# National Commission on Innovation & Competitiveness Frontiers

## *Key Takeaways from Phase 2 Working Groups*

*Working Group 4*
### The Future of Place Based Innovation: Broadening and Deepening the U.S. Innovation Ecosystem

## Session 2: October 18th, 2023

*Discussion during this session focused on expanding and retaining local talent bases.*

### I. KEY THEMES

*Working Group discussion identified several key themes during the first session:*

1) **Building talent throughout the workforce pipeline**, including upskilling workers and identifying young talent.

2) **Increasing the diversity of the innovation workforce** through targeted engagement and partnerships.

3) **Creatively defining regions** to broaden collaborations and open new connections.

4) **Incentivizing development and investment in new communities** by building additional financial and innovative capacity.

### II. PRELIMINARY IDEAS & POTENTIAL RECOMMENDATIONS

**Building talent throughout the workforce pipeline**

- Identify talent early in the pipeline through things like prep academies, teachers colleges, and K-12 programs; utilize remote education and online programs to build workforce down the pipeline.

- Use economic development resources to upskill existing workers, leveraging contributions from universities, community colleges, and K-12 institutions.

- Invest in programs to fill foundational knowledge gaps, particularly targeting rural communities; investments often focus on "sexy" areas like advanced manufacturing,

when the knowledge and skills don't exist for traditional manufacturing. To capitalize on these advanced technology investments, communities need foundational knowledge.

**Increasing the diversity of the innovation workforce**

• Engage community colleges and HBCUs in workforce development activities. These institutions are not only crucial for providing deep skilling, but will also help to increase the diversity of the workforce and bring new perspectives.

• Partner with Tribal communities to learn from their economic development lessons; these communities often have robust economic development programs and can share valuable teachings, especially for upskilling and reskilling.

• Balance retaining talent with bringing in new perspectives; while retaining talent can be beneficial for a consistent supply of labor, hiring new individuals with differing backgrounds (e.g., immigrants) will increase diversity and broaden perspectives.

**Creatively defining regions**

• Redefine regions to eliminate unnecessary geographic restrictions and enable new collaborations; for example, the National Science Foundation (NSF) encouraged grant applicants to define regions broadly, from a few counties to several states — whatever fit the context of their application.

• Take advantage of new remote work opportunities to artificially increase density in communities that may struggle to attract physical workers.

• Assemble distributed teams across regions and states that can overcome local political barriers; this allows communities to build capacity, recognizing that not every place can develop all of the required innovation assets.

• Eliminate barriers to collaboration across political jurisdictions; working with entities across counties, much less states, can be administratively difficult. Easing these burdens will allow for fruitful new collaborations.

• Build regional definitions by topic rather than geographic location; utilize anchor institutions to act as leverage points for individuals and organizations across the country.

**Incentivizing development and investment in new communities**

• Create stronger incentives to catalyze the formation of angel investor communities; while the investors and capital to create investment clusters exist, many places lack the incentives and support to actually form these communities. A federal program could

match angel investor dollars for a limited time; this would allow the community and networks to form without requiring continuous funding.

- Encourage the formation and co-location of incubator programs and technology-focused organizations; for example, in Idaho, the Trailhead incubator, the technology conference HackFort, and other entrepreneurial organizations have coalesced to form an intentionally-designed, innovation-driven environment. Capitalizing on unique regional assets and identities can help to attract these types of organizations.

- Leverage the national laboratory system to increase capacity across communities. Laboratories have expertise across a wide range of fields, from STEM education to economic development and beyond. Laboratories can unify regions by providing foundational and targeted capacity support.