

Mobile Area Workforce Alliance

Plan of Action

The Mobile area is experiencing unprecedented economic growth with a growing number of jobs in aviation, shipbuilding and repair, advanced manufacturing (e.g., steel, chemical, aluminum), logistics, healthcare, engineering, construction and business (e.g. accounting, law, information technology).

This growth presents a difficult challenge in the need to produce a much larger number of adequately skilled workers. Absent a clear plan and continuous cooperation among all the entities with workforce responsibilities, there is a real danger of failure. Failure is truly not an option.

In the face of this challenge, the Mobile Area Workforce Alliance was formed both to develop a plan to produce the needed workforce and to facilitate communication, collaboration, and mutual accountability through regular meetings. This Alliance is comprised of: The Chickasaw City School System, The Mobile County Public School System (MCPSS), The Saraland City School System, The Satsuma City School System, The Mobile Area Education Foundation (MAEF), Bishop State Community College, Coastal Alabama Community College, The University of South Alabama (USA), Alabama Industrial Development Training (AIDT), Southwest Alabama Partnership for Training and Employment (SWAPTE), South Alabama Workforce Development Council (SAWDC), and The Mobile Chamber.

This document lays out the Plan of Work for the Alliance and its constituent members. It includes specific actions which need to be taken, defines what is required to achieve success, identifies who is responsible for each, and provides clear metrics to define success for each action item.

This plan will be updated as new challenges/opportunities arise.

ACTION ITEM #1: Define and quantify workers and skills needed.

This Action Item requires the determination of each priority skill area where workers will be needed, quantifying how many workers will be needed in each skill area and continuously updating the numbers. This will establish the baseline for the community workforce needs and assess current projections minus economic development project announcements. The Alliance will utilize the JobsEQ dataset to capture these current projections. These reports will be run quarterly to ensure current projections are being met. The Mobile Chamber will continue to communicate with the Alliance members to promote the needs captured in the assessment.

The Alliance members responsible for this Action Item will be the Mobile Chamber, AIDT, SAWDC, and SWAPTE, with the Mobile Chamber in the lead.

Metric for Success: Key performance indicators will be based on reducing the number of projected shortfalls captured in the assessment. The baseline will be established by March 1, 2023.

ACTION ITEM #2: Attract new workers locally and regionally from groups and areas underrepresented in the workforce presently.

The most likely source of new workers are people who live in the Mobile area or nearby who are underrepresented in the workforce. These are (1) local high school and college students, whether in schools here or elsewhere, unaware of local opportunities and are therefore attracted to other areas; (2) adults in inner city areas that are not currently in the workforce; (3) adults in rural areas nearby; (4) active military members ending their careers and looking for where to begin their next careers; and (5) adults who have criminal records that are not currently in the workforce. Each of these groups must be targeted for recruitment and roadblocks (e.g., understanding of local opportunities, lack of transportation, housing, childcare availability and cost, and employer understanding of the desirability of these groups – particularly those with criminal records) removed. These barriers must be identified and cataloged to create support services needed to enhance abilities to train and educate these potential new members of the workforce. SAWDC and the Mobile Chamber will work to catalog various job fairs, apprenticeship programs, and training programs to design and implement marketing and outreach opportunities for those groups within the community.

The Alliance members responsible for this recruitment effort are the Mobile Chamber, the colleges, USA, SWAPTE, and SAWDC, with the Mobile Chamber in the lead.

Metric for Success: Key performance indicators include reducing the current unemployment rate (currently at 3.8% for Mobile County), increasing the current labor participation rate (currently at 56.9% for Mobile County), and increasing perception as monitored by regular public opinion surveys.

ACTION ITEM #3: Attract new workers to the Mobile area from other places.

This Action Item requires a deliberate and well-informed effort to advertise in targeted communities, the development of a dedicated website, and in-person recruiting to targeted communities and colleges. The Mobile Chamber will work with a marketing agency to establish a marketing and advertising plan within targeted communities to promote Mobile as a great place to live, work, and play.

The Alliance member responsible for this Action Item is the Mobile Chamber.

Metric for Success: Key performance indicators will be metrics on the number of individuals reached via marketing strategies in other communities. The Mobile Chamber will continue to host and increase the number of college familiarization tours. Increased perception of the Mobile community as monitored by regular public opinion surveys.

ACTION ITEM #4: Define skills students/workers will need for each skill area and create the educational programs/curricula to teach the skills.

In order for educators and students to understand what needs to be taught and learned, precise skills must be outlined for each skill area and then communicated to the appropriate colleges and schools. The Chamber will take the lead on creating a skills gap analysis to create market alignment between training needs, competencies, and employers. SAWDC will continue to facilitate the Educators Workforce Academy, taking educators into business and industry to see the work being performed and understand the skills and training needed. SAWDC and the Mobile Chamber will work closely to bring industry together to provide feedback directly from businesses and industry on the skills gap.

The Alliance members responsible for delineating the skills needed are AIDT, SAWDC, SWAPTE, and the Mobile Chamber. The school systems, the colleges and USA are responsible for taking this information and creating the appropriate programs/curricula. All of this should be monitored, and potentially updated quarterly.

Metric for Success: Key performance indicators include reducing the skills gap among students and measuring by way of data sets. Increased employer perception of the skills gaps will be monitored by regular public opinion surveys.

ACTION ITEM #5: Expand dual enrollment programs.

Dual enrollment programs have been proven to be very successful in matching high school students with careers and skills. These programs in the Mobile area must be greatly expanded based on the skill areas of greatest need (Action Items 1 & 4). The school systems must provide a baseline of current percentages of dual enrollment activities. The colleges and USA must meet regularly with all school systems and potential students to educate them on potential dual enrollment opportunities and work through credential challenges to ensure high school students are able to achieve the requirements necessary for graduation. This will expand career pathways and earned credit opportunities among students. The community colleges and USA will work collaboratively to create a one-page document to create a visual aid for students.

The Alliance members responsible for this expansion are the school systems, the colleges and USA.

Metrics for Success: Key performance indicators include increasing the number of dual enrollment students in each public school system.

ACTION ITEM #6: Bring employers into individual schools and colleges to communicate to students and faculty the careers available, pay, and skills needed; and develop resources to be used in this effort.

Students must be informed at the appropriate points in their academic pursuits what careers are available, how much they pay and what they should be enrolled in and studying to pursue that career. Employers are the best persuaders in this regard as they have the credibility to tell students what a career in their field means in terms of work environment and pay. Those employers must be recruited, scheduled, and resourced to do this. Faculty must also be informed by employers through representation on advisory boards/councils at the schools. SAWDC and

The Mobile Chamber will work to create an industry group of HR professionals and industry representatives that will go into the schools and colleges to connect with students and educate them on the skills, training, and opportunities available within the community. SAWDC and The Mobile Chamber will also work with the public school systems, community colleges, and USA opportunities for students to go the workplace for field trips and visits. Each school system, college, and USA, is responsible for their part of scheduling these visits on and off campus and advisory board/council meetings. The Mobile Chamber and SAWDC will work to catalog current advisory boards/council meetings to be marketed toward industry and business. The Mobile Chamber will work to create a standard CTE Advisory Council for all public school systems to meet regularly and discuss CTE goals and objectives with key industries. The public schools, community colleges, and USA will also take responsibility to increase faculty visits to industries.

The Alliance member responsible for recruiting employer representatives is the Mobile Chamber. Then the Mobile Chamber, working with AIDT, SAWDC and SWAPTE will develop the resources for the employers to use. The Mobile Chamber will work continuously with each school system, college, and USA to schedule on-campus visits and student visits to work sites. Each school system, college, and USA, is responsible for their part of scheduling these visits on and off campus and advisory board/council meetings.

Metric for Success: Key performance indicators include increasing the number of industry representatives visiting schools to meet with students and educators and increasing participation from industries on various advisory boards/councils. Another indicator will be the increase of faculty and educators within industries.

ACTION ITEM #7: Create more apprenticeships, internship opportunities, and work-based learning across all priority industries.

Every priority industry should create an ever-increasing number of opportunities for students to participate in apprenticeships and internships. Employers in each industry must be informed of the value of these programs and the state tax credits available to help defray the costs. Students and potential workers must be informed of the value of these paid training programs as well. Multiple education events will be held throughout the year in cooperation with the Alabama Office of Apprenticeships to educate employers on the value of apprenticeships and how to set up apprenticeships. The Mobile Chamber will advocate for every student graduating from Bishop State Community College, Coastal Alabama Community College, and USA to have at least one internship before graduation, especially within critical sectors. The Alliance members will collectively host multiple college and career opportunities for students to engage with industry to obtain an internship prior to graduation.

The Alliance member responsible for continuously educating employers and increasing apprenticeship and internship opportunities is the Mobile Chamber. AIDT, SAWDC, and SWAPTE will design the program for each industry in cooperation with the school systems, community colleges and USA.

Metric for Success: Key performance indicators will include cataloging and increasing the number of apprenticeship and internship opportunities within the community, especially within priority industries. Another indicator will include increasing the number of apprentices and interns with our local community colleges and USA. Also, tracking the number of graduates from internships and apprenticeships and the number that remain in the regional industry.

ACTION ITEM #8: Recruit high school seniors who are not pursuing a postsecondary academic degree into the workforce programs offered by the two local colleges and USA.

The most overlooked candidates for workforce education are those area high school seniors who are not pursuing postsecondary academic degrees. They should be identified early in their senior years and job coaches from the two local colleges and USA should actively recruit them into a workforce education program of their choosing. The school systems must create a way to capture contact information for students post-high school graduation.

The Alliance members responsible for identifying those high school seniors who are likely not to pursue academic degrees are the school systems, so they must each identify the system employees who will do so, and then communicate those names to the relevant college or USA along with times for the colleges' or USA's job coaches to meet with these students on campus. The colleges must provide an adequate number of job coaches to go into the schools, interview the identified students and navigate them through the process of enrolling in the programs.

Metric for Success: Key performance indicators include a higher labor participation rate among recent high school graduates and increasing the enrollment of key sector training initiatives among the community colleges, USA, and AIDT.

ACTION ITEM #9: Conduct local PR and messaging campaigns to inform the general public about growing local industries and the careers they provide.

Many local people, including students and their parents, are not aware of the growing industries in the Mobile area or of the careers they provide and make the wrong assumption that these jobs are dangerous, too physically taxing or low paying - or all three. This discourages them from considering or pursuing those jobs. A local PR and messaging campaign should be conducted to address the facts and overcome the negative assumptions about these industries and the careers they provide.

The Alliance member responsible for designing and carrying out this campaign is the Mobile Chamber, supported by SWAPTE and SAWDC.

Metric for Success: Calculating the number of media impressions during the campaign along with an evaluation of the content. Surveys – before and after the campaign – to determine whether awareness and perception are trending up. Social media mentions should also be tracked to determine whether mentions increase during the campaign.

ACTION ITEM #10: Obtain greater state funding for the school systems, colleges, USA, and AIDT focused on enabling them to carry out the responsibilities of each under this Plan of Work.

In Alabama, the State is the primary funder for education, including workforce education. The school systems, colleges, USA and AIDT will need more State funding directed to the actions required of each of them. A detailed legislative request should be prepared and presented to the Governor, Chancellor of Postsecondary Education, State Superintendent of Education, the Secretary of Commerce, legislative leadership, and the local delegation prior to the next Regular legislative session.

The Alliance members responsible for providing the details for such a request are the school systems, the colleges, USA and AIDT. The Alliance member responsible for presenting this request to the State and following it to passage and implementation is the Mobile Chamber.

Metric for Success: Increased funding available for all education and training programs and initiatives to carry out this plan of action.