Seeding a Bay Area Human Capital Lab

Mitchell L. Stevens mitchell.stevens@stanford.edu
Charlie Eaton, ceaton@stanford.edu

Stanford Graduate School of Education

The San Francisco Bay Area is one of the world’s regional economic miracles. Yet even while “Silicon Valley” is synonymous with innovation worldwide, it faces substantial challenges in sustaining its economic resilience and making opportunity widely available to all of those who live here. Neither the state of California nor the Bay Area’s regional governments have built additional capacity for higher/adult education in over a generation – even while the region’s population has swelled and its dynamic industries are constantly seeking new talent. Highly skilled workers are now sourced internationally, while hundreds of thousands of Bay Area citizens need to constantly enhance their capacities to maintain prosperity in local labor markets.¹

Enthusiasm is mounting for developing a “human capital lab” charged with maintaining our region’s economic vitality by developing new forms of lifelong learning opportunities for the Bay Area workforce. During the 2016-2017 we will work with Bay Area academic, philanthropic, and business leaders to develop coherent plan for a regional laboratory that would:

- Develop a methodology for assessing postsecondary educational capacity and human-capital needs in the Bay Area region;
- Be a mechanism for partnerships between academic and business organizations to produce top-quality lifelong learning opportunities and support their continuous improvement through iterative research;
- Develop technical protocols for data sharing, interoperability, use, and transparency among a wide diversity of adult education providers in the region to assure the quality of new learning opportunities;
- Study change over time in regional human capital capacity and forecast future needs to guide instructional research and development;
- Assess state and regional policy options and their political viability.

Through its 2015-16 “Year of Learning” initiative, Stanford University’s Vice Provost for Teaching and Learning (VPTL) already has nurtured the idea of a regional collaboration that would catalyze cooperation throughout the richly diverse but very minimally coordinated regional postsecondary ecosystem. Public forums featuring national experts and regional academic leaders have built momentum. A national forum on “inventing the future of higher education” at Stanford on 15-16 April featured keynote remarks from Governor Jerry Brown and plenary sessions with leaders from UC Berkeley, CSU and California community colleges, and several for-profit education ventures. The postsecondary educational needs of California and the promise of novel joint ventures between

academia and industry to meet them were a central focus of the convening (https://ols2016.stanford.edu/program). There has been activity throughout Northern California on creative responses to the region’s workforce needs, from MOOC providers such as Coursera, to the California Community College Online Education Initiative (http://ccconlineed.org), to the myriad coding academies flourishing under a variety of business models.

Despite this fertile contest, the idea of a regional lab to study and measure the region’s human-capital needs requires incubation to become a realizable proposition. We have secured seed funds from the UPS Endowment for Stanford University, Stanford’s Institute for Research in the Social Sciences (https://iriss.stanford.edu), and the College Futures Foundation (http://collegefutures.org) to support our work at this crucial stage in its evolution.

**Work Plan and Deliverables for 2016-2017**

*Fall/Winter 2016-17:*

-- Canvass social-science, planning, industry and policy experts throughout the region to **develop a methodology for specifying human-capital needs and adult educational provision** for the Bay Area over the next twenty-five years.

-- Conduct **outreach interviews** with researchers, philanthropists, business and academic leaders to spread word of the lab idea and seek early input.

-- **Develop proposals for ongoing funding** of the lab including government and philanthropic grants, private patronage, and industrial-affiliate mechanisms.

-- **Assemble an advisory group** with intramural and regional stakeholders to flesh out the mission, design and financial sustainability of this endeavor.

*Spring 2017*

-- **Coauthor a full proposal for a Bay Area human capital lab** that will be used to secure long-term private, philanthropic, and government funding for full realization.

-- Solicit and contribute to a series of issue briefs on policy ideas to address the Bay Area’s human capital challenges.