West Philadelphia
Skills Initiative

IMPACT REPORT 2016
The mission of University City District’s **West Philadelphia Skills Initiative** (WPSI) is to connect West Philadelphia employers seeking talent to West Philadelphians seeking opportunity.

**University City District** (UCD) is a partnership of world-renowned anchor institutions, small businesses and residents that creates opportunity, and improves economic vitality and quality of life in the University City area of West Philadelphia. We work within a place-based, data-driven framework to invest in world-class public spaces, address crime and public safety, bring life to commercial corridors, connect low-income residents to careers, and promote job growth and innovation.

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A little over five years ago, UCD – once exclusively focused on the physical transformation of our community – began to ask some important questions: What if we could connect people in the community to jobs at our partner institutions? What if we could work with residents living just blocks away from large employers, and bridge the skills gap that makes this distance seem unconquerable? What if we could help our institutional partners solve real business needs by stemming entry level turnover while building the skills that enable advancement and growth?

In order to explore these ideas, we worked with our partners, nationally-renowned education and medical institutions and private employers. And together, we created the West Philadelphia Skills Initiative (WPSI), connecting unemployed neighborhood residents seeking opportunity with major employers seeking talent.

Today, we approach everything we do through the powerful dual lens of physical development and talent development. If we want to create livable and vital cities and neighborhoods, then an all-in strategy to leverage employer relationships for inclusive opportunity seems essential to us. After five years, we are proud of our results and the Skills Initiative’s transformative impact on both employers and jobseekers. But we are just getting started. As economic growth accelerates in University City, the Skills Initiative is perfectly positioned to help hundreds of West Philadelphians access life-changing opportunities in the years to come.

Sincerely,

Matt Bergheiser  
President  
University City District

Sheila Ireland  
Vice President of Workforce Solutions  
University City District
University City has become the city and region’s economic powerhouse, with more growth on the horizon. This 2.4 square mile neighborhood is home to the city’s largest and most innovative academic, research and commercial partners, who collectively employ approximately 76,000 individuals. Yet even as UCD’s institutional and private partners pursue transformative developments that will create more businesses and jobs in the years to come, the community continues to grapple with poverty. Thirty-one percent of West Philadelphia’s population lives below the poverty level, with an unemployment rate that is 14% higher than the citywide rate. A gulf exists, preventing communities and residents from accessing local opportunities.

The West Philadelphia Skills Initiative was created to bridge that gulf. For nearly twenty years, UCD has worked hand in hand with institutional partners to revitalize University City, and WPSI leverages those relationships in order to help local residents access opportunity and thrive in the workplace.
76,000
jobs in University City, a thriving economic engine

$3.9 billion
in construction activity in University City since 2015, with billions of dollars of activity on the horizon

$1 billion
invested in annual research and development by University City institutions

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Opportunities

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Challenges

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Over 1 in 3
West Philadelphians lives below the poverty level

47%
of households have incomes below $25,000 a year

Only 22%
of the population aged 25 or older has a bachelor’s degree
The Skills Initiative Approach

The Skills Initiative harnesses the hiring power of the institutions at the core of University City’s economic engine – from Drexel University and the University of Pennsylvania to The Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia – and gives local residents the tools they need to open the door to opportunity. We use a unique, employer-driven strategy that adds value to both jobseekers and employers.

WPSI adapts recruitment and curricula to employers’ specific hiring needs - regardless of sector or position - only launching training cohorts once employers have committed to partnering with the program. As an employer-driven program, the Skills Initiative exemplifies the benefits of a “train and place” model rather than the “train and pray” approach common to many workforce programs. With a best-in-class approach to both soft and hard skills, the staff ensures that employers receive talented local employees who fit their work culture and are prepared to thrive on the job.

Perhaps most importantly, many participants find that the Skills Initiative becomes a pivotal life experience, connecting them to the tools, behaviors and supports they need to build careers that can change their lives, families and communities.
Why the Skills Initiative Works

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Employers partner with the Skills Initiative when they’re looking to resolve challenges related to recruitment, high turnover or performance quality. The Skills Initiative designs its recruitment, selection, and training activities based on the employer’s needs, working with the employer to understand:

- Performance Gaps
- Workplace Culture
- Current Hiring Practices
- Retention Challenges

**Employer Commitment:**
Employers identify vacant positions that can be filled by program graduates and agree to interview graduates and give them preferential hiring status.

**Eligibility:**
WPSI recruits individuals who are currently unemployed, live in West Philadelphia (zipcodes 19104, 19131, 19139, 19143, or 19151), received a high school diploma/GED, and possess the specific credentials and characteristics that an employer requires.

**Outreach:**
During recruitment, the Skills Initiative uses an online platform and social media, shares information with non-profits and community-based organizations and conducts information sessions for the public.

**Selection:**
The Skills Initiative uses an in-depth application, interview and assessment process to build each cohort.

The Skills Initiative offers a flexible program model, ranging from 4 to 26 weeks. While the model changes based on employer needs, it always includes WPSI’s best-in-class approach to soft skills development:

- On-the-Job Training
- Technical Skills
- Soft Skills

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**STEP 1: Employer Engagement**

![Employer Engagement](image1)

Employers identify vacant positions that can be filled by program graduates and agree to interview graduates and give them preferential hiring status.

**STEP 2: Recruitment**

![Recruitment](image2)

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**STEP 3: Customized Curriculum**

![Customized Curriculum](image3)

The Skills Initiative uses an in-depth application, interview and assessment process to build each cohort.

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**Soft Skills**

**Technical Skills**

**On-the-Job Training**
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The Skills Initiative builds weekly performance evaluations and milestones into the program. A performance-based weekly stipend is used to model expectations of the workplace and encourage the behaviors and tools that are needed in a professional environment.

Participants have structured opportunities to meet with the employer throughout the program, and graduates are guaranteed interviews at the end of the program.

Program graduates receive coaching services and have the opportunity to join the WPSI Alumni Network for ongoing supports.

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**On-the-Job Training**

Longer programs include on-the-job training, which allows participants to learn onsite with the employer while earning a wage.

**Technical Skills**

Many cohorts receive technical skills training, designed to help participants adapt their previous technical skills training to the needs of a specific employer or to teach an employer’s proprietary technical systems.

**Soft Skills**

Soft skills are the foundation of every cohort’s experience. The curriculum is assigned to help participants better understand themselves and their career goals, and how to navigate today’s job market and succeed in the workplace.
Over the years, the Skills Initiative has made a positive impact on jobseekers, employers and our shared West Philadelphia community. These numbers highlight our results since launching the program, demonstrating the cumulative impact of helping individuals connect to life-changing employment opportunities.
IN 5 YEARS...

610 adults and youth touched through WPSI job training, internships and workshops

$12 MILLION in wages for previously unemployed West Philadelphians

53 average number of weeks unemployed prior to WPSI

Last Year...

90% OF OUR GRADUATES CONNECTED TO EMPLOYMENT

AVERAGE STARTING WAGE $13.37

This Year...

We are on track to serve

122 West Philadelphia residents
Representative Positions for WPSI Graduates

Since the Skills Initiative curriculum focuses on soft skills, we are able to recruit individuals with the technical skills needed to succeed across a range of positions and sectors:

- Certified Medical Assistant
- Patient Sitter
- Inpatient Clerk
- Lab Technician
- Desktop Support Analyst
- Administrative Support
- Security Officer
- Customer Service Representative
- Bike Patrol Officer
- Food Service Worker
- Grounds Maintenance, Landscaper
- Parking Attendant, Valet Driver
WPSI Participant Catchment Area
We have some really difficult-to-fill positions. And if we can look to our local community to fill those positions – to me it’s an opportunity to get people back to work, to have people have pride in their community, to be part of something that’s bigger in their community. I feel such a great sense of pride in knowing that we are working together to get people who live minutes from here [...] back to work. But to know that we’re doing that at the same time as filling really critical-to-fill jobs – I can’t think of anything better."

“The partnership that Drexel has fostered with the West Philadelphia Skills Initiative has been fundamental to our ability to hire highly skilled employees residing in our West Philadelphia community. Thanks to WPSI’s expertise, hard work and dedication, Drexel is able to directly impact the lives of its neighbors and assist them with achieving long term success.”

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**Employer Partners**

**Madeline Bell**  
CEO, The Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia

**Megan Weyler**  
Vice President, Human Resources & Organizational Effectiveness, Drexel University
“I have so many great things to say about WPSI, I don’t know where to begin. This program has helped me find myself, build my confidence. We built people skills, communication skills, and I have also learned to open up and network. Not only did we gain professional education, we also gained life skills, learning how to stay financially stable and also how to prioritize our lives. I can say I will never forget WPSI – this was one of the best experiences I’ve ever encountered.”

Gary Bailey
University of Pennsylvania Cohort
February 2016

“Coming to this program I was lost, I didn’t know who I was. Throughout the program I was taught a lot of valuable things I can use for the rest of my life. This program has helped me find myself again, know my potential and worth. WPSI has given me so much training and so much information on how to be successful. WPSI has changed my life and I’ll forever be grateful.”

Nateesha Malcolm
Allied Universal Cohort
September 2015
After five years of the West Philadelphia Skills Initiative, we are looking to the future. Together with our partners, we are constantly asking ourselves how to turn University City’s accelerating economic growth into accelerating economic opportunity for all. As local institutions and businesses continue to create new jobs in the district, we are expanding our capacity to serve ever more jobseekers and employer partners. We are also taking steps to prepare the workforce of the future, aligning our economic opportunity vision with the growth sectors of the local economy. Much of that effort is based on the unprecedented surge of real estate development in University City, and the green space that accompanies this growth.
Total Jobs in University City

Value of New Real Estate Development Projects

- Jobs in University City
- % of Philadelphia Jobs in University City

Dollar value in billions
Fueled by the expanding footprint of our partners, UCD launched our landscaping social venture, Green City Works, which connects our work to beautify the district with our workforce expertise. In addition to caring for UCD’s own public space projects, Green City Works executes fee-for-service landscaping contracts for local institutions and businesses. Green City Works already manages 250,000 square feet of green space and is on track to become a self-sustaining business that trains, places and directly employs local residents with the highest barriers to employment, including returning citizens. It also serves as a template for UCD’s deeper exploration of social enterprise models.

At the same time, the Skills Initiative recently initiated the Community Porches Reclamation (CPR) pilot, combining our soft skills approach with entry-level carpentry and safety skills for young adults (18-26). The curriculum is enhanced by on-the-job training opportunities, as the cohort rebuilt a dilapidated front porch belonging to a longtime community member. At its current scale, the program allows the Skills Initiative to connect local residents to opportunities in the building industry, which will continue to drive tremendous economic growth throughout the district. As we grow, and a new skyline rises around us, we hope to prepare new members of the construction workforce drawn from right here in West Philadelphia.

By aligning the Skills Initiative with the economic opportunities generated by our local partners, we are positioned to scale our impact, ensuring that more West Philadelphians can access opportunity and contribute to the ever-expanding growth of our community.
Green City Works is UCD’s landscaping social enterprise, leveraging institutional purchasing power for job growth and opportunity.
From a move to a new facility that will allow us to scale our impact, to a visit from Federal Reserve Chair Janet Yellen, there are big changes afoot here at the West Philadelphia Skills Initiative. As we continue to grow our capacity to serve local jobseekers and employers, we continue to share our approach and impact with partners on a local and national stage.
Commentary: In University City, Giving the Jobless a Chance
by Matt Bergheiser, President, University City District

“[Green City Works has] committed to offering employees good wages, full-time positions, and advancement opportunities.”

“UCD is building career pipelines to jobs that are in demand in the neighborhood.”

“Based on WPSI’s overwhelming success, there’s pressure from both employer partners looking for workers and West Philadelphians looking for jobs.”
Locally, programs like the West Philadelphia Skills Initiative are helping businesses and labor adapt to the new economy, training and connecting unemployed residents to jobs in the health-care and IT sectors.

The program targets applicants struggling with challenges such as longterm unemployment or re-entry from the criminal justice system, and helps them build transferrable job skills.

philly.com

U.S. Senator Bob Casey visits Green City Works to help install a new landscaping project at Amtrak’s 30th Street Station
Derek Holmes, who looked in vain for work for a year after losing his previous job, is now training as a certified medical assistant at Drexel University. He said he hopes Yellen learned from his story ‘that there are many people in many communities with talent, with drive, with determination that just need opportunity.’

After her speech, Yellen met in a roundtable with training participants and graduates at the West Philadelphia Skills Initiative, a program that connects local residents with job opportunities in the area.

The percentage of [WPSI participants] finding jobs has climbed steadily over the last five years to about 95 percent, and demand from potential employers now exceeds the supply of workers the program can offer.

Federal Reserve Chair Janet Yellen Visits WPSI

The New York Times

Bloomberg

newsworks
Employer Partners Include:

The Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia
Drexel University College of Medicine
University of Pennsylvania
University of Pennsylvania Health System

Green City Works Partners Include:

Amtrak
Brandywine Realty Trust
Drexel University
The Enterprise Center
International House Philadelphia
National Board of Medical Examiners
Philadelphia Water Department

Allied Universal
BrightView
Green City Works
Impark
SodexoMagic

University City Science Center
University of the Sciences
University of Pennsylvania
University of Pennsylvania Health System
Wexford Science + Technology
WPSI Funders Since Inception

(Adult Training)

ACE Charitable Foundation
Bank of America Foundation
Barra Foundation
Claneil Foundation
Citi Foundation
Citizens Bank Foundation
Connelly Foundation
Department of Community and Economic Development through the Mayor’s Office of Community Empowerment and Opportunity
Dolfinger-McMahon Foundation
Equal Measure
GlaxoSmithKline

Job Opportunity Investment Network
The Lenfest Foundation
Lincoln Financial Foundation
Local Initiatives Support Corporation
McLean Contributionship
Patricia Kind Family Foundation
Pew Charitable Trusts
The Philadelphia Foundation
Samuel S. Fels Fund
United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey
Wexford Science + Technology
Wells Fargo Foundation
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Pennoni Associates, Inc.

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President & Chief Executive Officer  
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Vice President of Workforce Solutions

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