CAPITAL CoLAB'S WORK-BASED LEARNING STRATEGY

ADVANCING EQUITABLE WORK-BASED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES IN DIGITAL TECH ACROSS THE CAPITAL REGION

APRIL 2021

GREATER WASHINGTON PARTNERSHIP
FROM BALTIMORE TO RICHMOND.
FOSTERING UNITY. ADVANCING GROWTH.

CAPITAL CoLAB

About the Greater Washington Partnership

The Greater Washington Partnership is a first-of-its-kind civic alliance of CEOs in the Capital Region, drawing from the leading employers and entrepreneurs committed to making the region—from Baltimore to Richmond—one of the world's best places to work, raise a family, and build a business. The Partnership's top priority is advancing inclusive economic growth by driving solutions and fostering unity. Working in collaboration with leaders across our communities, the Partnership connects and leverages the region's extraordinary assets to advance inclusive, actionable solutions that strengthen the Capital Region as a leading global region and center for commerce and innovation.

The Capital Region is resource-rich, possessing great diversity, tremendous assets, and immense potential—but inclusive growth will require intentionally shaping an inclusive economy that benefits all our citizens. To drive this outcome, the region must focus on collaboration and act on solutions that overcome jurisdictional boundaries. Since the Partnership's public launch in 2017, we have come together in unprecedented ways to foster unity—changing the narrative on the region— and to drive results on the initial priority areas of tech talent and regional mobility.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Bridging coursework and professional experiences through work-based learning will help the Capital Region meet its demand for tech talent and expand career pathways to more diverse students, including racial and ethnic minorities and women.

The Capital Region is a major tech hub with one of the nation's most well-educated populations, but education and economic opportunities are out of reach for too many residents. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the socio-economic inequities that already existed in society, and the shift to virtual work and school has highlighted the digital divide within many communities. However, Capital Region employers have an opportunity to leverage the virtual environment to engage their future workforce in new ways. Work-based learning offers a way for employers to branch into schools and connect with talent pools that were not traditionally part of their standard workforce development and recruitments strategies.

Work-based learning (also called WBL) is an educational activity comprising meaningful workplace experiences that facilitate academic, technical, and employability skill development to support entry into or advancement along a career pathway. While employers historically hosted work-based learning programs onsite, the virtual environment provides a broader platform for them to reach more learners as they develop job-ready skills.

In 2020, Capital CoLAB—the talent and skills division of Greater Washington Partnership—enlisted the help of Higher Ed Insight to conduct a landscape analysis of digital tech work-based learning in the Capital Region.

HEI sought to do two things: 1) understand practices that increased representation of learners among populations that have been historically excluded from digital tech, and 2) identify strategies that contribute to equitable WBL opportunities and outcomes. This landscape analysis set the stage for how CoLAB will support work-based learning in the Capital Region over the next two years.

CoLAB will focus on the following goals to advance equitable work-based learning opportunities in digital tech across the Capital Region:

1) Inspire Capital Region employers to act with a shared sense of urgency around creating equitable WBL opportunities that advance diverse participation in tech talent pipelines.

2) Increase employer capacity to develop and sustain equitable WBL in digital tech.

3) Create an equitable and efficient WBL ecosystem by collaborating with employers, WBL providers, educators, and other intermediaries to identify gaps and leverage successful efforts.

As one component of our vision to engage 45,000 students and adult learners — with at least 50 percent from underrepresented backgrounds— *Capital CoLAB's Work-Based Learning Strategy* outlines how CoLAB will pursue each of its WBL goals over the next two years.

INTRODUCTION

Despite the Capital Region's position as a major tech hub with one of the nation's most well-educated populations, education and economic opportunities are out of reach for too many residents. Addressing these inequities is not only a moral imperative, but an economic one: without expanding the way academic institutions and employers prepare and source talent, the region risks 60,000 digital tech and tech adjacent jobs going unfilled annually by 2025[1].

The Greater Washington Partnership launched the Collaborative of Leaders in Academia and Business (CoLAB) to prepare more learners from more backgrounds for the in-demand, digital tech jobs of today and tomorrow. Through this work, CoLAB aims to build and scale educator-employer partnerships that expand learners' access to industry-validated, digital tech competencies. With its network of 18 major employers, 27 higher education institutions, and five K-12 school systems, CoLAB's vision is that the Capital Region can have the most diverse digital tech workforce in the country.
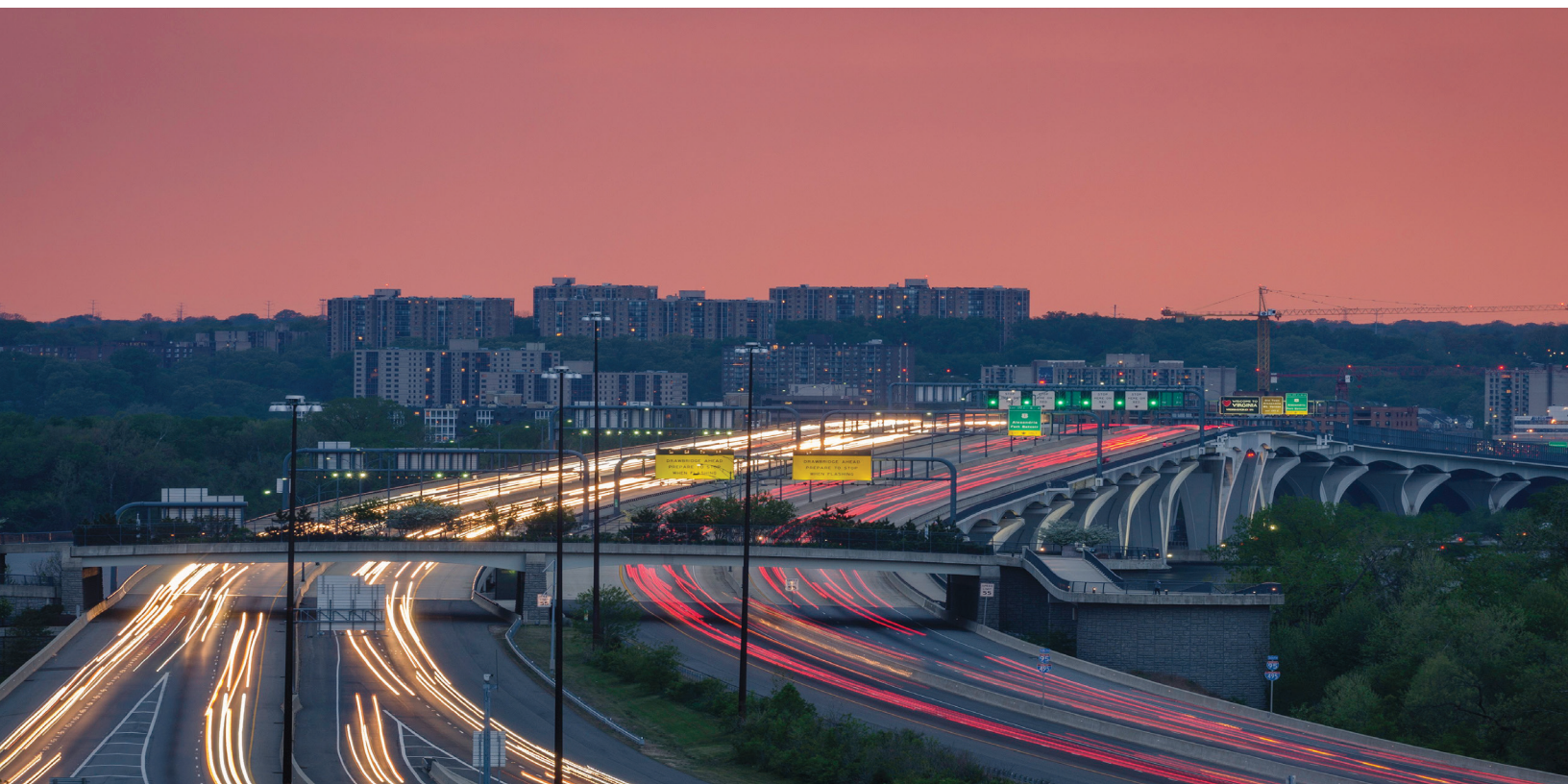
Specifically, CoLAB aims to do the following by 2025:

VISION

The Capital Region will have the most diverse digital tech workforce in the country.

MISSION

Build the Capital Region's diverse digital tech ecosystem by partnering with employers and educators to build industry-aligned digital tech pathways that ensure inclusive growth.

KEY OUTCOMES

By 2025, CoLAB will:

Engage over 45,000 students and adult learners in digital tech pathways.

Ensure at least 50 percent of the people engaged are from underrepresented populations.

Double the number of partner organizations working to scale CoLAB initiatives.

CoLAB recognizes that "diverse" is a broad term that encompasses both distinct and intersectional communities that have been historically underrepresented in tech.

While this report refers to Black, Hispanic, Latinx, and women learners, we know this is just a start. It is critical that all Capital Region residents interested in a digital tech career can clearly see and access the pathways that will support them along the way. CoLAB is eager to deepen its relationships with our region's diverse learner communities to make digital tech career pathways a reality.

To that end, the Capital Region has work to do. Although the region's tech and tech adjacent workforce is more diverse than that of its peer regions, participation by Black, Hispanic, and Latinx workers is lower than that of the Capital Region's workforce overall. Only 17% of tech workers are Black and only 5% of workers are Hispanic or Latinx, despite comprising 25% and 9% of the workforce, respectively[2]. Additionally, women made up 50% of the Capital Region's total workforce in 2018, but only 26% of the tech workforce[3].

Developing the region's diverse digital tech workforce requires a multi-pronged strategy that improves linkages between education and employment. CoLAB has already launched high school and postsecondary programs to align academic curricula with the knowledge, skills, and abilities that employers need most for entry level tech and tech adjacent jobs in the region. Work-based learning is a second piece of the puzzle, bridging coursework and professional experiences to help meet industry demand for tech talent while expanding career pathways to students from diverse backgrounds.

This report begins with a look at the state of work-based learning in the Capital Region, particularly at programs that offer digital tech opportunities to learners traditionally underrepresented in tech. The second half of the document outlines how CoLAB will support digital tech-focused work-based learning among Black, Hispanic, Latinx, and women learners.

CoLAB will pursue the following goals over the next two years to support work-based learning in the Capital Region:

1. Inspire Capital Region employers to act with a shared sense of urgency around creating equitable work-based learning opportunities that advance diverse participation in tech talent pipelines.

2. Increase employer capacity to develop and sustain equitable work-based learning in digital tech.

3. Create an equitable and efficient work-based learning ecosystem by collaborating with employers, work-based learning providers, educators, and other intermediaries to identify gaps and leverage successful efforts.

PROVIDING A CONTINUUM FOR WORK-BASED LEARNING

In 2020, CoLAB and Higher Ed Insight (HEI) conducted a landscape analysis of digital tech-focused WBL efforts in the Capital Region.

HEI sought to[4]:

- Understand practices that increased representation of learners among populations that have been historically excluded from digital tech.

- Identify strategies that contribute to equitable WBL opportunities and outcomes.

The analysis focused on identifying the spectrum of WBL models, platforms and tools, best practices in the design and delivery of quality programs, and key stakeholders throughout the region. Primary data was collected from 15 secondary educators funded through CoLAB's TalentReady program, 15 work-based learning providers with digital tech program offerings, and two roundtable discussions with work-based learning educators and intermediaries from the region. Secondary data sources included key legislation, research on best practices, and industry publications focused on WBL.

Work-Based Learning (WBL)

Definition: An educational activity comprising meaningful workplace experiences that facilitate academic, technical, and employability skill development to support entry into or advancement along a career pathway.
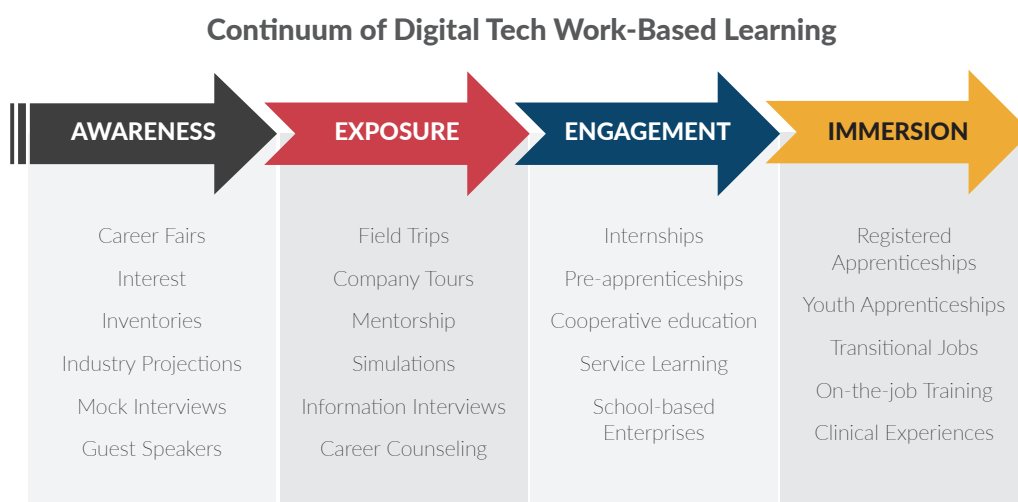
HEI's report, *Work-Based Learning Can Help Increase the Capital Region's Digital Tech Talent*, builds on four selected findings from the WBL landscape analysis in the Capital Region[5].

1. The most effective WBL models are designed to intentionally engage learners from recruitment through post-WBL follow-up, and each phase between.

2. Educators recognize what is required to deliver high quality WBL programming; however, lack of resources creates significant barriers to implementation.

3. Closing the digital tech talent gap will be only as successful as the region's ability to broaden participation among groups traditionally not included.

4. Intermediaries serve a key role of connecting learners, educators, and employers across the WBL spectrum and coordinating WBL efforts.

The Continuum of Digital Tech Work-Based Learning, detailed in the following figure, is central to these findings. The Continuum captures many of the ways employers can offer professional awareness, exposure, engagement, and immersion to students involved in a digital tech work-based learning program.

Continuum of Digital Tech Work-Based Learning

AWARENESS	EXPOSURE	ENGAGEMENT	IMMERSION
Career Fairs	Field Trips	Internships	Registered Apprenticeships
Interest	Company Tours	Pre-apprenticeships	Youth Apprenticeships
Inventories	Mentorship	Cooperative education	Transitional Jobs
Industry Projections	Simulations	Service Learning	On-the-job Training
Mock Interviews	Information Interviews	School-based Enterprises	Clinical Experiences
Guest Speakers	Career Counseling		

Career Awareness: Learning About Work

Build awareness of the variety of digital tech careers available and the role of postsecondary education; broaden student options.

Career Exposure: Learning for Work

Explore digital tech career options and postsecondary for the purpose of motivating students and to inform their decision making in high school and postsecondary education.

Career Engagement: Learning Through Work

Apply digital tech learning through practical experience that develops knowledge and skills necessary for success in careers and postsecondary education.

Career Immersion: Learning to Work

Train for digital tech employment and/or postsecondary education in a specific range of occupations.

HOW CAPITAL CoLAB WILL DRIVE WORK-BASED LEARNING IN THE CAPITAL REGION

Through generous funding from JPMorgan Chase and Bloomberg Philanthropies, the CoLAB launched a multi-year effort to create industry-aligned IT learning pathways starting in high school. This initiative brings together K-12 and higher education leaders from five jurisdictions—Baltimore City, MD; Fairfax County, VA; Montgomery County, MD; Prince George's County, MD; and the District of Columbia—to partner with each other and employers on designing pathways that connect postsecondary degrees, certifications, and real-world work experiences to in-demand technology careers.

Much like CoLAB's Digital Tech Credential program, TalentReady embeds employer-validated competencies into curricula—in this case, starting in high school—so learners have easier access to the skillsets needed for entry level digital tech jobs offering a family sustaining wage in the region. CoLAB, its funders, and its partners see meaningful WBL opportunities as a natural extension of this work to ensure the region meets its future workforce needs while also supporting those who live and learn here.

■ Current TalentReady Jurisdiction
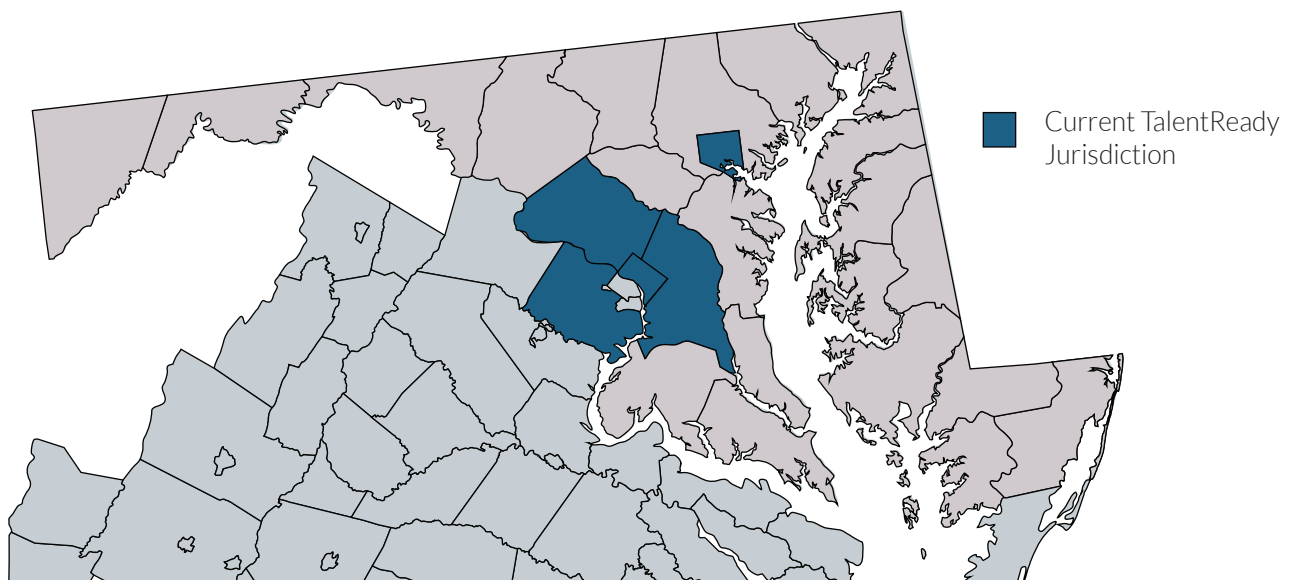
As CoLAB aims to engage 45,000 learners in digital tech pathways with at least half from underrepresented backgrounds, members of the region's tech ecosystem will need to think outside of the box when it comes to preparing the next generation of workers.

Using the Continuum of Digital Tech Work-Based Learning as a guide, CoLAB sees WBL as a spectrum of activities that mutually benefit learners and employers: high school and postsecondary learners will have more ways to identify and develop career interest, and employers can connect with talent through short-term methods requiring a lighter commitment than the traditional summer internship. The WBL community in the Capital Region is a rapidly evolving one.

As this environment evolves, CoLAB's role is threefold over the next two years:

1. Inspire Capital Region employers to act with a shared sense of urgency around creating equitable WBL opportunities that advance diverse participation in tech talent pipelines.

2. Increase employer capacity to develop and sustain equitable WBL in digital tech.

3. Create an equitable and efficient WBL ecosystem by collaborating with employers, WBL providers, educators, and other intermediaries to identify gaps and leverage successful efforts.

GOALS

1 **Inspire Capital Region employers to act with a shared sense of urgency around creating equitable work-based learning opportunities that advance diverse participation in tech talent pipelines.**

To keep pace with the region's demand for digital skillsets, employers must clearly signal their talent needs, proactively invest in their workforce pipeline, and deliberately do so with an equity lens. The employer benefits of a diverse workforce are well-documented: according to one McKinsey report, data from 366 public companies indicated that those in the top quartile for racial and ethnic diversity and gender diversity were, respectively, 35 percent and 15 percent more likely to have financial returns above their national industry medians[6]. But getting to this point requires employers to source from new and more diverse candidate pools to supplement their standard recruiting practices.

CoLAB has already built a robust Employer Signaling System to communicate employer demand around digital tech knowledge, skills, and abilities to educators, which is one step to ensure that more learners from more backgrounds are prepared for entry level jobs in the region. The second step is advancing equitable work-based learning opportunities. Students benefit from regular touchpoints with employers along their education journey: early career awareness and exposure lead to more individuals entering digital tech pathways, while later engagement and immersion activities cement that talent and place learners on track to good jobs offering a family sustaining wage.

To this end, CoLAB will unite employers in the Capital Region around a common understanding of the urgency for equitable WBL.

To achieve this goal, CoLAB will implement the following strategies:

a. Work with employers to identify talent-related DEI initiatives in their own organizations and consider the Continuum of Digital Tech Work-Based Learning as a way of supporting those initiatives. CoLAB will meet regularly with human resources leaders across the region to identify effective ways of recruiting diverse, entry level talent and share best practices with other employers.

b. Elevate employer efforts in the Capital Region and their motivations for investing in WBL via panels, webinars, and other public-facing events. CoLAB will also curate media content such as blogs, webinars, podcast episodes, and speaking engagements that highlight insights and other work produced from partner collaborations, convenings, and engagements.

c. Convene local employers around initiatives that would benefit from a regional, scalable approach. CoLAB will host working sessions with employers to discuss strategies and plans for a regional approach to WBL.

Industry leaders discuss employer-educator partnerships to expand the Capital Region's tech talent pipeline (2019).

2 Increase employer capacity to develop and sustain equitable work-based learning in digital tech.

WBL helps learners gain professional experience before they start a full-time job, which is especially important for low-income students and those with fewer professional networks.

Jobs for the Future identified four key benefits of WBL for students and employers:

1. Gain exposure to the world of work.

2. Get firsthand involvement in specific occupations or industries.

3. Gain experience that reinforces academic instruction.

4. Get a paying job that may become permanent[7].

CoLAB's strength is building relationships across employers and sectors to shape the region's digital tech workforce.

Through this work, many employers have shared that they do not have the internal mechanisms in place to support high school internships. Fortunately, the Continuum of Digital Tech Work-Based Learning offers a new lens for employers to consider as they invest in the regional tech talent pipeline.

CoLAB's strength is also building mutually beneficial and sustained relationships with large employers in the region and connecting them with partners across other sectors. Expanding employer linkages with education and training providers via WBL will broaden learners' access to digital skills-building and create a more competitive workforce.

To increase employer capacity to develop and sustain equitable WBL in digital tech, CoLAB will do the following:

a. Expand how employers implement WBL in their own organizations. CoLAB will work with employers to identify core competencies needed for in-demand jobs and ensure that their company offers substantial WBL engagement opportunities that are aligned with and/or could lead to real, quality jobs.

b. Advocate for WBL as a component of equitable talent development strategies. CoLAB will embed equitable WBL content into its communications channels and make it a focal point in its regular employer convenings.

c. Pilot innovative, replicable WBL programs with CoLAB partners that provide opportunities for Capital Region students to engage with employers in new ways. For example, CoLAB will pilot micro-internships where learners can complete short-term projects.
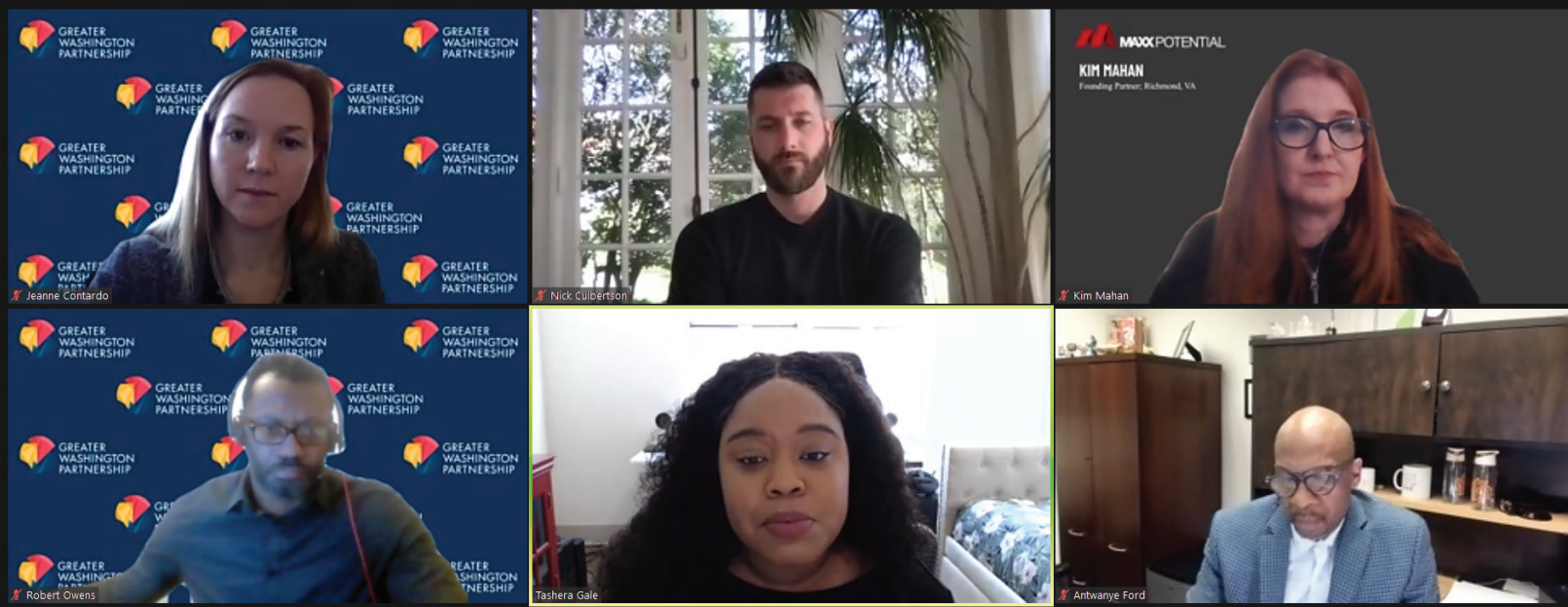
WBL intermediaries discuss ways to create equity-centered WBL opportunities across the Capital Region through a virtual roundtable discussion (2021).

3 Create an equitable and efficient work-based learning ecosystem by collaborating with employers, work-based learning providers, educators, and other intermediaries to identify gaps and leverage successful efforts.

Our landscape analysis recognized the benefit of a diverse coalition of intermediaries to build WBL capacity in the region. CoLAB prioritizes staying abreast of new perspectives and initiatives as many stakeholders work to expand the student awareness, exposure, engagement, and immersion activities that are so vital to preparing the digital tech workforce.

There are incredible intermediaries doing great work in this space already and CoLAB remains committed to supporting them. Groups such as Baltimore Tracks (in Baltimore), Employers for

Equity (in Washington, DC), and Maxx Potential (in Richmond) are already doing great work to diversify the tech talent ecosystem within their metro areas, and CoLAB is eager to continue engaging them. Additionally, as new players enter this space, CoLAB is eager to engage them and track how their efforts affect the ecosystem. CoLAB will support existing, high-quality programs as they scale their efforts and also identify gaps in opportunity not covered by existing organizations in the Capital Region.

As CoLAB regularly identifies new partners and convenes key stakeholders from across the region, it will draw on lessons learned from the specific metro areas within our footprint (Washington, DC, Richmond, and Baltimore) and expand insights across the region.

To drive an equitable and efficient WBL system though collaboration, CoLAB will:

a. Grow opportunity for diverse learners to participate in all four phases of the Digital Tech Continuum of WBL. CoLAB will seek new partners and help existing providers build capacity. Our landscape analysis found that most WBL efforts are concentrated in the exposure and engagement phases, with fewer programs that align with the awareness and immersion phases.

b. Collaborate with WBL stakeholders via CoLAB's community of practice web portal (currently under development) to discuss WBL progress and goals for the region. This active forum will help WBL stakeholders pinpoint areas of opportunity, create new partnerships, share successful WBL stories and best practices, and streamline efforts.

c. Represent CoLAB employers in other WBL initiatives throughout the Capital Region. CoLAB recognizes that there are many WBL initiatives with their own goals, target audiences, and geographic areas of focus. CoLAB is eager to facilitate connections between local and regional initiatives to the extent that it helps organizers streamline work while meeting their goals. Our current participation in the DC-based CEMETS and Employers for Equity are two examples of how CoLAB uses its regional employer lens to support local efforts.

CONCLUSION

With so many stakeholders across sectors committed to the future of Baltimore, DC, Richmond, and everywhere in between, the Capital Region is well-positioned to emerge from the pandemic with a stronger, more inclusive economy. It has never been a more critical time to ensure that everyone who lives here can truly build a life and thrive here.

CoLAB's work is one piece of this effort to ensure Capital Region residents, starting in high school, have clear pathways to meaningful careers. While CoLAB's commitment to engage 45,000 students in digital tech pathways is straightforward, its work is complex and relies on the joint effort of many partners to create the most diverse digital tech workforce in the country. The Continuum of Digital Tech Work-Based Learning offers many options for employers, educators, and training providers to explore as they strategize around their own talent pipeline and broader DEI initiatives.

Over the next two years, CoLAB is eager to advance equitable work-based learning in the Capital Region by building on stakeholders' shared sense of urgency, creating new ways for employers to engage in talent development, and collaborating with partners across the region who share our vision. We are thrilled with the prospect of what our digital tech ecosystem can accomplish together.

ENDNOTES

1. "The Capital Region Faces A Huge Tech Talent Shortage." Greater Washington Partnership. July 2020.

2. Ibid.,16.

3. McKinsey & Company Analysis, Emsi. March 2020.

4. "Work-Based Learning Can Help Increase the Capital Region's Digital Tech Talent." Higher Ed Insight. March 2021.

5. Ibid.

6. "Why Diversity Matters." McKinsey & Company. January 2015.

7. "Benefits of Work-Based Learning." JFF.

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