



Invest in people, grow the talent pool



Questa Scholars represent the diversity of talent.

ACCESS

Since 2007, Questa has served over **800 students**

RETENTION

$\frac{2}{3}$ of Questa Scholars have chosen to **stay in Northeast Indiana** to live and work.

POTENTIAL

More than **60%** of the current workforce has **no post secondary training or education**

BRIDGING THE TALENT GAP

The Questa Foundation works with employers and industries to develop and retain local talent.

article by Tammy Davis • photography provided

Momentum is building in northeast Indiana; accolades for the area's favorable business climate and livability have become a regular appearance in the media. As area organizations work together to attract business and investment, one question looms large: is the workforce able to fill the jobs being brought to the area?

Marc R. Levy, executive director of Questa Education Foundation, cites statistics that indicate that northeast Indiana's current workforce faces a growing talent gap: more than 60 percent of the current workforce has no postsecondary training or

education, and more people are retiring than are entering the workforce.

"The talent gap we're facing right now is only going to get bigger if we don't do something," says Levy. "Investing in our human capital is the most important area to focus on if we want to grow business."

Rather than simply making people aware, however, Questa Foundation offers solutions. The answer, says Levy, can be found in undertaking cooperative efforts among industries, educational institutions, and foundations like Questa.

"It's time to start collaborating on the talent pool, as opposed to competing with each other for the same talent," he says.

Growing the talent pool means making sure people have the right qualifications for the industries that need them. Those qualifications could range from a technical certification to a college education. In many cases, the people a company needs may already be on its payroll; they just need additional training. That's where Questa can help.

"We can partner with businesses to upscale the talent they already have," says Levy. "We can do this with an individual company or collectively

with others. We want to create talent clusters around our industry clusters."

Questa already runs tuition assistance programs with businesses around the region, not only relieving the administrative burden from the company, but also making the process easier for the individual seeking training. In one specific example, a local entity provides an initial investment from its annual education budget, and Questa administers the program on its behalf. The dollars are flexible; they can be used for tuition as well as ancillary costs such as books, computers and childcare. Questa monitors for compliance and completion, and employees commit to staying in the company when the program is complete.

"It's a triple win," says Levy. "The employer gains the talent it needs, the employee has the skills to maintain a living wage job and the area economy grows."

This same type of program can be applied on a larger scale to industries, and in many cases Questa has access to matching funds. The key to success is the fact that programs are facilitated through low-interest, forgivable loans which require people to stay in the area for a period of time after completing their training or education.

"Everyone has some skin in the game," explains Levy.

Working with entities across the region, Levy sees clear needs already, with more on the horizon. For example, northeast Indiana currently needs 300 additional welders, many with precision skills that can be applied to orthopedics and thus require additional training. There's also a shortage of nurses, skilled salespeople and health care workers, among others.

"There are people who would do these things if they could afford to get the training," says Levy. "If

you invest in people, they become your employees of the future."

Questa Foundation stands ready to help the area bridge its talent gap, but it requires a collective effort from all involved.

"We need to be about helping people prepare to be part of this economy," says Levy. "It's not just about bringing people here; it's about growing the right people here." 

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Years in existence: 82; founded in 1937
Products and services: Questa Education Foundation assists individuals in completing degrees with less debt, so that they will be prepared for the economy of the 21st century and become contributing members of Northeast Indiana's workforce.