



Driving Business Retention, Expansion and Attraction Programs to a Higher Level through Talent Pipeline Management

By Angie White, CEcD

SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS AS THE VEHICLE

Economic development organizations that develop strategies to convene existing businesses in their region's critical industries to help them define common threats and opportunities will end up with specific action items to improve their business environment. While a variety of issues may be uncovered through these conversations, talent will most certainly be at the top of the list. Economic development organizations that can facilitate dynamic and lasting relationships between industry and education and training partners will demonstrate their ability to improve the operating environment for existing business and the employment prospects for its residents, and this is a mighty tool for attracting new companies.

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EXPANSION AND ATTRACTION PROGRAMS TO A HIGHER LEVEL THROUGH TALENT PIPELINE MANAGEMENT

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INTRODUCTION

Economic development professionals are accustomed to receiving in their Inboxes the annual release of the top factors that have driven site location decisions over the preceding year. For most of the ten years I have worked in economic development, workforce has been in the top five most important factors, but over the last few years it has shot up to taking the lead role or at least slot number two.

- 89.8 percent of respondents to Area Development Magazine's 2016 Annual Survey of Corporate Executives ranked availability of skilled labor as either "very important" or "important" making it the second most critical site selection factor; it came in first place in 2015. In 2014, it came in fifth place.¹
- Workforce was the top factor in Site Selection Magazine's 2016 consultant's survey

Why has this change occurred?

THE SKILLS GAP

Driving the increased importance of available and qualified workforce in corporate location priorities is a series of societal shifts over the last three

plus decades that have led to the **SKILLS GAP** that is a major focus of countless research, policy and funding organizations in the United States for the last decade, and now as it is more specifically defined, the **MIDDLE SKILLS GAP**.

Driving the increased importance of available and qualified workforce in corporate location priorities is a series of societal shifts over the last three plus decades that have led to the SKILLS GAP that is a major focus of countless research, policy and funding organizations in the United States for the last decade, and now as it is more specifically defined, the MIDDLE SKILLS GAP.

Since the 1980s, rapid advances in technology and the corporate drive for efficiency to increase productivity and profit have been making many unskilled jobs obsolete. And more recently, the post-Great Recession jobs that came back with strong growth projections require much higher skill levels, leaving many Americans unemployed or underemployed.

Yet it seems that during this same period of increasing skill requirements for workers, education and workforce development programs were not evolving in response. This results in adults at the lower end of the educational attain-

ment spectrum unable to qualify for the blue collar jobs their parents and grandparents built solid lives from, because if those jobs still exist they require more technological proficiency than a high school drop-out or even a high school graduate will likely have. And the entry level jobs they qualify for are rarely at wages that can support a family. It benefits no part of an economy or our society at large to have a growing income gap caused by a growing skills gap. And this has been a major factor for policy change in how federal labor training dollars are to be awarded and outcomes measured.

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SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS AS THE VEHICLE

Economic development organizations that develop strategies to convene existing businesses in their region's critical industries to help them define common threats and opportunities will end up with specific action items to improve their business environment. While a variety of issues may be uncovered through these conversations, talent will most certainly be at the top of the list. Economic development organizations that can facilitate dynamic and lasting relationships between industry and education and training partners will demonstrate their ability to improve the operating environment for existing business and the employment prospects for its residents, and this is a mighty tool for attracting new companies.

CIVILIAN LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATE

Year	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2007	66.4	66.3	66.2	65.9	66.0	66.0	66.0	65.8	66.0	65.8	66.0	66.0
2008	66.2	66.0	66.1	65.9	66.1	66.1	66.1	66.1	66.0	66.0	65.9	65.8
2009	65.7	65.8	65.6	65.7	65.7	65.7	65.5	65.4	65.1	65.0	65.0	64.6
2010	64.8	64.9	64.9	65.2	64.9	64.6	64.6	64.7	64.6	64.4	64.6	64.3
2011	64.2	64.1	64.2	64.2	64.1	64.0	64.0	64.1	64.2	64.1	64.1	64.0
2012	63.7	63.8	63.8	63.7	63.7	63.8	63.7	63.5	63.6	63.8	63.6	63.7
2013	63.6	63.4	63.3	63.4	63.4	63.4	63.3	63.3	63.3	62.8	63.0	62.9
2014	62.9	62.9	63.1	62.8	62.8	62.8	62.9	62.9	62.8	62.9	62.9	62.7
2015	62.9	62.7	62.7	62.8	62.9	62.6	62.6	62.6	62.4	62.5	62.5	62.7
2016	62.7	62.9	63.0	62.8	62.6	62.7	62.8	62.8	62.9	62.8	62.6	62.7
2017	62.9	63.0	63.0	62.9	62.7	62.8	62.9					

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

This contradictory situation that is bedeviling civic leaders who are struggling with the negative effects of growing income inequality in their communities and employers who can't find qualified workers is well stated by the Harvard Business School report created in partnership with Accenture and Burning Glass Technologies called *Bridge the Gap: Rebuilding America's Middle Skills*:

"At the heart of the issue is an oft-discussed anomaly: while millions of aspiring workers remain unemployed and an unprecedented percentage of the workforce report being underemployed, employers across industries and regions find it hard to fill open positions. The market for middle-skills jobs – those that require more education and training than a high school diploma but less than a four-year college degree – is consistently failing to clear. That failure is inflicting a grievous cost on the competitiveness of American firms and on the standard of living of American workers."²

Another troubling trend is the consistent decline in the labor force participation rate from its pre-Great Recession level. The Bureau of Labor Statistics tracks the labor force participation rate and defines it as the percentage of the 16 year and up population that is either employed or unemployed (that is, either working or actively seeking work). People who are neither employed nor unemployed are not in the labor force.

The US unemployment rate in the US has improved dramatically since the height of the Great Recession, standing at 4.3 percent in July 2017 compared to 10 percent in October 2009,³ however it has not resulted in a corresponding increase in the number of employed Americans. A simultaneous decline in the number of individuals who are being counted as part of the labor force is indicative of a disturbing trend: these individuals have given up looking and are no longer being counted. How can these individuals be re-engaged and brought back into the labor force? Many organizations, government entities, and foundations are focused on finding solutions

to this problem that has disturbing implications for the American economy.

In manufacturing, the stress stems from several factors, including looming retirements of the industry's most experienced skilled workers combined with greater technical skill requirements for its starter-level positions, the slow disappearance of skills training in high schools and within corporations starting in the 1980s, and the offshoring of American manufacturing. Machines are increasingly doing more of the manual labor now, making those family-sustaining blue-collar jobs of the 20th century more of a nostalgic memory, but humans are still required to program and trouble shoot those machines. And the technology is ever-evolving, requiring continual employee skills upgrades. The June 2016 report "America's Divided Recovery: College Haves and Have-Nots" from the Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce stated that of the 1.7 million manufacturing jobs that have been gained since the Great Recession ended, only 214,000 (or 12 percent) have gone to workers with a high school diploma or less.⁴

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No longer can EDOs overlook making talent pipeline management a major priority, or they run the risk of becoming less successful at demonstrating their community's competitiveness.

Information technology-oriented sectors face a very different set of circumstances, where the jobs are growing at a much faster rate than education institutions have been able to produce the skilled workers to fill them. This has created significant supply-demand imbalances, which have concentrated talent pools in certain relatively high-cost metropolitan areas that are magnets for tech talent, and greatly driven up the price paid for that talent.

And in healthcare, which is not a traditional focus for economic development organizations (EDOs), the combination of a large aging population, extended life spans, and advances in medical technology have led to a tremendous increase in the demand for healthcare professionals all along the spectrum, from pharmacists to phlebotomists, medical coders to certified nursing assistants. The job growth projections for this industry nationwide are significant and show no signs of slowing. These jobs are also some of the best at pulling individuals out of multigenerational poverty, if they can be guided there.

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POLICY CHANGES

From every direction, workforce development, education and training organizations are being told that their funding, accreditation and metrics for success (and, therefore, continued funding and accreditation) are dependent on their ability to demonstrate that their programs have been designed using employer-driven planning. Until the last few years, most professionals operating in these realms did not view their role as responding to the needs of employers, their focus was on the individual – the unemployed client, the student. And in many cases, they were not equipped for this change in focus. Economic development organizations can play a crucial role in making this new relationship smooth and mutually beneficial by serving as an intermediary, and as a result achieve strategic goals of their own organization's mission.

A significant recent policy change is embedded in the 2014 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), the federal legislation governing how workforce training dollars are spent. WIOA reauthorized its predecessor Workforce Innovation Act for another six years, but it also requires local Workforce Development Boards (formerly called Workforce Investment Boards, or WIBs) to "convene, use, or implement" sector partnerships. There are other areas of the legislation where there is a heightened emphasis placed on employer engagement.

The National Skills Coalition provides a highly useful side-by-side comparison of the changes from WIA to WIOA.⁵

INDUSTRY SETTING THE AGENDA FOR THE NEW WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT MODEL

Talent pipeline management (TPM) is a term that is becoming more commonly used to describe workforce development within a specific community that is implemented using a framework companies typically use to better manage their supply chains. How is it different from the workforce development model that has prevailed since passage of the federal Workforce Investment Act of 1998? What is it about TPM as a workforce development model that makes it more appealing to the stakeholders that must participate in it than past models?

One model has been put forth by the US Chamber of Commerce Foundation, which named its new approach to closing the skills gap Talent Pipeline Management and has defined it as a method for "engaging employers and their partners across the country in developing a new demand-driven approach to close the skills gap . . . through extending lessons learned from innovations in supply chain management."⁶

The essence of this model, as well as that of the Harvard Business School-Accenture-Burning Glass research report referenced earlier, is that it looks directly at industry to address this situation. TPM is the creation of mutually beneficial and formalized relationships between industry, education, training and workforce development professionals, whereby industry provides the input on education and skill needs of their critical occupations, and rewards those resource providers who produce the highest quality product most efficiently, much like a company would within its supply chain.

Rewards can take many forms, including lending time and expertise in program development, providing adjunct instructors, offering internships to students, guaranteeing interviews to program completers, donations of equipment, scholarships, and direct program funding. The benefit for the industry participants is a more consistent and qualified supply of talent, which has a direct impact on their profitability. The benefit for the EDO and community is a more skilled and educated labor pool with higher employment and labor participation rates, lower income inequality, and a powerful tool for supporting existing business growth and attraction of new industry.

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You can have an industry partnership that does not have the talent pipeline as a major priority (though rare), but it is nearly impossible to realize TPM goals without an industry partnership. This is essentially the premise of the Next Generation Sector Partnership Model, born out of a 2013 National Governors Association's commissioned report *State Sector Strategies Coming of Age: Implications for State Workforce Policymakers*, which views Sector Partnerships through a broader lens than that of a purely talent-focused model. It is also centered on industry partners setting the agenda but what that agenda is will be "defined entirely by business leaders and focused on addressing what matters most to them: ensuring the industry has what it needs to grow and thrive. Since next generation sector partnerships tackle more than just workforce issues, the partnership has staying power, acting as a sustainable forum for business leaders to address shared priorities and work in collaboration with a cross section of public partners in workforce development, economic development, and education."⁷ Even going so far as to train support partners to refer to the business representatives as "industry partners" versus "employers" sends a strong message about the purpose of the partnership (though a hard habit to break for support partners).

A word of caution about Sector Partnerships – under any model – is that they do not form overnight; or sometimes over a year. Much advance work building relationships with the various companies or business associations that comprise the industry sector is the first step in the process, and likely an EDO has been doing that for a long time through its business retention and expansion (BRE) program, which should allow for a smooth outreach effort to get industry partners engaged.

Industry Partnerships are a hot topic right now, though they have existed for several decades. Why?

In addition to the employer-focused policy changes in WIOA, several national and federal grant-making and policy organizations are encouraging the establishment of industry partnerships within natural labor market regions and using funding and other support resources as carrots. Some of the leading organizations not already mentioned include:

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A sector partnership or employer collaborative, whichever model or name you choose, must be led by industry partners as a defining characteristic. It should involve education, training and workforce support partners, but it needs a facilitator to be sustainable and this role is often well served by an EDO, whose primary mission and goals are often broader than those of other support stakeholders.

- **Corporation for a Skilled Workforce:** a national nonprofit that partners with government, business, and community leaders to support the creation of good jobs and the highly skilled workers to fill them. Manages an inventory of sector partnerships at www.sectorstrategies.org
- **National Skills Coalition:** a great source for tracking federal labor policy development and has created useful resources for TPM initiatives including sector partnerships.
- **Jobs for the Future:** a national nonprofit that builds educational and economic opportunity for under-served populations in the United States.
- **National Fund for Workforce Solutions:** driving practices, policies, and investments that enable workers to succeed in good jobs, provide employers with a skilled workforce, and build more prosperous communities through the support of regional funder collaboratives that must include industry.
- **Federal Programs Supporting Target Industries:** For example, *Manufacturing USA* brings together industry, academia, and federal partners within a growing network of advanced manufacturing institutes to increase U.S. manufacturing competitiveness and promote a robust and sustainable national manufacturing R&D infrastructure. Funding to support demonstration models around the US is supplied through public-private partnerships. More at www.manufacturing.gov

GETTING STARTED ON A SECTOR PARTNERSHIP

As demonstrated here, there is a growing list of organizations focusing on new models to address the skills gap, but this article will focus on the Next Generation Sector Partnership (Next Gen) model, as it is the model currently being implemented in Louisiana, the home state of this author.

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the “Convener” and provides a thorough job description, summarized as follows:

“The convener plays an essential role in keeping a sector partnership on track and moving forward to accomplish the goals of the businesses in the partnership. The convener is the backbone of the sector partnership, providing administrative, project management, and facilitation support to keep the partnership focused and productive. It is essential that the convener is highly action-oriented but also a collaborative and disciplined team player.”⁸

The Next Gen model provides a detailed step-by-step training manual for organizations interested in getting a Sector Partnership started, and it emphasizes three key features of a Sector Partnership:

- **Industry-led.** Agendas are based on industry-determined priorities, not public programs.
- **Community-supported.** Public partners from workforce development, economic development, education, and others work together to convene and support Next Gen Sector Partnerships.
- **Sustainable over time.** Since Next Gen Sector Partnerships are organized around the topic that interests business leaders most – what it takes to ensure that their company thrives – they are sustainable over time.⁹

Start with one critical industry around which to create a partnership (this should ideally be one of the EDO’s target industries). Select it based on relevant labor market data and a thorough understanding of the players and ecosystem dynamics in that sector in your community. Things to consider:

1. Outlook for job growth. If it exists, is it due to new jobs or replacement jobs?
2. Industry Cohesiveness. Is there an existing industry association? Is the EDO a member? If there is not one, do industry managers appear to know each other? Is the ecosystem fiercely competitive or congenial?
3. What is the industry’s relationship like with education and training institutions in the region? Is it non-existent, one of dissatisfaction but little engagement, or deeply involved?
4. What is the depth of the EDO’s relationship with education and training institutions in the region? Is it cordial but with rare interaction, or deep and intimately connected?



Step-by-step training manual for developing sector partnerships available on the Next Generation Sector Partnerships website.

5. Reach out to community partners (workforce development boards, higher education institutions) to inventory their relationships with the target industry. Do they think it is ripe for collaboration on a sector partnership? Do they want to participate in the effort?

6. Once all the major parties seem willing to move forward with a sector partnership, identify industry leaders and meet with them – more than once – to explain what a sector partnership is, and what is in it for them (the Next Gen Model’s Training Manual has a detailed list of talking points to recruit industry champions). From among them, identify a few champions who will sign their name to the inaugural Sector Partnership invitation and if there is interest to progress, they will stay engaged as leaders at least until new leadership emerges.

MAKING TALENT A PRIORITY: THE EXPERIENCE OF THE NORTH LOUISIANA ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP WITH SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS

The North Louisiana Economic Partnership (NLEP), an Accredited Economic Development Organization, provides professional economic development services to a 14-parish (county) region of North Louisiana with a population of approximately 800,000 residents. In 2008, the NLEP launched a workforce marketing program because we were hearing from major employers that they could not find qualified employees, and at the same time we were hearing regular complaints from community members that their children were all leaving the area because they could not find good jobs. The plan was to develop tools to market the jobs available to those that needed them. But there was a lot more to it than that.

When I accepted the challenge to create this new workforce marketing program, I had no experience in workforce development. I did not know the key organizations, did not understand the role of higher education – in particular, community and technical colleges; I did not understand the myriad complicated and unstable funding streams to support workforce development; and had little knowledge of or connection to the companies that make up the NLEP’s critical industries. My first year was spent making a lot of cold calls, asking a lot of questions and doing a lot of listening.

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There was a solid discussion about the occupations and skills that were identified as the most in demand, but the conclusion that was reached by the end of the meeting was the thing manufacturers in the room needed most was a trainable employee. Deliver them that and they could handle the rest. This series of events led to the creation of the MMC's Workforce and Education Committee.

From our employers, there were regular complaints about workforce and the quality/relevance of local technical training programs. But this dissatisfaction was not being shared with the training providers. Training providers were challenged to find employers to sit on advisory boards and provide meaningful feedback and support (financial or otherwise). Higher education/training institutions were not very attuned to their role in supporting industry in the region; with a few notable exceptions, education and graduation of students were their sole focus. At the technical and community college level, there was a gulf between academic and workforce departments (for-credit vs. non-credit hierarchy), with little to no communication or collaboration between these two divisions that should work hand in hand.

Workforce development professionals were not frequently in the same room with education and training providers, and were still very much in the mindset of focusing on unemployment benefits administration, or serving in a reactive role of responding to employers at the time of their layoffs and shutdowns.

Since the program launch in 2008, there has been much change in occupational outlooks, the economy, and education and training arenas nationally, at the state level and locally, which has impacted our workforce program and its priorities. Given the size of our 14-parish region, we have found Sector Partnerships to provide the best return on our limited resources. Where we have had the most success is in support of one of our target industries, advanced manufacturing, though we have a burgeoning cyber sector partnership gaining steam with the growth of the I-20 Cyber Corridor in North Louisiana.

CASE STUDY 1: ATTRACTING THE FUTURE MANUFACTURING TALENT PIPELINE THROUGH NORTH LOUISIANA MANUFACTURING WEEK

Shortly after NLEP's talent program launched in 2008, I spoke at a Manufacturing Managers Council of Northwest Louisiana (MMC) meeting to introduce our new program. This self-managed organization is made up of plant managers and key leadership of about 30 manufacturers in the Shreveport MSA, and convenes its membership monthly at a breakfast meeting. I was informed by the organizer that these were busy plant managers and I would have about 20 minutes to speak and any longer than that they would start leaving. I gave my 15-minute

presentation and wrapped up by asking: "Are you facing any particular workforce challenges we might be able to help you with?" Forty-five minutes later, when they were still giving feedback, we wrapped up the meeting and I promised to carry on these conversations one-on-one.

After that meeting, the NLEP joined the MMC as an associate member. About a year later, we completed our first MMC workforce survey. It was not the most scientific or sophisticated survey, but it gave us a basis for a collective conversation about their critical occupation and skill needs. After the survey closed, we convened the group to share and validate the results, and encouraged the MMC members to bring the managers who oversee their critical occupations. There was a solid discussion about the occupations and skills that were identified as the most in demand, but the conclusion that was reached by the end of the meeting was the thing manufacturers in the room needed most was a trainable employee. Deliver them that and they could handle the rest. This series of events led to the creation of the MMC's Workforce and Education Committee.

Going through this process allowed the MMC to have a much more productive conversation with our local community and technical colleges, and Louisiana Economic Development's customized workforce training program, LED FastStart, which were already in the process of designing the Certification for Manufacturing (C4M) program based on similar feedback from industrial employers in the southern part of the state.

C4M is made up of four modules:

1. Introduction to Manufacturing
2. Manufacturing Tools and Equipment
3. Automation in Manufacturing
4. Introduction to Fabrication, P-Tech and Machining

These topics cover the fundamentals of a manufacturing environment. Completing this semester long program of extensive classroom and lab work would prepare a candidate to walk into a manufacturing environment at the operator level with a high chance of job success, and a much greater likelihood of retaining it, exactly what the MMC members were asking for. The C4M program became available at Bossier Parish Community College in 2014 and now has about a dozen employer sponsors who support the program with guest speakers, curriculum and equipment guidance, resume writing support, and a guarantee that every program graduate will be given an interview.



Cover of the Manufacturing Week magazine developed by the North Louisiana Economic Partnership and given to all participating students and teachers.



High school students in North Louisiana tour local manufacturing plants and training programs during Manufacturing Week.

From this ongoing action-centered dialogue with the MMC about their critical workforce needs, we were finally able to convince them to pilot a Manufacturing Day celebration, something we had proposed to the group for a few years with no luck. Closure of a GM facility in Shreveport during the automotive industry crash a few years before left our residents believing that manufacturing was a dying industry in our region. And while we have seen the decline in jobs due to industry-wide technology and automation trends as have been noted elsewhere in the article, manufacturing is still a significant employer in our region, and in North Louisiana it is a diverse industry sector.

Choosing to celebrate Manufacturing Day, a program of the National Association of Manufacturers, is a way to announce to the community that manufacturing is still here and it is not the same manufacturing environment of our fathers and grandfathers. Manufacturing in our region needed a public relations campaign if we were going to grow enrollment in programs like C4M and others being created or revamped to support manufacturing in our region, and this was a great way to kick it off (learn more about national Manufacturing Day and resources to support local efforts at www.MFGDay.com, learn about NLEP's North Louisiana Manufacturing Week at www.nlep.org/Workforce/Manufacturing-Week.aspx).

In 2014, the NLEP and the MMC launched Northwest Louisiana (NWLA) Manufacturing Week to promote manufacturing as a career to high school students in two parishes (counties) in Northwest Louisiana. The NWLA Manufacturing Week program offers tours of manufacturing facilities and training programs over the course of

The program goals are to increase awareness of manufacturing as a smart career choice among high school students, parents and teachers/counselors, and to increase enrollment in manufacturing training programs at regional high schools and higher education institutions.

a week, culminating with national Manufacturing Day, the first Friday in October. Participants receive a magazine we produce, profiling top demand manufacturing occupations and training in Northwest Louisiana, as well as a list of all participating manufacturers from around the region.

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The event has grown significantly in three years, as the chart below demonstrates.

	2014	2015	2016	2017 (goal)
Number of Tour Sites	7	23	27	30
Participating Students	150	750	875	1,000
Participating School Systems	2	6	9	10

In 2017, we are expanding our footprint to more parishes and changing the name to North Louisiana Manufacturing Week, and we intend to end the month of October with three Manufacturing Career Open Houses at community and technical colleges around the region. These events will be in the evening, to allow students to attend with their parents and learn from manufacturers about top demand occupations and where they can go locally to get the training to qualify. These events will be open to the public and will also target airmen soon to be leaving active duty at Barksdale Air Force Base in Bossier City.

With North Louisiana Manufacturing Week's success, NLEP hopes to boost participation in the Louisiana Department of Education's new Jump Start career diploma, developed through a collaborative effort of state departments to increase the number of skilled workers needed by industry. Completion of a Jump Start high school diploma signifies that the student is prepared for either a career or college, and has the certifications in hand to prove it. Jump Start is the beginning of our future talent pipeline and we plan to be heavily involved in it.

Manufacturing Week metrics for success:

- Short-term: number of students and tour sites participating in MFG Week, feedback from surveys given to tour providers and teacher chaperones, attendance at Manufacturing Career Open Houses
- Long-term: number of students choosing manufacturing as their Jump Start pathway, enrollment in target postsecondary programs

CASE STUDY 2: NORTHWEST LOUISIANA MANUFACTURING PARTNERSHIP

Responding to a new emphasis placed on employer involvement in programs receiving federal workforce training dollars under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), the Louisiana Workforce Commission contracted with the consortium behind the Next Generation Sector Partnership (Next Gen) model to come to Louisiana and help form and train collaboratives in each of the eight labor market regions of the state to establish Sector Partnerships.

In August 2016, a large group of workforce, education, training, economic development, and business-focused organizations was invited by the two Workforce Development Boards in Northwest Louisiana to attend the first meeting. The meeting was facilitated by a Next Gen consultant, John Melville of Collaborative Economics, and data on the top employment industries in our region compiled by the Louisiana Workforce Commission was distributed to the group. After analyzing and discussing the data, as well as non-data factors that might impact success, the group selected manufacturing for the

pilot Next Gen Sector Partnership for Northwest Louisiana, not because it had the largest projected job growth, but because of the existence of the Manufacturing Managers Council and North Louisiana Manufacturing Week made our chances of success much stronger.

We identified six manufacturing leaders who signed on as champions and developed a comprehensive list of manufacturers from across the 10 parishes of Northwest Louisiana to invite to the initial meeting in November 2016 at the Port of Caddo Bossier, a central location and one that has a heavy concentration of manufacturing tenants. We promised attendees that we would have a clear-cut agenda and would honor the 90-minute time-frame for the meeting. The room was set up per Next Gen guidelines, with industry partners around a center round or U-shaped table and support partners seated behind them. Support partners all agreed in advance that we were in listening mode only. Our industry champions provided the welcome and meeting purpose, and then our Next Gen facilitator led the discussion to identify what was keeping them up at night as manufacturing CEOs.

After a follow-up meeting, the group agreed on two major issues that would have the greatest impact on their future success and that the industry partnership had a degree of control over: increasing enrollment in critical talent pathways and marketing modern manufacturing to the entire community.

Working groups have formed around these two priorities, each with its own industry champions leading the agenda. The NLEP has become the convener for the



Next Generation Sector Partnership's suggested seating chart for initial partnership meetings.
Source: Next Generation Sector Partnerships, <http://www.nextgensectorpartnerships.com>

Partnership, but all community partners participate and understand that any accomplishments achieved by the partnership are shared success for all of our organizations. The NLEP intends to use this partnership in its marketing and attraction efforts as a demonstration of the collaborative environment that exists in our region for managing our talent pipeline.

Metrics for success:

- Number of industry partners that commit to participate.
- A strong group of community partners representing K-12, higher education, workforce development organizations, non-profits with workforce programs, chambers, and economic development professionals.
- Success at achieving action items identified by industry partners.

CONCLUSION

Convening a community's target industries to work together, specifically around talent needs, and bringing training providers and other support organizations to the table with them, is a tremendous tool EDOs can use to market their community as one that is proactive in addressing the talent needs of target industries AND it makes existing businesses happy because their difficulty in finding and retaining talent will lessen. Industry partners in Sector Partnerships also become empowered when speaking with one voice, which can secure resources to support the community for anything from extra financial support for specific training programs to additional infrastructure investment.

For an EDO's BRE Program, Sector Partnerships are fantastic tools for uncovering other issues that are critical to its target industries; maybe state regulation is a pain

point for the industry, or critical infrastructure is insufficient. Make sure the industry champions that are leading the partnership are trained not to ask leading questions about what the challenges and opportunities are for the others around the table. What may rise to the surface can be surprising, but being in a position to proactively address the issues early on makes the EDO a valuable partner in the success of its local companies and, ultimately, the competitiveness of its community. 

END NOTES

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- 2 Harvard Business School, US Competitiveness Project Report (November 2014) "Bridge the Gap: Rebuilding America's Middle Skills" <http://www.hbs.edu/competitiveness/Documents/bridge-the-gap.pdf>
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- 6 US Chamber of Commerce Foundation, Center for Education and Workforce (2014) White Paper "Managing the Talent Pipeline: A New Approach to Closing the Skills Gap" https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/sites/default/files/media-uploads/Managing%20the%20Talent%20Pipeline_0.pdf
- 7 Next Generation Sector Partnership Training Manual (February 2017) <http://www.nextgensectorpartnerships.com/toolkit/>
- 8 Next Generation Sector Partnership Training Manual
- 9 Next Generation Sector Partnership Training Manual

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