

Local Workforce Development Board 19 CAREERSOURCE HEARTLAND EDUCATION AND INDUSTRY CONSORTIUM] QUARTERLY REPORT

A. GENERAL INFORMATION

Report quarter: January 2026 – March 2026

Date of meeting: March 11, 2026

Report prepared by: D Doubleday, N Morgan

Local workforce development board contact: D Doubleday **Date:** March 11, 2026

B. ATTENDANCE

Name	Organization	Industry or Education Organization	Contact Information
Krystin Chapman	The Development Group	Industry-Economic Development	kchapman@thedevelopmentgroup.net
Maria Johnson	Indian River State College	Education	mgjohnso@irsc.edu
Kristie Mathey-Demedicis	Larson Dairy, Inc.	Agriculture	ldicorp@embarqmail.com
Paola Mogle	School Board of Highlands County	Education	morgans@highlands.k12.fl.us
Zachary Ramcharan	Indian River State College	Education	zramchar@irsc.edu
Daryl Roehm	Okeechobee County School District	Education	roehmd@okee.k12.fl.us
Claire Thomas	Peace River Electric Co-operative	Electric Power Generation	claire.thomas@preco.coop

Donna Doubleday	CareerSource Heartland	Workforce	ddoubleday@careersourceheartland.com
Ann Martin	CareerSource Heartland	Workforce	amartin@careersourceheartland.com
Nica Morgan	CareerSource Heartland	Workforce	emorgan@careersourceheartland.com

B. SUMMARY REPORT

I. Welcome

The Consortium Vice-Chair, Daryl Roehm, welcomed participants and reminded everyone of the three key components that are the focus of this Consortium, which will always be shown at the top of the agenda.

1. Summary Analysis of local labor market based on the industry representative needs and educational offerings.
2. Information on priority industry sectors and occupations for the local area; and
3. Information on the status of existing talent pipelines for in-demand occupations.

Mr. Roehm introduced new Consortium member Zachary Ramcharan and welcomed him to the group. He went on to thank The Development Group (TDG) for their hospitality and willingness to host today's meeting.

Ms. Sarah Evers, CEO of TDG, welcomed the group and shared a brief overview of TDG's purpose and mission.

II. Discussion

A. Labor Market Information

Florida By the Numbers (FloridaCommerce Handout) & Florida Target Industries (Target Industry Report – 2005, pg. 7)

Members reviewed the Florida by the Numbers- FloridaCommerce handout of March 2026 & page 7 of the Florida Target Industry 2025 report. One member shared that Ag Tech sector is growing, as is maritime production manufacturing, which will help this area. One member indicated surprise that Hospitality was not on the list, since it is such a huge industry in Florida. Another member noted a rise in the Aviation Industry in the local area, to include businesses handling maintenance, repair, and operations, as well as flight schools. A comment was made that a company that refurbishes airplane parts is in negotiations to move their headquarters to this area. It was also noted that one local airport is working on extending runways to enhance commerce opportunities.

B. Existing Talent Pipelines

The Evolution of Economic Development

Krystin Chapman from The Development Group (TDG) presented "Redefining Rural Economic Development," illustrating the plans and development in the greater Wauchula area with a focus on downtown. Ms. Chapman defined TDG as the lead economic and community development organization and highlighted the importance of partnership with other community entities. Her presentation focused on the new approach to economic development in rural areas, from traditional "job creation" to a broader, place-based approach. She went on to illustrate the actions taken by TDG and Hardee County to create a community that offers a business-friendly atmosphere where people want to live, work, and recreate. To this end, The TDG's defined its five pillars for growth: Housing & Quality of Life; Health Care; Education & Workforce; Transportation & Infrastructure; and Recreation & Tourism.

The area's evolution started with a "whole community" approach. A survey was developed and sent out using a multi-modal approach to determine what residents want the community to be. Survey results indicated that residents viewed *Agriculture, Farming, and Ranching*, and *Phosphate* as the County's most important industries. Some of the top priorities for growth included job training programs, improving k-12 education, and added housing supply.

Ms. Chapman highlighted projects/businesses that have drawn jobs into Hardee County, as well as new initiatives that will continue job growth, create housing to support the workforce, increase recreation activities, and revitalize the downtown area. She discussed grants received, processes for obtaining project proposals, and the commerce park. She added that with the revitalization of the downtown area and the creation of new spaces, there are new and more inquiries from retail and restaurants. The goals are to offer jobs, recreation areas and housing to support market growth, "To really make Wauchula an enriching place to live."

Her presentation sparked questions about the survey questions and response rates. Ms. Chapman reported that a company was used to assist with question development. The response time was limited to a few weeks. Responses were encouraged through community messaging, texting, emails, online messages, social media, and phone calls. The response rate was much higher than the norm. An idea of questions asked can be viewed on TDG's website.

Ms. Chapman added another method TDG is using to spur local revitalization is the implementation of the 6-week "Building a Vibrant Community" curriculum. This curriculum serves as a blueprint that empowers area residents to generate ideas and action plans to create a vibrant, thriving, community.

When asked what are the biggest concerns of businesses that are considering moving to the area, Ms. Chapman responded, "Workforce and workforce training availability."

Consortium members congratulated TDG for their efforts and thanked Ms. Chapman for her interesting and informative presentation.

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III. Other

Members- Industry Updates

One member shared that it is business as usual in health care industry even though reportedly fewer Canadians visiting the area this year has impacted the volume of healthcare services typically offered during the winter months.

One member shared their business is experiencing an issue with job retention of customer care employees, with turnover often occurring after just 2-3 weeks of employment. The business is trying to determine the disconnect. Issues include prioritization of time, and use of personal phone while on the job. For many of their new hires into this position, this is their first real job. The issues do not appear to reflect deficit in hard skills. The company offers 6 weeks of training and provides extensive support to new hires. When queried, the employees stated they did not have enough access to their personal phones or understand the standards for work time.

CareerSource Heartland (CSH) staff members reported that several businesses have identified retention as a growing concern, and use of personal phones as an ongoing major concern.

CSH shared details on the 5G Leadership (foundational skills), Artificial Intelligence, and Microsoft Office Skills training courses available to businesses through a special grant that allows CSH to reimburse businesses 100% of tuition costs, adding this grant will end on 06/30/2026.

Okeechobee Economic Development promotes several initiatives that promote early workforce development, including recent Early Career Events where participants had hands-on meetings with employers and equipment that was very well received, and the annual Junior Leader Skills Camp.

Members shared more information on the rise of the Aviation Industry and local focus on activities to promote commerce at local airports. Three area airports are seeking approval and funding for runway expansion, and a fourth recently began construction on a new taxiway to improve aircraft ground movement.

Vice-Chair Roehm thanked all for their input, with a special thank you to Ms. Chapman for her presentation and to TDG for hosting today's meeting. He added that the group will meet again in the next quarter. The meeting was adjourned.