The AUNE Center for Civic Engagement

Summary Report:
How Do We Ensure a Prepared and Thriving Workforce in Our Region?

The AUNE Center for Civic Engagement (The Center) facilitated two Deliberative Dialogue Forums with a diverse citizenry to address the challenging issue of a lack of a trained, educated and prepared workforce in our community.

This report is the summary of the challenges discussed and the follow-up actions as stated by the Forum participants.

March, 2017
The Center met and listened to many citizens through **Community Focus Groups** and it became apparent that a main priority in the Monadnock Region was the challenge of ensuring a prepared and thriving workforce.

The Center investigated this issue by listening to many individuals through multiple community **Interview Forums**. Individuals such as CEO’s of manufacturing, healthcare, large and small businesses, leaders of nonprofit organizations, employees, educators, college students, and high school students participated. The Interview Forums provided a diverse and broad understanding of the complicated challenges related to workforce issues, which led to the framing of the issue in an **Issue Guide**.

The Center then offered two **Deliberative Dialogue Forums**. In these forums, participants from the Interview Forums and other community members used the Issue Guide as a basis for thinking together and building capacity for action. One Forum was held at lunchtime and the other held in the early evening. There were from 30 to 35 participants at each Forum.

The deliberation at each Forum was unique due to the demographics of the participants. However, there was one main theme throughout both Forums: the **urgency** of addressing the lack of a prepared workforce, and the **urgency** of creating solutions and actions to ensure a thriving workforce.

A summary of the Forums follows. This summary begins with an overview of the central critical challenge facing the region along with recommended actions to address that challenge. The summary then goes on to consider specific subjects within that context: manufacturing, health care, middle and high school students, and a greying state.

**Critical Challenge**
A strong sense of urgency was heard from business representatives from the manufacturing industry. The same urgency was expressed by financing, accounting and management entities as well. The healthcare industry clearly stated that without action, the quality of healthcare in the region might be at risk. Participants from non-profit organizations expressed the need for immediate action in order to prevent a potentially negative economic impact for individuals and families. Educators expressed the urgent need for collaboration amongst all entities for sustainable educational pathways to jobs and careers.
**Actions**
Engage the media and newsprint to address the urgent need of creating a prepared and sustainable workforce. **Meet with the Keene Sentinel and tell your story.** Look to radio executives and broad social media opportunities for communicating why it is critical to create pathways for a sustainable workforce.

Create a multi-organizational collaboration within an industry to provide the needed workforce. **Industry leaders can create a streamlined and connected process to promote job opportunities eliminating the competition for employees within industries.**

Encourage community leadership and regional cultural enrichment by creating a corporate fund among diverse industries in order to engage the community in supporting a positive and optimistic approach for a sustainable qualified workforce. **Bring business leaders such as CEO’s, together to financially invest in a corporate fund.**

Ensure and create an inclusive, welcoming and diverse community. **Employers take leadership to set standards and expectations for attitudes, behaviors and actions that ensure a welcoming and safe community for everyone.** Community leaders and members take necessary steps to acknowledge and own discrimination and prejudice that create barriers for people of color in our community. These barriers are prohibiting people of color from staying in our community, feeling safe here, and having the self-assurance to feel comfortable integrating into the community. Create initiatives to support the organizations that embrace immigrants and their integration into the workforce. As a community, we will work toward eliminating systemic barriers together.

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**Challenge: Manufacturing**

Students continue to lack relevant and applicable math skills in preparation for work in the manufacturing industry and they are not receiving these skills in the traditional school setting.

**Actions**
Encourage and support the Competency Based Education Standards. (students must show competency in areas of math and science as opposed to a pass-fail standard). **Educators educate industry and parents on the intent and outcomes of competency based standards.**
Have teachers and student teachers shadow industry workers to understand today’s manufacturing companies. **Industry leaders take the lead and coordinate with educators.**

Coordinate student internships to assist students in understanding the practical application of skills that are taught. As well, schools and colleges could provide extended learning opportunities for students to earn credit through Internship Program. **Leaders in education and Industry collaborate to provide a systemic process for internships.**

Attract younger students to the advanced and high tech manufacturing industry by encouraging businesses to partner with Afterschool Programs and create extracurricular activities that engage students. **Afterschool Program Directors collaborate with manufacturer decision makers to create opportunities for students**

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**Challenge: Healthcare**

A statewide nursing shortage exists with consequences that are impacting the Monadnock Region.

**Actions**

Support the ongoing Monadnock Region Healthcare Workforce Group. **In order for the healthcare industry to increase the number of nurses in our region they need the support of all other entities. Without a strong and qualified healthcare workforce, it will be difficult to recruit a skilled workforce for all industries in our community.**

Create easier career pathways in the community for a one-year LPN program for students to quickly and efficiently enter the workforce. **Employers can create and encourage employees to work while attending school by supporting flexibility with the work schedule. In addition, they can create programs for reimbursing education costs in exchange for a commitment from the employee/student to contract with the healthcare facility.**
Remove barriers that limit the pathway for an LPN employee to receive an RN education. **Healthcare industries need to communicate with NH Legislators to pass legislation creating financial incentives that encourage and support LPN’s to attend RN Programs.**

**Challenge: Middle School and High School Students**

Young students do not know what employment and career opportunities exist in our community. These same students are not experienced or confident in connecting with business and healthcare leaders.

**Actions**

Connect business and healthcare leaders with students and school leaders to share employment opportunities. **Create ‘Career Days’ to expose and educate students about the 21st Century work opportunities, such as manufacturing, engineering and the many different careers in healthcare, following-up with job shadowing.**

Create ‘Interview days’ where students can interview with potential employers in a structured and comfortable environment. **Look to regional young professionals who have experienced this helpful structure in other states and encourage their leadership to implement a similar structure for our students.**

Expose educators and guidance counselors to 21st manufacturing, the healthcare industry, and small businesses in our community. **Invite school board members to hold school board meetings at industrial and healthcare facilities.**

**Challenge: Greying State**

New Hampshire is a graying state and young people are neither staying in our region nor moving to our communities to live, work, and play. An Interview Forum revealed that only four out of seventy-five college intended on staying in the region after graduation. Most students plan to leave after graduation. They plan to either return home to live with their parents due to the amount of college debt, or because there are more opportunities in larger cities outside of our region.
**Actions**

Change the image of the region by highlighting existing positive qualities; for example, emphasize the number of current job and career workforce opportunities with a changing work environment. **This is an opportunity for the Greater Keene Chamber of Commerce or other similar organizations to work with their members on a marketing message.**

Provide desirable and affordable housing opportunities for young professionals. **Forum participants take the lead and encourage community leaders to meet with business leaders, bankers, realtors, young professionals and college students to create affordable housing opportunities.**

Provide fulfilling and meaningful work opportunities for both employees and employers. **Look to current business models in the community that do not have a problem with recruiting a workforce. Examples include: Benefit Corporations, which are businesses that offer family friendly flexibility and entities, emphasizing employee investment in profit outcomes.**

Create Internships and partnership opportunities with our Community College Students in order to encourage students to stay and work in our community. **Community College staff invite and provide opportunities for businesses, healthcare entities and nonprofits to engage with students in preparation for degrees that meet the regional workforce needs.**

Create an internship hub to assist schools and business connections for mentoring opportunities. **Educators and Human Resource personnel coordinate with existing community organizations such as Chamber of Commerce, service sector organizations and NH State programs to create and fund a regional Internship Hub.**

Collaborate with students and young professionals for further discussions and real actions regarding a culturally live community. The Monadnock Region is an active community for individuals with families but not for single professionals or couples who may want to move into our region. **This is an opportunity for the Keene Young Professionals Group to lead efforts with businesses to collaborate and commit to supporting actions that will provide a culturally enriching community, working with new visionaries as well as encouraging the efforts of existing organizations.**

Encourage universities, colleges and community colleges to offer affordable and practical degree programs to draw students from out of state. **Business and Healthcare Industries working with Educational leaders can begin to offer financial incentives such as stipends and scholarships for particular degrees.**
Conclusion

It became very clear that there is an urgent need to support existing programs and to create new initiatives in order to ensure a prepared, trained and educated workforce in the Monadnock Region.

It will be necessary for leaders in business, healthcare and education to collaborate to move many initiatives into action for a successful and thriving workforce.

Additionally, to find sustainable solutions to the current workforce crisis, solutions that move our economy forward and increase the region’s attractiveness to potential employees, it is imperative to communicate and empower our young professionals, students and young families.

Ongoing Support Available from the Center for Civic Engagement:

The AUNE Center for Civic Engagement welcomes the opportunity to facilitate and organize additional Workforce Forums and invite additional participants who were not able to attend the previous Forums such as: guidance counselors, bankers, realtors, elected officials, additional business leaders, Keene State College leaders, students, and parents.

The Center is also available to facilitate and organize follow-up meetings with individuals to implement actions.