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## Officials mull challenge to increase degree-holders

By [Sherri Welch](#)

Metro Detroit could be in the running for a \$1 million national marketing campaign promoting its focus on a highly educated workforce -- provided the region accepts a challenge to increase the number of degrees it produces at local colleges, universities and community colleges over the next three years.

**CEOs for Cities** on Jan. 31 opened registration for the national Talent Dividend Prize contest, which springs from the group's so-called "talent dividend."

The Chicago-based nonprofit, a network of businesses, nonprofits and mayors dedicated to building and sustaining the next generation of great American cities, estimates that increasing the number of people with four-year college degrees in the largest 51 metro areas in the U.S. by just 1 percentage point would yield another \$124 billion in personal income across the regions.

The competition measures strictly the number of degrees granted in each region and not the percentage of population that holds a degree.

The three years the contest covers is not long enough to measure educational attainment or the percentage of the population holding a degree, based on data from the **U.S. Census Bureau's** American Community Survey, said Bridget Marquis, program director at CEOs for Cities.

"This prize is centered on talent development, not talent retention," she said, acknowledging that graduates from local educational institutions could choose to move to other cities.

CEOs for Cities expects that many of the strategies metro areas will use to increase the number of degrees they produce will center on re-enrolling adults with some college but no degree, Marquis said, noting that those people are likely to remain in the metro areas where they now work.

The economic benefit of increasing the number of people with degrees across the country's 51 largest metros won't change if they move between the metro areas, Marquis said.

"But I do think cities and metros need to be concerned about talent retention, as well."

Representatives from **Data Driven Detroit**, the **Detroit Regional Chamber**, **Hudson-Webber Foundation**, **Kresge Foundation**, **Michigan College Access Network**, **Skillman Foundation** and **University of Michigan-Dearborn** have been a part of CEOs for Cities' talent dividend conversation for about the past year and have already been working locally to increase degree attainment by local residents through various efforts, said Greg Handel, senior director, workforce development at the Detroit Regional Chamber.

"It's fair to say we have been working towards this goal and understand the importance of it. Now the question is: Do we align with the competition?"

The chamber plans to talk with the other groups working toward higher degree attainment rates to see if they believe the competition is a good idea, Handel said.

Interested regions have until May 1 to register for the competition, with rankings of the number of degrees produced by local colleges, universities and community colleges, per capita, in each region posted on the competition website at <http://ceosforcities.org/talent/> each September and the winning region announced in September 2014.

Many communities will bend over backwards to get a new stadium built or to provide tax incentives to keep a factory or business, said William Moses, a member of the advisory board for the contest and program director for education at the Troy-based Kresge Foundation -- which is contributing a \$1 million grant to help fund the competition.

But just a 1 percentage point increase in the number of degree-holders in a region would yield a "huge increase in the amount of income in that community, in the amount of taxes paid and ultimately, in economic vitality."

The prize winner will get \$1 million worth of advertising "saying this community is committed to a highly educated workforce and is successful at producing it," Moses said.

The Indianapolis-based **Lumina Foundation for Education** is contributing another \$420,000 to administer the competition over the next three years.

About 108 metro statistical areas have populations of 500,000 or more or are the largest city in their state, making them eligible for the prize. As of the middle of last week, Milwaukee and Memphis had entered.

Talent is critical to the success of a city, Marquis said. "As opposed to rewarding places that can attract or retain talent, this prize is about rewarding places that develop talent."

Flagship and private institutions with high completion rates will likely play less of a role in winning the prize than institutions with lower completion rates, Marquis said.

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