

Go Forward Pine Bluff

Economic Development Pillar

May Meeting

Meeting Notes

A brief presentation was provided by the Chair of our Employability Training Committee. The following progress was shared:

1. A curriculum developed by the DOL was chosen entitled “Skills to Pay the Bills”.
2. JRMC has volunteered their new hire orientation program as an audience for the “pilot” to test our proposed curriculum. We are still trying to confirm if JRMC will be able to also host. The training will be presented every other week to three separate groups. We are also looking into piloting the curriculum with a “work release” population.
3. A pre and post assessment will be developed and administered to each participant to measure training impact.
4. A qualitative survey will be provided all immediate supervisors of program participants to further determine training impact.
5. An instructor still needs to be identified; a number of names were mentioned. We feel it is important to provide some form of financial remuneration to whomever is selected.
6. At the conclusion of each training the committee and instructor will determine any changes to the curriculum based on in-class experience.
7. At the conclusion of the three training session the committee and instructor will review all pre and post assessment, feedback from supervisors, and instructor-student interactions to make a final determination as to the feasibility of the proposed curriculum and make their final recommendations to the Pillar.
8. The committee will also develop an implementation plan that details how the program should be implemented to include short, medium, and long-term outcomes, partnerships, and venues. A budget will also be developed to meet each of the three mentioned outcome points.
9. Estimated start date for the pilot program is July, 2016.

The next presentation was delivered on the Innovation Hub in North Little Rock. This was done for those pillar members who were unable to attend the tour given earlier in the week. A discussion followed the presentation and addressed the following areas:

1. At some point the Education Pillar needs to be engaged in a discussion regarding how to integrate innovation hub into the educational experience of Pine Bluff students.
2. Warrick Sabin should be included as an advisor in any efforts towards establishing a similar facility in Pine Bluff.
3. Grants and other funding sources must be identified and pursued.
4. A location or locations must be identified and committed to.
5. A development budget must be created.
6. Primary partnerships must be identified and cemented.

7. Application for the 501©3 status must be initiated.
8. At a minimum an individual must be identified who will be responsible for shepherding the hubs development.
9. A board of directors must be selected.

Jeff Pullium who is with UAPB and the current “incubator” will present at our next pillar meeting to inform us on what the incubator does and how or if it can be incorporated into an innovation hub like facility.

A final presentation was delivered summarizing the poor quality broadband service being delivered to Pine Bluff. After view some data describing how poor internet service is in Pine Bluff, a potential solution to the City’s problem was identified in how Chattanooga, TN has addressed a similar issue. They pursued and received a significant grant from the DOE as stimulus money to enable Chattanooga to construct and offer a municipality run internet service to compete with the likes of Comcast and AT&T. After some discussion we decided more information was required regarding any improvements that may already be proposed by Pine Bluff’s current providers as well as what legal limitations may currently be imposed by the state that would prevent Pine Bluff from pursuing alternative options. To that end the Pillar has invited Mark Peterson from the U of A Cooperative Extension to speak to our Pillar at our June meeting. Based on that presentation we will decide if we want to invite representatives from Pine Bluffs current internet providers to determine what plans they may have for improving the current services they provide.

The final area pursued by our Pillar was how to better integrate the activities and interests of business and industry and our local educational functions in Pine Bluff and Jefferson County. LouAnn Nesbit shared what the Jefferson County Alliance is doing to that end for manufacturing but the Pillar felt it was important to provide that type activity for as much of business and industry in the County as possible. The Pillar has had presentations in the past detailing what the state is doing to bring business/industry and educators together through their Educational Coops but felt that the outcomes of those efforts have been insufficient in our opinion. The Pillar determined they want to enhance those activities that are already in place by bring to bear best practices from around the state. To that end we have invited Sue Owens from Economics Arkansas to speak in July to share what their organization is doing to inform educators of the needs of business and industry. The Pillar also believes that at some point input from the Education Pillar would be beneficial.