



Greater **Minds**

Greater Opportunities. Greater Economies. Greater Communities.

# Education Creates Opportunity

A Business Solution to Accelerate College Completion  
for Working Adults







# Greater Minds

Welcome to Greater Minds, an initiative of Greater Spokane Incorporated (GSI) providing working adults support to return to school, finish their degree or certificate and unlock opportunity for the future of our region. Thank you for your commitment to our region's employees. Greater Minds is an important initiative of GSI's foundational strategy – Achieve, part of the Greater Spokane 7. You are now part of our key community initiative to significantly increase degree attainment in our region. Investing in education opportunities for your employees has the benefit of increasing the productivity and innovation that exists within your workplace while helping to expand, retain and recruit top talent for our region.



# Investing in Our Community

Increase the proportion of residents in our region with a high quality certificate, 2 or 4-year degree from 40 percent to 60 percent by 2025.

## The Goal of Greater Minds

Greater Minds is a regional collaboration of the higher education and business communities that help working adults return to school and finish their degree or certificate. Our goal is to increase the proportion of residents in our region with a high quality certificate, 2 or 4-year degree from 40 percent to 60 percent by 2025.

## How the Program Works

Working with your business, we assist working adults to evaluate options and identify opportunities, match their goals with the programs of local higher education institutions, and help them find the support they need to return to school.

## Investing in Your Employees Through Greater Minds

Investing in your employees' education opens doors to opportunity for our entire region. Adults who complete their degree or certificate can earn more money, advance their careers, and improve job security. Higher education institutions recruit new students and diversify their student base. Businesses improve company culture and gain a competitive edge. In short, an educated workforce means a healthy economy and thriving community.



# Why Should Your Business Participate in Greater Minds?

You have the opportunity to build a talent base for your company that fuels long term sustainability. You also have an opportunity to invest in your employees. This investment yields an increase in job satisfaction, productivity and an enhanced skill set. Supporting employees in pursuing their educational goals is one of the leading ways to guarantee that your business grows and thrives in an increasingly demanding and dynamic market.

A considerable number of jobs now require a postsecondary credential. High level certificates, 2- and 4-year degrees will be required to fill the technically skilled in-demand positions throughout our industry sectors. Without an adequate pool of talent, these jobs cannot be filled.

Talented high performers are attracted to regions with a density of college-educated individuals and a wealth of employers committed to continuous learning. Spokane continues to grow and attract employers who need a talented workforce.



## Employee Investment in Degree Completion

A survey conducted by GSI and 7 employer partners confirmed that many working adults are already enrolled in college and that they are motivated to complete a degree. Of those with some college and no degree, 45 percent attended college within the last five years and 40 percent have completed 60 credits or more. Employees identified personal satisfaction, increased income, career advancement and setting an example for their children as motivators for degree completion.

## Creating Greater Opportunities Through Education

GSI believes that education grows economies. In a 2016 survey of Site Location Consultants that focused on the Top 10 Site Selection Factors, when vetting locations for business expansion and relocation, the top factor was availability of skilled labor. We have a commitment to create and retain a GREATER talent pool of skilled workers who drive innovation and productivity to meet the needs of employers throughout the region.

As an employer you play a critical role in helping our region benchmark progress in this important work. It is estimated that 86,000 working adults in Spokane County\* have started some form of college education but have not completed a certificate or degree. By agreeing to collaborate and partner in this endeavor you contribute to a powerful infrastructure that supports our region's economic development efforts.

# Implementing a Degree Completion Program in Your Business

## Encourage

Emphasize the Importance of College Completion in the Workplace

## Get Started

**Incorporate a philosophy of education attainment by emphasizing learning in career and individual development plans.**

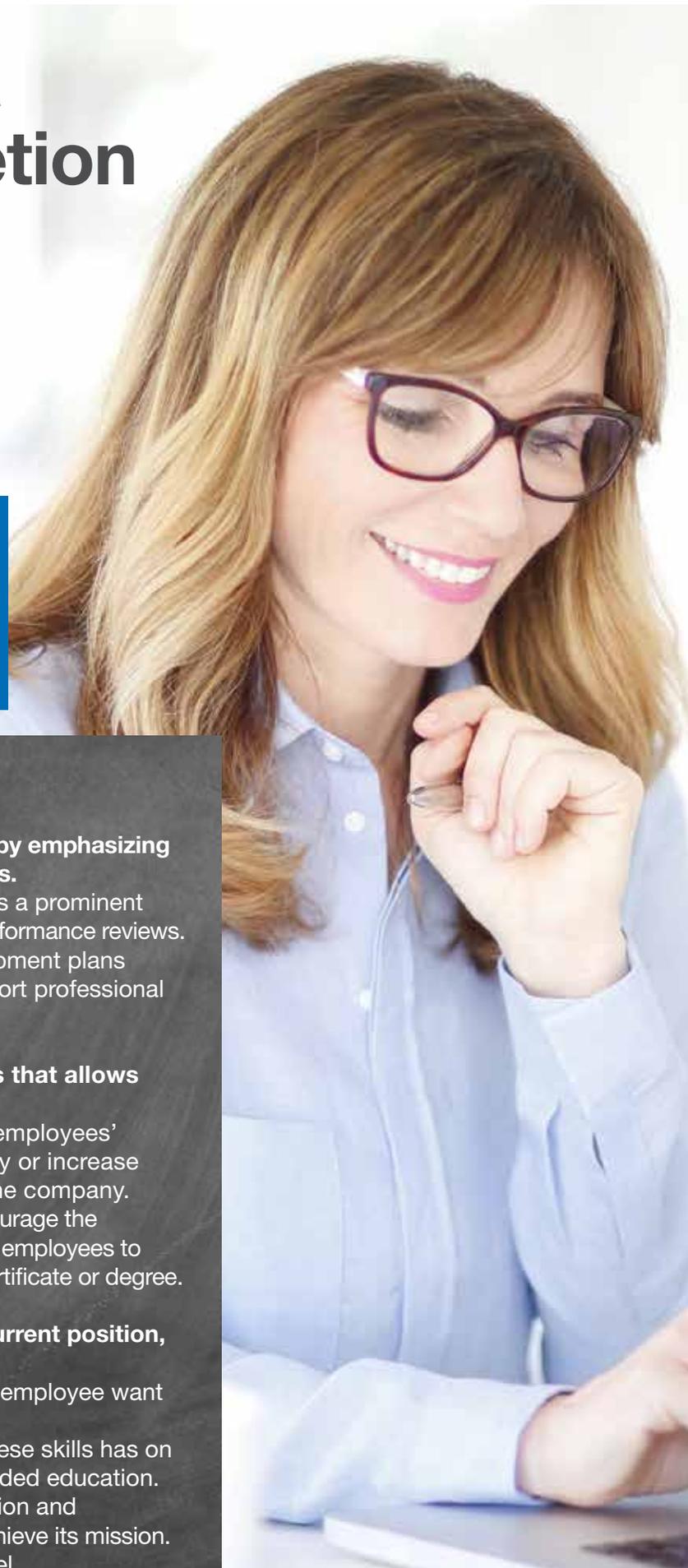
- Make both career and individual development plans a prominent feature of employee on-boarding documents and performance reviews.
- Encourage supervisors to review employee development plans and provide feedback on how their plans can support professional development.

**Create a career development path for employees that allows supervisors to address gaps in education.**

- Encourage and allow supervisors to identify how employees' educational goals would enhance their productivity or increase their ability to make meaningful contributions to the company.
- Supervisors should give projects and tasks that encourage the application of newly acquired skills, thereby enabling employees to see the value of what they are doing in pursuing a certificate or degree.

**Education attainment should affect employee's current position, promotions and transfers to new positions.**

- Individual needs: What level of education does the employee want to achieve?
- Department needs: Assess the impact acquiring these skills has on the bottom line, including the cost of providing needed education.
- Organizational needs: Align the employees' education and development goals to the organizations' ability to achieve its mission.
- Tie salary/wage or job increases to educational level.



# Educate & Engage

Empower Employees to be Smart Consumers and to Navigate the Systems of Education Attainment

## Get Started

Help drive down costs and provide internal supports for your employees to be successful in their pursuit of a college degree.

### **Establish a College Tuition Reimbursement Program and other financial support programs.**

- The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) allows tax free contributions up to \$5,250 each year.
- Consider how you would design a tuition reimbursement program and fund the program. You can offer a fixed amount to be standardized across the company or offer incentives based on performance.
- Implement a company scholarship program.
- Set up a college savings or life-long learning accounts as a payroll deduction.

### **Offer a flexible work environment.**

- Allow working students some flexibility in balancing school, work and family.
- Ad hoc arrangements, such as allowing employees to leave early on exam days or to attend a daytime lecture.
- Formal arrangements such as a four-day work week.

### **Create a mentorship program for attainment by inviting someone in your company to become a College Advocate Mentor that will:**

- Coach employees on work life balance.
- Tell their own story of attainment.
- Provide tutoring or academic support.

### **Advocate by recognizing and celebrating education attainment of your employees.**

- Highlight the accomplishments of an employee in your company newsletter or intranet.
- Celebrate with a graduation luncheon.
- Present a letter/certificate from the CEO with words of encouragement upon enrollment and graduation.
- Plan meetings that recognize opportunities for continued learning, and celebrate the success of employees while engaging others in the process of enrolling.

# Advocate

Become an Advocate for Your Employees  
in Their Education Attainment Efforts

## Get Started

Provide access to the Greater Minds initiative. Our neutral Navigator will work with your business to provide you and your employees information and services related to postsecondary education opportunities and affordability.

Our Navigator can provide:

- Short “lunch-and-learn” style workshops for employees with information on how to get started, persist and finish their education.
- Assist in identifying certificate or degree programs to meet the educational goals of your employees and organization.
- Connect your employees to information on financial aid including FASFA, grants, scholarships and how to access student loans.
- Help with the pathway to credits and transfer credit alignment.
- Additional support through out your employees degree program.



# Assessing Your Current Efforts

Before beginning to adopt any new practices, it is important to consider what you are currently doing to support your employees in completing a degree or pursuing continuing education opportunities that strengthen the skill set of your workforce. The checklist below has been used by others to effectively gauge the health of current practices.

HOW YOUR COMPANY SUPPORTS HIGHER EDUCATION	Check Completed Tasks
<b>ENCOURAGE:</b> Emphasize the importance of college completion in the workplace	
Incorporate a philosophy of educational attainment into your business mission or vision statement.	
Create a career development path for employees that focuses on degree attainment.	
Ensure that promotions and transfers consider education and continued learning.	
<b>EDUCATE AND ENGAGE:</b> Empower employees to be smart consumers and to navigate the systems of education attainment	
Establish a College Tuition Reimbursement Program and other financial support programs.	
Offer a flexible work environment.	
Create a mentorship program for attainment by inviting someone in your company to become a College Advocate Mentor.	
<b>ADVOCATE:</b> Become an advocate for your employees in their education attainment efforts	
Provide access to the Greater Minds initiative to work with your business to support and provide information and services related to postsecondary education opportunities.	
Assist in identifying certificate or degree programs to meet the educational goals of your business.	
Offer workshops for employees with information on how to get started, persist and finish their education.	
Connect your employees to information on financial aid including FASFA, grants, scholarships and how to access student loans.	

## FOR ADDITIONAL TOOLS | TO FIND OUT MORE

Visit [GreaterMindsSpokane.org](http://GreaterMindsSpokane.org) or contact a Greater Minds Navigator today at [info@GreaterMindsSpokane.org](mailto:info@GreaterMindsSpokane.org) or 509.321.3623.

### Initiative Investors





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Greater Minds is an initiative of Greater Spokane Incorporated, the Spokane region's next generation business development organization. [GreaterSpokane.org](http://GreaterSpokane.org)