

MEETING NOTES: Project GAIN

Heartland United Way

Monday, April 6, 2015

Attendance: *Jennifer Worthington, Rob Winter, Thomas Walker, Jr., Robin Dexter, Don Smith, Cindy Johnson, Dave Taylor, John Hoggatt, Audrey Lutz & Karen Rathke*

- The model was inspired by the Essential skills Demanded by Great Employers (EDGE) program in Battle Creek, Michigan.
- The question is, what would this program look like if we replicated it in Grand Island?
- EDGE targeted those at 200% of the poverty level and those with children. They screened applicants based on the applicants employers want.
- Different cycles of EDGE have focused on different emphases.
- The question is, how do you sustain someone's lifestyle while educating them if they aren't working? Grant dollars would be recruited for this purpose.
- This model comes from a business world perspective combined with the organizational capacity to train workforce skills.
- EDGE utilized their financial behavior center, community college and case management services.
- EDGE's key component is "Every day, you have to be perfect."
- The United Way staff brainstormed GAIN as the acronym which stands for Grow Accomplished Individuals for Nebraska. This name isn't permanent yet.
- United Way comes to the table with potential training available for the soft skills. It is a component of the bigger picture.
- The model can be read from left to right, if you are thinking about an individual stepping out of poverty. Or, it can be read right to left, if you are an employer thinking about growing individuals for your workforce.
- It is a great sell to participants, if you can offer them a higher paying job at the end of their training.
- This program is similar to the welding expansion program. Associated Staffing took care of the paperwork, and it provided trained applicants with the exposure to companies. This suggestion is broader, as it is not just limited to welders.
- Another question is, how do you keep people engaged? In this model, they have the relationships, hands-on experience, the full work days spent in training and the incentive of having a higher paying job at the end.
- Transportation is a major barrier in our community. How does that factor into this plan?
 - With input from community conversations, United Way is advocating for a route that would pick-up/drop-off during the shift changes at major employers.
- For the duration of person's time in the program, the training is their job.
- We need to ask industry people what they need right now in terms of workers.
- We believe that the grant dollars will come for a program like this if we get the concept right. EDGE was funded by the Kellogg Foundation and the Annie Casey Foundation.

- We need to know how to best move the needle for people stuck in poverty. Grander Vision/Grow Grand Island is tracking data on median income, poverty and graduation rates. The question becomes, what is the most effective strategy to move the needle in these areas?
- With Howard Elementary, United Way worked with parents on financial education. Wells Fargo had initially agreed to do an IDA account match, but the agreement fell through. The participants were incentivized with gift cards instead.
- Common Good Forecaster: <http://apps.unitedway.org/forecaster/>
- We have limited resources as a community. We have to decide which program will have the most impact.
- We have to change life behaviors to have true impact.
- Which 50 participants do you choose? We have to find the most passionate people. The screening process will be critical. What if you have a person's network (e.g. family) participating too?
- It is about moving people out of entry level work—this could be employees currently without the skills to progress and make more money.
- Grow Grand Island is working to poll current employers. We know that: 1) businesses may only know about six months out what their needs are (possibly up to a year) and 2) businesses are building outside of Grand Island because they can't recruit the talent they need locally.
- The phases of the EDGE program could be replicated here: the first phase could meet the immediate needs of employers. Next phases could be about meeting future needs.
- It is about changing mindsets when people are ready. We have to meet people where they are at.
- We should look at building up one's social network, with their siblings and friends so that they have a good system to rely on.
- We need a culture shift towards achievement, and we need this shift to happen earlier than it currently is.
- We need data on the immediate needs of employers, with their future goals. Grow Grand Island will collect this data.
- We have the facilities: Career Pathway Institute could remain open in the evenings and College Park has classrooms for one-on-one case management.
- Next Steps:
 - We need to drill down on the educational opportunities in our area.
 - Discuss EDGE's successes with Ken from Battle Creek, Michigan.
 - Formally fold Project GAIN into Grow Grand Island. This will provide easier, quicker access to key game players.