

The following is a thematic summary of the input captured through individual interviews and the group discussions associated with October 9-10 interviews and the October 10 kick-off session for the Strategic Planning Process. During the October 10 session, approximately 100 community leaders participated. After a briefing from the County Executive and leaders of the Plan Steering Committee, the participants divided into 12 Breakout Groups. Each of the Groups was asked to respond to four questions:

1. *In reviewing our objectives, what key questions come to mind that we need to understand?*
2. *What are the most significant issues facing Racine County that should be addressed in the workforce planning process?*
3. *What are the key impediments to “systematically” addressing those issues?*
4. *Who else should be engaged in this process to ensure that it is open and inclusive?*

The individual meetings held on October 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> served multiple purposes:

- ✓ *To introduce the strategic planning process and goals,*
- ✓ *To personally solicit input and support, and*
- ✓ *To begin to gather such input into the challenges facing Racine County’s workforce and economy.*

Below each major heading is a sample of the comments and contributions that support the issues identified there. This version of the summary does not include any analysis, synopsis, or editorial treatment for the purposes of describing or recommending courses of action or consideration.

## **A Sustainable Economic Future**

**There is widespread uncertainty about the future of Racine’s economy. With the persistent decline in the overall number of manufacturing jobs, the region continues to be in a period of economic transition. One result is that many of the traditional and familiar pathways to success are no longer viable for employers, elected and community leaders, educators, parents, and students. Jobs and careers require both more and different knowledge, skills and abilities.**

**Among the comments made during the kick-off events that illustrate this theme are:**

- *There is a lack of identification of the jobs of the future.*
- *[There is an on-going] change in the nature of jobs.*
- *Kids don’t know what jobs are available to them. Kids leave school and have no idea.*
- *[We] need to connect workforce development to small businesses and sole proprietorships; these, though small, can generate excitement and help with unemployment too.*

### **An Efficient Human Capital Development System**

There is agreement that businesses are demanding ever-higher knowledge, skills, and abilities from workers. Consequently, the county is faced with the challenge of providing more outcome-oriented education and training to meet the needs of employers and better prepare individuals for the jobs being created. This may involve education and training systems operating in very different roles than they have in the past. It certainly requires greater coordination and collaboration across the educational spectrum.

Among the comments made during the kick-off events that illustrate this theme are:

- *There is an inexorable movement from needing only to be literate, to having a high school education, to requiring at least an Associates' degree or beyond to be economically successful.*
- *Collaboration between schools and the county and cities is necessary to provide training for those unemployed.*
- *There will need to be partnerships between K-12 schools and technical schools and businesses that provide internships, apprenticeships, etc.*
- *Educational institutions should align their offerings with industry clusters/drivers.*
- *There might need to be more alternatives available to students in the education system.*
- *Have business support the non-profits that are currently providing effective career skill services.*

### **A Stronger Linkage between Poverty Alleviation and Career Employment**

Many pockets of the County experience a dearth of both assets and hope, as well as social and community support structures. When combined, these shortages severely inhibit individuals' opportunities to secure the necessary education, mentoring, and access to the kinds of jobs that might help workers escape poverty for good. In many cases, poverty prevents workers from successfully getting or keeping quality jobs. In other cases, it inhibits individuals from getting the kind of education and training needed to qualify for these opportunities. This issue affects a large enough proportion of Racine County residents to affect the competitive economic advantage of area businesses and residents.

Among the comments made during the kick-off events that illustrate this theme are:

- *"Poverty" as a core issue overrides all others.*
- *There is a core population of people who need a lot of help learning how to be employed and what it means to have a "work ethic." We've pretty much given up on them, but we need to find a way to address their needs.*
- *The dysfunctional nature of some families is one root of the problems in the central city; We will not make meaningful progress until we address this issue.*
- *There is a strong need for positive role models.*
- *There is a lack of parental involvement.*
- *What role does poverty play in unemployment?*

### **The Possibilities for “One Racine”**

The County of Racine has many fault lines that prevent it from being able to effectively leverage its collective assets for the greater good. These fault lines can be defined in a number of ways. They can be found along ethnic, geographic, cultural, generational, economic and municipal lines. Fundamentally, the issue is that the people and their leaders do not fully appreciate how they might be able to come together to address common challenges nor an understanding of what those common challenge might be.

Among the comments made during the kick-off events that illustrate this theme are:

- *There are different East [i.e., urban] and West [i.e., rural] cultures.*
- *There are disparities between East and West of the interstate, in terms of high school programs, approaches to providing educational opportunities, and ways of integrating technical and trade skills into curriculum.*
- *The “I” is the divider,” and the I-94 corridor is now the focus of current and future development, but what happens beyond that corridor? Are these zones left out?*
- *Diversity of communities (not demographically per se) within the County? Each community has its own identity.*
- *Census Tracts 1-5 in the City are divided from the rest of the community.*
- *The Wall (I-94) needs to come down; it is one county—does it have one vision?*

### **Emerging Companies Demand an Innovating Workforce**

Every available opportunity should be identified and taken to keep and grow knowledge-driven enterprises and intellectual capital within the County. Not all jobs are available through traditional wage and salary arrangements. Increasingly, entrepreneurship represents a viable option to earn a living wage. Technology deployment efforts are particularly relevant to firm efforts to develop new products, processes, or competitive advantage – and skilled, creative workers must be at the heart of these efforts.

Resources—marketing, financial, mentoring, networking—should be made available to small and minority-owned businesses that offer the potential for the county’s “next generation” family-sustaining jobs.

Among the comments made during the kick-off events that illustrate this theme are:

- *There are tech-transfer opportunities through CATI.*
- *It is possible to transfer licenses to patents as one opportunity to create and grow entrepreneurs.*
- *Financial institutions might be able to pool investments for entrepreneurs and small businesses.*
- *Angel investment opportunities might be possible.*
- *There could be better marketing of what business opportunities are already available in Racine.*

### **Effective Strategy Implementation Entails a Process of Inclusion**

For any strategic plan to be effective and successful, all voices need to be heard, respected and leveraged in the creation of solutions to the County's collective challenges. Certainly, all hands will be needed in responding to the County's complex challenges so all minds must set their creative juices to identifying ways to collectively develop those solutions. It is critical that the planning process be data-driven, but it is just as vital that time and effort are expended to build appropriate bridges, establish trust among a diverse leadership network, and maintain open and mutually-respectful communication channels.

Among the comments made during the kick-off events that illustrate this theme are:

- *[The process must incorporate a] serious and sustained commitment to inclusion of all segments.*
- *There is a need for greater dialogue across various components of the greater Racine community.*
- *There is a perceived lack of serious and substantial inclusion.*
- *Minority groups do not feel like they are "at the table" in decision making regarding community issues.*
- *There is a perceived "parochialism" of area leaders.*
- *Inclusion, Inclusion, Inclusion.*

### **Transportation**

There are a wide variety of transportation and mobility challenges within the County, both along North-South and East-West vectors. Some believe that transportation challenges contribute to the skilled worker shortage for some employers, especially in the County's western part. But, lack of regional public transportation also limits skilled worker access for all companies in the County.

Among the comments made during the kick-off events that illustrate this theme are:

- *How do we expand the bus service to the west end of the county?*
- *How do we capitalize on the regional corridor and build opportunities from it?*
- *We need improved transportation services beyond the current infrastructure.*
- *Commuter rail is needed to facilitate mobility.*
- *There is a need for public transportation for [industrial] parks near the I.*
- *There is a need for more transportation that serves all 3 shifts.*