

Guest Comment

City work force needs attention

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by [Sallie A. Glickman](#)

In business, you know your work force is both your most valuable asset and your highest cost. In an increasingly knowledge-based economy, your talent pool is likely your key driver of success. Innovation is now the primary differentiator of U.S. companies in the global marketplace. In this context, Philadelphia has tremendous growth potential. That's because our key strategic resource -- talent -- remains largely untapped.

Granted, the statistics are daunting. In the city, 45 percent of adults are not in the labor force. One in five 16 to 24 year olds is neither in school nor working. But look at it the other way: we have 80,000 adults of prime working age (25-45) who have completed at least a year of college, but have not yet gotten a degree. We have native-born residents and new Philadelphians who are eager to learn ways to take part in our economic resurgence. We have 83 institutions of higher learning in this region, and confer over 65,000 degrees annually. We have a network of organizations dedicated to adult education, serving thousands of learners annually. We clearly have the ability to educate people and have a large pool of people who would benefit from an education.

In a report released by the Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board last week, *A Tale of Two Cities*, we present new research that shows if we can raise the educational level of Philadelphians to the statewide average, our annual wage base would grow by more than \$1.8 billion dollars. That means higher tax collections, and less pressure on city government to figure out how to meet the social needs of residents. Consider this: a person who has not finished high school costs taxpayers on average \$274,000 over their lifetimes, including over \$83,000 in criminal justice costs. A person who has completed college contributes over \$800,000 in taxes. Do the math.

Beyond a safer city and less taxes, employers would be able to tap a more nimble labor pool. Imagine searching for a skilled worker, and finding one fast. Imagine a work force more in tune with your knowledge requirements, with the savvy to acquire what you need on their own. Imagine a talent pool that compares favorably to any region, in any country. We did, and we can make it a reality.

Realizing our potential requires leadership at the highest levels, and serious local investment. Our candidates for mayor have all responded positively to our research presented in *A Tale of Two Cities* and you will see its messages embedded in their various platforms. But as we all know, campaigns are one thing and governance is another. So join us, and our next mayor, in setting and sustaining an agenda for our city and region that makes capitalizing on our talent pool our shared priority...and our shared success.

Read "A Tale of Two Cities" and make your voice heard at www.pwib.org.

Sallie A. Glickman is CEO of the Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board, a primarily federally nonprofit that funnels funds to work force programs.