

Lee County Recovery Task Force Supporting Business & Workforce Workshop

Session 1 – Meeting Minutes

9:00 AM – 10:30 AM | JUNE 7, 2023 | COLLABORATORY | 2031 JACKSON STREET, SUITE 100, FORT MYERS, FL 33901 | DIVERSE WORKFORCE

Call to Order

On June 7, 2023, the facilitator of the Workshop, Tessa LeSage, convened the Supporting Business & Workforce Workshop: Diverse Workforce at 9:02 AM with the following panelists present:

- John Shannon
- Glenn Whitehouse
- Sharon Woodberry
- Selynto Anderson

The following Branch members were present:

- Troy Churchill
- Bill Ribble
- Fred Forbes
- Guido Minaya
- Laura Seibenmorgen
- Dan O'Berski
- Phyllis Calloway
- Trish Lassiter
- Todd Everly
- Sandy Stillwell Youngquist
- Jenn Hagen
- James Magnus
- Donna Germain
- Diana Giraldo

- David Cambareri
- Chris Simoneau
- Chad Criswell
- Alvin Henderson
- Marco Villalobos

Workshop Topic Discussion

Ms. LeSage asked what factors are key to the continuing economic growth and full employment for Southwest Florida post-disaster. The panelists indicated that some key factors included:

- The diversification of the economy;
- Affordable housing to retain younger generations/students;
- Investing in the right capital and infrastructure that impacts the community from a longevity aspect;
- Innovative workforce solutions for community resilience; and
- Community collaborations.

Ms. LeSage asked what the focus should be on, and the panelists stated the following:

- Having an annual survey to engage the workforce;
- Checking in with employees to see how they feel and their challenges;
- Innovative and community collaboration to meet the needs of the employees;
- Diversifying the workforce;
- Transportation for healthcare and other needs;
- Change the mindset of the employers and how they look at workforce and personnel;
- Providing social service needs;
- Determining skill sets and qualifications for new employees aside from years of experience or education; and
- Embracing overlooked populations that be a greater contribution to the workforce.

Ms. LeSage asked the panelists how to rethink qualifications or quickly upskill people that can lead to employment.

Dr. Whitehouse stated that institutions are becoming more aware of educational experiences outside a degree or micro-credentialing. He stated that there are a lot of training opportunities for job-specific areas that do not need a degree and micro-

credentials add bridges to go into specific jobs. It is important to have both a college degree and/or credentialing opportunities for a flexible workforce in the area.

Ms. LeSage asked about the barriers the workforce is facing and how to overcome them. The panelists identified the solutions as followed:

- Having supportive services for employees to upskill themselves and address problems they have, such as transportation; and
- Having a support system to overcome barriers and having employers that will be supportive after the barriers are overcome.

Ms. Giraldo asked if there is a different approach or screening tool available to evaluate the value, experience, or ability to be able to apply for and obtain jobs. The panelists provided the following suggestions:

- Institutions have looked at ways to signal to employers the skills that may be invisible;
- Instead of expecting skills, have structures available to employees;
- Think about skills and content, rather than just one;
- A survey and review of job descriptions;
- Determining ways to tap into the workforce to create pathways;
- Giving individuals an opportunity to achieve credentials and teach others within the field;
- Reviewing policies that may be outdated annually, such as those with disabilities;
- Reviewing the interview process;
- Creating a more inclusive environment for team members; and
- Looking at platforms that help define competencies and provide a simulation of challenges.

Mr. O'Berski asked how to take risks and engage with people from different backgrounds so it supports the employees and employers.

Dr. Anderson stated the importance of surveying the landscape of the workforce and trying to work early on with firms that have experience in bringing in diverse candidates. He stated that as employers interview and sit around the table, they need to have honest conversations with diverse candidates. He also emphasized utilizing data to drive the metrics.

Mr. O'Berski asked what infrastructure is needed for systems to coordinate with communities pertaining to their needs and how to move forward holistically. Ms. LeSage stated the need to change the way job requirements are posted, the recruitment process,

and the workforce environment and retainment. Ms. LeSage followed up by asking if anyone had seen an example of what we would need to resource places, such as a Chamber of Commerce. The participants stated the following:

- Changing the mindsets within the organizations to identify stakeholders being reached, to ensure diversity within departments, and have recruiters connect with diverse candidates;
- Starting from the bottom-up to target diverse workforce within the education system;
- Tapping into people who do not have credentials;
- Consider what to put in place to help employers recognize the needs for the organizations;
- Bring together stakeholders with different audiences (i.e., United Way, Goodwill, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP));
- Provide training programs where the mission is to target the audiences that need to be more engaged in the workforce;
- Ask providers what they can provide and offer to the community;
- Look at resources and partners that are available;
- Look at the evidence-based type of initiatives already established;
- Use data to identify goals;
- Look for platforms/technologies that can identify skills;
- Help senior leaders better understand other ways of recruitment (i.e. the Inclusive Leader Program);
- Use institutions to universalize internships, which can create a pipeline, which can be housed at a Chamber;
- Create different types of internships and a form of managing internships available in Southwest Florida; and
- A model would be a great opportunity.

Ms. LeSage stated the need to think about the untapped workforce and asked for suggested solutions. Additionally, she asked if there was anything that needed to be addressed to help the untapped workforce enter training programs and get jobs. Panelists suggested the following solutions:

- Community collaborations encourage businesses and organizations to tap into the communities that they serve and are around them;
- Finding ways to support employers;
- Take a deeper look at why some of the hiring practices are the way there are;
- Identify biases within the hiring process;

- Looking into affordable childcare and housing;
- Communicating with small businesses, chambers, communities, and other untapped markets in the area;
- Communication with education partners; and
- Identifying ways business and education can work together.

Ms. Wardein asked if there were tools or analytics available for the unemployment rates.

Ms. Calloway suggested trainings in areas of the untapped regions, such as Dunbar.

Ms. Hagen asked how to help Southwest Florida employers understand and address the fiscal cliff for their employees. Instead of paying extra per hour adding childcare services, try to address the Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE) threshold households in Southwest Florida. Instead of more money per hour, more services are available as far as healthcare, insurance, childcare, transportation options, and remote work availability.

Mr. O'Berski stated mixed-use and densified residentials and creating transferrable skills.

Mr. Churchill asked what the path forward looked like [for the workforce] due to the new legislation. Dr. Anderson stated that it would begin with scripting out the problems and solutions, so patients know that the care is still being offered despite legislation. She stated that there is a lot of unknown.

Ms. Hagen asked how to connect Southwest Florida employers within the Lee County School District or community partner schools to increase awareness for students of local job options and awareness of students of the potential for career development and mentorship opportunities. Ms. Woodberry suggested increasing engagement with school counselors to let students know about opportunities and resources.

Mr. Villalobos asked if there is a model business that can be used, denser than an internship, to help with the workforce that might not be a college degree. He stated that career technical education has been a way that professionals have trained people who didn't have a degree. He felt that there was nothing in place for people who have experience, but not necessarily a degree.

Next Steps and Questions

There were no next steps or further questions discussed.

Public Comment

Betsy Haesemeyer stated that the ALICE report shows the importance of a living wage. Using grants and programs to provide paid internships for non-profits to provide to interns as they enter the workforce.

Angelo Biasi stated that there are opportunities to expand for people who do not have a degree, such as Certified Nursing Assistants.

Concluding Remarks and Adjournment

Ms. LeSage thanked all members and panelists for their participation. The meeting was adjourned at 10:28 AM on June 7, 2023.