



workforce realization occurring cooperatively

*A comprehensive workforce
development strategy for
Round Rock, Texas*

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THE CHAMBER
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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP

WHITE PAPER

Executive Summary

The Round Rock economy is extremely strong. Existing companies in the city are growing, new ones are being created, and others across the country view it as a prime location for relocation. The even better news is that all signs point to this positive climate remaining for years to come.

It would be easy for the Round Rock community, especially the business sector, to rest on its laurels and reap the rewards of the great economical decisions made through its history. Instead, it is looking towards the future and identifying potential obstacles. One such concern is workforce. Low unemployment and a Baby Boomer generation coming closer and closer to retirement has raised the alarm that solutions need to be created and enacted.

With this in mind, the Round Rock Chamber, in partnership with a working group of educational and workforce development professionals and advisement from industry leaders, has developed the Workforce Realization Occurring Cooperatively, or WROC, strategy. This multi-year plan provides a roadmap for how the chamber and its partners will ensure that there is an ample talent pool from which local businesses can pull. It is divided into four critical areas: replenishing the skilled trades; implementing accelerated learning opportunities; increasing direct-to-college participation; and supporting ancillary service capabilities. Each is designed to address a specific workforce landscape that could negatively affect the city's economic future.

Building a critical mass of skilled tradespeople will require a cultural shift in how students, parents/guardians, and educators view what has been known as the "blue collar" careers. Today's skilled trades are unlike their predecessors. Most are safe, clean, and require the use of advanced technology. Overcoming lingering biases demands the initiation of an image (i.e., marketing) campaign that presents these jobs in a more current light. This should lead to more students embracing the educational pathways to skilled trade careers.

Whether it be traditional or non-traditional students, Round Rock has a great opportunity to intensify its accelerated learning options. The WROC strategy advocates for increasing

the number of internships available for students; expanding fast-tracked educational programs; bringing the Texas Workforce Commission's Veteran and Industry Partnership's advanced manufacturing component to Austin Community College – Round Rock; and further developing a job-training beta project being conducted by the chamber and the Round Rock Independent School District. When done in coordination with one another, these recommendations should quickly impact the workforce situation in a positive manner.

The chamber has identified seven economic development target sectors as the key to its business attraction success. Three of them (i.e., clean energy, computer systems development, and healthcare and biotechnology) require a good deal of college degreed employees. To ensure that the companies in these sectors have the proper number of applicants, Round Rock needs to enlarge its direct-to-college numbers. By increasing completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and creating an early college high school, the city can accomplish this goal.

Supplementing the efforts of workforce development practitioners is equally important to guaranteeing WROC success. Assistance in the form of an employer-subsidized transportation system; an expansion of RecognizeGood's® Ethics in Youth Education program; an increase of participation in personal finance training; and an integrated workforce-provider matrix would be examples of the types of support needed. These ancillary strategies would greatly help the community's overall talent development climate.

As it has done since its founding, Round Rock refuses to sit back and wait for things to happen. The potential workforce issue has its stakeholders looking for solutions now instead of later. Because of this thoughtfulness, the WROC strategy has been developed. By using it as guide and executing its recommendations, the city ensures that it will once again be ahead of the curve.

Acknowledgements

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- Chair: Kris Whitfield – Councilmember; City of Round Rock
- Hector Aguilar – Executive Dean, Continuing Education; Austin Community College
- Jenna Akridge – Director of Contracts and Programs; Workforce Solutions – Rural Capital Area
- Sheri Bonds – Director, Career and Technical Education; Round Rock Independent School District
- Joshua Book – Assistant Director of Distance and Extended Learning; Texas State University
- David Cummings – Coordinator, Extended Learning Services; Texas State University
- Mark Hiemstra – Chief Operating Officer; Goodwill Central Texas
- Steven Jakobs – Executive Director; Capital IDEA
- Al Lopez – Planner; Workforce Solutions – Rural Capital Area
- Evan Morgan – Center Director; Texas State Technical College
- Edgar Padilla – Department Chair, Career Services; Texas State Technical College
- LeAnn Powers – Chief Professional Officer; United Way of Williamson County
- Dr. Edna Rehbein – Assistance Vice President for Academic Affairs; Texas State University
- Linda Sappenfield – Reference Librarian; Round Rock Public Library
- DeWayne Street – Vice President of Workforce Advancement; Goodwill Central Texas
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Introduction

When describing the future workforce landscape in Round Rock, two numbers come to mind – three and two thousand twenty. The former is the percentage of which the city’s unemployment rate hovers, and the latter is the year in which all members of the Baby Boomer generation will be at least fifty-five years old. Both of these figures could greatly impact the ability of employers to find and attract the skilled workforce that they require to compete on a global scale.

The continued success of the Central Texas regional economy has led to a significant tightening of the metropolitan area’s talent pool. Luckily, this constriction has not stopped companies from relocating to or expanding within the area, but it has raised concern for the future. Economists Jared Bernstein and Dean Baker of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities and the Center for Economic and Policy Research, respectively, have said that their work indicates that 4 percent unemployment is the point at which full employment is reached (Bernstein and Dean 2013). Considering that Round Rock was been below that mark since November 2014, the alarm is worthy of being sounded.

More troubling for the future is the aging of the community’s workforce. While Millennials have overtaken Generation X in terms of the number of people within the workforce (Frey 2015), the Baby Boomers still command a large portion of the labor pool impact. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ Monthly Labor Review, “[t]he increasing shares of workers in the 55-years-and-older age group is a structural force that will continue over the 2010-2020 period, dramatically lowering both the overall participation rate and the growth of the labor force” (Sommers and Franklin 2012). When combined, the low unemployment

Funding the WROC Strategy

A glaringly absent component of WROC is funding. Obviously, many, if not most, of the strategy’s recommendations will require either an initial funding source, a repetitive funding source, or both. Since some of the recommendations will take years to develop, the chamber decided to eschew the proposing of specific funding options. Instead, it will identify dollar needs during the execution phase of the WROC plan.

and Baby Boomer retirement trends are a “call-to-arms” for Round Rock and its business community.

Unwilling to wait for the situation to attain a critical level, the Round Rock Chamber (chamber) deemed that one of its main priorities for 2015 was to aggressively meet the challenge head on by creating a comprehensive community workforce development strategy. The following pages lay out that multi-functional, multi-year strategy, which it has deemed the Workforce Realization Occurring Cooperatively (WROC) strategy. Along with a diverse working group of workforce and service providers, the chamber has developed this plan to address major aspects of the city’s employment situation. Each plays an important role in ensuring that Round Rock has a stable talent pool.

Skills That Thrill

Preparing for tomorrow's workforce needs means that Round Rock will have to start filling the "occupational pipeline" now. Based on economic trends and feedback from the chamber's business retention and expansion (BRE) work, a focus on increasing the availability of skilled tradespeople is significantly warranted. For the WROC strategy, skilled trades are defined as occupations that require specialized training for certifications, but not necessarily degrees. Some prominent examples may be medical technician, plumber, and computer-aided design (CAD) operator. Many of these are positions that have been historically considered "blue collar," but the old ways of thinking are no longer valid today.

WROC RECOMMENDATION: Initiate an image campaign that promotes the viability of skilled trades

Offshoring, recessionary pressures, and a constant spotlight highlighting the next billion dollar tech startup have impacted how parents and their kids view careers in skilled trades. There's also the misguided perception that skilled trades consist of dirty, unsafe, low-wage jobs. In actuality, a large portion of today's skilled trade positions are active in advanced manufacturing and other technology-driven fields. For instance, heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) technicians use cutting-edge technology in fault detection and diagnostics as well as other industry tools. And with a cross-section of positions averaging \$50,000 and higher annually, the skilled trades are proving that they are dynamic careers with good pay and a positive future.

All of these attractive attributes provide a tremendous opportunity to promote the skilled trades in a targeted and concerted manner. Developing a full-scale image campaign that initiates an intellectual and emotional connection between specific audiences and the viability of trade career options could increase students' willingness to seek employment in these industries after graduation. Addressing the students alone will be ineffective as they are strongly influenced by their parents/guardians and educators. Because of this fact, the image campaign should include messaging and platforms tailored for these stakeholder groups as well. Particular attention should be given to which grade levels are included

in the target audience as simply defaulting to high school may not be early enough to overcome embedded perceptions. Finally, the chamber should arrange tours of facilities and operations for students, parents/guardians, and educators where skilled trades are being applied.

Facing many of the same challenges for which Round Rock is preparing, the state of Alabama realized that it needed to generate a significant interest increase in its skilled trades, especially among young people. So in 2010, it created the Go Build Alabama campaign. The campaign is “designed to educate young people on the value of learning a trade, dispel their misconceptions about the construction industry, and inspire them to consider a career in the skilled trades” (Big Communications 2015). The program’s leadership engaged nationally prominent figure Mike Rowe, host of the popular television show *Dirty Jobs*, to be the spokesperson, while creating a number of partnerships with a diverse set of organizations across the state. The success of Go Build Alabama has led it to be replicated in other states (e.g., Go Build Georgia) and even on a national level (e.g., Go Build America). A similar campaign could easily be developed for the Round Rock community.

Hitting the Accelerator

The skills gap concern caused by the anticipated Baby Boomer retirements will need to be addressed in an accelerated manner to meet the demand. While traditional educational and training methods will continue to be the main producer of talent, Round Rock must embrace and enhance expedited avenues in order to provide employers with a large enough workforce to be successful. Fortunately, a number of accelerated training programs are already in existence and performing well.

WROC RECOMMENDATION: Enlarge the number and variety of internship opportunities

In his book *The Career Playbook: Essential Advice for Today’s Aspiring Young Professional*, James M. Citrin describes the Permission Paradox as “[y]ou can’t get the job without experience, but you can’t get experience without the job” (Citrin 2015). It is understandable that employers want and need experienced staff to run their business at its highest and

most-efficient level. At the same time, inexperienced job seekers need an opportunity to prove themselves by using the skills and training that they have acquired. A vibrant high school and college internship program could satisfy both ends of the Paradox.

There is real value for all involved in the internship programs. According to a survey conducted by the Association of American Colleges and Universities, over 80 percent of employers believe that a supervised internship would be very or fairly effective in ensuring that recent college graduates possess the skills and knowledge needed for success at their company (Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc. 2008). From the student perspective, a 2014 Internships.com and Millennial Branding study found that “70 percent of companies say that high school students...are either very or completely likely to eventually land a college internship with their company” (Schawbel 2014). Finally, the National Association of Colleges and Employers collected data which indicated that “approximately 60 percent of 2012 college graduates who took part in paid internships received at least one job offer” (National Association of Colleges and Employers 2012).

A significant barrier to companies offering internship opportunities, especially small- and mid-sized ones, is the logistical burdens of developing, promoting, and managing the program. Anything more than the antiquated filing, copying, and answering the phones requires a well thought-out plan with proper job responsibilities, descriptions, and mentoring. In large companies with built-out human resources teams, creating a strong internship program is easier to accomplish. In smaller organizations, it is harder to add additional duties to an employee’s workload, which may already exceed capacity. It is, therefore, critical to develop resources that will make creating or expanding internship positions an easy proposition.

Recognizing the need for these resources, chambers across the country have established support systems that employers can turn to for help. The Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce provides internship assistance through an online service called Intern Hub. The platform; which is a component of the Internship Collaborative, a partnership led by the chamber and the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston; offers connections between companies and students, an “intern dashboard” to manage the intern search process, and other resources for employers. The Baton Rouge Area Chamber (BRAC) has BRAIN, which stands for Baton Rouge Area Intern Network. Similar to the Boston Chamber, BRAC’s

program has resources for both companies and students as well as a job board. The Round Rock Chamber should create its own program that is tailor-made for the city’s needs; thus increasing the number of internships available. Equally important, it must convince area companies that it is advantageous to consider non-traditional student interns such as adults attempting to augment their career education.

Another opportunity to model is the new “IT Career Expressway” being piloted by Capital IDEA, a non-profit that is currently supporting over 130 Williamson County residents for high-value careers, and Austin Community College District (ACC). The new “proof of concept” effort will support low-income adults through a semester of information technology (IT) fundamentals followed by a half-time internship and continuing studies. The pilot will target the network administrator, computer support specialist, and software quality assurance technician careers and expand over time. ACC has set aside 100 internships as part of its partnership with Google Fiber and the City of Austin Housing Authority.

WROC RECOMMENDATION: Expand and promote accelerated learning and certification opportunities

For Round Rock to successfully build an effective workforce development strategy, it is going to have to leverage its many accelerated learning

I-BEST – A BEST demonstrated practice

An innovative accelerated learning/training program that has started to gain national prominence is I-BEST, which stands for Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training. In this model, two instructors – one focused on basic skill teaching (e.g., math) and the other on specific career-technical training (e.g., welding) – work side-by-side to seamlessly integrate the two subject areas in order to shorten the certification/graduation timeline. Created by the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, I-BEST has been lauded due to its extremely impressive results. A Columbia University study found that the “chances of earning an occupational certificate was 55 percent for I-BEST students, compared with only 15 percent for the matched group” (Jenkins, Zeidenberg and Kienzel 2009).

ACC, realizing the value of I-BEST, has been participating in a grant-funded project evaluating not only the program’s ability to help students improve their career options, but also its ability to raise a participant’s socio-economic status. Results have been extremely positive, but the funding mechanism is ending soon. Round Rock should closely evaluate whether it can identify new funding sources and attempt to bring I-BEST to its ACC campus.

and certification programs. These programs and the organizations that operate them are dedicated to producing a proficient graduate in the employment areas that are of the greatest need for the community. Due to their design, they are able to quickly adapt to an ever-evolving workforce environment and are focused on a segment of the population that values their services as a path to a better, more secure, life.

One such organization is Skillpoint Alliance. Skillpoint is a non-profit enterprise that for over two decades has been developing and implementing successful workforce and educational programs that have led to increased employment and life opportunities for its participants. In partnership with business representatives, it has built a sustainable and respected model that generates qualified workers for industry sectors such as healthcare, construction, electrical, HVAC, and plumbing in three to ten weeks. Plus, over 80 percent of its graduates find employment within forty-five days of finishing the program.

While Skillpoint and similar organizations work within Williamson County, their presence needs to be increased greatly, especially in Round Rock. Overcoming obstacles such as a dedicated funding source(s) and facility options is critical to ensure that these organizations have the resources to grow their programs in the community. The chamber needs to take the lead in identifying the partners and opportunities necessary to secure program expansion in a meaningful manner.

WROC RECOMMENDATION: Expand the Veteran and Industry Partnership in the Round Rock area

In late 2014, the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) launched the Veteran and Industry Partnership (VIP) to build an employment connection between veterans and companies that will lead to a skilled workforce pipeline for in-demand jobs. Funded through the TWC-administered Skills Development Fund and executed through local workforce investment boards and community colleges, the initiative focuses on accelerated certifications in the advanced manufacturing, information technology, and petrochemical industry sectors. Unfortunately, an area that would greatly benefit the Round Rock area, advanced manufacturing, was not slated for its ACC campus so very few classes occur there.

Round Rock is in a prime position to take advantage of the proliferation of the advanced manufacturing sector. Located on an attractive transportation nexus with an established hub of advanced manufacturers like TECO Westinghouse and Toppan Photomask and the recent removal of a manufacturing tax, the city has situated itself for huge growth in this area. These reasons alone should justify expanding VIP at Round Rock's post-secondary institutions. But, when you consider that the community is less than fifty miles from Fort Hood which averages around 700 soldier separations a month (Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce 2015), it becomes easier to see the value in adding more advanced manufacturing class opportunities.

WROC RECOMMENDATION: Expand the chamber/RRISD job-training beta project

On-the-job (OTJ) training has proven to be an effective tool for both employers and employees. As the National Fund for Workforce Solutions noted in an analysis of a Boeing manufacturing training project, "[o]n-the-job training is well suited to customize training to the employer's specific needs, while creating career advancement opportunities for entry-level workers" (Kobes 2013). OTJ programs also reduce the learning curve that new hires experience; thus increasing their job effectiveness.

For these reasons, the chamber felt that OTJ could be a critical component of its workforce development efforts. Beginning in late 2014, it approached the Round Rock Independent School District (RRISD) about developing a program to test this theory. The two organizations created a beta project that allowed a small number (i.e., three) of Round Rock companies to create positions that would be specifically dedicated to students in either their junior or senior year of high school. Working with career and technical education (CTE) staff, the program allows students to experience a traditional application and interview process. Once hired, the selected students have the option of spending only one hour a day in the classroom with a CTE instructor discussing aspects of their position and working with them to overcome workplace challenges. The rest of the school day can be spent at their place of employment. Participating companies had to commit to at least fifteen hours per week of work, to meet regularly with the instructor, and to complete performance reviews periodically throughout the semester.

Initial results were extremely limited. While the small number of participating companies gave the chamber and RRISD the ability to manage the project in a controlled environment, it also severely limited the compatibility of positions and students. In other words, there was simply not enough critical mass of job openings to properly measure the program's effectiveness. To truly test the validity of this project, as well as identify the value of a full implementation, it needs to be expanded to include more employers. If those efforts prove fruitful, the next step will be to develop quality assurance systems and open participation to all Round Rock companies.

The Old College Try

A healthy amount of debate is occurring around the right path for early high school students: direct-to-career or direct-to-college. Many will agree that not every child should be solely focused on going to college, but every child should have college readily available to them if they decide to go. RRISD has one of the top direct-to-college rates in the region (69 percent in 2014), but more can and should be done to increase this percentage. The WROC strategy has some fundamental recommendations that could help.

WROC RECOMMENDATION: Increase FAFSA completion

The affordability of post-secondary education has become a national issue over the last decade. What once was an issue mostly affecting economically disadvantaged families is now impacting peoples across the entire financial spectrum. This cost barrier is causing students and/or their families to take on large amounts of debt or skip college altogether.

Beyond tuition, room, and board – When financial aid is just not enough

A Being accepted by a college(s) and receiving financial aid to pay for it are only the beginning for most students. They now must weave their way through the complicated maze of expenses such as fees, supplies, and pre-attendance requirements (e.g., vaccinations). The volume of dollars needed can be overwhelming and can derail a young adult's post-secondary education dreams, especially those from economically disadvantaged homes.

As a community, Round Rock should spend time studying this issue and identifying possible solutions. Students and their families need to have access to or, at the very least, an understanding of options for these types of lesser-known expenditures.

Taking advantage of available financial aid opportunities has to be a priority for all college-prepared students, especially those in the RRISD.

In 2014, the federal government awarded approximately \$134 billion in student aid (Federal State Aid 2015). In order to determine eligibility for this assistance, students and their families must complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Unfortunately, but understandably, FAFSA completion is an involved process. Dual fulfillment by both the student and their parents (or legal guardian) is required, as is a complete financial overview including that year's federal tax information and asset categorization. The enormity of this information, as well as an overall lack of awareness of the forms existence, prevents many students from taking advantage of its benefits.

Since 2012, the Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce has been tracking the FAFSA completion rate for many of the school districts within the Austin-Round Rock Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). For the RRISD specifically, the percentages have been slightly eroding. Beginning with a 63 percent completion rate in 2012, the number has gone to 60 percent in 2013 and 55 percent in 2014. Meanwhile, the direct-to-college enrollment rate has remained flat; hovering around 70 percent. Increasing FAFSA participation has a direct correlation to enrollment as research has "found that students who had been accepted by a four-year college and completed a FAFSA form in the spring were almost 50 percent more likely to enroll in college than students who had not completed a FAFSA form" (McKinley Group, LLC 2011).

The Austin Chamber has done significant work on this front by integrating initiatives such as student incentives, superintendent and board of trustee engagement, and targeted text messaging. The Round Rock community, however, needs to supplement this work with its own efforts. Due to the FAFSA requirement for parental participation and completed tax forms, identifying opportunities where students and parents can complete the form at the same time with access to their finished Internal Revenue Service documentation becomes critical.

Two examples of successful practices provide avenues that could be replicated. For the past two years, the United Way of Williamson County (UWWC) has partnered with the Leander Independent School District (LISD) to offer FAFSA completion assistance

in coordination with local churches; thus interweaving a family connection point with FAFSA participation. From 2007 through 2009, a group of researchers from Stanford University, Harvard College, and the University of Toronto conducted “The H&R Block FAFSA Experiment,” which was created to evaluate the effectiveness of offering free FAFSA completion assistance to families receiving tax preparation services. (Note: In year one of the UWWC/LISD partnership, free tax assistance was offered with little response.) The results were extremely promising with enrollment increasing by “30 percent among high school seniors and 20 percent for young adults already out of high school” (Bettinger, Long and Oreopoulos 2013).

WROC RECOMMENDATION: Create an early college high school

For many students, the prospect of attending and eventually graduating from college is an unfathomable dream. This is especially true for children from lower socio-economic (SES) families. According to the College Board, only “58.4 percent of high school graduates from low-income families’ enrolled in a two- or four-year college immediately after high school, compared to 63.3 percent of students from middle-income families and 78.2 percent of students from high-income families” (Wyatt and Mattern 2011). While there is much being done (see the aforementioned recommendation of increasing FAFSA completion), creating an early college high school within RRISD would significantly align with these efforts.

Coming into existence around 2002, early college high schools are an innovative educational model that allows its students to earn up to sixty hours, essentially four semesters-worth, of college credit or an associate’s degree while simultaneously securing their high school diploma. Traditionally, the schools are focused on lower SES kids and have been especially successful in increasing their probability of high school and college graduation. According to a 2013 impact study by the American Institutes for Research®, early college students were more likely to graduate from high school than their peers (86 percent vs. 81 percent), more likely to enroll in college (80 percent vs. 71 percent), and more likely earn a college degree (22 percent vs. 2 percent) (Berger, et al. 2013). Equally impressive and important for lower SES students and their families from a financial standpoint, “[e]arly [c]ollege students earned college degrees far earlier than is typical: 20 percent of [e]arly [c]ollege students earned a degree by the time they graduated from high school” (Berger, et al. 2013).

Based on these results, an RRISD early college high school could be a tremendous tool for the district's efforts to increase its direct-to-college rates. This would not be uncharted territory for Texas as the state has already established 107 early college schools with seventeen in the Central Texas region alone (Texas Education Agency 2015). Many of these have been developed in cooperation with ACC; a viable direction for RRISD. Fortunately, the district is currently evaluating the creation of a school and could apply for Texas Education Agency approval as early as October 2015.

Supporting the Supporters

The majority of the WROC strategy is focused on ensuring that Round Rock is maximizing its use of the workforce and education providers. They are dedicated to producing the future workforce that the community requires. Equally important, however, are the ancillary services that support the practitioners. Developing a robust system of assistance is crucial to guarantee that the community's talent pool is positioned for success.

WROC RECOMMENDATION: Develop an employer-subsidized transportation system

While Round Rock has grown significantly over the past few years, its population has not justified a fully integrated transportation system. The city has created a by-request bus service, but it cannot fully meet the needs of area businesses. A more robust solution is required so employers can be assured that current and potential employees can reliably report to work, pre-employment testing, etc.

This workforce/transportation dynamic is not unique to Round Rock. All over the country, communities and their business stakeholders have been forced to conceive innovative solutions to ensure that companies have the people necessary to run their operations. In many cases, subsidies in the form of paid or reimbursed travel costs are used to compensate for transit issues. Vanpools are another option being leveraged by employers including many in the Austin-Round Rock MSA. With the lack of a dynamic public transit system and the instability of vanpool operations, the community will need to look for other fixes.

The WROC recommendation is the development of an employer-subsidized transportation system. Created in partnership with Capital Metro or a private bus operator, the system could use a limited-stop and limited-service-time route that would be focused on employer-cluster areas around Round Rock. Businesses would provide employees with full or partial pre-loaded fare cards that would allow for a “user pays” system. In order to ensure initial participation, the chamber would be responsible for building the coalition of companies. A limited-time test run would be recommended to verify usage and route.

The idea of a transit system paid for by businesses is not unfounded. The Brazos Transit District has partnered with area employers such as Tyson Foods, Inc. and Beaumont/Port Arthur refineries to offer subsidized bus transportation. The program is “provided via a contract with Coach America and uses (fifty-five) passenger coaches to carry commuters traveling from Louisiana to Central Texas” (Community Transportation Association of America 2012). Along with the sheer inventiveness of this strategy, the cross-state collaboration shows that jurisdictional concerns shouldn’t limit implementation.

WROC RECOMMENDATION: Expand the Ethics in Youth Education program

During a recent chamber workforce-related focus group, a participant said that one of his biggest concerns about the next generation of employees is the lack of a “moral compass.” His comment enlisted a number of shaking heads in the form of agreement. Many of the issues that employers are experiencing with today’s workers are attributed to perceived lapses in ethical behavior and decision making. Many may argue that imparting morals and values should be the responsibility of the parents/guardians, but the Harvard Graduate School of Education found that about 70 percent of polled “public school parents want schools to teach ‘strict standards of right and wrong,’ and 85 percent want schools to teach values” (Weissbourd 2012).

Fortunately, an organization called RecognizeGood® foresaw this trend and created a program to address it. The program, Ethics in Youth Education or EiYEd, brings local student and business people together to discuss the importance of behaving ethically and making good decisions. With a specific focus on high school students preparing to enter the workforce, attendees have the opportunity to hear from and interact with business

representatives who share their collective wisdom on the subject matter. Students also receive a certificate of attendance that gives “them a competitive advantage on their résumé by signifying to potential employers that they have an understanding of ethics” (RecognizeGood 2015).

Seeing the value of the initiative, the RRISD joined RecognizeGood® and the RRISD Partners in Education Foundation to hold an EiYEd student summit in April 2015. The multi-school event included presentations by area business leaders, a mini-job fair, and giveaway prizes to attract students sixteen-years-old and above to Round Rock High School on a Saturday morning. The summit was attended by approximately 300 students; quite an accomplishment for its first year in existence. The success of the event shows that there is an appetite for an EiYED presence within the community. By building on the summit’s ground work, an opportunity exists to expand and further integrate the program into the secondary education fabric.

WROC RECOMMENDATION: Increase exposure and usage of personal finance education opportunities

In both the chamber’s workforce assessment and its subsequent focus group, employers communicated that a chief cause of employee issues was the lack of personal finance acumen. An inability to properly budget, manage a bank account, and plan for unexpected expenses has led to absenteeism, distraction, and an overall instability; all of which affect a company’s bottom line. The concern is heightened with the pending wave of Baby Boomer retirements and a greater reliance on millennials, who, as the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority (FINRA) Investor Education Foundation found, “display low levels of financial literacy [and] engage in problematic financial behaviors” (FINRA Investor Education Foundation 2014).

Recognizing the significance of this issue, organizations across Round Rock and Williamson County have developed free resources and assistance. UWWC, in partnership with the Williamson County Financial Stability Coalition, offers free educational workshops at public locations (e.g., Round Rock Public Library) and individual companies. Participants in these classes learn how to create a personal budget, build an emergency fund, and reduce their debt among other important topics (United Way of Williamson County 2015).

Taught by trained volunteers, the bi-lingual (i.e., English and Spanish) classes are the perfect avenue for those that are in need of financial educational help.

Similar to other programs of this nature, however, the level of exposure, and consequentially usage, determines the overall value and impact. In order to increase the participation in programs such as UWWC's, the chamber should become a vocal and persistent supporter. Leveraging its network of businesses and organizations, it should encourage promotion through a dedicated information campaign that would target employers of all sizes and industry sectors. Companies should be receptive to this message as they will be the ultimate beneficiary in the form of consistent attendance and concentration.

WROC RECOMMENDATION: Develop an integrated workforce-provider matrix

The Round Rock, actually the entire Central Texas, community has a number of high-performing and successful workforce development practitioners that provide an array of services. It is obvious, however, that the coordination and awareness of their services is limited to those closest to them. Through the chamber's BRE's visits, it has become clear that most employers are unaware of the work that these organizations do and how they are beneficial in their workforce efforts. Likewise, these companies are missing out on the opportunity to share their ever-changing talent needs with the groups that could fill the voids.

With this in mind, the chamber should develop a matrix that will be used as a guide to understand the workforce-provider landscape. The matrix should include a list of providers, composition of their target client (e.g., recent high school graduate), insight into their services, highlights of their funding and facility requirements (if necessary), and other valuable information. It should be a public tool available for social-assistance, faith-based, and governmental organizations to use as a reference to direct citizens in need of aid. The chamber should take responsibility for regularly updating the matrix and ensuring that it is distributed to employers across the community.

The benefit of the matrix is to deliver a faultless pathway of workforce development services. A person in need of these services should be able to be informed of them at any contact point. It will also provide much-needed exposure to the wide variety of workforce-provider organizations. Entities such as Goodwill Industries, Capital IDEA, and Skillpoint Alliance play very specific and necessary roles and most are not utilized to their full extent. By shining the light on their existence and value through the matrix, Round Rock will leverage some extremely meaningful assets.

Conclusion

The decade-long outlook for the Round Rock economy is extremely positive. A city that is made up of diverse and growth-oriented companies operating in a pro-business environment is a tremendous formula for continued success. As the community's economic-generation leader, the chamber shoulders a large responsibility in ensuring that the positive future comes to fruition. That means addressing any upcoming challenges that may be on the minds of company executives.

Topping the list of concerns is the prospect of a talent pool unable to meet the forthcoming workforce needs. With an unemployment rate that consistently remains south of 4 percent and a Baby Boomer generation counting down the days until retirement, their worries may be justified. The WROC strategy is designed to address this issue both from a short- and long-term perspective. An effective implementation of its recommendations should result in a skilled workforce in numbers that will secure Round Rock's economic future.

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