

Passport to the Future

How one city's innovative program is helping address its talent challenge





Setting the Stage: Talent Challenges in the New World of Work

The past several years have shown that when it comes to the work we do - and where and how we do it - the old adage that “change is the only constant” could not be more true. With automation continuing to transform work, PwC’s Hopes and Fears Survey found that 39% of workers believe it’s likely that their job will be obsolete within 5 years¹, creating a heightened focus on reskilling. In parallel, the global pandemic has catapulted us into a world of virtual and hybrid work that is unlikely to go away anytime soon. Nearly three-quarters of workers now prefer a mixture of in-person and remote work¹, enabling companies to pursue talent in other geographies while also introducing new sources of competition for local talent. Finally, heightened national focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion means companies must do more to attract and retain talent. In fact, 62% of job seekers are more likely to apply to a job when a company is openly committed to improving diversity and inclusion². With all of these factors, it’s not surprising that PwC’s annual CEO survey found that the vast majority of CEOs - 74% - are concerned about the availability of key skills on their organizations’ growth prospects³.

Winning this competition for talent isn’t just a matter for companies and job seekers, but for cities, states, and regions whose ongoing economic development depends on attracting talent to live and work there. As a result, PwC believes these challenges will require innovative solutions and collaboration across sectors. One such example is taking place in Pittsburgh, where the Allegheny Conference on Community Development, a civic leadership organization and economic development engine, has launched The Pittsburgh Passport program.

What is the Allegheny Conference?

The Allegheny Conference is a nonprofit civic leadership organization dedicated to improving the economic future and quality of life for a 10-county region in Southwestern Pennsylvania, centered around the largest city in the region, Pittsburgh.

1. PwC “[Hopes and Fears](#)” Survey of 32,500 workers. 2021
2. PwC “[The Future of Recruiting](#)” Survey. 2019
3. PwC “[Talent Trends 2020: 23rd Annual CEO Survey](#)”. 2020

The Challenge in Pittsburgh

The Pittsburgh region is celebrated for its affordability, green spaces, arts and culture, sports teams, and food scene. A hub for education, healthcare, and technology, Pittsburgh - in recent years - has topped lists of America's most livable cities by publications such as Forbes and the Economist. And yet, research by the Allegheny Conference indicated that the region would face a severe talent shortage unless it implemented aggressive talent attraction and retention strategies.

The Allegheny Conference noticed a troubling pattern contributing to its talent shortage projections: while 40,000+ students were graduating from regional colleges and universities each year, about 50% relocated to other cities after completing their studies¹.

50% of Pittsburgh regional college graduates relocated to other cities after completing their studies

What, they wondered, caused so many graduating students to leave? Focus groups revealed that a combination of factors led so many to move away:

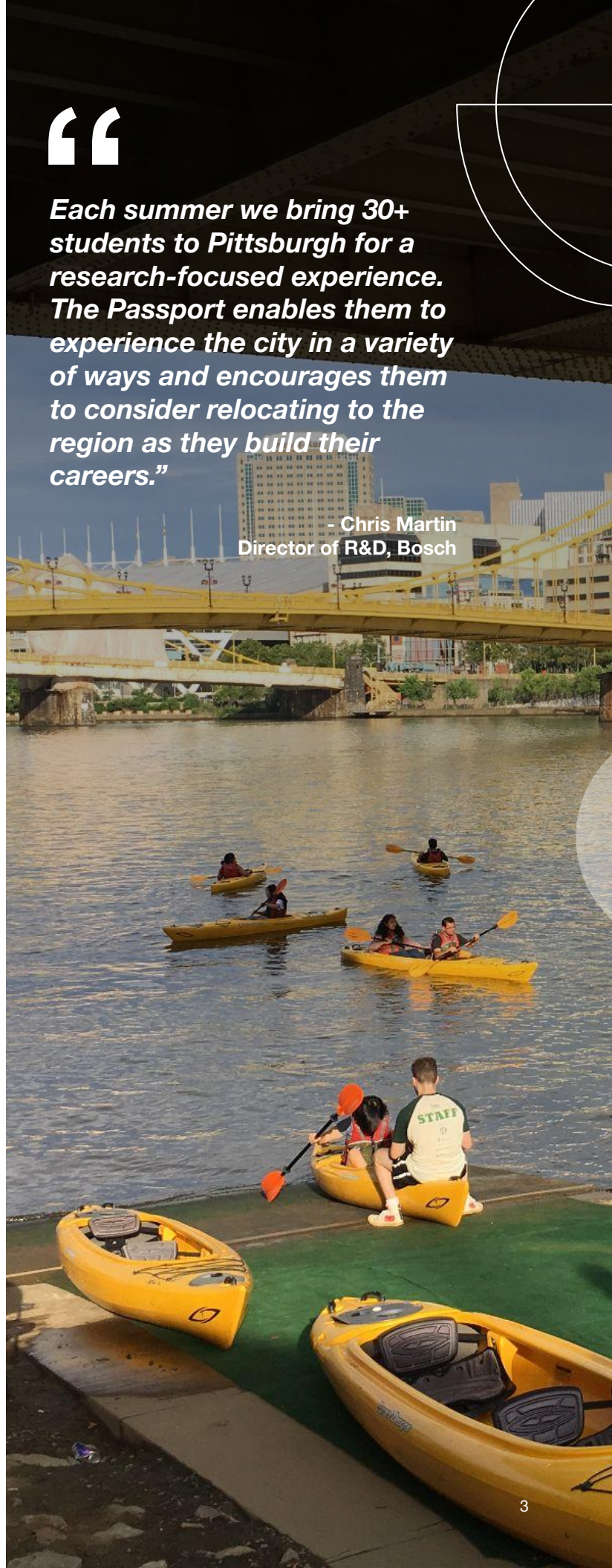
- ⊙ Students were unaware of the city's numerous professional and cultural attractions because they hadn't explored the city outside of their university or neighborhood.
- ⊙ Pittsburgh companies with small internship programs weren't able to offer immersive experiences like their counterparts in larger cities, making it difficult to compete for talent.
- ⊙ Pittsburgh being less diverse than other markets made it difficult for some students to imagine a future in the city given their desire for connections that reflect their identities.

1. [Inflection Point: Supply, Demand and the Future of Work in the Pittsburgh Region](#)

“

Each summer we bring 30+ students to Pittsburgh for a research-focused experience. The Passport enables them to experience the city in a variety of ways and encourages them to consider relocating to the region as they build their careers.”

- Chris Martin
Director of R&D, Bosch



Enter *The Pittsburgh Passport Program*

In 2019, the Allegheny Conference convened 25 companies representing different sizes and industries to launch The Pittsburgh Passport, with a focus on collaborating, not competing, to solve the region's talent challenges. Sponsored by participating companies and organized by the Allegheny Conference, The Passport hosted a range of social, cultural and professional activities throughout the summer for any student completing a summer internship in the region, with the hopes of enhancing the internship experience and increasing the retention rate of graduates to the area. In 2020, given the need to conduct events virtually, The Passport was opened to any student or recent graduate interested in learning more about Pittsburgh - regardless of whether they were currently completing an internship in the city (or had ever even been to Pittsburgh!)

Examples of Passport events include:

Professional Development and Entrepreneurship

These events allowed students to explore the companies, roles, and industries in the Pittsburgh region; speak to entrepreneurs in the city; build new skills; and connect with hiring managers about follow-on opportunities. For instance, students could attend a panel with company executives to learn about corporate social responsibility, join a roundtable with recruiters to learn best practices for navigating a job search, or talk to founders about building a company in Pittsburgh.

Social and Networking

Whether through visiting local art galleries, battling it out in a kickball competition, kayaking, or getting a behind-the-scenes look at Heinz Field (home of the Pittsburgh Steelers), students were able to have fun, experience the city, and build relationships with a broader network.

Diversity and Inclusion

In 2019, participants expressed an interest in having candid conversations with diverse professionals about living and working in Pittsburgh. So, in 2020, The Passport heightened its focus on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), with events such as an unconscious bias and anti-racism training session, a virtual drag show, and networking with diverse professionals.

BY THE NUMBERS

	2019 (in-person)	2020 (virtual)
Participating students	1500	1700+
Participating schools	110	170
Participating countries	25	41
Participating companies	25	35
Passport events	25	24
Participant diversity	32%	46%

[Learn more about The Passport](#)

The Case Competition

The Case Competition challenged students to find scalable solutions to issues that would help the Pittsburgh region become a better place to live, work and play. Topics included: social justice and anti-racism, safe activities on college campuses during COVID-19, and apps that could welcome newcomers to the region. Working in teams of three to five participants, students had one week to create solutions. Top teams shared a private networking event with employers and \$30,000 in cash prizes.

Open Mic Night

Open mic night invited students to share their artistic talents with their peers and planted a seed for exploring Pittsburgh's diverse arts and cultural community. Virtual performances included songs on guitar, ukulele, and keyboard; flash fiction; and poetry.

Affinity Networks

The Passport partnered with Vibrant Pittsburgh and their corporate Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) network to host breakout sessions with African American, Latinx, Asian, LGBTQ+ and Ally groups. Students were able to see the diversity that exists in the region, speak openly and ask questions, and grow their social and professional networks.



The Pittsburgh Passport Experience: Meet Baravier

Born and raised in Jamaica and studying at Columbia University, Baravier had never been to Pittsburgh. But, he got hooked after participating in The Passport.

He participates in exciting events like a tech talk, an open mic night, and a case competition. "The events were so fun, I just kept on going to more!" - Baravier

The company gets to know Baravier during the case competition and is impressed. He also feels good about the company culture and opportunities he's learned about. He accepts a full-time offer! Though he's never been to Pittsburgh, he's excited about the city and has a network already thanks to The Passport.

Baravier learns about The Passport through Out 4 Undergrad, an LGBTQ+ professional group that connects college students to opportunities.

He learns about a financial services company headquartered in Pittsburgh through virtual events hosted by The Passport. Intrigued by what he learned about the company, he decides to apply for a full time position.

Baravier packs his bags and moves to Pittsburgh!

“

I kept getting surprised by what Pittsburgh has to offer! Even though I had been in Pittsburgh for a few years, I wasn't aware there was a Hispanic community for me to plug into. I met other Hispanic professionals and have continued to get mentorship through them thanks to the introduction I got through The Passport.”

- Melany Arriola, Recent Chatham University graduate

Making an Impact: Program Outcomes

In only its first two years, The Pittsburgh Passport has made a significant impact on students, employers, and the region. It is helping reverse the pattern of “graduate flight” and reduce the projected workforce shortage for Pittsburgh. Most notably, program data and employer interviews show that The Passport has resulted in:

Increased Offer Acceptance

The aggregate offer-to-hire ratio for companies participating in The Passport increased by more than 30% relative to previous years, allowing companies to meet more of their talent needs and to realize the benefits of investments in their internship programs.

Increased Internship Satisfaction

Nearly every company participating in The Passport saw an increase in internship satisfaction scores during exit interviews at the end of the summer.

Enhanced Diversity

In 2020, 46% of participants in The Passport program were diverse, compared with 17% of the broader Pittsburgh population. By attracting and retaining a more diverse set of employees to Pittsburgh, The Passport is helping companies and the region become a more diverse, equitable and inclusive environment.

Higher Employee Engagement

One of the unexpected benefits of the program is that many participating companies saw an increase in engagement among their existing full-time employees. As these employees accompanied interns to The Passport events, they too learned more about what Pittsburgh has to offer.



“By highlighting dope art, culture and outdoor activities locally, The Passport uplifts important work taking place here and shows participants you can be whoever you want to be in Pittsburgh.”

- Josiah Gilliam
City of Pittsburgh, Office of the Mayor

What's Next for The Pittsburgh Passport

As The Passport enters its third year in the summer of 2021, it continues to innovate and evolve, with a focus on:

Hybrid Model

Just as employees begin returning to office environments and companies experiment with new hybrid working models, The Pittsburgh Passport aims to combine the best of in-person and virtual programming to allow for a broader audience reach, while still providing personalized engagement.

Impactful Events

2021 events will continue to focus on the areas that participants indicated are most important to them and which highlight the diverse offerings of the region. Example events will include: tech talks, arts and culture pop-ups, professional networking, kayaking, DEI-focused events, yoga in the park, and local business features.

Continued Growth

As the Allegheny Conference continues to make Pittsburgh a destination of choice for students starting their careers, The Passport will seek to increase engagement from local students, as well as students across the U.S. in the coming year.

The Passport will combine the best of in-person and virtual programming to allow for a broader audience reach

The Pittsburgh Passport is a signature program that supports a larger college retention strategy for the region. As part of the Allegheny Conference 10-year vision and strategy¹, efforts will focus not only on growing The Passport, but also on partnering with the academic community to increase the pool of talent in growth sectors, and attracting leading organizations to the region to create a vibrant and inclusive environment for professional talent.

1. The Allegheny Conference [2030 Long Range Report](#)



With competition for talent and skills rising and the pandemic shifting where and how we work, it has never been more critical for businesses to collaborate with partners across sectors to attract, develop and retain talent in their region.”

- Justin Kaufman
Managing Partner, PwC Pittsburgh Office

Looking Ahead: PwC Considerations for Building Talent in Your Region

With competition for talent reaching new heights, cities around the country are confronting the same set of questions that Pittsburgh has. If you're considering solutions for your own city, PwC recommends keeping the following in mind to make sure that programs are high impact, innovative, and designed to meet ever-changing workforce and business needs:

Clearly Define the Problem

Pittsburgh identified a specific challenge to tackle - loss of recent graduates from the area. For your city, the challenge may be something different, such as low participation in post-secondary education, loss of talent at specific career levels, or lack of diversity. Leverage data to clearly define a specific focus where you can drive greatest impact.

Bring Perspectives to the Table

Solving these challenges will require cooperation from employers, nonprofits, academia, and government. Having perspectives from each of these entities at the table early in the design of the solution - as the Allegheny Conference did - will be critical. And, don't forget to capture the perspective of current and potential talent. Gather feedback on their perceptions of your city and their

wants and needs, and incorporate that into the planning process.

Lead with Purpose

In defining the problem, consider how stakeholders can collectively address issues of social justice. In many cities, for example, leaders have come together to establish guidelines for DEI practices that all participating companies commit to. Doing so not only helps address specific talent challenges, but also collectively builds trust in the community.

Anticipate Shifts in Industries

Automation will continue to disrupt how work is done, with some roles and industries impacted more than others. The most innovative and collaborative cities will anticipate these trends, establishing reskilling programs that connect those in disrupted roles with opportunities at other companies with high demand or emerging roles.

Empower Talent to Sustain the Movement

How will you provide a platform for the participants in your program - whether they are college students, young professionals, or another group - to build a community with each other? How will you maintain engagement with them so that they can become mentors to future participants? In doing so, programs will have impact and momentum far beyond the life of specific events.

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