

New River/Mount Rogers Workforce Development Region

2022 Q3 QUARTERLY
WORKFORCE REPORT

Introduction

Welcome to the November 2022 Workforce Report.

The young adult population makes up an important part of the workforce; this segment of the overall population is the future workforce for a region and without adequate preparation and attention, they can easily be lost in the pipeline. Young people can face many social and economic barriers as they grow up that may impede their capability of finding employment. Studies show that young people are more likely to have meaningful, well-paying employment later in life if they can start working at a younger age. By having internship programs, training opportunities, and resources that target young people widely available, outcomes for young adults will improve.

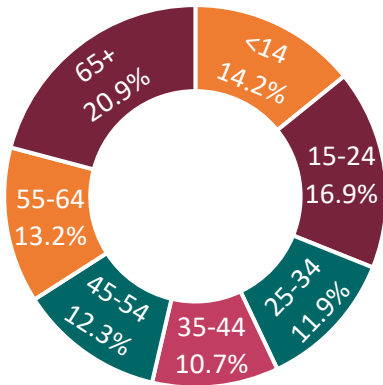
This quarter's report focuses on the young adult population in Region 2, which encompasses those ages 16-24. Regional programs are highlighted in this report that work to educate, train, and provide job opportunities to young adults. Successful programming can increase opportunities for young adults and strengthen the pipeline from graduation to employment., improving employment for Region 2.



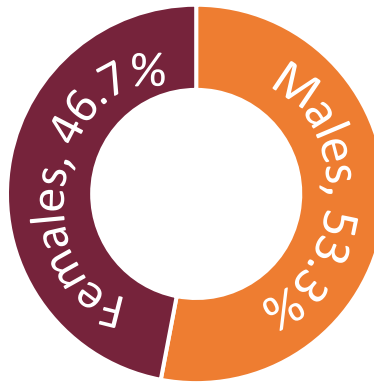
Regional Overview

Demographics of Young Adult Population

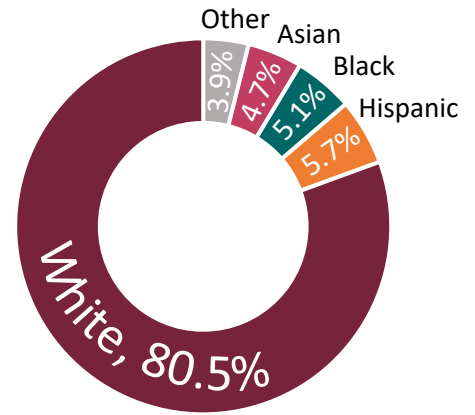
Age Distribution in Region 2



Gender of Ages 15-24



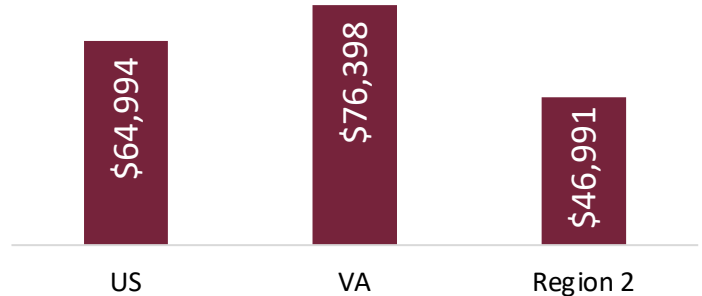
Race and Ethnicity of Ages 15-24



In 2021, the young adult population was the second largest age group in Region 2. This is likely due to the presence of post-secondary institutions in the region. The largest percentage of the population is the oldest age group; as residents ages 65 and older begin to retire, it is important to have a pipeline of workers prepared to fill gaps in the workforce. The young adult population in Region 2 is majority male and white and little demographic change is expected in the next five years.

Median Household Income

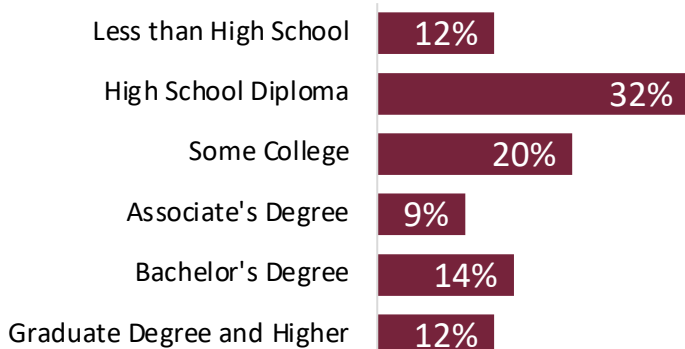
The average median household income in Region 2 in 2020 was lower than both the median income for the nation and the state. In Region 2, Montgomery County had the highest income at \$59,126; Montgomery also has the highest percentage of residents with Bachelor's and Graduate degrees, which could contribute to higher incomes. The City of Radford had the lowest median household income at \$34,576.



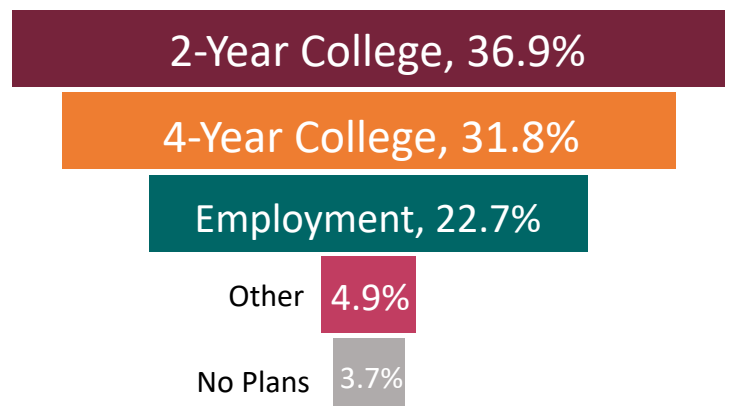
Educational Attainment

In Region 2, adults over the age of 18 received a high school diploma, followed by completing some college. More residents have also completed a Bachelor's degree than an Associate's. For the graduating class of 2021, most were planning to attend college, with more choosing a 2-year program. A large percentage of students were also planning to enter the workforce; adequate resources and information must be available so that these students can find meaningful, local employment.

Highest Level Attained



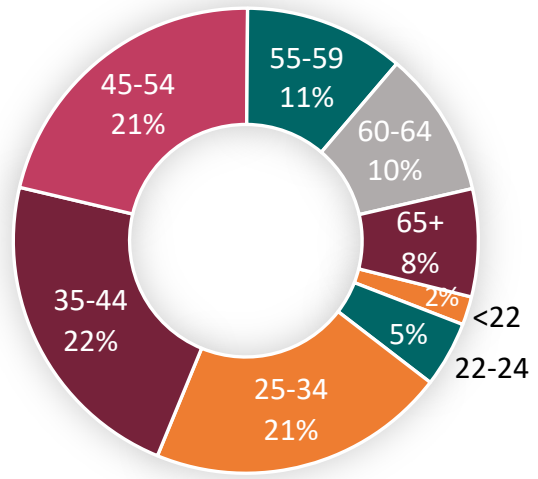
Expected Plans After High School



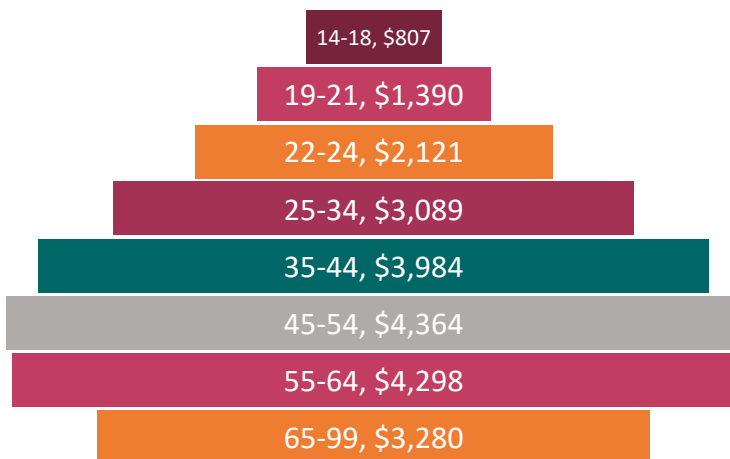
Employment

Unemployment Breakdown by Age

Across Region 2, youths under the age of 22 had the lowest unemployment of any age group, ranging from 1.13% in Grayson County to 2.06% in Radford city. Unemployment rates are similarly low for youths ages 22-24 across the region, but skyrockets to 21% for 25-34 year olds. This is likely because most of those under age 25 are enrolled full-time in school (i.e. not in labor force) or are employed in unskilled professions. By age 25, most have graduated. Those who stay in the region and are not already employed are actively seeking employment.



Average Monthly Earnings, 2021



Youths aged 14-24 have an average monthly income of \$1,439 per month. Ages 14-18 make the least amount per month, at \$807 on average, likely because they are working part time, low wage positions suitable to accommodate schoolwork and other extracurriculars while living in the family home. Ages 19-24 are more likely to reside around the region's post-secondary institutions with higher costs of living and thus higher wages. Graduate students on higher paying assistantship stipends may also skew the regional average to appear higher than what the majority of 19-24 year old make.

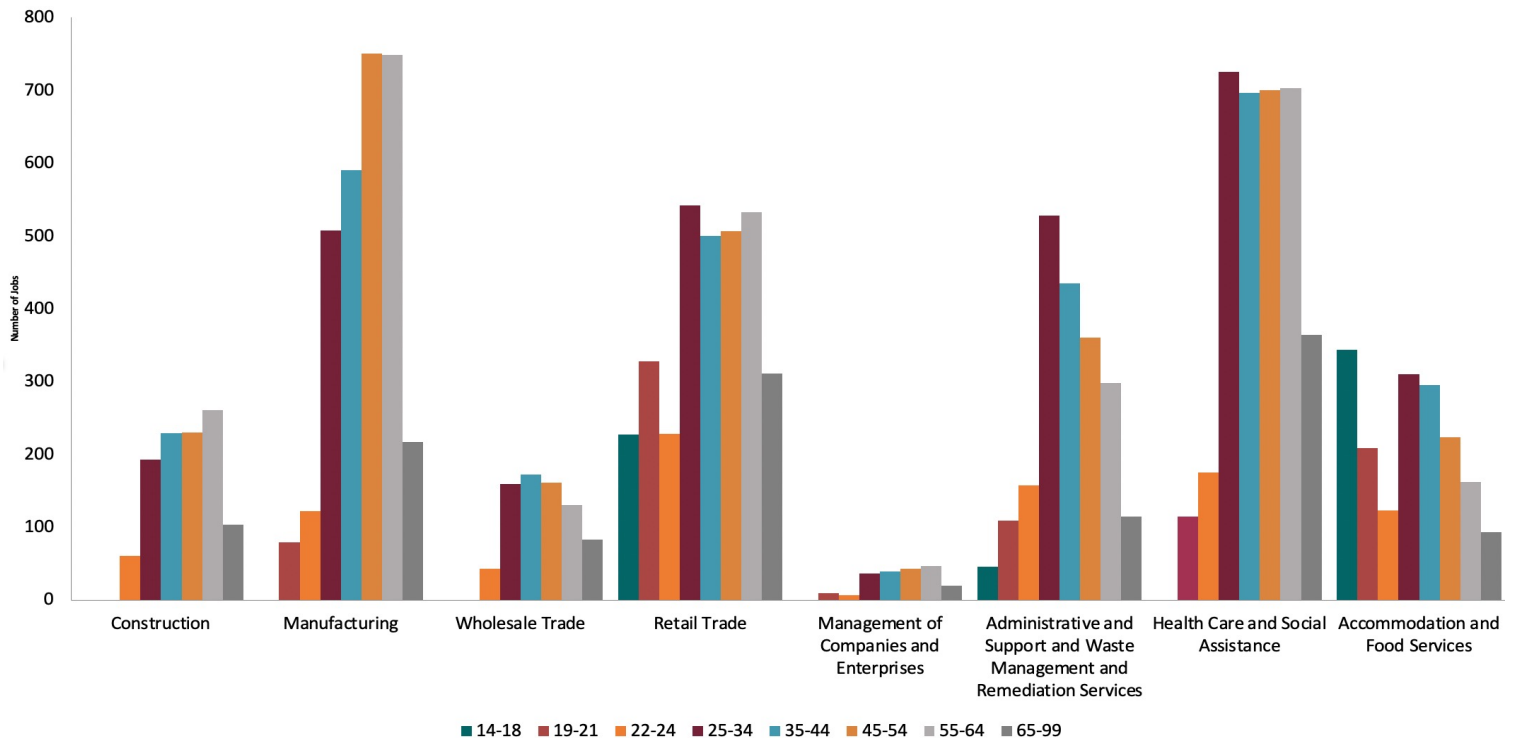
Percent Change in Youth Employment



Youth employment is especially susceptible to seasonal changes in economic activity. Jobs held by 14-24 year olds experience higher sensitivity and were impacted far more greatly by the initial COVID-19 pandemic, shown by the sharp declines relative to those over 24 in Q2 of 2020. That said, they also bounced back quickly in the next quarter when businesses slowly began to reopen, as many essential positions in retail stores and fast-food restaurants are held by younger people. The trend of job spikes in youths aged 14-18 in the third quarters of both 2020 and 2021 coincide with the end of the school year.

Industries & Occupations for Youth

Top Industries by Age



The industries employing the highest number of youth are Retail Trade and Accommodation and Food Service. Industries that require more training and education such as Manufacturing and Health Care do not hire as many young adults but can provide opportunities for young people seeking to enter the field through internships and mentorship opportunities, which are often seen in these industries.

Top Occupations for Youth

Top Occupations	Ages 14-18	Avg. Hourly Earnings	Ages 19-24	Avg. Hourly Earnings
1	Fast Food and Counter Workers	\$10.71	Cashiers	\$11.52
2	Cashiers	\$11.52	Fast Food and Counter Workers	\$10.71
3	Waiters and Waitresses	\$12.35	Retail Salespersons	\$14.80
4	Stockers and Order Fillers	\$14.39	Stockers and Order Fillers	\$14.39
5	Restaurant Hosts and Hostesses	\$11.71	Waiters and Waitresses	\$12.35
6	Retail Salespersons	\$14.80	Office Clerks	\$16.80
7	Dining and Cafeteria Attendants	\$13.05	Laborers and Freight Stock Movers	\$17.50
8	Restaurant Cooks	\$12.95	Miscellaneous Assemblers	\$19.39
9	Food Preparation Workers	\$12.14	Postsecondary Teachers	\$43.81
10	Lifeguards and Recreational Workers	\$11.14	Home Health Aides	\$11.07

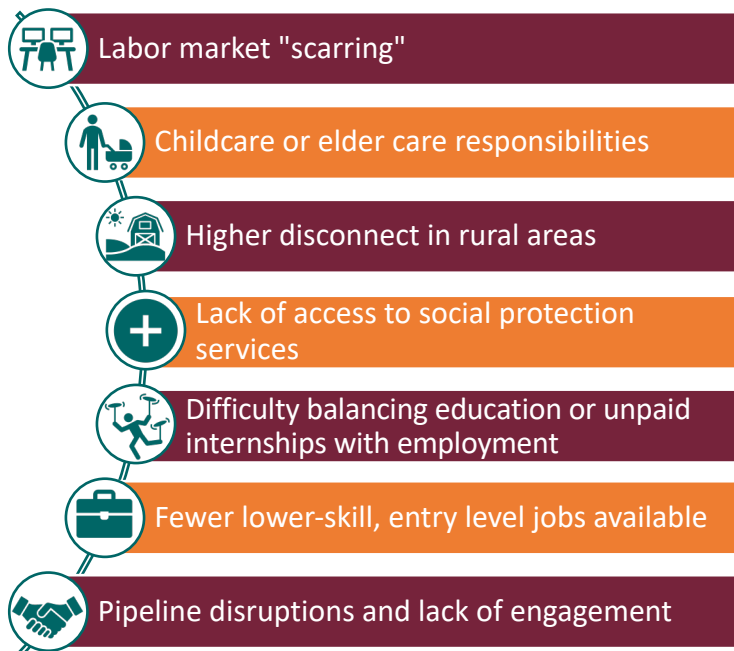
The top occupations for youth working are fast food counter workers, cashiers, stockers, waitstaff, and hosts. These positions are generally low part-time wage jobs with minimal previous requirements, making them accessible to high school and college-aged students, but do not allow for many opportunities for growth. Many who hold these positions do so on a cyclical basis, with high turnover as schools go in-and-out of session. However, as age increases, opportunities for higher-paid wages become available, such as office clerks, laborers, and postsecondary teachers; this is likely due to older young adults having more experience and education to qualify for these types of occupations.

Outcomes for Young Adults

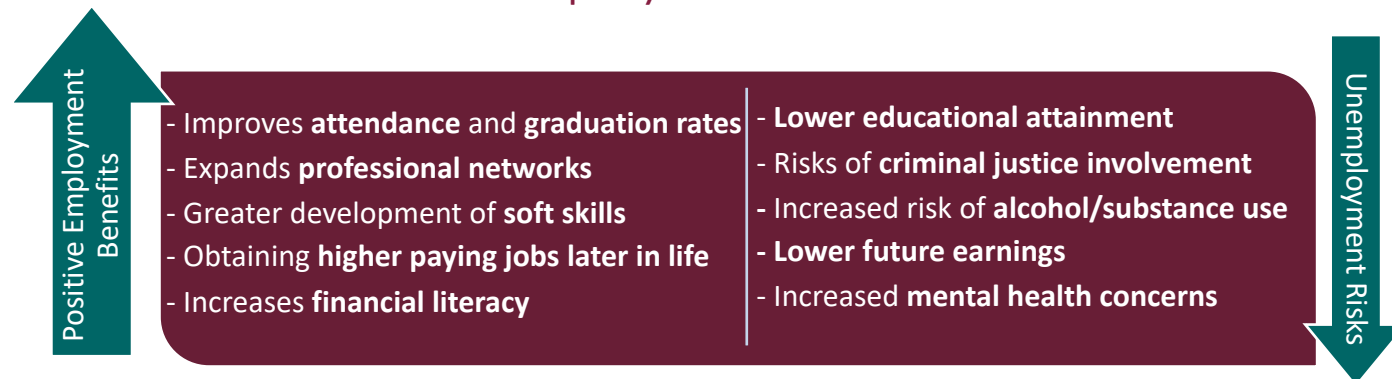
Factors that Contribute to Youth Unemployment

Between 2019-2022, young adults aged 15-24 experienced a much higher loss in employment and challenges finding employment compared to older adults. During this time, many young adults dropped out of the labor force or failed to enter it altogether. Many factors contribute to young adults not finding employment; labor market "scarring" is a major factor, which occurs when young adults are unable to find their first jobs, which ultimately affects finding meaningful employment later in life.

Strengthening social protection services to ensure other needs are being met can alleviate stressors that may prevent finding or maintaining employment, e.g. transportation or childcare services assistance. Engaging young adults prior to graduation in workforce opportunities ensures they do not become disconnected from the employment system after leaving the education system. As such youth will better understand their options, strengthening the overall workforce pipeline and encouraging more industry-needed skill development.



Outcomes for Youth Employment



High school students who work light-to-moderate hours in their senior year earn an annual income 22% higher than their unemployed counterparts (Urban Institute). The benefits to youth being employed go both ways – young people gain valuable experiences, while employers help develop the next generation of talent on which their growth relies. Negative outcomes for youth not employed include higher risk of criminal justice involvement, substance use, and feelings of uncertainty.

Each year, each young adult not employed costs...	\$13,900	\$37,450
	...in tax burdens	...in social burdens for lost productivity
Therefore, estimated total costs in Region 2 for youth unemployment would be...	\$4.8M	\$13.2M

The outcomes for youth employment for the local economy are important. Having a large population of disadvantaged youth leads to lower economic growth, lower tax revenues, and higher governmental spending. The impact this has on generational wealth and development is important as well. Without access to resources to find employment, young adults will have increased risks and barriers throughout their lives, leading to higher risks for the community as well.

Regional Programs



[GO Virginia Region 2 Talent Collaborative](#)

An extensive workforce training program to develop talent and remain competitive in the region. Focuses on stimulating economic growth by closing the skill and interest gap in middle/high-skilled occupations in manufacturing, healthcare, and IT. All counties in Region 2 are included in this program.



[Developing a Destination for Talent - Virginia Tech](#)

A program that connects Virginia Tech undergraduate students to regional employers and highlights current job opportunities, internship positions, and reduces hiring and training costs. The program serves Floyd, Giles, Montgomery County and the City of Radford in Region 2.



[Mt. Rogers Regional Educational Program](#)

A GED program that also has Career Readiness Certification preparation for participants and training opportunities. Available for those over the age of 18. The program serves Bland, Carroll, Grayson, Smyth, Washington, and Wythe County and the Cities of Bristol and Galax.



[Regional Health Sciences Talent Pipeline](#)

An initiative to meet growing needs of regional employers in the healthcare and life sciences sectors to find and hire qualified workers. The program involves widespread business-education collaborations, increasing the number of graduates in relevant programs, and formalizing the healthcare talent pipeline. The program serves Montgomery, Floyd, Pulaski, and Giles County in Region 2.



[Stopping the Brain Drain Strategy Development](#)

A GOVA program that works through the Roanoke Regional Partnership that is focused on boosting skilled occupational employment, retaining college talent in the region, increasing net migration, and both retaining and attracting regional jobs. Priority is seeking to close the data gap on why recent graduates leave the region. All counties in Region 2 are included in this program.



[People Inc.](#)

A youth employment program for ages 14-24. The program enhances workforce readiness skills, connects young adults to paid internships and training opportunities, and aids them in exploring future careers. The program serves Bland, Carroll, Grayson, Smyth, Washington, and Wythe County and the Cities of Bristol and Galax.



[Ignite](#)

An internship program through the United Way of Southwest Virginia for middle and high school aged students, focusing on both occupational and industry awareness as they prepare to graduate. The program serves Pulaski and Giles County and the City of Radford in Region 2.

United Way of
Southwest Virginia
UnitedWaySWVA.org

Strategies for Improved Outcomes for Youth

Literature outlining best practices for overcoming the long-term difficulties of youth retention across rural areas highlight the implementation of programs aimed to support students, as well as strategies for preventing the phenomenon of Brain Drain.

Youth Programming



Energy Express: This 6-week summer program is a partnership between AmeriCorps and West Virginia University Cooperative Extension for elementary school students in rural, low-income areas of WV. Students attend the program for 3.5 hours per day, 5 days a week. It strives to **both improve academic and social skills**, as well as combat food insecurity by providing two meals per day. College-aged volunteers run the program, which also **builds personal relationships and investment in the communities they are serving, making them more likely to return or serve other similar areas.**

Community Identity Building: Students in rural, low-income communities often find themselves feeling bored and disconnected by the lack of recreational, educational, and employment opportunities available. **Cultivating a culture of place and community identity in classrooms** through texts and writing prompts positively reframe how youth view their role within their communities. Fostering these types of connections **empowers students as agents of change.** It allows them to write their own stories and construct a narrative of their lives while overcoming negative stereotypes about living in underserved rural areas. **Students with a sense of pride and ideas of a positive future are more likely to create positive change in their communities.**



Project LAUNCH: Poverty and health disparities in Appalachia, as well as a culture of self-reliance, present barriers to success for children from an early age, increasing the risk of negative outcomes. Project LAUNCH (Linking Action to Unmet Needs) takes a two-pronged approach through workforce development to equip teachers with trauma-informed behavioral management strategies and increasing resilience in school children through skills such as initiative, attachment, and self-control. **The project aims to foster resiliency and overcome the negative behavioral outcomes associated with early childhood trauma.**

Counteracting Brain Drain

Who Comes Home? Social identities such as **gender and socioeconomic status influence the likelihood of recent graduates moving home in rural areas.** Leaders should explore the employment opportunities available in economies with distinct gender gaps alongside the career aspirations of local youth to better align the economy to the future workforce. Financial incentives can also attract people with higher incomes to return home to start new businesses. Such monetary benefits not only attract migration to rural areas, but also **show youth what a thriving small business community looks like, promoting the return of future college students.**

- Females acting as caretakers
- Rural college graduates from low-density communities with fewer college-educated adults
- If someone is receiving financial incentives to return back home

**More likely to
return home**

**More likely to
leave home**

- Men who obtain a degree in a traditional, declining industry, like manufacturing or agriculture
- African American students
- If income will increase by living elsewhere

Conclusion

Recommendations for Young Adult Employment

Implementing successful strategies that have worked for comparable regions as well as growing existing programs in Region 2 can assist in increasing opportunities for youth in the region. The pipeline from graduation to finding employment is a pivotal moment in a young person's life and can greatly influence their futures. Efforts to improve youth employment in Region 2 should focus on the existing strengths in the region, matching youth to dominant, well-paying industries, and increasing support for young adult programs. The following recommendations are based on successful best practices and address the weaknesses in the young adult pipeline to grow regional opportunities and improve young adult achievements.

Increase access to employment to prevent labor market “scarring”

- By having opportunities offered starting at a younger age, young adults are able to gain skills and explore their interests, increasing the likelihood of meaningful employment later in life.

Improve the pipeline prior to graduation

- Intentional programming is needed; this include worksite visits, employer career days in school, and awareness of regional post-secondary opportunities at both community colleges and 4-year institutions.

Encourage better community connections for youth

- Cultivating a community identity in classrooms positively reframes how youth relate to their communities, creating a sense of pride and a greater likelihood of creating positive change locally.

Focus not only on academic growth, but development of social skills as well

- Programs such as Energy Express and Project LAUNCH are successful because of the additional focus on building personal relationships and empowerment for youth.

Prioritize youth programs that focus on target industries

- Programs such as the GOVA Region 2 Talent Collaborative and the Regional Health Sciences Talent Pipeline strengthen the employment pipeline by establishing relationships to strong regional industries.

Counteract local brain drain

- Leaders can explore employment opportunities alongside the career aspirations of local youth to better align the economy to the future workforce, rather than the opposite, to increase retention.



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