



REGIONAL ECONOMIC AREA PARTNERSHIP

Strengthening the economy of South Central Kansas through joint action of cities and counties

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2020 Regional Policy Summit on Employment and Skills Training: Business-Led Demand Driven Solutions Summary Report

The Regional Economic Area Partnership (REAP), along with the Wichita Regional Chamber of Commerce and Kansas Global Trade Services, hosted its fourth quarter regional convening on Friday, Dec. 6. The focus of the convening was challenges and strategic solutions for workforce development. Business leaders from many industry sectors reported on challenges faced within their industry and how they are attracting, training, retaining and growing an educated workforce to meet their business demands. The following sectors were represented: technology, manufacturing, construction and trades, energy and utilities, and aviation.

Kansas Department of Commerce (KDOC) Secretary, David Toland, gave an overview of the department's approach to workforce development. KDOC has identified three major workforce development challenges:

1. Loss of educated Kansans – Kansas is trailing much of the country in retaining educated workers
2. Tight labor market – more open jobs than we have unemployed Kansans
3. “Difficult to fill” jobs – over half of job opening are “difficult to fill” positions

Toland emphasized that our most valuable export to Kansas is our educated talent. In 2018, only 39% of graduates live in the state following graduation. 64% of the outflow migration moved to Missouri, followed by Texas, Oklahoma, Colorado and California.

Secretary Toland identified three possible solutions for recruiting and retaining workers.

1. Partnerships between business and educational institutions to establish better pipelines into good jobs in Kansas
 - Getting workers off the sidelines – retraining and getting back into the workforce
 - Aligning training with industry demand – Innovative industry partnerships
 - Workforce AID
 - Registered Apprenticeships

- Military Articulation and retention
- 2. Supporting quality-of-life improvements and creative place-making efforts;
- 3. Marketing Kansas as a great place to live, work or start a business – we need to do a better job of telling our story.

Lastly, Toland encouraged everyone to be part of the new strategic planning process to develop a strategy for economic growth in Kansas. The last time the state of Kansas had a comprehensive strategy for economic growth was in 1986, when the Redwood-Krider report was published. The new plan, called Kansas Framework for Growth, is currently in the first of three phases of implementation.

Three Phases:

1. Assessment and Benchmarking
 - Public Town Hall meeting on Thursday, Dec. 12, 6:00 – 7:30 p.m., at Citizens Hall, McPherson Community Building, 122 E. Main Street, McPherson, KS
2. Recommendations and Best Practices
3. Implementation Planning

A panel discussion on industry trends and challenges was moderated by Gary Plummer, President of the Wichita Regional Chamber of Commerce. Panelists included:

- Lisa Roberts-Proffitt, Executive Director, FlagshipKansas.Tech
- Jordan Rose, Plastics Production manager, Viega
- Mike Gibson, Executive Vice President, Associated General Contractors of Kansas
- Jeff Beasley, Vice President, Customer Operations, Evergy

The panel identified challenges that are hindering growth within their companies, including:

- Aging workforce
- Skilled workforce
- Mergers
- Filling craft/trade positions
- Workers moving to California for higher wages

All agreed that workforce development is a critical component of economic development. They are addressing the employment needs of their companies by seeking innovative solutions.

- Targeting 17-22 year-olds through social media
- Build Up Kansas website
- Diversity & Inclusion – Making people count instead of counting people
- High school recruitment
- Partnerships with educational institutions

A second panel discussion of industry experts was moderated by Keith Lawing, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Workforce Alliance of South Central Kansas. Panelists included:

- Amanda Duncan, Vice President and Chief Business Development Officer, Workforce Alliance of South Central Kansas
- Samantha Meeds, Senior Manager, Workforce Planning and Development, Spirit AeroSystems
- Emelie Knobloch, Talent Management Representative, K-12 Programs, Textron Aviation

The Kansas Registered Apprenticeship Program balances a unique partnership between job seekers and employers throughout the state. The program incorporates classroom studies through on-the-job training supervised by a skilled employee.

Duncan highlighted some of the advantages to business and industry who use Registered Apprenticeship (RA) programs to address employment needs:

- Apprentices receive on-the-job training from an experienced mentor
- Apprenticeships combine on-the-job learning with technical education from community colleges, technical schools, apprenticeship training schools or on-line programs
- Apprentices receive increases in wages as they gain higher level skills
- Registered apprenticeship programs result in a nationally recognized credential
- For every \$1 spent on apprenticeship, employers get an average of \$1.47 back in increased productivity
- Workforce Alliance of South Central Kansas 2019 Registered Apprenticeship Activity
 - 21 Active RA Sponsors
 - Sponsors are Municipalities
 - 11 New RA Programs Approved from 6 Sponsors
 - 136 Active Apprentices
 - 16 New RA Programs are in development from 7 Sponsors
 - 10 Youth Apprenticeship Programs are in development
 - 2 Sponsors are planning for 2020 rollout of new RA Programs

To fill the skills gap in the labor force, the Kansas Department of Commerce and the Kansas Board of Regents are working in partnership with Kansas companies to train and deliver skilled, certified workers. Industry demand for skilled workers in Kansas is significant. Workforce AID (Aligned and Industry Demand) is an adaptable initiative for every business interested in developing their current and future workforce.

Meeds identified employment challenges Spirit Aerosystems has been addressing to meet industry demand including a low unemployment rate, low population growth and an aging workforce. Through the Workforce AID (Aligned with Industry Demand) program, Spirit has partnered with Hutchinson Community College and the Workforce Alliance to help close the skills gap of its workforce.

Knobloch summarized Textron Aviation's summer internship program for area high school students. Interns experience projects that align with full-time employees and make an impact on the business. They are introduced to a wide variety of opportunities for career development and the chance to network with leaders and other full-time employees. The internships have been designed to support the business needs of Textron Aviation.

The last panel of experts addressed other employment challenges impeding economic growth in South Central Kansas. Access to affordable childcare is a fiscal challenge for many. Families with young children must make a choice between spending a significant portion of their income on child care, finding a cheaper, but potentially lower-quality child care option, or leaving the workforce altogether to become a full-time caregiver. Whether due to high cost, limited availability, or inconvenient program hours, child care challenges are driving parents out of the workforce at an alarming rate.

Vicky Roper, Director of Education and Awareness for the Kansas Children's Service League, advocated for developing family-friendly workplaces including flexible work schedules, childcare access and paid family leave. A family-friendly workplace benefits the employee and allows for increased productivity, lower turnover and stronger family bonds.

A retired U.S. Army colonel, John Buckley, Military Relations Manager at Koch Industries, gave an overview of the company's military transitioning program. He said the emphasis on hiring and keeping veterans employed helps fill a skills gap that is helping to broaden the workforce. Nationally, half of all veterans hired leave their job in the first year, and 80 percent in the first 18 months. Buckley estimates that 10 percent of Koch's employees in the United States are veterans.

Lastly, Lawing provided an update on the Workforce Alliance of South Central Kansas (WA), the Kansas Department of Corrections (KDOC) and Sedgwick County Community Corrections (SCCC) partnership. The Kansas Offender Risk Reduction and Reentry Plan (KOR3P) includes various strategies to provide risk reduction and reentry programs, services and interventions to citizens in the criminal justice system. The WA has been contracted to provide an Offender Workforce Development Specialist (OWDS) to assist with job readiness with offenders and to provide services to offenders who are job seeking and available for employment within the area, and desires to continue and build on this partnership. In 2018, there were 1,533 offenders released from KDOC correctional facilities to Sedgwick County. The WA provided services to 659 individuals referred by SCCC, 249 from Wichita Work Release, 161 from Wichita Parole Office. The WA also provided workshops to 318 participants and developed 181 employment plans, resulting in 98 individuals gaining employment and a 73.5% retention rate at 12 months.