

THE HEINZ ENDOWMENTS

HOWARD HEINZ ENDOWMENT • VIRA I. HEINZ ENDOWMENT

Learning Strategy Overview

Opportunity

The Heinz Endowments is committed to fostering Southwestern Pennsylvania as a dynamic region where everyone has the opportunity to belong and thrive. We have a long history of investing holistically toward that vision and are inspired by the progress our grantees and their partners have made toward inclusive economic growth and strengthening opportunity.

However, access to economic mobility continues to be a barrier for many children and families in our community. Today, 68,000 young people live in poverty in the 10-county region.¹ In Pittsburgh alone, 27% of children live in poverty, and 46% of Black children live in poverty.² Living into a vision of making our region work for everyone requires putting pathways to economic opportunity at the heart of our strategy.

We know that entering a high-opportunity career pathway is one of the most important factors to securing a family-sustaining income and economic stability. Obtaining a first full-time job with opportunity for advancement, pursuing and completing college, and receiving a degree in a high-paying field of study are all linked to increases in long-term income.³ Our region is home to a vibrant, diverse, and creative community of young adults – many of whom face barriers to accessing these opportunities. At the same time, there are an estimated 29,000 unfilled jobs that pay a living wage but do not require a BA, demonstrating an opportunity to better bridge the gap between young people and companies seeking talent.⁴ Our region is working to bridge that gap, as a recently designated Workforce Hub and with state-level efforts to improve career readiness and college affordability.

We believe that by targeting pathways to social and economic mobility as young people are transitioning to adulthood and making independent decisions about their futures, we can increase the likelihood that their efforts to become self-sufficient and financially secure become reality. Increased economic security is also linked to positive outcomes for children, thus contributing to long-term opportunities to disrupt multi-generational cycles of poverty. This work is deeply connected to our existing efforts to support an inclusive economy and equitable development.

¹ US ACS 2022, 5-year estimate. Includes young people ages 0-18.

² Ibid.

³ [Life experiences that power economic mobility](#)

⁴ Analysis of unfilled jobs assumes living wage >\$21/hour, derived from MIT Living Wage calculator for Pittsburgh, assuming one adult with no children. Number of unfilled jobs obtained from Lightcast projections of job openings in the 10-county region in 2024. Lightcast projections based on data obtained from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), and is an estimate of new jobs as well as job replacements (workers permanently leaving an occupation and needing to be replaced by new hires)

Goal

We aim to expand pathways to living-wage careers for low-income young adults and parents of young children in our region. We envision a future where every person growing up in Southwestern Pennsylvania has the opportunity to choose their path in our economy and to thrive. With our investee partners, we aim to:

- Decrease the number of youth who do not transition from high school to post-secondary education or jobs (~5,000 each year today)
- Increase young adult and student parent degree and high-value credential attainment (est. <50% of youth attain degrees or credentials by age 24)
- Improvement driven by focus on populations facing circumstances that make attaining a living-wage career more challenging (reduced disparities in outcomes)

We will serve low-income young adults experiencing transitions, targeting low-income young adults 18-24 and low-income student parents. Our focus is on individuals facing circumstances that make attaining a living-wage career more challenging; this includes:

- The ~5,000 young people each year that graduate from high school but do not transition to either college, the military, or employment
- Young adults employed in low-wage jobs with limited opportunity for advancement
- Young adults and parents in college, particularly two-year programs, that face high risk of dropping out and limited opportunities to connect to living-wage careers
- High school juniors and seniors facing financial pressures and other systemic barriers that reduce their chances of connecting to college and good jobs after graduation

We will pay particular attention to reducing disparities in outcomes and access to opportunity, including disparities by race, income, and neighborhood. We will continue to learn about the target population and identify areas for deepest initial focus.

Accomplishing this impact will require fundamental shifts to our systems: bridging education, corporate, public, and nonprofit sectors to forge connected career pathways and changing practices, policies, and funding flows so these systems work for every young person. Ultimately, we will know we are successful when we see an increase in 25-34 year-olds on a pathway to economic mobility, as indicated by increases in proportion employed in jobs with opportunity for advancement or pursuing a degree (~55% today).

Investment strategy

Our strategy is undergirded by a set of principles that draw on what we have learned from the community, our experience, and the research base, in addition to our values:

- Embrace **multiple pathways**, enabling individual agency while expanding the vision of what's possible
- Focus most deeply on **populations facing systemic barriers to advancement**
- Support **holistic approaches** that provide industry-aligned skills, experience, connections, and coaching – AND remove barriers to engagement (e.g., wraparound supports such as access to childcare and housing)
- Seek to accelerate a **diverse set of industries** that are anchored in pathways to “good jobs”

To achieve these goals, we anticipate investing to further four interconnected investment areas:

- 1) **Increase access to high-quality industry-aligned credentialing programs** through demonstration and scale of effective programs (e.g., community-based training, short-term credentials, apprenticeship), data collection, and research support to inform effective and sustained solutions. Focus on programs with key hallmarks of quality, including centering individual agency, connection to supports that address barriers to employment, direct connection to paid jobs, industry alignment, relationship-building, and follow-up during placement. *Key measures: Increase program seats available to low-income young adults, increase completion for participating low-income young adults, increase employment and retention in living-wage jobs for those completing, increase in public and private funding accessed by programs.*
- 2) **Increase degree and credential attainment, with focus on community colleges** through institutional support to advance effective models (e.g., retention, employer-connected pathways, dual enrollment and credit articulation), convening, and state-level funding influence. We seek to explore innovative models that lower barriers to access and enable degree completion, including those tailored to low-income parents and other target populations. *Key measures: Increase resource connections for students naming basic needs challenges, increase persistence and completion rates, shifts in policy and practice (e.g., employer connectedness of programming; higher ed cost and funding).*
- 3) **Empower young adults to navigate high-potential career pathways** through support of effective holistic models to connect young people to information and supports, tech-enabled innovation, and research on key barriers. Our focus will be on young people navigating transitions, including the transition after high school graduation. *Key measures: Increase in young people's reported access to attractive career pathways and agency in path forward, increase in post-secondary transition in targeted schools & neighborhoods, decrease in youth disconnection in focus areas, changes in practice/ influence on existing systems and practices.*

- 4) **Strengthen region's education-to-workforce ecosystem and infrastructure** through intermediary support, convening cross-sector initiatives centered on young adult input, communications, data infrastructure, and cross-cutting research and policy development and support. *Key measures: Increase in stakeholder alignment and cross-sector initiatives, increase in size and representativeness of coalition, growth of ecosystem's data and knowledge base, policy shifts, increase in dollars flowing to career path efforts in the region narrative and perception change around diverse career pathways.*

Achieving the impact we seek requires working at multiple levels of the ecosystem. We will influence region-wide and state systems; focus the majority of our grantmaking in counties with both need and potential for systems change; and deploy targeted grants in neighborhoods, with a focus on accelerating deeply community-based work.

The Learning Portfolio plans to deploy the majority of our grantmaking dollars to this strategy. Living into our ambitious goals for impact will also require us using our influence beyond our grantmaking dollars. This includes using our voice and positionality to elevate the voices of those we seek to serve, using our convening power and relationships to convene cross-sector coalitions, and using our influence to advance high-impact policies.

How we invest

As with all our grantmaking, we will learn from the individuals we seek to serve and our investee partners and know that our strategy will evolve over time. Our investments in initial years will include an outsized focus on more deeply understanding and developing avenues to infuse the voice of young people and parents into our work.

We will prioritize investments based on strategic alignment, impact potential, and distinctive contribution. We will also assess applicants' leadership strength, organizational strength, and financial sustainability as inputs to build strong partnerships.

Complementary investments

We recognize that success in this work is deeply connected to strengthening adjacent systems such as early childhood education, K-12 education, and health. In addition to this strategic focus, we anticipate a small portion of our grantmaking will focus on responding to adaptive community needs. This will include some targeted grants focused on access to quality childcare, given the importance of affordable childcare for low-income parents seeking to secure and retain employment.