



## **Defining the new landscape of workforce development - by Stacey Duncan**

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At the end of the day, workforce development is truly about the people. As leaders in defining the new workforce landscape, The Agency and the Greater Binghamton Chamber of Commerce through the Leadership Alliance are striving to bolster the workforce while simultaneously fostering a sustainable quality of life for all Broome County residents. Post COVID-19 workforce strategies especially will need to be viewed through a community focused lens tackling external barriers to workforce access and ascension such as transportation, housing, and childcare.

Creation of a successful comprehensive workforce development plan must also be a joint effort. The Broome Tioga Talent Task Force, created in 2017, brings together leaders from key industries, educational institutions, non-profits, and economic development organizations to tackle this issue of access within our community. 2020 saw the completion of the initial Strategic Workforce Action Plan as well as the introduction of new challenges to workforce that COVID-19 restrictions bring.

The first Broome County Workforce & Talent Attraction Strategic Action Plan covered the years 2017 through 2020 and was developed in response to two critical catalysts. The first was the introduction of over five hundred new jobs through the successful bid on the new Dick's Sporting Goods Warehouse in Kirkwood, NY, and the second was an amalgamation of anecdotal data seen across both The Agency's and the Chamber's networks that businesses needed help filling thousands of open positions with trained and skilled workers.

Upon the completion of the initial four years of a long-term vision to develop and promote a vibrant, healthy, and sustainable workforce for Broome's future, there were many successes to celebrate. The final Progress Report released September 2020 features the work of key community partners such as SUNY Broome, Broome-Tioga Workforce, the Greater Binghamton Education Outreach Program (GBEOP), the Tioga County Department of Economic Development and Planning, and more.

The strategic priorities were simple yet effective, to address urgent and immediate vacancies in critical industries, to address these shortages over the next 1-3 years, and to create a comprehensive career pathway program for grades K-12. Collaborative partnerships drove the success of several programs that satisfy these priorities, such as the cooperation between SUNY Broome and Broome-Tioga Workforce and their participating employers in the development of the Manufacturing Opportunity Impact Training program (OITP). The manufacturing branch of the OITP is the second of the series, following the initial warehouse OITP, and both iterations of the program afford participants with both on-the-job training experience and a position upon completion of the course.

Collaborative efforts on more community focused initiatives have proven successful, too. Tioga County's recent Child Care survey, for example, garnered nearly 300 responses from families across the region thanks to the partnerships between the Tioga County Department of Economic Development, the County Department of Social Services, Family Enrichment Network, and the school districts. Surveys with genuine community input such as these steer the direction of workforce development efforts and help direct the creation of new partnerships for better solutions.

As we continue to face the COVID-19 pandemic, it is clear that now more than ever, regional partnerships are critical to success. Collaboration between the diverse collection of business leaders, educators, non-profits that make up the Talent Task Force will help identify ongoing needs and concerns within the communities we aim to serve.

Going forward, the Broome Tioga Talent Task Force certainly has work to do to tackle the challenges brought on by COVID-19, however, the process has already begun. Now housed under GBEP, the Task Force has reconvened, and a new set of strategic priorities are being developed as community leaders are continually meeting on a monthly basis to determine data driven priorities for the future. The impact of COVID-19 will be long lasting, and a full economic recovery relies partially on the preservation of a robust workforce.

There are over 2,000 open positions right now in Broome County, and all we are missing is you. While COVID-19 regulations raise some uncertainties, The Agency wants to assure you that our community as a whole has come together to tackle the issue of workforce. Our strength is in numbers and the resources we can leverage as a team. From health care, to transportation and distribution, to advanced manufacturing, and more, there are positions to fill and the last piece to the puzzle is attracting the job seeker. Through the Good Life program, by celebrating those who live and work here, it is clear to see that with a community as strong and dedicated as ours, Broome County is home to the good life. Truly the end goal of workforce development to ensure that all residents have equitable access to a good life.

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