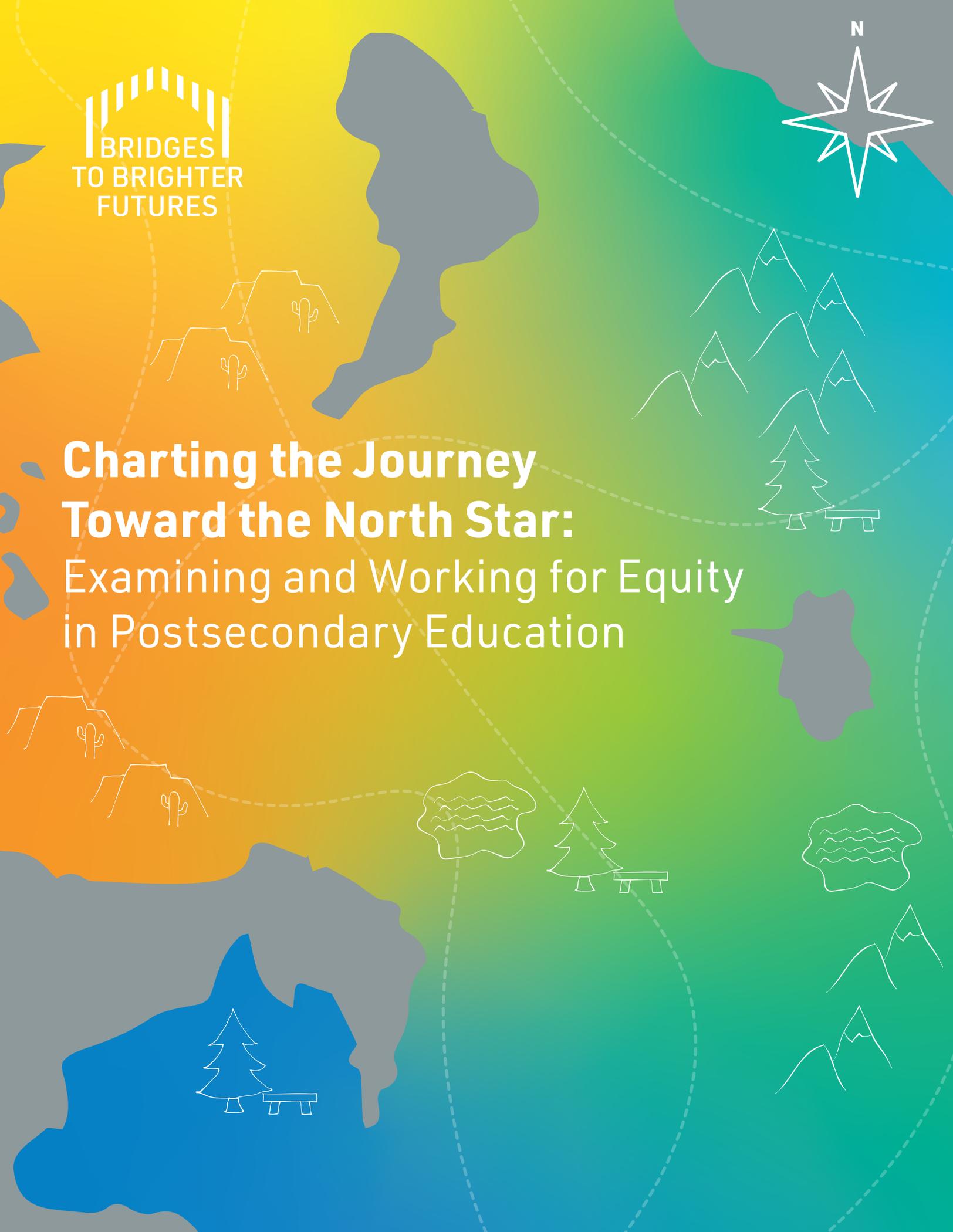
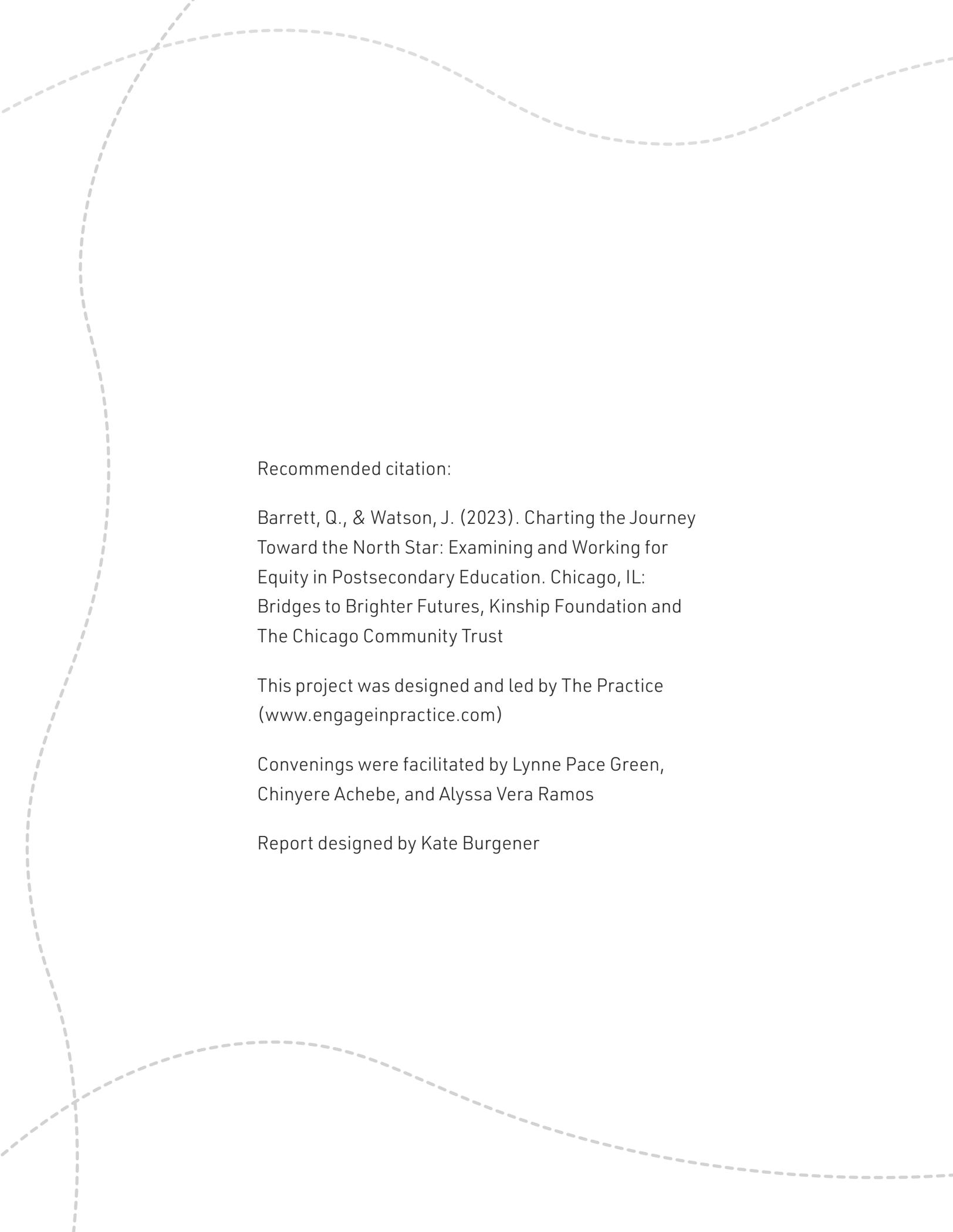




# Charting the Journey Toward the North Star: Examining and Working for Equity in Postsecondary Education



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Recommended citation:

Barrett, Q., & Watson, J. (2023). Charting the Journey  
Toward the North Star: Examining and Working for  
Equity in Postsecondary Education. Chicago, IL:  
Bridges to Brighter Futures, Kinship Foundation and  
The Chicago Community Trust

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Report designed by Kate Burgener



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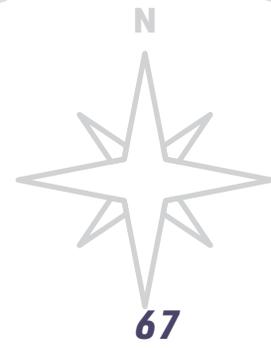
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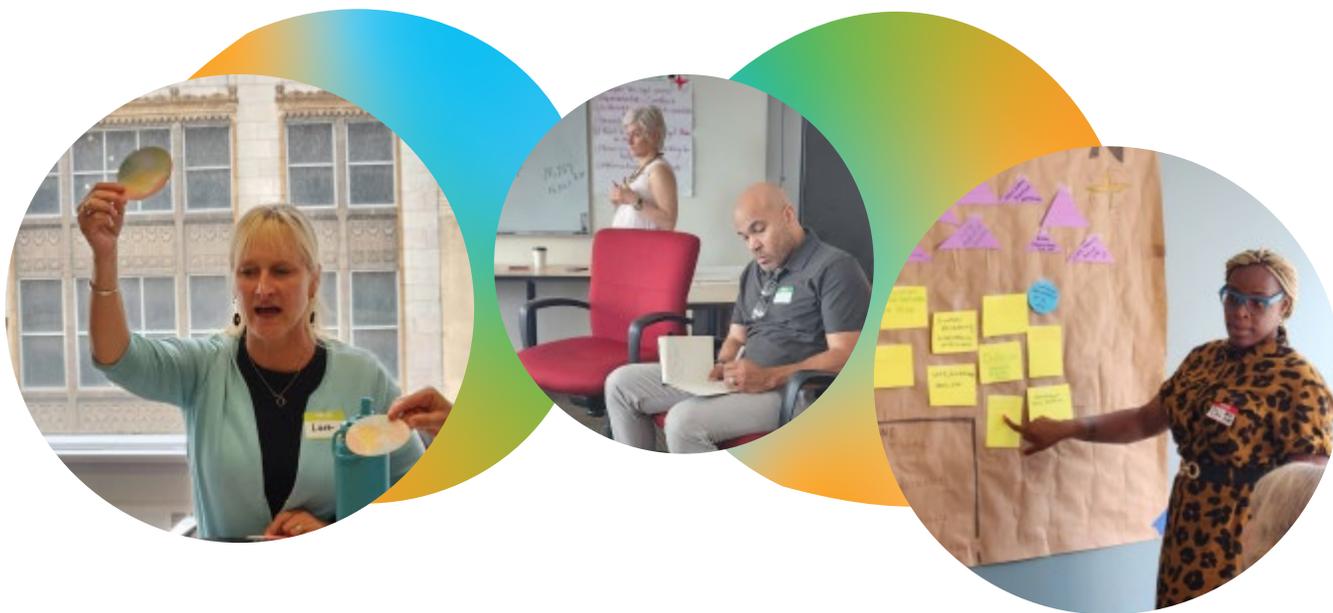
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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Bridges to Brighter Futures (Bridges), a partnership between Kinship Foundation and The Chicago Community Trust, aims to create equitable, affordable access to good jobs and career development for low-income and Black and Latinx Chicagoans who have earned a high school diploma or GED. Research demonstrates that focusing on community colleges and getting students through postsecondary education will drive economic growth, induce a more educated workforce, and lessen income gaps. However, students and the organizations supporting them still face incredible barriers.

In 2023, Bridges convened 13 grantee organizations working to support students through postsecondary journeys, along with representatives from the City Colleges of Chicago, in order to listen to their challenges and stories of success. The organizations work in the areas of **Community Coaching**, **Construction Trades (Trades)**, and **Information Technology (Tech)**, with both Tech and Trades considered “Middle Skills”<sup>1</sup> cohorts.



## ***OVERVIEW: KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS***

What follows is a high-level summary of the key findings of this report. Beginning with shared experiences faced by all three cohorts, this overview uses the metaphor of a map to highlight challenges to overcome (“scalable mountains”), areas with significant gaps (“persistent deserts”), and opportunities for enrichment and replenishment (“bodies of water”), as well as overall recommendations.

## SCENIC OVERLOOKS

Places to Pause and Appreciate

### *Students Are Succeeding!*

Due to the work of these postsecondary organizations and the entities that support them, student completion and employment rates continue to rise.



### *Program Staff Provide Essential Support*

Grantee organization staff provide critical support for postsecondary students, including personalized coaching and mentorship, academic planning and goal tracking, career coaching, resume and interview help, and assistance finding additional resources when students encounter obstacles.

### *Student and Community Engagement Fuels Success*

Grantee organizations succeed when they can collaborate meaningfully with their students – such as by engaging them to lead workshops – as well as when students' families and local communities get involved.



### *Ongoing Community Investment Enables Sustainable Career Pathways*

Many students who complete postsecondary programs become employed or otherwise involved with those programs, creating an employment pipeline and visible examples of success in their communities.



## **SCALABLE MOUNTAINS**

### Challenges to Overcome



#### ***Basic Needs Still Hinder Student Retention***

Access and disruptions to essential needs and services continue to be barriers for many students in postsecondary pathways. These include but are not limited to: loss of transportation or no transit fare, lack of childcare, lack of money to cover tuition or class materials, housing instability, and issues with mental wellbeing.

#### ***Maintaining Alumni Engagement Proves Challenging***

Maintaining contact with alumni has proven to be an ongoing and persistent challenge for grantee organizations, due to both a lack of consistent funding and the inherent complexities of continued engagement once program participants have moved on.



#### ***Lack of Cultural Competency Among Employers Undermines Access***

Most employers need competency training to be more able to “meet students where they are.” These employers do not always have the appropriate cultural competencies to effectively hire the organizations’ students.



# DESERTS AND BODIES OF WATER

Needs and Ways to Replenish



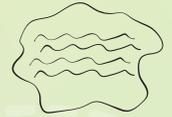
## Need

## Opportunity

### Organizations Desire Regular Collaboration

Grantee organizations need mechanisms to network and share resources with each other more fluidly so that students can access services at multiple organizations without feeling like they are competing.

Regular and intentional gatherings of cohort participants could be used to develop collective action and advocacy strategies, synthesize who is doing what, and better communicate to students that they are all part of a system designed to support their multiple needs.



## Need

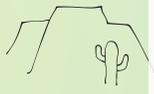
## Opportunity

### Inadequate Organizational Capacity, Climate, and Culture

Many organizations lack the bandwidth and staff education to appropriately serve their students' needs.

One particular opportunity is to create a job or market reality resource that clearly describes specific job expectations and salaries for a wide variety of employment opportunities.





### Need

### Opportunity

## Students Succeed When They Feel Welcome

In order for students to feel like they belong, organizations must validate skills that students already possess and reinforce with employers how those skills are transferable.

By recognizing assets and working with students to overcome imposter syndrome, organizations can enable students to have a greater sense of belonging and empowerment, which will impact their overall success.



### Need

### Opportunity

## Intentional Hiring Must Address Mental Health Needs

Students often carry and experience stigmas around mental health and then struggle to identify and name that they need support.

Organizations need a clear path for addressing mental health. Approaches to this vary, from partnering with outside organizations to offering internal support to connecting students individually to specific supports (e.g., case management).



## ***PACKING THE BACKPACK: RECOMMENDATIONS***

Following our map metaphor, journeyers through this terrain would be well-equipped with the following practices in their proverbial “backpack.” In order to support grantee organizations, their staff, and the students they work with, policymakers, funders, and organizational leaders can:

### ***Policymakers and Funders***

---

- Offer grantees more flexibility and agency in choosing how to spend funds
- Support data collection, storytelling, and marketing efforts
- Develop infrastructure for regular, ongoing organization convenings
- Become (or provide tools to become) better educated in the issues and needs of participants in postsecondary pathways
- Establish clearer examples of equity; develop and enforce equity accountability measures for employers

### ***Organizational Leadership***

---

- Deepen organizational culture, allowing for more rest periods between cohorts/ programs
- Invest in and allow time for staff training and development
- Create opportunities for staff to speak directly with funders
- Reinforce the pipeline from participant to employment
- Strengthen processes for gathering and incorporating participant feedback
- Continue to hire staff who represent students’ identities and can serve as role models

## ***COHORT BRIEFS: KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS***

In addition to the challenges and successes that the grantee cohorts encounter collectively, each cohort has its own specific set of successes and challenges. Each cohort’s individual brief provides further detail on these specific findings and recommendations.

# COMMUNITY COACHING



## Scenic Overlooks: Successes

- Student-Driven Approaches Fuel Agency
- Holistic Approaches Work



## Scalable Mountains: Challenges to Overcome

- Clients Don't Feel Safe
- "Invisible" Obstacles Exist



## Persisting Deserts: Places with Too Few Resources

- Problematic Policies Within Public Institutions



## Bodies of Water: Ways to Replenish

- People Power Offers a Connected System of Support
- Emergency Funding Is Critical



## Recommendations

### Policymakers and Funders:

- Set more realistic expectations and goals with organizations
- Convene City Colleges of Chicago (CCC) decision-makers and grantees to collectively reimagine institutional policies that hinder student access and engagement

### Organizational Leadership:

- Create opportunities for conversation and feedback from frontline staff to organizational leaders

# CONSTRUCTION TRADES



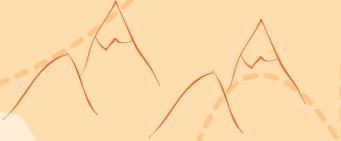
## Scenic Overlooks: Successes

- Placement Success Stories Shine
- Alumni Engagement Is a Driving Force



## Scalable Mountains: Challenges to Overcome

- Need for Wraparound Supports and Barrier Reduction Services
- The Challenges of Racism and Discrimination
- Harassment in the Workplace
- Overcoming Underrepresentation



## Persisting Deserts: Places with Too Few Resources

- Lack of Representation Within Field Leadership
- Need for More Simplified Reporting on Public Funding



## Bodies of Water: Ways to Replenish

- Nourishing Strong Relationships
- Role Models Create a River of Opportunity



## Recommendations

### Policymakers and Funders:

- Invest in alumni engagement

### Organizational Leadership:

- Directly address the systemic racism and sexism in the Construction Trades

# INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY



## Scenic Overlooks: Successes

- All Skills Are Tech Skills

## Scalable Mountains: Challenges to Overcome

- Tech-Tonic Shifts Cause Hiring Gaps
- Lack of Cultural Capital

## Persisting Deserts: Places with Too Few Resources

- Internal Champions Make or Break Partnerships

## Bodies of Water: Ways to Replenish

- Student Success Funds
- Changing the Face of the Industry

## Recommendations

### Policymakers and Funders:

- Support the development of resources and policies that advocate for the needs of students in an unstable industry

### Organizational Leadership:

- Create tools for students transitioning into Tech from other fields



# 2023 GRANTEE CONVENINGS OVERVIEW

## ***ABOUT BRIDGES TO BRIGHTER FUTURES***

Launched in 2020, Bridges to Brighter Futures is a partnership between Kinship Foundation and The Chicago Community Trust, funded through the Searle Funds at The Chicago Community Trust. Bridges aims to create equitable, affordable access to good jobs and career development for low-income and Black and Latinx Chicagoans who have earned a high school diploma or GED. Bridges supports students in choosing clear pathways that allow access to higher earning careers. Bridges sees three primary “gaps” in this space, as articulated in the chart below.

<b>The Opportunity Gap</b>	<b>The Support Gap</b>	<b>The Wage Gap</b>
<p>Black, Latinx, and low-income students are often faced with challenges that impact their ability to develop skills beyond a high school diploma.</p> <p>To prepare students for careers that earn a living wage, we must invest in education pathways that recognize and support them through the unique, historic barriers they face along the “middle skills” pathway.</p>	<p>Institutions often lack the support services needed to put students on pathways to careers.</p> <p>In order to be successful, students need a wide range of institutional and community support, including accessible academic and career advising; coordinated student support services; mental health and wellness services; and overarching culture shifts that center equity in the classroom and across campus.</p>	<p>Here in Chicago, fewer than half of households (48%) earn a living wage.<sup>2</sup> The gap is even worse for Black and Latinx families.</p> <p>Affordable postsecondary education and workforce development programs are the solution.</p>



## The Need for Alternative Pathways

For many students, the path to a well-paying job can be challenging: 65% of jobs require some level of postsecondary education,<sup>3</sup> with just 30% of those jobs requiring only some college or an associate's degree. Additionally, a four-year public institution costs more than three times the average tuition and fees as a community college, while a four-year private institution can cost up to ten times more.<sup>4</sup>

Research demonstrates that focusing on community colleges and getting students through postsecondary education will drive economic growth, induce a more educated workforce, and lessen income gaps. "However, college completion rates nationwide have stagnated. Millions of students 'stop-out,' leaving college without completing a degree, and miss out on the economic opportunities afforded by having a postsecondary credential."<sup>5</sup>

***It's more important than ever to build bridges to good jobs that earn living wages, sustain families, and offer continued career development and advancement.***

## **ABOUT THIS REPORT**

### **Audience**

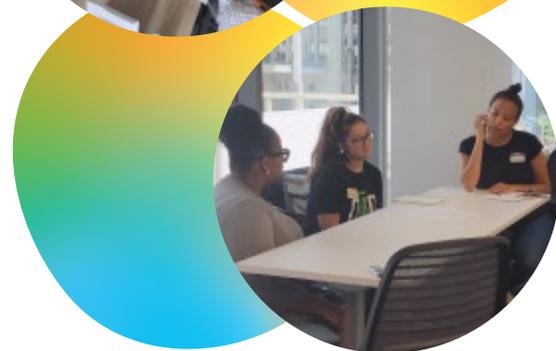
This set of documents highlights insights and learnings from a set of convenings held from June to August 2023, including recommendations for funders, policymakers, organizational leaders, and the postsecondary education field at large. We hope this report can serve as a roadmap for those working across this field to address key challenges while building on existing successes to ensure a more equitable future.

### **Organization**

The overview highlights themes and trends across all three cohorts, followed by three briefs, one for each grantee cohort. Each brief, accessible on its own, contains a visual “map” of the terrain those organizations must navigate, calling out key obstacles and opportunities as various landscape features. In each section, you’ll find a summary of the current situation/need followed by a list of recommendations for policyholders/funders, as well as for the organizations themselves.

### **The Term “Students”**

The term “student” is used to refer to the people who access services at each of these organizations. Bridges uses “student” intentionally as it is an education initiative, but also seeks to challenge what constitutes postsecondary education, in order to be more inclusive of workplace and career development initiatives as part of one’s learning journey.



## **GRANTEE CONVENINGS: PROCESS AND APPROACH**

In its funding applications, Bridges to Brighter Futures invites applicant organizations to describe how program beneficiaries or their communities are involved in decision-making around programmatic priorities and projects. This approach is grounded in the belief that decision-making by students, their parents, and others surrounding them is core to equitable practice. Proximity matters. Student-centered approaches, collaboration, and equity are listed as core values and unified strategic initiatives in the City Colleges of Chicago (CCC) Strategic Framework, underscoring how vital these attributes are to the success of students in postsecondary programs, and thus to our economy.

Centering those values, in 2023, **Bridges convened staff from 13 nonprofits as well as the CCC to map out the successes and challenges encountered by organizations working to support students through postsecondary journeys.** Students and organizations alike navigate difficult terrain, encountering obstacles that feel like insurmountable *mountains*, but are also loaded with replenishing resources along the way. Bridges retained The Practice, a Chicago-based education and arts consultancy, to lead the grantee convenings that would allow its leaders to learn from grantees and partners, build on past successes, identify challenges and opportunities, and document salient issues facing organizations in serving students and their communities.



## Research Questions

During convenings held from June to August 2023, Bridges and The Practice sought to investigate the following questions:

What are the salient issues where Bridges can “shine a light” on changed practice and institutional equity?

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How might the collecting and sharing of stories and evidence support thought leadership and advocacy among grantee organizations?

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What additional evaluation and storytelling support do grantees need moving forward?

## Data Collection and Analysis

Convenings were facilitated by two-person teams from The Practice and attended by an average of two representatives from each organization. Additionally, pre-convening “Leadership Luncheons” held with senior leadership from each organization ensured that the challenges and opportunities generated in the convenings would be appropriately supported across the organizations.

All sessions were audio-recorded, transcribed, and then analyzed using a thematic coding process. Additionally, artifacts from the sessions – most notably terrain “maps” generated by the organizations themselves – were reviewed to inform our key findings and recommendations.

# Participating Organizations

## Community Coaching

*Cohort supports students currently attending City Colleges of Chicago*

**Network for  
Young Adult Success  
(UtmostU)**

UtmostU empowers young adults to realize their professional aspirations by supporting their successful degree attainment and career preparation.

**LIFT**

LIFT advocates policy that centers the voices of low-income families and partners with health systems, colleges, and local and national governments to deliver services across the country.

**One Million Degrees  
(OMD)**

One Million Degrees accelerates community college students' progress on career pathways to economic mobility.

**Enlace**

Enlace Chicago convenes, organizes, and builds the capacity of Little Village stakeholders to confront systemic inequities and barriers to economic and social access.

## Middle Skills - Construction Trades

*Cohort supports students in programs operating outside of the City Colleges of Chicago (CCC) system toward placement in wages of \$25+/hour or \$50K/year*

### **Hire360**

Hire360 provides sustainable career opportunities for local residents and support for women- and minority-owned businesses.

### **Revolution Workshop**

Revolution Workshop builds skills, hope, and resilience in Chicago's underserved communities through construction job training and job creation.

### **Evanston Rebuilding Warehouse (Rebuilding Exchange)**

Rebuilding Exchange invests in its communities by reusing building materials, reducing construction waste, and training, supporting, and connecting people seeking careers in the building trades.

### **Jane Addams Resource Corporation (JARC)**

JARC offers free customized job training courses and apprenticeships tailored to the needs of companies.

### **Chicago Women in Trades**

Chicago Women in Trades (CWIT) is a non-profit organization that provides training and support for women working in or seeking employment in construction and other nontraditional related fields.

## Middle Skills - Information Technology

*Cohort supports students in programs operating outside of the City Colleges of Chicago (CCC) system toward placement in wages of \$25+/hour or \$50K/year*

### **i.c.stars**

i.c.stars addresses the lack of opportunity and the racial equity gap by connecting talented, underserved young adults with the high-growth technology industry.

### **Year Up**

Year Up is committed to ensuring equitable access to economic opportunity, education, and justice for all young adults.

### **Per Scholas**

Per Scholas is an organization that believes a thriving workforce starts with equitable access to education. Per Scholas provides skills training and access to employer networks to individuals often excluded from tech careers.

### **National Able Network**

National Able Network's mission is to help make careers happen. Each student receives personalized career supports that integrate career coaching, specialized training, and direct connections to the job market.

## OVERVIEW OF THE THREE COHORTS

*"The postsecondary education landscape is fraught with historic racism and inequity, and there continue to be very stark disparities between students of color and white students in their access to and success in postsecondary institutions."*

*-Convening Participant*

Bridges currently supports organizations working in the areas of **Community Coaching**, **Construction Trades (Trades)**, and **Information Technology (Tech)**, with both Tech and Trades considered "Middle Skills" cohorts.

### Community Coaching Challenges

**Community-based and culturally specific coaching remains essential to many young people's journey toward two- and four-year degrees.** Poorer and minority students tend to be locked out of college opportunities in a number of ways: convoluted college application processes, high schools without postsecondary support and rigorous academics, mismatched graduation requirements to college readiness, and, of course, prohibitive costs at every step of degree attainment. Many students in these grantee organizations are the first in their family to go to college, meaning parents or others at home can only help them navigate the complex systems to a certain extent. All of the Bridges-funded organizations have coaches who provide individualized approaches to help students maneuver these challenging terrains, walking alongside them from enrollment to graduation to job placement and beyond.

### Obstacles in the Construction Trades

**In the Construction Trades industry, 64% of the workforce is white and women only make up 4%.<sup>6</sup>** Jobs are often temporary, so workers need to be both persistent and have the capability to keep getting new jobs to stay employed. Work environments still tend to be racist and sexist, thus women and workers of color need strong support systems to maintain jobs in the field. The majority of roles in the Trades require access to union apprenticeships for skill-building and job placement, a postsecondary education system that lies almost entirely outside of the college environment. Organizations that support access and success in these career pathways are another important opportunity for economic mobility as they provide job training that meets employer needs and offer direct referrals to employer partners.

## Trouble in Technology

In 2022, there were 164,000 Technology job postings in Chicago, with only 8,000 Tech-ready college graduates and 850 reskilling completers.<sup>7</sup> In addition to community colleges, several nonprofits in Chicago offer Technology education in combination with professional skill-building, financial support, and access to assistance in identifying additional resources to support emergent needs. Like community colleges, these organizations promote economic mobility through increased earnings from valuable credentials and Tech skills.

## MAPPING THE TERRAIN

A guiding framework for our convening was the notion of “mapping the terrain.” This visual metaphor provided space for grantees to reflect on and illustrate the “ecosystem” within which their work occurs. We invited participants to identify some of the following landmarks:

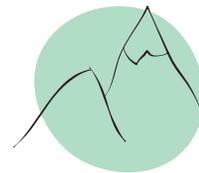


**Scenic Overlooks:** Places to Pause and Appreciate

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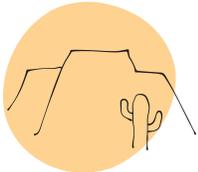
**Mountains:** Challenges to Overcome

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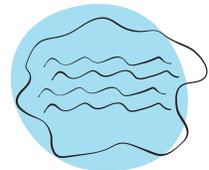
**Deserts:** Places with Too Few Resources

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**Bodies of Water:** Ways to Replenish

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**Treasures:** Indicators of Success

# FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## ***SCENIC OVERLOOKS: PLACES TO PAUSE AND APPRECIATE***

These are stories of student and organization success and celebration.

### **Students Are Succeeding!**

The first place to pause and celebrate is that, due to the work of these postsecondary organizations and the entities that support them, student completion and employment rates continue to rise. Grant recipients shared that beyond attaining and retaining employment, graduates:

- Return to programs for continuing education opportunities
- Purchase homes
- Become entrepreneurs and create opportunities for others

All of Bridges' supported programs continue to have high completion/graduation and job placement rates.

### **Program Staff Provide Essential Support**

Another foundational support in the success of students and organizations is the high level of staff engagement. All Bridges grantees employ some method of personalized coaching or mentorship with their students and alumni, providing services like academic planning and goal tracking, career coaching, and resume and interview help. They are also there when students encounter barriers and can connect those students to resources to navigate challenges. This strategy is critical to students completing programs and alumni staying employed. This support is amplified when staff are involved in the local community where their students live and have connections beyond their organizational roles.

*"The people at i.c.stars helped me embrace my ability. Resilience is part of the journey at i.c.stars. It's both a tool and a gift. You learn not to let self-doubt hold you back."*

*-i.c.stars alum and business owner*

## Student and Community Engagement Fuels Success

Grantee organizations succeed when they can collaborate meaningfully with their students. Some organizations engage students as models back in their home communities – having them host discussions and lead workshops – while others hire former students as employees and offer feedback opportunities even when they are still students. Additionally, student success increases when organizations are also able to collaborate with the students' family and local community or neighborhood, as this creates a stronger network of support.

## Ongoing Community Investment Enables Sustainable Career Pathways

*"It's not just about placing people in jobs. It's about making sure they have a sustainable income for many, many years to come."*

*-Convening Participant*

Within organizations that train and connect students to postsecondary options, there is an implicit and explicit homegrown workforce desire and opportunity. Students who have gone through the program become examples of success in their communities. This visible representation creates deeper community impact as well as a bridge for others to see these programs as viable options. At least one organization utilizes an "each one teach one" approach, in which they invite current students and alumni to mentor people in their community who are not yet in the program. Several programs hire alumni into the organization beyond completion, creating "self-sustaining programs" and a pipeline to employment. Additionally, hiring alumni as staff creates a byproduct, or "unknown impact," at some organizations of better wages for all staff. When they hire students, organizations demonstrate the same equity and standards that they advocate for employer partners to have.

## **SCALABLE MOUNTAINS: CHALLENGES TO OVERCOME**

*“Adult learners face having a family and not being able to juggle home, family, work, and school. These become obstacles to continuing on through the programs.”*

*-Convening Participant*

Despite these numerous successes, postsecondary students and the organizations supporting them continue to encounter prevailing challenges: “mountains” that are difficult to climb, navigate, or overcome.

### **Basic Needs Still Hinder Student Retention**

We know that access to essential needs and services is a barrier to entry for many students in postsecondary pathways. Even with grantee organizations working to fill these needs with enrolled students, almost all of the organizations still struggle with student retention and sometimes low enrollment. Some spoke to the difficulties of keeping students engaged beyond the initial year or phase of enrollment. Students are hard to reach as they become overwhelmed managing many life priorities. Life obstacles occur, and students don’t know if the program is still the right choice or fit for them in their current circumstances. Such disruptions include:

- Lack of technology or internet access
- Loss of transportation or no transit fare
- Lack of childcare
- Lack of money to cover tuition or class materials
- Housing instability
- Issues with mental wellbeing

These are basic needs for any student. When these challenges go unsupported for low-income, minority, and immigrant students, they can lead to “stopping out” (taking one semester or more off) of programs. Half of students who stop out do not return, and only 10% of students who stop complete the credential.<sup>8</sup>

*“Little assistance is available by way of scholarships and grants to support the purchase of digital devices.”*

*-Convening Participant*

*"Punitive enrollment and late fee structures require student parents to front costs for classes, often while they are managing childcare and are the sole earners in their household."*

*-Convening Participant*

## **Maintaining Alumni Engagement Proves Challenging**

*"The real work begins post-placement."*

*-Convening Participant*

Maintaining contact with alumni has proven to be an ongoing and persistent challenge for grantee organizations, due both to a lack of consistent funding and the inherent complexities of continued engagement once program participants have moved on. Public funding opportunities typically end shortly after participant placements and philanthropy has been slow to recognize the need for longer-term support. While most organizations have an alumni mentor, coach, or support role on staff, most convening participants remarked on the difficulty of keeping alumni involved. As organizations seek improved funding for supporting graduates, there is a need for improved strategies for reaching alumni and improving networking offerings. Some participants noted that alumni often register for workshops, group sessions, and trainings, but ultimately do not follow through to attend. Theories about why the engagement is low include lack of transportation, childcare, and event timing as well as the emergent nature of alumni programming. Lack of alumni returning also means that recent graduates miss out on continued learning and support opportunities early in their career, which can decrease their overall chances of retaining employment and achieving financial stability.

*"Barrier reduction and stabilization is necessary to ensure clients can complete their training, connect to a career, and advance along a career pathway."*

*-Convening Participant*

## Lack of Cultural Competency Among Employers Undermines Access

Most employers need competency training to be more able to “meet students where they are,” and do not always have the appropriate cultural competencies<sup>9</sup> to effectively hire grantee organizations’ students. Underlying racial codes persist when students seek employment. Employers perceive “professionalism” in outdated ways that do not leave room for the cultural and personal realities of students. Employers need training and resources to be able to recognize and value the strengths and assets that students bring, rather than penalizing them for taking untraditional routes or using culturally different communication patterns. Employers need to become equipped to receive, recognize, and support these students in order to take advantage of the tremendous assets inherent in a diverse workforce. Additionally, there are no accountability measures when employers don’t engage in equitable and culturally competent practices, thus limiting the potential for economic growth that a strengthened workforce could create. The field needs clearer examples of equity in practice. Policymakers can strengthen their support by developing and enforcing accountability measures of equity.

*“With these opportunities being the first professional role for many of our graduates, they are new to navigating conversations about pay, company culture, and other areas. It’s important to us that our graduates are being treated fairly and are in a good environment, so we are intentional about who we work with for hiring.”*

*-Convening Participant*

## ***PERSISTING DESERTS AND BODIES OF WATER: NEEDS AND WAYS TO REPLENISH***

*Deserts* are similar to *mountains* in that they are visible and consistent. *Deserts* are places with limited resources, thus they include opportunities –*bodies of water*– to co-create deepened support systems. The work of the grantee organizations is taxing and time-consuming, often leaving staff feeling dry, depleted, or overwhelmed. In order to address the *deserts* (and *mountains* above), *bodies of water* need to be filled, made more visible, and continuously replenished.

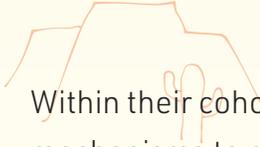
The four *deserts* that follow are identified areas that need replenishment, and the accompanying *bodies of water* are opportunities or ways that organizations are addressing some of those deserts. However, these solutions are not common to all organizations doing this work. Though these examples serve as models for the field, overall, there is a need to develop more *bodies of water* so that organizations can execute their work easefully. It is also important to note that many of the staff working in these organizations are themselves examples of economic mobility in action – supporting them supports overall goals to strengthen career pathways.

***“I am thinking differently about the role of team-building and bonding with other organizations and how the community partners can help our clients to succeed.”***  
***–Convening Participant***

## Organizational Collaboration

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### Desert: Organizations Desire Regular Collaboration



Within their cohorts of Tech, Trades, and Community Coaching, grantee organizations need mechanisms to network and share resources with each other more fluidly. While some organizations have already been informally practicing this by gathering ad hoc, many often feel like their students compete for resources. There is a prevailing “no double dipping” mindset, especially within communities of color, that it is uncouth to receive resources from multiple programs. In reality, programs offer different resources and an “abundance mindset” could support students moving between organizations to get the full help they need. All grantee cohorts agree that collaborations can be complementary in helping each other achieve organizational goals. Explicitly, each cohort wants to be better able to:

- Share resources
- Share other nonprofit and for-profit partnerships (e.g., housing, childcare, legal aid, emergency funding)
- Share best practices
- Have space to collectively problem-solve

### Body of Water: Cross-Organizational Partnerships and Problem-Solving



Regular and intentional gatherings of cohort participants could be used to develop collective action and advocacy strategies, synthesize who is doing what, and better communicate to students that they are all part of a system designed to support their multiple needs.

Organizations deeply value the time they spend problem-solving and celebrating accomplishments with colleagues in their field who share the same values. Often, in addition to resource sharing, these conversations develop into solidarity and bring much-needed relief and strength to keep fighting the good fight.

As one cohort-specific example, there are many experts already working to address Tech sector issues. How can these leaders be brought to a table together to eliminate unnecessary research and labor? How can these Tech sector tables be more inclusive in order to recognize the value of nontraditional pathways to careers and include all student-supporting voices?

Tech cohort organizations that excel in turning data into storytelling could support organizations that struggle. There’s also the opportunity to create a job or market reality resource to clearly describe specific job expectations and salaries for a wide variety of Tech employment opportunities.

## Climate + Culture

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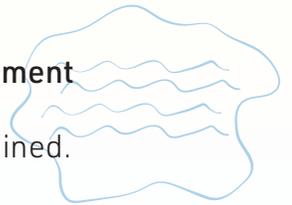


### Desert: Inadequate Organizational Capacity, Climate, and Culture

Many organizations lack the bandwidth and staff education to appropriately serve their students' needs. Staff expressed their desire to be able to attend conferences and career-related events to bolster their confidence and knowledge in working with students. They called for strategic plans, project managers, and streamlined and compartmentalized day-to-day operations to enable staff to plan and "know what's happening when." Additionally, staff spoke to the difficulty of keeping coaches or program staff engaged, underscoring the need for more investment in professional development.

### Body of Water: Invest in Organizational Culture and Professional Development

Organizations are restored and replenished when they are well staffed and well trained. Examples of this include "ease" around work schedules:



- Offering "summer Fridays"
- Delaying the start of a new class of students to provide staff with time to rest, reset, and improve practice
- Developing clear protocols for onboarding and training new staff in a timely manner
- Supporting additional professional development for staff
- Showcasing career pathways within the student supports field, detailing opportunities for promotion or career growth

## Belonging

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### Desert: Students Don't Feel They Belong

In order for students to feel like they belong, organizations must validate skills that students already possess and reinforce with employers how those skills are transferable. Many students have trouble advocating for themselves due to imposter syndrome, which is characterized by self-doubt and the feeling that they don't belong in a particular workplace environment. Without adequate training for both students and employers, the assets and strengths students bring with them are easily overlooked.

### Body of Water: Students Succeed When They Feel Welcome

Student empowerment is an immense treasure to grantee organizations. "For example, a student with retail or restaurant service experience can use their customer service skills in an Information Technology (IT) role, while a bilingual employee can provide service to a greater range of clients. Recognizing assets and working with students to overcome imposter syndrome will enable them to have a greater sense of belonging and empowerment, which will impact their overall success."



*"What I'm hearing...is the idea of belonging. And that's something that I see in all of our graduates' success stories is that they feel like JARC [Jane Addams Resource Center] is a place where they belong."*

*-Convening Participant*

# Mental Healthcare

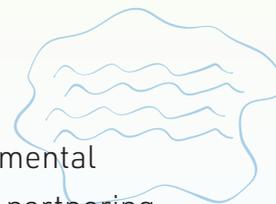
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## Desert: Students Don't Access Mental Healthcare

Mental healthcare and wellness can be difficult to access for a variety of reasons. Students often carry and experience stigmas around mental health and then struggle to identify and name the fact that they need such support. More often than not, students do not seek out or use provided resources. In addition, there is a significant gulf in the availability of services for those with low incomes.

## Body of Water: Intentional Hiring to Address Mental Health Needs



Across the board, we heard that all organizations need a clear path for addressing mental health needs among those they serve. We saw that approaches to this varied, from partnering with outside organizations to offering internal supports to connecting students individually to specific supports (e.g., case management). One organization turned this trial into a triumph by hiring a program graduate who recently completed their training as a therapist. This example illustrates supporting current students on a number of levels: by providing an accessible and familiar face to navigate the palpable and often intimidating scenario of receiving mental health care, and by demonstrating the pipeline to employment at work. This stands out as a potential model for other areas of student need.

# EQUITY AS THE “NORTH STAR”

*“Please continue investing in the programs that uplift people who are stuck in the cycle of violence or poverty.”*

*-Convening Participant*

## Defining Equity

The Chicago Community Trust’s “moonshot” is to close the Chicago region’s racial and ethnic wealth gap through a shared commitment to equity, opportunity, and prosperity. Bridges seeks to support greater equity in postsecondary educational outcomes, such that people of all races and income levels have equal access to career pathways with not just living wages, but family-supporting and ultimately wealth-building wages. Chicago is filled with people with the potential to lead this region now and in the future, however, an inequitable system has limited access and opportunity for Black, Latinx, and low-income Chicagoans.

- Low-wage workers, who tend to be Black and Latinx, were denied vital health and economic protections during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Studies have found that “12 years after college, the typical white borrower owed 65 percent of their original student loan amount, but Black borrowers actually owed more than their original amount”<sup>10</sup> whether they completed the degree or not
- Twelve years after college, Latinx bachelor’s degree holders “had only paid down 20 percent of their loans”<sup>11</sup>
- “Among white residents with household incomes of \$100,000 or more, nearly 7 in 10 are financially healthy (69%), compared with just 40 percent of Black and 44 percent of Latinx residents”<sup>12</sup>

Worker power, access to paid leave, access to retirement savings, access to education savings, job stability, and opportunities for professional development and advancement have taken greater importance in the overall picture of economic stability.

To the postsecondary organizations participating in the convenings, equity looks like their students knowing their cultural and social capital and accessing networks for employment and other opportunities. It looks like an active commitment to antiracism within the organization. It looks like students being able to see themselves on and in the staff. And more than merely a living wage, it looks like a “thriving wage,” the earnings threshold needed to achieve true upward economic mobility: investing in education, saving for retirement, and/or accumulating the down payment to purchase a home.<sup>13</sup>

From our conversations with organizational leaders, we heard them refer to **equitable systems change** as their North Stars. Through their collective work, these organizations seek to:

- Close the racial wealth gap
- Achieve economic stability and vitality
- Improve quality of life
- Advance upward social mobility
- Diversify the respective sectors with traditionally underrepresented talent
- Create a community of change agents
- Reframe thinking around holistic supports for all<sup>14</sup>
- Reach social and economic freedom

Only by incorporating the following and other practices of equity can we begin to get there.

*“In our organization, we’re trying to open paths to the LGBTQ community, transgender community, people of color. And for us, it’s very essential to target those populations and inspire them to pursue careers in trades and make sure that they are not scared, they are confident that they will achieve something after completing the program.”*

*-Convening Participant*

### **Equitable practice within the field at large should look like:**

- Engaging and challenging opponents of equity-centered work
- Advocating and increasing entry level salaries
- Engaging in organizational accountability when equity values are not adhered to
- Holding stakeholders accountable when equity values are not adhered to
- Accepting funding that is more acutely mission-aligned, and avoiding tailoring or shifting programs solely to meet funder requirements

## Equitable practice with and toward students should look like:

- **Validating nontraditional pathways:** Stakeholders/allies can work together to eliminate false notions that some pathways are more valuable than others and support students individually to understand the best option for them. Shifting the cultural narrative supports equity.
- **Providing differentiated methods and personalized approaches for greater access to training:** Offer support based on what individuals need and work with them to develop their own plans for success.
- **Adopting iterative processes to gather feedback from students:** Consult students regularly. They should know that their participation matters and leads to programmatic change or outcomes, and thus feel ownership and stake in their own success and that of their fellow students.
- **Operating from humility, empathy, and an asset-based mindset:** Individuals or organizations cannot assume they will fix everything, and employers must enter the process valuing the skills students bring.
- **Being intentional about behaviors and language to build cultures of respect:** For example, address students by their correct name and pronouns; this allows them to bring their full and true selves to program and employment spaces. Intentionality matters.
- **Offering representation and role models in staff and leadership:** Students are more likely to succeed when they can see themselves in the work.
- **Providing honest portrayals of the industries and jobs that students are entering, before they enter them:** Understanding qualifications and expectations will lead to greater preparedness from students.
- **Providing transparency:** Organizations also have a responsibility to name the particular barriers that exist for people of color and should be invested in supporting students in navigating those barriers.
- **Recognizing trauma:** Staff can realistically address the impacts and limitations trauma creates for students.

By adhering to these practices, organizations, funders, and employers help to establish a sense of safety for participants so they have freedom to fully explore postsecondary options. These equity practices help to mitigate the imposter syndrome that underrepresented students often face, so students can get to the learning and earning faster and more securely.

## **PACKING THE BACKPACK: ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

*“Partnerships are crucial in this work, and there is a need for an advocacy and policy plan.”*

*-Convening Participant*

In addition to strengthening and developing the *bodies of water* on the previous pages, below are other policies, procedures, systems, and structures (racial equity elements) that are essential tools for staff and the sector to achieve the “North Star” of equity.

While all stakeholders and leadership have a part to play in equity work, these recommendations focus on what policymakers and funders can do to advance equity with and for postsecondary organizations and the students they serve.

### **Recommendations at a Glance**

#### ***Policymakers and Funders***

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- Offer grantees more flexibility and agency in choosing how to spend funds
- Support data collection, storytelling, and marketing efforts
- Develop infrastructure for regular, ongoing organization convenings
- Become (or provide tools to become) better educated in the issues and needs of participants in postsecondary pathways
- Establish clearer examples of equity; develop and enforce equity accountability measures for employers

#### ***Organizational Leadership***

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- Deepen organizational culture, allowing for more rest periods between cohorts and/or programs
- Invest in and allow time for staff training and development
- Create opportunities for staff to speak directly with funders
- Reinforce the pipeline from participant to employment
- Strengthen processes for gathering and incorporating participant feedback
- Continue to hire staff who represent students’ identities and can serve as role models

## Offer Grantees More Flexibility and Agency in Spending

*“With dollars that have less restrictions on use, we are able to allow the trainee to prevail as the expert on their situation and make appropriate decisions for their household.”*

*-Convening Participant*

Grantee organizations need more agency and autonomy in how they spend grant funding. Labeled as “emergency funds,” “barrier reduction funds,” and “supportive services funds,” the list of uses for this flexible funding is long and varied:

- Tuition assistance
- Transportation (gas, bus fare, tolls, car repairs)
- Childcare or dependent care
- Rent support/housing (bills, utilities)
- Groceries
- Tech (devices, internet service)
- Meeting expenses (food, incentives)
- Unrestricted quarterly cash infusions

When organizations can provide funds directly to and at the discretion of students and graduates, graduation and employment outcomes are greatly improved.

Program staff also desire to speak directly with funders as they feel they are more closely connected to the day-to-day issues their students encounter than their organization directors. As one staffer put it, “I can’t help you get to your doctor’s appointment because the grant money won’t let me.” Staff see strength and possibilities in students being able to advocate from their positionalities.

*“Every dollar helps in removing a barrier.”*

*-Convening Participant*

## Invest In and Allow Time for Staff Training and Development

Organizations need resources, including the space and time, to deepen and expand training to serve growing student demands. For some organizations growth happens quickly, putting stress on the bandwidth of an already overextended program staff. Organizations called for additional funding and resources to support the training of new staff members, as well as the ongoing well-being of those already on the team. Case studies and data on the topic could be useful, in addition to practical shifts in programming to allow for reflection and rest and reset. For example, many grants don’t currently support staff time off. Obstacles such as low salaries and social anxiety for those less experienced with relationship-building were also cited as places where additional support is needed.

## Support Data Collection, Storytelling, and Marketing Efforts

Organizations need training to better document, distill, and share student success stories across three avenues: grantors to drive fundraising, prospective students and community members to drive enrollment, and policymakers to support advocacy. These organizations also need stronger systems for tracking data and then turning that data into stories. Feedback from former students could proactively improve the current student experience. However, keeping in touch with and tracking alumni data remains an obstacle. When alumni are unresponsive, it is difficult to track outcomes and data long-term, encumbering the ability to gauge the efficacy of the program and perhaps acquire more funding. Additionally, staff need ways to amplify their organizations' stories to better reach employer partners. Some employers lack awareness of these organizations and the work they do.

## Develop Infrastructure for Regular, Ongoing Organization Convenings

Across the grantee cohorts, organizations desire more regular, organized gatherings. Biannual convenings were one proposed solution. These would allow formal time to network, share resources, and collectively problem solve student-facing or industry problems. They would also provide an opportunity to bring policymakers, content experts, funders, and other stakeholders to a collective table.

## Provide Tools for Policymaker Education

Policymakers need evidence to better understand the actual work and outcomes of these organizations. Tools could be developed to include explicitly crafted language, quantitative data, and storytelling that shares both short- and long-term impact.

*"Funders and policymakers would benefit from sitting down with a diverse group of organizations, and not just leadership, in order to understand what's needed and to stay current."*

*-Convening Participant*

## Establish Clearer Examples of Equity, Informed and Enforced by Policy and Stakeholders

To return to our "North Star," there are gaps in the field about what equity means and looks like. Policymakers and field leaders need to clearly define and provide strong examples of what equity in outcomes looks like in these industries. Systems need to be created to hold employer partners accountable when they don't measure up, all while lifting up the work of employers that are changing the game.

*“To me it seems like a culture shift is the most important need, and having more alignment on external messaging about what truly embodying the equity North Star means... We need to hear more of ‘nothing for us without us’ in external messaging.”*

*–Convening Participant*

## ***FINDING TREASURES AT THE END: WHERE THE FIELD CAN GO***

*“Small steps, small treasures lead to a big increase in quality of life.”*

*–Convening Participant*

Collective treasures (detailed further in the accompanying grantee cohort briefs) for the different cohorts include higher rates of student hiring and retention, increased income ranges, and supports for social-emotional wellness.

Overall, the organizations’ greatest treasure is student involvement. Whether by continuing to show up as a participant, attending feedback sessions, or being hired as a staff member, program staff demonstrated immense care for their students’ voices. These program staff recognize that to truly work toward equity, they must center and empower their students to have a meaningful say in the outcomes of the work.

Organizational staff deeply recognize the power of strong storytelling backed by rigorous data collection. Yet this will only be possible with improved frameworks for networking and sharing resources, as well as creating sustainable plans for growth.

***These treasures can only be achieved by investing in equity practices that lead to systems change.***

***Policymakers, funders, organizational leaders, and other stakeholders can support the overarching journey toward equity by helping to operationalize these shifts.***







BRIDGES TO  
BRIGHTER FUTURES

*A Map For Success*

# COMMUNITY COACHING BRIEF

## Participating Organizations



# COMMUNITY COACHING BRIEF

## ***INTRODUCTION***

This brief is a component of the Bridges to Brighter Futures (Bridges) 2023 Convenings Project, in which staff and leadership of current Bridges grantees in cohorts of Construction Trades, Information Technology, and Community Coaching convened to examine successes and issues in postsecondary programs. This brief focuses on the Community Coaching cohort, providing specific takeaways and policy and field-building recommendations to address sector-specific challenges, with racial equity and opportunity operating as the guiding “North Star.”<sup>15</sup>

## ***THE JOURNEYERS: COHORT OVERVIEW***

Community Coaching organizations support student populations who face marginalization and discrimination in the higher education system. Finishing college has become increasingly more difficult, and the intersections of race, socioeconomic status, and other factors contribute to the already challenging landscape. Research shows that “increased college attainment and completion rates result in a more educated workforce, greater economic mobility, and reduced income disparities. However, college completion rates nationwide have stagnated.”<sup>16</sup> Community Coaching organizations provide coaches and mentors who walk alongside students as they navigate the processes of registering for and attending classes, while balancing life’s everyday obstacles.

### **Challenges for Black and Latinx students and students from low-income backgrounds:**

- In 2020, only 10,269 of the 17,684 (58%) Chicago Public School high school graduates from low-income backgrounds enrolled in college.<sup>17</sup>
- 55% of white City Colleges students receive a degree or credential within three years, but only 29% of Black students and 33% of Latinx students do so.<sup>18</sup>
- Nationally, students from the lowest income families are seven times less likely to earn a bachelor’s degree by the age of 24 than peers from the highest income families.<sup>19</sup>
- Student parents who identify as Black, multi-racial, Native American, and Latinx are more likely to experience poverty or near poverty while pursuing postsecondary education, contributing to disparities in credential and degree attainment that can hinder meaningful employment and higher incomes.



Research indicates that community colleges are an underutilized resource in getting students who face economic barriers at traditional or four-year institutions (e.g., low-income, immigrants, and students of color) successfully through to postsecondary completion. One of the organizations in the Community Coaching cohort, One Million Degrees (OMD), “is a community-based organization that accelerates community college students’ progress on pathways to economic mobility.”

OMD support services include academic support, financial support, personal coaching, and professional development. The program works in conjunction with students’ academic and career goals whether they aspire to transfer to a four-year institution or obtain a meaningful job opportunity directly after completing a community college program. OMD also works to inspire the next generation of leaders by connecting scholars to work exposure and readiness activities through partnerships, coaching, and the scholar development program. This allows scholars to observe working environments and build connections with prospective employers.

The Community Coaching cohort supports students currently attending the City Colleges of Chicago (CCC), and includes four organizations as well as the CCC. They are:

- [\*\*Network for Young Adult Success \(UtmostU\)\*\*](#)
- [\*\*LIFT\*\*](#)
- [\*\*One Million Degrees \(OMD\)\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Enlace\*\*](#)

OMD is part of a national cohort of student-serving organizations that incorporate “comprehensive approaches to student success” (CASS). All of the Bridges Community Coaching grantees utilize some of the elements listed for student success, including:

- Having a coach, counselor, or case manager
- Using a strategy to keep students on track
- Relying on a multi-year approach
- Providing financial, academic, and personal support

## **MAPPING THE TERRAIN: OUR MAP KEY**

What follows is a “map” of the Community Coaching organizations’ pathways to addressing these issues, the challenging *mountains* and isolated *deserts* they face, but also the reflective *scenic overlooks* of student successes and the ways they replenish the work by tapping into existing resources.



**Scenic Overlooks:** Places to Pause and Appreciate



**Mountains:** Challenges to Overcome



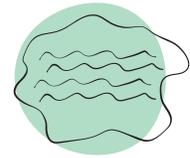
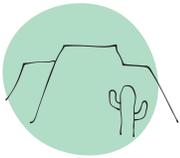
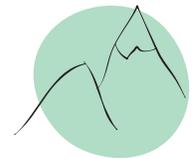
**Deserts:** Places with Too Few Resources



**Bodies of Water:** Ways to Replenish



**Treasures:** Indicators of Success



## SCENIC OVERLOOKS

Places to Pause and Appreciate



### Student-Driven Approaches Fuel Agency

Community Coaching staff spoke extensively about the wide range of student participation across their programs. Within the training programs themselves, students are empowered to advocate for themselves when interacting with employer partners and feel confident and aware enough to access services to the full extent. Clients in some organizations are also invited to offer feedback regularly. When this feedback gets incorporated into program changes, clients are then able to witness their power in action.



### Holistic Approaches Work

Many organizations in this cohort see the power in offering a holistic approach, recognizing the need to serve students beyond the classroom. They are proud to connect students to housing services, childcare, digital literacy training, legal assistance, and more. They named several successful collaborations with partner organizations that were able to provide such services. They also noted the importance of case management, in which students receive warm handoffs for support.



## SCALABLE MOUNTAINS

### Challenges to Overcome

#### **Clients Don't Feel Safe**

While there is sometimes a clear need to refer students to partner organizations for particular areas of need, for many students there is both a real and perceived sense of danger in engaging with unknown entities. For instance, some students don't feel safe leaving their children with unknown care providers. Additionally, students often report feeling unsafe in accessing care such as mental health supports on campus, sometimes because they felt providers couldn't understand their specific issues. Even completion of Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) forms can require students to recall the trauma that defined or created their poverty. Students need support to recognize and react to both predatory and/or culturally incompetent practices.

#### **"Invisible" Obstacles Exist**

Program staff recounted certain unknown or "invisible" obstacles that their students face. Many students don't have family or parents who have gone through similar experiences before and can pass on knowledge. One story recounted how an immigrant student couldn't register for school because they didn't have an ID. They had no prior knowledge that having an ID was necessary or important, and this created additional costs and barriers for them starting class. Other obstacles unknown to students include program costs, processes for accessing services, or not knowing that a background check for a job could reveal immigration status or a history of justice involvement. Organization staff rely on individual, one-to-one support to reveal and work around these barriers, as they vary from student to student.

## A PERSISTING DESERT

Places with Too Few Resources

### Problematic Policies Within Institutions

While convening participants acknowledged that this area was being addressed, one significant *desert* that emerged was the problematic policies at the CCC. Students encounter a myriad of difficulties trying to navigate the systems, including difficulties registering for class and making tuition payments. In some cases, because they encounter numerous roadblocks along the way, students stop trying as a result of “institutionalized trauma” from attempting college unsuccessfully earlier in life.

## **BODIES OF WATER**

Ways to Replenish

### **People Power Offers a Connected System of Support**

Overall, “the people” were the Community Coaching cohort’s greatest source of replenishment. The cohort lauded staff, coaches, community partners such as legal aid, family members, and particularly the members or students themselves. They felt nourished when they were well staffed, and referred to the successes of community connections. Students have a higher rate of excelling and completing programs when they receive interconnected support from their home, their community, and the institutions with which they are engaging.

### **Emergency Funding Is Critical**

Convening participants value being able to offer incentives and emergency funding to students when they needed it most. When organizations are unable to provide support due to their own grant restrictions, they leverage partnerships to get members the help they need.

## VOICES FROM THE FIELD

Quotes from Convening Participants

"In Chicago, we provide funds for urgent needs such as transportation costs (e.g. gas, tolls, bus fares, etc.) to and from sites and work placements; housing bills (e.g. rent, utilities, etc.) for four to five months per student; childcare or dependent care costs, such as referrals and tuition to daycare services; upgraded Wi-Fi, to have faster and more reliable internet for virtual learning and remote work; and grocery and food expenses."

"We are part of a large community and ecosystem in the work that we do. We are all combating the oppressive systems that cause the inequities we're hoping to solve. However, the ecosystem functions in a fairly disjointed and siloed fashion. How can expertise, human capital, etc., be more fused to provide stronger, consistent services in key areas?"

"Everyone is bringing knowledge."

"The caseworkers...do the hard work. They coach, they support, they're there for [our clients]... Not only do they provide empathy, they take them to go get their license, they take them to deal with the justice system. They find wraparound partners if they don't have a place to live, they need childcare, need clothes, need a ride, need gas cards, or if someone in their family dies and they don't have money for final expenses."

"It is important to continue making decisions off of what our participants voice, not just off of assumptions or status quo."

## PACKING THE BACKPACK: ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

These are specific ways that funding and policy stakeholders can bolster support for Community Coaching organizations.

### Policymakers and Funders

- Set more realistic expectations and goals with organizations
- Convene City Colleges of Chicago decision-makers and grantees to collectively re-imagine hindering institutional policies

### Organizational Leadership

- Create opportunities for conversation and feedback from frontline staff to organizational leaders

### Set more realistic expectations and goals with organizations

More realistic expectations might help to ease some of the tensions staff feel around capacity and not being able to appropriately meet client needs. Program staff feel pressured to keep up with the demand of their growing organizations, but don't feel trained or have enough human resources to keep up. They feel that this partially comes from unrealistic ambitions set by the philanthropic community, as well as by growth expectations set by their organization's leaders.





## **Convene City Colleges of Chicago decision-makers and grantees to collectively re-imagine hindering institutional policies**

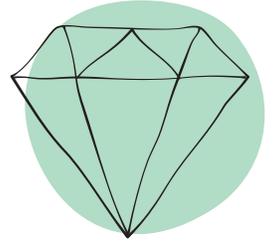
Many policies that are intended to protect CCC actually prohibit students from accessing its institutions. These policies need to be radically reworked in order to consider not only the needs of the institution, but also the needs of potential students and the organizations supporting them. The inherent challenge of working with large, public institutions requires all stakeholders to invest in understanding the specific nature of these barriers and how to overcome the challenges they pose to organizations. Collaborative problem solving is critical.

## **Create opportunities for conversation and feedback from frontline staff to organizational leaders**

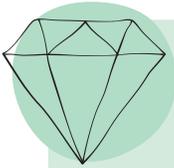
Many frustrations and related challenges align with the critical race theory notion that “the people closest to the problems will have the best solutions.”<sup>20</sup> Staff recognized that their leaders are often removed from the decisions they are making and called for even more integration of client voices in decision making.

## **FINDING "TREASURES" THROUGHOUT AND AT THE END**

When equipped with the appropriate resources, treasures for the Community Coaching organizations include growth in student self-advocacy, progress on educational goals, increased salaries, and institutional systems change. Below are two examples of how these "treasures" show up in real students' experiences.



### **TWO ORGANIZATIONAL TREASURES**



Student parents like Ashley exemplify LIFT's impact as well as what "success" looks like in their program. Ashley joined LIFT-Chicago after hearing about the program at her son's daycare center. She had three primary goals when she joined: 1) secure full-time employment, 2) go back to school, and 3) secure stable transportation. Ashley worked closely with her coach to break her goals into actionable steps and, by her fifth meeting, had already made progress toward her employment goal and purchased a car. Though Ashley wanted to pursue her educational goals, she decided her best option was to stabilize financially first before looking into schooling. Once this was in place, Ashley ensured her materials were up to date and started the application process. Less than a year after starting with LIFT, Ashley was accepted into a Master of Social Work program!

In Ashley's words, "[The most important step was] organizing my goals so that I can reach them and holding myself accountable without beating myself up. I tend to overload myself with goals and with my plate too full, I ultimately crash, and nothing gets done. Then I start to feel like a failure. In working with my LIFT coach, I learned how to prioritize and work on realistic goals."



One Enlace community committee focused on understanding and solving the challenges Little Village students face in making educational transitions. By sharing resources across schools and streamlining services provided to students and parents, the committee created significant systems change that other higher education institutions have since adapted to accommodate the needs of their own students.

For example, representatives from local high schools and advisors from CCC collaborated to create a more efficient and effective college registration process that led to increased participation of Little Village students in the CCC open house, improved coordination around orientation and registration dates, and better preparation of students. Many of the CCC colleges have created a one-stop office that centralizes the multiple services needed by incoming students by combining the offices of registration, financial advising, academic advising, and Associate Dean of Student Services. These types of changes support transition, retention, graduation, and long-term success of students at these institutions.





**BRIDGES TO  
BRIGHTER FUTURES**

*A Map For Success*

# **CONSTRUCTION TRADES BRIEF**

## **Participating Organizations**



# CONSTRUCTION TRADES BRIEF

## **INTRODUCTION**

This brief is a component of the Bridges to Brighter Futures (Bridges) 2023 Convenings Project, in which staff and leadership of current Bridges grantees in cohorts of Construction Trades, Information Technology, and Community Coaching, convened to examine successes and issues in postsecondary programs. This brief focuses on the Construction Trades (Trades) cohort, providing specific takeaways and policy and field-building recommendations to address sector-specific challenges, with racial equity and opportunity operating as the guiding “North Star.”<sup>21</sup>

## **THE JOURNEYERS: COHORT OVERVIEW**

Trades organizations support apprenticeship and career pathways for those entering various construction and manufacturing-related fields. Entry-level workers in the Trades face a variety of challenges, including “the ability to pass a drug test, ability to do basic math and apply mechanical logic, a relatively high level of physical strength and fitness, willingness to rise early in the morning and always be on time, and for many trades, willingness to work in extreme heat, cold, or wet environments.”<sup>22</sup>

They must also navigate an unsteady employment situation (as the end of a particular job does not necessarily guarantee the next one) and, for women and workers of color, face racist and sexist conditions on the job site and across the culture of the industry.

Jobs in the Trades can lead to satisfying, well-paid careers. For those who have not attended a traditional college or university, the Trades offer an alternative route to middle-class income. The organizations in this cohort support those seeking to enter and remain in the Trades profession through apprenticeships and related opportunities.

Organizations in the Construction Trades cohort support alumni placement in jobs where they receive wages of \$25+/hour or \$50K/year. They are:

- [Hire360](#)
- [Revolution Workshop](#)
- [Evanston Rebuilding Warehouse](#)
- [Jane Addams Resource Corporation \(JARC\)](#)
- [Chicago Women in Trades](#)

## Eyes on the Prize: Securing Long-Term Stable Employment for Trainees and Staff

*"You are not, you know, this number, you are a person."*

*- Convening Participant*

There are more than 100,000 people working in the Trades sector in the Chicago area, with median wages ranging anywhere from \$18.71 to \$40.02 per hour. Trades workers typically enter the field in one of three ways: 1) union apprenticeship, 2) trade school or community college, or 3) low-skilled non-union work alongside a more skilled tradesperson.<sup>23</sup>

For those working in this space, the end-goal is clear: improving life satisfaction, ending intergenerational poverty, and creating long-term success for those who are in the field. We found this to be true both for the trainees and apprentices that these organizations serve, as well as for the organizations' own staff.

Leaders cited evidence like improved graduation and retention rates for their programs, personal development and growth for those who pass through them, and trainees having money in their savings as key indicators that their work is on the right track.



### Filling the Jobs That Exist

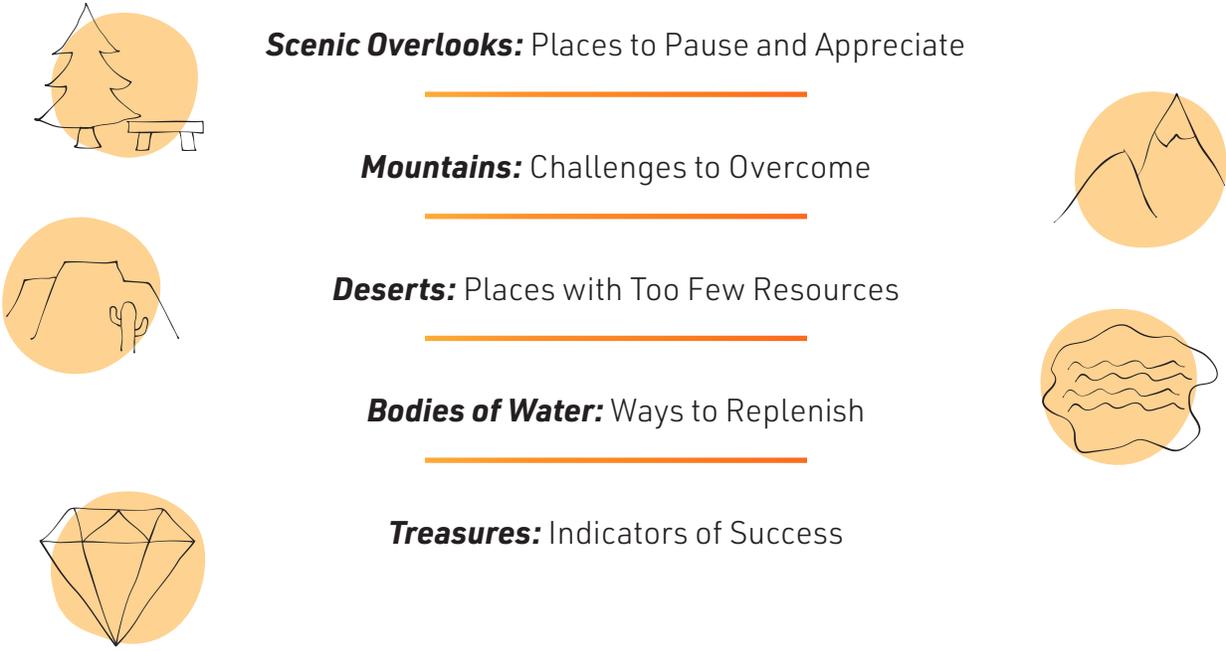
There is a need for this work from the perspective of employers, as well. According to JARC, "Many manufacturers struggle to fill their hiring needs for CNC operators, welders, press brake operators, and assemblers. The shortage of middle-skilled workers is one of the most vexing issues facing manufacturing employers today creating a growing skills gap."

This need is exacerbated by the retirement of the Baby Boomer generation and advances in technology that have changed the face of the industry. "There is an estimated national skills gap of 2 million jobs over the next decade," according to JARC, creating an opportunity to embrace greater access to careers in the Trades, particularly for those who might have been excluded in the past due to systemic inequities.

In addition, infrastructure and clean energy dollars will increasingly flow from the federal government as the increasing demand for construction workers grows exponentially in the coming years. There is enormous opportunity for skilled workers in Chicago both now and in the future.

### **MAPPING THE TERRAIN: OUR MAP KEY**

What follows is a "map" of the Trades organizations' pathways to addressing these issues, the challenging *mountains* and isolated *deserts* they face, but also the reflective *scenic overlooks* of student successes and the ways they replenish the work by tapping into existing resources.



## SCENIC OVERLOOKS

Places to Pause and Appreciate

### Placement Success Stories Shine

A highlight we saw among the Trades cohort was the success of job training that is in deep partnership with employer and sector needs, both in terms of hard skills and the workplace dispositions that employers are looking for in hiring.

As one organization describes it, “The training is meeting the demands and really seeking to fill gaps, and that seems like something to celebrate.”

### Alumni Engagement is a Driving Force

Another highlight for members of the Trades cohort was seeing their program alumni excel, post-placement. They spoke highly of watching past apprentices thrive, and even, in some cases, become staff members who are well-positioned to support future program participants.

Alongside this bright spot was a recognition of additional opportunity ahead: the need for more robust and ongoing alumni engagement strategies. This was also cited as a place where there is a need for more dedicated funding and support with alumni follow-up, creating networking opportunities and data collection.

## SCALEABLE MOUNTAINS

### Challenges to Overcome

#### **Need for Wraparound Supports and Barrier Reduction Services**

In the Trades cohort, starting a program was only the first step on a long road to a well-paying, stable job. Organizations often lose trainees in the initial two-week probation period because they “can’t make it on time” or “don’t want to sit in the classroom doing math.” Staff spoke of the need for wraparound supports to help those participants deal with challenging life circumstances in order to complete their programs and advance to apprenticeship.

#### **The Challenges of Racism and Discrimination**

The Construction Trades are rife with issues of discrimination and racism. This presents a major obstacle for trainees accessing and succeeding in construction industry jobs. Despite unprecedented investment in this sector in Illinois in recent years, Chicago-area construction apprenticeships remain largely white (63.7%) and male (96.1%).<sup>24</sup> Black individuals make up just 8.8% of the demographics, with Latinx representation accounting for 24.7%.

Cohort members called for candor when dealing with such inequities. “Just tell me [what it is going to be like],” expressed one staff member, referring to the unique experience of being a Black woman on a construction site. “We can’t deal with it if we pretend it’s not there,” was another prevailing attitude.

More concerning, Black and Latinx apprentices are notably less likely (50% and 60%, respectively) to complete their apprenticeships, as compared with their white colleagues (67% completion rate).<sup>25</sup>

## Harassment in the Workplace

Women face a particularly challenging path in the Construction Trades. According to Chicago Women in Trades (CWIT), “Women are most likely to be among the last hired and the first fired and are rarely included in the core crews that travel from job to job with the company. In addition to unfair hiring and lay-off practices, women still routinely face gender and race-based harassment, isolation, nonexistent or unsanitary toilets, and micro-aggressions or inequities that constantly remind them that they are not really part of the crew. Moreover, the challenge of balancing pregnancy and parenthood in an industry that does not align with availability of childcare and has placed attendance and the ability to work at any time with no notice at the heart of its value structure, has a significantly greater impact on women.” All this can have disastrous impacts on women’s success in these fields. Research has linked sexual harassment to pay inequities, reduced career advancement for women, and a greater likelihood of leaving their job within two years. For JARC, “It’s important to provide workshops focusing on this topic to our trainees of all genders so they can be more aware and better allies in the workplace.”

## Overcoming Underrepresentation

Prior research has identified several important factors contributing to underrepresentation within the Construction Trades. The barriers range from complicated entrance requirements to racist, sexist, or hostile work environments, to a lack of resources and support to help minorities succeed in these fields. Greater investment in barrier reduction funds and anti-bias training could help eliminate some of these obstacles.<sup>26</sup>

## **PERSISTING DESERTS**

Places with Too Few Resources

### **Lack of Representation Within Field Leadership**

Participants pointed to a need for better representation within philanthropy in order to ensure that those supporting the work understand the challenges faced by those in the field.

When funder identities are not reflective of the communities they serve, it can limit their ability to relate to the unique difficulties of those on the ground. Participants called for more diversity on boards and among funders in order to mitigate some of these challenges. Another approach might be involving participants or organizations in building funding initiatives and grant decisions. Ultimately, it is clear that those most impacted by these issues are in the best position to make decisions about how funding is allocated, and involving those individuals in the decision-making process will only strengthen the impact of the dollars allocated.

### **Need for More Simplified Reporting on Public Funding**

Program staff also advocated for more streamlined reporting across organizations with common outcome measures and tracking, rather than customized reports for each funder. In the words of one development director, "If every funder could get together and you know, just have [one] application and a report, that would be my dream." While we recognize this may not be a fully realistic recommendation, we also know that any place funders can simplify and streamline their giving – such as through more general operating/unrestricted funding – will help reduce the administrative burden on busy program staff.

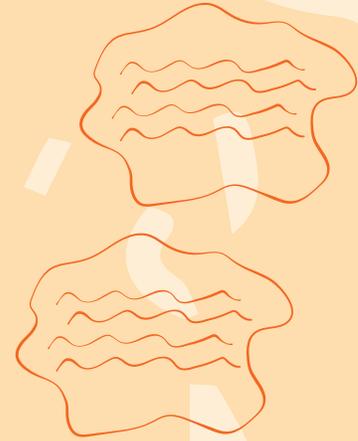
## **BODIES OF WATER**

Ways to Replenish

### **Nourishing Strong Relationships**

Across the board, it was clear that partnerships are a source of replenishment within the Trades. These could be at the organizational level – such as between union and non-union organizations – or at the individual level, such as between participants and providers.

While the Trades might seem like a straightforward place, there is more than meets the eye when it comes to ensuring a successful apprenticeship experience. Strong relationships and role models within the field are key to enduring career pathways.

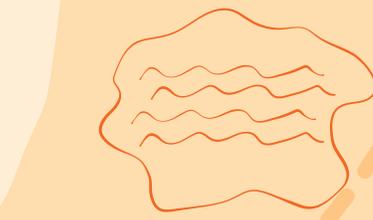


### **Role Models Create a River of Opportunity**

In response to rampant inequities in the Trades industry, organizations have invested in affinity-based alumni and peer networking, such as a “women in construction” space. They hope to also create a similar group for carpenters, laborers, electricians, woodworkers, and more.

The importance of role models was reflected everywhere from organizational leadership to alumni engagement. For one organization, it was about “hiring your graduates and showing the success of those people. Saying, ‘Hey, this woman made it from here to a management position.’”

As another put it, “We have to show role models in order to motivate folks. I think the staff and the leadership of an organization should reflect the people that you are serving. The organization should be able to walk the talk.”



## VOICES FROM THE FIELD

Quotes from Convening Participants

"I wish that both policymakers and funders could see the forest through the trees. And understand that there are these highs and lows, especially in the construction industry that are so dependent on the economy. And that investment in a low will still be an investment in a high."

"I admire [my colleague] for the way he offers psychological support to our trainees. Our trainee was going through a crisis, and he approached her and talked her through and he helped her to understand both her own personal boundaries and the way she can communicate [through this conflict]."

"For people of color, women, and trans/LGBTQIA folks, the Trades is not always the most friendly. But finding employers and potential partners that understand diversity and inclusion and what that looks like in a Trades environment [helps] so that we are not sending our folks into opportunities that are not [well] suited."

"[Our organization] has now started hiring our alumni...and it's actually a good thing to see. You know, get a chance to work with and be there to welcome our instructors. So they work alongside the instructor and they tell them what they know. Yeah, that's beautiful."

"There'll still be the trainees who have their family members pass away and things like that. And we have lost alumni...We've had an alumna who passed away right before she entered into the carpenters union. That was a very hurtful situation that I was involved in. So that's something that happens."

"It's very common for a woman to be the only woman in an apprenticeship class or on the job site."

"[We need] longer term solutions to helping people retain their employment."

"That ripple effect happens afterwards, right? Like they go back, and they feel empowered to support the next person. Or they feel empowered to say, hey, look, I'm a woman, I made it through... I'm in this apprenticeship program, and I'm having a great time and I have this wonderful sisterhood of people that support me, come join it. And so now you have 10 new people walking through your door being like, 'I've heard that this is the place to be.'"

"The trades is not a [traditionally] equitable field."

## ***PACKING THE BACKPACK: ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS***

These are specific ways funding and policy stakeholders can bolster support for Trades organizations.

### ***Policymakers and Funders***

- Invest in alumni engagement

### ***Organizational Leadership***

- Directly address the inherent racism and sexism in the construction trades

### **Invest in alumni engagement**

Data from these convenings suggests that having strong role models and affinity spaces, particularly for those with marginalized identities, is key to supporting apprentices through their career journeys. Representation, particularly at the staff level, was a major motivator for trainees who may not have seen themselves reflected in certain Trades professions.

### **Directly address the inherent racism and sexism of Construction Trades**

Whether through quotas, funding incentives, anti-racism trainings, or other measures, it is clear that policies that support a culture of inclusion among the Trades will contribute to the continued success of cohort organizations.



## ***FINDING "TREASURES" THROUGHOUT AND AT THE END***

When equipped with the appropriate resources, treasures for Trades organizations include increased retention, higher salary and wages, newfound confidence, and student success despite racism and sexism in the field. Below are two examples of how these "treasures" show up in real students' experiences.

### ***TWO ORGANIZATIONAL TREASURES***



"One of our instructors is actually a graduate from our program. Before he came to our program, he had previous criminal background involvement. He came to our program and kind of changed his life around and was able to really gain some really good wages, so that he comes back to our program as one of our instructors, and has really developed his skills and public speaking and now is going all over the country to represent us. And I think that that's really the element that it ties back to with our equity guide star is intentionality around how we are representing the different people in our program. And so really prioritizing women and BIPOC communities in our marketing strategies."

"One classmate, at the very end of our three weeks towards graduation, her car got completely broken into and totaled. And she basically came in to say, I need to quit the program. And the entire class just rallied and made sure that each one of them could give her a ride wherever she needed to go. And I just think that that culture... translates into the culture that organization reflects."







BRIDGES TO  
BRIGHTER FUTURES

*A Map For Success*

# INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY BRIEF

## Participating Organizations

**i.c.stars |\***



# INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY BRIEF

## ***INTRODUCTION***

This brief is a component of the Bridges to Brighter Futures (Bridges) 2023 Convenings Project, in which staff and leadership of current Bridges grantees in cohorts of Construction Trades, Information Technology, and Community Coaching convened to examine successes and issues in postsecondary programs. This brief focuses on the Information Technology (Tech) cohort, providing specific takeaways and policy and field-building recommendations to address sector-specific challenges, with racial equity and opportunity operating as the guiding “North Star.”<sup>27</sup>

## ***THE JOURNEYERS: COHORT OVERVIEW***

Organizations in the Information Technology cohort support students in programs operating outside of the City Colleges of Chicago (CCC) system toward placement in wages of \$25+/hour or \$50K/year. They are:

- [i.c.stars](#)
- [Year Up](#)
- [Per Scholas](#)
- [National Able Network](#)





Current trends indicate that there is not enough talent to meet the demands of the fast-moving Technology industry. These organizations leverage partnerships with employers to train students to meet the demands, and in particular focus on identities traditionally underrepresented in the field – BIPOC, women, and those without college degrees. In 2020, only 15% of Technology degrees went to Black and Latinx Illinois students.<sup>28</sup>

The Tech industry faces a particular access challenge, as many job opportunities are limited by four-year degree requirements, which may be unrealistic or untenable for students who pursue alternative pathways. The organizations in this cohort are working to create new inroads for students to access these careers, in spite of such obstacles.

## Tech Field Challenges<sup>29</sup>

Supply-Side Challenges	Demand-Side Challenges	System Challenges
<p><b>Misalignment on Requirements</b></p> <p>Graduates aren't quite what companies are looking for</p>	<p><b>Closed Doors</b></p> <p>Company practices don't align with stated goals on hiring from new talent pools</p>	<p><b>Lack of funding</b></p> <p>Funding for training, wages, and supports is scarce</p>
<p><b>Inconsistent Quality</b></p> <p>The experience is frustrating for companies</p>	<p><b>Competition for Attention</b></p> <p>Companies already have "too many things"</p>	<p><b>Life Challenges</b></p> <p>We don't account for complicated lives of the adults who might benefit from reskilling</p>
<p><b>Fragmentation and Sub-Scale Operations</b></p> <p>No simple, large-volume solutions for companies</p>	<p><b>Unwelcoming Environments</b></p> <p>Companies are failing to support nontraditional hires to succeed</p>	
<p><b>Organizational and Model Weakness</b></p> <p>Too few providers are effective businesses</p>		

The Technology industry contains some of the highest paying jobs available and can provide invaluable wealth-building opportunities for racial minority and low-income students, ultimately helping to close the racial wealth gap.

## MAPPING THE TERRAIN: OUR MAP KEY

What follows is a “map” of the Tech organizations’ pathways to addressing these issues, the challenging *mountains* and isolated *deserts* they face, but also the reflective *scenic overlooks* of student successes and the ways they replenish the work by tapping into existing resources.

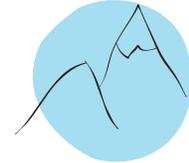


**Scenic Overlooks:** Places to Pause and Appreciate

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**Mountains:** Challenges to Overcome

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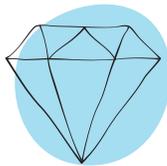


**Deserts:** Places with Too Few Resources

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**Bodies of Water:** Ways to Replenish

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**Treasures:** Indicators of Success

## SCENIC OVERLOOKS

Places to Pause and Appreciate

### All Skills are Tech Skills

Students who enter Information Technology can leverage skills that they bring with them from prior training or educational experiences. Organizations can identify and help bolster these skills as valuable with students, and employer partners can recognize these as incoming assets to their companies. For example, students may have developed customer service skills in another industry, which can help prepare them for the human-facing dimensions of an IT career.

## SCALABLE MOUNTAINS

### Challenges to Overcome

#### Tech- tonic Shifts Cause Hiring Gaps

The landscape of the Technology ecosystem is ever-shifting. Training organizations are sometimes limited to offering essential skills and certifications because employer demands and needs keep changing. Additionally, employers have their own needs and systems that change along different timelines as new technologies are developed. For this reason, some organizations are unable to place students in internships or post-graduate opportunities. Instead, they focus on basic career readiness skills and specific credentialing so that when jobs do become available, students are equipped to pursue them.

Further roadblocks occur when there is misalignment between executives at companies who say there is a need for workers and the HR-level roles who won't hire the students from these organizations. This appears to be directly related to training not being able to keep up with employer skill demands.

#### Lack of Cultural Capital

While there is a clear need to fill middle-skills jobs in the Tech industry, many qualified applicants find themselves struggling to adjust to the cultural norms of such workplaces. In addition to the hard skills required to land the job, students from marginalized or under-resourced communities will need access to cultural capital that allows them to navigate this new environment. For the organizational leaders we spoke with, this challenge goes both ways. In addition to preparing graduates for the workplace environment, employers often need help understanding the additional effort required to establish a welcoming environment for those graduates to access.

## **A PERSISTING DESERT**

Places with Too Few Resources

### **Internal Champions Make or Break Partnerships**

For many of the companies that partner with organizations in the Tech cohort, understanding the unique circumstances of nontraditional career pathways can be a challenge. When companies have an “internal champion” – someone who believes in and advocates for more inclusive recruitment, hiring, and onboard practices – partnerships with cohort organizations thrive. Conversely, without someone inside of the partner company playing that role, grantees found it difficult to make inroads for their students and advocate for necessary changes in hiring practices. Grantee organizations also highlighted the importance of employers who recognize and invest in the growth potential of interns, seeing them as company assets rather than recipients of charity.

## **BODIES OF WATER**

Ways to Replenish

### **Student Success Funds**

The ability to provide students with “student success funds” is a necessary resource that Tech organizations have found invaluable. As learners continue to navigate lasting pandemic impacts and homelife and personal obligations, organizations help meet gaps with financial support to cover areas including:

- Transportation costs to and from work
- Housing bills and utility payments for 4-5 months
- Referrals and tuition to daycare services
- Reliable internet for virtual learning and remote work

### **Changing the Face of the Industry**

A positive cycle occurs when students who receive successful placements go on to recruit new employees from the very organizations that secured their own placements. These leaders will have more empathy and understanding toward students from nontraditional pathways, and will know what it takes to keep them meaningfully employed. Ultimately, this cycle will lead to a more diverse Tech industry.

## **VOICES FROM THE FIELD**

Quotes from Convening Participants

“Our learners are coming from different industries like retail and hospitality, the food industry, and what I like is there’s a lot of transferable skills that you guys have there. Customer service is a big one, especially for IT support, and I let them know, like, there’s always an IT department everywhere you go, there’s always computer breaks or printer breaks or phone breaks, [IT support are] the first ones we call.”

“When you think about the scheme of the Chicago landscape, it’s just a very small percentage of employers that partner with all of us.”

“We were discussing how sometimes our clients become our stakeholders, because now that [a former student is] an employer hiring, he’s returned to us, and we’ve never worked with his employer. And now he’s willing to talk to our clients. And he wants to do a mock interview, because he knows what to expect from himself and the other manager, [and wants to] give them details about the job and things like that to make sure that they’re really prepared for the interview. But he is looking to hire from our new batch of clients.”

“The higher ups, they’re like, ‘Oh, yeah, we need, we need, we need.’ But the kind of techs that we talk to on a daily basis, maybe HR or lower HR people that are more in the weeds and everyday, there’s roadblocks for us to push our students and our programs to them and make those connections. I don’t know how we get the executives to recognize that we’re here.”

“With these opportunities being the first professional role for many of our graduates, they are new to navigating conversations about pay, company culture, and other areas. It’s important to us that our graduates are being treated fairly and are in a good environment, so we are intentional about who we work with for hiring”

“So with larger organizations, if you don’t have somebody who’s leading this, they have abysmal diversity hiring numbers, like it’s just awful. So the guy leading the conversation, he knows nothing about workforce development or training. And he’s trying to figure out how to connect the pieces in this gigantic company. And the whole thing just blew up, and it was a really wasted opportunity, frankly. So it’s just a frustrating piece for me, you have to have a champion or a willingness to change with one of these corporate partners, because it’s a lot of talk, but who’s leading?”

## **PACKING THE BACKPACK: ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

These are specific ways funding and policy stakeholders can bolster support for Tech organizations.

### **Policymakers and Funders**

- Support the development of resources and policies that advocate for the needs of students in an unstable industry

### **Organizational Leadership**

- Create tools for students transitioning into Tech from other fields

## **Support the development of resources and policies that advocate for the needs of students in an unstable industry**

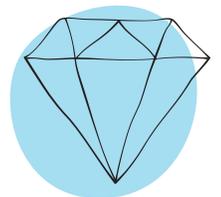
The Tech industry is ever-changing, and students benefit from a clear understanding of training requirements and certification and/or credentialing opportunities, as well as direct and upfront pay and salary expectations.

## **Create tools for students transitioning into Tech from other fields**

Students already face significant barriers to entering the Tech industry. Field leaders can support career-changers by developing more navigable labor market resources that help students make informed decisions. These could include realistic portrayals of workload and life balance, as well as accurate job and hiring forecasts.

## **FINDING “TREASURES” THROUGHOUT AND AT THE END**

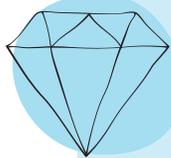
When equipped with the appropriate resources, treasures for Tech organizations include increased graduation, placement, and retention rates; increased salary and wages; and graduates earning one or more industry-recognized credentials. Below are two examples of how these “treasures” show up in real students’ experiences.



*“Prior to the cycle, I operated in survival mode. Now, everything I do comes from a place of love and abundance. I obtained my dream role one year after the program and I’m better equipped to change other peoples’ minds about where their life may be headed.”*

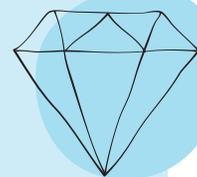
*-Convening Participant*

## TWO ORGANIZATIONAL TREASURES



i.c.stars' project-based learning model pairs each cohort with a corporate partner. This means that the company gains direct access to i.c.stars' learners and witnesses their rapid learning curve. This creates direct advocates for nontraditional talent among hiring managers, who often compete to bring on the i.c.stars participants with whom they have worked. Similarly, companies who provide subject matter experts as mentors or workshop leaders during the training are also more likely to become advocates for the individuals in training.

"One of our learners did the 12-week program and then got reached out to on LinkedIn from a former employer [who] also paid for a six-month training and now she's just way ahead of the game. She started off as a junior Oracle analyst and now she's a senior Oracle analyst, and all because she really committed to doing the six-month training program. And now she's been able to go from someone who definitely had issues of imposter syndrome, she had trouble making eye contact, had trouble vocalizing all her strengths. She has spoken to *Crain's Business Journal* about Per Scholas and what she's done, and is a really good example."





# ENDNOTES

- 1 “Middle Skills” is referred to as the pathway of workers who have higher education than a high school diploma, but less than four-year degree. They may have some college credits and credentials such as certificates, certifications, professional licenses, or associate’s degrees.
- 2 <https://www.metroplanning.org/news/8593/More-than-half-of-Chicago-family-households-do-not-earn-a-living-wage>
- 3 Postsecondary education is referred to as the formal education or training occurring after high school, including universities and colleges as well as trade and vocational institutions. *Three educational pathways to good jobs: high school, middle skills, and bachelor’s degree* - CEW Georgetown. (2021, August 13). CEW Georgetown. <https://cew.georgetown.edu/cew-reports/3pathways/>
- 4 National Center for Education Statistics. (n.d.). *Fast Facts: Tuition costs of colleges and universities* (76). <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=76>
- 5 Palomar, A. *Why the postsecondary student success grant program matters*. The Institute for College Access & Success. <https://ticas.org/college-completion/why-the-postsecondary-student-success-grant-program-matters/>
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- 9 Cultural competency refers to the principles, beliefs, and attitudes toward cultural differences and experiences and applying those values operationally as policy.
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- 11 [https://partnershipfcc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/PCC\\_LatinxStudentsReport.pdf](https://partnershipfcc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/PCC_LatinxStudentsReport.pdf)
- 12 <https://finhealthnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Financial-Health-Pulse-2022-Chicago-Report.pdf>
- 13 Thriving wage definition from Per Scholas, one of the grantee organizations.
- 14 Note: Grantee organizations used the terms “holistic supports,” “wraparound supports,” and “meeting basic needs” relatively interchangeably to refer to the broader resourcing needed by students pursuing alternative career pathways, beyond typical skill development. We use each of these terms throughout this report to refer to that same constellation of activities, while recognizing the slight nuances in how they apply across organizational contexts.
- 15 Themes and challenges that Community Coaching had in common with the other cohorts can be found in the Convening Overview.

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- 28 The Computing Technology Industry Association, *State of the Tech Workforce*, 2022
- 29 Chicago's Tech Reskilling Imperative: How to Accelerate Growth and Expand Opportunity presentation; P33. <https://p33chicago.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Talent-Insights-Report-Dec-2022-FINAL.pdf>

