

2020
Colorado
Talent Equity
— *Agenda* —



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The Talent Equity Agenda is published by the Colorado Workforce Development Council (CWDC), a Governor-appointed, public-private partnership with the purpose to advise, oversee, and integrate the work of the Colorado talent development network. The CWDC's vision is that every Colorado employer has access to a skilled workforce and every Coloradan has the opportunity for meaningful employment, resulting in individual and statewide economic prosperity.

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For questions or requests related to the Talent Equity Agenda, please contact:

Renise Walker
Senior Consultant, CWDC
renise.walker@state.co.us





The Talent Equity Agenda makes the case for targeting resources, raising awareness, and accelerating shared strategies to close racial economic disparities in the state and measure the results.

Overview

The Prosperity Now Scorecard ranks Colorado 12th nationally on overall prosperity of the state's residents, yet at the same time ranks Colorado 37th when it comes to racial disparities between white residents and residents of color.¹ This gap has significant implications and spotlights a critical need to strengthen how we educate, train, hire, and promote our current workforce. So long as these disparities exist within our talent pipeline, they undercut our economic competitiveness and undermine our goal of a state that works for all Coloradans.

Why now?

During its January 2020 meeting, the Colorado Workforce Development Council (CWDC) adopted equity as a key value in creating an economy that works for all Coloradans. While significant progress has been made to better align Colorado's supply of workers with market demands, our state continues to experience gaps in credential attainment; unemployment; digital skill development; and fair hiring, compensation, and advancement practices.

In an effort to live out the value of equity and address the growing disparities within the state's talent development ecosystem, the CWDC convened stakeholders to produce the Talent Equity Agenda. This holistic effort is aimed at

raising awareness, identifying shared opportunities for strategic action, targeting resources, and measuring progress to address equity gaps and intersecting disparities impacting our current and future workforce.

The compounding challenges to equity presented by COVID-19 and national and international calls for racial justice make the need to focus on racial disparities in the Talent Equity Agenda a matter for urgent concern. It is also central to Colorado's efforts to ensure that workers are resilient amidst a rapidly changing environment and that businesses have the talent they need. We acknowledge that this effort alone is not the sole answer to addressing racial disparities, but rather a start to focusing our collective action and resources.

¹ Prosperity Now Scorecard 2020. scorecard.prosperitynow.org/about

Fully realizing a state economy that works for all Coloradans requires that we acknowledge the racism and systemic inequities that plague our talent development ecosystem and actively work to restructure how we educate, train, hire, and advance Coloradans.

WHY RACIAL EQUITY?

Colorado's population is projected to become more racially diverse over the next 30 years, forecasting that the overall labor market will become increasingly dependent on people of color.² This amplifies the need to close racial disparities for the benefit of individuals and the economy as a whole. Furthermore, education and economic disparities by race carry a heavy cost.

Nationally, closing the educational achievement gap between Black and Latinx children and their white counterparts would result in an estimated \$2.3 trillion benefit to the U.S. economy by 2050.³

Colorado's increasing racial diversity is an asset for our workforce and attention to racial equity is an economic and moral imperative. Especially when considering that racial workforce diversity is a key driver of America's economic growth as it is one of the most important predictors of business sales revenue, customer numbers, and profitability.⁴

DEFINITION

Racial equity is achieved when race or immigration status is no longer correlated with one's outcomes; when everyone has what they need to thrive, no matter who they are, the color of their skin, or where they live. Achieving racial equity requires an understanding of the root causes of outcome disparities in our society and a commitment to justice and fairness in procedures and processes of our institutions or systems, as well as in the distribution of resources. Racial equity results in the fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all people, and is achieved through striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of people of color.

This is different from equality, which is a situation in which everyone has the same amount of something (ie: food, medicine, opportunity) despite their existing needs or assets. Equity has been described as being about fairness and equality about sameness.⁵



² State Demography Office at the Colorado Department of Local Affairs, 2019 Data

³ *National Equity Atlas, Data Summaries - United States.* nationalequityatlas.org/data-summaries

⁴ National Skills Coalition. (September 2019). *The Roadmap for Racial Equity: An Imperative for Workforce Development Advocates.* www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resources/publications/file/Racial-Equity-Report_6x9_web.pdf

⁵ Definition adapted from National Skills Coalition. (September 2019). *The Roadmap for Racial Equity: An Imperative for Workforce Development Advocates.* www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resources/publications/file/Racial-Equity-Report_6x9_web.pdf

Colorado's Current Talent Landscape

Although Colorado is typically a top state in regards to labor force participation and low unemployment, there are persistent discrepancies in race and ethnicity. Pre-COVID-19, the African American unemployment rate was 6.6 percent.

Unemployment rates are not the only indicator of racial inequity. Starting as early as third grade reading levels, and on through postsecondary credential attainment and jobs held (or not held) by persons or color, we see large gaps between the state's white population and its people of color, which ultimately leads to instances of occupational segregation.⁶ Colorado's white population has the highest representation in occupations like legal, management, and science while the African American population has the highest representation in military, healthcare support, and transportation and material moving occupations; the latter occupations typically accompanied with lower median annual salaries.⁷



**Data on Colorado's
Talent Landscape**

⁶ Fact sheet: Occupational segregation in the United States - Equitable Growth. (2020). Retrieved September 10, 2020, from equitablegrowth.org/fact-sheet-occupational-segregation-in-the-united-states

⁷ EMSI 2020.3 Data



Addressing Racial Inequity

Racial disparities in Colorado and the U.S. have been fueled by decades of racially biased policies, enduring mindsets, inequitable distribution of resources, and outdated systems that perpetuate the inequalities and inequities we see today. Adequately addressing these issues requires a sustained commitment of effort and resources and a proactive approach to reengineering how our systems educate, hire, train, and advance Colorado's workforce.

While the breadth of this work will not be accomplished within the year-long scope of the Talent Equity Agenda, it is our hope that the agenda will serve as a catalyst for future efforts. To that end, the CWDC convened stakeholders across business, education, workforce, and economic development to examine the data on Colorado's current talent landscape and identify five key areas of focus for sustained action over the next year.

Following are recommendations for policy makers, as well as key strategies for education, business, and workforce to take collective action to improve outcomes over the next year.

While not all strategies that emerged from stakeholder conversations are captured in the body of the Talent Equity Agenda, they have been included in the appendix for future consideration.

Considerations for Policy Makers

As Colorado works to determine how to adapt to current and future budget realities, fiscal policy choices made at the state and local level will help determine whether racial inequality will continue increasing exponentially or whether we will actively work to dismantle structural issues contributing to inequality in our state.

In the face of enormous economic challenges, we recommend Colorado policy makers adopt the following policy principles proposed by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities:

- Target aid to those most in need due to COVID-19 and the economic crisis. The [Racial Equity Impact Assessment](#) is useful for systemically examining how different racial groups will likely be affected by a proposed action, helping to minimize unanticipated adverse consequences.





Changing racial disparities in employment and wage outcomes starts with strengthening the foundation of how effectively Coloradans are exposed to careers and plan their career trajectories.

- Advance antiracist and equitable policies, both short- and long-term, to dismantle persistent racial, gender, geographic, and economic inequities and other barriers that non-dominant groups and identities experience. Antiracist policies actively seek to dismantle the racism embedded in our social, economic, and political systems and structures that results in persistent racial inequities.
- Protect state finances to preserve the foundations of long-term economic growth and opportunity.

To view a detailed description of these recommendations, please visit cbpp.org.

CAREER NAVIGATION AND ADVANCEMENT

Career exposure and planning is critical for students as they explore colleges and other training opportunities, and it is also a need for adults -- those who are both unemployed and those who are currently in the workforce looking to move up.

This is particularly true for workers who lack college degrees or other forms of training that prevents them from accessing jobs with better wages and benefits, suggesting a need for upskilling models that allow individuals to earn wages while increasing their skills and earning industry-recognized credentials.

Strategies

- Support intentional efforts to diversify Colorado's educator workforce. Research and data demonstrate a strong correlation between student achievement and students being in a classroom led by non-white educators.
- Work with school districts to analyze enrollment in and completion of career pathway programs, and support districts in increasing access for underrepresented populations in high-demand career pathway programs.
- Increase user adoption of [My Colorado Journey](#) as a tool for education and career planning for students and adult job seekers and workers.
- Set a statewide target to intentionally increase participation among people of color in pre-apprenticeships and apprenticeships as an upskilling earn-while-you-learn model.
- Expand upskilling and accelerated training opportunities targeting those who hold entry-level jobs.
- Identify and promote training programs and opportunities that create a "Pathway to the Pathway" for job areas that are projected to grow post-COVID.
- Intentional pipelines should be built from middle school allowing for exposure and experience in multiple fields that align with the student's interest and economic demand.

Indicators

- Number of career coaches utilizing multiculturally relevant⁸ approaches to career navigation
- Increase in pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship participation by people of color
- Increase in number of credentials obtained by people of color in high-demand industries
- Number of people with career change/promotion and wage gain

CLOSING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

In the last 10 years, demand for jobs requiring medium and high digital skills have increased, with 77 percent of all jobs requiring digital skills and 84 percent of small businesses using at least one digital platform as of 2020.⁹

Jobs vulnerable to displacement or significant transformation are disproportionately concentrated among people of color, those without college degrees, and workers under the age of 34 and over the age of 50.¹⁰

The ability of all Coloradans to take advantage of emerging opportunities and transition effectively as their jobs evolve depends on how we bridge the digital divide. This includes providing equitable access to high-speed internet (infrastructure and affordable connectivity) and technology (devices) and the development of digital skills for work, education, and life.

Currently, 14 percent of rural Colorado households have slow or no broadband internet.¹¹ More than 54,000 school-age children lack internet in Colorado, two out of three of whom are Hispanic.¹² Meanwhile, 53,000 students in Colorado lacked devices for remote learning.¹³ Eighty percent of those with no digital skills have a high school credential or less; 57 percent have earnings in either the bottom or the second-lowest quartile; and 44 percent are white, 15 percent are Black, 35 percent are Hispanic, and 4 percent are Asian/Pacific Islander.¹⁴ Efforts are needed to address multiple fears and worries that populations have related to using technology, increase access to high-speed internet and web-enabled devices, and increase digital skill development.

⁸ Kivel, P. (2007). *Multicultural Competence*. paulkivel.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/multiculturalcompetence.pdf

⁹ The Markle Foundation. (October 2019). *Digital Blindspot: How Digital Literacy Can Create A More Resilient American Workforce*. markle.org/digitalblindspot

¹⁰ McKinsey & Company. (2019, July 11). *The future of work in America: People and places, today and tomorrow*. mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/the-future-of-work-in-america-people-and-places-today-and-tomorrow

¹¹ Chuang, T. (2019, July 23). As Colorado nears 100% broadband access, funds for rural support shrink. The Colorado Sun. coloradosun.com/2019/07/23/as-colorado-nears-100-broadband-access-funds-for-rural-support-shrink

¹² Colorado Futures Center. (April 2020). *Who are Colorado's School Age Children Without Access to Internet?* coloradofuturescsu.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/colorado-remote-learning-impact-region-final.pdf

¹³ Colorado Education Initiative. (2020, April 20). *Results of Statewide Survey Reveals Technology and Other Needs of Students During Pandemic*. coloradoeducationinitiative.org/results-of-statewide-survey-reveals-technology-and-other-needs-of-students-during-pandemic

¹⁴ National Skills Coalition. (April 2020). *Digital Skills Series: Health workers need investment in their digital skills*. nationalskillscoalition.org/resources/publications/file/Digital-Skills-Health-NoCrps-1.pdf





Related to digital literacy are the diverse challenges across many communities that are faced on a daily basis by non-native English speakers, as well as those with limited overall literacy skills.

Strategies

- The Office of Future of Work in the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment (CDLE) will establish a baseline understanding of what is needed to address Colorado's digital divide by partnering with community stakeholders, state and municipal partners, and others to assess current and future demands for digital skills, define core digital competencies, and identify policy and program changes that could promote digital literacy instruction, coaching and technical assistance, and access in education and workforce development programs. A report on the findings will be published by the end of 2020.
- Engage CDLE, CWDC, and the Colorado Community College System (CCCS) in a process to encourage local communities to incorporate digital skill development into state and local education and training plans, including local [WIOA](#) plans and [Perkins](#) plans.
- Increase access to technology among people of color by building on lessons learned from the Colorado Department of Education (CDE), Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE), and local school districts and education providers to target

the distribution of wi-fi enabled computers, tablets, and hotspots to enable connection to digital work and learning opportunities.

- CDLE's Office of the Future of Work will work with community organizations, faith-based institutions, and media outlets who focus on people of color and individuals who speak English as a second language to raise awareness around the need for digital skill development and opportunities to develop and update digital workforce skills.

Indicators

- Increase in percentage of people of color in Colorado with access to high-speed internet access
- Increase of percentage of people of color in Colorado with internet-enabled devices
- Increase in the number of programs for children, youth, and adults with digital skill development incorporated into their services

POSTSECONDARY CREDENTIAL ATTAINMENT

Nearly two-thirds of all jobs in the U.S. now require some form of postsecondary education.¹⁵ Work is being done to define and count quality non-degree credentials (NDCs) in the state.

Quality assurance measures are important due to the role NDCs play in providing opportunities for people of color. Currently, 56.9 percent of Coloradans hold

¹⁵ Jones T., & Berger, K. (2019, Jan 9). *Aiming for Equity*. edtrust.org/resource/aiming-for-equity

a postsecondary credential¹⁶ with considerable gaps in attainment among Black (43.94%), Native American (27.87%), and Latinx (32.16%) populations. Narrowing the racial equity gaps in postsecondary credential attainment will better equip people of color in Colorado to compete for jobs.

Strategies

- SB 297 - Revising Higher Education Performance Requirements: This policy prompts higher education institutions to set goals for overall retention and credential attainment for Black, Hispanic, Native American/Alaska and Pell students. The Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE) aggregates this information into the [Master Plan Dashboard](#).
- Amend occupational licensing policies so that they recognize foreign training, education, and experience.
- Strategically align eligibility requirements and applications for wrap-around services to increase awareness and access.

Indicators

- [Educational attainment](#)
- 2020 aggregate credential attainment target for Black, Hispanic, and Native American populations
- Number of higher education institutions that establish an

institutional equity action plan, which includes a commitment to increasing training for cultural competencies from seven to 30 by June 30, 2021.

- Increase completion of postsecondary education/training programs by individuals from underrepresented race/ethnicity groups by 10 percent from 14,096 to 15,506 by June 30, 2021.

UNEMPLOYMENT

COVID-19 has exacerbated unemployment disparities in Colorado and the nation. Prior to the pandemic, Colorado's Latinx population faced an unemployment rate of 3.4 percent, compared with white unemployment at 3.2 percent. The unemployment rate of African Americans was more than double at 6.6 percent. The unemployment rate for Black youth followed a similar trend at 25.9 percent compared to 13.9 percent for white youth and 12.3 percent for Latinx youth.¹⁷

Even when controlling for educational attainment levels, the unemployment rates persist, suggesting the need for intentional, data-driven efforts to target engagement, retraining, and redeployment for individuals who have been laid off. Solutions to narrow racial disparities in unemployment should not focus on placing the burden on individuals, but rather focus on the systems preventing individuals from fully participating in the labor market.¹⁸



Credentials that offer value in the workforce extend beyond two- and four-year degrees and include industry-recognized certifications, apprenticeships, and other forms of technical certificates.

¹⁶ Dougherty, J. (2019). *2019 Colorado Talent Pipeline Report*. drive.google.com/file/d/1PdJlxfO-ej0oCwiSzG06voCIHmq385SM/view

¹⁷ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey, 2019 Data

¹⁸ Ajilore, O. (2020, February 24). *On the Persistence of the Black-White Unemployment Gap*. americanprogress.org/issues/economy/reports/2020/02/24/480743/persistence-black-white-unemployment-gap



Strategies

- Target resources into building career pathways from low-wage jobs where there are large concentrations of immigrants and people of color to transition into higher wage jobs with limited risk of transformation from automation threats.
- Pathway opportunities should include opportunities for digital skills training.
- Maximize the connection between SNAP Employment and Training and workforce program opportunities.
- Provide education and training providers with data on racial disparities and unemployment numbers to inform targeted outreach.
- Promote scholarships, loan forgiveness, and training opportunities targeted at engaging people of color in in-demand occupations.
- Invest intentionally in language and literacy programs that can assist job seekers and underemployed workers in advancing language and literacy skills, as well as workplace language skills that lead to being qualified for jobs that have higher levels of compensation and benefits.
- Increase the adoption of **skills-based hiring** among employers to decrease bias in the hiring process and focus on skills needed to perform the job.

Indicators

- **Decrease in overall unemployment** among people of color (unemployment numbers will be disaggregated by race)
- Promote sectors that hire individuals who were previously unemployed

EQUITABLE HIRING, COMPENSATION, AND PROMOTION

The jobs and wealth generated by Colorado businesses are powerful tools for transformation. Not only do businesses have a critical role to play in closing racial disparities, but operating with a racial equity lens serves as a competitive advantage.

Research shows that more diverse teams are better able to solve problems and that companies with more diverse workforces have higher revenues, broader customer bases, and greater market shares.¹⁹

Simply hiring more diverse talent is not enough. Truly operating as an equitable company requires a personal commitment from leadership and a re-invention of every aspect of a business's culture and operations.

The strategies outlined below provide practical starting points for businesses committed to adopting more equitable employment practices, which contribute to outcomes of both community prosperity and corporate success.

¹⁹ Blackwell, A.G., Kramer, M., Vaidyanathan, L., Iyer, L., & Kirschenbaum, J. (2017). *The Competitive Advantage of Racial Equity*. policylink.org/sites/default/files/The%20Competitive%20Advantage%20of%20Racial%20Equity-final.pdf

Strategies

- Increase employer adoption of apprenticeships.
- Incentivize management training programs for people of color in in-demand industries.
- Increase employer adoption of **skills-based hiring** from five percent to 10 percent and promote employers who revise job descriptions, interview questions, personnel policies, apprenticeships, and onboarding practices to reflect cultural respect, responsiveness, and a commitment to being an inclusive and equitable workplace.
- Target stimulus funds and technical assistance to businesses owned by people of color (and companies with strong diversity and inclusion plans) to help them build and scale in procurement, hiring, and ability to gain major contracts.
- Provide employers with access to credential evaluation services. These services compare academic accomplishments to standards in the U.S. This service can help employers (and schools or licensing boards) better understand educational backgrounds of applicants with career and academic experience from overseas.
- Incorporate requirements for diversity, equity, and inclusion targets and technical assistance for businesses receiving state stimulus funds supporting stabilization. Prioritize funding for small businesses that employ large numbers of Coloradans.

- Promote successful employer models for upskilling, reskilling, and internal promotion (internal career pathways) that result in career advancement for people of color.

Indicators

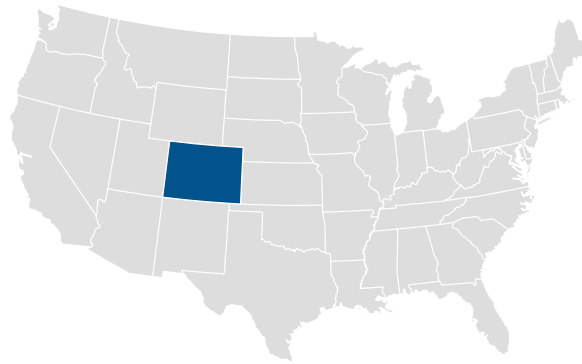
- **Job and wage growth**
- Number of people of color in executive leadership in Colorado businesses and state agencies
- Increase in percentage of people in Colorado enrolled in apprenticeships





Racial Disparities in Colorado's Talent Pipeline

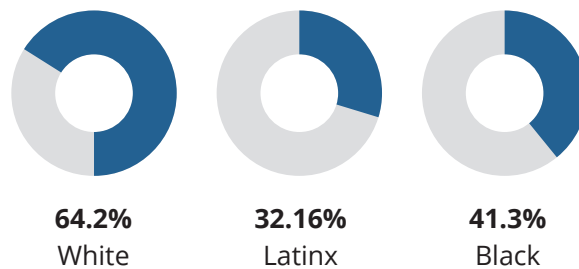
In Colorado, there is a gap between individuals who are white and individuals of color in relation to educating, training, hiring, and promoting our current workforce. This gap has significant implications for the state's economic competitiveness and undermines our goal of a Colorado economy that works for all of us.



Colorado ranks
37th
out of 50 states

Colorado ranks 37th out of 50 states and the District of Columbia when it comes to racial disparities in relation to how well the state puts households of color on a pathway to economic prosperity.²⁰

Of the Top Jobs in Colorado, 64% require a postsecondary credential.²¹



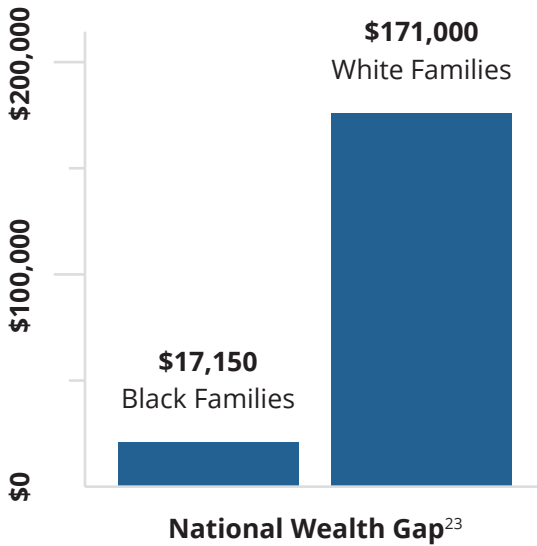
Postsecondary credential attainment rate
(by race in 2019)

Nationally, closing the educational achievement gap between Black and Latinx children and their white counterparts would result in an **estimated \$2.3 trillion benefit to the U.S. economy by 2050.**²²

²⁰ Prosperity Now Scorecard 2020. scorecard.prosperitynow.org/about

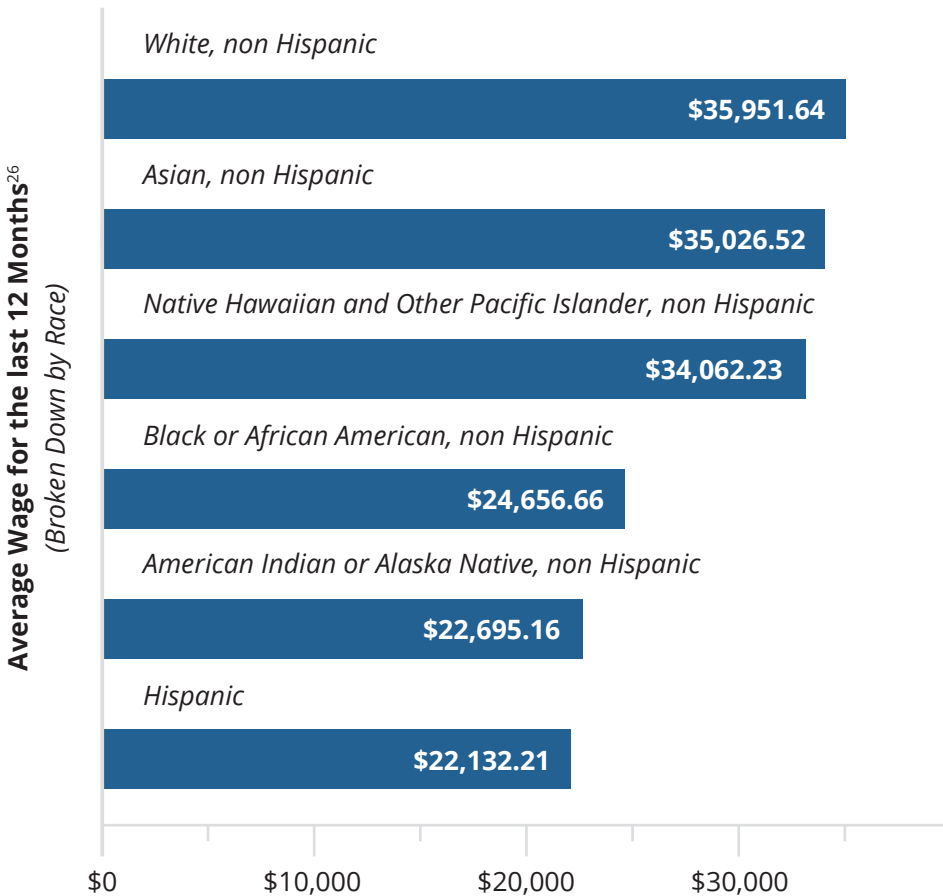
²¹ Dougherty, J. (2019). 2019 Colorado Talent Pipeline Report. drive.google.com/file/d/1PdJlxfO-ej0oCwiSzG06voCIHmq385SM/view

²² National Equity Atlas, Data Summaries - United States. nationalequityatlas.org/data-summaries



77% of all jobs in the U.S. require digital skills.²⁵

80% of those with no digital skills have a high school credential or less.²⁵



²³ McIntosh, K., Moss, E., Nunn, R., & Shambaugh, J. (February 2020). Examining the Black-white wealth gap. *The Brookings Institution*. Retrieved at www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/02/27/examining-the-black-white-wealth-gap

²⁴ The Markle Foundation. (October 2019). *Digital Blindspot: How Digital Literacy Can Create A More Resilient American Workforce*. markle.org/digitalblindspot

²⁵ National Skills Coalition. (April 2020). *Digital Skills Series: Health workers need investment in their digital skills*. nationalskillscoalition.org/resources/publications/file/Digital-Skills-Health-NoCrps-1.pdf

²⁶ U.S. Census Bureau. (2019). 2004-2018 American Community Survey 5-year Public Use Microdata Samples



Colorado Workforce Development Council

The Colorado Workforce Development Council (CWDC) is a Governor-appointed, public-private partnership with the purpose to advise, oversee, and integrate the work of the Colorado talent development network.

The vision of the Colorado Workforce Development Council is that every Colorado employer has access to a skilled workforce and every Coloradan has the opportunity for meaningful employment, resulting in individual and statewide economic prosperity.

The CWDC's mission is to enhance and sustain a skills-based talent development network that meets the needs of employers, workers, job seekers, and learners for today and tomorrow.



*The CWDC's values are equity, agility, and integration. **Learn more.***



Supplemental

Additional strategy recommendations

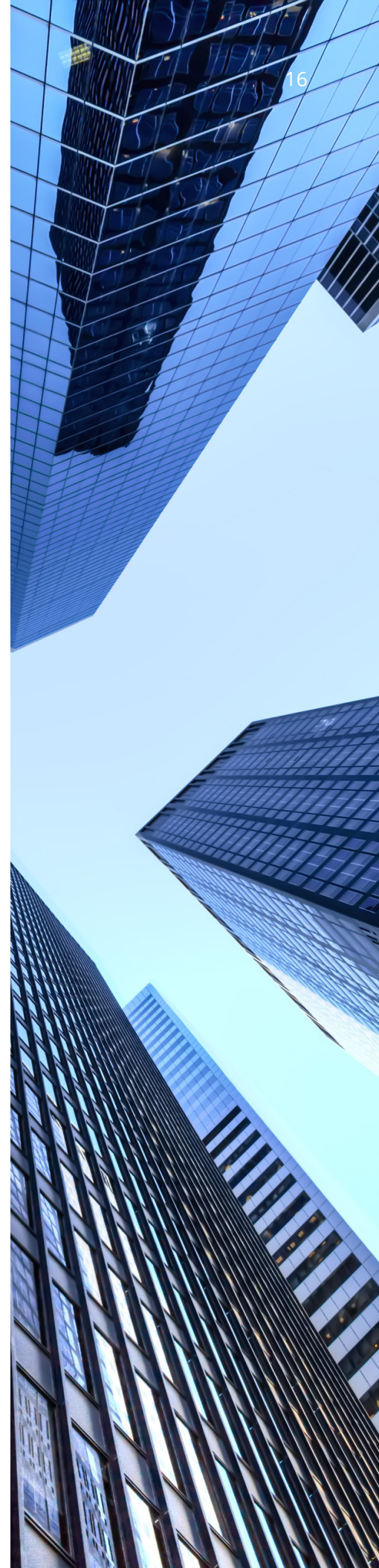
Stakeholder recommendations posed to address equity gaps in how Colorado educates, trains, hires, and promotes workers.

Resources

A list of frameworks, scorecards, and resources to increase awareness of equity disparities in Colorado and existing initiatives working to address those issues.

Acknowledgements

Recognition for individuals who contributed to the development of the Talent Equity Agenda.





Colorado Workforce
Development Council

coworkforcecouncil.org