

# JobsNet

## Career Launch Council Study

December 2007



The Business Council  
of Fairfield County

*Strengthening Businesses. Strengthening Communities.*



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### About JobsNet

The region has both a labor and a talent shortage that is projected to grow significantly over the next 15 years. The high cost of living and severe highway congestion limit the region's ability to recruit workers through relocation or longer distance commuting. While we are fortunate to be an international immigration magnet, the arriving workforce does not fit easily into the available positions in our knowledge-based, technology-driven economy. Most importantly, most immigrants have a lack of English language proficiency and a poor skills fit with well paying jobs in the local labor market. The problem is exacerbated by fragmented media markets, limited mass transit services, and municipally-focused support networks (community-based organizations, libraries adult education programs, etc.) in a regionally-focused labor market. The impending retirements of "boomers" will make the problem even more difficult to solve.

JobsNet is a managed network of resource organizations that will help employers recruit, train and retain employees. Its activities are directed by the JobsNet Council, a team of employers, training providers, educational institutions, constituent services groups, and public agencies.

The JobsNet initiative links resources and opportunities to the needs of employers and workers. Three industries have been identified as having immediate and growing labor needs: retail, health care and financial services. In the short term, improved information sharing will reduce some of the current labor market inefficiencies. Longer term, the initiative will seek to build a workforce community culture that views all vacancies as entry points into a regional career ladder, while training and education opportunities will be tailored not just to assure entry-level proficiency, but also to enable upward mobility.

More information is available at [www.coastalfairfieldcounty.org](http://www.coastalfairfieldcounty.org) and at [www.businessfairfield.com](http://www.businessfairfield.com).

### About One Coast, One Future

The JobsNet Council is a component of the *One Coast, One Future* initiative, a cooperative effort between the public and private sectors in Fairfield County, Connecticut. Its focus is to stimulate economic growth, job creation and individual economic opportunity by linking the Coastal Fairfield County region's business centers in a new and stronger alliance for their mutual benefit. The *One Coast, One Future* initiative is a partnership of the Bridgeport Regional Business Council and the Business Council of Fairfield County in cooperation with the Greater Norwalk Chamber of Commerce.

The *One Coast, One Future* initiative of Coastal Fairfield County is funded through a grant from the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA). SBA's funding should not be construed as an endorsement of any products, opinions, or services. All SBA-funded projects are extended to the public on a nondiscriminatory basis.



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## **One Coast, One Future JobsNet Career Launch Council Study**

### **Executive Summary**

Connecticut has lost a higher percentage of the 25-34 year old population (including a proportionate number of college graduates) since 2000 than any other state in the nation. The purpose of this initiative is to identify reasons for the talent out-migration of graduates from the seven colleges and universities in Fairfield County and to create strategies and make recommendations designed to make the region a more attractive and career-destination environment for young professionals.

### **Goals and objectives**

- Identify the college graduate cohort targeted by this report in terms of age, career preferences and priorities.
- Determine most effective methods of communication with this group.
- Identify strategies and best practices nationally and regionally that are successful in helping to reverse the talent out-migration.
- Recommendations for reversing the talent and brain drain of young college graduates and professionals from Fairfield County.

### **Findings**

- The talent-drain and out-migration of college graduates from their native states is a common problem throughout the United States. Regionally, states in the Midwest, the Great Plains, and the Northeast are suffering the largest loss of young college graduates. According to U.S. Census out-migration patterns, at least 33 states were "net exporters" of residents age 25 to 39 between 1995 and 2000.
- According to the 2000 U.S. Census data, the percentage of college graduates in the age 20-34 demographic in Fairfield County who left the state was 18.2 percent. Out-migration totals from the adjusted Census data in 2005 dropped slightly to 15.7 percent for the same cohort.
- Connecticut mitigates the effect of its young professional talent drain by its status as a net importer of college graduates, particularly in Fairfield County. The reason: the growth of large financial services companies that have located in Southwestern Fairfield County.
- Nation-wide, states are taking actions and initiatives to keep their best college graduates at home. These retention initiatives range from merit-based scholarships to in-state colleges and universities to commitments from individuals states to reimburse students for tuition costs or tax credits in exchange for a commitment to work in the state after graduation for a prescribed number of years.
- Other initiatives range from business plan competitions that allow students to network and show case their talent for regional employers to state supported marketing campaigns promoting their regions as ideal place to live, work and play.
- The state of Connecticut does fund merit scholarships awarded to its highest achieving high school students in the form of the "Nutmeg" scholarship and "Day of Pride" scholarships to its highest minority high school student achievers. There is

also tuition scholarships awarded by the University of Connecticut for the students with the highest-grade averages in their graduating classes. Yet, there are no initiatives from the state to retain college graduates involving tax credits or tuition debt reimbursements in exchange for remaining in the state for a set number of years.

## **Best Practices**

- **Florida Trends NEXT:** “Your Future After High School in Florida.” The state of Florida publishes this magazine targeting high school students that offers a variety of tips on everything from taking job interviews to college scholarships and financial aid and loan sources. The magazine is sponsored by several state agencies including the Department of Education, Workforce Florida, and the state Lottery Commission that provides funding for merit scholarships to attend Florida colleges and universities.
- **“Weekly Options of Tampa Bay”** – A Tampa Bay, Florida Internet database provides a daily calendar of events throughout the city on a monthly basis and upgraded as events are scheduled. Events range from a networking night for young professionals at the Tampa Bay Devil Rays baseball game to a wine tasting and an evening with renowned author, Norman Mailer. Email subscription is free. Website is supported by paid advertising. [www.TampaOptions.com](http://www.TampaOptions.com).
- Several states are now offering future college graduates tax credits or reimbursement of tuition loans as incentives to stay and work in the state. Maine will become the first state to offer graduates a tax credit of about \$5000 a year if they will stay in the state to work for an extended number of years.
- Pennsylvania attracts of the highest numbers of out-of-state students to its colleges but was losing those graduates to jobs after graduation. Three years ago, the state set up Keystone Innovation Zones (KIZ) to give grants to partnerships between universities and their surrounding communities including businesses and private foundations.
- Some states like Nebraska are trying to link people and jobs in a brain regain effort by tapping its alumni and surveying their reasons for leaving the state. In the last 10 years, the state has targeted alumni through its Nebraska-focused job site, [Careerlink.org](http://Careerlink.org), and by contracting Nebraskan expatriates with mailings, luncheons and job fairs to induce them to return to the state.
- The Iowa Legislature this past year created the Generation Iowa Commission to tap 18-35 years olds for ideas on how to keep native college graduates in the state. More than 250 people applied for one of the commission’s 15 spots.
- The Business Council of New York State Inc. conducted an on-line survey of seniors graduating in the spring 2007 from the state university system. The survey was an effort to learn about job plans and prospects for the graduates. Surveys of this type are needed to identify reasons for the brain drain and how it might be reversed.

## Recommendations

- Create and implement a Fairfield County campaign to develop strategies to reverse the talent drain of graduates leaving the state as well as raising the number of graduates from State postsecondary institutions. Convene a task force (“Connecticut Talent Keepers”) of representatives from business, colleges and secondary schools to be responsible for developing strategies to attract and retain young professionals in Coastal Fairfield County.
- Create and implement a Fairfield County promotion and marketing initiative to highlight recreation options for young college graduates that offers suggestions and ideas for local recreation, young professional networking events, and learning more about the varied attractions of Fairfield County. One example of creative marketing: See Best Practice section – “Weekly Options of Tampa Bay.”
- Create and operate a permanent student – employer internship committee to advise business and academic community about how to improve the internship environment among the seven Fairfield County-based colleges and universities.
- In collaboration with the alumni associations and career departments comprised of the seven Fairfield County –located colleges and universities, conduct an annual survey of both graduating seniors and graduates to determine their career plans including jobs in-state or out of state and what types of inducements would these young professionals want to start their careers in Connecticut?
- Promote a collaborative effort among the business community and the colleges and universities based in Fairfield County to improve the viability of the college internship program. The Business Council of Fairfield County took the lead in 2007 to form an initiative – the Internship Stakeholders Dialogue – comprised of representatives of local colleges and employers, to identify challenges to the internship system and take actions to make the system more responsive and effective for students and employers alike.

## I. Introduction

The Southwestern Connecticut economy is changing at an unprecedented pace, influenced more than ever by the needs and trends of the global economy. The ability to innovate and respond to change in a timely manner requires vision, perspective, and an understanding of these trends based on the most current data. As Southwestern Connecticut's Workforce Investment Board, The Workplace, Inc., is charged with guiding the region's workforce development systems. To that end, The Workplace constantly examines regional workforce dynamics and engages partners in crafting innovative solutions to the most urgent issues facing individuals in the labor force and employers seeking qualified labor. In the Workplace's 2006 Community & Needs Assessment report, it identifies several of the major trends combining to drive change in Southwestern Connecticut:

**The aging workforce.** The Southwest's workforce is old and aging, and large numbers of highly skilled workers are expected to retire in the near future. With the first of the 77 million baby boomers turning 60 in 2007, the U.S. Bureau of Labor estimates 10 million jobs will go unfilled in 2010 as the first wave of boomers retires.

**The surge in immigration.** More than 50,000 immigrants arrived in Fairfield and New Haven counties in the first half of this decade. These immigrants have become critical to keeping certain sectors of the Southwest economy afloat, but with focus and support they also hold the potential to propel the region forward.

**The widening gap between the haves and the have-nots.** The fastest growth in the Southwest is in high-wage occupations such as Financial Service and Health Care and in low-wage occupations such as retail and hospitality. Combined with a serious academic achievement gap, this has prevented many Southwest residents from enjoying the benefits of one of the wealthiest regions in the world.

**Technology.** In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, we live in a rapidly changing, global information age where the basic understanding of technology is critical to survival or advancement in almost any field. Too many of our region's workers simply do not have the necessary technology skills to succeed.

**Innovation.** Due to global competition, innovation is essential to creating a thriving economy. The regional workforce investment system must partner with employers to devise innovative approaches to using the workforce to increase competitiveness.

**Regional and Global Integration.** Southwest Connecticut is a vital part of the dynamic tri-state metropolitan area which is in turn a major global center, especially in finance, health care, and the arts. Cross-commuting and economic integration with New York is up substantially as major financial firms have migrated to the southern portion of the region. Leveraging this competitive advantage will be one key to increasing success.

The Workplace's report also examines the sectors driving the regional economy and creating the most jobs – financial services, health care, leisure and hospitality and retail – and what needs to be done to support this growth and ensure that it benefits resident of the region. Manufacturing, though in continued decline in numbers of jobs, remains a major force in the regional economy. The report confirms that significant issues remain – namely deficits in basic technology and workplace skills of a large segment of the population; the growing population without English language fluency and skill gaps and shortages specific to certain sectors.

The following report addresses one solution to building a more competitive and dynamic workforce for the Southwest region.

**a) Background on Study.**

This initiative is part of the One Coast One Future project that seeks to stimulate economic growth, job creation and individual economic opportunity by linking the Coastal Fairfield County region's business centers in an alliance for mutual benefit. The One Coast One Future project is funded by a Small Business Administration grant secured by Congressman Christopher Shays.

A consortium formed by the Bridgeport Regional Business Council and The Business Council of Fairfield County, One Coast seeks to spark new and renewed growth through cooperation yet venue-appropriate efforts. The interdependency of Bridgeport, Stamford and Norwalk is based upon infrastructure, commutation patterns, housing cost differentials, employment trends, communications, Long Island Sound coastal locations and share health care providers, higher education institutions and transportation services. The combined region is statistically among the wealthiest in the country. Thirty years of economic growth in Stamford has come to a virtual halt in the fact of structural issues that must be addressed while the perennially struggling city of Bridgeport is increasingly recognized as having great potential and is gradually building momentum for sustained economic growth. Norwalk, the third largest city in the region, has developed a strong retail sector and a rapidly developing corporate office building sector, yet faces many of the same issues facing Stamford and Bridgeport.

One Coast One Future's long-term plan consists of eight key objectives. Four of those objectives are managed by the Bridgeport Regional Business Council, including developing a comprehensive economic development strategy; a marketing campaign focused on development and housing opportunities, and cultural and entertainment opportunities; and encouraging growth of minority and women-focused business development groups.

The Business Council of Fairfield County (BCFC) is managing four additional objectives including creation of a growth strategy for jobs in the healthcare sector; enhancing the quality of the region's workforce through improvement and expansion of services from local colleges and universities through establishment of a Higher Education Council, creation of a wi-fi network in city centers and a linkage of employer needs with available employee skills through the JobsNet program.

The "Career Launch" initiative is one of the JobsNet programs managed by BCFC.

**b) The One Coast One Future region.**

For purposes of this study, the One Coast region is comprised of 20 communities covering 462.3 square miles that include Ansonia, Beacon Falls, Bridgeport, Darien, Derby, Easton, Fairfield, Greenwich, Monroe, New Canaan, Norwalk, Oxford, Seymour, Shelton, Stamford, Stratford, Trumbull, Weston, Westport, and Wilton. These communities form the service area of The Workplace, Inc, the Southwest Connecticut Workforce Investment Board area of responsibility, due to this study's emphasis on workforce development.

Although this narrow geographic definition has been chosen for research purposes, the One Coast region is best understood in relation to the larger New York-New Jersey Metropolitan Area which stretches from New Haven to Princeton, New Jersey. The Connecticut Economic

Resources Center (CERC) describes the One Coast region as satellite urban-suburban center linked to the greater New York Metropolitan Area. In terms of labor market, firm location decisions and economic development opportunities, this perspective changes the view about individual and firm behavior. As has been the case with the finance industry, the region's location and labor market within the New York-New Jersey Metropolitan area present significant employment opportunities for the age 22-34 Connecticut college graduate demographic.

### **c) Methodology.**

The Business Council of Fairfield County (BCFC) retained Robert S. Stokes, a workforce consultant, to work with a Steering Committee composed of local and regional stakeholders in business, labor, workforce development, and the individual communities in the One Coast One Future region to develop a set of recommendations about how to retain our young college graduates and encourage them to achieve their career goals within Connecticut. The Steering Committee, with direction and support from the consultant, will seek to develop a set of recommendations regarding the retention of Connecticut college graduates and reversing the talent drain based on a review of extensive demographic data, a literature search of national and regional trends involving best practices as well as the opinions of experts about strategies for retaining young college graduates and encouraging them to start their careers in the state and specifically Fairfield County

### **d) Study Framework.**

The project is administered by the Business Council of Fairfield County and conducted in cooperation with the Bridgeport Regional Business Council, and other affected and interested organizations and agencies. A project steering committee, **JobsNet "Career Launch" Council**, was formed in May 2007 to work with The Business Council of Fairfield County's designated consultant on this effort. The steering committee agreed to be available for consultation and to meet frequently during the period of the grant to interact with the consultant regarding new and relevant research about Connecticut college graduates, age 22-34 demographic and strategies for reversing the talent drain, nationally and regionally. The steering committee also agreed to provide any other input regarding best practices or research to make the report relevant and actionable.

- Steering Committee: The initial meeting of the Steering Committee was held on May 11, 2007. The members of the committee who attended included:

Jonathan Crovo, Congressman Shays Office  
Kurt Peterson, Gibbs College  
Patrick Boland, Norwalk Community College  
Karen Laurel, Purdue Pharma  
Kathleen Walsh, Stamford Partnership  
Kim Trubenbacher, UBS  
Kindra Jones, Peoples's United Bank  
Timothy Dowding, UCONN CITI  
Halina Hollyway, UCONN, Stamford  
Other members added to the Steering Committee included:  
David Rosenthal, Blum Shapiro  
Lloyd Fremed, Scan and Print with Xerox  
Karen Ross, Advantage Human Resources

- Stakeholder outreach: The consultant, with support from the Steering committee, will conduct outreach meetings with local, state and federal officials, companies and other key stakeholders for the purpose of understanding reasons why college graduates choose to leave the state and Fairfield County for career opportunities and the viability of potential solutions.
- Focus groups: The consultant will conduct focus groups with college graduates from Fairfield County universities, other colleges and local companies to identify reasons for staying in Connecticut or leaving to pursue other employment opportunities.
- Literature review: The consultant, with recommendations from the Steering Committee, will conduct in-depth research and review of literature published within the last five years regarding the subject of college graduate talent drain from Connecticut and national best practices used by other states to retain local college graduates in the 22-34 age demographic.

e) **Study goals and objectives:**

Fairfield County has lost a higher percentage of the 25-34 year old population demographic (including a large number of college graduates) since 2000 than any other state in the nation. We must find a strategy to make Fairfield County a more attractive and career-building environment in order to enable our region to stop the talent and brain drain.

The objective of the JobsNet "Career Launch" council is to define the population of recent college graduates; identify more effective methods of communicating with them; leverage alumni programs managed by local colleges; recommend ways to establish a program of regular contacts among local employers and younger workers; and survey young adults who grew up in the region about why they did not return to Connecticut after college graduation to seek employment here.

- Research questions to be answered:
  - ✓ Why are recent college graduates leaving the state for employment elsewhere?
  - ✓ Identify and define why some Fairfield County employers are more successful in recruiting local graduates than other companies?
  - ✓ What strategies and best practices are being employed in other states that are successful in retaining in state college graduates for employment?
  - ✓ What strategies can be devised and implanted to reverse Connecticut's college graduate talent drain and recapture the state's "best and brightest?"

## **II. Population migration trends and implications for the workforce.**

Population change at every geographic level in the United States and elsewhere is strongly influenced by migration, both domestic and international. Young adults, particularly those between the age of 25 and 39 constitute a large share of migrants perhaps because they are less risk-averse and have a longer time horizon to recoup an “investment” in migration. Their migration choices may be influenced by housing or employment preferences, or simply preferences for a particular set of local amenities including quality of life or the proximity to friends and family. For the purposes of this initiative, we are focusing on the migration of young, single adults who possess at least a bachelor’s degree. Young, single college-educated adults may be more willing to relocate in order to meet economic or lifestyle demands than married individuals who could be constrained by location preferences of a spouse. Understanding the migration trends of this group and how they differ from other parts of the population offers insights for states and regions about how to retain the “human capital” these young college graduates represent.

Regions all over the country are taking actions and initiatives to keep their best students at home, attract talented workers from out of state, and create an environment that will allow local economies to grow and prosper. These brain-drain reduction initiatives range from merit-based scholarships encouraging students to attend regional universities and colleges to commitments from individual states to reimburse students for tuition costs or tax credits in exchange for a commitment to work in the state after graduation for three or four years. Private industry is collaborating with new university campuses on research initiatives to attract the best and the brightest science and engineering students to put down career roots. Other initiatives range from business plan competitions that allow students to network and showcase their talents for regional employers to state supported marketing campaigns promoting their regions as ideal places to live, work and play. These collaborations of the academic, government and private sector will result in shaping the future of our cities and states for years to come.

### **a) National trends**

A “brain drain” of young, college graduates is one of the most difficult challenges facing a majority of states throughout the country. Regionally, states in the Midwest, the Great Plains and the Northeast are getting hit particularly hard with the exodus of college-educated residents. Between 1995 and 2000 at least 33 states were “net exporters” of residents ages 25 to 39. The beneficiaries of this talent migration were in the West and South, home of the top 10 states that took in more young people than they lost. Nevada, Colorado and Georgia – with major cities such as Las Vegas, Denver and Atlanta – led the list.

To reverse the loss of such a valuable human asset, as well as the loss of tax revenues, states are trying solutions that range from granting financial incentives to graduates to stay, to creating new jobs to keep and attract new workers, to improving the quality of living, working and social life in each respective state. The problem for states is that there’s no strategic road map for these initiatives that has succeeded in the past. Maine is considering an initiative to give future college graduates a hefty tax credit to help pay back their student loans if they stay and work in the state after graduation. The incentive could amount to a yearly tax credit of just under \$5000 over the course of ten years. Other states have experimented with forgiving the loans of college graduates who remain in-state, but those programs usually have been targeted at specific jobs such as doctors or math and science teachers or directed at rural areas. The Pennsylvania Legislature, for

example, is weighing currently a bill to forgive doctors' medical school tuition if they practice in the state for 10 years. Both North Dakota and Iowa in recent years flirted with proposals to exempt resident under 30 from paying state income tax. Indiana Gov. Mitch Daniels tried but failed to get approval for a scholarship program for technology graduates who promise to work in the state after graduation. Last December, a Wisconsin higher education commission recommended what it called the "big bang:" free college tuition for graduates who commit to live in the state for at least 10 years after college. The state took no action on the proposal.

Other states are focusing on jobs and collaborations with the business sector, especially in the technology sector as a chief inducement to college graduates to stay in state after graduation. California is one of the most successful practitioners of this strategy. Stanford University Research Institute laid the groundwork for Silicon Valley's technology explosion back in the 1980s. In the 1990s, the California Institutes of Science and Innovation were created by the state in a collaboration of California high-tech and life sciences businesses to maintain the state's economic growth and to expand the economy. Similar collaborations between states and academia have generated jobs and surging economies in Austin Texas and the Raleigh-Durham Triangle in North Carolina.

Nebraska is trying to link people and jobs in a brain reversal effort through former graduates. Some states are attempting to improve the quality of life in regions as a way of keeping young graduates from moving on to greener pastures. New Hampshire has created its "55% Initiative" – so named for a state-funded marketing campaign to raise the population of college graduates who stay in the state from the current 50 percent to 55 percent. State colleges are surveying students and alumni on why they chose to leave the state or stayed put.

Bruce Vandal, director of the Postsecondary Education and Workforce Development Institute in Denver, Colorado, suggests that many states need to start making efforts to recruit their best and brightest young people while still in high school. A typical strategy that many states utilize is a merit-based award initiative modeled after the HOPE Scholarships, a program based on a student's academic achievement and not on the family income. Most merit-based scholarships provide full college tuition and books allowance for students who maintain a B average through high school and college. The scholarships also encourage the students to attend colleges in their home state.

**b) State and Southwestern Fairfield County Migration Trends.**

According to the 2000 Census, the age 20-34 demographic in Fairfield County that left the state was 18.2 percent of the county population. According to new Census totals tabulated in 2005, the out-migration of 20-34 year olds dropped to 15.7 percent. Compared to other states in out-migration totals of college graduates, Connecticut makes up for its talent drain because it is a net importer of college graduates. The state's problem is related more to producing college graduates than losing them. According to Dr. Bruce Vandal, director of the Postsecondary Education and Workforce Development Institute at the Education commission of the States, Connecticut data indicates that "the state does not have an economic development challenge as much as it has a workforce development challenge. The data suggests that the real problem is not producing a sufficient number of graduates from your postsecondary institutions."

Unfortunately, the state has done little to demonstrate its awareness or intention to reverse the talent drain of college graduates. It offers nothing in way of tax credits or other financial incentives to remain in the state. The state's efforts to improve the achievement level and grade competency of high school students have not succeeded even in Fairfield County which has the highest education levels among its residents. The state does offer merit-based scholarships for its academic high achievers, but the scholarships carry no post-graduate requirements for remaining in the state. Despite the state lottery's net proceeds from fiscal year 2006 of \$284.8 million, only \$12.1 million or 4.3% was earmarked for Higher Education.

### c) **Steering Committee Discussions**

The initial meeting of the JobsNet "Career Launch" Council took place on Friday May 9, 2007, attended by Jonathan Crovo, Congressman Shays staff; Karen Laurel, Purdue Pharma; Kathleen Walsh, Stamford Partnership; Kim Trubenbacher, UBS; and the Business Council of Fairfield County staff, Chris Bruhl, President & CEO; Tanya Court, Director, Public Policy & Programs; and Bob Stokes, Consultant and Workforce Projects Manager.

Below listed in bullet format, are comments, suggestions, and recommendations from the group regarding the following questions:

- Why are recent college graduates leaving the state?
- Define a younger worker-friendly employer/ place to live.
- Best practices designed to keep young people in Connecticut after graduation.
- What can/should we do to reverse the talent/brain drain?

#### **Why are young college graduates leaving the state?**

- Proximity to NYC for lifestyle/jobs.
- High cost of housing in Fairfield County.
- Lack of efficient public transportation.
- Slow job growth/ lack of info sites identifying real time job opportunities in Fairfield County.
- Traffic congestion/ Metro North unreliability.
- Lack of affordable young family housing.
- Lack of employer presence on local college campuses.
- Career mobility.
- Lack of marketing by state or region about benefits of living/working in Fairfield County.

#### **Definition of younger worker-friendly employer?**

- Marketing of lifestyle benefits in Fairfield County.
- Providing peer interaction/entertainment, i.e., mixers for employees and non-employees.
- More sophisticated management awareness of what appeals to younger, new hires.
- Mentoring and career nurturing of young workers.
- Encouragement of upgrade of skill sets for young workers.
- Flexible work schedules
- Internal office sports and entertainment opportunities.

### **What can/should we do to reverse talent drain of young college graduates?**

- Explore more effective methods of communicating with youth, starting at high school level.
- Conduct focus groups with college seniors and new graduates who have taken jobs within Fairfield County.
- Connect with alumni career counsel groups to get input
- Form youth advisory group in Fairfield County to get feedback and make recommendations about how to reverse talent drain from state.
- Explore technology for establishing websites that provide one stop shopping for available jobs, local employers and local graduates (with resumes) seeking work.

#### **d) Results from Focus Groups.**

Two focus groups were conducted – one in July and one in August-- to survey reasons why young college graduates chose to stay in Fairfield County or seek employment out of the state.

The first focus group included seven new employees working at UBS in Stamford. Half of the group attended college in Connecticut and grew up in Fairfield County. The remainder were from out of state. Reasons why the group chose UBS for their first job out of college were, in order of importance:

- Challenge of job, career advancement potential
- Salary
- Proximity to family living in Fairfield County - Family ties were particularly important for young college graduates with large college tuition debts who were able to live at home to save on the high cost of Fairfield County housing.

Reasons why some of the group said they considered jobs out of Fairfield County:

- Lack of affordable housing.
- Traffic jams, commutation issues.
- Lack of social life for young people compared to New York City.
- A lack of information regarding things to do after work and on the weekends throughout Fairfield County.

UBS recruiters said individual faculty members of local colleges and universities often helped student job seekers to take jobs in local companies by their personal recommendations to employers regarding the student's value and job potential.

Some members of the group criticized the lack of effectiveness of their respective college career centers and job placement departments.

The second focus group involved seven undergraduate and graduate students attending UCONN, Stamford. The reasons for remaining in Fairfield County were, in order of priority:

- Salary
- Job challenge.
- Family proximity (for those who grew up in Fairfield County) and the ability to live at home to avoid housing costs.

Negative factors for staying in Fairfield County after graduation, included:

- Lack of exciting social scene in Stamford and surrounding communities in comparison to NYC only 50 minutes away by train.
- Lack of affordable housing.
- Lack of industry sector diversity. Said one student, "Fairfield County is a great place to start your career if you're interested in banking or financial services, but not marketing or public relations."
- Lack of information sources identifying after work or weekend recreation events for networking and connecting with peers.

Both focus groups said that they would be influenced to remain in the state to work following graduation if the state of Connecticut offered financial inducements including tax credits or tuition loan reimbursements.

e) **Best practices** implemented in other states that are designed to retain the best and brightest college graduates after graduation

- "Florida Trends NEXT: Your Future After High school in Florida." The state of Florida publishes this magazine targeting high school students that offers a variety of tips on everything from taking job interviews to college scholarships and financial aid and loan sources. The earlier the state starts to connect with its native sons and daughters, the better its chance of retaining home-grown talent. The magazine is sponsored by several state agencies including the Department of Education, Workforce Florida, and the state Lottery Commission that provides funding for merit scholarships to attend Florida colleges and universities. The magazine also has its own website:

[www.FloridaNEXT.com](http://www.FloridaNEXT.com).

- "Weekly Options of Tampa Bay" – A Tampa Bay, Florida Internet database that provides a daily calendar of events throughout the city put out on a monthly basis and upgraded as events are scheduled. Events range from a networking night for young professionals at the Tampa Bay Devil Rays baseball game to a wine tasting and an evening with renowned author, Norman Mailer. Email subscription is free. Website is supported by paid advertising. [www.TampaOptions.com](http://www.TampaOptions.com).

- State-funded merit-based academic scholarships – A handful of states offer scholarships for post-secondary study at in-state colleges and universities with the intention to influence post-graduate retention. Scholarships are merit-based requiring student to earn a minimum of a B average throughout high school and continue at that academic level in college.

- Several states are now offering future college graduates tax credits or reimbursement of tuition loans as incentives to stay and work in the state. Maine will become the first state to offer graduates a tax credit of about \$5000 a year if they will stay in the state to work for an extended number of years.

- Pennsylvania attracts of the highest numbers of out-of-state students to its colleges but was losing those graduates to jobs after graduation. Three years ago, the state set up Keystone Innovation Zones (KIZ) to give grants to partnerships between universities and their surrounding communities including businesses and private foundations. The zones are designed to create new businesses and jobs. There are now 26 zones with 647 Pennsylvania college graduates and interns working at companies inside the zones.
- Some states like Nebraska are trying to link people and jobs in a brain regain effort by tapping its alumni and surveying their reasons for leaving the state. In the last 10 years, the state has targeted alumni through its Nebraska-focused job site, Careerlink.org, and by contracting Nebraskan expatriates with mailings, luncheons and job fairs to induce them to return to the state.
- The Iowa Legislature this past year created the Generation Iowa Commission to tap 18-35 years olds for ideas on how to keep native college graduates in the state. More than 250 people applied for one of the commission's 15 spots.
- The Business Council of New York State Inc conducted an on-line survey of seniors graduating in the spring 2007 from the state university system. The survey was an effort to learn about job plans and prospects for the graduates. Surveys of this type are needed to identify reasons for the brain drain and how it might be reversed.

## **Recommendations**

- Create and implement a Fairfield County campaign to develop strategies to reverse the talent drain of graduates leaving the state as well as raising the number of graduates from State postsecondary institutions. A working group of representatives from business, academia to convene a meeting of stakeholders, including colleges, universities, high school students, and employers ("Keep Connecticut Talent Home") to announce formation of a retention task force that would be responsible for developing strategies for attracting and retaining young professionals .
- Create and implement a Fairfield County promotion and marketing initiative to highlight recreation options for young college graduates that offers suggestions and ideas for local recreation, young professional networking events, and learning more about the varied attractions of Fairfield County. One example of creative marketing: See Best Practice section – "Weekly Options of Tampa Bay."
- In collaboration with the alumni associations and career departments comprised of the seven Fairfield County –located colleges and universities, conduct annual survey of both graduating seniors and graduates to determine their career plans including jobs in-state or out of state and what types of

inducements would these young professionals want to start their careers in Connecticut?

- An organized and enhanced effort by local company representatives to reach out and visit students in the middle schools and high schools to encourage them to consider starting their careers in Fairfield County. The effort should also include student visits to company business sites for explanations and briefings about specific business models and academic qualifications for specific business sectors.
- A collaborative effort among the business community and the colleges and universities based in Fairfield County to improve the efficiency and viability of the college internship program. The Business Council of Fairfield County took the lead in 2007 to form an initiative – the Internship Stakeholders Dialogue – comprised of representatives of local colleges and employers, to identify challenges to the internship system and take actions to make the system more responsive and effective for students and employers alike. The initiative has already achieved a breakthrough of sorts in the issue of summer housing for interns. Through the mediation efforts of The Business Council, two Fairfield County-based universities have already offered employers rental dormitory space on campus with easy access to trains.