Developing Alabama’s Workforce

Business leaders identify workforce development as Alabama’s number one economic development issue. As global competition and advancements in the use of technology increase the pace of economic change, a knowledgeable, skilled, and adaptable workforce has never been a more valuable asset or a greater necessity for economic survival. With a network of educators across the state and a 100-year history of collaborative learning, Alabama Extension is uniquely equipped to meet these challenges. Extension can connect local, state, and federal agencies, schools, community groups, labor, employers, and others to strengthen workforce development, including continuous training and lifelong learning needed to survive today. In the role of connector, catalyst, and educator, Extension can bring about needed improvements and foster workforce connections in all 67 Alabama counties.

Boosting Broadband Use

A key component in Extension’s role in workforce development is providing training in the use of broadband communication technologies both to bolster workforce capacity and to strengthen community connections among workforce and economic development stakeholders. • Connecting Alabama: Boosting Broadband to Bridge the Digital Divide is a $1.2 million sustainable broadband adoption project administered by the Auburn University Economic and Community Development Institute (ECDI). The program is administered at the local level by Extension’s 67 county coordinators and employs interactive computer-based programs to educate and train residents and community leaders in the social and economic benefits of broadband technology. • ECDI is partnering with community colleges to deliver the eWorkforce training module. Other training modules will include Broadband 101, eCommerce, ePublic Safety, eHome, eCommunity, eLearning, eHealth, eGovernment, and eGlobal.

Connecting with Stakeholders and Engaging Citizens

Extension’s efforts in workforce development emphasize making connections with stakeholders and engaging citizens. • Counties throughout the state are benefitting from Extension-funded mini-grants known as the Rural Alabama Initiative, which supported 39 local workforce development initiatives during the past five years. In all, 122 RAI grants have supported local economic and community development projects in 59 counties. • In the past 26 years, more than 900 Alabama economic developers have completed the Intensive Economic Development Training Course, created in 1984 and administered by ECDI since 1999. • The Alabama Prosperity Forum provides specialized training in areas important to Alabama’s economic development, including education and workforce development. • ECDI conducts many citizen-based deliberative forums on innovation and technology, youth development and education, and workforce development. • A comprehensive summary of Alabama’s resources for economic and community development is found in the Alabama Economic Development Resource Directory. • ECDI also develops customized workforce trend and forecast information for business attraction and site selection, career and technical education programs, and community and technical colleges. These reports include a scan of existing educational attainment, workforce skills, economic makeup, in-demand occupations, labor pool trends and forecasts, 10-year occupation and industry trends and projections, and more.

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Bolster Families, Bolster Workers

Extension’s family-centered programs work diligently to meet the needs of the workforce in Alabama. • The Summer Technology Institute exposes math and science teachers in Colbert and Lauderdale Counties to technology programs; the Business Buffet offers a similar program for school counselors and administrators. • Reality Check gives students a dose of real-life expectations in career selection, salary anticipation, and living expenses. • Job fairs and workshops provide information to help citizens look for jobs, write resumes, dress for interviews, complete applications, and start small businesses. • Returning to Work helps inmates choose a career path before their parole or release back into society. • Shrimpers in the southwest region of the state who are ready for a career change receive practical assistance from Extension agents. • Realize Your Potential grants have helped individuals establish a wholesale food business and a home-based embroidery business. • Extension has also helped prepare individuals in the food service industry for ServSafe certification, a licensing requirement.

Equipping With Urban Programs

Extension’s Urban Affairs and New Nontraditional Programs help Alabamians prepare for the workforce. • Promoting Readiness for Employment Possibilities (PREP) helps with job applications, resume writing, and resource management skills. • Consumers Score with Credit in Check focuses on responsible management of resources among youth and adults to avoid financial risks, indebtedness, and bankruptcy. • A real-life readiness simulation program, Welcome to the Real World, promotes career exploration and improves education planning. • Educational opportunities that foster interest in scientific pursuits for personal and career development is a part of Ready? Get S.E.T. to Explore Forensics. • Teens Making Impact (TMI) provides experiential learning to enhance coping skills and prepare youth for life decisions, including career choice. • The Youth Career Summits expose high school seniors to technical programs and opportunities in high-skill and high-wage careers.

Preparing for Careers With Hands-On, Minds-On Learning

Through hands-on, minds-on learning opportunities, Alabama 4-H teaches young people critical skills required for a creative, responsive, efficient workforce and directs youth toward specific disciplines. • With an increased demand for scientists, 4-H science programs reach one in four Alabama late-elementary youth with hands-on learning experiences to prepare them for careers as leaders in science, engineering, and technology in fields ranging from agriculture to energy. • Financial and entrepreneurship programs show youth the importance of saving, learning to use credit, and making consumer and business decisions. • The 4-H healthy living programs help young people develop physical, mental, and emotional health that will improve their opportunities to obtain and retain employment.

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