Akron Receives $1 Million Prize for Higher Education Attainment Increase

Number of degrees awarded rose more than 20 percent in four years

Washington, D.C., October 29, 2014—The city of Akron, Ohio, has been awarded a $1 million prize for increasing the number of residents receiving college degrees by 20.2 percent over a four-year period. Akron’s achievement was the largest increase among 57 cities participating in the Talent Dividend, a national research project designed to calculate the monetary gains cities can achieve by increasing college attainment rates.

The prize was funded by The Kresge Foundation. The Talent Dividend, a joint initiative of CEOS for Cities and Living Cities, also received support from Lumina Foundation.

The award was announced at an event in Washington, D.C., by Bruce Katz, vice president and founding director of the Metropolitan Policy Program at the Brookings Institution, and received by the Northeast Ohio Council on Higher Education (NOCHE).

The Talent Dividend used graduation data from the 2009-10 through 2012-13 academic years to track cities that made the greatest increase in the number of associate, bachelor’s and advanced degrees granted per one thousand citizens over that four-year period.

Akron’s efforts were coordinated by NOCHE, which advocates for higher education in the region and develops partnerships across the business and higher education communities. Through NOCHE, Akron worked with leaders in Cleveland, Youngstown and Canton to address issues with a regional focus, rather than a city-by-city approach. In their commitment to this collaborative effort, leaders from across the four cities agreed to split the $1 million prize across all districts in northeast Ohio.

“Increasing the number of adults with postsecondary degrees is among the most important components of northeast Ohio’s effort to revitalize its economy and reenergize the region,” said Shawn Brown, vice president of NOCHE. “We know that effort does not stop at the
Akron city limits, which is why regional collaboration across all business and education sectors is such a critical part of our work.”

To increase its education attainment rate, Akron implemented a number of strategies, including:

• Focusing on collecting, analyzing and understanding education data for all students in the region to implement strategies at specific points throughout high school that would better ensure students were prepared to enroll in college or community college and succeed once they arrived on campus.

• Developing innovative partnerships between local community colleges and public and private four-year institutions. For example, Hiram College, Akron University, Kent State University and Stark State College worked closely with Cuyahoga Community College and Lorain Community College to develop pathway programs, reverse transfer programs, layered certificates and other efforts to ensure students on all Akron-area campuses have opportunities to complete their degrees.

• Partnering beyond two- and four-year degrees to boost attainment. In addition to partnering on pipeline programs and signing articulation agreements, the Northeast Ohio Medical University developed dual enrollment programs with area institutions to meet student needs and boost graduation rates.

“The Talent Dividend project was designed to spur innovation and collaboration in U.S. cities and among institutions of higher education, and that’s exactly what led to Akron’s success,” said Noël Harmon, national director of the Talent Dividend. “Akron’s achievements should stand as an example of what can be accomplished when you focus on regional collaboration and partnership development. Congratulations are in order for each graduate and for the strengthened region.”

While college completion is important for a number of reasons, the Talent Dividend project focused specifically on the correlation between college attainment rates and per-capita income. It has been calculated that each additional percentage point improvement in aggregate adult four-year college attainment is associated with an $856 increase in annual per capita income.

“People often overlook the fact that the college attainment rate of a metro area is the single biggest factor in explaining economic success,” said William Moses, managing director for The Kresge Foundation’s Education Program. “It is extremely difficult—if not impossible—to improve a city’s economic prospects without also improving the educational attainment rate of a city’s population.”
The Kresge Foundation works to expand opportunities in America’s cities. Its Education Program promotes postsecondary access and success for low-income, first generation and underrepresented students.

Moses further stated, “I am hopeful that the success we have seen in Akron and other cities will serve as an inspiration to others as they work to increase postsecondary attainment.”

The following cities were also recognized for their work and successes in the degree attainment project:

• **Portland, Ore.** – Second-highest increase in the number of citizens with postsecondary degrees (17.6 percent).

• **The Center for Houston’s Future** – Exemplary leadership of a Talent Dividend effort

• **Buffalo-Syracuse, N.Y.** – Cross-sector/regional collaboration, in appreciation of the strength of the partnerships Say Yes to Education has built in each city

• **Louisville, Ky.** – Exemplary business collaboration, for their creation of key citywide initiatives involving business leader participation including Degrees at Work and Business Leaders for Education

• **Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana, Calif.** – Biggest increase in the share of Latino, African American and multi-racial graduates (associate degrees), representing an increase from 38 percent of all graduates in 2009-10 to 49 percent of all graduates in 2012-13

• **Orlando-Kissimmee, Fla.** – Biggest increase in the share of Latino, African American and multi-racial graduates (bachelor’s degrees), representing an increase from 22 percent of all graduates in 2009-10 to 28 percent of all graduates in 2012-13

• **Grand Rapids, Mich.** – Foundation of future success, recognizing that the city’s efforts may not yet show results, but that the city shows future promise
Resources available to the media include:

- For interview:
  - Noel Harmon, National Director, Talent Dividend
  - William F.L. Moses, Managing Director-Education, The Kresge Foundation
  - Shawn Brown, Vice President, Northeast Ohio Council on Higher Education
  - Representatives from the winning city teams and representative institutions of higher education
- High resolution photos of award presentations to all winning cities
- Video associated with the streamed awards and day-long programming
- Final report for the project
- Data set reflecting the percent increase in college degrees awarded over the last three years among all 57 participating cities

Materials and interviews requests can be coordinated through Brian Wachur (brian@tvpcommunications.com or 301-807-7723). To coordinate media inquiries that are Kresge Foundation-specific, please contact W. Kim Heron at 313-478-0197.

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**About the Talent Dividend**

The Talent Dividend was a research project designed to calculate the monetary gains cities could achieve by increasing college attainment rates. Fifty-seven cities participated in the competition, which was a joint initiative of CEOs for Cities and Living Cities and funded primarily by the Kresge Foundation and Lumina Foundation. More information, including a list of participating cities, may be found at [http://talentdividendnetwork.com/](http://talentdividendnetwork.com/).

**About the Kresge Foundation**

The Kresge Foundation is a $3 billion private, national foundation that works to expand opportunities in America’s cities through grantmaking and investing in arts and culture, education, environment, health, human services, community development and place-based efforts in Detroit. In 2013, the Board of Trustees approved 316 awards totaling $122 million; $128 million was paid out to grantees over the course of the year. In addition, Kresge’s Social Investment Practice made commitments totaling $16 million in 2013. Kresge’s Education Program promotes postsecondary access and success for low-income, first-generation and underrepresented students. For more information and to coordinate media inquiries that are Kresge Foundation-specific, please contact W. Kim Heron at (313) 478-0197.