

WHERE THERE'S A SKILL...

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT HELPS SUSTAIN HEALTHY COMMUNITIES.

THE GOAL FOR any business is sustainability. Sustainability is not a measurement of time; instead, it refers to the delivery of a unique product or service that meets the customer's needs or solves the customer's problems. As long as people want that product or service, a business will remain sustainable.

In order for communities to provide sustainability, they need to provide a service as well. In fact, services are the reason why most people choose to live where they do; they're attracted by beautiful parks, strong schools, maintained roads, cultural amenities, safe neighborhoods, and affordable housing. As long as a community can deliver quality services, residents will want to stay there.

However, communities need to provide more than just services to be sustainable. Communities must also provide opportunities, and those opportunities start with workforce development. Not having an acceptable workforce can be a deal breaker no matter how good everything else is.

To make sure your city maintains an acceptable workforce, start by taking a good look at the young adults coming out of your schools. Most of them will either stay in the community or return to form the backbone of your community for the next 50 years. If they are hardworking and smart, if they have been introduced to a spirit of entrepreneurship, and if they have learned a skill, your community's businesses will likely prosper—and possibly even create new businesses. But if schools

have a high dropout rate and low test scores, and if your young adults have never had the opportunity to intern with local businesses or learn a skill, your existing businesses will not survive, and new businesses will not develop.

The negative effects can accumulate. If a community no longer has an acceptable workforce, it will not have an adequate tax base; if it no longer has an adequate tax base, then the number of services a community can provide will decrease; if services are reduced or eliminated, people will relocate to communities that can provide opportunities. To avoid this spiral, local practitioners in economic and workforce development need to work together to develop business and education partnerships that make businesses competitive and employees productive.

Thankfully, cities don't need to rely solely on their own resources. They can tap into a highly regarded statewide system of education and training that prepares people for high-skill jobs and assures employers of a skilled, flexible workforce in the future. Washington has ranked high in numerous economic development rankings because we understand that sustainability equals the delivery of quality services plus workforce development opportunities. Continued workforce investment is a formula that will help create healthy communities. **C**

Maury Forman is a nationally popular speaker and the author of numerous books on a variety of economic development subjects.



Opening Doors

These strategies can enhance your city's workforce development.

- Encourage apprenticeships, licensing training, and skills certification.
- Promote education and preventive programs at all levels.
- Work with business and labor to close the training gap.
- Endorse programs for GED graduates and high school dropouts.

- Participate in local workforce investment boards.
- Ensure that investments respond to local and regional workforce priorities.
- Support academic achievement for a global market.
- Review city-level policies that help or hinder alternative schools.
- Align relationships with state workforce and economic development officials.
- Integrate schools as centers for social services, youth activities, and recreation.

