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Summary

LEED – Linking Education and Economic Development is ideally positioned within the six-county Sacramento region to develop partnerships between employers, educators and civic interests in an effort to align educational resources to meet workforce needs and economic demands. LEED is an example of a regional economic development organization that could be replicated around the state to prioritize educational curriculum and programs that meet workforce needs, and coordinate strategies between educators and employers to meet mutually beneficial goals, while maximizing the efficiency and effectiveness of time, effort and resources.

Background

LEED – Linking Education and Economic Development is a 501 c(3) non-profit corporation serving the six-county Sacramento region.

Mission

To lead the Sacramento region in developing partnerships among business, labor, education, community and government in order to strengthen workforce development and ensure economic prosperity, and enhance the academic performance of students.

Vision

The residents of the Sacramento region are prepared to meet workforce, education and civic demands

Scope of Work

Align the region's educational resources to meet the region's current and future workforce needs.

Board of Directors

Our 29 member board of directors is comprised of top level leaders – educators, employers and civic partners. The top executive from UC Davis, Sacramento State University and the Los Rios Community College District are all members of the LEED board of directors as well as six superintendents from K-12 districts and county offices of education. Executives from key employment segments serve on the LEED board, including construction, technology, health care, communications, finance, law and utilities. The board also includes representatives from labor, business organizations, workforce investment boards and the state Dept. of Education.

The board has made a commitment of over \$350,000 in annual funding to support the general operations of the organization. To augment its revenue, LEED obtains funds through sponsorships of programs and events and seeks grant funding to support its specific scope of work.

History

LEED was founded by volunteer leaders of the Sacramento Metro Chamber of Commerce who realized that a prepared, educated workforce was a critical ingredient to overall economic prosperity.

Initially, the organization operated programs like internships and job shadowing to facilitate career exploration among area high school students.

Over the last five years, LEED has served as the intermediary in implementing grants from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation of New York to fund high school redesign within the Sacramento City Unified School District. This reform effort included establishing small learning environments within existing comprehensive schools and creating individual, smaller high schools established around theme-based curriculum.

Education, Workforce Critical to Competitiveness

Within the last year, the LEED board of directors has significantly altered its business plan and scope of work to address national, state and regional educational and workforce development objectives.

Nationally, the Rising Above the Gathering Storm brought attention to the notion that the United States is at an increasingly competitive disadvantage in the global marketplace, especially as it relates to developing the human capital necessary to compete in the high technology and innovation-driven industries. In addition to implementing policies to encourage capital investment in innovation industries, the administration and the Congress have each developed policy agendas to improve the quality of education in US schools, particularly in the STEM fields (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math).

Here in California, the Governor and the legislature have recognized that curriculum and educational programs in our schools are not aligned with the jobs and careers that are critical to our state's economy. Career Technical Education (CTE) is not only intended to provide students with exposure to and preparation for future careers, but will also provide students with appropriate academic rigor and the relevance students increasingly demand to place academic concepts within real world application.

Here in the Sacramento region, business, education and civic leaders recognize the critical importance of aligning education to meet workforce needs and economic demands. In 2006, representatives from over 30 civic organizations came together to develop a regional economic strategy. LEED was identified as the primary regional organization to implement strategies linking education to regional economic priorities.

Revised Scope of Work

As a result, LEED's revised scope of work includes three specific segments: Workforce Development, Educational Development and Student Development.

Workforce Development

Regional Workforce Study

LEED will work through Partnership for Prosperity to conduct a regional workforce study to identify the primary industries that comprise the Sacramento region's economy, which careers are critical to these industries, essential skills, general skills and associated training requirements.

Industry Roundtables

LEED will conduct quarterly roundtables between employers and educators around key industries, including Health, Construction and STEM. The roundtables will seek to identify goals, strategies and agreements to align education to meet the workforce needs of specific industries. LEED will consider additional roundtables upon review of the regional workforce study.

Educational Development

GAP Analysis

LEED will conduct a quantitative and qualitative assessment of existing career related educational curriculum and programs. When complete, LEED will identify opportunities to develop curriculum and educational delivery models consistent with the workforce needs defined in the regional workforce study.

Project Lead The Way

LEED is already working with employers and educators to implement a pre-engineering curriculum called Project Lead The Way (PLTW) at 13 individual school sites for the 2008-09 school year. PLTW is intended to provide students with exposure to and preparation for careers in engineering – a critical element of an emerging STEM pipeline to support the development of high technology and innovation enterprises.

Align CA Prop 1D/CTE requests with regional workforce needs

One way LEED hopes to align educational resources to meet regional workforce and economic needs is to conduct meetings with K-12 officials preparing funding requests for Prop 1D funds, many of which are tied to CTE programs. By briefing K-12 facilities and curriculum staff, LEED hopes to ensure that local requests for state bond funds not only meet the workforce needs of the region, of local communities and the needs employers and higher education, but also that local bond requests complement, rather than compete with each other.

Student Development

Career Exploration

LEED will work with employers and educators to develop a high impact, region-wide career exploration strategy to inform students about the high priority careers in the Sacramento region, identify relevant educational and career paths, and then connect students, educators and parents with the resources they need to explore careers – including internships, mentorships, and job shadowing. The objective of this portion of the scope of work is to change the culture among employers, educators, students and parents, encouraging them to view education as a means to obtaining a prosperous career, not an end in and of itself.

LEED positioned to align education to meet workforce needs

LEED's board of directors is comprised of the region's top educators and employers. Important objectives and strategies that require consensus can be identified and implemented quickly.

Regional consensus has already been established that education must be aligned to meet workforce needs and LEED has the regional "license" to move forward in this area.

LEED is positioned as a partner to help support educators improve both academic rigor, relevance real world application and relationships with business and employers.

By identifying regional priorities, LEED is looked upon as a critical organization to eliminate duplication of effort and funding with respect to educational and workforce priorities and programs.

LEED can facilitate the discussion of sensitive issues that impact education's ability to meet the needs of the workforce, like the appropriate level of academic rigor required for CTE coursework in public schools. Two distinct camps have developed: ConnectEd, which proposes the marriage of CTE with A-G academic requirements to increase academic achievement of all students; and GetREAL, which calls for separate academic pathways, recognizing that not all students are desirous of obtaining a college degree, nor do a majority of California's jobs require one. LEED plans to convene discussions between these two perspectives to help inform state decision makers.

LEED's working hypothesis is that objectives and strategies to align education to meet workforce needs can be developed more effectively and efficiently at the regional level than at the state or federal levels.

Barriers to CTE at the state level

California lacks a recognizable, defined economic development strategy and apparatus which makes overall economic priorities difficult to establish and coordinate.

The elements responsible for both economic strategy and educational delivery are siloed: Governor's office, Legislature, BT&H, Labor, Secretary of Education, Superintendent of Public Instruction, Community Colleges, CSU, UC. All are working individual strategies without deliberate coordination.

Educators say that there is not enough academic time to commit to a broad expansion of CTE, particularly with rigorous testing and accountability methods which prescribe intervention classes to underperforming students – students frequently more responsive to CTE delivery.

The majority of state programs and non-profit foundations target special needs populations, which encourages the proliferation of individual, piece-meal programs, rather than overarching, coordinated, regional strategies.

The State Should Support Regional Educational and Workforce Collaboratives

An entity such as LEED could help the state align resources and eliminate duplication when implementing the scores of siloed, categorical programs that flow from the state and federal educational and labor funding sources.

The state has a number of resources in place to support LEED's work, however LEED currently does not have the staff capacity to take full advantage of them. Perhaps the state could establish regional councils of relevant agencies, departments and organizations to meet with LEED staff and volunteers to develop common objectives and bring appropriate resources to bear. Increasingly, the state could and perhaps should view its role as facilitating the work of regions to meet critical social and economic objectives, rather than developing diluted, one-size fits all strategies.

Relevant state agencies could work with LEED to proactively identify existing state grants and other funds to support activities identified in LEED's scope of work.

The legislature might also consider organizing bi-partisan regional councils among its members to work directly with regional non-profits like LEED to support and advise regional civic and economic development activities.