

Education & Workforce Branch – Lee County Recovery Task Force

Meeting Minutes

11:00 AM –12:30 PM | APRIL 13, 2023 | COLLABORATORY | 2031 JACKSON STREET,
SUITE 100, FORT MYERS, FL 33901| PUBLIC MEETING

Call to Order

At 11:03 AM on April 13th, 2023, the Education & Workforce Branch meeting convened with the following members present:

- Katy Errington
- John Roth
- Guido Minaya
- T. Sharon Woodbery
- Kristy Rigot (On behalf of Mike Wukitsch)
- Ayesegul Timur
- Denise Carlin
- Todd Everly
- Jamie Lienhardt-Engle
- Laura Siebenmorgen

Facilitators and Branch Support:

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

Introductions

Branch members introduced themselves. Tessa LeSage, the Branch facilitator, began the presentation.

Recovery Task Force (RTF) Updates and Problem-Solving Process

Ms. LeSage provided a review of the RTF and Branches in the recovery and resilience planning process and provided a review of the unmet needs committee and the separate group. Robert Heere provided a review of the work of the RTF since the last meeting, including the community engagement plan priorities and information regarding the Community Development Block Grant – Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) program.

Ms. LeSage outlined the work of this meeting and provided a review of the problem-solving process in identifying solutions and recommendations for the Recovery & Resilience (R&R) planning process.

Research and Data Presentation and Discussion

Harrison Newton presented the key challenges and findings for the four Branch identified priorities regarding Education & Workforce and reviewed the experience to gain a shared understanding of solutions to explore in the process of creating recommendations.

Priority 1 Key Challenges and Key Findings

Mr. Newton presented the key challenges and findings of the first priority: Improve workforce participation by increasing skilled and credentialed workers to fill jobs in Lee County. Partnerships and data from the FutureMakers Coalition helped inform this first priority.

The following was discussed by the Branch members:

- Questions from Branch members regarding the state average for skilled workers and wondering why Lee County is behind.
 - There is an interest in having skilled worker data broken up by city or zip code, by area or municipalities, analytics of school districts by high school, and the graduation rate.
- Interest in having data on vocational training and if there are enough critical job openings.
 - There is also an interest in knowing what programs and capacities technical colleges have.
 - Examples are entrepreneurship and programs at Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU).

- Interest to know what entities offer what programs and analyze if those programs are in alignment with the skills gap and if programs are designed on the areas of need.
- A Branch member discussed that expansions of facilities are in the works to grow and meet needs. They have data for placement and licensure.
 - There is an expansion happening at Cape Tech. They are adding an East Technical College and looking at expanding programs based on the industry occupation list.
- Ms. LeSage asked for Branch members to think about examples of roles that employers can play. Is there a way to change tactics on how employers recruit and hire?
 - A Branch member answered that employers play a big role. The business and work environment is changing fast along with the skills gaps and response is different based on credentials. FGCU created micro-credentials to combat those quickly changing needs. It is important to have employers and education directly synced so that individuals can be prepared for future jobs.
 - It is important to have job sector representatives included in these conversations to provide current open job numbers.
- There is an issue with critical gap positions or persistent positions open for an extended amount of time. A Branch member discussed individual interviews with employers inquiring about job descriptions, questioning required credentials, and looking for ways those could change. FGCU has a study based on compiling the common areas for education providers to develop programs across industries.
- There is an interest to look at education institutions and online institutions as to which students in our area are earning degrees through the National Clearinghouse.
- There is an issue that more nuanced credentials that are not being calculated or counted.
- It is important to keep in mind the hospitality and construction sectors.

Priority 2 Key Challenges and Key Findings

Mr. Newton presented the key challenges and findings of the second priority: Create ways to partner and leverage resources to increase shared ownership of education, to improve outcomes and opportunities from early childhood education to career.

The following was discussed by the Branch members:

- There is a need to identify accredited Pre-K opportunities and information about early childhood education preferred providers and pursued status.
- Daycares are accredited and preferred providers, but there are not enough places and access to quality.

- The early learning coalition and school district of a number of providers and quality. The workforce needs to support these teachers was discussed. There is a need to share ownership of education and providers in the region.
- Some helpful organizations were identified, such as Lee Interfaith, 21st Century Collaborative, and New Horizons.
- There is a need to create a connection with FutureMakers Coalition when bringing partners together for education to improve outcomes.
- It is important to find ways to support employers in creating pathways for future employees. For example, Lee Health programs help line up jobs for the program participants.
- Tutoring services for employers to provide to their employees was discussed.
 - An example was the minority community's business group. Many businesses that are small operations do not easily lend themselves to accelerators. If their income grew, that would affect the microbusiness segment.
- Helping micro businesses.
- There is an interest to see retention rates for workers in healthcare.

Priority 3 Key Challenges and Key Findings

Mr. Newton presented the key challenges and findings of the third priority: Create systems that foster lifelong learning and training opportunities for all.

Mr. Newton discussed that economic recovery and resilience is a growing part of how to respond to disasters. A common thread is the adaptability of skills of the workforce.

The following was discussed by the Branch members:

- A large priority is mental health support and resources.
 - There are issues with an inordinate amount of mental health staff, teacher burnout, a cycle of existing violence, not enough services for mental health, and the ability to retain staff.
 - Services like a Children Services Council are priorities.
- Branch members discussed career pathing for early careers, employability, thinking about gaps in certain skills, and having experts pass down their knowledge prior to their retirement.
 - There was additional discussion around how to support people that are ready to retire and help inform the newer workforce.
 - Suggestion having a survey for retirees to learn about their ability to contribute to the workforce or mentorships.
- Suggestion having a mentorship program for nurses and educators.

Priority 4 Key Challenges and Key Findings

Mr. Newton presented the key challenges and findings of the fourth priority: Address outside variables (housing, transportation, mental health, childcare, etc.) that hinder education and the workforce.

Mr. Newton discussed the trend of recovery, the impact on jobs, and the evolving needs of the Southwest Florida workforce.

The following was discussed by the Branch members:

- Prices are still high for housing and rentals.
- There is an interest to see the geographical distribution of childcare facilities and where people live. There is also an interest to see food and education deserts.
- There is an interest to learn about the curriculum at the middle and high school levels.
- Access and broadband affordable internet and needs were discussed.
- A Branch member brought up that insurance needs to become part of the housing topic.
- Suggestion to have the Chamber of Commerce engaged.
- Suggestion for the school district to provide after-school programs at every school. Potential to partner with non-profits to provide before and after school care.
- Branch members discussed schools damaged by the hurricane. Two schools had to be relocated to other schools.

Next Steps

The schedule of meetings was shared with the Branch members with the acknowledgment that meeting invites will be sent soon. Meetings will occur as needed in the second phase of this group.

Discussion and Questions

No further discussion or questions.

Public Comment

Betsy Haesemeyer commented on coordination of the immigrant coalition. Language should be considered as a barrier and an asset. Some technical schools are doing programs for Limited English Proficiency (LEP). There is importance to having trained people when disaster strikes and an understanding of what the response will be.

Tracy McMillion commented to thank the Branch members for their time and work.

Concluding Remarks and Adjournment

Ms. LeSage thanked the members for attending and then adjourned the meeting at 12:27 PM.