

Step Forward Workforce Committee

Marketing Subcommittee Report

January 2016

Problem:

The Community Foundation's Community Counts report shows that the Shreveport metro area has a significant number of its working age citizens lacking any kind of post-secondary degree, and even further, a larger-than- acceptable number without a high school degree.

The education and workforce development communities in our state and region have developed many programs, often short-term in nature, that will prepare citizens for high-demand, high-wage occupations here in our community. But not enough people are enrolling in these programs.

So the question this committee was asked to address is **how do we reach the 18-25-year-old resident that is unemployed or underemployed to inform them of opportunities to become trained for high-demand, high-wage jobs?**

Process:

We began our research by hosting a meeting in May 2014 with a number of community organizations that work with this population. In attendance were representatives from the Louisiana Workforce Commission, the staff of the Workforce Investment Boards for both the City of Shreveport and Northwest Louisiana, Coordinating & Development Corporation, Goodwill of North Louisiana, SUSLA, BPC and Bossier Schools. We wanted to understand the barriers that the target population faces enrolling in training programs that will help them achieve marketable credentials. The responses were:

- Lack of reliable transportation
- No high school diploma
- No experience limits them in finding work
- Lack of soft/life skills
- Criminal background prohibits them from being hired
- Academic preparedness
- Mental health challenges
- Family issues

This group of organizations noted that they would be able to identify members of the target population that can speak about their life experiences.

We next held focus group meetings in the summer of 2014 with members of the target population who were participating in programs at SUSLA and Goodwill. From them we wanted to learn about their plans for the future, if they were enrolled in any kind of training program, and how they most often receive information about things that benefit or interest them. The responses were:

Goodwill Life Skills Class (11 participants aged 17-21)

- Primary information sources:
 - Instagram

- Facebook
- Word of mouth
- Probation office
- Texting with friends
- Goodwill
- Radio
- Internet job searches (CareerBuilder, SnagAJob, Indeed.com)
- Programs in which they were enrolled:
 - Industrial Readiness Training (BPCC brings program to Goodwill site)
 - HiSET
 - SUSLA Adult Education (City of Shreveport Youth Network Initiative (YNI))
- Why had they considered enrolling in a training program:
 - Because representatives from training institutions come speak to them at the Goodwill office (e.g. Ayers Career College, American School of Business, BPCC, SUSLA)

In the summer of 2015, we surveyed a sample of organizations in the metro area that have the target population as a client base and asked them a series of questions about their experience with our target population. See the attached list of organizations identified for surveying. We wanted to understand from them how they reach these individuals, and what the common barriers are that keep them from enrolling in training that will help them find a family-sustaining job. The responses were very similar and included:

- They find their target client base often through referral programs, word of mouth, or one-on-one encounters with them in their neighborhoods.
- The target population relies heavily on word-of-mouth for information. Social media (Instagram and Facebook were most often referenced) are also used. Occasionally traditional media, like TV and radio, is effective.
- Barriers of the target population are often “bottom of the pyramid” issues:
 - Lack of reliable transportation
 - Lack of consistent housing
 - Family crises (illness, loss of job, loss of home)
 - Lack of reliable/affordable child care
 - They have entry level jobs with little flexibility in their schedule
- The organizations polled find that incentives or prizes are not ultimately effective inducements with the target population. They are most successful when the desire for life improvement is there, otherwise their commitment is short-lived.
- The target population needs constant and consistent affirmation, and you have to address the needs of the WHOLE PERSON to help them succeed (it was stressed by more than one interviewee that a tired person, or a hungry person is not going to do well in any kind of learning environment).

Recommendation:

Organizations who have the target population as a client base are great partners for education and training institutions that are looking for participants for programs that were designed to prepare citizens for high-demand, high-wage jobs. However, the staff of these organizations that are on the “front-line”

with the target population largely do not know about such programs, and in many cases do not know about support services that could assist the target population in overcoming the common barriers they face enrolling in such programs.

Our recommended next steps:

1. Inventory organizations/programs providing support services to address barriers to enrollment (e.g. bus passes, child care assistance)
2. Compile these support services into a printed and online directory for organizations working closely with the target population. It must be updated at least annually.
3. Invite those organizations with our target population as a client base to become involved with the Step Forward Workforce Committee. In some cases, the leader of one of these organizations may be part of the committee, but not the people interacting with the target population.
4. Education and training providers should find a CONCISE way to share information about their programs that for high demand, living wage occupations to these “front-line” organizations in both print and electronic formats.
5. Education and training providers should identify program completers to be ambassadors for their programs, potentially offering incentives to them, to help spread the word to their circles of influence via text, Instagram, Facebook, etc. Making information about your program available in multiple formats is critical.

List of Organizations Surveyed:

1. SUSLA (YouthBuild, Youth Network Initiative)
2. Community Renewal International
3. Goodwill of North Louisiana
4. Volunteers of America
5. Praise Temple Baptist Cathedral / CDC
6. Bossier Parish Community College Middle College
7. City of Shreveport WIB Staff
8. NWLA WIB/Coordinating & Development Corporation