

The March 29, 2007 Logistics and Distribution Banner Center Focus Group was made possible by the Business Development Board of Palm Beach County and the Employ Florida Banner Center for Logistics and Distribution.

Lake City Community College has been selected as Florida's Banner Center for Logistics and Distribution, part of a Workforce Florida commitment to encourage and launch centers of excellence to meet Florida's economic and workforce needs of the future. Phase One of the effort requires formation of an implementation plan, a strategic plan to serve the Florida market, and near-term program implementation to demonstrate the customer commitment and operational capabilities of Banner sites.

Challenges for the Industry and Companies

Top of mind and generally shared challenges for industry and companies included:

- High cost of living and scarce affordable housing harms companies' ability to attract and retain employees in southeast Florida
- High cost of doing business, including cost of zoned industrial space
- Ability to find qualified workforce is low
- Education and training intentions are good, but lack funding to deliver to the programs
- Rail/truck/port connections increasing
- A lack of marketing about jobs and careers in logistics and distribution
- People lack basic skills out of high school
- A shortage of vo-tech training in schools

Summary

In Phase One of their Banner Center program, Lake City Community College conducts focus groups to inform both the strategic planning process and opportunities for near-term curricula development. The Banner Center team forms and conducts focus group conversations based on the following key assumptions:

- A wide range of sector leaders and experts must be included
- Participants should be provided access to focus group documentation and other results, and encouraged to supplement missing or emerging data
- Participants should be provided with avenues to discuss both long-term and near-term issues
- Sessions should be fast-paced and sensitive to the time and travel investments of the participants

Focus Group IV consisted of participants across the business, economic development, education, and workforce sectors. Participants possessed experience and expertise in management, security, terminal services, port management, inventory management, transportation, economic development, workforce development, education, recruiting and human resources, and port services and cargo.

Southeast Florida is facing the dual issues of high costs of living and doing business along with worker shortage. The cost of housing, insurance, property taxes and utilities is causing workers to migrate out of the area. This, coupled with the aging work force and language barrier, is causing a crisis in finding workers. Additionally, the lack of available land and buildings is preventing some businesses from moving to the area.

A shortage of drivers, mechanics and welders exists along with skilled facility workers in refrigeration and ammonia, plumbers and electricians. A major finding is lack of qualified workers, or people capable of being trained for these jobs.

Truck drivers require at least one year experience before being hired by the industry participants' companies. Today's training sources involve a CDL partnership to provide training for truck drivers while, for a few job categories such as electrician and refrigeration, the training may be outsourced.

Technology changes are happening rapidly and the need to understand and use computers resides in every job. Safety and traffic rules and regulations require constant training updates.

Employers use several avenues to attract potential employees to their companies: TV advertising, job fairs, trade shows, and employee references. Seasonal business needs require changing levels of hiring at various times during the year.

The Ratings

The Focus Group provided a rating of regional access to talent for both technical and “soft” skills, as defined by the participants.

Technical Skills

Considering their ability to access talent with the technical skills needed to support a competitive Florida enterprise as poor, fair, good or excellent, the four industry guests rated between poor and good.



Soft Skills

Considering their ability to access talent with the “soft” skills needed to support a competitive Florida enterprise as poor, fair, good or excellent, the four industry guests rated between poor and good.



Situation Assessment—Access to Talent

The participants are searching for people who possess such basic skills as language, respect, honor, trustworthiness, and a strong work ethic. Along with these requirements, a group of technical and soft skills were identified as most needed, with participants stressing that not nearly enough people have these skills.

Technical Skills

The Focus Group participants outlined a number of priorities for technical skills for employees and recruits.

- Truck drivers, mechanics and welders
- Facility skills:
 - ▶ Refrigeration and ammonia
 - ▶ Plumbers
 - ▶ Electricians
- Technology and computers
- Safety and traffic rules and regulations
- Language of company and industry

Soft Skills

The Focus Group participants outlined a number of priorities for “soft” skills for employees and recruits.

- Customer service
 - ▶ Phone skills
 - ▶ Courtesy
 - ▶ Communications
- Office skills
- Loyalty and dedication
- Bilingual

*“We are in
a war for talent.”*

Concluding Consensus

The 2 hour conversation ended with a rating of the participants' potential to engage in developmental conversations for the Banner Center in the future. There was consensus that the potential was good, and would be excellent on the following conditions:

Condition 1

The Banner Center delivers a return on investment:

- ▶ Short-term: input is acted upon or at least discussed
- ▶ Long-term: jobs are filled with the right people with the right skills

Condition 2

The Banner Center integrates business and education in the classroom, utilizing industry and sector experts, by job category, to educate and train people.

Condition 3

The Banner Center provides a balance of technical and soft skills in its information, curricula, and trainings.

The Role of an Emerging Banner Center

The Banner Center can help establish an education track that participants believe should begin in middle school. In middle and high school, participants suggested career fairs for students and parents and "focus groups" with guidance counselors to inform them about jobs and careers in logistics and distribution. Junior Achievement was recommended to participants as a way to connect industry with schools to develop a logistics and distribution module for students

The Banner Center could help reshape the image of jobs in logistics and distribution. Advertise and use videos to market in a new way to the emerging adult generation. The merits of the jobs and careers need to be touted, as participants shared attributes including flexible schedules, improved safety, tuition for school and training, "forever jobs" (no outsourcing), good pay with commission opportunities and benefits still included, and the existence of career paths.

The participants also noted that the Banner Center has the opportunity to train, retain, and refresh in all aspects of logistics and distribution. Additionally, new skills are needed by employees in the areas of radio frequency, computers, scanners, and both IT and personnel security.

The Banner Center can play a role in preparing and providing much-needed workers to companies in southeast Florida. Participants emphasized that schools should reach out to businesses to find subject matter experts and experienced people to teach, as well as offer courses on-site at companies' facilities.

Our thanks to the guest leaders who invested their time and perspectives in this Focus Group:

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