

Workforce Shortage Initiatives for the BIPOC Community

Career Solutions, Central MN Community Empowerment Organization, Hands Across the World and The Higher Collaborative plan to work together to address the worker shortage in central MN by developing workforce initiatives to address high unemployment in the BIPOC community. Initiatives will focus on high paying, in-demand occupations such as: Transportation (CDL), construction, healthcare, technology, and manufacturing.

According to a 2021 Wilder Research study, Greater St Cloud's population has grown by 7% since 2010, while the population of color has nearly doubled. Poverty rates amongst Somali residents is at 72% and the black community is at 47%. 75% of low income residents of color are housing cost burdened. The struggles and strains of poverty affects the entire family. About half of Black students and students with two or more races graduate from high school in four years.

Intentional efforts are needed in our community to reduce disparities and address the grave Unemployment Rate within the BIPOC Community. According to DEED's Labor Market information, in Stearns County, there is a 20% unemployment rate amongst Black or African Americans. In Benton County, Hispanics hold the lowest labor force participation rate at 65% and an unemployment rate of 7.4%.

Through this initiative, both employers and job seekers will be supported through a variety of training activities, providing workers with the skills needed in today's workforce. Being able to provide workers to area businesses positively impacts the economic vitality of our community. Job seekers will receive wrap-around support from career exploration, training, job seeking to successful employment. Assistance will be given to support the entire family to increase success and impact change within the family structure. Employer support would include guidance for recruiting from the BIPOC community, training, retention and communication needs.

Initiative Outcomes:

1. Build infrastructure to advance the growing BIPOC community
2. Reduce economic and employment inequities, created pathways to good quality and family sustaining jobs, and foster culturally competent workforce development approach.
3. Improved long-term potential for growth and inclusive employment – "Inclusive Workforce-Employer (I-WE) program", increasing workforce diversity
4. Enhanced longer-term employability of youth in sectors with high growth potential and employment potential
5. Assist BIPOC job seekers in obtaining employment
6. Provide tools for employers to remove barriers to hiring diverse job seekers
7. Address broad workforce issues/shortages in the community
8. Educate employers to remove barriers to hiring the immigrant population including: language, accommodations, transportation, child care, limited education
9. Improve high school graduation rates, reduce dropout rates
10. Assist students aging out of high school continue their education and/or find meaningful employment
11. Build bridges - creating meaningful connections in the community

List of suggested activities:

1. Establishing an African Community Academy for Workforce Development
 2. Create a bilingual Commercial Driver's License (CDL) Program
 3. Develop and deliver culturally appropriate transportation/trucking driving and construction transportation training programs
 4. Provide guidance to entrepreneurs, driving business development
 5. Develop and deliver culturally competent training for financial management and business development curriculums and programs
- Develop partnerships with employers to provide internships, employment preparation, job placement and on the job skills training. On the job training, coaching, apprenticeship in the construction and transportation sectors

6. Provide career counselling and job market information to marginalized communities
7. Develop and offer a bilingual construction training program Program, Including OSHA 10, CPR and other industry recognized credentials. Training includes both technical skills and relevant ESL material.
8. Develop a bilingual Customer Service Program to include communication, writing, and speaking skills necessary for an entry-level job in the customer service and/or an administrative field. Trainees will also learn about job readiness, time management, financial literacy, and entry-level Microsoft Office programs such as Outlook and Word.
9. Provide bilingual Servsafe Training, including FDA Food Code and food sanitation.
10. Provide bilingual Workplace Safety Classes include Excavation Hazard Awareness, Fall Protection Hazard Awareness, WorkZone/Flagger, and Focus Four Training.

When people from diverse and conflicting cultures meet and work together, they start respecting their own and the culture of others. They work together to achieve the objectives of the organization for which they are working. This creates a healthy work environment, and in turn supports economic growth in our community.

Funding Requested: According to 2020 U.S. Census data, there are over 33,000 people of color in the greater St. Cloud area. With poverty, unemployment rates at astronomically high levels, and graduation and dropout rates that are spiraling out of control, the group is requesting 3.5 million to build the infrastructure needed to drive systematic change in the BIPOC community.