

THE GEORGE W. BUSH INSTITUTE-SMU ECONOMIC GROWTH INITIATIVE
AT
THE GEORGE W. BUSH INSTITUTE

BOLSTERING NORTH AMERICA'S COMPETITIVENESS

VIA A COORDINATED APPROACH
TO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

RECOMMENDATIONS

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GEORGE W. BUSH INSTITUTE-SMU ECONOMIC GROWTH INITIATIVE

The Bush Institute-SMU Economic Growth Initiative combines the public policy expertise of the George W. Bush Institute and the academic expertise of SMU. The joint initiative draws from economic policy-making experience at the highest levels and from cutting edge academic research to identify ideas for promoting innovation, entrepreneurship, and faster, more inclusive growth through global competitiveness and sound immigration policy.

NORTH AMERICAN STRATEGY FOR COMPETITIVENESS (NASCO)

North American Strategy for Competitiveness (NASCO) is the only tri-national membership organization focused on the competitiveness of North America's supply chains, environment, and skilled workforce. NASCO is the leading network of North American governments, business, and educational institutions, driven by a common interest in collaboration along commercial corridors and trade networks. Founded in 1994, NASCO advances North America's competitiveness in the global marketplace. Learn more at www.NASCONetwork.com.

Canada, Mexico, and the United States have long partnered to compete in the global marketplace. However, the countries have different systems for recognizing skilled trades and funding, administering, and certifying training. In an integrated North America where companies operate across the three countries, this ingrained inefficiency reduces our global competitiveness. A shifting global economy has made the issue increasingly urgent as countries look to re-shore supply chains and, as a result, need to ensure that their workforces have the necessary skills.

RECOMMENDATIONS

While the three countries have different approaches to workforce development, there is an opportunity for trilateral cooperation to ensure that career and technical education (CTE) produces the requisite skills in the right places. Better collaboration and alignment across North America could create a more flexible and better prepared workforce. Specifically, such integration could lead to higher employment rates for opportunity populations, better opportunities for re-skilling, lower training costs, and a more mobile labor force created by industrial investment flows.

Recognizing that harmonization and consistency across borders is essential to efficiency and competitiveness, North American businesses already standardize and streamline their labor practices. A commitment by the three governments to create a unified apprenticeship program would build confidence and attract private sector investment toward a public-private partnership which is necessary to implement the following recommendations:

- The United States, Canada, and Mexico should pilot adopting a single credential within a given industry.
- Labor and economic agencies at the Federal and state/provincial levels should partner with private sector and labor interests to inform the creation of this credential.
- This pilot credential should be tested with one or more businesses currently hiring and operating in all three countries.
- This pilot should lead to the development of a trilateral, North American apprenticeship program.

The opportunity to convene the United States Office of Apprenticeships, Mexico's National College of Technical Professional Education (CONALEP), and Canada's Excellence in Manufacturing Consortium (EMC) around a single credential within a given industry is the first step to multinational alignment for apprenticeships. Leveraging the collaborative nature of the governments and credentialing industries can produce a replicable strategy for a North American apprenticeship program. Engagement among the three organizations and relevant stakeholders should include the following:

- Discussion at the trilateral level, both nationally and subnationally, to support labor force development in the skilled trades and worker movement across borders.
- Consultation with workforce development stakeholders, such as employers, workers, and educators, to develop a plan on these shared goals.

- Cooperative development of solutions that are holistic but also flexible enough to address regional labor force pressures and challenges.

Marketing the benefits of CTE programs to young people is also of increasing importance. Along with earning high wages, workers stand to benefit greatly from rewarding experiences with upward mobility and career-track potential. The misconception that singular training puts workers on a dead-end trajectory needs to be removed from our North American mindset. This marketing effort should be multifaceted with collaboration from the education sector, business, industry, and the three federal governments.

The United States, Canada, and Mexico should strive to create aligned industry credentials across North America, with apprenticeships as a focus. This is an ambitious undertaking that will require full engagement from federal and state/provincial labor and economic policy agencies, as well as extensive consultation with the private sector and labor interests.

An important next step for this work is to create a pilot with one or more business partners who currently hire and manufacture in all three countries. There are a number of efforts along these lines already in train; as a result, we believe that the private sector effort will respond to a clear intergovernmental signal. This partnership will enable the governments to observe current training practices and explore how international apprenticeships across borders could provide focused and intentional paths to upskilling opportunity populations, strengthening the global competitiveness of North American industry.

At minimum, aligned multinational apprenticeships could bring clarity around the common skills necessary in all three countries in specific industries. In particular, the transportation, logistics, and manufacturing sectors offer intriguing possibilities for credentialing alignment. Devising mutually recognized credentials that are to industry standards for all three countries would increase the talent pipeline beyond local communities as North America competes in the global marketplace.



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