



GO Virginia Region One
Advanced Manufacturing Working Team

March 9th, 2019

12:00 PM - 1:30 PM

Virginia Highlands Small Business Incubator
851 French Moore Jr., Blvd., Abingdon, VA

Meeting Notes:

In attendance:

Stephanie Surrent, SVAM Center of Excellence

Kim Hamilton, SVAM Center of Excellence

Sarah Lamb, UVa-Wise

Becky O'Quinn, UVa-Wise

Tommy Asher, UVa-Wise

Lydia Sinemus, Strongwell

Te-Kai Shu, Strongwell

Randy Rose, Southwest Virginia Community College

Tim Lawson, General Engineering

Robyn Lee, UVa-Wise

John Matthews, Joint IDA of Wythe

Stacy Walker, Schaffner

Kim McFarland, Schaffner

Maggie Anderson, Speyside Bourbon Cooperage

Martha Rasnake, General Dynamics Mission Systems

Dedra Helbert, Tadano Mantis

Lennie Gail Mitcham, The Southwest Virginia Alliance for Manufacturing

Mandy Barker, The Southwest Virginia Alliance for Manufacturing

Welcome, Introductions, and Purpose of Meeting

After a welcome and introductions, Lennie Gail Mitcham provided an outline of the meeting purpose: to identify creative workforce solutions.

Identifying Creative Workforce Solutions

Offender to Manufacturing Training and Hiring Program

The first program discussed was the Offender to Manufacturing Training and Hiring Program. About 10,000 people a year transition from the prison systems into society. Stephanie Surrett gave an overview of the program she has been working on with Wise County Corrections. She started the program by meeting with Major Nathan Cope in Coeburn who wanted to weld test some offenders. Ms. Surrett was looking at different populations for training and they decided to try a pilot project. Major Cope picked two offenders for training and testing. Those two men have been released and obtained jobs. It is important to get a job as soon as released to reduce the rate of recidivism. This program works on a short timeline with offenders who will be released within 3-6 months. Ms. Surrett outlined the steps she believes needs to be taken for this type of program:

1. Make contact with correctional facility
2. Get WIOA and Virginia Cares programs involved as well as case managers
3. Make a point of contact with manufacturers
4. Make connection upon offender's release

Next, manufacturers discussed their concern regarding hiring offenders. Dedra Helbert from Tadano Mantis Corporation stated her main concerns were what the person had been incarcerated for and their ability to pass a skills test. Becky O'Quinn mentioned a program in Tennessee where the judge can send inmates to a work ready program instead of jail.

Ms. Surrett discussed what funding would be used for. It would include:

1. One staff person to go to prisons and identify potential program candidates.
2. Up front money for training if the person is not eligible for other funding.
3. Money to pay off fines to get the offender's driver's license back. There is already a program to help with the down payment for a car.
4. Money for clothing and equipment.

Stacy Walker with Schaffner stated that when she was in Kentucky there was a transition program for when offenders were released to a halfway house. They also coached other people transitioning. It was a great program with the offenders having better attendance, less turnover, and being more grateful.

Lydia Sinemus with Strongwell informed the group that they have recently started hiring people straight out of jail and expect them to be long term employees. Tim Lawson with General Engineering also stated they had recently hired someone on parole who went through the machining program at VHCC. They originally took him as an intern then hired him full time.

Maggie Anderson with Speyside Bourbon Cooperage said her company has a strict policy regarding hiring those who have been incarcerated, but she is looking for ideas to take back to upper management.

Martha Rasnake from General Dynamics thinks it's a good program and something worth pursuing. However her company wouldn't participate due to the security clearance employees must have.

Individuals with Disabilities

The next creative workforce solution covered was individuals with disabilities. Becky O'Quinn discussed autism spectrum individuals, stating that there are over one million Americans living with an autism spectrum disorder and the number is rising. Over 80% will be unemployed or underemployed. The pros of hiring someone with autism include: they are analytical and good with repetitive tasks, and work more than typical colleagues because of less social interactions. The cons include poor communication skills, and anything outside of routine can be an issue. The need is to come up with a way to find autistic employees before their application is turned down. Also, they are not good with the typical interview process and will need onboarding and patience as they learn their job. Ms. O'Quinn stated there are programs in the school system to help students, but not for workforce after age 18.

Ms. Sinemus discussed hiring differently abled employees at Strongwell. They have a long-time employee who has a son with Down syndrome and is involved in community programs. She asked them to consider an employee with Down syndrome. There was a concern about safety that had to be settled and the worker has a mentor. Strongwell has had a very positive experience with this.

Ms. Helbert stated they have a part time employee with autism who does a lot with parts and numbers. He initially had a liaison outside TMC then found a mentor at TMC that he was comfortable with.

Ms. Anderson explained that her company has hired highly functioning autistic employees through DARS and they are good at repetitive tasks. Ms. Surrent elaborated on DARS, explaining they will do assessment of work site and offer ways to improve/accommodate. They also offer pre-employment services.

Te-Kai Shu suggested that since each disabled individual comes with an IEP from school that this could be used during the application process. Ms. Surrent agreed, and pointed out that some kids do get lost and it is important to catch them in high school. Ms. Rasnake brought up Project Search which works with people in high school who have disabilities.

Displaced Adults

The next creative workforce solution involved displaced adults. Robyn Lee led the discussion and gave handouts with more information about current programs. Ms. Surrent discussed her partnership with Genedge in putting together a boot camp for individuals in fast food and retail to transfer their skills into manufacturing. The community college might have some info about drop out students or be willing to push out information to those students, otherwise the student is lost. Ms. Surrent also mentioned those receiving food stamps are a good target. People Inc is offering training to low income people. Another possible project is sitting down with CTE and community colleges to focus on meeting needs.

Other creative solutions were discussed. Mr. Lawson stated they are bringing in people from machining class at VHCC and have offered 3 out of 4 interns a job. Through internships you get to see the potential of prospective candidates. They have started a program through United Way for high school and developed relationships with local community colleges for an internship program. Ms. Mitcham mentioned that Utility Trailer in Glade Spring is also working with the NEFF Center and Smyth Co CATE to do paid internships. It has been a very successful program and some good employees have been gained through it.

Ms. Sinemus stated that she is also in contact with the VHCC machining class and likes the idea of boot camp to expose students to manufacturing jobs.

Ms. Walker explained that for people who want to go to college they have tuition reimbursement. A new service they are looking to add is something similar to a 401k but for student loan debt. The company contributes through a third party a certain amount of money per year towards student loan debt. This has been a good recruiting tool. Each company would determine a policy of how much, often, term and direct payment to the loan.

Next Steps/Closing

Robyn Lee discussed the next steps for the meeting. She stated that if the group can identify a manufacturing need and a way to address that need the idea can be supported through a grant. She thought everything discussed would be supported through GO Virginia.

Lennie Gail stated that she, Becki O'Quinn, and Robyn Lee would get together to create a plan for the next meeting and what to do with the information that was gathered at the meeting.