

## Background

In 2019, the Greater Washington Partnership officially launched the **Collaborative of Leaders in Academia and Business (CoLAB)**, a first-of-its-kind cross-sector group of executives from over 30 leading employers and regional postsecondary institutions. While the initial goal of CoLAB was to foster an education-to-workforce ecosystem that equipped learners in the region with the skillsets that they needed to thrive in the tech workforce and supplied businesses with the talent they needed to compete in the digital economy, the CoLAB table and goals have evolved.

CoLAB is now made up of all over 35 leading employers on the Partnership's Board, as well as more than 20 presidents representing community colleges and 4-year institutions across the region. And CoLAB's scope has broadened beyond tech roles and skillsets, but the purpose of the group is the same: to break down silos between education and business and create high-quality talent pipelines that retain highly-skilled talent across the region.

CoLAB's signature event is a yearly dinner—the CoLAB Executive Dinner—that pulls together this group of leaders to collaborate on regional talent pipeline development, as well as discuss the challenges and opportunities facing the education-to-workforce ecosystem.

## Employer Insights Brief

During the 2025 CoLAB Executive Dinner, the Partnership unveiled a new Employer Insights Brief, which combines labor market data analysis and high-level trends from 1:1 conversations with talent leaders from the Partnership's Board organizations to highlight the current state of the region's talent pipelines.

The Employer Insights Brief outlined four key themes:



The impact of **federal workforce reductions** is not fully borne out by data, but employers across industries are considering how to adjust, and initial projections find that former federal workers in business and management occupations may have limited absorption potential into the private sector.



In both data analysis and conversations with employers, **a slowing demand for entry-level tech talent emerged** in favor of experienced, specialized tech talent. Where entry-level tech talent is in-demand, AI skillsets are critical.



**Workforce readiness** is top of mind for employers, as is standing up new pathways to fill talent gaps – and regional talent gaps in education and health services are expected to grow unless these pathways are developed at scale.



Employers are prioritizing **upskilling and reskilling** as the modern workplace evolves. Data shows office and administrative or sales roles as possible targets for these efforts, where work has the potential to be performed by Generative AI.



## CoLAB Executive Dinner Discussion and Takeaways

The 2025 CoLAB Executive Dinner surfaced four unique talent topics during a robust discussion, where participants were also asked to offer written suggestions of opportunities to collaborate in the year ahead. Below outlines what we heard during discussion and in leave-behind comments.

- 1. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly emerging in workforce and education, and better alignment is needed between educators and employers on the skillsets increasing in demand as a result.**
  - ▶ Participants suggested potential “certificates to signify AI literacy” and the need to develop better higher education partnerships to train students in “Cyber and AI Security and Governance”.
- 2. Employers should prioritize engagement in active talent pipeline development, particularly where there’s an opportunity to support educators as they aim to identify and train for adjacent skillsets for federal workers looking to move into new roles and industries.**
  - ▶ Several comments from leaders responded to this, with one specifically referencing “a skills translation platform,” the need for “rapid retraining deployment,” and the “opportunity for employers to tap into this talent pipeline” of impacted federal workers.
- 3. Professional skillsets that are relevant across industries are critical. Education leaders emphasized that a liberal arts education can equip students with these skills, and business leaders named that these skills are their top priority when recruiting entry-level talent.**
  - ▶ Respondents suggested that “private sector employers could provide specific professional skills” for higher education partners to embed in curriculum, and that as the region’s workforce shifts, these professional skillsets are even more important, citing an opportunity to “increase adaptability and resiliency for the region’s workforce”.
- 4. Finally, education and business leaders identified a need for access to better workforce data, particularly in this moment of transition for the region’s labor market, around how talent moves into and through the workplace.**
  - ▶ Comments drove this point home, calling out the need for data around which institutions trained the most graduates that remain in the region to glean and replicate best practices. Additional comments referenced “the need for better real-time data to align education and workforce”, and better capturing which institutions are “contributing to the retention of federal workers”.

## Next Steps

The Partnership is actively working to integrate the CoLAB Executive Dinner discussion topics and leave-behind comments as building blocks for the Skills & Talent initiative over the next year. As we build on this year’s [Employer Insights](#) and 2024’s [Skills Forecasting](#), we will update the labor market data and Knowledge, Skills & Abilities (KSAs) in the Employer Signaling System (ESS) and add new lists of professional skillsets. We continue to engage talent leaders and postsecondary partners through 1:1 conversations and communities of practice like the College Leadership Council for Regional Tech Pathways, which brings together Deans and Vice Provosts in tech programs from CoLAB institutions. Through this sustained engagement, we ensure the Partnership is responsive to the current needs of its stakeholders as they evolve with the region’s workforce.

