

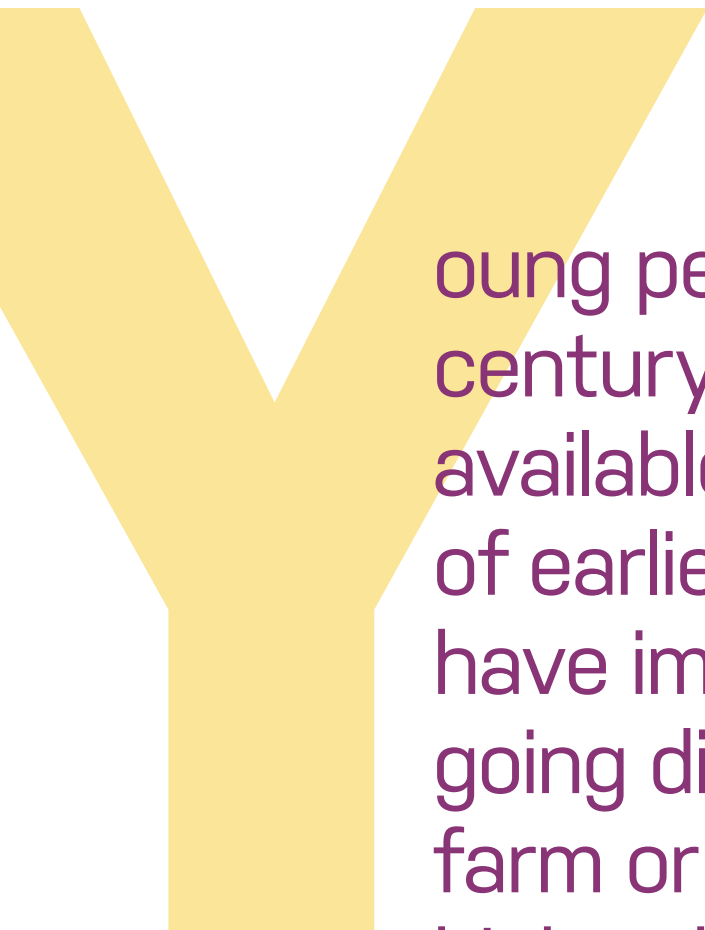


CREATING OPPORTUNITY

The Heinz Endowments is increasing investments to help 18- to 24-year-olds in the Pittsburgh region who would benefit from additional support to obtain living-wage careers and a chance at a promising future.

By Elwin Green

Elwin Green is a Pittsburgh-based freelance writer. His last stories for h ran in Issue 1, 2024. One examined the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust's upgrades of its venues in Downtown Pittsburgh and impacts the improvements could have. The other summarized the history of the Trust and the city's Cultural District.



Young people in the 21st century have opportunities available to them that those of earlier times might never have imagined. Rather than going directly to work on a farm or in a factory, today's high school graduate can go to college, join the military or receive job training through a wide variety of vocational schools and programs.

And yet...



When The Heinz Endowments hired The Bridgespan Group last year to help foundation staff assess its Learning Strategic Area, the Boston-based consultancy's review found that about 5,000 young people in the Pittsburgh region graduate from high school each year with no plan for the next stage of their lives, whether it be employment, continuing education or some combination of the two.

Carmen Anderson, the Endowments' vice president of Equity & Learning, explained that the Endowments had wanted to learn from past giving and impact, build on existing assets, better understand challenges for children and families in the region, find gaps that could be addressed, and identify potential investment areas that could accelerate and deepen impact.

As part of the process, Bridgespan looked at post-secondary transition rates from the Pennsylvania Department of Education and information from The Annie E. Casey Foundation's KIDS COUNT Data Center and determined that many high school graduates in the region did not follow a straightforward path to college, a career or the military.

Bridgespan also reviewed job openings in the Pittsburgh region that pay a living wage and do not require a bachelor's degree and determined that there were an estimated 29,000 unfilled jobs in southwestern Pennsylvania.

youth and young adults from pre-K through post-secondary education. This year, the decision was made to increase the focus on helping young adults in the region ages 18 to 24 find and keep living-wage careers, particularly those who face economic hardships and would benefit from additional support to fulfill their potential. These individuals include the parents of young children who are pursuing higher education.

"It's the right time for us to take a step back and look at that portfolio and say, 'How do we want it to evolve?'" Mr. DeCardy said.

Diana Bucco, president of the Pittsburgh-based Buhl Foundation, welcomed her peer philanthropy's rethinking of its Learning focus.

"We've always recognized that the most vulnerable population in our community is our 18- to 24-year-olds that don't get the right foundation," she said. Also, "there's a significant number of sustainable-wage jobs [that don't require a degree] because not everyone's meant for college. I think it was not fair of us as a community to suggest, or as a country to suggest, that everyone should go to college."

"These and other findings set the direction for Heinz Endowments leaders to develop a targeted approach to grantmaking intended to change the trajectory for young people in the region," Ms. Anderson said.

"We're losing the thread with these young folks," said Endowments President Chris DeCardy, emphasizing the urgency. "And at this moment in time in the country and in this region, we can't afford anybody in Pittsburgh and southwest Pennsylvania to not successfully be able to move into that journey for work."

In response to the lack of connection between some local young people and the opportunities surrounding them, the Endowments launched a redesign of its Learning area. Since 2016, Learning had funded a wide range of programs that support

The process of revamping the Endowments' Learning area has involved several stages of development. Bridgespan, in partnership with Endowments staff, reviewed 15 years of grantmaking to identify key lessons from past investments. The work included interviewing community, government and systems experts and conducting data analyses based on numerous research studies. The organization completed a national best practices study, identified a set of options and developed criteria for the updated focus such as addressing strong need in the region and providing an opportunity for systems change.

Through this process, a strategic plan was developed, Ms. Anderson said. Among the goals of the plan are to decrease the number of youth who do not transition from high school into either post-secondary education or jobs and to increase the number of young adults and student parents who attain a degree or other high-value credentials.

"We also want to increase the level of community engagement in our work so that we deepen our understanding of the assets and challenges from the people who are impacted directly," she said.

An important next step is to hear directly from young people about "what the barriers are that are inhibiting their progress and what they believe would make a difference in their trajectory," Ms. Anderson said. "Based on what we learn,



CRITERIA FOR UPDATING FOCUS OF THE HEINZ ENDOWMENTS LEARNING STRATEGIC AREA

Revised focus must:

- > Meet strong needs in southwestern Pennsylvania
- > Have potential for evidence-informed strategies that have demonstrated impact
- > Provide opportunity for systems change
- > Fit with Endowments knowledge, grantmaking philosophy and assets

well-stated:

we intend to build the foundation for young people's success and an inclusive talent development pipeline."

This process would include creating robust pathways to careers for young people who have untapped potential and would benefit from support in obtaining good jobs, she explained. To do this, the Endowments will need to help increase the capacity of organizations that train the local workforce and assist in coordinating the business, education, nonprofit and public sectors around the future of work in the region.

"We intend to also target the barriers that inhibit young parents' progress," Ms. Anderson said. "There are many parents that begin higher education, have aspirations for how it could change their lives, but for a variety of critical reasons aren't able to complete their programs. Taking a long-term, systemic approach in partnership with key intermediaries and building on best practice models will increase our likelihood of success."

This reorientation of the Endowments' Learning Strategic Area will impact many current grantees doing important work," Ms. Anderson added.

"Narrowing our focus around a specific set of people and priorities will necessitate changes in how and who we fund," she said. "These changes are not a reflection of the importance of the work of current grantees. However, in an effort to deepen impact, we had to make hard choices about strategy and partnerships. Our grantees and other community partners are aware of the shift and, to the extent possible, those that don't align [with the changes] going forward will receive transition support.



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Diana Bucco, president, The Buhl Foundation

The goal is to better understand the regional education and workforce development systems... looking at what is happening in educational institutions, at both the K-12 and the higher-ed levels; workforce development systems; workforce boards; other kinds of education and training programs; and then also all of the other pieces of the education and training ecosystem.

Charlotte Cahill
associate vice president, education,
Jobs for the Future

We have a lot to learn from our existing grantmaking partners. We couldn't care less about the credit. We simply want to play our part so that the region can thrive.

Chris DeCardy, president, The Heinz Endowments

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Carmen Anderson, vice president, Equity & Learning, The Heinz Endowments



“We intend to deepen our knowledge about opportunities to strengthen the workforce system, its connection to educational institutions, and the key policies that create barriers to high-quality jobs and career pathways.”

The Endowments will receive a large assist from Jobs for the Future, a Boston-based nonprofit that Bridgespan introduced to the foundation.

“What we are doing is launching in partnership with Heinz a regional asset mapping process,” said Charlotte Cahill, JFF associate vice president for education.

“The goal is to better understand the regional education and workforce development systems... looking at what is happening in educational institutions, at both the K-12 and the higher-ed levels; workforce development systems; workforce boards; other kinds of education and training programs; and then also all of the other pieces of the education and training ecosystem.”

Besides surveying those institutions’ programs, the study will look at issues that affect young adults’ ability to participate in workforce opportunities, such as transportation, child care or housing, Ms. Cahill said. As an organization with national reach, JFF will be able to compare the Pittsburgh region to other parts of the country.

The Endowments will develop programming based on what was learned from JFF’s analysis, the priorities that young people themselves identified, and new or existing partnerships with communities, targeted intermediaries and the Endowments’ grantmaking colleagues, Ms. Anderson said.

“In the next 12 to 24 months, we hope to have a number of strategic initiatives underway that both address barriers and create opportunity,” she said.

Endowments staff also kept track of the growing trend nationally to increase career path options for young adults. In May 2023, the Biden-Harris administration announced the creation of a new program, the Roadmap to Support Good Jobs. The stated purpose of the initiative is “to build our workforce by ensuring every American — whether they go to college or not — will have equitable access to high-quality training, education, and services that provide a path to a good career without leaving their community.”

Pittsburgh was named as one of five cities to participate in the program as a “workforce hub.” As an affiliate, Mayor Ed Gainey’s administration has designed an initiative to focus on four targeted sectors: infrastructure, advanced and bio-manufacturing, broadband and clean energy.

The Pittsburgh Workforce Hub is the only one of a wide swath of potential partners whose presence bolsters Mr. DeCardy’s confidence in the likelihood of the Endowments’



success in pursuing the new direction of its Learning area. Besides government initiatives, he sees the private sector “really leaning into training in all sorts of different ways” to enable folks to enter directly into the workplace.

That applies to the nonprofit world as well.

United Way of Southwestern Pennsylvania is one of the agencies that has been giving attention to workforce-related programs. Sally Ellwein, chief program and policy officer, learned about the Endowments’ shift in direction by attending a webinar for philanthropic partners.

“I think my first reaction was that we actually have a lot of alignment with the new focus areas that The Heinz Endowments has outlined,” she said.

“For example, our work in financial stability really focuses on workforce development. And our work in building for success in school and life really focuses on youth and making sure that they have the tools they need, everything from early literacy up through post-secondary.

“We’re really looking forward to having more conversations about how we can collaborate.”

Mr. DeCardy is eager for such conversations.

“We’ll want to go even deeper into having those conversations,” he said, “especially those that allow us to know where there are gaps that we might be able to fill or where there are

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partnerships that we might be able to augment what another organization is already doing.”

Ms. Bucco of the Buhl Foundation is “beyond thrilled” at the prospect of a Heinz Endowments deep dive.

“I think that Heinz choosing to go deep and to address this issue will do two things: It’ll change the life of an entire generation of young adults. But it will also prepare Pittsburgh to have the labor market that will allow us to grow economically and make it more attractive for more people to choose to move and live here because they will see more opportunity in the neighborhoods that they care about.”

Another category of potential partners is the people on the other side of the nonprofit table — individuals and organizations that are already Endowments grantees, whether in community and economic development, in sustainability or in an area that is a less obvious arena for workforce development, the arts.

“We’ve supported for generations a vibrant community of visual and performing arts organizations, leaders, and a critical thing for the long-term success of this region is that artists, performing or visual artists, can make a career of doing that work,” Mr. DeCardy said.

“We have a lot to learn from our existing grantmaking partners. We couldn’t care less about the credit. We simply want to play our part, so that the region can thrive. And one way to do that is to enter into partnership with those who have already been doing this work in great depth.”

In short, the details of the strategic plan are not yet fleshed out, but the approach to refocusing the Learning area is clear, according to Endowments leaders. It is to reach out to the region’s young people and to listen carefully to them when they say not only what they need but what they can offer, to move more deeply into existing partnerships and to establish new ones, to keep the Learning area in learning mode, and to partner with everyone they can.

“This opportunity to support workforce readiness and scaffold career tracks and ladders as a pathway out of poverty, we believe can have extraordinary benefits in so many other ways, including around health, around neighborhoods, around broader community goals,” Mr. DeCardy said.

“So, for all those reasons we got animated and excited about an area of work that we’ve definitely supported in the past, and ... over the next number of years, where we’re going to increase our focus and increase our resources to try to make our part stronger in this ecosystem, building toward a better future.” **h**