

## **Building Talent Today for Tomorrow's Careers: A Community Conversation Co-hosted by the Jay & Rose Phillips Family Foundation and the Greater Twin Cities United Way**

### **A Recap of the January 12, 2012, Event**

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Eric Seleznow of the National Skills Campaign delivered the keynote address to a full house – we had a crowd of 134 individuals representing 79 different organizations from around the Twin Cities. Eric gave a “state of workforce development” overview, describing various state and local education, training and employment strategies that have currency in today’s economic and political landscape.

Using examples from places as different as Pennsylvania, Oregon, and Maryland, Eric brought to life innovative programs like career pathways, integrated education and training, and sector strategies. He highlighted how these approaches can be woven together inside a statewide framework for workforce development, and encouraged the audience to think about the collaborative structures and policy changes needed to carry on this work jointly and effectively.

Following Eric’s address, and a lively question and answer session with the audience, the event’s focus shifted to what’s happening in specifically Minnesota in terms of job training. Bryan Lindsley of the Governor’s Workforce Development Council and Andrea Ferstan from the Greater Twin Cities United Way took the floor first to introduce Skills at Work, a statewide campaign to raise awareness about – and find joint solutions to – the gap between workers’ skills and employers’ demands. The campaign will engage employers, educators, and community organizations through a series of regional meetings. Stakeholders will galvanize around statewide, measurable training and employment goals, with employers playing a key role in identifying industry specific skill and occupational needs. To learn more, visit the [Skills@Work](http://www.skillsatwork.org) website at [www.skillsatwork.org](http://www.skillsatwork.org)

Next, event participants got to hear from, and ask questions of, local industry representatives. There to offer their first-hand experiences working with local colleges and non-profit providers to develop targeted education and training programs were Erick Ajax, co-owner and manager of the metal forming company, EJ Ajax & Sons, and Valerie DeFor the Director of Healthcare Education and Industry Partnerships Office for HealthForce Minnesota – a partnership of education, industry and community organizations created to increase the number and expand the diversity of healthcare workers.

Erick Ajax explained the success his business has had participating in the M-Powered Program, for which he and other manufacturers help design the training provided by Hennepin Technical College. Under M-Powered, HIREd, a Twin Cities workforce development organization, provides students – both entry-level and incumbent workers – with the support services they need to stay in school and succeed at their courses. Erick emphasized the importance of businesses making this kind of commitment to training, noting EJ Ajax invests 5.5% of its payroll to help educate and train its employees. The reward is a loyal, productive workforce that increases the company’s profitability while earning a family-sustaining wage.

Val DeFor of HealthForce Minnesota described how state agencies, health care providers, educators, associations, and unions get together regularly to discuss how to better align workforce development

activities to meet employer needs and to design and deliver training around career pathways. For example, Val explained that through multi-stakeholder participation, Minnesota has built a strong Community Health Worker training model, whereby students gain a strong set of foundational skills that are useful in many health care settings and that can be a launching pad to advancement along different career pathways in the field.

In the conversation with audience participants that followed, several key themes and ideas for action came up:

- Together, we need to identify a shared strategy that will work for our region and state and that purposely brings lower-income, lower-skilled workers forward.
- The training community has a unique understanding of the talent pool – workers’ skills and abilities; we need to marry this “supply side” information with up-to-date “demand data” from employers about their specific occupational and skill needs.
- Qualitative data from employers should complement the wealth of quantitative labor market information – including longer term projections and regional analyses – available via our Workforce Investment Boards and the Department of Employment and Economic Development.
- We have an excellent community of non-profit training providers; these providers need to raise their profile and use among employers and become a “preferred” source of training and hiring.
- We can use, build on, and extend existing programs, such M-Powered, to deliver industry-driven skills training.
- We can cultivate stronger engagement among the business community utilizing structures like HealthForce Minnesota and connecting more deliberately with industry associations, chambers of commerce, and economic development entities.

Joel Leudtke from the Phillips Family Foundation wrapped up the meeting by noting that moving workforce development innovations forward requires both *leaders and followers*, in a structure where different entities feel invested and there is a sense of joint ownership. The Skills@Work campaign may provide one avenue for this kind of collective opportunity.

Joel also noted that the day’s event was the first in a series of seminars being hosted by the Phillips Family Foundation. Coming up is a seminar in late March focusing on CBOs working with community colleges to help adult learners move through credentialed programs; and, another in April examining ways in which the workforce development system can alleviate racial inequities in employment. More details on these events will be announced as they are available.