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PROFILING NEXT GENERATION SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS

A Benchmarking Project of the Institute for Networked Communities (INC)

NEXT GENERATION SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS

WHAT'S INSIDE THE 2022 ISSUE:

- *Lane County Sector Partnerships*
- *North State Sector Partnerships*
- *Cape Fear Manufacturing Sector Partnership*



INTRODUCTION TO NEXT GEN

Next Generation Sector Partnerships mobilize business leaders from a single industry sector in a shared regional economy to work with one another and with a coordinated team of public partners to strengthen their industry and their communities. Next Gen Partnerships are based on the premise that access to good jobs depends on two critical dynamics: first, industry sectors must be growing and thriving, with businesses sustaining or creating new, quality jobs. Secondly, education, workforce training, economic development and government must stay finely attuned to the needs of those industry sectors in order to effectively create access to those jobs by community members. The key to getting both right is fostering strong networks that connect business leaders and public partners to simultaneously do both. This requires that business leaders be fully engaged partners, not just interested stakeholders, in the work of strengthening their industry and region. It requires public partners to shed practices of program and mission territorialism and embrace a new level of program and policy coordination.

That's why Next Gen Partnerships put at the center a critical mass of engaged business people from a single industry in a shared regional economy. They attract business leaders who share the belief that the success of their companies, industry and region are all interdependent. When mobilized into action teams and focused on specific, shared priorities, they can have a powerful effect on focusing and rallying public partners around a common agenda for common benefit. This model of public-private partnership exists in nearly 20 states across the U.S.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Benchmarking Project was generously supported by Ascendium Education Group. Ascendium Education Group is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization committed to helping people reach the education and career goals that matter to them. Ascendium invests in initiatives designed to increase the number of students from low-income backgrounds who complete postsecondary degrees, certificates and workforce training programs, with an emphasis on first-generation students, incarcerated adults, rural community members, students of color and veterans. Ascendium's work identifies, validates and expands best practices to promote large-scale change at the institutional, system and state levels, with the intention of elevating opportunity for all. For more information, visit <https://www.ascendiumphilanthropy.org>.

The Institute for Networked Communities (INC), home to the national Next Gen Sector Partnership community of practice, is grateful to Ascendium for their support. INC is also grateful to our community of practice who continually invest back into shared learning and continuous improvement. Specifically for this project, INC thanks three new regions for sharing their stories, successes, and criteria for success. This 2022 series adds three new profiles to the Next Gen benchmarking collection from the following regions:

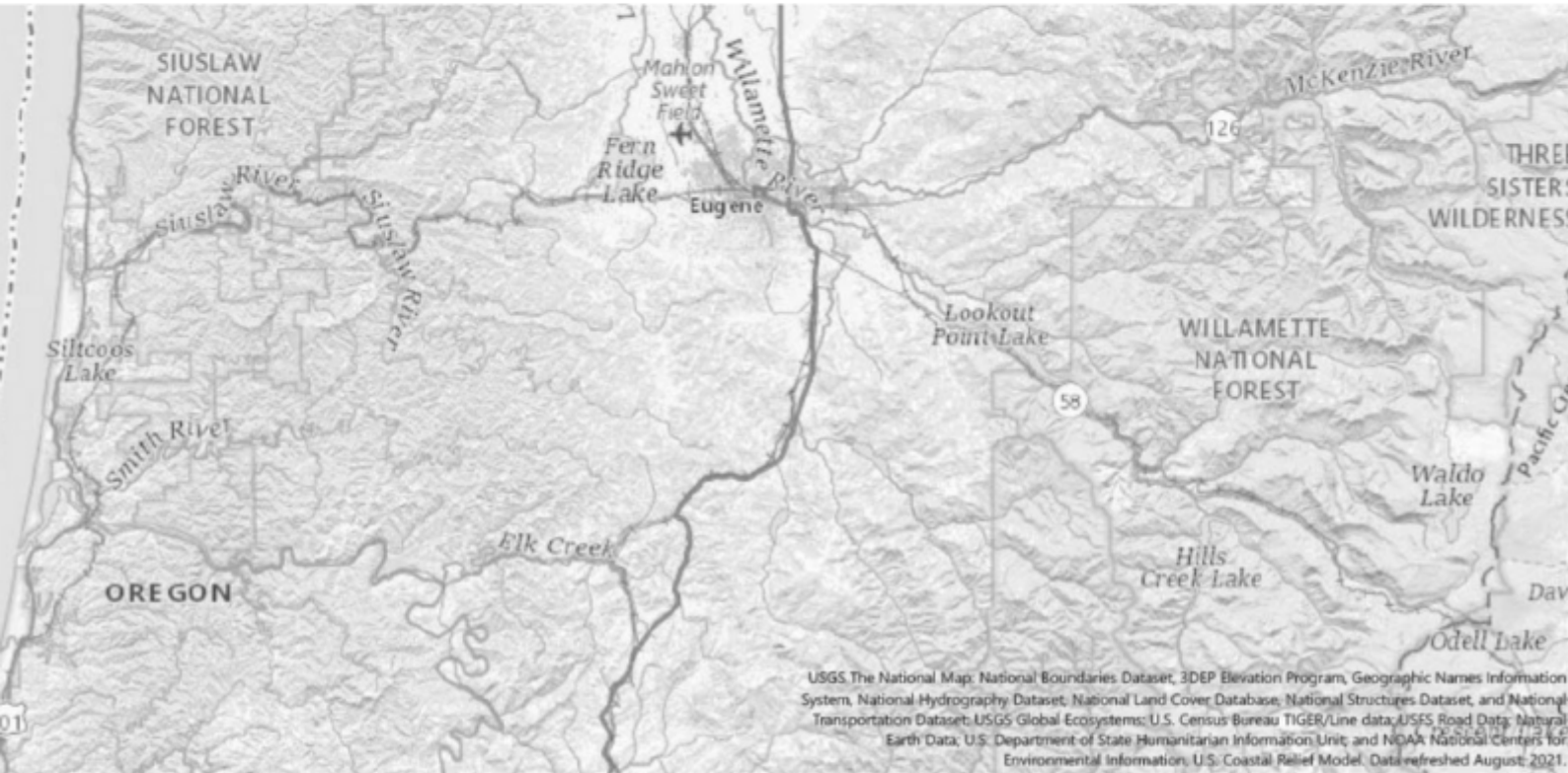
- Lane County, Oregon
- The North State of California
- Cape Fear, North Carolina

ABOUT THE BENCHMARKING PROJECT

After a decade in action and with almost 100 partnerships in nearly 20 states, the Next Gen community of practice has both grown and diversified. Over the years, Next Gen partnerships have learned and evolved to tackle challenges with their region's best interests in mind. Next Gen principles build from the premise that business and industry must take a central and active role in the shared work of building a thriving regional economy that benefits everyone. Building off Next Gen's toolbox and in partnership with the Ascendium Education Group, the Benchmarking Project set out to document the lifecycle of six partnerships across the nation in 2021, and three additional partnerships in 2022. This collection features the 2022 profiles. The 2021-22 Profiles are not evaluations; they are assessments of the common factors that make these partnerships work. These profiles outline the strategies, structures, challenges, wins and the pieces in between for unique partnerships, target industries and settings. Accompanying these profiles is a Benchmarking Framework, organized across categories of potential impact and offering examples of success indicators in each. These profiles and the framework are intended to add to the growing set of guiding tools to other regions and partnerships endeavoring to close the gap between public and private actors both interested in shared economic vitality.

PROFILING LANE COUNTY SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS

A Benchmarking Project of the Institute for Networked Communities



LANE COUNTY SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS

By: Francie Genz, INC

This case study is one in a series of Next Generation Sector Partnerships profiles from across the country. Its primary purpose is to give practitioners insights into the key milestones and critical ingredients for success to-date that have shaped the journey of the Lane County Sector Team in building five industry-driven sector partnerships. Its intended audience is the diverse mix of business, education, workforce development, and economic development leaders who are committed to the work of taking their communities to a new level of shared prosperity. The profile is organized into six sections: motivations for launch, mechanisms for change, moments of transformation, measurable results, major ingredients for success, and the future of Lane County partnerships moving forward.

WHAT'S INSIDE:

- *About Lane County Sector Partnerships*
- *Motivations for Launch*
- *Mechanisms for Change*
- *Moments of Transformation*
- *Measurable Results*
- *Ingredients for Success*
- *Future of the Partnership*



ABOUT LANE COUNTY SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS

Lane County, Oregon sits in the Willamette Valley, stretching from the Coast all the way to the Cascade Mountains. Lane County is the same geographic size of the State of Connecticut with a population of about 400,000 people. Traditionally driven by the timber and agriculture industries, Lane County's economy has diversified into a robust mix of high tech, manufacturing, creative industries, health care and biosciences, construction as well as wood products. But these shifts didn't happen on their own. Since 2015, Lane County has been purposefully activating networks of business leaders and public partners to support the driving industry sectors that are most important to the region's economy. They have invested in the region's collaborative capacity, building five Next Gen Sector Partnerships and creating a sustainable infrastructure to support each of them.

The region is currently home to five active sector partnerships in technology, food and beverage manufacturing, creative industries, construction aggregate, and wood products. While each sector partnership is unique and tailored to the needs of its targeted industry, they all use the same model. They are industry-led and community-supported, serving as a platform for collaborative action to strengthen the targeted sector. Each partnership is supported by a Sector Strategist who facilitates partnership activities. These strategists work for different organizations—industry associations, the workforce development board, or other community-based groups—but they share a common approach. They connect business leaders to one another, elevate their collective voice and help organize public partners to meet their needs for the greater good of the industry and the community.

Lane Workforce Partnership supports all five partnerships, ensuring they have what they need to be successful, cross-pollinating innovations across partnerships, and keeping each partnership grounded in a consistent vision and model. Lane Workforce Partnership also convenes the Community Collaborative, a monthly gathering of Sector Strategists and other public partners from the region's education, workforce, and economic development systems. These meetings are an opportunity to discuss priorities and needs from each sector, determine what's needed and enlist support in driving toward solutions.



"Before we were disparate, disconnected and withdrawn. We became a community because of this."

-TODD EDMAN, CO-FOUNDER, BITCORK, TECH SECTOR PARTNERSHIP CHAMPION



MOTIVATIONS FOR LAUNCH: A NEW KIND OF COLLABORATION

When the State of Oregon introduced the Next Gen Sector Partnership model in 2014, sector partnerships weren't new to Lane County. There was a long history of bringing businesses together to understand their common workforce needs and respond with sector-based training. But bringing partners together from economic development, Chambers of Commerce, industry associations, educators, and workforce developers to holistically support targeted industries—this was a new level of collaboration.

The team analyzed regional labor market data to help answer the question, "Which industry sector needs our collective support and has the most good-paying jobs?" A small but growing tech industry stood out. It was a sector with potential but without deep roots in the region. Halfway between Seattle and Silicon Valley, Lane County had potential to be a tech hub. But, after speaking with tech sector leaders, it was clear that there was very little keeping them in the region. Without a strong tech talent pipeline, high-speed internet connectivity, or direct flights to major cities, tech companies could easily uproot and move elsewhere.

Fast forward to today, none of the companies interviewed in those early days have left the region. Instead, they have put down roots and built the ecosystem needed to grow and sustain the industry in Lane County through the Tech Sector Partnership.

The Tech Sector Partnership was the first to launch using the Next Gen model. It demonstrated what was possible when the right people come together with a shared goal. Within six months, Eugene had a direct flight to San Jose, connecting Lane County to Silicon Valley. High speed internet rolled out in the corridor within nine months. The University of Oregon changed their entire computer science curriculum; whereas tech companies had complained about the dearth of local tech talent, two years later they were vying to hire graduates. These tangible, high-impact achievements gave the group traction, momentum and inspired the region to launch four additional partnerships using the same model.

MECHANISMS FOR CHANGE: BUILDING TRUST AND SHARED GOALS

None of Lane County's five sector partnerships started from a blank slate. In every industry, there were a range of efforts underway run by community colleges, industry associations, Chambers of Commerce and others. That's why it was critical to be clear from the outset about what these partnerships are and are not. They are a tool to organize around collective goals, not a new program or initiative. They are a platform to leverage work underway, not a replacement for existing efforts. They are a mechanism to connect business leaders to one another and to the public sector, not an isolated strategy. As Mitra Gruwell, champion of the creative industries sector partnership said, "It's not about competition, it's about amplification. We are amplifiers of other work other organizations are doing and we fill in the gaps. There's a place for everyone to contribute."

This vision required creating a formal mechanism to connect partners and solve problems collaboratively. Lane Workforce Partnership established the Lane County Sector Strategy Team as a platform to connect partners and industry champions. This group met quarterly with over 40 people in attendance including Strategists from each sector partnership, local economic developers, City and County leaders, workforce development and community colleges. It provided a platform to help the regional team solve problems, build relationships and trust, and report out on accomplishments of each of its sector partnerships. The Sector Strategy Team had its own brand and identity reflecting the many partners who contribute to sector partnership successes. This allowed them to share credit for partnership wins and reinforce a sense of shared ownership.

Through the COVID-19 pandemic, when meeting in large groups became difficult, the Sector Strategy Team evolved into a smaller "Community Collaborative." It brought together key partners from the region's economic and workforce development organizations along with each of the Sector Strategists, providing a regular forum to keep partners connected and aligned through the pandemic. The meetings provide an opportunity to share about efforts underway and, more importantly, to identify synergies and potential for collaboration.



The Lane County team has also been intentional about staffing sector partnerships, balancing the need for consistent, high-quality staffing with the need for shared ownership and investment. The team strives to provide each partnership with a dedicated staff person—or Strategist—responsible for facilitating partnership activities and engaging business leaders and public partners. They have been careful to ensure that Strategists bring the right skill set, focused on relationship-building, motivating others, delegating, and driving progress without prescribing the agenda. Strategists are employed by different organizations but funding for their positions is a collaborative effort. In the first two years, Strategists are supported by public funds from the workforce board and other public partners with the expectation that financial support transitions to industry in the third year. This ensures that no single partner shoulder the load of supporting a partnership independently.

The food and beverage sector partnership, for example, initially relied on a contracted Strategist to support the partnership. After two years, the partnership evolved into Eugene's Table, an association with dues-paying members and community partners that is financially sustainable. Micah Elconin, the Food and Beverage Industry Strategist describes his role as, "The [industry's] biggest fan, the catalyst, the instigator."



"It's not about report outs. It's about action. It's, 'Here are the things I'm working on. Who can support and where?'"

- ASHLEY ESPINOZA, DIRECTOR OF SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS,
LANE COUNTY WORKFORCE PARTNERSHIP





MOMENTS OF TRANSFORMATION: A COMMITMENT TO GETTING THINGS DONE

When the first Next Gen Sector Partnership launched in the tech sector, there was healthy skepticism among both business leaders and public partners that this would be different. They had been part of convenings and county-wide initiatives before, many of which fizzled out over time. Kristina Payne, Director of Lane Workforce Partnership, insisted this would be different. First and foremost, it would be about getting things done. And it would be a team effort.

Payne enlisted the support of Todd Edman, CEO at the time Lunar Logic, who championed the tech sector partnership in the early days. Todd called his peers in the industry to invite them to the launch meeting and said, "This will be different. We will get things done. And if we don't see outcomes, I promise I will never ask you to come to another meeting again."

With that call to action and a commitment to working differently, the team did achieve outcomes. But, crucially, those wins were reported as collaborative achievements. The direct flight to San Jose? The Chamber played a critical role in negotiating that. Installation of fiber in downtown Eugene? The Council of Governments led that effort.



"We didn't stand up and go, 'Look what we've done for you.' We pointed out all the people who helped. This is *your thing*. That's why it's different -- and better -- than how we've worked before."

**-KRISTINA PAYNE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
LANE WORKFORCE PARTNERSHIP**



MEASURABLE RESULTS: SHARING SUCCESS

Lane County has made a concerted effort to document and track results from each sector partnership as well as from collaborative, cross-sector efforts that emerged from individual sector partnerships. Sharing these successes helps to reinforce a sense of momentum and strengthen commitment to leveraging partnerships as vehicles for accomplishing big, community-wide goals.

Results include:

- The Construction Aggregate partnership helped to create a new Trades Skills Fundamentals curriculum that introduces basic construction concepts in ten accredited modules. The curriculum has been adopted by all 16 Lane County School Districts as well as Lane Community College as the construction starter course.
- In 2021, the Tech Sector Partnership, together with Lane Workforce Partnership, launched a six-week cultural intelligence workshop focused on unconscious bias, inclusive leadership, and developing cultural intelligence in the workplace. While this effort was initiated within the tech sector, it ultimately engaged HR directors and others with hiring authority across a variety of sectors in Lane County. After a successful first cohort, registration is now open for a second group. The goal is to build a critical mass of HR professionals and hiring managers committed to pushing for changes in hiring practices in a systematic way. The partnership is exploring establishing a People Community that would drive these offerings, developing innovative solutions to push for more diverse, inclusive workplaces.
- The Tech Sector Partnership forged strategic partnerships with the University of Oregon for industry-led experiential learning, internships, networking and events to build a strong local talent pipeline into the tech industry. It has also held annual Hackathons for civic good ("Hack for a Cause" and "Sprint4Oregon") since 2015.
- Through the Construction Aggregate partnership, eight Lane County construction companies along with McKenzie School District students worked together to build fifteen sheds to replace structures destroyed in the Holiday Farm Fire. Each of the participating companies volunteered crews to work side by side with the students to offer mentoring and support as they learned valuable construction skills.
- The Food and Beverage Manufacturing Partnership has raised the profile of the industry through events that showcase local food and beverage companies. Eugene now hosts Startup Weekend Food, the first event of its kind on the West Coast. Eugene is also now home to two national wine conferences: the Wine Marketing & Tourism Conference and the Wine Media Conference.

MEASURABLE RESULTS: CONTINUED

- The Food and Beverage Manufacturing Partnership has helped build relevant education and training programs in the region; Lundquist College of Business launched undergraduate and graduate level Business of Food course and the University of Oregon Food Studies Program started to offer an undergraduate minor and graduate-level certificate. The Partnership also launched the first Growing People program in Lane county, training 11 professionals from seven food and beverage manufacturing companies who are aspiring industry leaders.
- In the initial weeks and months of the COVID-19 pandemic, many of the largest sectors in the region laid off workers just as wood products experienced a surge in demand and workforce needs. The Wood Products Partnership mobilized to identify dislocated workers in industries affected by the pandemic and connected candidates to opportunities in wood products.
- All five sector partnerships shared a goal of elevating the profile of their industry in Lane County. They came together to develop a marketing campaign in the Eugene airport, showcasing the World Class Industries in Eugene. This campaign shined a high-profile light on Lane County's industry sectors, job opportunities in those industries, as well as the connections to the local community.
- The Creative Sector Partnership has shined a light on an industry that can sometimes fly below the radar. By defining the industry and quantifying its impact on the region, the partnership has helped to elevate the importance of creative industries to the region and the economy. They have also gained a more comprehensive understanding of artists' needs by collaborating with multiple arts organizations to launch a collaborative artists survey. The survey was distributed using pre-existing networks of each supporting organization. Within six weeks, they had over 70 respondents—a level that no organization had been able to achieve independently—and a much better handle on what artists needed. After publishing the results, arts organizations used it as the basis for their programming going forward, aligning with artists' needs.

MAJOR INGREDIENTS FOR SUCCESS: BUILDING MORALE, BUILDING TRUST

While each Sector Partnership is led by teams of champions and supported by a Strategist, Lane Workforce Partnership plays a critical role in supporting all five partnerships. The Sector Strategy Director plays an especially important role in facilitating collaboration and driving toward progress and results. Ashley Espinoza, who has held this role since 2018, regularly convenes the Strategists to share what they're learning, troubleshoot together, and explore opportunities to collaborate across sectors. She also facilitates the Community Collaborative meetings, bringing public partners together to share resources and helping to facilitate connections across organizations or systems. "I don't lead anything," Espinoza says. "I make sure everyone is equipped with what they need to do the work they know best how to do."

Espinoza understands that the single most important factor in getting groups of people to work together is trust. When a group has the experience of accomplishing something tangible together, they develop confidence in one another. Trust builds, and so does their capacity to solve big problems together. In contrast, nothing erodes trust like failure to deliver on a commitment. Espinoza's role is a backstop for the regional team. She helps ensure that partners follow through on commitments so that the group moves forward. "When someone says, 'I'll do this,' I reach out to make sure they're supported, and they have what they need so they don't under-perform. That way, they build confidence in themselves and the team."

Espinoza also plays an important role in reinforcing the norms and values behind effective sector partnerships. She helps emphasize the importance of keeping the voice of industry at the fore, engaging partners collaboratively and sharing credit. She also helps keep the focus on the big picture: a stronger community.

Ultimately it's these shared values that underpin Lane County's success. The team has been purposeful about finding the right "civic entrepreneurs" to drive sector partnerships. Whether they work for an industry association, a public entity or a community-based organization, the focus is on prioritizing the health of the sector and the community first. "We're trying to get away from the attitude that you either fit or you don't. It's not about the structure or the organization you represent. It's the attitude you bring and the way you show up that's the deciding factor," says Espinoza.

LOOKING FORWARD: SUSTAINING & LAUNCHING NEW PARTNERSHIPS IN NEW SECTORS

With five partnerships up and running, Lane County had learned what it takes to build a sustainable infrastructure that supports each sector's unique needs while leveraging synergies across them. They have plans to launch additional partnerships, targeting four additional industry sectors critical to their region's economy: biosciences, health care, advanced manufacturing, and transportation, distribution and logistics. They also hope to further bolster the region's collaborative capacity, investing in the systems that will help them sustain each partnership while realizing synergies across them.

Lane County continues to pave new ground in defining what it takes to sustain multiple partnerships targeting most—or all—of the driving sectors of the regional economy. They will continue to balance the need to customize their approach to the unique needs of each sector while staying true to a core set of values that are shared across the board: industry leadership, community support, and a commitment to getting things done, collaboratively.



MORE FROM THE 2022 SERIES:

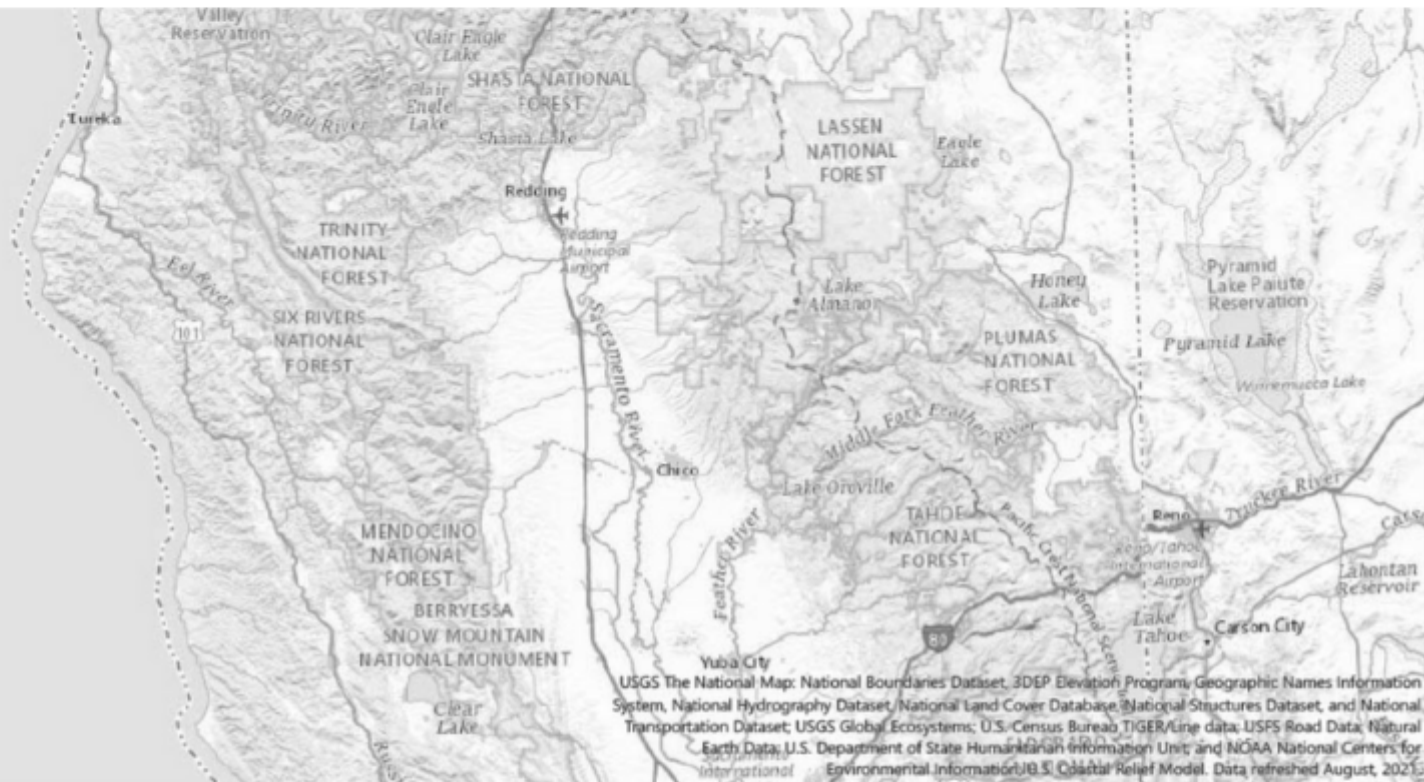
- *North State Sector Partnerships*
- *Cape Fear Manufacturing Partnership*

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The Benchmarking Project is made possible thanks to generous support from Ascendium Education Group.

PROFILING THE SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS OF THE NORTH STATE

A Project of the Institute for Networked Communities



SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS OF THE NORTH STATE

By: Lindsey Woolsey

This case study is one in a series of profiles of Next Generation Sector Partnerships operating across the country. Its primary purpose is to give practitioners insights into the key milestones and critical ingredients for success that have shaped the industry sector partnership journey of the North State region, the 11 rural counties of Northern California. The intended audience for this series is the diverse mix of business, education, workforce development, and economic development leaders who are committed to the work of taking their communities to a new level of shared prosperity. The profile is organized into six sections: motivations for launch, mechanisms for change, moments of transformation, measurable results, major ingredients for success, and the future of industry sector partnerships in Northern California.

WHAT'S INSIDE:

- *About the North State*
- *Motivations for Launch*
- *Mechanisms for Change*
- *Moments of Transformation*
- *Measurable Results*
- *Ingredients for Success*
- *Future of the Partnership*



ABOUT THE NORTH STATE

The vast region of northern California, often called the North State, encompasses arguably some of the most majestic landscapes in the country. It's eleven counties include Butte, Del Norte, Lassen, Modoc, Nevada, Plumas, Shasta, Sierra, Siskiyou, Tehama, and Trinity. For those who live there or have visited, they know it's a combination of stunning Sierra Nevada mountains, clear rivers and lakes, rich agricultural land and small rural towns scattered between it's more urban hubs of Redding and Chico.

Perhaps not as obvious are the economic engines behind the vistas, brew pubs and ski destinations. The North State's economy no longer relies on just traditional industries like agriculture and timber; it is fueled by a mix of high tech, manufacturing and healthcare jobs. Typical of rural economies, one of the biggest challenges for businesses in any sector is finding and retaining an adequate workforce. In some places there just simply are not enough people; in others there's a mismatch between open jobs and available skill sets. There's also a lot of misinformation and reliance on outdated information about what jobs exist and the real skill sets and education pathways needed to get them.

It's in this context that the region's workforce development board, the Northern Rural Training and Employment Consortium (NoRTEC) began an experiment with regional industry partnerships, borrowing pages from the Next Gen Sector Partnership playbook. Since 2016 NoRTEC has been the catalyst for the launch and implementation of six distinct collaborations in the following industries: Manufacturing, Digital Media, Technology, Healthcare and Tourism. Each is a unique partnership of businesses, from the same industry and in a shared labor market region, who work with economic development, education, workforce development, and community organizations to address the overall competitiveness needs of the targeted industry. By addressing business-driven priorities, their Next Gen Industry Partnerships not only support the overall competitiveness of an industry and regional economy, but also benefit workers, students, and the broader community.



MOTIVATIONS FOR LAUNCH: REGIONALISM AND RESOURCES

For many years NoRTEC was known nationally for its ability as a rural workforce board to leverage federal, state and philanthropic dollars for workforce training programs. But in 2016 when then new Executive Director Michael Cross came on board, he realized that leveraging grants was a small part of a bigger opportunity. Perhaps more urgent than in urban areas, regions like the North State have fewer organizations and institutions to rely on for education, training and community connections.

It's therefore even more important to sync up, connect and leverage the organizational resources that do exist, especially across organizations trying to understand, stabilize and grow the region's economic sectors and appropriately train a workforce. The costs of fragmented and duplicative efforts were too high. But coordination, like in most regions, does not come naturally. After attending a U.S. Department of Labor conference focused on best practices in sector partnerships and participating in a California Workforce Development Board initiative (known as Slingshot) that emphasized a coordinated approach to education and training, Michael Cross wasted no time getting organized back home around the region's top economic sectors. He had two goals in mind: first, promoting regionalism and coordination instead of siloed programmatic or county-specific approaches; and second, the purposeful knitting together of regional institutions and their resources behind shared and critical jobs sectors.

The timing was perfect for this pivot. In a similar timeframe a passionate and fierce advocate for young people and for his own industry, Bill Gaines of Transfer Flow, Inc (a fuel tank manufacturer in Chico) had recruited a small handful of other manufacturing executives to convince multiple school districts to adopt CAD-4 and other manufacturing-related curriculum for high school students. Working with NoRTEC and others he also spearheaded the creation of a Manufacturing Directory. This was a critical first step to connecting manufacturers in the region who otherwise kept their heads down and noses to the grindstone. Transitioning these early wins into a more formal and organized, industry-led manufacturing sector partnership was the next step.

MECHANISMS FOR CHANGE: EARLY INDUSTRY LEADERSHIP AND A NEW MODEL

Getting organized would require securing buy-in from stakeholders around a common model for business engagement. For NoRTEC and its education and training partners the Next Gen Sector Partnership model rose to the top for three reasons. The model requires:

- Industry and business leaders to step in more to jointly solve their most pressing issues, especially those as complex and urgent as workforce needs;
- Public and education partners to sync up and coordinate around common goals, driven by the needs of target industries to stabilize and thrive; and
- Convener entities to be willing to act as neutral brokers and to act beyond business-as-usual roles so that both business and support partners' expertise and value-add is identified and maximized.

Using existing state funds, NoRTEC set to work by first covering the costs of over one hundred stakeholders from across the eleven counties from workforce development, independent school districts, community colleges, universities, economic development organizations and community-based organizations to attend a full day training. The training went into depth on the what, why and how of industry sector partnerships, and set a clear expectation that for the North State the preferred model would not be traditional sectoral training initiatives, but instead a hybrid of economic cluster partnerships and strong employer-driven workforce training initiatives. This is a hallmark of the Next Gen model.

Coming out of the training, participants were given an open invitation to assemble proposals to organize Next Gen style industry partnerships. They would have to justify their selected target industry, proving it provided significant numbers of jobs, was a diverse cluster of small, medium, large and anchor institutions, and held opportunities for employee advancement. They would also need to identify actual companies and executives in their target industry and provide a reasonable geographic focus that reflected the industry's true labor market region and that also stretched across traditional service areas of colleges, schools, or economic development districts.

Finally, applicants would need to demonstrate an ability to neutrally facilitate and build an industry partnership, requiring the ability to build trust across public partners who may otherwise compete for the time and attention of business and industry. This anywhere is a tall order. For those willing, a grant would be provided to subsidize the administrative and staffing costs. The amount nominal, with the expectation that the home organization would match and repurpose staff appropriately to support this work. Only a handful would be awarded, quality over quantity.



"Our complex workforce, and economic situation calls for innovation and integration – our workforce system partners must partner with state, regional, and local workforce stakeholders to explore challenges and opportunities, develop actionable strategies, and improve how we deliver services to meet the needs of our critical industries."

- MICHAEL CROSS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
NORTEC



MOMENTS OF TRANSFORMATION: CROSS SYSTEM COLLABORATION AND THE NORTH STATE'S FIRST OFFICIAL PARTNERSHIP

While conducting training on a shared model of industry partnerships and launching a competitive process for their set up and convening, NoRTEC also moved along two other tracks, one that focused on cross-system relationship building and one that quickly got a prototype of an industry partnership officially off the ground.

First reaching out and setting expectations that the industry partnerships would be shared with the region's two community colleges and larger economic development entities. The vision was, and remains, that the North State's industry partnerships become a vehicle for multiple education, training and economic development systems to partner with companies within the partnerships. This deliberately reduces the common death by a thousand cuts phenomenon often experienced by businesses when public partners independently engage with them. It also nudges much needed coordination by education and training institutions who often go it alone when seeking private sector advisors to curriculum and credentials. The work of relationship building across workforce development, education and economic development is an ongoing and major focus of NoRTEC still today. It is foundational to the success of their shared industry partnerships.

Second, formalizing the initial work spearheaded by Transfer Flow into a formal industry partnership, the Butte County Grow Manufacturing Initiative (GMI), thus creating a prototype for the North State's industry partnership model. Building on the traction gained by the existing manufacturing directory and a small emerging coalition of other manufacturing executives joining forces with Transfer Flow, an official steering committee launched.

The Butte County GMI thus became the North State's first official Industry Partnership. Their Directory became a connection point for manufacturers to strengthen a locally-based supply chain. Their initial partnerships with high schools evolved into a major focus on connecting middle and high school students to real world experience and onto STEM education and engineering pathways. Today this means companies like Airspray, Lundberg Farms, Coe Equipment, Sel-tek and Safe Path, among others, collaborate on classroom presentations, student events, job shadowing opportunities, internships, scholarships, mentorships, manufacturing plant tours, job fairs, mini-Makers fairs and an annual Grow Manufacturing Expo that draws over 2,500 students from regional schools.

MEASURABLE RESULTS: FROM PROOF OF CONCEPT TO A WAY OF OPERATING

Between 2017-2021, five additional industry partnerships launched, each following a similar set of steps to each other, closely aligned to the Next Gen sector partnership model, but with unique areas of focus and outcomes based on the target industry and specific geography. Today these five partnerships continue.

They continue despite the COVID pandemic, which closed schools, shuttered businesses and like every region across the globe affected livelihoods and economic activity in unprecedented ways. Unlike most of the world however, the North State was dealing with another massive crisis during the same time, record-breaking wildfires, one after another. Still not recovered from the previously unmatched Camp Fire of 2018, which combined with co-occurring fires burnt 1.6 million acres, the North State's next few years brought more. The co-occurring Dixie, River Complex, Monument, Antelope, Beckworth Complex and McFarland fires of late summer 2021 burnt a combined 2 million acres, an area equivalent to 2/3 of Connecticut, including residential and commercial structures, farm and wild lands.

In these conditions, re-building quickly became the number one priority. The Construction sector steadily grew, the manufacturing sector also made a comeback. The tech sector pivoted more completely to a virtual workforce. The tourism sector, despite fire damage, had unprecedented upticks due to city dwellers temporarily migrating to the outdoorsy environs of the North State. Healthcare continued to struggle amidst pandemic staffing shortages, revenue losses and overwhelmed providers. Like healthcare, overall, every sector faced an unprecedented massive worker shortage. Already suffering typical workforce issues of a rural area, the fire forced many families out of the region. Many have not returned. It is in these conditions that the North State's industry partnerships not only have sustained, they play a critical role.



MEASURABLE RESULTS: CONTINUED

In addition to the Butte County GMI, the North State is home to:

- The Shasta Grow Manufacturing Initiative, self-organized into three committees: Customized training, which aggregates needed incumbent worker training needs of manufacturers and match-makes with training programs; Shared workforce recruitment, resulting in shared marketing videos and outreach to schools about manufacturing careers; and Educational Pathways, an ongoing effort to identify career exposure and education programs at the K-12 and post-secondary institutions that lead to manufacturing careers. Companies like Sierra Pacific Industries, Southern Aluminum Finishing, McHale Signs, Knauf and Maas collaborate and drive the committee work.



- GrowTECH, operated by Chicostart, that brings tech businesses and tech entrepreneurs together in the Chico area to collaborate on industry events, network and share best practices on business innovations. They also partner directly with California State University – Chico to create open-source libraries with students, create project-based learning programs, offer internships and direct job matching with CSUC students and grads.



There's a lot of collaboration that can happen if you're introduced to other manufacturers in the area, and Shasta GMI provides that opportunity.

- SAM HEIER, GM
SOUTHERN ALUMINUM FINISHING CO INC



- The Nevada County Tech Connection (NCTECH), convened by the Nevada County Economic Resource Center, is a partnership of tech-based manufacturers (like ZAP Manufacturing and Electrical Design Technology) tech start-ups, and tech companies (like Red8Interactive, ClientWorks and Autometrix) who come together to innovate, create and problem solve for their industry and region. They design and operate tech education programs, VR/AR workshops, and business networking events.
- The Rural Healthcare Collaborative, a combined set of initiatives that have come together into a shared partnership serving five large counties (Modoc, Lassen, Plumas, Shasta and Siskiyou). The Collaborative is key to aggregating shared workforce needs across very rural hospitals (like Dignity Health Northstate), community clinics (like Shasta Community Health Center and Hill Country Medical Clinics) and even the healthcare divisions of large prisons in the region. It is also key to brokering relationships with the regions' workforce training and community college programs that otherwise do not have clear pictures of shifting workforce needs.
- An emerging tourism and outdoor experience partnership, convened by the Siskiyou Economic Development Council but covering a huge geography into Southern Oregon and a diverse set of industry partners (like regional arts councils, legacy byways, national forest offices, tourism associations, visitors bureaus, and outdoor recreation alliances). This partnership collaborates across them all for shared marketing, destination development, visitor services and shared stewardship.



MAJOR INGREDIENTS FOR SUCCESS: LETTING LEADERS STEP IN, SUPPORTING THE RIGHT WORK

Among what could be a playbook of success criteria for the North State, a few stand out. NoRTEC's constant relationship building with regional economic development and education institutions is one. Because industry partnerships are not seen as initiatives, but as sustainable mechanisms by which the private sector can engage with each other and with public partners, both NoRTEC and the individual partnership conveners take seriously the work of understanding the value add and plugging in the resources of systems, institutions and programs otherwise operating in siloes. This work is constant, not a one-time endeavor. When staff turnover in systems and agencies, the work of onboarding new people to the value of plugging into the industry partnerships begins again. Often re-engaging partners who have fallen out of the loop is necessary too.

Another critical ingredient to success is no doubt the procurement of high quality and consistent staffing for each unique partnership. Starting with setting the right expectations in the competitive process for securing a credible convener for each industry partnership, the North State stands out in how they support their conveners to staff the partnerships effectively. One way is by providing some but not too much funding for quality staffing. In the Next Gen sector partnership world, the most effective partnerships require existing organizations to re-purpose staff to act as the coordinator and facilitator. This ensures that an organization sees this work as core to their mission, not as a grant initiative. Some funding to seed this however is important, especially for smaller organizations in rural areas.



"I don't think that more urban areas spend half the time that we do on relationship-building and nuanced understanding of the community. This work is twice the boulder to push and even more important in a rural community."

- ANDREA CAMPOS, DIRECTOR OF PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION, NORTEC



An adherence to a consistent model also matters, despite the fact that each industry partnership is highly unique in its outcomes and activities. Successful Next Gen sector partnerships depend on two mutually reinforcing elements: 1) coordinated staffing from the convener and public partner team; and 2) strategic and active industry leadership. Too much staffing can deter industry partners from truly owning the work and outcomes. Too little of the right work stream management, facilitation, communication and follow through by the convener can do the same. Getting the balance right is the secret to the model. In the North State, starting off with and adhering to a model that constantly seeks this balance has been important to their success.

Finally, the role of NoRTEC itself is no doubt a reason for the sustainability of the North State's industry partnerships. Constantly keeping a finger on the pulse of engagement and operations of each partnership, acting as a central hub for peer sharing among conveners and partners, staying organized and opportunistic on activities and outcomes that can be shared across the partnerships, and helping partnerships troubleshoot when needed. These in addition to being the source for consistent information on jobs and regional needs, for example Occupational Outlook reports on critical industries, or special reports on the effects of COVID-19 on job demand, are all roles that for the past five years NoRTEC has played.



THE FUTURE OF NORTH STATE SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS

The North State has no doubt broken ground on what it takes to organize around the needs of its top employment sectors and on behalf of the people who need quality jobs in their communities. But by no means do they see the work as done.

Decisions about better mechanisms and approaches are always in play. For example, a third Grow Manufacturing Initiative, inspired by the Butte and Shasta GMIs, also launched in Sacramento, an area just outside the North State's geography. Important conversations are now underway about the most effective mechanisms for collaboration across the GMIs, which no doubt would require new staffing structures and assessments of regional definitions.

Regardless of the changes to be made, leadership at NoRTEC, the individual conveners and the business partners of their six industry partnerships appropriately view their collaboration as a long-haul strategy. They're open to the changes needed to be more effective, always with an eye toward the future.



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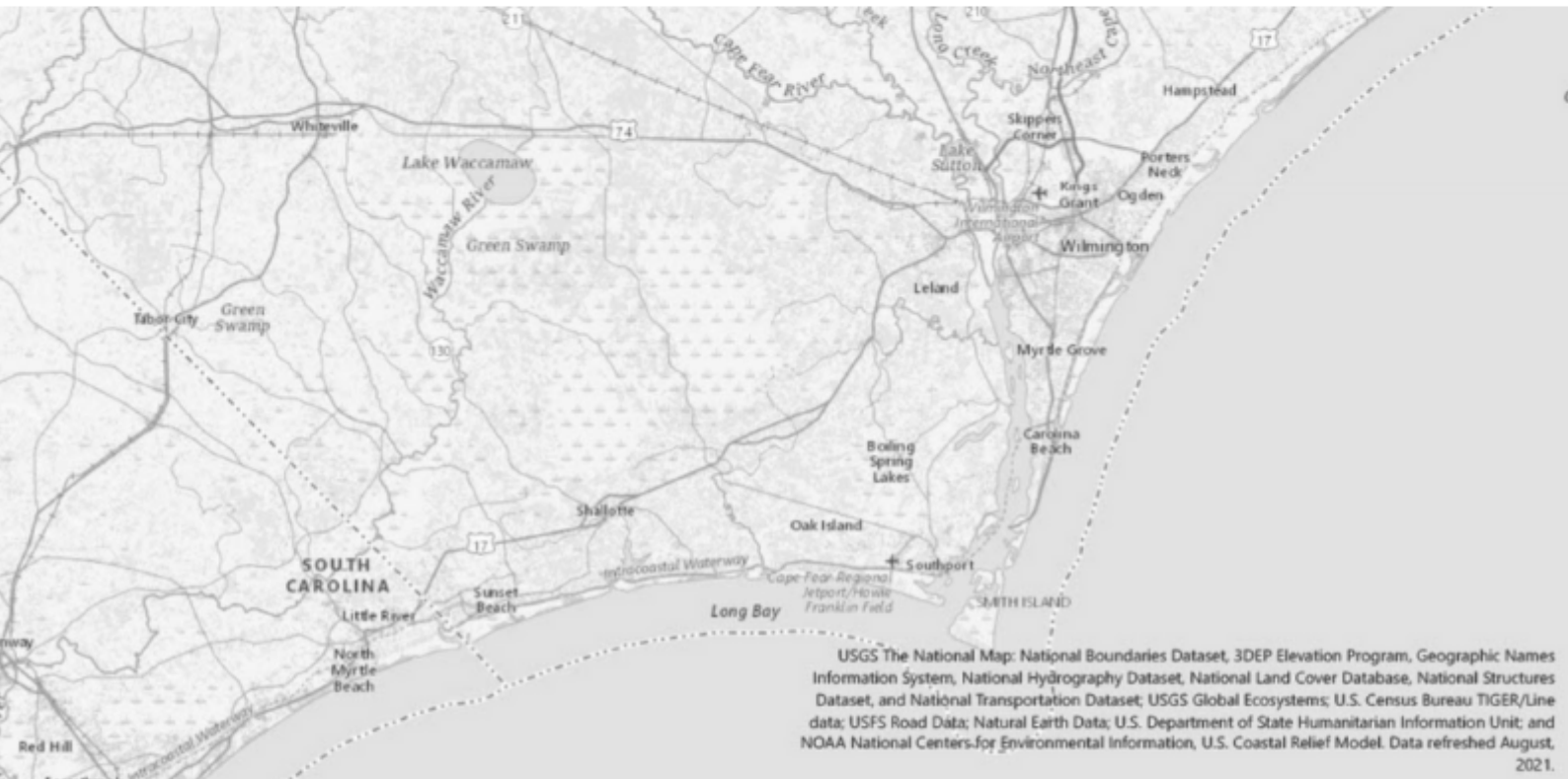
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PROFILING THE CAPE FEAR MANUFACTURING PARTNERSHIP

A Project of the Institute for Networked Communities



CAPE FEAR MANUFACTURING PARTNERSHIP

By: Francie Genz

This case study is one in a series of Next Generation Sector Partnerships profiles from across the country. Its primary purpose is to give practitioners insights into the key milestones and critical ingredients for success to-date that have shaped the journey of the Cape Fear Manufacturing Partnership. Its intended audience is the diverse mix of business, education, workforce development, and economic development leaders who are committed to the work of taking their communities to a new level of shared prosperity. The profile is organized into six sections: motivations for launch, mechanisms for change, moments of transformation, measurable results, major ingredients for success, and the future of the Cape Fear Manufacturing Partnership going forward.

WHAT'S INSIDE:

- *About Cape Fear Manufacturing Partnership*
- *Motivations for Launch*
- *Mechanisms for Change*
- *Moments of Transformation*
- *Measurable Results*
- *Future of the Partnership*



ABOUT THE CAPE FEAR MANUFACTURING PARTNERSHIP

The Cape Fear region of North Carolina, best known for its beaches and shoreline, is home to a small but growing manufacturing sector. Although manufacturing accounts for fewer jobs than sectors like hospitality and tourism, it has grown steadily in recent years and offers higher-than-average wages. The region has also recently attracted new manufacturing companies, with recent announcements bringing 350 jobs and millions in investments to the region.

In the summer of 2020, the State of North Carolina invited regional teams from around the state to apply for technical assistance to support the development of industry-driven Next Gen Sector Partnerships. Cape Fear was one of the regions that applied, seeking a new way to engage businesses in the manufacturing sector.

It was time to experiment with a new approach. About three months into the COVID-19 pandemic, it was clear that business as usual wouldn't be returning anytime soon. Public partners were eager to respond to the rapidly changed economy, helping put people back to work and helping get businesses on stronger footing. But the region lacked a mechanism to understand industry needs in real time and to coordinate efforts across education, workforce development and economic development. The Next Gen model addressed both goals—and to define what a partnership would look like in a virtual, post-COVID world.

Over a year later, the Cape Fear Manufacturing Partnership is now a vibrant network of manufacturers and public partners working to elevate the region's manufacturing industry. The Partnership is organizing to change the perception of manufacturing careers, build a workforce pipeline into good jobs and connect business leaders to one another to foster innovation and competitiveness. Despite launching in the early months of the pandemic and only recently shifting to in-person meetings, the Partnership has fostered meaningful relationships among manufacturers and across education, workforce and economic development partners in the region. It has provided a focal point to amplify and accelerate the impact of manufacturing on the region's economy and community.



MOTIVATIONS FOR LAUNCH: AN INDUSTRY WITH UNTAPPED POTENTIAL

The Cape Fear region has long been known as a destination for tourists. Its hospitality and tourism industry accounts for a significant share of overall employment. But the manufacturing industry has been a steady—and growing—source of jobs in the region. When the team gathered to make decisions about what industry sector to target in forming a Next Gen Sector Partnership, economic developers had been actively cultivating the manufacturing base. They had recently announced two major expansions, bringing over 350 jobs and significant investment to the region. The manufacturing industry represented an opportunity both to grow good jobs in the region and to diversify, shoring up an economic driver less susceptible to economic fluctuations than hospitality and tourism.

At the time the sector partnership launched, there was no shortage of efforts to engage with and support the manufacturing industry. Like most regions, Cape Fear was home to multiple community colleges that operated advisory boards for each of its manufacturing-related programs. Likewise, the region's Chambers of Commerce and economic developers were also actively engaged in working with manufacturers to understand and respond to their needs. Further, the workforce development board had also been engaged in career pathway development to build a talent pipeline into the industry. When the team applied to receive coaching to develop a Next Gen Sector Partnership they reflected, "Although public partners in our region often work together to assist businesses, 'program push' has been at the heart of working with businesses. A Next Gen Sector Partnership will afford partners the opportunity to use 'industry pull' to truly get to the underlying factors affecting success of an industry in our region."

The Partnership launched with three organizations sharing the convening role. This was a critical decision that helped to position the partnership squarely as a collaborative regional effort, not an initiative driven by a single organization. Erin Easton, with the Workforce Development Board, Cliff Pyron, with Wilmington Economic Development and Kevin Lackey with Brunswick County Economic Development, shared the convening role, helping to identify and recruit initial industry champions. The Partnership launched virtually with an initial 16 manufacturers in attendance. Since then, it has continued to expand.

— “ —
"This partnership has given manufacturers a purpose in their community, beyond what they're making in their companies."

- GINGER BRICK, DIRECTOR
CAPE FEAR WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD

MECHANISMS FOR CHANGE: FINDING AND PROJECTING A COLLECTIVE VOICE

The manufacturing sector in Cape Fear is diverse. Companies manufacture products ranging from aerospace parts to smoked fish, guitars and grills. They vary in size from less than 25 employees to hundreds. As a result, before the partnership launched, it was not obvious what common challenges these companies faced or whether they would find value in coming together in the first place.

From the first launch meeting in the fall of 2020, however, the partnership helped manufacturers discover their common ground. Regardless of the size of the company or the products produced, manufacturers were equally affected by the public's perception of the industry as a dirty, dangerous, and poorly paid career field. They all shared the challenge of attracting and recruiting skilled talent in this environment, without strong pipelines into the industry. "When we got together in our initial sessions, we all realized we face similar obstacles. That's when I realized, 'I'm not alone in this.' If we can do something together, we'll have a much bigger voice," said Jim Flock, General Manager of HSM Machine Works and one of the early champions of the sector partnership.

The Partnership quickly organized around two action teams, both aimed at growing the pool of talent interested and prepared for careers in manufacturing. The first focused on aligning talent supply and demand in the region, defining career pathways in the industry, and working with educators to align program to those pathways. The second focused on elevating the image of the industry, partnering with K-12 schools to expose students to careers in manufacturing and generate excitement about the opportunities the industry offered.

Neither of these strategies were entirely new. Companies had weighed in on community college and K-12 curriculum for years via advisory boards. They had also been involved with student tours and career days on an ad hoc basis. This time, however, the scale and breadth of engagement was different. Speaking with a collective voice across companies, they garnered greater attention and were therefore about to affect change at a larger scale. "We're a 20-person shop," said Jim Flock. "But together with Mojo Tone and General Electric, Corning. All of a sudden, we have a lot bigger voice. As soon as we started to project that voice, we could see the enthusiasm of public partners."



MOMENTS OF TRANSFORMATION: PUBLIC PARTNERS LEANING IN

The public partner team, led by the co-conveners at Workforce and Economic Development, operated with two principles in mind. On the one hand, they were committed to ensuring the partnership was authentically owned and driven by industry leaders. They were careful not to overstep or over-staff, providing just the right level of facilitation and support to give the business leaders confidence that the partnership would get things done. "This isn't our thing," repeated Erin Easton, one of the co-conveners of the partnership, as she spoke with business leaders. "It's yours."

At the same time, the team also understood the importance of being responsive to the partnership, moving quickly on priorities that emerged from the teams of manufacturers and working creatively to develop solutions together. This willingness to lean in and follow through had the effect of building manufacturers' momentum and enthusiasm. They sensed that public partners were eager and willing to take their ideas and put them into practice and, therefore, were more willing to contribute themselves.

One of the first major wins of the partnership, for example, was creating a new Certified Production Technician program at a local community college. This program emerged out of a collaborative discussion with the manufacturers and a team of leaders from three community colleges in the region. Coming out of the discussion, it was clear that a Manufacturing Production Technician program would help to address the most significant gaps among entry-level candidates. Cape Fear Community College committed to developing a non-credit program based on the criteria the manufacturers had developed. The Manufacturing Production Technician program is now underway, with companies committed to interviewing candidates that complete the program.

MOMENTS OF TRANSFORMATION: CONTINUED

The partnership experienced a key transition when the lead staff person convening the partnership at the Workforce Board, Erin Easton, transitioned to a new job at Cape Fear Community College. This transition tested the staying power of the partnership. It required public partners to reassess their roles and reorganize to maintain support. Erin Easton continued to serve as co-convenor in her new job at the College, working alongside with her partners at Wilmington and Brunswick economic development as well as the Cape Fear Workforce Development Board. The partnership emerged stronger with renewed commitments to seeing it through as a collaborative regional effort, not just an initiative driven by a single organization.

MEASURABLE RESULTS

After only a year the Cape Fear Manufacturing Partnership has already generated results for the industry and for the region as a whole. (This is all the more significant considering that the partnership's first year coincided with the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic).

In the fall of 2021, the partnership held a series of activities for Manufacturing Day, reaching more students and companies than ever before. The Partnership organized an event in collaboration with Cape Fear Community College that brought together over 300 people and 30 manufacturing companies, displaying their products, doing presentations and showcasing the work that they do. They also held an event at Brunswick Community College to showcase manufacturing careers and relevant programming at the college. Both events resulted in immediate positive feedback, with new inquiries about manufacturing programs and jobs at members companies.

The new Production Technician program also represents a significant expansion of training capacity in the region. No similar program existed in the region prior and this will be the first time that manufacturers have worked together to define a common set of needed skills and competencies. Similarly, the partnership has created a K-12 team tasked with forming partnerships with school districts in each of the region's four counties. Task force members work to get on school calendars with guest speakers, tours and to join advisory boards, "adopting" school districts to embed a manufacturing presence in the schools.



LOOKING FORWARD: FORMALIZATION AND CONTINUED MOMENTUM

The Cape Fear Manufacturing Partnership has a long list of ambitions going into 2022. There are plans in the works to create a promotional video on Cape Fear manufacturing designed to drive interest in the industry and to showcase the breadth of opportunities in the region. The video will be used at open houses and at career days in the high schools. They are also exploring ways to foster stronger connections among businesses. In addition to networking and creative problem-solving that has emerged organically from the partnership, they are considering leveraging shared buying power to create insurance programs to help smaller companies or sharing freight costs across companies.

In addition, the Partnership is exploring different organizational structures to support its ongoing activities. The leadership team is evaluating whether incorporating as a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization would give it greater clout and leverage. They are also exploring the possibility of creating a dues structure to formalize member roles. These organizational questions will be answered through the same lens that launched the partnership initially: will it contribute to industry ownership and collaboration across public partners? And will it benefit the manufacturing industry as a pillar of a strong and healthy regional economy?

Although the Cape Fear Manufacturing Partnership is just getting started, its wins so far have demonstrated that when the right leaders come together with a common set of challenges and a willingness to be a part of the solution, big things can happen.

“We get very compartmentalized. I've gotten into a mindset that our problems are our problems and we have to fix them ourselves. I see now that's not the case. There's a lot of good in a collective approach. We have to have that cooperation.” - **Jim Flock**
HSM MACHINE WORKS, INC

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- *North State Sector Partnerships*
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