A new initiative in Indiana is looking beyond the state’s K-12 population as a means to increase the percentage of Hoosiers with education beyond high school. The goal of the "You Can. Go Back." program is to encourage the 750,000 Indiana adults who completed some college, but left before earning a degree, to come back and finish what they started. Through a mix of strategic marketing and financial aid, the campaign hopes to attract 200,000 adults back to college by 2020, and help them complete an associate’s or bachelor’s degree, or a workforce credential. “You Can. Go Back.” is administered by the Indiana Commission of Higher Education in partnership with the state’s public university system, but has also gained the support of nearly two dozen private institutions and a variety of businesses.

In February, thousands of former college students received information about the benefits of completing a postsecondary degree, and the resources available to help them do so. The state focused this first wave of outreach on Indiana residents who had earned at least 15 credit hours at a community college or 30 credit hours at a four-year institution and had been out of school for less than 10 years.

To ease the financial burden on returning students, the state is offering $1,000 need-based scholarships from a pool of $7.5 million in financial aid funds. Incentives such as tuition discounts and debt forgiveness are being provided by participating postsecondary institutions, and employer partners such as Subaru, Toyota and Comcast are assisting their employees with tuition reimbursement and flexible scheduling.

The program’s initial progress is being measured by traffic to the YouCanGoBack.org website — where prospective returning adults answer a series of questions and are matched with schools that would most likely meet their needs.

“In less than two months, we’ve had over 9,000 people visit the website, and over 4,000 requested more information. That’s a pretty significant number,” explains Teresa Lubbers, Indiana’s commissioner for higher education.

“You Can. Go Back.” is part of a larger statewide goal to increase the percentage of residents with education beyond high school to 60 percent by 2025. A Lumina Foundation study found that in 2014, just under half of Indiana’s working-age population (25-64) had earned a postsecondary degree, certificate or workforce credential. In the Midwest, three other states (Michigan, Ohio and South Dakota) were also below the national average for the number of residents with a two-year degree or higher.

According to Lubbers, highly skilled workers are especially needed in Indiana’s advanced manufacturing and health care sectors, which have replaced many of the state’s traditional middle-class jobs that often did not require education beyond high school.

In 2015, Indiana’s biennial budget bill (HB 1001) included a requirement that the state reach out to residents who earned credits in the public university systems and encourage them to complete their degree.
Indiana adult population postsecondary attainment
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