

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

A. GENERAL INFORMATION

Report quarter: April 2026 – June 2026

Date of meeting: June 3, 2026

Report prepared by: D Doubleday, N Morgan

Local workforce development board contact: D Doubleday **Date:** June 4, 2026

B. ATTENDANCE

Name	Organization	Industry or Education Organization	Contact Information
Chelsea Bilukha	Central Contractors	Electrical Contractors	Chelsea@centralcontractors.com
Krystin Chapman	The Development Group	Industry-Economic Development	kchapman@thedevelopmentgroup.net
Laine Daum	Triangle Chemical	Agriculture	laineadaum@gmail.com
Zack Farr	Biotech Applied Research	Scientific Research and Development	z.farr@biotechappliedresearch.org
Tina Gottus	South Florida State College	Education	gottust@southflorida.edu
Oliver Grandez	Westlake Royal Roofing Solutions	Manufacturing	ograndez@westlake.com
Maria Johnson	Indian River State College	Education	mgjohnso@irsc.edu

Kristie Mathey-Demedicis	Larson Dairy, Inc.	Agriculture	ldicorp@embarqmail.com
Scott Morgan	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
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 Chair, Scott Morgan, 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.

He added that the Chair of the Workforce Board asked him to thank members and to commend them for their work. The honest, open discussion is appreciated and helps

in the development of a local workforce that truly meets the needs of our local community.

II. Discussion

A. Labor Market Information

Florida's Employment Gains and Losses

CareerSource Heartland Labor Market Information Data May 22, 2026

Members reviewed the Nonagricultural Employment by Industry Over-the-Year Change April 2026, Seasonally Adjusted (Florida's Employment Gains and Losses) report, and the May 2026 Overview of the CareerSource Heartland (CSH) Region report (Local Labor Market Information). For discussion, members considered the following questions:

- a. How does the data compare to what is happening within their business or industry? (similar, different?)
- b. Does the data reflect what they are seeing or hearing locally?
- c. What other thoughts come to mind concerning this information?

Clarification was provided on how to read the Gains and Losses chart. Questions were asked about what jobs fell under certain industry sectors, with clarification provided through the definitions posted on the US Bureau of Labor Statistics website. Members discussed the minor increases in unemployment in the region over the year and suggested the lowest rates in Hardee and Okeechobee may reflect the increase in manufacturing employment. Discussion ensued. Several comments were offered. Main points included:

- a. Local increases in Other Services, Manufacturing, Government, Professional and Business Services, and Trade, Transportation, and Utilities outpaced the statewide growth in those industries.
- b. Locally, the Government sector showed an increase in employment, compared to the State's decrease in that category.
- c. The increase in the local unemployment rate may reflect the influx of people moving into the area.
- d. A quick overview of how unemployment rates are calculated was provided, per US Bureau of Labor Statistics explanation.
- e. As a plus, the local average annual wage has increased (partially due to minimum wage increases and wage compression).
- f. Locally, while residential construction has slowed, commercial construction is increasing, possibly due to businesses moving inland from coastal areas.

- g. Cash flows in Agriculture are currently problematic, the result of diseases, natural disasters, return on investment related to the costs of production, and difficulty finding affordable labor. For labor, farms use H2A, which is expensive as well.
- h. Several Citrus Under Protective Screen (CUPS) grapefruit farms can be found throughout the region, with a new, large farm anticipated to open in Highlands County soon. While this farming method combats greening, cash flow, other diseases, natural disasters, and overall return on investment remain concerns.
- i. Some mines have closed, at least temporarily, due to the war, which has caused disruption of the supply chain for sulfur. This disruption caused a spike in the cost of sulfur, negatively impacting the profitability of phosphate processing.
- j. Over the year, the Education and Health Services sector gained 36,400 jobs Statewide. It will be interesting to see the September employment data. Locally and throughout Florida, several school districts are having to cut positions due to budgetary constraints.

B. Existing Talent Pipelines

Florida’s Master Credentials List (MCL) Including Local Credentials Cited for Removal

Artificial Intelligence Discussion

Referring to the Master Credentials List (MCL) – Credentials Cited for Removal” spreadsheet provided with meeting materials, Chair Morgan shared that he had downloaded an updated copy of this spreadsheet and found that some credentials of concern were cleared after the meeting materials had been sent out. Those include:

- Certified Medical Administrative Assistant
- Certified Nursing Assistant
- Certified Patient Care Technician/Assistant
- Ecology Conservation and Management Certification

(Note: Although someone mentioned that 911 Public Safety Telecommunicator had also been cleared, at the time this report was written, this occupation did still appear on the “cited for removal” list on CareerSource Florida’s website.

Chair Morgan asked the group to review the MCL Flagged for Removal spreadsheet along with the Local MCL Cited for Removal document. A brief overview of the purpose of the MCL and criteria for inclusion was provided. For discussion, members considered the following questions:

- a. Other than the occupations listed on the local document, are there occupations/credentials identified on the main cited for removal

spreadsheet that will negatively impact members' business/industry if removed?

- b. Can members provide wage or demand information for any of the occupations identified on the local cited for removal concerns document?

Discussion ensued. Several comments were offered. Main points included:

- a. The listed wage rate for the Agricultural Mechanics Specialist is low. Employers would be hard-pressed to find a mechanic willing to work for the wage listed (\$17.00/hr.) Large farms do employ mechanics, with starting wages between \$22.00 and \$28.00/hr. Most small farms in this region contract out for equipment repair. Communication with the repair companies may provide the data that is needed to submit a request to keep this certification on the list. This is an important certification for this area.
- b. Emergency Medical Technician/Emergency Medical are pathways to Paramedic. One member indicated the Paramedics he knows are earning over six-figures. One method of keeping credentials on the MCL is to present documentation showing that the credential is part of a career pathway that sequences into a credential/occupation that does meet wage criteria, such as an articulation agreement.
- c. Small UAS Safety Certification and Advanced Unmanned Safety Safety: Level 2 are important also. Drones are used locally in several industries, including but not limited to agriculture, aviation, law enforcement, emergency management, and real estate.
- d. Aquaculture was recently cited targeted industry in Florida. Locally, manufacturing is targeted. It would be helpful for the to Paramedic. One member indicated the Paramedics he knows are earning over six-figures. One method of keeping credentials on the MCL is to present documentation showing that the credential is part of a career pathway that sequences into a credential/occupation that does meet wage criteria, such as an articulation agreement.
- d. Small UAS Safety Certification and Advanced Unmanned Safety Safety: Level 2 are important also. Drones are used locally in several industries, including but not limited to agriculture, aviation, law enforcement, emergency management, and real estate. Direct linkage to a Standard Occupation Code (SOC) is needed to keep these on the MCL.

- e. The Entrepreneurship certifications are not likely to remain on the MCL since they cannot be linked to a specific occupation (SOC).
- f. NCCER Carpentry Level 1 will not be pursued by the Highlands School District due to the educational level required by the instructor, imposed by NCCER.

Chair Morgan opened discussion on Artificial Intelligence, asking if AI is being used in members' business or industry, and if so, what is working and what is not. One member stated that it is useful for code reference, but field staff do not use much technology. Another commented that AI is in its infancy in agriculture. It can be useful for identification of species, insects, and disease, yet its use needs to make "dollars and cents" for return on investment. Education members shared the importance of teaching students to understand how to use AI as a tool, rather than using it for "cheating" or having it perform work they should be performing independently. Other members reported receiving resumes clearly written by AI where the interviewees could not substantiate the skills presented, leading to wasted time trying to fill needed positions. AI is being used in the creation of elaborate fireworks and aerial displays.

Chair Morgan presented the Smart Future for Small Businesses Scholarships flyer and stressed the rapidly approaching deadline to apply.

III. Other

Members- Industry Updates

Next Quarter Meeting Location

Chair Morgan, reminding members that the workforce Board suggested rotating these meetings to give members the opportunity to showcase their business, asked if anyone wanted to host the next meeting. He added that virtual access is helpful because the Consortium's membership spans four counties, everyone cannot always attend in person. Zack Farr offered the possibility of Biotech Applied Research hosting next quarter, adding that there are various factors still up in the air that make it impossible for him to fully commit yet.

With no other member expressing interest in hosting, and no other matters brought up by members, Chair Morgan thanked all for the very engaging discussion and adjourned the meeting.