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Equitably Addressing the Workforce Crisis in MA: How to Capitalize on Minority Serving Institutions

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Massachusetts is experiencing a dual workforce challenge – a shrinking labor force and a lack of diversity in key sectors. Increased mobility due to the availability of remote work, high costs, and troubling demographic trends create challenges for the state to meet its current and future labor force needs. Between April 2020 and July 2022, Massachusetts lost 110,000 residents to other states. These migration trends have a significant impact on the workforce; a recent survey of members of the Massachusetts Business Roundtable found that 75 percent of employers anticipate difficulty in finding talent to fill open jobs over the next year.

Demographic changes are further reducing the Massachusetts workforce – the prime age working population is declining and projected to shrink by a further 140,000 people by 2030. In addition to these challenges, stark racial inequities hinder the state’s economic growth.¹ Access to good paying jobs is one way to shrink workforce and equity gaps, but Massachusetts struggles with promoting workforce diversity. Blacks and Hispanic/Latinos in Massachusetts are underrepresented in higher paying industries like information, finance and insurance, and professional, scientific, and technical services.² For example, Blacks comprise 6.7 percent of the workforce but just 2.6 percent of the professional, scientific, and technical services industries. These disparities are all the more unacceptable because Massachusetts has a plethora of diverse residents, especially in majority-minority cities like Boston, Springfield, Lynn, and Haverhill, to name a few.

¹ Bagley, Andy. Closing the Racial Divide in the U.S. and Massachusetts: A Baseline Analysis. 2021.

² MA Department of Economic Research. Equity Dashboards. 2020.

<https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/maeconomicresearch/viz/EquityDashboard-BlackAfricanAmerican/LandingPage>

Improving the state's workforce diversity is a moral and economic imperative. The state's future economic success is dependent on closing the racial divide and maximizing our workforce pipeline by taking advantage of previously untapped talent sources. Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) offer the state the ability to capitalize on its diverse talent pipeline by closing workforce gaps, and providing equitable economic opportunity for residents, businesses, and the state. By federal definition, MSIs are higher education entities established with the purpose of educating certain minority populations or that currently enroll high percentages of specific minority populations. Although the number of eligible MSIs can change based on enrollment and other factors, Massachusetts has approximately 12 MSIs, ranging from Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) to Predominately Black Institutions (PBIs) to Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs).³

Employers are in need of talent and have indicated a desire to focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion, especially around recruiting workers. However, major workforce development programs in Massachusetts designed to connect prospective and existing talent to available jobs have not historically prioritized MSIs and the role they can play in increasing our workforce and its diversity. This means that MSIs often compete amongst other public higher education institutions, community colleges, and training providers for state dollars that prepare and connect current and prospective workers to available jobs. As is documented below, MSIs also often receive less resources than their non-MSI counterparts, even though their distinct missions require uniquely targeted support. This paper introduces the idea that more strategic investment in MSIs, in addition to improved coordination with employers, could help the state address its workforce challenges and provide equitable economic opportunity to our residents.

In order to understand the potential role of MSIs, the first sections of this paper are dedicated to contextualizing workforce conditions in Massachusetts, including identifying existing challenges and opportunities for more equitable growth. In subsequent sections, we provide an overview of MSIs – both nationally and in Massachusetts – and how their history and focus on serving disadvantaged students make them well-positioned to address the state's workforce and equity challenges. The paper concludes with ideas on how Massachusetts could capitalize on the unique value of MSIs by building off existing programs within, and outside of, Massachusetts.

Current State of the Massachusetts Workforce

Labor Shortages

Demographic changes, domestic outmigration, and the increased availability of remote work are placing constraints on the Massachusetts economy. The civilian labor force – those working and looking for work – declined by 100,000 between May of 2019 and February of 2023. This workforce decline is accelerated by an aging population; the number of residents sixty-five and over in Massachusetts has been growing since 2007 and retirements are up 15 percent in the first quarter of 2023 compared to 2019. Unfortunately, birth rates have not helped to provide a pipeline of future workforce talent. While birth rates in Massachusetts have recovered slightly from

³ Center for MSIs at the Rutgers Graduate School of Education. List of Minority Serving Institutions 2022.

pandemic lows, they are still roughly 34 percent below where they were in 1990.⁴ Perhaps even more striking, Massachusetts is not attracting new workers from other states to make up for these gaps.

The impact of these challenges has become more acute given current economic conditions. Unemployment in Massachusetts is exceptionally low, and the state now has two and a half job openings per unemployed person.⁵ These factors indicate that despite the state's economic recovery from the pandemic, it is struggling to have talent readily available to fill current job growth. As a result, Massachusetts is experiencing workforce shortages across a variety of industries, most notably in health care, manufacturing, and life sciences, which are key segments of the state's economy. A range of reports highlight this acute need for talent:

- The [Preparing for the Future of Work](#) report commissioned by the Baker administration found that the health care sector is expected to add an estimated 210,000-235,000 jobs by 2030.
- A [2022 survey from the Massachusetts Hospital Association](#) found that an estimated 19,000 positions were unfilled across all of the acute care hospitals in the state.
- The [2022 Mass Life Sciences Workforce Analysis Report](#) cited that the life sciences labor market more than doubled from 2006 to 2021, outpacing other industry sectors and the state.
- The manufacturing industry is notable for its high percentage of older workers, which is likely to lead to increased openings in the years to come. The [Central Region Workforce Blueprint](#) from 2018 indicated that there were already over 22,000 short term openings at the time.

These are just some examples of the workforce shortages in Massachusetts that could be addressed by taking advantage of previously untapped talent sources. While the state is experiencing low unemployment on average, there is an opportunity to better capitalize on the diverse talent in Massachusetts that has been historically underrepresented in key high-wage industries. The section below takes a look at some of these disparities and introduces the idea that MSIs can be a potential solution for shrinking workforce and equity gaps.

Workforce Diversity

The challenges outlined above mean we have to implement policies that attract and retain residents, but also better maximize our existing talent. While the state's overall population declines are troublesome, Massachusetts is experiencing population growth among non-Whites, making the state increasingly diverse. In 2021, there were roughly 42 percent more Hispanic or Latino residents in Massachusetts than in 2010.⁶ The number of Black residents also grew, albeit modestly, at about five percent over the same time period, while the number of White residents declined by over nine percent. In addition, although the state's overall unemployment rate is low,

⁴ Moody's Analytics.

⁵ Bureau of Labor Statistics. Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey. June 2023.

⁶ U.S. Census Bureau. ACS 2010 and 2021 1-year estimates.

unemployment statistics by race/ethnicity indicate that there are untapped talent sources across the state that could fill our workforce needs and create a more equitable economy. As of June 2023, the unemployment rate was 5.1 percent for Black residents and 5.0 percent for Hispanic/Latinos, compared to 3.0 percent for White residents. Additionally, unemployment rates for Blacks and Hispanic/Latinos still have not entirely rebounded from the pandemic and are significantly higher than they were in March 2020.⁷

By some estimates there are roughly 400,000 underemployed workers in Massachusetts as of March 2023, with 1 in every 11 prime-age working residents being underutilized, unintentionally part-time, and/or discouraged.⁸ Roughly 38 percent (150,881) of that population are workers of color, while 35 percent (140,156) are foreign born workers.⁹ In fact, a recent Massachusetts Business Roundtable report found that there are more than 100,000 foreign-educated immigrants with bachelor's degrees in Massachusetts whose underemployment costs the state's economy \$2.3 billion every year.

As such, increasing employment rates among residents of color is not the only challenge. Promoting upward career mobility to currently underemployed or employed workers of color in low-wage jobs is also critical. For instance, Blacks and Hispanic/Latinos in Massachusetts are disproportionately represented in lower-wage industries, such as health care and social assistance, retail, and service occupations. Hispanic/Latinos make up 10.3 percent of the Massachusetts workforce but 20.2 percent of the accommodation and food services industry which has a median salary of just under \$28,000 a year. Both Blacks and Hispanic/Latinos are also underrepresented in industries like manufacturing, construction, information, and professional scientific and technical services, which offer in-demand, higher-wage jobs.

Massachusetts must strengthen its ability to provide economic opportunity to residents of color throughout the state by promoting their entrance into the workforce and reskilling and retraining them for high-demand sectors of the economy. Taking better advantage of MSIs is one way to do that. Given that these institutions serve large percentages of students of color, who are also more likely to be low-income, they are well-versed in the challenges these students face in furthering their education and obtaining financial prosperity. The sections below go into further detail about what MSIs are, who they serve, and what they look like in Massachusetts.

What Are MSIs?

MSIs have a long history in the United States but are not widely known outside of higher education circles. The section below provides information about their formation, how they are defined, the federal programs that support them, and their funding history. In providing this context, we illustrate not only the unique value that MSIs bring to the communities they serve, but the unique challenges they face as well. If Massachusetts is to consider its role in further supporting these institutions, understanding both of these factors is critical to forming effective policy solutions that support MSIs and strengthen the pipeline of diverse workers in Massachusetts.

⁷ MA Economic Research Bureau Equity Dashboards. U.S. Census Bureau. ACS 1-Year Estimates.

⁸ Rubin, Jerry. Tapping Massachusetts' Hidden Talent. 2023.

⁹ The category of foreign-born workers may also include workers of color and vice versa.

The History and Definition of MSIs

The first MSIs in the nation were created to serve minority students who had historically been left out of the U.S. education system. MSIs have been in existence since the 1800's, most notably in the form of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Cheyney University in Pennsylvania was established in 1837 and is widely recognized as the first HBCU in the nation.¹⁰ The Second Morrill Act of 1890 led to the further proliferation of HBCUs by providing them with federal funds to support teaching and research.¹¹ Similar to HBCUs, Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), another form of an MSI, were created in response to the exclusion of minority students from formal education. The first TCU – Dine College - was established in 1968 in Tsaile, Arizona with the goal of educating indigenous students.¹² Given their origins, HBCUs and TCUs are often referred to as mission-based MSIs.

While mission-based MSIs like HBCUs and TCUs were some of the first MSIs in the nation, changing demographics have given rise to another form of MSI: the enrollment-defined MSI. Enrollment-defined MSIs are fundamentally different from HBCUs and TCUs as they were not founded to educate specific minority populations but have come to serve a large percentage of students of color through demographic shifts. These institutions also tend to serve low-income students, first-generation students, and non-traditional students. There are hundreds of these institutions across the U.S. and by some estimations, roughly half of them are two-year community colleges. Moving forward, this report will primarily focus on enrollment defined MSIs, as Massachusetts does not have an HBCU or TCU.

The Higher Education Act (HEA) establishes and defines five different enrollment-defined MSIs (see Table 2). If an MSI meets the definitions set forth in the HEA, they become eligible to apply to competitive grant programs designed to strengthen their ability to expand access to education for low-income students of color. While eligibility for these grant programs is based on the racial and ethnic composition of the students enrolled, there are other qualifying criteria that institutions must meet. Predominately Black Institutions (PBIs) have unique requirements, but all other enrollment-based MSIs must also meet a series of criteria laid out in the HEA. The most common set of criteria include the following, which are outlined in Section 312b of the HEA:^{13,14,15}

- Having low educational and general expenditures.
- Having enrollment of needy students.

¹⁰ Rutgers Center for MSIs. The History of Minority Serving Institutions.

¹¹ Lawrence, Margaret. U.S. Department of Agriculture. *Celebrating the Second Morrill Act of 1890*. August 2022. <https://www.nifa.usda.gov/about-nifa/blogs/celebrating-second-morrill-act-1890#:~:text=On%20Aug.,in%20agriculture%20and%20mechanical%20arts.>

¹² Rutgers Center for MSIs. The History of Minority Serving Institutions.

¹³ Predominately Black Institutions (PBIs) are subject to additional eligibility requirements outlined in Section 318b related to student financial needs.

¹⁴ Congressional Research Service. *Programs for Minority-Serving Institutions Under the Higher Education Act*. March 23, 2023.

¹⁵ For full details on eligibility criteria see Section 312 in Part A of Title III of the Higher Education Act. <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/COMPS-765/pdf/COMPS-765.pdf>

- Being legally authorized to award bachelor’s degrees or be a junior or community college.
- Being accredited or pre-accredited by a Department of Education recognized national or state accrediting agency.
- Being located within one of the 50 states, Puerto Rico, D.C., or the outlying areas.

Table 2: Eligibility Requirements for Enrollment Based MSIs

MSI Type	Race/Ethnicity Enrollment Criteria	Other Eligibility Requirements
Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI)	25% or more Hispanic, full-time, undergraduate enrollment	Section 312b
Predominately Black Institutions (PBI)	Undergraduate enrollment of at least 40% African American students	Section 312b and Section 318b
Alaska Native and Native-Hawaiian-Serving Institutions (ANNHI)	Undergraduate enrollment of at least 20% Alaska native students or at least 10% Native Hawaiian	Section 312b
Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISI)	Undergraduate enrollment of at least 10% Asian American Pacific Islander students	Section 312b
Native American-Serving, Nontribal Institutions (NASNI)	Undergraduate enrollment of at least 10% Native American students	Section 312b

Although the HEA sets definitions for enrollment-based MSIs in order to determine their eligibility for federal grants, there is no universal standard for identifying MSIs at any given time. For instance, some organizations count MSIs as any higher education institution that is eligible for an MSI grant through the HEA, while others only count institutions that have actually been funded through the HEA. In addition, given these institutions are defined primarily based on enrollment, their eligibility can change from year to year. These two challenges make it difficult to accurately track MSIs and who they are. The two most reputable lists of MSIs in the U.S. are from NASA and the Rutgers’ Center for MSIs. As highlighted below, to determine MSIs in Massachusetts we use a list curated by Rutgers because it includes all eligible institutions, whether or not they have received HEA grants.

Grant Programs for MSIs in the Higher Education Act

Unlike HBCUs and TCUs, enrollment-based MSIs do not receive dedicated funding. Instead, such MSIs are eligible for competitive grant programs designed to improve infrastructure and expand academic opportunities for low-income and/or minority students. While there are generally five different enrollment-based MSIs, there are eight different grant programs open to them if they meet specific eligibility criteria and program goals (see Table 3).¹⁶

¹⁶ In addition to the grant programs available to specific enrollment-based MSIs there are also programs for HBCUs, TCUs, and higher education institutions that serve high-needs students more broadly.

Table 3: Grant Programs for MSIs in the Higher Education Act

Program	Federal Authorization	Overview
Strengthening ANNHIs	Higher Education Amendments of 1998	Grants to improve and expand AANHs institution’s ability to serve Alaska Natives or Native Hawaiians
Strengthening PBIs	College Cost Reduction Act of 2007	Grants to expand educational opportunities
Strengthening NASNTIs	College Cost Reduction Act of 2007	Grants to improve and expand AANHs institution’s ability to serve Native Americans
Strengthening AANAPISIs	College Cost Reduction and Access Act of 2007	Grants to improve and expand AANHs institution’s ability to serve Asian Americans and Native American Pacific Islanders
Developing HSIs	Higher Education Act of 1992	Grants to expand educational opportunity and attainment of Hispanic students and enhance stability of institutions that educate them
HSI Stem and Articulation	Higher Education Act of 1998	Grants to increase the number of Hispanic and low-income students obtaining degrees in STEM fields
Promoting Postbaccalaureate Opportunities for Hispanic Americans (PPOHA)	Higher Education Amendments of 1998	Grants to enable HSIs to expand postbaccalaureate opportunities for Hispanic students
Minority Science and Engineering Improvement Program (MSEIP)	Department of Education Organization Act of 1979	Grants to increase the number of underrepresented ethnic minorities in science and engineering careers

Source: Congressional Research Service

Higher education institutions can be more than one type of enrollment-based MSI, but there are limitations on the number and type of grant programs they can apply to.¹⁷ These program interactions are complex and not easy to navigate. The U.S. Department of Higher Education publishes an “eligibility matrix” to help colleges and universities identify if they are able to receive simultaneous funding from more than one program.¹⁸ In order to potentially receive a federal grant, higher education institutions must first be deemed eligible before formally applying. However, meeting eligibility criteria alone does not guarantee they’ll receive grant support. Generally speaking, grants are awarded on five-year timelines, but institutions have to recertify their MSI eligibility annually. Given these colleges and universities tend to be more resource-constrained, navigating complex eligibility criteria while consistently having to re-apply for grants can make it difficult to access these funds.

¹⁷ Congressional Research Service. Programs for Minority-Serving Institutions Under the Higher Education Act. Updated March 2023.

¹⁸ U.S. Department of Education. <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/idades/eligibility.html>

Recent Federal Funding Trends for MSIs

Federal funding for all MSI grant programs has increased in recent years. In 2023, total funding for MSIs reached almost \$1.3 billion, a 41 percent increase over pre-pandemic levels.¹⁹ However, less than half of those funds (\$488 million) went to programs that support enrollment-based MSIs (see Table 4). The majority of the remaining funds go towards programs for HBCUs and TCUs.²⁰ Most of the recent increases have come in the form of annual discretionary appropriations, as mandatory funds, which are appropriated through prior legislation, have stayed roughly flat since their addition through the College Cost Reduction and Access Act of 2007.²¹

In addition to mandatory and discretionary appropriations, enrollment-based MSIs received just shy of \$1.5 billion across all three federal COVID relief bills.²² In total, these bills provided roughly \$5.7 billion to a multitude of MSI grant programs, but some of these funds have been clawed back through subsequent legislation.²³

These more recent funding levels are still not likely enough to support every enrollment based MSI that is eligible. For instance, while the percentage of funded PBIs has increased recently, just over half received grant funding in 2021.²⁴ In many cases, the proliferation of certain types of MSIs has far outpaced the level of available grant funding. For example, in 2017, 31 percent of HSIs eligible for the STEM grant program received funding compared to 19 percent in 2021. A similar pattern can be seen for AANAPISIs of which 20 percent received funding in 2017 compared to 14 percent in 2021.²⁵ In addition to not enough funding, limited participation in these grant programs could be related to the complicated funding parameters set by the HEA outlined above.

MSI Grant Program Spotlight: HSI STEM

What Does it Do?

The HSI STEM and Articulation program was designed with two goals:

- 1) to increase the number of Hispanic and low-income students attaining degrees in STEM
- 2) to improve transfer and articulation agreements between two-year HSIs and four-year institutions with a STEM focus.

What Does Funding Look Like?

In 2021, the program awarded 100 grants with a maximum grant award of \$1 million.

Springfield Technical Community College received a \$746,000 grant in 2021 to expand transfer opportunities with UMass Amherst and Central Connecticut State University.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ A small portion of the funding goes towards the Strengthening Institution Program (SIP) which provides grants to higher education institutions that serve large proportions of higher-needs students.

²¹ Mandatory appropriations are required through existing laws. Discretionary appropriations are annually approved by the President and Congress through the budget.

²² Congressional Research Service. Education Stabilization Fund Programs Funded by the CARES Act, CRRSAA, and ARPA: Background and Analysis. Updated January 2023.

²³ The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the Keep Kids Fed Act of 2022 clawed back roughly \$753 million of the \$5.7 billion dedicated to MSI grant programs through COVID recovery bills.

²⁴ NYU MSI Data Project. <https://www.msidata.org/data>.

²⁵ Ibid.

Table 4: HEA Funding for Enrollment Based MSI Grant Programs

Program	Disc/Mand	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	% Change
Strengthening ANHHs	D	\$15,930	\$18,320	\$19,044	\$21,371	\$24,433	53%
	M	\$14,070	\$14,115	\$14,145	\$14,145	\$15,000	7%
Strengthening PBIs	D	\$11,475	\$13,197	\$14,218	\$17,708	\$22,300	94%
	M	\$14,070	\$14,115	\$14,145	\$14,145	\$15,000	7%
Strengthening NASNTIs	D	\$3,864	\$4,444	\$5,120	\$7,834	\$11,405	195%
	M	\$4,690	\$4,705	\$4,715	\$4,715	\$5,000	7%
Strengthening AANAPISIs	D	\$3,864	\$4,444	\$5,120	\$10,936	\$18,589	381%
	M	\$4,690	\$4,705	\$4,715	\$4,715	\$5,000	7%
MSEIP	D	\$11,135	\$12,635	\$13,370	\$14,539	\$16,370	47%
Developing HSIs	D	\$124,415	\$143,081	\$148,732	\$182,854	\$227,751	83%
HSI STEM	M	\$93,800	\$94,100	\$94,300	\$94,300	\$100,000	7%
PPOHAs	D	\$11,163	\$12,838	\$13,845	\$19,661	\$27,314	145%
Grand Total		\$313,166	\$340,699	\$351,469	\$406,923	\$488,162	56%

Source: Congressional Research Service *In thousands*

Other Federal Programs for MSIs

In addition to appropriations through the Higher Education Act, there are also other federal grant programs available to support enrollment-based MSIs and their students. These programs exist through federal departments and agencies like the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the National Science Foundation (NSF), and the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE). The purpose of these programs varies widely, from expanding research capacity to increasing graduation rates to providing internship opportunities and fellowships. In many cases, funding for these programs is limited, with very few institutions receiving awards. The NSF HSI program provides an example of how this support impacts institutions and also highlights work being done in Massachusetts to expand STEM education among students of color.

NSF developed its STEM program for HSIs in order to increase participation, retention, and graduation rates of underrepresented minorities in STEM disciplines.²⁶ Within the program, there are three different levels of grant opportunity – planning or pilot projects, implementation and evaluation projects, and institutional transformation projects. The length of the grants and their amounts depend on the grant type, with the longest and largest award being for transformation projects (\$3 million over 5 years). Additional funds are also available if multiple institutions come together to form partnerships. The program is anticipated to be funded at \$22.5 million in federal fiscal year (FFY) 2023.

Proposals must be submitted by a non-profit and institutions must meet the following criteria in order to be eligible:

- Be an accredited institution of higher education.

²⁶ National Science Foundation. Improving Undergraduate STEM Education: Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI Program). <https://new.nsf.gov/funding/opportunities/improving-undergraduate-stem-education-hispanic>

- Offer undergraduate STEM educational programs that result in certificates or degrees or submit a proposal to develop such programs.
- Satisfy the definition of an HSI as specified in section 502 of the Higher Education Act of 1965.

In 2021, Holyoke Community College received close to \$1 million in grant funds through the program to create the Western Massachusetts Engineer Pathways Program.²⁷ The four-year project has three goals: 1) create improved pathways to increase the participation of minority students in engineering, 2) improve the college's engineering program to be more responsive to diverse students and regional economic demands, and 3) produce research on building an effective pathway that can be replicated nationally.

Summing Up Federal Support for MSIs

As the previous sections highlight, there are numerous federal resources available to MSIs, but these resources are limited, spread across multiple federal programs, and require a significant degree of acumen to access. Even with available federal support, national research shows that MSIs do not receive the same amount of federal financial assistance as their non-MSI counterparts. For example, per student, HSIs receive 69 cents for every dollar that goes to other universities and colleges.²⁸ In addition, funding through the HEA and federal agencies is spread across multiple programs, each with its own criteria and application process. MSIs are responsible for tracking, applying, and managing these funding opportunities and oftentimes have limited capacity to do so. The state could play a greater role in coordinating and streamlining access to additional funding for MSIs, but little information about MSIs in Massachusetts is known. The following section dives deeper into who these institutions are in Massachusetts and the students they serve.

MSIs in Massachusetts

Although the number of enrollment-defined MSIs can change, based on research by Rutgers' Center for MSIs, Massachusetts has 12 MSIs in the form of Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), Predominately Black Institutions (PBIs), and Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs). The majority of the state's MSIs are public (9 of 12 in 2022), but private institutions like the Benjamin Franklin Cummings Institute of Technology (Franklin Cummings Tech), Cambridge College, and Urban College of Boston meet the criteria as well. While MSIs in Massachusetts may not fit the strict definitions set forth in the HEA every year, they do offer the state an opportunity to develop a workforce strategy that addresses critical hiring needs and creates equitable economic opportunity. This section provides relevant data about MSIs in Massachusetts that could help policymakers better understand their current and potential future role in state workforce policy.

²⁷ National Science Foundation. https://www.nsf.gov/awardsearch/showAward?AWD_ID=2122723

²⁸ The Penn Center for Minority Serving Institutions. *National Campaign on the Return on Investment of Minority Serving Institutions*. August 2017.

Table 5: Massachusetts MSIs (2022)

Institution Name	MSI Type	Institution Type
Franklin Cummings Tech	HSI	Private, 4yr*
Bunker Hill Community College	AANAPISI & HSI	Public, 2yr
Cambridge College	AANAPISI & HSI	Private, 4yr
Holyoke Community College	HSI	Public, 2yr
Middlesex Community College	AANAPISI & HSI	Public, 2yr
North Shore Community College	HSI	Public, 2yr
Northern Essex Community College	HSI	Public, 2yr
Roxbury Community College	PBI	Public, 2yr
Springfield Technical Community College	HSI	Public, 2yr
University of Massachusetts-Boston	AANAPISI	Public, 4yr
University of Massachusetts-Lowell	AANAPISI	Public, 4yr
Urban College of Boston	AANAPISI & HSI	Private, 2yr

*Franklin Cummings Tech offers one Bachelor of Science program; however, 97% of its students are pursuing certificates and associate degrees

Who They Serve

MSIs in Massachusetts enrolled just under 100,000 students in state fiscal year (FY) 2021.²⁹ Much like nationally, MSIs in Massachusetts serve a much higher proportion of low-income students of color, compared to non-MSI colleges and universities (see Table 6). Data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) shows that in FY 2021, 53 percent of students attending an MSI in the state were diverse.³⁰ By comparison, non-MSI community colleges and state universities had enrollments that were 38 and 28 percent diverse, respectively. In addition, 27 percent (23,500) of all undergraduate students at MSIs in Massachusetts were receiving Pell Grants, a federal financial aid program for high needs students.³¹ Since MSIs in MA are more often than not 2-year institutions, their enrollment tends to be filled with a high proportion of part-time learners. These students are more likely to be going to school while also working to support their education and/or families. In Massachusetts, 58 percent of all undergraduate students enrolled at an MSI are going to school part-time.³²

Given MSIs in Massachusetts are a combination of two-year and four-year institutions, they offer a mix of certificates, associate degrees, bachelor's degrees, master's, and PhDs. These programs have concentrations and majors in high demand areas like health sciences, professional studies, engineering, environmental studies, and advanced manufacturing. In 2021, MSIs conferred almost

²⁹ Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System. Unduplicated 12 month headcount. 2020 - 2021.

³⁰ Roughly 12% of students did not identify their race/ethnicity and are not included in the percentage totals.

³¹ Figure includes full-time, first-time degree/certificate-seeking undergraduate students.

³² MTF analysis of IPEDS data. FY 2021.

16,000 degrees/certificates across all the programs they offered, with a large percentage being awarded to diverse students.³³

Table 6. Enrollment Demographics of Higher Education Institutions in MA

	All Students	Diverse Students*	% Diverse	% Pell Recipients (UG, FTE)	% Part-time (UG)
MSIs (All)	86,895	46,015	53.0%	27%	58%
<i>MSIs (CC, State, UMass)</i>	81,106	41,568	51.3%	27%	57.1%
<i>MSI Community Colleges</i>	45,962	25,801	56.1%	26%	73.8%
<i>MSI State Universities</i>	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
<i>MSI UMass</i>	35,144	15,767	44.9%	29%	30.8%
<i>MSI Private</i>	5,789	4,443	76.7%	24%	77.4%
Community Colleges (non-MSI)	41,615	15,739	37.8%	25%	69.1%
State Universities (non-MSI)	54,584	15,255	27.9%	28%	28.1%
UMass (Non-MSI)	40,055	12,622	31.5%	21%	17.6%

*Total does not include non-responses

The Challenge

The nature of MSIs and who they serve means that these institutions face greater challenges in supporting students in obtaining their degrees and furthering their careers. MSIs are well positioned to support students of color, given their history of serving diverse populations and diverse body of faculty and staff. However, financial and other limitations create challenges. Although MSIs tend to serve more resource intensive students, they receive much less funding than their non-MSI counterparts. This is true both nationally and in Massachusetts. While MSI community colleges have slightly higher per-pupil spending than non-MSI community colleges (~\$3,200 vs. \$3,100), they receive significantly less than non-MSI state universities.³⁴ For example, in the FY 2021 budget, MSI community colleges received just over \$3,200 per-pupil, compared to roughly \$4,900 for non-MSI state universities.^{35,36,37}

One potential contributor to this disparity is that the state does not intentionally coordinate resources to support MSIs and the diverse students they educate. For instance, unlike the way the state funds public K-12 education, the state budget does not consider student demographics or the needs level of students when determining public higher education funding. It also does not fully account for part-time students and does not provide direct support to students at private higher education institutions, therefore excluding the three private MSIs in Massachusetts – Franklin Cummings Tech, Cambridge College, and Urban College of Boston. This means that institutions that serve large proportions of underrepresented students, including MSIs, have to look outside of the traditional state appropriation to receive additional support. While the federal grants for MSIs

³³ Data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System. FY 2021.

³⁴ There are no state universities in MA that qualify as an MSI according to the Rutger’s 2022 MSI list.

³⁵ FY 2021 budget spending was used in order to match it with the most recent enrollment data from IPEDS.

³⁶ The per-pupil estimate only includes line items that provide direct funding to public higher institutions for operational costs.

³⁷ The UMass system was excluded from the calculation because they have both MSI and non-MSI campuses.

are meant to address these challenges, limited funding and a lack of technical assistance to support institutions in applying to the numerous grant programs constrain their impact. More strategic investment in MSIs at the state level could create better outcomes for students of color and a larger pool of diverse talent for employers. The section below provides opportunities for Massachusetts to better support and leverage MSIs to improve educational and career outcomes.

Opportunities for Massachusetts to Better Leverage MSIs

Historically, the workforce system in Massachusetts has not prioritized funding for MSIs to help educate, train, and/or skill up workers. Our research only uncovered two programs – a green jobs training program funded through one-time ARPA resources and an internship program through the Mass Life Sciences Center – that specifically target MA residents at MSIs across the U.S. As has been highlighted throughout this paper, Massachusetts should consider how to more strategically partner with MSIs to create career pathways for diverse talent in sectors of the economy that desperately need it. In furtherance of this goal, we share details on the two Massachusetts programs mentioned above, in addition to two programs found in other states – California and Illinois – and preview some considerations for how Massachusetts might want to think about improving support for MSIs and their connection to employers.

Green Jobs Program

In December 2021, the legislature passed the first of two economic development bills using one-time resources from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). The bill included a \$7.5 million earmark to support accredited two-year colleges that are also MSIs in delivering training programs focused on green jobs for underserved populations. The Executive Office of Education is administering the program in partnership with the Workforce Skills Cabinet and the Clean Energy Center. The grant program is designed to provide planning and support resources to increase the number of students prepared to enter green jobs, with a focus on unemployed or underemployed individuals.

Grant awards can be used for administration, technology and equipment, planning, and implementation.³⁸ Dollars allocated for implementation can be spent on non-credit training programs, paid internships, scholarships, wraparound services, staff time, and research and evaluation. Funds can also be used for unpredictable student needs that might create barriers to completion, such as car repairs or other emergencies.

³⁸ Up to 25 percent of requested funds can be spent on planning, up to 25 percent can be spent on equipment and technology and a maximum of 10 percent can be spent on administration.

MSI Spotlight: Roxbury Community College

In 2020, Roxbury Community College (RCC) launched the Center for Smart Building Technology (C4SBT) in order to address the shortage of skilled workers in the energy industry focused on maintaining energy-efficient smart buildings. The C4SBT provides credit and non-credit pathways in Building Fundamentals and Building Automation Systems (BAS) which trains workers to become building operator technicians and middle managers. With support from the Green Jobs grant, Roxbury Community College will be able to build upon this work by:

- Expanding RCC's relationship with high schools to create a pipeline of students exposed to BAS training.
- Designing a 90-hour non-credit Building Fundamentals Pathway to be piloted with 12 high school students, including a 4–6-week paid internship.
- Designing a credited BAS degree pathway program with "stackable credentials" that allow non-credit students to obtain Credit for Prior Learning (CPL) and industry-recognized credentials that could lead to a two-year associate degree while working in their chosen field.
- Investing in state-of-the-art instructional equipment and wraparound services like transportation.

The program uses the Bureau of Labor Statistics definition for 'green jobs' but also includes a list of more than 35 priority green jobs for institutions to consider creating training programs around.³⁹ These include positions like electricians, environmental engineers, HVAC technicians, mechanical engineers, and building weatherization and insulation technicians. The program is still in the midst of reviewing applications and issuing grant awards, so limited details are available on outcomes. So far, two institutions, Franklin Cummings Tech and Roxbury Community College, have been awarded funding through the program. If proven successful, Massachusetts could consider making this program permanent or integrating similar ideas into other existing programs.

Massachusetts Life Sciences Center Internship Challenge

The Massachusetts Life Sciences Center (MLSC) Internship Challenge is a workforce development program aimed at creating a robust talent pipeline for smaller sized life sciences companies in Massachusetts. The program offers paid internships throughout the year to current students and recent graduates interested in life sciences career opportunities. Since 2009, the program has funded more than 6,000 internships across 950 companies.

The program subsidizes paid internship opportunities at small sized life sciences companies located in Massachusetts (100 or fewer employees). Larger companies are eligible to participate, but wages for their interns cannot be subsidized through the program. Internships can be part-time or full-time and can take place throughout the 12-month program year, which runs from May 1 through April 30. The MLSC reimburses eligible organizations at pay rates up to \$20 per hour, with a maximum potential reimbursement of \$9,600. Although the program is not specifically for students at MSIs, there are incentives built in to encourage employers to hire interns from those institutions. For instance, employers are typically allowed to hire two interns per program year;

³⁹ The program uses the Bureau of Labor Statistics definition for 'green jobs' which includes 1) jobs in businesses that produce goods or provide services that benefit the environment or conserve natural resources and 2) jobs in which workers' duties involve making their establishment's production processes more environmentally friendly or use fewer natural resources.

however, companies can hire two additional interns if they come from a Massachusetts two-year community college, certificate program, or MSI located anywhere in the U.S.

The program is designed to streamline and simplify the process for businesses to find potential talent. Approved organizations get access to a comprehensive database of intern applications where they can then contact potential candidates directly. To be eligible for the program, students have to be currently enrolled in a two-year higher education institution or certificate program or have completed at least their freshman year at a four-year college. Students who have graduated within the last year are also eligible. The program aims to support more than 500 interns throughout the 2023/2024 program year.

This program gives Massachusetts some interesting ideas on how to incentivize support for MSIs. However, the program could likely go further in ensuring that students from MSIs are thoroughly represented in the program. For example, the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center offers a similar program, but actively reserves spots for students from colleges and universities within Gateway Cities. The MLSC could consider integrating a similar element into their program in order to provide economic opportunity to underrepresented students and improve the industry's diversity.

California's Student Achievement Program

In 2022, California passed legislation to create student achievement programs for Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander students at its public higher education institutions. The purpose of the program is to provide culturally responsive services that enhance the educational experience and success of low-income, underserved, first-generation Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander students. The state budget included \$16 million dollars to create and implement these programs. The funds are split between the California State University system (CSU) and the community college system, with roughly 1/5th of the annual funding set aside for administration.

The legislation requires that CSU and the community colleges create a central office to administer, manage, and oversee the program. The two central offices are in charge of creating their own RFP in order to award grants to eligible institutions. In order to be eligible, institutions need to be an AANAPISI as defined in the Higher Education Act and also meet the following qualifications:

- Experience providing student support services to Asian American, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander students, and other underserved students.
- Program staff that will coordinate with campus faculty and staff to deliver support services to Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander students.

Both the CSU system and the community college system are in the design phase of the program, so there is limited information about how institutions will be selected or how these dollars will be used. However, the legislation does outline that participating institutions must provide the following services:

- Culturally responsive learning communities.
- Advising and counseling services.

- Mental health counseling and awareness services.
- Career development, career readiness, internships/mentorship, and employment services.
- Supplemental instruction and tutoring, such as English language development.
- Asian American, Pacific Islander studies courses and curriculum development.

The Student Achievement Program provides the state with an idea on how to address the financial challenges associated with educating students of color while also incorporating components designed to connect them to the workforce. The SUCCESS program run by the Massachusetts Association of Community Colleges is similar in design, but only focuses on students at public community colleges and does not have any workforce development elements. As we'll detail below, the SUCCESS program could be tailored to expand its reach and more directly target MSIs, much like California.

Illinois' Workforce Equity Initiative

The Workforce Equity Initiative (WEI) was created in legislation passed by the Illinois General Assembly in June 2020. The goal of the WEI is to ensure workforce equity for African Americans in Illinois. The program attempts to accomplish this goal by awarding grants to community colleges so that they can create, support, or expand short-term workforce training opportunities in high needs communities. The program has a particular focus on supporting African Americans, as data showed that they had the lowest employment in the state and declining participation in the community college system. The Illinois Community College Board manages the program and distributes \$18.7 million worth of grants to participating institutions each year.

Instead of focusing directly on schools that meet federal MSI criteria, the program prioritizes institutions that serve a large proportion of high needs students. Institutions must prove they operate in communities with high poverty, unemployment, crime, and incarceration rates in addition to high rates of participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and federal free lunch programs. African American participants must represent at least 60 percent of the population going through the institution's program funded with the WEI grant. There are 48 community colleges in Illinois and roughly 18 are able to participate in the program each year. Although being an MSI is not part of the application process, a number of them are, given the program's focus.

In addition to the funds being used to cover the cost of the training program and to provide stipends, grants can also be used to support additional staff capacity to provide wraparound services to students. For example, grants can be used to fund 'Navigators' who are responsible for helping participants through the program by minimizing or removing any barriers that may impact their ability to persist through the program and obtain a full-time job. Resources have been used to purchase interview attire, books, laptops, Wi-Fi hot spots, and more. Navigators are also encouraged to connect participants with community-based organizations that can help provide resources like rental assistance and food support.

The primary outcome the program strives to achieve is employment after the completion of a credential that aligns with regional workforce needs and provides a wage paying at least 30 percent

above the regional living wage. The latest WEI Performance Report includes a host of meaningful outcomes over both FY 2020 and FY 2021:

- 6,532 students were enrolled.
- Over 73 percent of the enrolled students identified as African American.
- 4,002 students completed the program.
- 70 percent of completers were employed.
- Average hourly wage of \$17.69 in FY 2020 and \$20.39 in FY 2021.

The WEI program offers Massachusetts some interesting ideas on how to strategically support institutions that tend to serve a large proportion of low-income students of color. As we'll expand upon below, Massachusetts should consider putting its own MSI definition into statute in order to provide clarity and consistency around who MSIs are so that they can be better integrated into the state's workforce development system. In addition, Massachusetts could consider incorporating funding in its workforce programs for similar high-touch supports such as Navigators.

Creating a Strategic Approach to Support MSIs – Recommendations for Massachusetts

Massachusetts has an opportunity to play a more active role in supporting MSIs in order to reach untapped talent sources and achieve our diversity and workforce goals. Below, we provide a set of recommendations based on our research findings. These recommendations are organized into three categories:

- 1) How can Massachusetts provide more clarity and predictability around identifying MSIs so that state programs can be tailored to support and connect their students to the workforce?
- 2) How can state supports be targeted to help MSIs develop effective pipeline programs and provide the students they serve with the assistance necessary to complete their education goals and enter a professional role with opportunity for growth?
- 3) How can policymakers and the business community improve connections between MSIs and employers?

Over time, policymakers should also consider how to track the longer-term performance of MSIs and any related workforce programs. Doing so will ensure that Massachusetts continuously improves its MSI strategy in order to address our workforce and diversity challenges. We hope these recommendations can serve as a guide on how to improve support for MSIs and employers, with the ultimate goal of providing equitable economic opportunity that meets our workforce needs.

Identifying MSIs in Massachusetts

Awareness and knowledge about who MSIs are and the role they play is limited. The U.S. Department of Higher Education does not regularly publish a list of eligible MSIs, leaving other organizations to fill the information vacuum, oftentimes with competing results. In addition, the responsibility for obtaining a federal MSI designation is entirely on the higher education institution, which may not have the resources to navigate the complex application process. This lack of clarity and support around what institutions are MSIs makes state level policy coordination

a challenge. Developing a Massachusetts-specific MSI definition could help the state integrate MSIs into our workforce development policies and programs by providing transparency and predictability to policymakers and higher education institutions.

Starting with a Massachusetts definition that replicates the federal designation could be an expeditious way to begin better incorporating MSIs into the state's workforce development system. However, unlike the federal process, Massachusetts should proactively identify the schools that meet the definition every few years. Over time, the state could consider utilizing a more expansive definition that more broadly engages institutions that serve high proportions of students of color, but that don't meet strict federal eligibility criteria.

The WEI program in Illinois, in addition to the Gateway City designation in Massachusetts, are two examples of more expansive definitions that the state could potentially build off of. Instead of focusing specifically on the HEA's definition of an MSI, the WEI program provides workforce development grants to institutions that prove they operate in disproportionately impacted communities. Similarly, the Gateway City designation provides clarity and predictability to recipients by outlining a set of standards and then targeting resources to a cohort of cities that meet them.

Targeting State Support to MSIs and the Students They Serve

Massachusetts does not currently have a coordinated strategy to support MSIs and other like higher education institutions. State funding for MSIs is limited to the public higher education system and one-off workforce programs, both of which do not account for an institution's MSI status or the demographics of students served. This means that MSIs often rely on federal funding for institutional support, but these dollars are not guaranteed and can be difficult to access. Providing additional state support is one way to address these challenges and is also well aligned with the Department of Higher Education's equity agenda. Below are four recommendations for creating a Massachusetts MSI funding strategy.

Rethink the Base Funding Model for Higher Education

Direct operational funding for the public higher education system totaled almost \$1.4 billion in FY 2024. However, the way in which that funding gets disbursed does not properly account for different types of enrollment or the demographics or needs levels of the students. Put simply, the subsidies that public MSIs receive from the state are blind to the fact that they educate a high proportion of low-income students of color who predominately attend school part-time. This lack of a coherent approach creates inequities in per-pupil funding between MSIs and non-MSIs. Introducing a funding formula for the public higher education system that accounts for demographics and socio-economic factors, in addition to the full costs associated with part-time students, is a more equitable approach that could improve outcomes among low-income students of color, increasing the talent pipeline prepared to fill available jobs.

Provide Direct Funding for Private MSIs within the State Budget

While rethinking the state's base funding formula could help improve student outcomes among public MSIs, it's important to note that private institutions are not included. Therefore, the three

private MSIs in Massachusetts – Franklin Cummings Tech, Cambridge College, and Urban College of Boston – do not benefit from state subsidies provided through the budget. Instead, they compete amongst other higher education institutions for limited funds disbursed through competitive grant programs at the federal and state level. Although these are private institutions, it is important to note that they are also mission-driven non-profits, each with a long history of serving non-traditional and underrepresented students. The state should consider providing state subsidies specifically for private MSIs in Massachusetts so that all MSIs in the state can receive the additional resources needed to improve retention, graduation, and job achievement outcomes among their students. Similar to the base funding formula, allocations could be determined by a multitude of factors, such as enrollment, demographics, and socioeconomic status.

Tailor Existing Programs to Prioritize MSIs

Massachusetts has an opportunity to better engage MSIs by expanding and/or amending existing workforce development programs to incentivize or prioritize MSI participation. The Training Resources and Internship Network Program (TRAIN) provides an example of an existing program that could be tailored to prioritize MSIs and diverse students. TRAIN awards grants exclusively to community colleges in order to provide training and career advancement to underemployed or unemployed workers. Although some MSIs participate in the program, there is no prioritization or incentive for them to do so. The state could take stock of existing workforce programs like TRAIN and adjust them to prioritize funding for and participation from both public and private MSIs. For instance, in FY 2023, TRAIN distributed 14 grants with an average award of \$107,000. Policymakers could adjust the program to include a percentage boost for MSIs, increasing the average grant award for institutions that serve high proportions of students of color.

In addition, the Donnelly Success Grants, funded through the Workforce Competitiveness Trust Fund (WCTF), is another program the state could tailor to prioritize MSIs. These grants have historically not been utilized by many of the state's MSIs, even though they are designed to target crucial sectors of the economy like health care and manufacturing, a key focus for MSIs. Funding for the WCTF has increased dramatically in recent years, allowing for more investment in Donnelly Grants. Including additional incentives for MSIs could be a way to boost participation in these grant opportunities and concentrate investment among students of color.

Focus Holistically on Student Success

While directly funding workforce programs designed to connect potential workers to job opportunities is a critical part of bolstering the workforce, supporting students and participants as they pursue and persist through education programs is equally as important. For instance, while many workforce programs in the state offer stipends and wraparound services, oftentimes those funds are extremely limited and are utilized to address last minute challenges, not systemic barriers. Similar to California's Student Achievement Program, The SUCCESS program run by the Mass Association of Community Colleges is designed to more holistically address challenges faced by low-income students of color by providing high-touch support services like

individualized academic advising, coaching, and mentoring. The program just completed its first full academic year and the findings are promising:⁴⁰

- 6,359 students were served by the program in FY 2022.
- 35 percent of participants were Hispanic/Latino; 24 percent were Black or African American.
- 63 percent of SUCCESS participants enrolled in Fall 2021 persisted to the following Fall, compared to 51 percent for non-participants.

Addressing the workforce crisis and creating economic opportunity for more residents of color depends on improving persistence and graduation outcomes among disadvantaged populations. Programs like SUCCESS could be expanded to target Massachusetts MSIs, bolstering the number of diverse residents prepared to enter the workforce. The program could also be adapted to support high-needs students in particular areas of study where matriculation rates are particularly low and demand in the workforce is high (e.g., STEM related fields).

Intentionally Connecting Employers to MSIs

Increasing awareness and improving state support of MSIs will go a long way in creating a more effective and equitable workforce system. However, policymakers should also be mindful of how the system does, or does not, forge connections between employers and MSIs. Massachusetts should consider how to create a more coordinated way for employers to interact with MSIs across the state. The Mass Life Sciences Internship Challenge and the Clean Energy Internship Program are two examples of programs that directly connect employers to available talent by creating a centralized repository of interested candidates for them to access. Creating programs with a similar approach, especially in high demand industries, would make it easier for employers to capitalize on MSI talent across the state.

In addition, the state could also consider using technology to better foster connections between employers and higher education institutions. Currently, there is no centralized place for employers to go in order to understand who MSIs are and what degrees/training programs they offer. Many employers may be unaware of what an MSI is and the students they serve. Creating a centralized resource that employers could access in order to learn about MSIs could help to create connections between them. Expanding the MassHire site to include MSI resources for employers could be a good start.

Lastly, partnerships between MSIs and employers are often formed organically through networking or convenings where leaders from business and education overlap. While this has led to successful one-off partnerships, it often does not lead to creating scalable programs. Coalitions have historically played an important role in achieving policy progress in Massachusetts by organizing stakeholders around shared goals. In conjunction with the business community, the state should consider how to capitalize on existing coalitions or support the formation of new ones in order to establish connections between employers and MSIs in the state. Business coalitions and associations could mobilize employers to focus more intently on engaging MSIs. In addition, MSIs

⁴⁰ A full list of program outcomes is available here: <https://masscc.org/success-program/>

could form their own coalition to promote collaboration and coalesce around a shared policy agenda.

Conclusion

Massachusetts is at an inflection point. The state faces two interrelated challenges: a workforce shortage and racial inequities within our labor force, both of which limit our economic potential. Increasing the state's ability to connect diverse populations to in-demand jobs is both a moral and economic obligation that is critical for the long-term sustainability of the Commonwealth. MSIs have a history of and expertise in educating low-income students of color, making them well suited to improve workforce diversity and address critical hiring needs. However, these institutions are also resource constrained and receive less public funding than their non-MSI counterparts. Federal programs designed to fill these financial gaps among MSIs are limited and difficult to access.

As a result, the state has an opportunity to play a more prominent role in supporting these institutions to maximize workforce readiness among the students they serve. In order to establish a system of support for MSIs, Massachusetts must accomplish three things: clearly identify MSIs, better target support to MSIs and their students, and improve connections between MSIs and employers. The recommendations above and the examples from both inside and outside Massachusetts can provide a path forward that enables the state to support and expand programs that connect diverse populations to economic opportunity.