

Workforce Innovation Board of Ramsey County

Technology Committee Meeting Minutes

Thursday, January 21, 2021

1:00-2:00 PM

Present:

Sam Drong
Caroline Karanja
Tony Lusiba
Kowsar Mohamed
Koami Pedado
Diane Rucker
Sabina Saksena
Carly Voshell

Absent:

Staff/Guests:

Ling Becker, Workforce Solutions

Call to Order

Chair Tony Lusiba called the meeting to order at 1:02 PM

Welcome and Introductions

Everyone in attendance introduced themselves and answered an ice breaker question about their favorite tech device or app.

Conflict of Interest Statement

Becker asked that everyone sign and send the acknowledgement form to Becky Milbrandt. Signing the form acknowledges that a person will abstain from voting if they have a conflict of interest.

Committee Orientation

Becker will reach out to see if anyone is interested in what the Workforce Innovation Board is. There are multiple committees: Youth, Policy and Oversight, Equity, Partnership and Outreach, and tech. Committee was formed in response to market conditions and COVID-19. Purpose is to highlight, amplify, and want to connect our resources together. Instead of always trying to create something new, try to enhance what is already established.

Committee Work Plan Discussion

COVID-19 and CARES Act Funding: Becker explained that COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted individuals under age 34 years, those less educated, and BIPOC populations. There is a need to figure out better ways of inclusion, especially around the tech space. Becker also reported that women, especially African American and Latinx, saw substantial job losses in December; 140,000 jobs. Some of this is attributable to mothers who left the workforce to take on school/caretaking responsibilities.

Economic Competitiveness and Inclusion: Becker provided an overview of the county's Economic Competitiveness and Inclusion Plan which will be voted on by the County Board this spring. There are tech references and she would like feedback in the future from this group.

Resources: Becker announced that a planner has been hired to provide staff support for the WIB committees. The WIB also has strategic funding available to support the committee initiatives. Labor market industry data is also available.

2021 Work Plan: The current work plan aligns the efforts the WIB was engaged in prior to the pandemic with strategic initiatives needed to address COVID impacts. The plan represents a six to nine-month timeframe and brings forth efforts for each committee that are definable and actionable. The four initiatives outlined for this committee were discussed.

1. Assess the Ramsey County Tech Ecosystem
 - Becker sees this as a valuable resource that the WIB can curate and update for use by community organizations and others applying for grants.
 - This resource may already exist. Karanja suggested reaching out to Make It MSP, Forge North and Tech.MN.
 - Rucker mentioned an existing framework that has a five-point connection on the ecosystem that includes government interaction, education, entrepreneur financing and support, and corporate engagement. This could be useful in mapping out what exists and connections.
 - Voshell has information on training providers.
 - The Community Technology Empowerment Program (CTEP) through AmeriCorps could also be a source for information on training.
2. Host a community Convening with SWOT conversation on how to increase diverse tech talent
 - This could be planned for later in the year.
 - Start now by developing a list of who needs to be at the table
 - Lusiba could put in a funding request for a facilitator.
 - Minnesota Tech Association and Greater MSP hosted a discussion on tech development. That data could be used as a baseline.
 - Ramsey County is a small business county, with most businesses have fewer than ten employees. The diverse tech strategy developed should focus on support for micro businesses. The convening could center on the needs of these businesses. A list of consultants and contractors could be developed now.
 - There is a need to also need to think five years from now and what tech skills will be dominant in the future so that students have access to needed resources and training.
3. Ramsey County Tech Co-op
 - There was discussion about developing a tech co-op to broadcast and amplify tech entrepreneurs who are available for consulting or contract work. Karanja, Saksena and Karanja expressed interested in taking part in this effort.
4. Tech Equity
 - The tech equity issue is intergenerational. Older people don't have the skills to navigate tech devices and many young people are lacking skills and basic tech etiquette.
 - Consider developing a journey map to visualize how people move as they acquire new skill sets.
 - Becker can provide maps of who doesn't have technology in Ramsey County. This committee could have a stronger voice in influencing the county board and city council on tech equity. She will also check to see if there is any current legislation on tech equity.

Working Together and Next Steps:

- Rucker, Karanja, Voshell and Becker will work on the tech ecosystem assessment.
- Karanja, Saksena and Karanja expressed interested in working on the tech co-op.
- A forum for the committee to share documents will be coming soon.

Other

No other items were discussed.

Adjourn

Upon completion of the agenda, meeting was adjourned at 2:06.

Next meeting: Thursday, March 11, 1:00 – 2:00 PM