

Education & Workforce Branch – Lee County Recovery Task Force

Meeting Minutes

11:00 AM – 12:30 PM | NOVEMBER 9, 2023 | COLLABORATORY | 2031 JACKSON STREET, SUITE 100, FORT MYERS, FL 33901 | PUBLIC MEETING

Call to Order

At 11:01 AM on November 9, 2023, Dr. Mike Martin, Branch Lead, convened the Education & Workforce Branch meeting providing comments to frame the challenges of education and workforce issues in the region. The following Members were present:

- Dr. Mike Martin, Lead
- John Roth
- Mike Wukitsch
- T. Sharon Woodberry
- Dr. Guido Minaya
- Laura Siebenmorgen
- Dr. Jennifer Cupid-McCoy
- Dr. Amir Borges Ferreira Neto (on behalf of Dr. Aysegul Timur)

County Liaison:

- Dominic Gemelli

Facilitator and Branch Support:

- Tessa LeSage, Collaboratory
- Robbie Heere, Hagerty Consulting
- Harrison Newton, Hagerty Consulting

Introductions

Ms. LeSage provided an update on the work of the Recovery Task Force and the Recovery and Resilience Planning Process.

Upcoming Community Engagement

Ms. LeSage summarized the upcoming community engagement series regarding the Initiatives of the ResilientLee Recovery and Resilience Plan.

Updated Initiative Review

The Support Team introduced each Initiative for discussion with Branch Members.

Expanding Lifelong Learning to Support the Workforce

- Members suggested including the role of CareerSource SWFL in supporting these efforts as more than just a stakeholder.
- Members suggested providing an example from CareerSource SWFL to leverage local institutions.
- Dr. Martin suggested including the importance of the workforce and the regional need for workers in the need statement.
- Dr. Neto suggested that the definition of resilience is important to clarify throughout the entire plan. The introduction of the plan should clearly define resilience.
- Dr. Minaya discussed the framing of the Initiative with emphasis on resilience with scaling and the speed to recover.

Supporting a Diverse and Resilient Economy

- Members discussed the importance of centralized information versus decentralized information sources with flowing information and accessibility. Members agreed to make sure that information is accessible and available. The focus should build a culture of resilience for the economy and businesses to share information.
- Members suggested following a disciplined approach to identifying and defining needs.
- Members suggested cross-referencing this initiative in the Planning Regional Resilience Initiative.

Accessing Early Learning

- Members suggested referencing the inclusion of a strong talent pipeline for the early learning workforce as part of other Initiatives.
- Members suggested strengthening the need for accessing early learning by referencing where Lee County ranks in education statistics compared to the rest of the state.
- Members discussed barriers and policy challenges such as incentives and advocacy for state policy solutions to funding. Funding is often tied to addressing barriers for low-income families.

Increasing Mental Health Provider Capacity

Members expressed positive feedback with no changes requested.

Expanding Out of School Programming

- Members suggested focusing on efforts to improve retention for discouraged or at-risk youth.
- Members discussed the value of resilience. There are indicators and measures for reading and exposure to career readiness. This leads to better outcomes for graduation and post-secondary education. A program like this is already piloted in the Lee County School District to provide free out-of-school programming for middle school students, including those at risk. Members suggesting including public charters in those programs.
- Members suggested leveraging existing programs and expanding programs for specific groups of youth.
- Members suggested including American Sign Language (ASL) when discussing language barriers. This is inclusive to the deaf and blind as well.

Questions and Next Steps

Members reviewed the next process steps including that Branch Members will be notified as soon as possible of the next meeting.

Public Comment

Peggy Elmore, President of CareerSource SWFL, thanked members for their work. She commented that CareerSource is recognized as the economic and business development leader by the Florida Departments of Commerce and Labor. CareerSource SWFL retains funding through formula grants that include regulations and monitoring that is time-consuming. CareerSource SWFL worked during Hurricane Ian response to provide aid and funding to help the unemployed and provide humanitarian aid. She commented that not having the workforce development leader at the table was a misstep.

Marsha Ellis said the construction industry should use programs like YouthBuild to support the foster program. YouthBuild and CareerSource should be coordinated to assist the County. She supported the construction of a Technical College in Lehigh Acres. She commented that in reviewing the employment section, efficiencies could be included for the shrimp industry. She suggested looking at past data to build resilience capacity and bolster the community. She supported the conversation about information-sharing and

supported a Geographic Information Systems platform for community services. She supported the portability and accessibility of resources and information.

Concluding Remarks and Adjournment

Ms. LeSage thanked the members for attending and adjourned the meeting at 12:36 PM.