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

A. GENERAL INFORMATION

Report quarter: July 2026- September 2026

Date of meeting: September 16, 2026

Report prepared by: D Doubleday, N Morgan

Local workforce development board contact: D Doubleday **Date:** September 16, 2026

B. ATTENDANCE

Name	Organization	Industry or Education Organization	Contact Information
Nicholas Brown	Indian River State College	Education	nbrown@irsc.edu
Jessica Carlson	Adventhealth	Healthcare	Jessica.Carlson@AdventHealth.com
Zack Farr	Biotech Applied Research	Scientific Research and Development	z.farr@biotechappliedresearch.org
Tina Gottus	South Florida State College	Education	gottust@southflorida.edu
Maria Johnson	Indian River State College	Education	mgjohnso@irsc.edu
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
Derek Taylor	DT Building Solutions	Construction	dtbuildingsolutions@gmail.com;
Alex Tijerina	Okeechobee County Economic Development Consortium	Economic Development	alex@ocedcorp.com;
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 four new members to the Consortium: Nicholas Brown, Jessica Carlson, Derek Taylor, and Alex Tijerina. Chair Morgan then welcomed all 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

Labor Force Participation Rate (LFPR)
Florida Chamber Foundation and US Census Bureau Quick Facts Data

Members reviewed the Labor Force Participation Rate (LFPR) definition, how LFPR is calculated, why it is important, potential impacts on the rate, and the data by county (source; US Census Bureau Quick Facts). Members also reviewed the Florida Chamber Foundation's LFPR Gap Map for the four-county area. Comparisons were made concerning the rural Heartland region's rates by County (DeSoto 49.5%, Hardee 52.5%, Highlands 43.5%, and Okeechobee 50.1%) as compared to the US average LFPR of 61.5%.

The following details were provided (sources: US Bureau of Labor Statistics and the National Institutes of Health):

- A strong labor force rate for rural communities appears to be 58-60%;
- the lower rates in rural areas generally reflect structural and demographic realities;
- healthy signals include stable local industries and diverse job opportunities; good commuting infrastructure, and remote work capabilities (including broadband accessibility);
- unhealthy signals include limited job opportunities (including lack of nearby employment), geographic isolation, lack of broadband, chronic health issues;
- lower wages impact workers' ability to pay for child care and transportation;
- LFPRs reveal the true size of an economy's active labor pool;
- LFPRs can gauge a community's economic health;
- LFPRs can signal demographic shifts; and
- LFPRs can help determine the total amount of labor to produce goods and services.

The following questions arose, for which answers were provided in a follow-up communication:

1. What is the age range for LFPR calculations? According to the US Census Bureau Quick Facts, the age range is 16 and up.
2. Is there data on the annual trends, to compare whether the rates by County are improving or decreasing? The official source for county-level LFPR is the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates. Annual single-year ACS estimates are not published for small counties due to sample size. The chart below compares the data for 2018-2022 and 2020-2024.

LFPR - percentages	2018-2022	2020-2024
Desoto	47.6	49.5
Hardee	53.8	52.5
Highlands	42.1	43.5
Okeechobee	51.2	50.1

B. Existing Talent Pipelines

New candidates and trends
LFPR Local Impact
Challenges and solutions

1. Members were asked if they were experiencing issues with candidate follow-through during their hiring processes. One member reported several candidates are failing the screening process, others become unresponsive at some point during the process. Another employer reported similar experiences, including no call, no show for scheduled interviews, no response to calls/emails of job offers, and in one case, a candidate who initially accepted a position contingent upon results of drug-screening and background checks, did not respond to a call to set an actual start date. The call was made after the results of both checks were completed with no issues. One member questioned whether learning the rate of pay during an interview might cause someone to rethink their interest in the position. It was acknowledged that could certainly happen. One employer responded that their job postings include their wage rates, and that applicants are made aware of the wage rate during the call to schedule the interview, to avoid wasting the time of the applicant or the business. This employer still experienced the candidate "ghosting".

2. Thinking about the local LFPR, members were asked, based on their perspective and experience, are there groups of people that seem to face the most challenges getting into the workforce, and if so, why? While it was acknowledged that one County has recently seen an increase of youth in the local workforce members generally agreed that younger individuals, ages 18-26, seem to find it difficult to enter the workforce. Older individuals are remaining in the workforce longer for various reasons, and often, to enhance

their income they are willing to work the lower wage and lower skilled entry level jobs that used to serve as the younger generations' first excursion into the world of work. Members also commented that employers who once sought to hire youth are hesitant to do so due to the lack of soft/foundational skills. Employees use of cell phones for personal calls was noted as a common concern among employers. One member reported that their business rarely receives applications from anyone 26 years of age or younger.

Members also noted the following additional impacts to local labor force participation:

- Confusion with navigating the various methods to apply for work;
- Questions about how job seekers complete applications or respond to interview questions (examples given: responses to availability for work, expected wage rates, mothers/parents accompanying applicants to job interviews);
- Lack of transportation;
- Lack of child care;
- Lack of access or inability to afford broadband;
- Youth remaining in their parents' homes longer (high housing costs, high insurance costs inhibit independent living opportunities);
- Although youth enrolled in Career and Technical Education programs in the k-12 school system receive career readiness and foundational skills in their program curriculum, these same opportunities are not available for all students and are not available to students attending virtual school.
- Limited local amenities result in people relocating from the area.

Education members reported the following actions are occurring in career and technical education courses at the school districts and in career services departments within the local colleges:

- Interview Skills
- Resume Development
- Dress Etiquette
- Introduction to the proper use of Artificial Intelligence
- Customer Service

While options exist for some students enrolled in k-12 and post-secondary education, how do we reach those students for whom these courses are not available or expected work behaviors are not taught, as well as individuals who are not enrolled in education yet could benefit from skill development in these areas? It was noted that soft/foundational skills courses are

available virtually through Florida Ready to Work's modules. This interactive training includes employability skills such as professionalism, teamwork, communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving.

III. Other
Next Quarter Meeting Location
Members- Industry Updates

A. Chair Morgan reminded members that the workforce Board suggested rotating these meetings to give members the opportunity to showcase their business. He added that virtual access is helpful because the Consortium's membership spans four counties, and everyone cannot always attend in person. He asked if anyone is interested in hosting this meeting to please let Ms. Doubleday know and then noted that the next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, December 9, 2026, at 9:00am.

B. Chair Morgan opened the floor for Member Updates.
On the (MCL) updates. It was clarified that for applications submitted for addition or continuation on the State's Master Credentials List, wage rates need to meet either the Framework of Quality's entry level or median wage rate. The occupation does not need to meet both. It was also noted that Emergency Medical Technician is back on the list due to the Hometown Heroes Initiative, so no additional local action is needed. Ms. Doubleday reported that although there is no longer a need for our area to submit an application to keep emergency response applications on the MCL, all four counties did provide letters of support toward our efforts.

IV. Adjourn

With no other matters brought up by members, Chair Morgan thanked all for the very productive and engaging discussion and adjourned the meeting.

Follow up:
The December 9 meeting will be held at Indian River State College, Dixon Hendry Campus, Building C, Williamson Conference and Education Center, Room 112.