

NEW ORLEANS TALENT DIVIDEND SUMMIT

Executive Summary: On Wednesday, May 20th about 20 regional leaders convened in New Orleans for the Talent Dividend Summit that was hosted by Tulane University President Scott Cowen. After hearing about the national initiative and the potential impact in the city and region, the attendees were excited about the possibilities for our community and eager to participate in this worthwhile dialogue. After almost four years of being in recovery mode from the devastating hurricane of 2005, the leaders agreed that now is the right time to transition the focus to improving educational outcomes and economic development opportunities in the region. The group discussed strategies for achieving the Talent Dividend in New Orleans, which is an increase in approximately 7,000 college graduates in the region. A follow-up meeting is currently being scheduled and should take place during the month of June. Highlights from the initial meeting follow.

What do you believe is your best opportunity for achieving the Talent Dividend?

Reform High Schools: Louisiana is in the midst of a state-wide high school redesign initiative that has already received national recognition, and the initial results are very promising. We feel strongly that this initiative should be leveraged as an opportunity to increase matriculation to college. In addition to the state funds that have been allocated to this reform effort, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has committed funding for this type of initiative in the stimulus package. These additional resources should be secured as soon as possible. We also discussed the importance of college attainment complementing K-12 strategies that are emerging in New Orleans, in which the Cowen Institute's AdvanceNOLA program was noted as a success. The program, funded by ExxonMobil and managed by the Cowen Institute, supports the launch of college-level courses in low-performing high schools and provides materials/equipment, intensive professional development, and financial incentives to participating schools, teachers, and students. The program has been one of the main contributors to the increased graduation rate at one partner school (from 40% to 90%). The attendees also noted the need to align high school graduation and college entrance requirements.

Increase College Attainment: The group agreed that integrating college students into the community while they are enrolled in higher education institutions is critical to ensuring that they graduate. Tulane recently incorporated a service learning component into its curriculum, which mandates that students complete two semesters of service in community-based organizations before graduating. It was also noted that articulation agreements between community colleges and four-year universities are necessary to ease the transition for students, and that these must be approached from a state-wide perspective (Florida was noted as an example). The group agreed that the low hanging fruit is the approximately 175,000 people in the region that have yet to earn a degree but have taken college courses.

Retain Talent in the Region: The leaders noted that it's critical to retain local college graduates in the region. A number of initiatives are currently being implemented in the city to address this, including the launch of an organization called 504ward and a recent business plan competition for entrepreneurs.

What are the next three steps you need to take now to achieve the Talent Dividend for your community?

Leading Organization: In order for this effort to be successful, a leading organization must be identified and funding must be secured. Tulane's Cowen Institute will submit a proposal to the Greater New Orleans Foundation to seek funding for this effort.

2010 Mayoral Election Platform: With the 2010 mayoral election in New Orleans gaining attention in the city, we have the opportunity to make the Talent Dividend initiative a platform for potential candidates' campaigns.

Research Current Initiatives: To ensure that efforts are not being duplicated and to understand the landscape, we intend to research current initiatives in the region that fit into the proposed strategy.

What would you like to know that you don't currently know that you believe would make your Talent Dividend pursuit more effective?

Data Systems: It would be helpful to know what type of data systems other regions are using to track college attainment. Louisiana currently only tracks public high school graduates that go to public colleges and universities in the state.

Private/Parochial Attainment Measurements: Since up to a third of the high school students in the region attend private and parochial high schools, it would be useful to identify a way to effectively measure the attainment of this large segment of the population.

Dropout Rates Distribution: We would also like to understand how to effectively track the distribution curve shift in dropout rates (in grades 7-12).

Interim Indicators: In addition, we would like to identify interim indicators that can be used to monitor progress and compare it to other cities. Attainment rates in other cities?

Community College Presence: In addition to performance indicators and metrics, the group's perception was that there are more universities and colleges in our region compared to others. They also noted that we had fewer community colleges than other metropolitan areas. It would be helpful to know the number of community colleges and four-year universities and colleges in major cities to better understand the context.

What can CEOs for Cities do to support your efforts?

In addition to helping find answers to the questions above, CEOs for Cities can:

Provide Training: It can train the group and/or representatives at Tulane to present the opportunities and the strategies for the New Orleans Talent Dividend to regional and state-wide business and civic leaders, community organizations, policymakers, and government officials. Leaders of the Jefferson Chamber of Commerce and other organizations have already voiced interest in having Carol speak at an upcoming meeting. Also, education and the Talent Dividend are on the agenda for the August 2009 meeting of the New Orleans Rotary Club.