

SETWIN – Economic Development Focus Group
SET Regional Airport, Media Room
OCTOBER 4, 2001 9:00-11:15 am

Purpose of the Focus Group

The purpose of the focus group was to gather opinions of regional economic development entities (ED) on the subject of the workforce development system in Southeast Texas, pursuant to a survey of the region and the development of a workforce development map of Southeast Texas.

FOCUS GROUP TOPICS

- Is education an economic development tool?
- How do you interface with training/educational providers?
 - What services do they provide?
 - What services would you like for them to provide?
- Workforce Development Boards
 - What services do they provide?
 - What services do you use?
 - What services would you like for them to provide?
- Partnership of Southeast Texas (POST)
 - What services does POST provide?
 - What services do you use?
 - What services would you like to see POST provide?
- What do you want from the regional workforce map?
- Rate the workforce system in Southeast Texas.

IS EDUCATION AN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TOOL?

The consensus of the group was that education is an economic development tool but the emphasis was on higher education. Most of the group felt that having a college in the region makes it more attractive for economic development since industry tends to locate where "pools" of trained workers are located. Higher education can provide an "evergreen" effect in the workforce to help with worker upgrade as technology advances.

The group rated the education and training in SET as a 7 on a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being the best.

HOW DO YOU INTERFACE WITH TRAINING/EDUCATION PROVIDERS?

Local ED's have worked with Lamar on community projects such as "fast track" and career guidance activities, coordinated customized training for new industries in Southeast Texas, and conducted leadership training in high schools. In Port Arthur the ED's have worked to get Lamar PA certified.

WHAT SERVICES DO TRAINING/EDUCATIONAL PROVIDERS PROVIDE?

Customized training is offered by higher education to connect with the ED recruitment of new industries. Training managers and owners of small businesses and job specific training for non-

profit management. They also provide G.E.D., ESL, and adult literacy programs, vocational training for specific skills and employee mentoring.

WHAT SERVICES WOULD YOU LIKE FOR THEM TO PROVIDE

- Listing of various programs available.
- Lists of exemplary schools
- Teach more employability skills
- School Board recognition of BISD.
- Junior Achievement as school curriculum
- Computer classes upgraded to meet the needs of regional workforce.
- Industry-specific basic computer training classes.
- More high school co-enrollment at Lamar State College of Port Arthur.
- Customer service training.

WHAT SERVICES DOES WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD OFFER?

Most of the group seemed to know about the Workforce Development Board but only knew of a few services such as:

- early education
- education on soft skills like appearance, etiquette, and work ethics
- coop education

WHAT WDB SERVICES DO YOU USE?

One member stated that they had had negative experiences with WDB GED training. One member mentioned the computerized job match system, assessments and screening, entrepreneurial training, workforce statistics (web site), and wage rate information. The rest of the participants could not recall using WDB services.

WHAT SERVICES WOULD YOU LIKE THE WDB TO PROVIDE ?

Most of the members agreed that the WDB should do more training to prepare participants for what awaits them in the work place. Some other suggestions were

- Better marketing of their services
- Teach more employability skills
- Labor market statistics need to be more current
- Provide actual follow-ups on job applicants
- Focus on more than the 5% unemployed, need to serve more underemployed
- Strategies beyond just the unemployed sector
- Educate and bring targeted populations up to higher skill levels for better jobs
- Concentrate more on career paths versus jobs.

WHAT SERVICES DOES POST PROVIDE?

Most of group agreed that POST provides a network between communities to bring potential businesses to the region as opposed to a specific community within the region. Other services mentioned were:

- POST magazine and newsletter
- Leadership Southeast Texas
- Extreme expertise in hosting ED prospects and preparation of proposals
- Catalyst for putting the right people together to make things happen
- Provide information about areas outside of each community's area
- Extremely good current, evergreen monster web site promoting the area

- Staff is very accessible, open, receptive, friendly, and non-bias to membership
- Maintain a good building and site inventory - they know what is available
- Service-driven and dedicated to their mission

WHAT POST SERVICES DO YOU USE?

The group agreed that at one time or another, they had all used most of the services mentioned above

WHAT SERVICES WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE POST PROVIDE?

Some of the group were interested in seeing POST conduct regional conferences in which knowledgeable speakers address such topics as future trends relating to ED, five-year plans for marketing and needs assessment, and other topics/needs as determined by representatives of the nine counties.

POST should have a grant writer available to write grants for the region, inform regions about availability of state and federal grants, and conduct grant-writing workshops.

WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM THE REGIONAL WORKFORCE MAP?

Some saw it more as an information resource; statistical data, educational opportunities and support systems and also training programs that are available. The consensus of the group was that it should be a modular map. There should be a composite study -- an assessment of all agency locations and what is offered, who and how many they serve, and what service is not being met so the gaps can be filled in. These modules should be part of an electronic map in which needed workforce system information can be retrieved by entering a keyword.

The map should also include an overall ED/workforce strategy – more than a problem fix. They should include Career Path Mapping, K-16, what occupations are in demand and what career paths are available for the region now and in the future. Other modules should include:

- Demographic profile of current jobs (hi-tech, petro, etc.)
- A wage survey as compared to Austin and other areas of the state.
- What talent pool is available.
- Assessment of employer needs including their comments to better define their needs
- Support services (daycare/transportation/etc.) – what is available and what is needed for both employers and employees.
- How to maneuver through the job finding process
- Map should include components of the career centers and the services they offer Workforce services of other organizations, where they are located and the programs they offer, hours staffed, web sites -- the full picture.
- Map should include some consensus building of the regional workforce system along with its goals. Map at a minimum should be the input (drive) to the consensus process.
- Include linkages to other resources.
- There must be cohesiveness to the map or it will not work.
- List of groups who provide work site mentors.

RATE THE WORKFORCE SYSTEM IN SOUTHEAST TEXAS

ED members rated the workforce system as a 6 -- 1 being worst and 10 being best