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Globe Editorial

## Progress needs an open door

IT'S WELL KNOWN that innovation is the lifeblood of the Massachusetts economy. At every period of stagnation or decline over the past 400 years, someone's bright ideas have turned the tide. Too little valued, however, is the central role played by minorities and women in helping Massachusetts thrive. This morning, the state's political, business, and civic leaders will spotlight the contribution of a diverse workforce to the region's success, and challenge each other to do more. Much more.

A 2006 report by the Boston History and Innovation Collaborative found that of 64 game-changing innovations in Massachusetts - from wiping out smallpox to the invention of the mini-computer - fully a third featured a woman, immigrant, or African-American in a leading role. And yet an important survey by the University of Massachusetts at Boston last year found that among Globe 100 companies - the cream of the region's corporate sector - just a tiny fraction of board members (5 percent) were people of color.

Women had more seats at the table (13 percent), but since women are 52 percent of the population, that hardly seems like progress. And it's not just the business world; higher education, hospitals, and nonprofit institutions are also lagging. All at a time when the state's complexion is changing rapidly but growth is stagnant.

It is common to speak of the Boston area's poor image as a welcoming place for people of color. But the hard numbers in the UMass survey suggest this is not just a public-relations challenge. "The reputation is underpinned by a stubborn reality," says Stephen Crosby, dean of the McCormack Graduate School of Policy Studies at UMass-Boston.

This morning Crosby will convene the first meeting of the Commonwealth Compact, an ambitious new approach to changing Boston's reputation by changing its reality. Former Suffolk County District Attorney Ralph Martin, now managing partner of the law firm Bingham McCutchen, and Steven Ainsley, publisher of The Boston Globe, are co-conveners.

Employers who sign the compact commit to specific diversity goals for hiring, promoting, mentoring, and engaging with the wider community. More than 100 organizations and companies have signed on. There is still outreach to be done; the list is light on biotech and financial services firms that represent the new economy.

But the talent is here: Boston is second in the nation (after Atlanta) in the number of African-Americans receiving college diplomas or graduate degrees. Sadly, the exodus starts almost as soon as the newly minted graduates take off their gowns. This has to change. Too many of tomorrow's bright ideas are in jeopardy.■