

The HRWC Talent Division: An Initial Overview

A targeted talent pipeline implementation is a pivotal part of an extensive, regional initiative launched and spearheaded by the Hampton Roads Workforce Council (HRWC), a program conceived, designed, and launched to alleviate the 757's long-standing, economically detrimental labor shortage in skilled positions. This effort will be a major step in building the foundation to generate a much-needed, long-term talent pipeline in Hampton Roads and structuring the program to be a self-sustaining mechanism supporting local business for many years to come.

In 2019, the HRWC commissioned a study of regional workforce and talent, one that delivered resultant Talent Alignment Strategy reports. The reports stated, among their many findings, that Hampton Roads has a "growing labor shortage" owing to the economic state of full employment, competition for high-demand occupations, and other factors. The report states, "The supply of labor is stressed even further as regional gains in employment (+30,000 jobs in five years) substantially outpaced growth in the working age population (+9,600 people)."

More specifically: "There is an opportunity to enhance and build on existing partnership and collaboration efforts. Increasing system alignment by creating coordination across all systems and integrating talent investments into a single regional talent development strategy will be key to Hampton Roads' ability to create a robust workforce and world-class talent development system."

The HRWC's strategy to solve this growing problem began with dedicated staff recruited and hired specifically to focus upon this issue and lead a regionwide initiative. Last year we onboarded Whitney Lester as our Senior Director of Talent Development. Mr. Lester and executive leadership at the Council have developed an approach that will generate this very kind of aforementioned "world-class talent development system." We will not only address current shortfalls in key industries but put people and projects into place that will ensure this pipeline becomes and remains a regional asset long into the future.

At this point, multiple, extensive/expensive studies and countless meetings with presentations of evidence both data-driven and anecdotal reach the same conclusion: Hampton Roads faces an ongoing challenge to fill a large number of open jobs in industries vital to the economic health of the region. **Even with a pandemic spiking the number of unemployment filings, the talent needed to populate skilled worker positions in the 757 is not readily available.** In terms of Project Management Life Cycle phases, Initiation is over, and Planning is nearly complete. It's time for *Execution*.

The HRWC employs a full-time team of exceptional personnel to cultivate and augment relationships throughout the realms of local business, education, government, and civic leadership. This team will systematically launch and execute the broad array of initiatives

compiled in the HRWC Talent Toolkit, a living document that incorporates a series of programs, projects, and tasks focused on the singular goal of **developing, attracting, and retaining** top talent in the 757.

The initiatives include but are far from limited to: employer engagement (specifically working with business to focus on chronically unfilled positions); alignment between higher education curriculum and mandatory job requirements; on-the-job and incumbent worker training; regional apprenticeships; military/veteran outreach; college student engagement and graduate retention; talent portal development; soft skills development; workforce development alliance among local community colleges; out-of-market talent recruitment; and many more.

The program we have designed is vast and ambitious but achievable through a regimented implementation adhering to budgetary scope and the intelligently prioritization of the areas of greatest need. The HRWC approach, in the short term, accounts for a subset of our eventual team to be added. Similarly, the first stage of constructing an over-arching Talent program that works across industries, benefits all of southeastern Virginia, and remains in place for many years to come is to establish an initial program with a sharp but limited focus on just one industry segment. This will serve in many ways as a proof of concept through which we can enhance the program before expanding across business clusters. The HRWC has targeted the business cluster most in need of the middle skill workers and with whom we already have substantial traction and in-roads as the area of initial primary concentration: **the Hampton Roads Maritime Industry**.

We intend to hire three (3) positions to round out the preliminary iteration of the Talent team: a Director of Strategy and Operations, a Director of Engagement, and a Business Intelligence Analyst. This small but critical group will expand upon the process that Mr. Lester, senior leadership at the HRWC, and the regional Talent Coalition commenced in 2019. The Talent team also includes the Program Manager for Campus757, a related initiative that focuses on retaining graduates from local colleges here in Hampton Roads after they finish their coursework. As sustainable resources continue to be garnered for this division, this team will continue to grow.

The clamoring for desperately needed talent has never been louder. Indeed, it has gained volume in the current global health and fiscal crisis. The region cannot afford to wait any longer to definitively address a worsening problem. The HRWC has embarked upon a pathway that, with a great deal of coordinated work, continued regional collaboration, and the proper early-stage funding to ensure later-stage success, will create a model for projects of its nature that we hope and expect will be borrowed as a blueprint elsewhere in the Commonwealth and beyond. The Talent program, thanks in part to GO Virginia grants, has launched in earnest in 2020, and we at the Hampton Roads Workforce Council believe this initiative to be one through which we will accomplish something truly meaningful for our region.

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