes; through TPM these efforts can be expanded to include private sector–controlled incentives. Private sector incentives can include priority access to work-based learning opportunities, access to equipment and facilities, scholarships, and, of course, direct funding, to name just a few. These incentives can be powerful signals of employer commitment.

What makes TPM different is that both employers and their partners are encouraged to tie incentives directly to their agreed-upon performance metrics. In other words, incentives drive performance. TPM provides a useful framework for employers to organize the right mix and level of incentives to offer; for OPSOs, it helps identify which types of incentives are most critical and result in improved performance on both supply- and demand-side metrics.

Success Story:
Bridging the Gap in Dallas County with a Comprehensive Workforce Ecosystem

Despite record unemployment in Dallas County, driven by the COVID-19 recession, employers in sectors such as logistics and manufacturing still have thousands of available jobs that they can't fill with qualified applicants. A significant contributing factor is that almost one-third of working-age Texans have a criminal record, which currently excludes them from many jobs.

In February 2020, non-profit Redemption Bridge launched the South Dallas Pilot Project in partnership with the State Fair of Texas to create a comprehensive eco-system of employers and organizations providing training and wraparound services to help ex-offenders, veterans, homeless, unemployed youth and people with disabilities overcome barriers to employment.

The South Dallas pilot will not only close the skills gap for employers in the region, but also serve opportunity populations by providing training in nationally recognized industry certifications to enable long-term employability in living wage jobs. To do this, Redemption Bridge has built out a collaborative community of businesses, educational institutions, and workforce agencies that prepares individuals for personal and professional success in the workplace.

Wes Jurey, Redemption Bridge's Executive Director, vets every partner in the system to make sure they will deliver results as a collaborative team player. In addition, all employers in the collaborative have agreed to interview candidates who have earned nationally-recognized certifications, such as certified logistics technician in a "without prejudice" process. A major goal of the initiative is to align and integrate existing support resources to enhance their impact in developing the region's talent pipeline and to increase opportunities for individuals from low income neighborhoods to secure sustainable, living wage jobs.

The project also is closely aligned with local, non-profit social enterprises who provide support with assistance for housing, transportation, addiction recovery, and reconnecting in the community.

Key Takeaways

Strategy 5: Leveraging a transparent process for preferred provider designation. Using employer information to co-design solutions that directly address the skills and credential requirements for the identified critical jobs, as well as accommodations needed to tackle barriers to access and success (e.g., coaching and mentorship as part of the onboarding process and beyond). Integrating case management services when identifying preferred providers and co-designing value streams. Value stream mapping and inclusion of a wide variety of support services, including those that are employer-facing. Aligning incentives and braiding funding to achieve best outcomes for opportunity population talent.

Measuring Impact to Improve Performance

The TPM strategies offer a playbook for employers to engage more effectively within an organization as well as across companies. One major challenge in employer and opportunity population partnerships is how to use a balanced and aligned set of performance metrics that reflect the needs of all partners, including employers. Performance and accountability metrics rarely factor in employer-facing metrics that address key pain points. TPM provides a framework for establishing a balanced set of demand- and supply-side metrics to verify progress, such as the percentage of hires from targeted populations and the percentage of targeted population hires achieving career advancement. These metrics ensure that other performance measures and related incentives (e.g., preferred provider designation) do not have any unintended consequences for expanding opportunity and equity when implementing and managing talent pipeline partnerships.

Through TPM, employers can work with OPSOs and their practitioners to co-design not only training programs and support services, but also balanced scorecards that reflect metrics that are important to opportunity population organizations as well as employers (see Figure 2: Example Aggregate Performance Scorecard). These balanced scorecards are particularly useful in that they communicate value to the employer in ways that can sustain their engagement and commitment to the partnership. In addition, this moves the employer from an advisory role to a direct beneficiary—with data and evidence to back it up. This approach results in shared accountability across partners and helps the collaborative be more transparent to government, funders, and the community.

Through TPM, employer collaboratives work with their supplier partners to develop talent pipelines based on career pathways. These pathways help to produce results based on the agreed upon metrics, including the delivery of coaching and services that contribute toward long-term success.

Figure 2: Example Aggregate Performance Scorecard

| Shared Pain Point Measures	Performance	Relative to Goals	Trend
Percentage of applicants from talent providers that meet the requirements	55%	🔴	⬇️
Percentage of new hires from targeted opportunity populations	20 days	🔴	⬇️
Average number of days to fill open positions	128 days	🔴	⬇️
Percentage of hires retained in first year of employment	75%	🟡	⬆️
Percentage of employees completing career advancement from targeted opportunity populations	25%	🔴	⬆️
Driver/Transition Measures	**Performance**	**Relative to Goals**	**Trend**
Number of learners enrolled in training program	95	🟡	⬆️
Number of learners who complete training program	75	🟢	⬆️
Percentage of completers from targeted opportunity populations	28%	🟡	⬆️
Percentage of employees from targeted opportunity populations enrolling in career advancement programs	20%	🔴	⬇️

Finally, TPM promotes a continuous improvement process that can help identify root causes associated with persistent gaps in opportunity and success and can promote proven solutions to address them at every stage of the talent pipeline. This occurs by using performance data (see Figure 3: Example Performance Scorecard for Tier 1 Training Providers). Data are not just useful for accountability purposes—they permit ongoing conversations between partners on how to improve the relationship in ways that manifest themselves in better outcomes for employers, OPSOs and practitioners, and, most importantly, opportunity population talent.

TPM scorecards allow employers and their partners to avoid chasing solutions and instead focus their attention on key points in the talent pipeline that need to be investigated and improved on through a commonly used improvement model (see Figure 4: TPM Continuous Improvement Process). Sometimes this means employers in the collaborative may need to look more closely at themselves in order to identify a possible breakdown in the talent supply chain partnership; this includes revisiting their data, how they communicate that data to partners, as well as their own role in supporting learners and onboarding new workers.

In TPM, continuous improvement opportunities can be found on both the supply side and the demand side; it should not be assumed the problem lies with the opportunity population talent being hired. For example, exit interviews or focus groups with existing workers and providers/case managers can be instrumentally helpful to determine any improvement opportunities for onboarding, career coaching, mentorship support, or supervisory training.

Figure 4: TPM Continuous Improvement Process
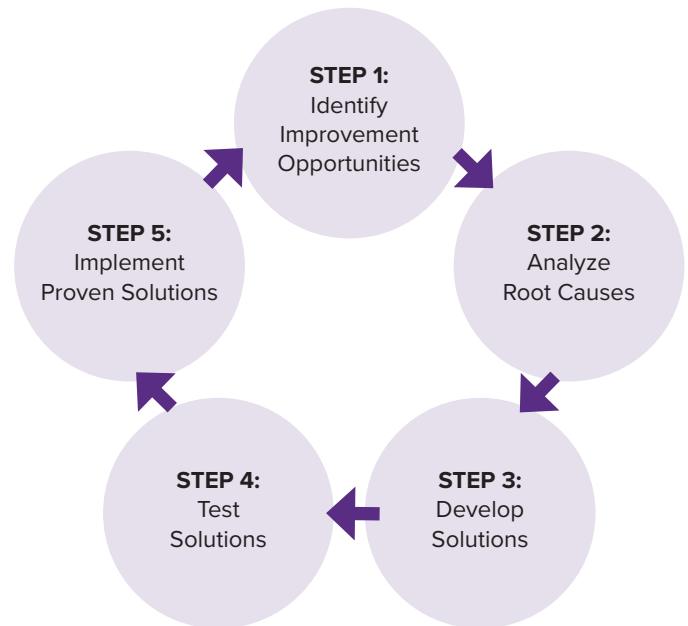
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Figure 3: Example Performance Scorecard for Tier 1 Training Providers

Tier 1 Provider	Measure	Level	Relative to Expectations	Trend
Community College A	Percentage of applicants from talent providers who meet the requirements	85%	🟢	⬆
University B	Percentage of applicants from talent providers who meet the requirements	60%	🟡	⬇
University C	Percentage of applicants from talent providers who meet the requirements	40%	🔴	⬇

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Key Takeaways

Strategy 5: Establishing balanced metrics and incentives that achieve results and demonstrate shared value creation for all partners.

Strategy 6: Using an evidence-based continuous improvement process that can identify and address root causes of the opportunity and achievement gaps for those facing barriers to career and education advancement.

Recommended Actions in Using TPM to Achieve Better Outcomes for Opportunity Populations

OPSOs and their employer partners should take the following actions:

1. **Is TPM Right for You?** TPM is a useful framework to build mutual understanding and a shared language between OPSOs and their employer partners. It can be used to establish new partnerships or to enhance existing ones (e.g., sector partnerships or advisory boards). It provides a structured process for getting employers organized and having them produce consistent and granular information about their workforce needs. It also provides them with tools to partner more effectively in designing, delivering, and improving a career pathway program, including support services offered to opportunity population talent.

   Work with business associations and economic and workforce development agencies to explore implementation of TPM within the state.

   Questions to Consider:

   a. As an OPSO, what is your current employer engagement strategy? If it is an advisory board, what is the role employers are expected to play, and what professional role do participants represent?

   b. As an employer, have you been or are you currently involved in a partnership with an OPSO, and what was that experience like?

   c. Would TPM be a useful framework to promote mutual understanding and shared language between OPSOs and employers? If so, in what ways?

   d. How, if at all, is TPM different from what strategies you may have used in the past or are currently using?

   e. Can TPM be a useful organizing framework for OPSOs to better understand employer needs and align their offerings for opportunity population talent?

   f. Is TPM right for you?

   g. If so, what additional information do you need to start your TPM journey, and would you benefit from organizing a TPM Orientation or participating in a TPM Academy?

2. **Utilize TPM Best Practices and Tools.** Use TPM best practices and tools to improve opportunity population trainings or support services that achieve an ROI, including diversity and equity goals, for all stakeholders.

Questions to Consider:

a. What ways can TPM be used to address your DEI priorities?

b. When planning a training program, what is the source of information used to align with employer demand? Is it sufficient?

c. Can TPM be helpful in identifying which support services will be most advantageous to opportunity population talent?

d. In what ways can TPM be used to improve the design and delivery of career counseling?

e. Does TPM offer anything new in terms of thinking about performance management, ROI, and continuous improvement, and is that useful or relevant to you and your organization?