

ACTION

From the Editor Workforce Education

Few would argue anymore that for Alabama to succeed economically we must be part of the global economy. The change in the state's emphasis from textiles to automobile manufacturing is but one example of this. To be successful in this environment, **workforce education** is critical. A more skilled workforce results in increased economic productivity for the state, as well as an increase in employability and income potential for the worker.

"Action" is a quarterly publication of the Economic and Community Development Institute (ECDI), a partnership of Alabama Cooperative Extension System and Auburn University. The mission of ECDI is to improve the quality of life of all Alabama citizens by promoting continuous improvement of economic and community development policy and practice through communication, education, research and community assistance. ECDI seeks to play a leading role in revitalizing Alabama communities, especially in the state's rural areas. "Action" is one tool we use to link AU's and Extension's resources to community groups.

Workforce education is the focus of this fall 2007 issue of "ECDI in Action." Amelia Hall Stehouwer, training and research coordinator with ECDI, is the author for this topic. Arturo S. Menefee, Extension leadership specialist with ECDI, is the author of the Resource Tools segment. Three guest authors contributed articles for the What's Happening in Alabama section.

The next issue of "Action," winter 2008, will highlight local community development programs across Alabama. For more information on these topics or suggestions for additional topics, contact the editor at (334) 844-3517, fax (334) 844-4709, or e-mail chesnjt@auburn.edu.

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One World, One Workforce: A New Agenda for Education and Workforce Development

In 1942, after a trip around the world, Wendell Willkie concluded, "There are no distant points in the world any longer. I learned by this trip that the myriad millions of human beings of the Far East are as close to us as Los Angeles is to New York by the fastest trains. I cannot escape the conviction that in the future what concerns them must concern us, almost as much as the problems of the people of California concern the people of New York. Our thinking in the future must be worldwide."¹ When Willkie penned these words, he was not conscious of the extent to which they were truly prophetic of a global age yet to be imagined. However, 65 years later, we have, as a state and nation, become profoundly aware of the degree to which Willkie's vision has been fulfilled.

One of the most significant effects of the process of globalization and the corresponding "flattening" of the world can be found in the global competition for talent. As the National Center on Education and the Economy explained earlier this year, "A swiftly rising number of American workers at every skill level are in direct competition with workers in every corner of the globe. So it matters that, increasingly, it is easier and easier for employers everywhere to get workers who are better skilled at lower cost than



American workers."² A knowledgeable, skilled and adaptable workforce has never been a more valuable form of capital or a greater necessity for economic survival.

Thus, the system through which we develop the human and intellectual capital of our state and nation must be more effective than ever before. However, we face monumental challenges in this area. According to the National Center on Education and the Economy, "If we continue on our current course, and the number of nations outpacing us in the education race continues to grow at its current rate, the American standard of living will steadily fall relative to those nations, rich and poor, that are doing a better job. The core problem is that our education and training systems were built for another era, an era in which most workers needed only a rudimentary education. It is not possible to get where we have to go by patching the system ... We can get where we must go only by changing the system itself."³ Likewise, in December of 2005, The National Summit on Competitiveness issued a single "fundamental and urgent message" to U.S. decision-makers, "If trends in U.S. research and education

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continue, our nation will squander its economic leadership, and the result will be a lower standard of living for the American people.”⁴

The challenges we face in educating the next generation of workers are compounded by shifts in the demographic composition of our current workforce. As millions of “baby boomers” currently employed in key fields, especially scientists, engineers and mathematicians, retire within the next decade, young people entering the workforce will not replace them in sufficient numbers. In light of this reality, Michael E. Porter and Debra van Opstal (2001) have observed, “The ability to maximize the productive potential of every American of working age, through investment in education and training, will be essential to sustain future growth.”⁵

Further, in the post-9/11 era, a decrease in the availability of H1B visas that allow international students to study in the United States and the implementation of national immigration policies that discourage international students from joining the U.S. workforce after graduation, have contributed to a decrease in the available pool of scientists, engineers and mathematicians available in the U.S. labor market.

In addition, we have witnessed unprecedented rates of job churning and worker mobility, as well as a significant increase in the number of jobs created by smaller firms that have less capacity to provide workers with advanced training opportunities. As a result, individual workers must assume responsibility for acquiring continuing education as they prepare for a more uncertain career path. As explained by the National Center for Education Statistics (2001), “Every year, up to a third of all jobs are either additions to or are soon to be eliminated from the economy. This churning has contributed to the demise of the social contract between employees and employers and has reduced the incentives for employers to invest in their workers.”⁶ Thus, to be effective, a new synergistic model of education and workforce development must reflect “a fundamental rethinking of how workers are educated, trained and equipped with the knowledge and skills

necessary to compete throughout their working lives.”⁷

Finally, to become more competitive, we need a new education and workforce development model that builds upon the resources available throughout all sectors of a community and is measured by its contributions to the local, regional and national economies. In 1981, John Goodlad suggested, “The idea educative community or society is not . . . one where the school has expanded upwards, downwards and sideways to embrace the whole of educating. Rather, the educative community or society is one in which all institutions play their educational role to their full potential.”⁸ It is “high time” that we heed Goodlad’s suggestion, especially in a state like Alabama, where many school systems are severely underfunded. In our state, it will take the efforts of every segment of our communities working together to succeed in the face of an ever-changing and increasingly demanding global, knowledge economy. In 2002, the Southern Growth Policies Board observed, “Given the twin crises of low skills and a shrinking supply of workers, how can the South thrive in a knowledge economy? The chief response has to be to raise skills across the board, and to ensure the skills being taught are for occupations in demand. This will require dramatic changes in institutional behaviors, increased investment in education and training, and new public attitudes towards work, learning, and change itself.”⁹

Just as Wendell Willkie experienced a paradigm shift in the way he saw the world in 1942, we must also experience a paradigm shift in how we see our own society and the institutions that support it if we are to succeed in a global, knowledge economy, and we must collectively commit to making the changes and investing the resources necessary to meet the challenges that we face.

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Resource Tools

The Advantages and Steps to Forming Successful Alliances

In today’s world with such great need and limited resources, individuals and groups are encouraged to form alliances (such as coalitions and partnerships) to better serve their communities (constituents). An alliance is simply a relationship between two or more partners (individuals, groups or organizations) that is strategically formed to accomplish goals that benefit the community. There are many benefits associated with forming alliances. These benefits include the following.

Additional resources. With additional individuals and groups involved, additional resources are involved (more people, larger network, new tools and additional expertise). Also, most funding agencies encourage organizations to partner with each other to better service the community. Therefore, alliances have a greater chance of receiving a grant from a funding agency than an individual organization.

More creative solutions. With access to more people (larger network), the pooling (brainstorming) of ideas, which result from a cooperative effort, generates more creative solutions to issues in the community.

Better coordination of program/service delivery. In many cases, agencies with similar missions are offering similar programs. Partners in an alliance can better coordinate programs and activities to clients without the overlapping of services. This allows the alliance to be more efficient in program and service delivery.

Gain access to new markets. Alliances give individuals and groups access to different target populations that others serve, as well as helping organizations connect with the stakeholders of the partnering agencies who share a common interest in the alliance.

Better programming. Through alliances, entities can create an array of programs and activities impossible for one organization to provide alone. This will allow alliances to offer more comprehensive services to clients that will better meet their needs.

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Balance the workload. Alliances permit the sharing of responsibilities (ownership) between the members of the alliance. This is critical in the success of the alliance. In most communities, the challenges are so great that it is quite difficult for one individual or organization to address alone. The same is true with an alliance. Within the alliance, shared leadership is a necessity so that individuals are not burned out. To avoid this, simply “spread the love.” (responsibilities/work load) and allow all members to contribute to the success of the alliance.

Alliances emerge when individuals or entities make a deliberate effort to further their interest (mission) beyond what they could accomplish individually. Generally speaking, individuals and groups form alliances as a result of circumstances such as addressing community issues, economic interdependence and other commonalities (interest) among the membership. The five basic steps in forming alliances are as follows:

1. Clarify the purpose.
2. Identify and recruit partners.
3. Frame and formalize the alliance.
4. Establish a plan.
5. Implement and manage the alliance.

Clarify the Purpose. It is important to determine the purpose of the alliance. The purpose (mission) of the alliance will serve as the guiding light for the

organization. Call on individuals within your immediate organization or community to participate in a brainstorming session (idea generation) to discuss the reasons for the existence of this particular alliance. What do you want to accomplish from the alliance (that is, do you want to assist individuals in the area of health, education or financial planning)?

Identify and recruit partners. An alliance needs partners. Therefore, identify and meet with potential partners (individually) to determine their participation in the alliance. At this point, it is vital to understand the benefits to all participating groups/agencies in the alliance. This message (benefits of the alliance) must be relayed to all potential partners of the alliance. Each alliance must create win-win opportunities for all partners because each organization in the alliance must also meet their needs and fulfill their mission.

Frame and formalize the alliance. Now, potential partners must meet to determine the possibility of forming an alliance. Potential partners should be contacted individually and received information on the potential alliance. All potential partners should be invited to a meeting to discuss the concept of the alliance. At the meeting, all individuals should share their ideas, interests and beliefs about the possibility of the alliance. At this stage, if the partners agree to form an alliance, then the alliance must be formalized. The partners should craft an overall vision for the alliance and determine the roles/responsibilities (shared leadership) for the members of the alliance. In most cases, alliance will develop a memorandum of understanding between all of the partner organizations.

Establish a plan. Once the partners have agreed to establish an alliance, it is now time to develop a plan that will assist the alliance in accomplishing its vision. The plan should establish goals, objectives and concrete action steps that include who, what and when (that is, who is responsible, what is he or she going to do and when will this task be completed).

Implement and manage the alliance. Implement the steps of the plan to accomplish the alliance’s goals. Manage the alliance – facilitate the meetings of partners to make joint decisions for the alliance (shared leadership). Periodically evaluate the performance of the alliance and make the appropriate changes as needed.

References:

- The Fieldstone Non-profit Guide to Forming Alliances (Hoskins & Angelica)
- Guidebook, Building Alliances (National Association of Conservation Districts)

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What's Happening in Alabama

Your Town Alabama

Sixty-five Alabama residents completed the Your Town Alabama, Designing Our Future workshop held at Camp McDowell near Nauvoo on June 20 to 22, 2007. The workshop was 2 ½ days of interactive presentations and group work with a team to plan a hypothetical town. After attending this intensive workshop, many participants have returned to their communities to emphasize the importance of planning to long-term economic viability.

Your Town Alabama is a direct response to the uncertain future of Alabama’s small towns – a future increasingly threatened by large scale changes in our economy, population shifts, the effect of telecommunications and mass merchandising, and changes in land policy. In the face of these forces, communities have found themselves struggling to maintain their vitality and even their sense of identity. Whether the threat is sudden growth or stagnation, planning and design decisions can often make the difference between survival and decay, between healthy prosperity and decline.

The workshop was highly participatory with lectures, case-study presentations and interactive group problem solving, including working on realistic issues in a hypothetical small town. For more information about Your Town Alabama, please visit the Your Town Alabama Web site: www.yourtownalabama.org.

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ACTION

Alabama
Communities
in Transition

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Action is published once each quarter by the Alabama Cooperative Extension System.

We would like you to share success stories in your community for inclusion in future issues of *Action*. Send to: J. Thomas Chesnutt, 218 Extension Hall, Auburn University, Alabama 36849.

Henry County Cares!

Abbeville was faced with a challenging situation when WestPoint Homes announced that the textile plant located there would be closing toward the end of summer. Although fears had existed for some time that this plant would someday go the way of many U.S. textile plants, the more than 700 employees were shocked by an announcement several weeks ago that the end had finally come.

Fortunately, Abbeville's Mayor Rhett Taylor was determined to show these soon-to-be displaced workers that he was going to do all that was in his power to help them find employment within a 35-mile radius of the plant. He enlisted the Henry County Extension agent, James D. Jones Jr. and the Henry County Workforce and Leadership Development Council to conduct a job fair as soon as possible. WestPoint Home generously agreed to allow the job fair to take place within the plant on July 11 from 1:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. and on July 12 from 7:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Jones solicited the help of numerous groups and volunteers to coordinate all aspects of the job fair. Among those most involved were the

following agencies: Henry County Family Services Center, Headland; David Duke of the Alfred Saliba Family Services Center, Dothan; Ginger Mayer of Living Waters, Headland; Dothan Chamber of Commerce Workforce Group; Headland Chamber of Commerce; and Henry County retired teachers. Seventy-five volunteers put in a total of 825 volunteer hours.

More than 50 vendors participated in the job fair, and about 700 employees attended. Six employees were hired by Nutcracker of Dothan; 25 were hired in the last few weeks by Golden Peanut; 45 applications were received by Wal-Mart Distribution in Brundage; 150 applications were received by Ventress Correctional Institution; 14 interviews given by Qualica Steel Co; and 50 to 75 applications were received by Equity Group (poultry processing). The Business Post-Survey stated that this was the best job fair they had participated in all year, and Mayor Rhett Taylor said he thought the job fair was wonderful.

According to the employee survey, employees unanimously felt that the job

fair helped them. The thing they pointed out as being most beneficial was that they found out people cared and were trying to help them. A number of them said they needed a GED and would be willing to attend classes. Although only about 10 percent said they now have a job lined up, close to 90 percent said they wanted to improve their skills and receive training.

Mary Claire Wilson, Chairperson of the Henry County Workforce and Leadership Council, stated that plans are now underway to open the first Henry County Workforce Academy in Abbeville. Mayor Rhett Taylor has been extremely helpful by providing an excellent facility for the training program. A grant recently awarded to the Henry County Workforce and Leadership Development program by the Rural Alabama Initiative will be used to open our facility within the next few months. Hopefully, these workers will take advantage of the training offered to them and locate rewarding jobs close to home.

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Visit the Community Resource Development home page at www.aces.edu/department/crd/



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