



Activate Workforce Solutions Impact Report 2020

For questions or requests related to this report, please contact:
Kathryn V. Harris, Chief Operating Officer, Activate
kathryn@activateworkinc.org

Table of Contents

A Letter from Helen Young Hayes	3
Public Benefit Impact	4
Growing Team	6
Aspen Institute Grant	6
Colorado Inclusive Economy	7
Community Awareness Efforts	8
Challenges in 2020	8
What's Next in 2021	9

In accordance with Colorado's benefit corporation statute, [House Bill 12-1138](#), Activate Workforce Solutions, PBC is a for-profit corporation that is operated in a manner that is sustainable and beneficial to society and the environment. A Colorado Public Benefit Corporation (PBC) must:

- List one or more public benefit that the company strives to achieve,
- Be managed to balance the pecuniary interest of the shareholder, the best interests of those affected by the company's conduct, and the public benefits listed, and
- Prepare an annual benefit report with a description of how the company promoted the public benefits listed on the company's articles of incorporation, any obstacles the company faced in promoting those public benefits, and an assessment of the overall social and environmental performance of the company against third-party standard.

ABOUT ACTIVATE WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS, PBC

Since 2016, Activate has served as a bridge connecting untapped talent with high-quality careers in financial services, business services, healthcare, information technology, and the skilled trades, transforming lives and communities. In 2020, Activate launched [ActivateIT](#), a tuition-free technology training and professional development program with the national tech training institute [Per Scholas](#). Our mission is to activate individuals to achieve economic freedom through the dignity of work. Together with our nonprofit and employer partners throughout the Denver metro area, we are creating an alternative workforce ecosystem built on excellence.

Our public benefit, defined in our charter, is to provide job placement and post-placement coaching support for individuals who are transitioning out of poverty and entering the workforce. For more information visit <https://www.activatework.com>.



Colorado was named the second-best economy in the nation by [US News & World Report](#). However, when compared to the nation, Colorado ranks 12th in overall prosperity, 37th in racial disparity, and 45th in high school graduation rate ([Prosperity Now Scorecard, 2020](#)).

In 2020, COVID-19 exacerbated these disparities. By April 2020, 35% of the lowest-income workers were unemployed. In contrast, just 9% of the highest earners experienced job loss due to COVID. And these job losses inordinately impacted people of color. Activate Workforce Solutions firmly believes that *there is no economic freedom without a job, and there is no job-creation machine like business*.

Business-led solutions are at the center of this work, and business leaders have a moral duty to work together to build an economy with equitable access for everyone. We are working closely with community leaders, government agencies, nonprofits, and business leaders to build our economy back in a way that is equitable for all people. Leaning on the research and insights of the Colorado Workforce Development Council, Colorado's Department of Higher Education, Department of Education, Department of Labor and Employment, and the Office of Economic Development, we believe that together we have an opportunity to serve the individuals most impacted by decades of systemic bias, generational poverty, and other barriers to employment.

Activate's reimagined recruiting model allows everyone to win:

- Individuals launch careers, earning better wages, more comprehensive benefits packages, and the dignity and stability of work.
- Employers benefit from reduced costly turnover, an improved workforce culture that supports diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts, and 3X+ the retention rates.
- Workforce development partners experience better program outcomes with a feedback loop and shared data from Activate.
- Communities benefit from state and local tax revenue from increased wages, putting dollars directly back into the community.

As with many businesses in 2020, Activate experienced hardships because of COVID-19. Employers implemented hiring freezes, workforce development programs paused many services, and individuals had new barriers to work, including childcare center closures, virtual learning for school children, and mental health implications associated with increased stress. Notably, during the height of COVID-19, not a single individual that obtained a career through Activate was impacted by furloughs and layoffs.

We believe our purposeful and pragmatic approach to recruiting, the boldness of the employers that hire Activate individuals, and the Activate professional coaching we offer every individual we place into a career, will elevate the workforce of Colorado. Our data-driven focus on improving our work and the outcomes we secure for individuals will continue elevating our mission to activate individuals to achieve economic freedom through the dignity of work.

Founder & CEO

Activate Workforce Solutions
ActivateIT Powered by Per Scholas

PUBLIC BENEFIT IMPACT

Our public benefit is directly related to the number of individuals we can place and support through our operations and the financial improvements those individuals achieve on their way to financial independence, mainly through stable, sustained work. To track our public benefit performance, we selected several metrics that are widely used and considered standards in workforce development.

Activate's success is measured by job retention of the individuals we serve.

The federal government's [Work Investment and Opportunity Act \(WIOA\)](#) sets a low bar for defining worker retention as whether an individual's wages are greater than \$0 during the quarterly reporting period. Alternatively, Activate is focused on full-time, full-benefit, professional positions. Additionally, our retention is defined as any individual currently earning full-time wages at the same employer at which they were originally hired. We believe job retention is a critical component of our work to provide value for employers. This employer-centric approach helps us demonstrate our value to employer partners.

We remain absolutely convinced that good jobs are the antidote to poverty. As much as we can provide opportunities for those jobs to people outside the typical hiring pools, entire communities can be dramatically impacted. This happens in three ways:

1. The income earned by our placements is reinvested in families and neighborhoods.
2. Stronger bonds are formed between people from diverse backgrounds. As our partner [CrossPurpose](#) describes it, we seek to "reweave the fabric of society."
3. Sustained, quality employment allows individuals we serve to become net-tax contributors, sometimes for the first time in their lives. Most people we work with rely on social programs, including traditional cash assistance, housing support, government-supported employment, childcare assistance, food assistance, Medicaid, energy assistance, and more.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Since we are a professional services business, typically our day-to-day business operations have a negligible environmental footprint. The COVID-19 shutdown revealed the positive implications of moving our services fully remote. Activate closed its office on Logan Street in Denver and joined ActivateIT in the shared office space of WeWork. Additionally, all processes were moved virtual, and employees work primarily from home, decreasing the carbon footprint from candidates and employees.

NETWORK IMPACT

Workforce Development Partners

Activate receives candidate referrals from over 35 workforce development partners, including [Metropolitan State University of Denver \(MSU\)](#), Bridge of Hope, CrossPurpose, and Dress for Success, among others. Activate is also working strategically with referral partners to create more equitable pathways to employment for individuals, including an Activate Leadership Program with MSU Denver, which is a year-long fellowship program for rising seniors. This will launch in June 2021.

Employer Partners

Activate has signed agreements with 20 employers across industries in the Denver metro area, with a job board of 100+ job openings. The employers represent five industries, including healthcare, information technology, financial services, business services, and nonprofit. The healthcare industry is the largest opportunity within Activate, with large hospital partners in SCL Health, Craig Hospital,

and Denver Health. As part of their initiative to be an [Anchor Institution in Denver](#), Denver Health has committed to 50 placements per year across all open positions (i.e., clinical, administrative, food services, etc.).

INDIVIDUAL IMPACT

Activate’s 1-year retention rate with the same employer, for individuals placed in professional careers, is 66%. COVID-19 had a drastic impact on the population served by Activate. Seventy percent of the individuals with a tenure less than one year were hired in 2020, 50% of whom were female. Additionally, those hired in 2020 that did not make their one-year mark experienced more barriers to employment than compared to the rest of those that did not stay employed for at least one year.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to have a significant impact the individuals Activate serves. The decrease in one-year retention from previous years is directly correlated with the pandemic, including the lack of reliable childcare and the mental health implications caused by the stress of long-term unemployment and uncertainty. To address these added stressors, Activate re-evaluated the post-placement coaching curriculum, extending the curriculum to 12-months.

Below are the impact metrics by year, including total number of placements, average starting wage, average age at placement, and monthly income increase. Most notable is the increase in average starting wage from 2019 to 2020.

Year	# Placed
2016	5
2017	9
2018	16
2019	14
2020	22
2021	6
Grand Total	72

Year	Starting Hourly Wage
2016	\$ 14.48
2017	\$ 14.39
2018	\$ 15.14
2019	\$ 17.60
2020	\$ 21.29
2021	\$ 18.38
Grand Total	\$ 17.63

Year	Age @ Placement
2016	40
2017	41
2018	36
2019	37
2020	36
2021	34
Grand Total	37

Year	Monthly Income Increase
2016	\$ 2,509.87
2017	\$ 2,218.19
2018	\$ 2,591.25
2019	\$ 3,050.88
2020	\$ 3,145.98
2021	\$ 2,968.33
Grand Total	\$ 2,829.26

GROWING TEAM

We expanded the [Activate team](#), hiring individuals with wide-ranging experiences bridging public and private sectors. Collectively, the Activate team has 10+ decades of experience in recruiting, staffing, and workforce development. The depth of experience and addition of new team members will allow Activate to:

- Increase the volume of candidate referrals;
- Create partnerships with the Colorado Community Colleges;
- Work closely with workforce development programs to offer the right support for program graduates;
- Partner with leading businesses in Colorado to create multiple on-ramps to professional careers;
- Offer a more individualized and comprehensive professional development coaching curriculum.

Kathryn V. Harris, the Managing Director of [ActivateIT Powered by Per Scholas](#), stepped into a dual role of Chief Operating Officer with Activate Workforce Solutions, maintain her role as Managing Director for ActivateIT. The previous COO, [Dan Kaskubar, started Spur LLC](#). Through Spur, Dan builds coaching cultures in companies and teams around the Denver metro area. He longs to see as many employers as possible spurring their employees on toward love and good work in Denver and beyond.

ASPEN INSTITUTE GRANT

Activate joined the second cohort of the [Aspen Family Prosperity Innovation Community](#), *Ascend at the Aspen Institute*, an initiative for breakthrough innovations and collaborations that position families to reach educational success, economic prosperity, and health and well-being. Activate's involvement in the initiative is part of a larger partnership that is led by the nonprofit [CrossPurpose](#) and includes the Colorado Department of Human Services and [The Bridge Network](#).

This collaboration is vital to facing the challenge of the moment: keeping prosperity from slipping away for families. The coronavirus pandemic is threatening our health and our economy, spotlighting the existing cracks in the nation's systems that millions of Americans have been falling through for generations. As leaders aim to stem the fallout, Family Prosperity is in the position to catalyze long-term solutions that will work for families now and well after the pandemic is over. Activate, a people-centered placement agency and professional coaching firm, is in the proud position of having none of its placements laid off during the pandemic – a testament to the quality of the jobs we recruit into.

This new phase of Family Prosperity brings together 20 national and community-based organizations and 14 expert advisors from across the U.S., including employers in the public and private sectors. Working beside families, and guided by their expertise and experience, this community will develop, refine, and amplify strategies and solutions that remove barriers and accelerate prosperity for families, centering on people of color and those with low incomes.

Together, Family Prosperity will:

- Build, disseminate, and implement a portfolio of actionable approaches and strategies that put child and family outcomes at the center, including innovations in paid leave and

childcare; equitable support for families' health, mental health, and well-being; employment partnerships; and public benefits programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program;

- Identify a set of practices and policies that can shift the narrative around families with low incomes and transform policymaker, practitioner, and public mindsets; and
- Create and refine bold policies that can influence the private sector and the way workers, particularly those with low wages, are supported, employed, and trained.

COLORADO INCLUSIVE ECONOMY

The Colorado Inclusive Economy (CIE) movement was started with the vision of Helen Young Hayes, founder and CEO of Activate Workforce Solutions. Because of the work that Activate does to connect overlooked, marginalized individuals with good, career-pathway jobs, she was acutely aware that Black and Brown people were being disproportionately impacted by COVID19 both from an illness and job loss perspective. She started by convening a small group of leaders in April with a common interest in workforce development. They came together with a desire to shape the narrative as CEOs emerged from COVID.

The pandemic had laid bare decades of structural inequality and concentrated poverty that has created a two-tiered economy. The leaders that started the movement wanted CEOs to remember the lessons of COVID and not just revert to business as usual, but rather prioritize diverse hiring practices by moving more people of color into quality, full-time, full-benefit jobs with opportunities for growth and advancement throughout their organization. The explosive nationwide protests against the deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor in May ignited the collective conscience toward the need for real change and gave fuel to our growing movement.

An opportunity exists for CEOs and business leaders to lead by addressing structural issues of inequality and making an immediate, long-term commitment to build inclusive cultures and diversify their workforce. We have seized this opportunity with CIE. These were the humble beginnings of the movement that has now grown into 28 founding CEOs and business leaders and an all-volunteer Steering Committee that is giving 500+ hours per month to launch, design, and execute the movement.

Justine Metz acted as the interim Executive Director for the movement and worked to weave together the five volunteer committees including the Marketing/Communication, the DEI Toolkit, Program, Business Development, and Metrics committees. In May 2021, CIE hired Luella Chavez D'Angelo as Chief Executive Officer.

Colorado Inclusive Economy represents civic leadership at its best, responding to the unprecedented, devastating effects of COVID-19, an economic recession and growing racial inequalities with extraordinary, shared vision, collaboration, and leadership. Three pillars of Colorado Inclusive Economy:

1. Employers (leadership, recruiting, hiring, retention, advancement)
2. The Workforce Pipeline (education, upskilling, reskilling, employment)
3. The Larger Business Ecosystems (suppliers, procurement, partners)

CIE will be taking CEOs and business leaders through a transformational learning journey that will allow them to work first on themselves, with their DEI teams, and ultimately their entire company. Our goal is to have the CIE members make an immediate and long-term commitment to diversify their workforce and build inclusive cultures and economic community by doing the following:

1. Transforming their corporate cultures and revamping their recruiting, hiring, retention and advancement practices to support people of color.
2. Investing in education, upskilling, reskilling, and employing people of color to create a skilled and inclusive workforce for the future.
3. Sustaining diverse business ecosystems and supply chains by working with suppliers and partners led by people of color and by supporting procurement processes that advance equity.

While this movement is much larger than Activate Workforce Solutions, it plays a significant role in our business development strategy to work with employers who are strategic in their intent to build diverse teams providing economic opportunity and wealth creation for people of color.

COMMUNITY AWARENESS EFFORTS

Helen Young Hayes received several awards and appointments in 2020, including:

- Titan 100 CEO
- GlobalMindED Inclusive Leader Award
- Colorado Technology Association APEX Awards, Talent Champion of the Year
- Business Experiential Learning Commission

Media Placements:

- Helen and Activate were featured in the [Colorado Business Roundtable's Faces of Business](#) campaign, alongside Habab Balla, who launched a career with Activate employer partner, Arrow Electronics.
- Faces of Business: discover your purpose and live your passion ([Colorado Biz Magazine](#))
- The Colorado Business Roundtable Launces Faces of Business Campaign ([EIN Presswire](#))
- Colorado Business Roundtable launches Faces of Business Campaign ([The Gazette, CO Springs](#))
- Denver Health strives to improve wellbeing of community more than health services ([FOX News KDVR](#))
- Community Highlights: Meet Helen Young Hayes of Activate Workforce Solutions PBC ([VoyageDenver](#))

CHALLENGES IN 2020

COVID-19

In the height of the COVID-19 shutdown in 2020, candidate referrals ceased. Nonprofit partners were pivoting to remote support and reassessing what programs could be offered under the pandemic restrictions. Some organizations from which Activate received referrals shut their doors indefinitely. Activate did not make a placement between March and July of 2020 due to lack of candidate referrals and employer hiring freezes across industries.

As businesses reopened and nonprofit organizations resumed supportive service offerings, Activate adjusted its processes to accommodate the CDC's health and safety guidelines. Rather than having candidates come into the office for interviews, assessment, etc., we moved completely virtual. We worked closely with many of the nonprofit partners to ensure individuals had access to reliable internet and devices to allow for the remote process. Even as restrictions lighten, Activate continues to proceed through the virtual format, as it allows more flexibility for candidates.

SCALING OUR MODEL

Activate continues to focus on scaling the model, but faces challenges with employer partner turnover, fewer early career positions, and identifying felon friendly employers.

Activate runs an employer-funded model and employers add Activate to their talent acquisition strategy because they align with our mission to activate the potential of individuals from often overlooked communities. When a key advocate at an employer partner leaves, this creates an issue down-line to hiring managers – the mission is forgotten within the organization and creates a need for Activate to retrain and regain commitment.

While employers are committed to hiring candidates sourced through Activate, there are often few entry pathways into an organization. Many open positions are high-skilled and require years of experience within a specific field. Although Activate does work with candidates with traditional, four-year degrees, many Activate candidates have nontraditional training (i.e., industry certifications) rather than a formal degree. This makes candidate-to-job matching difficult. Additionally, Activate continues to increase the number of partnerships with fair chance hiring employers.

WHAT'S NEXT IN 2021

CANDIDATE SOURCING

As a response to fewer referrals from nonprofit partners, Activate is piloting a digital sourcing strategy to attract candidates for high-volume opportunities within healthcare and information technology. Candidates complete a skills assessment provided through Indeed as well as an Activate application, which gathers demographic and barrier-to-employment information. Candidates sourced through digital initiatives still undergo the rigorous screening and vetting process.

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

Activate is creating alternative pathways to employment in partnership with community organizations and employers. In June 2021, select Metropolitan State University of Denver rising seniors will begin a year-long fellowship at a participating [Colorado Concern](#) employer partner. During this year, individuals will learn hard and soft skills necessary to be successful in the workplace. Additionally, individuals will receive ongoing coaching and mentorship from Activate professional coaches. The goal of this partnership is to create a pathway from college to professional positions.

DATA COLLECTION/REPORTING

In 2021, Activate will undertake a Salesforce implementation to centralize the communication and process management of all stakeholders, including candidates, employers, and community partners. This will provide for better data collection for analysis and production improvement, as well as automation of marketing and communication.