



Business Engagement Committee Accomplishments, March 2024 – May 2024

Charge:

- The charge of the BEC is to provide guidance and direction to help bridge the gap between Illinois' important business sectors and employers, and the Illinois workforce development system.

Priorities:

- Enhance and support the development of regional industry-led sector partnerships.
- Developing compelling messages that respond to employer needs.
- Identifying and employing effective methods of communication to employers.
- Improving data and information regarding business engagement.

Leadership: Co-Chairs

- Kara Demirjian, ksd@dccmarketing.com, DCC Marketing
- Jess Wright, jess.wright@duravant.com, Duravant Corp.

Q4 Accomplishments and Progress Toward Workplan:

- The Committee welcomed a new co-chair during this quarter. Kara Demirjian joined the BEC as a new member of the IWIB, and also as a member of the Apprenticeship Committee's Marketing Work Group.
- Committee efforts during this quarter continued to focus on the business engagement track developed for the annual WIOA Statewide Summits. In addition to final session preparations and the accomplishment of the business engagement track, the committee also held a debrief session to discuss results, audience feedback and questions.





Each of the lead presenters of the business engagement sessions at the WIOA Statewide Summit were invited to give a quick debrief on their session experiences and results. Marty Johnson led off with a debrief on the “Using Data to Engage with Business” session. She described the three business scenarios or use cases that formed the basis of the session. The main questions received were regarding how, and how quickly, could the described data be obtained by business engagement staff. Several channels were discussed to access the data. Additionally, Dee Reinhardt, who spoke about the IEBS system, asked the group for thoughts on some of the new resources DCEO is looking to roll out under IEBS, and she got some useful feedback.

Next, Biswa Puhyal of IDHS discussed the session on engaging business to consider more inclusive hiring practices. This session featured both employers and workforce professionals on a panel – focused on Will County -- that discussed innovative methods to bring employers together with an inclusive workforce, such as training and workshops for employers and job fairs and hiring events focused on inclusive communities. Kraig, another of the panel members in this session, spoke about what works for him as an employer in terms of finding, hiring and retaining an inclusive workforce.

Kim Kuchenbrod then discussed her session, which was on the dos and don'ts of business engagement, and on creating an elevator pitch for employers. Participants were broken into groups, given examples, and given a timeframe to create their elevator pitch to keep it short, simple and to the point.

Antonio Garcia followed with a discussion of the session on talking to businesses. Key to this is to engage with businesses without using government jargon, but to use business terminology and present WIOA services as a value proposition for business. He discussed the value proposition that Lake County WIOA presents to its businesses: workforce solutions, workforce training, and a workforce ecosystem. By having a clear message you encompass everything that the employer needs. Lastly, Antonio discussed the need to take this message directly to company leadership, to have buy in at the highest levels. One way to do this is to utilize the relationships and connections of local workforce board members.





- The committee also reviewed and discussed a presentation based on data from the state, regional and local WIOA plans. This data included demographic trends, employment and labor market trends, and emerging workforce trends. Regarding demographic trends:
 - About 2/3 of Illinois population is in the age groups typically considered “working age;”
 - Hispanic persons had above average labor force participation rates, those identifying as white or African American have below average rates;
 - The unemployment rate for African Americans was double that for the overall Illinois population;
 - The Northern Stateline region had the highest unemployment rate among the then economic development regions. The Southwest region had the lowest unemployment rate;
 - Minority populations typically have higher labor force participation rates, but they also typically have higher unemployment rates, indicating that they are looking for work but might be having more difficulty finding that work;
 - Continuing a long-term trend, Illinois is one of few midwestern states that have had a net outmigration of population over time, generally 1-2% per year. Of those outmigrants, a quarter move to neighboring states (possibly while still working in Illinois), a third move to warm weather states (possibly as retirees), and the rest move to a mix of other states.
 - Also noted was the increase in remote work that has increasingly made it possible to live apart from the technical place of employment.
- Regarding labor market and employment trends:
 - As of 3Q 2023, Illinois had the nation’s fifth largest economy, in line with its population;
 - Illinois’ labor force participation, employment and unemployment trends have all closely tracked national trends;





- Within Illinois, labor market trends often differ for different demographic categories. For instance, among Asian and Hispanic workers those not working are more likely to be new entrants to the labor force looking for a first job. Among whites, those not working are more likely to be job leavers rather than job losers (i.e., those who have voluntarily left their previous positions and are now searching for another job).
- Regarding social, technological and economic trends that make up “Key Labor Market Trends,” Illinois’ plan identified four such trends: developments in artificial intelligence (AI), trends in working arrangements, trends in employer needs for skills and reskilling, and workforce trends within the “clean” energy field.
 - If generative AI meets its promised capabilities, there could be significant disruption in the workforce and labor market. Research has found that roughly 2/3 of current jobs could be impacted in *some* manner by AI. Up to ¼ of current work *tasks* could be completely substituted by AI.
 - With most technology leaps such as this, there is always an element of new job creation involved, and in some cases that will entail completely new occupations that we don’t see in the workforce now. From the perspective of the workforce development system, this provides great opportunity along with the risk of possible job losses.
 - Technology tends to automate *tasks*, not *occupations*, so reskilling efforts will be a key to companies being able to utilize AI properly.
 - Tony Fuhrman noted that the upcoming WIOA Statewide Summit will feature a plenary speaker discussing this topic in detail.
 - Regarding trends in working arrangements, the pandemic accelerated what might have been a 15 year trend in remote working into a months-long timeframe. As of May, 2023 about one in eight employees were fully remote, with another 30% working under a hybrid arrangement. Days worked from home were a little over ¼ of all days worked. Trends seem to have stabilized around these numbers, and most jobs in the U.S. economy simply cannot be done remotely.





- Regarding skills and reskilling, research and polling of employers – particularly human resource professionals – has shown a high level of concern with skill gaps in their current and future workforce.
- Many of those employers see it as a somewhat insoluble problem, as they simply do not have the resources they need to train new workers and retrain their current workforce. Technical skills and “soft” skills are both seen as serious issues for these employers.
- Regarding “clean” energy jobs, one important issue identified is the ability to recruit workers to these industries – particularly from traditional energy industries – due to the inability to offer pay scales commensurate with those traditional energy industries.
- Another issue identified through discussion during the meeting is a supply/demand mismatch for workforce in this industry. Workers can be trained, for instance, in solar panel installation, job creation in that field may be lagging to the point that placement opportunities may not exist when that training is completed. It doesn’t really help a training completer to tell them that they job they seek may exist in a year or two when they need a job now.
- The committee also began a series of discussions around the existence and collection of business engagement data. This is both in response to an initial inquiry from the Continuous Improvement Committee (CIC) and to the place of data as one of the four priorities of the committee. (see above). This has been an ongoing issue that the committee has sought to resolve, and we will continue to work with the CIC and other partners such as the Illinois Workforce Partnership (IWP) to better understand what data is being collected, if an how that collection might be expanded, and how a data pipeline could be established for the use of the BEC and the IWIB as a whole.

