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ZOMALAB

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SyncUp Colorado Offers \$5 Million Prize Pool for Breakthrough Solutions for Young Coloradans to Pursue Meaningful Careers

Workforce Design Challenge Brings Employers, Educators, and Nonprofits Together

DENVER, Colo., April 8, 2021— ZOMALAB, in partnership with the Colorado Governor’s Office, Colorado Succeeds, Colorado Thrives, SemperVirens, Skillful a Markle initiative, and Strada Education Network today announced the launch of SyncUp Colorado, a \$5 million prize pool centering on the challenge question: “How might we accelerate education-to-employment partnerships that support Coloradans ages 12-24 to make informed choices and obtain job relevant skills to build quality careers?”

Colorado-based organizations with early- and mid-stage solutions are eligible to apply, with opportunities to win between \$350,000 and \$2,000,000 per applicant. Round 1 applications are due June 1, 2021. Winners will be announced on September 14, 2021.

“Innovation is part of our DNA here in Colorado, and I’m excited to see this creative spirit being put toward solutions that will help Colorado build back stronger and get more folks the skills they need to get good paying jobs,” said Governor Jared Polis. “I want to thank these partners for their collaboration and efforts to continue making Colorado one of the best places to live and work.”

The state’s job growth average is [nearly double the national average](#). However, according to the [2020 Colorado Talent Pipeline Report](#), while 88% of new jobs in the state require a postsecondary degree, only 58% of Coloradans have a certificate, associate’s, bachelor’s, and/or professional degree. Of those earning bachelor’s degrees, [two-thirds graduate with significant debt](#). Additionally, Colorado is behind the national average in [high school graduation with 79%](#) of Colorado’s high school students graduating in 4 years, compared to a national average of 84%. The resulting skills gap limits opportunities for individuals and families as well as businesses. In fact, in a recent statewide survey conducted by Colorado Succeeds, 86% of Colorado’s employers said the skills gap is a threat to their businesses.

“Young Coloradans need more visibility into the evolving labor market and valuable skills and competencies, as well as more access to affordable resources and training. Our hope is that every Coloradan will have viable opportunities to make informed choices and obtain job-relevant skills to pursue quality careers. SyncUp Colorado aims to inspire and accelerate innovative partnerships across the state to support the future economic and career success of Coloradans ages 12-24,” said Ben Walton, Co-Founder of ZOMALAB.

“The SyncUp Colorado Challenge is an incredible opportunity to scale-up workforce development initiatives that address a big need: matching Coloradans with high-quality jobs through training, re-skilling and ongoing education,” said Kent Thiry, Chair and Founder of Colorado Thrives. “Colorado Thrives and the large employers we represent are committed to

helping to build equitable and inclusive opportunities—through programs like the SyncUp Colorado Challenge—for young people to contribute to our economy and build better lives for themselves and their families.”

Interested organizations can visit www.syncupcolorado.org to learn more about the Challenge, determine their eligibility, and sign up for virtual events to support applicants and build community amongst organizations.

About ZOMALAB

[ZOMALAB](#) was founded by Ben and Lucy Ana Walton to catalyze systemic, scalable solutions to key issues facing their home regions of Colorado and Chile. ZOMALAB focuses on advancing the areas of early childhood development, workforce, community economic development, and water and energy to help support resilient, thriving communities that will endure for future generations.

About Colorado Succeeds

[Colorado Succeeds](#) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that brings business leaders across the state together to ensure all of Colorado’s children are educated to their greatest potential and all Colorado’s businesses have the innovative and homegrown talent needed to thrive.

About Colorado Thrives

[Colorado Thrives](#) exists to advance Colorado as an inspiring and inclusive community known globally for innovation, collaboration, and overall well-being. Colorado Thrives is led by a group of 14 current and former Chief Executives from some of Colorado’s largest companies who believe corporate citizens are an important part of ensuring a better future for all and who have made a commitment to collectively leverage our voices, platforms, talent and resources to help Colorado succeed for the long term.

About SemperVirens

[SemperVirens](#) is an early stage venture capital fund investing in technology transforming healthcare, work, and financial wellness. The fund has a portfolio of more than thirty industry-defining technology companies, as well as an ecosystem of more than 100,000 HR executives. SemperVirens is committed to making meaningful connections amongst all stakeholders on a mission to build a better future of work.

About Skillful

[Skillful, a non-profit initiative of the Markle Foundation](#), is dedicated to enabling all Americans – particularly those without a four-year college degree – to secure good jobs in a changing economy. In partnership with Microsoft and others, Skillful is developing skills-based training and employment practices in collaboration with state governments, local employers, educators and workforce development organizations. Skillful’s work also informs, and is shared through, Markle’s Rework America Alliance which aims to advance opportunities for unemployed and low wage workers to move into good jobs, particularly those that have been disproportionately affected by the current economic crisis.

About Strata Education Network

Strata Education Network is a new kind of social impact organization dedicated to improving lives by forging clearer and more purposeful pathways between education and employment. Our approach combines innovative research, thought leadership, strategic philanthropy, mission-aligned investments, and a network of affiliate organizations. Together, we work to better serve millions of individuals in the United States seeking to complete postsecondary education and training, gain clear value from those experiences, and build meaningful careers. Learn more at stradaeducation.org.

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