

# **City of Scottsbluff, Nebraska**

**Monday, September 15, 2014**

**Regular Meeting**

## **Item Reports1**

**Council to discuss and take action on the Scottsbluff Public School District High School Bond issue.**

**Staff Contact: Rick Kuckahn, City Manager**

# City of Scottsbluff – Economic Development Strategic Plan

## Workforce Development: Review and Recommendations

Thomas P. Miller and Associates (TPMA) reviewed the Scottsbluff-Gering region's workforce development initiatives and partnerships and developed the following series of recommendations to build upon the region's strong, existing foundation to improve service delivery and enhance the quality of the region's workforce.

### Current Observations

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Many organizations in the Scottsbluff-Gering region provide workforce development resources and programming to improve the skills and education attainment levels for their constituents. Some of the groups integral to the success of the region's workforce include Scottsbluff Public Schools, Gering Public Schools, Western Nebraska Communication College (WNCC), the Nebraska Department of Labor, and the Twin Cities Development Association, Inc.(TCD).

One of the most significant initiatives underway is the development of several high school Career Academies, in order to align with Rule 47 (Career Academy Program) from the Nebraska Legislature. As defined by the American Youth Policy Forum, a career academy is a smaller learning community within a larger high school setting (Brand, 2009). Scottsbluff High School is working to build such a facility for its career academies and to expand existing activities to align with Rule 47 guidelines. Currently, almost all of Scottsbluff High School's students are involved in related programs where the student is either a Career Participant (enrolled in one career education course) or a Career Concentrator (enrolled in two or more courses in the same career pathway). In order to align the career-focused initiatives at Scottsbluff High School to Rule 47, administrators are launching the following activities:

- A career exploration course offered in 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grades
- An introductory course to a specific career field, aligned with identified career clusters, for all 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students
- A career education course bearing 2 credits within a chosen career pathway
- One core academic course that ties specifically to the career pathway (e.g.: anatomy and physiology for nursing students)
- A personal learning plan for every student that includes work-based opportunities for job shadowing, career aptitude testing, industry tours, internships, and resume preparation
- Intensive academic counseling aligned with career guidance
- Career student organizations tied to the specific Career Academy (e.g.: DECA - Distributive Education Clubs of America for business students and FFA - Future Farmers of America for agriculture students)
- An advisory committee for each Career Academy includes industry representatives that meet at least twice per year to discuss internships, job shadowing, curriculum, industry needs, and guest speaking opportunities

The Scottsbluff High School administrators and WNCC are currently working diligently to align the effort into official Career Academies (as defined by the state), with many components of these activities ready to be implemented. Plans for expanded Career Academies are centered on the institution's identified career clusters, such as Business Marketing and Management; Human Science and Education; Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources; Skilled and Technical Sciences; Communication and Information Systems; and Health Sciences. Plans also entail continued collaboration with WNCC on dual credits, industry tours, and other educational benefits. Gering High School plans to establish a Career Academies initiative with WNCC in the near future.

The Career Academies have strong partnerships with the business community, which provide job shadowing opportunities, internships, industry tours, and participants for an advisory council. Key stakeholders such as educators from WNCC, Scottsbluff Public Schools, and Gering Public Schools anticipate that the development of robust, systematic Career Academies will drive the advancement of Career and Technical Education (CTE) where previously, the approach to CTE has been scattered.

In addition to the public schools' drive in the education arena, WNCC is the keystone to the region's education attainment level advancement and strong workforce development. Currently, WNCC offers dual credit for several general studies courses, along with automotive body, automotive technology, and welding. In addition, Western Nebraska Community College offers customized training for industry, facility access, blended learning opportunities, and on-site employer-based training. The business-education committee focuses on a training consortia, but representatives from WNCC cite that the institution does not satisfactorily build public-private partnerships around the direct training of a workforce, nor does it adequately insource projects.

The key stakeholders interviewed also contend that one challenge to educational institutions' efforts to develop the workforce is that the regional culture is not one which has traditionally supported post-secondary education, certifications, and degrees. They validate this contention by reporting that students often choose classes based on how much they like the teacher instead of choosing classes that further their career objectives. Additionally, community stakeholders share a major concern regarding the shortage of workers with adequate soft skills, work ethic, workplace skills, and 21st Century skills.

With respect to the public workforce system led by the Nebraska Department of Labor, the regional Career Center One-Stop in Scottsbluff offers employment and training related services for workers, youth, and businesses. The services are provided by a small staff focused on Unemployment Insurance (UI), Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP), and Workforce Investment Act (WIA) and covers an 11-county region. The strain of resources hinders the Career Center from effectively providing standard One-Stop services, including the delivery of on-the-job training (OJT) and specialized youth programs. The staff indicated there are no eligible recipients for the Trade Readjustment Allowances (TRAA) program. Currently, staff visit approximately 50-75 businesses per year with typical outcomes of creating job postings and obtaining referrals to other businesses for the same purpose.

The workforce staff collaborates with Darla Heggem, Employee Recruitment Manager from TCD, on initiatives such as business and industry tours with the Scottsbluff and Gering High Schools. The workforce system regional manager believes the impact of service delivery to companies and individuals in the region could be increased by strengthening the partnership with TCD.

TCD also conducts several workforce development programs focused solely on attracting talent to the Scottsbluff-Gering region. Such programs include: implementing a marketing campaign to encourage local high school alumni to return to the region; operating a job board on the TCD website; and partnering with the State of Nebraska to incentivize military veterans to move to the region.

## Recommendations

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To boost the quality of the region's workforce, the TPMA team recommends that regional organizations collaborate effectively on existing talent development, talent attraction, and the creation of a talent pipeline. Specific action steps include:

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- 1. Cultivate Existing Talent**
    - a. Talent Coalition
    - b. Targeted Industry Workforce Training
    - c. Business Resource Network (BRN)
  - 2. Drive Talent Attraction**
    - a. "Talent Ready" Dashboard
    - b. Expand TCD Activities
  - 3. Establish a Talent Pipeline**
    - a. Career Academies
    - b. Career Awareness Series
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### 1. Cultivate Existing Talent

The TPMA team recommends the establishment of a Talent Coalition, alignment of workforce training to the demands of identified targeted industries (i.e. Agriculture, Food Processing and Technology; Advanced Manufacturing and Precision Metals; Plastics and Chemicals; Health Services; Data Centers; and Oil and Gas Support Industries), and implementation of the Business Resource Network model.

#### *a. Talent Coalition*

Regional organizations should elevate and formalize as a Talent Coalition to ensure business and industry skills needs, both soft skills and technical skills, are identified and communicated to education and training partners. Other responsibilities should include establishing a certified workforce, developing brain drain mitigation tactics, and addressing low educational attainment levels. The Talent Coalition should include TCD, the Nebraska Department of Labor, Scottsbluff and Gering Public Schools, Aim for Brilliance, target industry representatives, and other stakeholder groups. Effectively, TCD should facilitate the effort to bring all of the necessary partners together.

#### *b. Targeted Industry Workforce Training*

In order to enhance the skills of the existing labor force in the region, TCD and the Talent Coalition are recommended to facilitate expansion of existing and development of new internship and apprenticeship programs with the targeted industries. Additionally, the Talent Coalition should identify needs and encourage development of new or enhanced education and training programs.

Though TCD's workforce initiative is currently focused on talent attraction, TCD is uniquely positioned to engage businesses that have connections to pertinent services outlined in the new Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). The TPMA team recommends that TCD build a stronger partnership with regional representatives from the Nebraska Department of Labor to ensure effective existing talent development in the region.

*c. Business Resource Network (BRN)*

Outlined previously in this report, the Business Resource Network model connects economic development, workforce development, and education partners to address employers' needs in a variety of areas. If TCD extends its workforce development initiative to include existing talent development, a Business Resource Network is an essential tool for TCD and the Talent Coalition in order to identify the source of workforce issues and work collaboratively in the region to devise solutions.

## 2. Talent Attraction

Since TCD's main workforce initiative is centered on attracting talent to the region, the TPMA team recommends creating a new marketing tool, a Talent Ready Dashboard, to boost the region's workforce spotlight and magnify TCD's current workforce development activities. TCD should also enhance their current workforce activities, increasing the program's audience and boosting its quality.

*a. Talent Ready Dashboard*

In partnership with WNCC and Scottsbluff and Gering Public Schools, the TPMA team proposes TCD create a Talent Ready Dashboard: a marketing effort to promote the education and skills of the region's workforce. The Talent Ready Dashboard will provide pertinent workforce metrics for companies and site selection consultants researching the optimal location for a business for their operations. Such metrics can include:

- Educational attainment levels
- High school graduation rate
- Certificate holder figures
- Labor force participation rate
- Soft Skills participation

## SOFT SKILLS CERTIFICATION

A soft skills certification program in the secondary education system can help senior high school students prepare for the transition from school to work and life beyond the classroom.

Ensuring that students are acquiring the needed work ethic in order to obtain and secure successful

employment is one of the main missions of the

program. Graduates with the certification have an

advantage when seeking employment as it identifies candidates with a

demonstrated work ethic.

Furthermore, soft skill certification is valuable for students applying to post-secondary institutions, as it shows that the student has learned the value of active participation in school, good attendance, and a hard work ethic.

Certification programs should include the following:

- Attendance and punctuality
- Communication
- Teamwork
- Leadership
- Critical Thinking

The Talent Ready Dashboard metrics are encouraged to be added to the TCD website and collateral material to be easily accessed by companies and site selection consultants.

#### *b. Enhancement of Current TCD Workforce Operations*

The TPMA team endorses the expansion of TCD's workforce activities to include talent attraction, as described above, as well as the amplification of current programs. TCD has developed and continues to maintain several strong tools that bring value to their talent attraction efforts, which includes growing Career Link, the marketing campaign aimed to draw alumni back to the region, and a newer initiative focused on attracting military veterans. Increased funding and staff would enable further development of these workforce development initiatives.

### **3. Establish a Talent Pipeline**

While existing talent development and talent attraction are vital pieces to the workforce development puzzle, creating a pipeline of talent for industry is the third integral element. For successful creation of the talent pipeline, the expansion of Career Academies and the creation of a Career Awareness Summit are essential.

#### *a. Career Academies*

Scottsbluff Public Schools have outlined detailed plans for alignment with the State of Nebraska's Rule 47, including an expansion of its current programming. In addition, Gering Public Schools have plans to initiate their own Career Academies in collaboration with WNCC, and should focus its programs on target industries (i.e. Agriculture, Food Processing, and Technology; Advanced Manufacturing and Precision Metals; Plastics and Chemical; Health Services; Data Centers; and Oil and Gas Support Industries). As previously described above, the Career Academies should have a special focus on work-based learning opportunities, such as apprenticeships and internships, for students.

One supplemental service from the advisory council to help guide the Career Academies is an employer needs assessment effort. The initiative – the Employer Learning Network (ELN) – will assess the needs of various segments of the employer base within the Scottsbluff-Gering region to determine common challenges many businesses face. Essentially, the ELN is an industry, post-secondary, and community college partnership whose mission is to build academic programs to meet specific job needs.

#### *b. Career Awareness Summit*

Building from the Industry Tour series, in which local businesses provide tours and career information to high school students, the TPMA team urges the Talent Coalition to launch a Career Awareness Summit. The Summit would focus on the skills and knowledge required for youth and adults to take advantage of career opportunities obtainable in the targeted industry sectors. Industry leaders and workforce development practitioners would present on the needed skills, possible occupations, growing careers, and effectively communicating the current status and future needs of the region's workforce. Students should also present on their experience in the Career Academies, essentially acting as ambassadors to their peers with the goal of persuading other students to pursue further education and training in targeted industries. Prior to each year's Summit, both education and technical education teachers should have the opportunity to participate in "field trips" to the region's major employers in order to learn how the curricula relates to real world examples. In addition, the local newspaper could run a series of

articles addressing specific issues to be discussed at the summit in addition to the Talent Coalition offering a workforce “report card”.

In summary, the region’s workforce partners have established creative and effective programs. The Scottsbluff and Gering Public Schools, WNCC, Nebraska Department of Labor, and TCD have all built a strong foundation upon which these recommendations would take development to the next level.