

**SA: Ready to Work Advisory Board
Meeting Minutes
Thursday, September 23 2021
1:00pm - 3:00pm**

**Council B Session Room
Municipal Plaza
114 W Commerce St.
San Antonio, TX 78205**

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:

Daphene Carson
Sonia Garza
Peter John Holt
Ben Peavy
Rosa Santana
Chair, Jerry Graeber
Councilmember Adriana Rocha Garcia
Councilmember Manny Pelaez

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:

Emily Spurlock
Vice Chair, Doug McMurry

STAFF PRESENT:

Alejandra Lopez, Assistant City Manager
Christina Ramirez, City Attorney's Office
Christina Reck-Guerra, Workforce Interim Assistant Director
Amy Contreras, Economic Development Manager
Mary Mills, Advisory Board Staff Liaison
Mike Ramsey, Workforce Development Office Executive Director

A. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Graeber called the meeting to order at 1:10 p.m. after quorum was established.

B. PUBLIC COMMENT

No citizens registered in advance to make public comments.

C. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mr. Graeber asked members to review Advisory Board meeting minutes of August 26th, 2021. Ms. Garza moved to approve the meeting minutes. Dr. Carson seconded. The Board voted unanimously to approve the minutes.

D. REMARKS FROM MAYOR RON NIRENBERG

The Mayor thanked the Board members for their work so far in helping establish SA: Ready to Work, and expressed his excitement at the development of the program and its impact on the economic future of the City.

He then introduced Dr. Thomas Evans, President of the University of the Incarnate Word, and announced that he will be recommending Dr. Evans to City Council as the Higher Education representative for the Advisory Board moving forward.

E. INDIVIDUAL ITEMS

1. City of San Antonio Workforce and SA: Ready to Work Updates

Mr. Ramsey provided a brief update on the timeline to review the Program Implementation RFP, explaining that not much can be discussed with the Board members because the review of proposals will be underway soon.

He then briefed the Board on three upcoming job fairs that the Workforce Development Office will be facilitating for Train for Jobs SA participants. He invited the members to connect with WDO if they have suggestions for employers to invite.

Mr. Holt asked if there is someone on the WDO staff who employers can connect with to find out what industries categories will be represented at each job fair. Mr. Ramsey replied that staff are willing to meet with any of the Board members to discuss the alignment of employment sectors at each event, but suggested that Romanita Matta-Barrera with SA WORX may be better to connect with because they will be coordinating that part of the planning process.

2. Review and Provide Feedback on greater:SATX Contract for SA WORX

Mr. Ramsey presented on the planned contract with greater:SATX for fiscal year 2022. During his presentation on talent pipeline management (TPM), Mr. Ramsey asked Mr. Graeber if Ms. Matta-Barrera was allowed to comment on the concept in more depth, and he agreed.

Ms. Matta-Barrera explained that TPM is an approach that is a demand approach to closing the skills gap and being able to match industry need and local residents. She mentioned that it can be a good strategy for the contractors for SA: Ready to Work to use to ensure that training graduates can be adequately trained for and placed into jobs that are currently available.

Mr. Ramsey continued the presentation on the responsibilities SA WORX will take on as part of the contract, including employer roundtable events, train-the-trainer seminars with HR representatives from local employers, and job fairs.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia asked what strategies are being considered to ensure that the number of training completers aligns with the number of job openings available. Mr. Ramsey responded that it will take extensive relationship-building with employers to achieve that. The Councilwoman then asked how this program can be competitive considering that many businesses, including food service, are increasing their pay above the \$15 an hour requirement for job placements through Ready to Work. Mr. Ramsey replied that the potential for upward mobility in skills and salary through training set Ready to Work apart.

Mr. Holt expressed his support for the plan to partner with SA WORX on future strategies. He then mentioned that he was concerned at the focus on healthcare jobs in SA: Ready to Work, as historically there have been issues in the past with using data to inform the alignment of workforce training programs with open jobs in that field. He then said he wants to ensure that whatever data is used to drive decision-making in Ready to Work is used in the correct way. He then suggested that Workforce Development Office staff put effort into ensuring that training providers and instructors are well-vetted before they are allowed to serve Ready to Work participants.

Mr. Peavy asked that SA WORX work closely with the Employer Engagement Subcommittee on the initiatives presented, and also suggested that they look further into the future and ensure that these strategies are sustainable for the long term, including networking with training providers and employers.

Mr. Ramsey confirmed that SA WORX will be in close contact with the Employer Engagement Subcommittee's efforts moving forward.

Ms. Garza asked the members to consider the potential that there could be an overflow of demand of participants wanting to enter certain career tracks, that outstrips local demand. She asked whether anyone present had suggestions for strategies to mitigate that potential. She also asked if there would be any strategies in place for reconnecting applicants if they leave the participant pipeline before starting training.

Mr. Ramsey responded that the responsibility for balancing supply of available jobs with participant training demand will lie with the case management agencies, who will rely on relevant local job market data to help participants identify career paths that are both fulfilling for the participant and that lead to an in-demand, high-paying job. He added that the Advisory Board's input on target occupations will assist with this as well.

Councilmember Pelaez relayed a conversation he had with the owner of a local trucking company who was struggling to fill positions. The Councilman expressed concern that some high-paying job opportunities may be overlooked as target occupations for the program because they aren't as easily marketable as more popular options like IT and nursing. He then requested that the Workforce Development team had any contact with the City's HR Department and staffing agencies that the City works with to fill vacancies within the City organization.

Mr. Holt mentioned that a successful strategy that HOLT CAT has been able to use is training residents for transferrable skills that they can use or build upon in multiple different positions. He suggested that this could be a good way to fill open positions in some fields that residents may not be aware of. He also expressed his excitement at having SA WORX as a part of that process, and

having Ms. Santana chair the Employer Engagement Subcommittee, due to her experience leading a Toyota manufacturing supplier.

Mr. Ramsey offered for Workforce Development Office staff to identify unemployed CDL graduates who can connect with local trucking companies in need of CDL-certified drivers. He also mentioned that the City Manager is prioritizing hiring graduates of Train for Jobs and SA: Ready to Work.

Mr. Peavy stated that it is very important during the employer engagement process that contact be made with the employer's HR department to specifically identify and connect their job openings with prospective employees coming out of SA: Ready to Work.

Mr. Graeber asked whether SA WORX is the agency responsible for providing the labor market data that the Advisory Board will be using to determine target occupations quarterly, and suggested that the first review be done very soon. He followed up by suggesting that the Board members consider adding Hospitality as a target industry as businesses recover from the pandemic.

Mr. Ramsey ensured that the Board would receive updated data from SA WORX soon. He then encouraged the Board members to speak up if they feel that certain industries should be included as targets in the future.

Mr. Graeber then expressed the difficulty in finding instructors for trades courses, especially construction. He suggested that the Board members should use their influence in their specific industry to encourage growth among prospective instructors.

Ms. Matta-Barrera gave the Board members background on SA WORX's role in the Train for Jobs SA program, to connect employers with open positions to Train for Jobs trainees. She went on to state that the case management agencies through Ready to Work will have the responsibility of avoiding an oversupply of graduates in certain fields.

3. Employer Engagement Subcommittee Work Update and Approval of Meeting Dates

Ms. Santana shared with the Board members the proposed date for the Employer Engagement Subcommittee meetings. She then expressed that she wants to ensure that trainees entering the program need to be held accountable for their commitment to completing the program and to search for a job they intend to hold long-term afterwards.

Ms. Santana also encouraged the existing Employer Engagement Subcommittee members to recommend both small and larger employers to join the Subcommittee, and echoed Mr. Peavy's earlier comment that the Subcommittee members will need to connect with HR decision-makers, rather than organization leaders, to make progress in hiring Ready to Work participants.

Councilmember Pelaez expressed his agreement in Ms. Santana's comment that participants should be held accountable for completing their programs and maintaining employment. He then suggested that the Ready to Work program should focus on maximizing the participant's experience, so that they see the program as successful and a good resource, even if they end up in a different career or training than they initially thought they would.

Ms. Santana agreed with the Councilman's comments, and followed up by mentioning that successful employers of Ready to Work participants be supported and encouraged to share their experiences publicly to act as spokespersons for the program.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia noted that it will also be important to look at the benefits that prospective employers offer to ensure employee retention.

Mr. Peavy suggested that the program also needs to be one step ahead of jobs that are currently being recruited for, and start having conversations with employers to get them to make commitments to hire Ready to Work participants in the years to come. He also suggested that long-term tracking of participants' careers could lend good data to inform the future of workforce development locally.

Mr. Graeber agreed with Ms. Santana's and Mr. Peavy's comments about tracking participants' careers long-term, and also holding them accountable through their time in the program. He continued that the case managers in the program will play a role in ensuring a participant's job retention as well. He then mentioned that a strong marketing campaign will help build employer recognition of the brand, which could make the employer engagement efforts easier.

Ms. Santana suggested that a one-pager be put together to summarize the various workforce programs and agencies in San Antonio, so that efforts are not duplicated and that stakeholders are aware of how they complement each other. She also mentioned that maintaining a relationship with participants even after they are employed is important to the program's success.

Ms. Garza agreed with Ms. Santana's last comment on employee retention.

Mr. Graeber asked for a motion and a second to approve the proposed day and time for the Employer Engagement Subcommittee meetings. Councilmember Rocha Garcia moved to approve, and Mr. Peavy seconded. The Board unanimously voted to approve the meeting schedule.

4. Community Outreach Subcommittee Work Update and Approval of New Nominees

Mr. Ramsey presented the two new Subcommittee nominees, Ms. Desai and Ms. Gonzales. Mr. Graeber asked for a motion and a second to approve the two nominees. Councilmember Pelaez moved to approve, and Councilmember Rocha Garcia seconded. Mr. Peavy abstained from the vote. The rest of the Board unanimously voted to approve both members.

F. STAFF MEMBER COMMENTS

Mr. Ramsey reiterated his excitement in the new Employer Engagement Subcommittee, and encouraged the Board members to mentioned SA: Ready to Work as they network with employers in their respective industries.

Mr. Graeber reminded the Board members that the Train for Jobs SA job fairs are coming soon.

Mr. Peavy mentioned to the group that evictions have increased in recent months, and that trend is impacting attendance for many grade school students. He expressed the importance of helping vulnerable individuals get jobs so that they can also stabilize their living situations.

