

**SA: Ready to Work Advisory Board
Community Outreach Subcommittee
Meeting Minutes**

Meeting Room at Alamo Colleges District Support Office

2222 N Alamo St., San Antonio TX 78215

**Tuesday December 14, 2021
8:30am - 9:30am**

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Frances Gonzalez
Jason Smith
Jerry Graeber
Yadira Gonzales
Co-Chair, Doug McMurry
Councilmember Rocha Garcia

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:

Atree Desai
Co-Chair, Sonia Garza

STAFF PRESENT:

Amy Contreras, Economic Development Manager
Mary Mills, Advisory Board Staff Liaison
Mike Ramsey, Workforce Development Office Executive Director
Christina Ramirez, City Attorney's Office

A. CALL TO ORDER

Co-Chair Doug McMurry called the meeting to order at 8:40a.m. after quorum was established.

B. PUBLIC COMMENT

No citizens registered in advance to make public comments.

C. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Jerry Graeber moved to approve the meeting minutes. Francis Gonzalez seconded. The Subcommittee voted unanimously to approve meeting minutes.

D. INDIVIDUAL ITEMS

1. Discussion on SA: Ready to Work Eligibility Requirements

Mr. McMurry said that the minutes mentioned that the college course requirement would change from two years to one. But now it says "not currently enrolled in college".

Mr. Ramsey confirmed that the requirement is now “not currently enrolled in college” and that the thought process behind that is the people who were in college but had to drop out because of COVID-19 are given an opportunity to finish school. We know that the issue of low educational attainment was an issue in San Antonio prior to the pandemic. So this helps to broaden that net to include individuals who are not currently enrolled in college but want to pursue that training. There’s a huge percentage of people who started college but never completed. We want to try to capture that group in Ready to Work.

Mr. McMurry said that not all of the accepted changes in eligibility requirements came from our committee.

Mr. Ramsey stated the current educational requirement is a modification that came from this Subcommittee.

Mr. Graeber said that it was discussed and approved at the last Advisory Board meeting. Mr. Graeber asked if these revisions will still need to be presented to City Council, and Mr. Ramsey replied that it will.

Ms. Gonzalez stated that her only concern is that the intake agencies will have to be cognizant that 250% of the federal poverty guideline includes people from all over San Antonio. If Ready to Work is improving economic mobility, then we really to focus on targeting zip codes. We need to be very cognizant that we need to choose people that need this program the most and that are within 120% of the poverty guideline or below. She then mentioned wanting to stay focused on the data while it’s coming in on a consistent basis. She asked how this committee can stay abreast of data showing where in San Antonio participants are coming from.

Mr. McMurry replied that that information would become a part of these meetings, and that as time goes on, the Subcommittee members would hear directly about the financial information.

Mr. Ramsey replied that the marketing and outreach RFP provider will be required to update this Subcommittee. The contractor will have strict directions to focus on marketing along those zip codes where residents have been historically living below the poverty level so we can make sure they get that information to sign up for the program. He mentioned that staff is not sure yet how the community will respond to the Ready to Work program; whether or not there will be an overwhelming response or a gradual ramp up over time like we saw with Train for Jobs. We’re seeing a phenomenon within the workforce ecosystem that we have never seen before, with people choosing not to engage within the workforce overall as a whole. If you talk to employers, this labor shortage is becoming critical as they can’t find workers to fill their positions. They have to scale back business operations because of lack of workers.

Ms. Gonzalez said the increase in income to 250% of the federal poverty guideline doesn’t fix that. Mr. Ramsey replied that it just casts the net a little bit wider. Ms. Gonzalez suggested a focus on all the barriers to entry, such as language barriers. There are thriving pockets of the population who do not speak English that exist in San Antonio, but we don’t necessary market to them. We need to find creative ways on how we’re going to do that with the marketing agency.

Ms. Contreras replied that we will have the different partners and community organizations helping us touch and motivate the people Ms. Gonzalez is referring to, the people most in need.

2. SA Ready to Work: Press Conference

Mr. Ramsey said we had originally targeted January 6th for the press conference, but realized that the media will probably focused on other issues on that date. Staff decided to push back and find

a date in February. The focus on the press conference is to really highlight the employer pledge and get more employers engaged in signing that pledge. We have about forty employers now that have already signed, but we want to be more inclusive and give every employer in the City the opportunity to partner with us. So anyone who is like-minded and as focused as we are in making sure that San Antonians have access to high quality jobs has a seat at the table. We have very positive responses from the business community so far. Our partners at SA WORX have been very valuable to help us facilitate those meetings. I believe this press conference will be one of those things that pushes the message out to the people who we may not be already connected to. Mr. Ramsey expressed his excitement about this press conference, which was another great idea that came from this Subcommittee.

Mr. McMurry said that Mr. Ramsey has done a great job in the industry meetings he has been a part of. He then asked whether Secretary Walsh might be with us for the press conference.

Mr. Ramsey said that while he was once on the calendar to visit, it got pushed back. We don't have a make-up date yet. But when we do have one, we will make sure the Advisory Board is aware of when that will happen.

Mr. McMurry said that in a perfect world, he would like Secretary Walsh to be a part of this press conference. Mr. Ramsey agreed.

Ms. Gonzalez mentioned that while the press conference is primarily supposed to bring more employers under the umbrella, the messaging will be heard by people that need jobs. She asked how we can enlist those people. It opens the door for a separate set of messaging, that tells people that they are wanted and needed in the workforce. It will also potentially reach employers that are not in the mainstream of the employment sector, but that employ pockets of the population and she suggested that the members think proactively about how we are going to push the messaging out.

Mr. Ramsey replied that the challenge is that we're not ready to intake residents for Ready to Work, so we don't want them to think they can sign up when the contracted agencies are not even in place yet. But we're trying to figure out a solution to pre-register them so we don't lose the pre-marketing push.

Mr. McMurry stated that he thinks that another goal for the press conference should be to get some more positive news coverage. We've had some disappointing coverage and we've taken steps to improve, especially since Mike has been on board. Mr. McMurry continued that in some meetings he has been in with Mike, it seems hard for some people to make the distinction between Train for Jobs and SA: Ready to Work. He thinks there is a need for better press in general, and getting a good group together to talk in an uplifting and positive way about where we're headed will yield some good benefits. He requested that WDO staff update the Subcommittee members on developments in the planning of the press conference, so that they can be present to be cheerleaders and do what they can to contribute to a good event.

Ms. Contreras asked the members to suggest individuals they think should speak at the event, including representatives from the chambers of commerce.

Ms. Gonzalez suggested inviting members of the nonprofit community, as they are the ones enrolling residents in various support programs who we want to know about Ready to Work. She also mentioned that some of these, like Headstart, are huge local employers, who have access to the community.

Mr. Graeber asked if the press conference will take place after the RFPs are awarded. He suggested that it might be a good opportunity to highlight the selected partners.

Mr. Ramsey replied that we can't say anything publicly until City Council approves the prospective agencies, and that it might be possible to announce, depending on timing.

Mr. McMurry asked whether there might be some value in another symposium after those providers are selected. Mr. Ramsey replied that he thinks it is an excellent opportunity to hear community voices. It would be great to brainstorm with agencies and community leaders as we put the final touches on what Ready to Work will look like.

Ms. Gonzalez asked whether there is an exit survey for Train for Jobs participants. Mr. Ramsey replied that there is a survey and that overall, results are very positive. He said that over 75% of respondents said that they would recommend the program to others.

Ms. Gonzalez asked Ms. Contreras if they offered any comments around barriers or issues that were not training-related, but anything that would improve their ability to complete the program.

Ms. Contreras said that the Train for Jobs partners regularly let City staff know of these barriers, and that they get updated in a bi-weekly, publicly-published report. Ms. Gonzalez replied that she would love to see that if possible.

Ms. Contreras mentioned that the survey had 228 responses, and it included questions about the application process, the job training, and employment.

Ms. Gonzalez replied that it would be helpful to know all of that information, just to get ourselves ready for conversations with the marketing agency about what's it's going to take to overcome residents' barriers Mr. McMurry said that it gives us the knowledge on how to improve.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia asked whether there is an opportunity for participants to recommend friends and family to the program. Ms. Contreras said that while there currently is not, that it can be included in future surveys.

Mr. Smith said he liked Councilwoman's idea of a recommendation system, but cautioned that we don't want to spam somebody without permission. It might be better to send over a link that can be forwarded.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia stated that another opportunity to get the word out is engaging teachers, because they play a big role in contacting parents. Something we can take advantage of is school faculty meetings, so we can give the information to them first-hand that they can pass along to parents. She mentioned that she advocated for a WDO staff member dedicated to marketing, because she knows that recruitment is going to be critical.

Ms. Contreras replied that this is a great idea, especially since one target industry for Ready to Work is education.

Ms. Gonzalez asked Ms. Contreras if the survey question asking if participants are having difficulty finding employment, includes a question asking if we can contact them. Ms. Contreras said that there is, and that there is a follow-up question asking if we can share their information to employers. The survey respondents can choose to remain anonymous.

3. Ready to Work Employer Pledge

Mr. McMurry asked how we are doing with the employer pledge results. Ms. Contreras replied that we are doing very well, with 37 pledges to date.

Ms. Gonzalez asked to request that Ms. Garza coordinate getting WellMed to sign the pledge. Ms. Contreras replied that Mike is currently on a call with them.

Mr. McMurry mentioned that there is still a lot of work to do, but that he welcomes other members' thoughts.

Ms. Gonzalez asked if we develop a map on where these pledged employers are located, so we know if we are making a good impact. She said she would like to make another pitch for our public sector partners like San Antonio Housing Authority.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia asked about Valero, because they said they had committed but she doesn't see their name on the slide. Ms. Contreras replied that they have committed but we don't have their pledge yet.

Ms. Gonzalez asked how many people are employed by Pre-K 4 SA. Ms. Contreras said that she can find out, but that Pre-K 4 SA is considered a department of the City of San Antonio.

Mr. McMurry would like to have a goal for the pledge. He suggested 100 or 200. Ms. Contreras replied that it would be a good idea to have a goal to achieve before the press conference. Mr. McMurry asked the members if they would informally agree that we're all going to work towards 200 by the press conference date. Ms. Contreras said we can share that goal with the Employer Engagement Subcommittee as well.

Mr. Graeber said that it would be great to see if the pledge list be organized by industry to see where we're light and where we're heavy in coverage. Ms. Contreras said that she agrees.

Mr. McMurry said that after the holidays, we can work as a team with the other Subcommittees to get more people to sign up for the pledge.

Ms. Mills stated the first part of the pledge gives a little more context on who all has agreed to do what. The first section of the pledge asks for 3 commitments: identifying roles that match participant training and prioritize participant application review, allocating HR specialist or recruiter time to provide and share specific hiring needs, and providing entry-level and mid-level positions above \$15 an hour. Out of the 37 organizations, 23 committed to all 3 selections, the rest was 2, and no one committed to just one. In the next portion there are several asks for participation. One is quarterly industry sector meetings, and 26 organizations committed to that. The next is informational round tables with case managers to inform them about job openings at their company; 25 committed to that. The next is mock interview sessions for participants; 17 committed to that. The next is offering apprenticeships, internships, and experiential learning; 25 committed to that. So a fairly even spread for all those. The last section includes commitment to share. The first commitment is to share testimonials on participant success and opportunities; 25 committed to that. The next commitment is to share information with other employers and encourage them to commit to supporting this program; 21 committed. The last commitment is to share where they currently source their talent and identify preferred training programs; 25 committed to that.

Mr. McMurry asked how current the pledge list is. Ms. Contreras replied that it was pulled when the agenda was written, so it is just a few days old.

Ms. Contreras mentioned that we are trying to align the employers' needs with our trainings.

Mr. McMurry asked staff to remind him who is serving on the Employer Engagement Subcommittee, and who the chair is. Ms. Contreras said Rosa Santana is Chair, and Ben Peavy, Dr. Carson, and Councilman Pelaez are currently serving, and working to determine other members to recommend to the Board.

4. STAFF MEMBER COMMENTS

Ms. Contreras outlined the program calendar to the members. January will be a soft launch of the program with the Department of Human Services. Later in January, City staff will brief EWDC members about the RFP responses for intake, case management, marketing and program evaluation. Those recommendations will be pushed to City Council B session on February 9th and A session on February 17th. Then ideally the press conference will be soon after, so we can announce the partners. We'll be having the marketing team come present to the Subcommittee after that, and we'll be kicking off the program thereafter.

5. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

Ms. Contreras recommended a vote on 2 additional subcommittee members to fill current vacancies.

Mr. McMurry asked to include another update on pledge results.

Ms. Gonzalez asked whether the targeted industries will be broken out into sub-industries. She is curious about this background information as we start to think about the pledge employers. Mr. McMurry stated that we can continue that discussion in the next meeting.

Mr. Graeber asked what kind of diversity we need in prospective new Subcommittee members. Mr. McMurry replied that we are open-minded to people who believe in the mission of developing a national model for what we're doing. In terms of marketing and outreach, he thinks that it's people with experience in marketing and community outreach should be prioritized.

Mr. Smith asked if we will have a report from WDO when the vendors are chosen.

Mr. McMurry suggested a review of work done in the past year, as March will mark the first anniversary of the Advisory Board.

Mr. Graeber asked if there would be any benefit to have some type of booth or event associated with Fiesta to promote Ready to Work. Councilmember Rocha Garcia suggested that we need Ready to Work medals, and that she would be happy to work on the medals.

Mr. McMurry said the next meeting is January 11th and asked if we can get the agenda and meeting minutes a little bit sooner.

6. MEETING ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Gonzales motioned for the meeting adjourned at 9:32 am and Mr. Graeber second it.

APPROVED:
