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STEM Education and Training Critical for Nevada's Economy

Brookings Releases Recommendations for the State of Nevada to Align Education and Workforce Development with Growing Demand for STEM Jobs

(Washington, D.C) –Nevada has a sound economic development strategy but needs a workforce strategy focused on science, technology, engineering and math skills, concludes a new report from the Brookings Institution's Metropolitan Policy Program and Brookings Mountain West, a partnership with the University of Nevada at Las Vegas.

The new report—*Cracking the Code on STEM: A People Strategy for Nevada's Economy* by Jessica A. Lee, Mark Muro, Jonathan Rothwell, Scott Andes, and Siddharth Kulkarni— identifies the challenges facing Nevada as it expands its high-value STEM economy. It advances a suite of recommended actions that public-, private-, civic-, and philanthropic-sector leaders in Nevada can take to develop a skilled, STEM-proficient workforce.

The report is a sequel to the 2011 Brookings report “Unify | Regionalize | Diversify” which helped the state develop an economic diversification strategy focused on higher-tech growth sectors.

“These recommendations outline the kind of STEM education and training agenda that Nevada needs to deliver on economic transformation,” said Lee, a Brookings senior policy analyst and associate fellow. “By taking actions like these, Nevada will be able to connect more of its residents to the state’s growing STEM economy.”

The report finds that STEM education and workforce training is now critical to Nevada’s economic future. STEM-oriented sectors such as Business IT Ecosystems and Health and Medical Services are growing faster and creating more jobs than can be supported by Nevada’s existing labor pool. Accordingly, the new report employs novel job postings data to document serious supply and demand issues in numerous professional and blue-collar STEM occupations, ranging from software developers and physicians and surgeons to nurses, clinical lab technicians and database administrators.

“In southern Nevada, STEM training is the key to the region's economic diversification efforts because it provides a workforce for manufacturing, IT, and health care,” notes Rob Lang, UNLV Director of Brookings Mountain West.

In the north, the recent announcement from Tesla Motors to locate its gigafactory for lithium ion batteries in Storey County offers yet another reminder that the state needs a larger pool of both blue-collar (sub-BA) and professional STEM workers. The company projects that it will need to hire several thousand technically skilled assembly line and engineering workers starting in 2017.

“The state’s economy is becoming more technical, and so its students and workers need to adapt by obtaining the requisite STEM skills,” said Muro, a Brookings senior fellow and the co-director of Brookings Mountain West. “The good news is that STEM skills and jobs are more accessible than many people realize, and in many cases require just a two-year degree. What’s more, STEM jobs pay a significant wage premium.”

Given the urgency of Nevada’s STEM skill deficit, *Cracking the Code* aims to help the state and its regions develop a new approach to STEM-related education and workforce training through two major tiers of action:

- The public sector must work with business, civic and philanthropic stakeholders to build a STEM education and training ecosystem that establishes a clear vision of STEM’s importance, strong alignment between training systems and industry, and improved basic education.
- Civic entrepreneurs must work in a bottom-up fashion in Nevada’s regions to spark new interest in STEM, catalyze new partnerships and change the dynamic across the state’s public education system.

“Nevada’s economic diversification requires a new approach to education and workforce development,” said Lee. “By taking action now, Nevada can put in place a people strategy to match its economic strategy and link more Nevadans to better jobs in the process.”

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Brookings Mountain West was established in 2009 as a partnership between the Brookings Institution and the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV). Brookings Mountain West (BMW) seeks to bring high-quality, independent public policy research to the bear on the most critical issues facing the dynamic metropolitan areas of the Mountain West region. Learn more at <http://brookingsmtnwest.unlv.edu>.