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ZOMALAB

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SyncUp Colorado Announces Winners of \$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., Oct. 25, 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 six winners 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?”

SyncUp Colorado received more than 130 applications across 40 high-growth industries representing more than 200 Colorado-based organizations with early- and mid-stage partnership solutions. Applicants had opportunities to win between \$350,000 and \$2 million per partnership application. Judges who determined the winning solutions were Luella Chavez D’Angelo, Chief Executive Officer of Colorado Inclusive Economy; Ryan Craig, Co-founder and Managing Director of University Ventures; David Dragoo, Founder of Mayfly Outdoors; Alison Griffin, Senior Vice President of Whiteboard Advisors; Kristen Hamilton, Senior Vice President of Strategic Partnerships at Guild Education; Rebecca Holmes, President and CEO of Colorado Education Initiative, and Dwight Jones, Senior Deputy Superintendent of Equity and Engagement at Denver Public Schools.

“SyncUp Colorado catalyzed connections we’ve not seen before across employers of all sizes, intermediaries, technology innovators, and educators from the front range to rural areas of the state. The winning solutions and partnerships meet evolving labor market needs, offer valuable skills and competencies, and increase access to affordable resources and training,” said Kristen Hamilton, Senior Vice President of Strategic Partnerships at Guild Education.

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 82%](#) of Colorado’s high school students graduating in four years, compared to a [national average of 88%](#). 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.

The six winning partnerships collectively bring modern apprenticeships and hybrid college approaches to serve broad geographies and beneficiaries statewide and represent solutions across fast growing industries in Colorado including health care and construction.

“We are seeing real innovation in the education-to-employment sector in Colorado. Through Skillful, Markle has been working with some exceptional partners in the state to connect workers in Colorado with the support and training that will help get good jobs in our changing economy and to have employers recognize this talent. We are now sharing these learnings through the Rework America Alliance – so that Colorado innovation can have national impact,” said Beth Cobert, COO Markle Foundation.

The SyncUp Colorado workforce design challenge winners which earned unanimous agreement among the judges are:

Mid-stage, Scale Solutions

- **Colorado Health Careers Collaborative**, led by Arapahoe Community College and the Community College of Denver, brings together three of Colorado’s largest health employers -- Centura Health, HealthOne, and DaVita, as well as Beyond Campus Innovations, CollegenInvest Colorado, the Arapahoe/Douglas Workforce Center, and Denver, Englewood, Elbert, Kiowa, Littleton, Elizabeth, and Cherry Creek School Districts. Together, they will co-create equitable, health career pathways curriculum for Colorado youth around the 10 fastest growing health occupations including postsecondary certification, career navigation, and job shadow experiences. Award: \$2 million.
- **Unleashing Scale in CareerWise Modern Youth Apprenticeship**, a partnership led by CareerWise brings together more than 200 employers, 99 school partners across multiple school districts, state government, and higher education institutions. The partnership will strengthen and expand partnerships with additional employers and education providers improving the experience of 250+ apprentices and creating an additional 500 new apprenticeships throughout the state. It will scale the only youth apprenticeship model that provides in-school high school youth with paid employment in occupations and industries including financial and business services, technology, manufacturing, health care and nonprofits. Apprenticeships are designed to support high school youth to launch their careers alongside their continued education, reducing time and cost to complete a post-secondary credential and enter high-wage employment. Award: \$970,000.
- **Eagle County Collaborative for Career Pathways**, a partnership between YouthPower365, Vail Valley Partnership, and Eagle County Schools, will support Eagle County youth grades 8-12 as they gain the knowledge, skills, and expertise necessary to obtain and sustain a quality career. The Eagle County Collaborative for Career Pathways seeks to bridge the gap between education and employment, grow the number of students pursuing meaningful modern/non-college careers after school, and reduce gaps in the skilled workforce pipeline to feed into our community. Award: \$971,600.

Early-stage, Seed Solutions

- **Grow Our Own: Partnership for Equity in Health Careers**, led by Colorado Community Health Network (CCHN), is a solution for high school and young adult learners to build awareness of health careers opportunities and provide an accessible pathway for entry and advancement to meaningful and financially sustainable careers, with a specific focus on Medical Assisting as a first step. This solution is supported through formal partnerships with the National Institute for Medical Assistant Advancement (NIMAA), Colorado Safety Net Collaborative (CSNC), Doctors Care, Mission Medical Center, Mountain Family Community Health Centers, and River Valley Family Health Centers. Award: \$350,000.

- **EPIC Center Featuring Tiny Homes**, led by the Colorado River Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) and Copper Key Tiny Homes, provides opportunities for students in multiple Western Slope school districts to learn and gain experience with a variety of construction techniques through hands-on construction of tiny homes and produce affordable housing. The completed tiny homes will be sold and the proceeds reinvested in construction materials for future builds. Award: \$350,000.
- **The Linked Education: Providing a Continuum of Experiences in Agricultural Industries and the Food System**, led by Colorado State University (CSU) in partnership with industry leaders and employers at Together We Grow, the Colorado Vocational Agriculture Teachers Association, Northeastern Colorado high schools Briggsdale and Fleming and the CSU Spur Campus, will support young adults in exploring the role of innovation in the future of agriculture and modern careers in agri-food industries. The data-driven solution will provide new micro-credentialled professional and technical skills across the workforce pipeline via flexible online training programs, career experiences with agri-food industry partners, and teacher professional development. Programs will include digital badge modules, reinforced through experiential learning in Food Systems Resiliency and Regenerative Agriculture, community-based student internships, and professional development for teachers across Colorado focused on exposure to and incorporation of cutting-edge technologies and skills in the agri-food systems. The agri-food industries are critical to Colorado's economy — employing more than 195,000 Coloradans and representing 4.6% of the state's gross state product (GSP). The unmet demand for employees in these sectors threatens not only the resiliency of the food system, but also the sustainability of numerous Colorado communities who are facing never-before-seen crises. This solution will develop a pipeline and infrastructure to link young Coloradans to career opportunities while also enhancing the future of Colorado. Award: \$350,000.

“Our hope was to inspire and accelerate innovative partnerships across the state to support the future economic and career success of young Coloradans. In addition to the outstanding winners, we were so impressed and inspired by the community of partnerships that applied and the caliber of their solutions that we want to support the other applicants and finalists in connecting with additional funding opportunities and resources to bring their solutions to fruition,” said Ben Walton, co-founder of ZOMALAB.

SyncUp Colorado will host a demo day for the remaining 21 finalists to pitch their solutions to prospective funders. Additionally, ZOMALAB funded a SyncUp Fellow at Colorado Succeeds dedicated to helping applicants who were not finalists continue to develop and implement solutions to build a more coordinated system and create more opportunities for young Coloradans to build meaningful careers. SyncUp Colorado and ZOMALAB will continue work with applicants, finalists, winners and key stakeholders throughout the state to explore long-term solutions for sustaining collaboration across the education-to-employment system which will include future design challenges.

Read more about the SyncUp Colorado Workforce Design Challenge, the winners, and the finalists at www.syncupcolorado.org.

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 is a nonprofit initiative of the Markle Foundation and part of [Markle's Rework America Alliance](#), working with employers, educators, nonprofits, workforce leaders and others to open opportunities for millions of unemployed and low wage workers to move into good jobs, particularly people of color who have been disproportionately impacted by the current economic crisis.

About Strada Education Network

Strada Education Network is a new kind of nonprofit social impact organization, dedicated to increasing individuals' economic mobility through purposeful connections between education and employment. Our approach combines innovative research, thought leadership, strategic philanthropy and investments, and support for individuals through student coaching, work-based learning, career exploration, and helping adults learn new skills throughout their careers. Together, we work to better serve the millions of Americans 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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