

Supporting LatinX Talent Pipelines

Building Bridges through Education recognized as an Excelencia in Education 2021 finalist.

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Building equitable talent pipelines is critical to the Steelcase Social Innovation mission to create thriving communities where quality education is more accessible. The Steelcase Equitable Talent Pipelines program takes a systems-change approach to bringing together the world of work and education by co-designing early career exposure programs with our community partners. We take students through a learning journey that emphasizes mentoring, skill development, hands-on project experience, and developing an understanding of the career paths and skills needed to excel in key Steelcase functions.

This September, our partner The West Michigan Hispanic Chamber of Commerce (WMHCC) received national recognition by Excelencia in Education and was named a 2021 Excelencia finalist for their equitable talent pipeline program, Building Bridges Through Education (BBTE). An education and workforce development program, BBTE prepares and connects LatinX college students with the tools and opportunities to reach their career goals. BBTE was one of only 21 initiatives in the country to receive national recognition for their asset-based approach to serving Latinos.

The BBTE Leadership Team visited Steelcase for their program kickoff.

“It is an atypical body of work we are leading here in Michigan that has caught the attention and interest of our peers across the nation,” says BBTE Program Manager Jessica Ledesma. “For them to see Michigan based companies and universities support leaders of color to lead an intentional long-term investment in the Latinx community for the advancement of the greater community flips the typical nonprofit/charitable contribution narrative to trust-based partnerships driven by equity. It is what has enabled significant positive outcome in such a short amount of time.”

Since 2019, Steelcase has been a proud partner and supporter of the BBTE program, most recently by developing a design thinking program that paired a group of Steelcase mentors with small teams of BBTE fellows during a year-long career-readiness fellowship program. Over four sessions, Steelcase employee volunteers used the Design Thinking methodology to teach innovation mindsets as they as they took on the challenge of reimagining the future of health in urban environments. The goal was to build the creative problem-solving capacity of the fellows and develop tools for clearly articulating perspective and generating new and novel ideas.

“Mentoring the fellows and being able to give back and empower my Hispanic brothers and sisters has been so rewarding,” says **Cecilia Calzada Munoz**, workplace innovation student associate and BBTE employee volunteer. “I love seeing Steelcase and its employees care about their surrounding communities while partnering with a local organization.”

“Investing our efforts today to nurture equitable talent pipelines for the future is truly an example of a win-win, rooted in shared value creation with our community partners and employees,” says Kim Dabbs, Steelcase global vice president, Social Innovation & ESG Strategy. “We are proud to partner with WHMCC in support of helping grow a dynamic and inclusive workforce in Michigan and beyond.”

About WMHCC: The West Michigan Hispanic Chamber of Commerce is dedicated to working with all members of the community to increase the economic advancement of Hispanic owned businesses and to assist the professional growth of Hispanic business leaders in West Michigan. **Learn more at <https://westmihcc.org>**

About Excelencia in Education: Excelencia in Education accelerates Latino student success in higher education by promoting Latino student achievement, conducting analysis to inform educational policies, and advancing institutional practices while collaborating with those committed and ready to meet the mission. Launched in 2004 in the nation’s capital, Excelencia has established a network of results-oriented educators and policymakers to address the U.S. economy’s needs for a highly educated workforce and engaged civic leaders. **For more information, visit <http://www.EdExcelencia.org>.**