



Workforce Leadership Café #2 — Workforce Solutions Alamo

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Description

Local workforce investment boards can play a pivotal role in fostering an innovative, agile, and equitable workforce development ecosystem. In Texas, [Workforce Solutions Alamo](#) serves San Antonio and the 13-county Alamo Region. Meet them in the Café to learn about their approaches to talent development for workforce practitioners at both the frontline and leadership levels.

For more information about this event — including video, audio, transcript, speaker bios, and additional resources — visit our website:

<https://www.aspeninstitute.org/events/workforce-leadership-cafe-2-workforce-solutions-alamo/>

Speakers

- Caroline Goddard, Strategic Community Partnership Manager/Equal Opportunity Officer, Workforce Solutions Alamo
- Adrian Perez, Chief Innovation Officer, Workforce Solutions Alamo
- Kat Pipoly, Director of Social Accountability, Kronkosky Charitable Foundation
- Brad Turner Little, CEO, National Association of Workforce Boards
- Sheila Maguire, Senior Fellow, EOP, The Aspen Institute
- Dee Wallace, Senior Fellow, EOP, The Aspen Institute

Transcript

Sheila Maguire (00:06)

Hello, and welcome. I'm Sheila Maguire, a senior fellow at the Aspen Institute's Economic Opportunity Program, and we are so pleased that you chose to spend the Thursday afternoon before Christmas with us at the Workforce Leadership Café, the second in a series of conversations with partners who we've worked with over the past two years, to sponsor and facilitate workforce leaders academies. These conversations are taking place over the winter with others in the field who are interested in how investments in the leaders, managers, frontline practitioners within the workforce system, the workforce workforce, if you like, could significantly grow the capacity of ecosystems through fostering not only increased talent but fostering collaboration. My colleague Dee Wallace and I, who is here with us today, lay out our argument in a blog, *The Cobbler's Children Have No Shoes* - we encourage business to make the kind of investments in workers as part of what we do is something that we're not doing enough ourselves.

We want to talk about how these investments in what you might call the human infrastructure are often very messy and in talent development can at the local level foster a more collaborative and innovative system. But before we start, just a quick review of our technology. You're all muted. We do welcome your questions, and there's a Q&A button at the bottom of your screen to submit and upvote questions. We also encourage you to share any ideas or examples or resources or experience in the chat as we talk about today's topics. And if you have technical difficulties, please let us know via the chat or email the email address that is now in the chat. This event is being recorded and will be shared via email and posted on our website. Closed captions are available for this discussion, just click the CC button to get them going. And then after we've heard from our speakers, we will invite you to join us in an open café, and we'll send you at that time a link to chat more informally if there's more things that you wish to discuss coming out of our discussions today.

So with that said, grab your coffee, tea or beverage of choice, maybe some hot toddies all round, a little eggnog, and let's get started. So the Workforce Leaders Academies have grown out of EOP's work over the last decade plus with both national and local academies. In short, it is a ten-month peer learning community of leaders from institutions across the local workforce ecosystem. It is, if you like, a microcosm or attempts to be a microcosm of the greater workforce system. Leaders and fellows in the academy have a chance to step back from the day-to-day and look together at the local ecosystem through a race equity and systems-thinking lens and make recommendations for improvement. Our partners who have been operating the academies this year come from a variety of organizational types, community college, local funders, advocacy groups in chamber of commerce, and we are particularly pleased today to have the Workforce Investment Board from Alamo.

We were very encouraged in the process of selecting partners for this project, how many workforce boards step forward to say, "That's a role we think we can play," given the commission that they have in terms of their role in the workforce investment system as a board. So we are very pleased to be joined by the partners from the Workforce Alamo system, the Workforce Solutions system, and I'm going to introduce them to you. First is Kat Pipoly, who was the academy lead facilitator and previously the chief operating officer of Alamo Workforce Solutions, and now director of social accountability impact at the Kronkosky Foundation. We're really pleased that Adrian Perez, who comes from a long career of

economic development, is working with us, who is now working as chief innovation officer at the Workforce Solutions Alamo. Caroline Goddard, who is an academy fellow and is the strategic and communications partner manager at WSA.

We are also really pleased to have Brad Turner Little, the incoming CEO of the National Association of Workforce Boards, who's going to listen to the story of Alamo and the kinds of investments they've made not only in the academy, but in lots of different strategies for investing in the human infrastructure, and share some of his reflections once we've had a chance to hear the story of Alamo. So welcome, and we look forward to a great conversation. So Adrian, let's start with you. Could you just give us a little short background on the region in terms of the economy and some of the challenges there are in connecting jobs and people?

Adrian Perez (05:43)

Thank you, Sheila. It's great to be here with you today. In light of us wanting to keep it succinct, I'll avoid all of the facts and figures that you could find out about the region by simply googling or asking ChatGPT for that matter about our area. Instead, I'll tell a little bit about who we are as a region, and then I'll talk a little bit about why the challenges that we see in front of us are really highlighted by the sheer enormity of the opportunity that's in front of us. So when you think about the city of San Antonio, you think about the 13 county region that we serve at workforce development. We really sit in southern Texas as part of the Texas Triangle, one of the most economically dynamic super regions in the country. What we've seen in our community is a community that is historically socioeconomically divided.

We have a focus on socioeconomic mobility because of our history and who we are as a community. An economy once based on tourism, maybe military, has now since evolved into an area that's really focused on biosciences, healthcare, manufacturing, advanced manufacturing, cybersecurity, so all of these investments have coalesced into this evolving economy down in this area. We're also seeing this partnership with the city of Austin. There's also this natural confluence of development and interest along the 35 corridor as the bottom left corner of the Texas Triangle. So all of those things are happening because we sit in this backdrop of socioeconomic mobility being so important. What we're seeing right now post-COVID is a series of institutions in our community really behind making scale investments in workforce development, right?

City of San Antonio passing the ready to work sales tax initiative, investing over \$200 million in human capital over a five-year period, and you match that up with what's happening in Texas in terms of all of the job growth, the incredible job growth and the velocity at which jobs are growing in Texas in this region. And so obviously San Antonio is feeling a lot of that as well. We just announced a 1,500 person employer, a manufacturer in southern San Antonio back in October. And so the scope and scale of the projects that we're seeing, the evolution of the economy and this posture of really wanting to invest at scale in human capital is really this confluence of opportunity, so that's really what we're seeing in terms of really focusing on how we do our work.

Sheila Maguire (08:15)

Thank you, thank you. Kat, could you talk a little bit about how you describe the local workforce system as it operates today?

Kat Pipoly (08:27)

Absolutely, Sheila. What I think is really unique around our local workforce ecosystem specifically in the Alamo region is that our local workforce board is both the donut and the donut hole. So in other areas, you can see some of these outer lining areas that are supporting more of the rural areas and then you see a local workforce board supporting more of the urban area. I think that's really both a blessing and potentially a challenge in our area, is that we're balancing our strategies and we're balancing our approaches to honor both the outer lying counties that tend to be more rural, especially as our inner more urban areas develop and individuals move to those outer lying counties, or we bring in big businesses that want to be housed in those outer lying counties. How do we support both of those areas and create that balance by honoring the nuances within each of those areas and what their workforce system looks like?

Sheila Maguire (09:24)

Thanks, Kat. One of the things that really drew us to the Alamo proposal was the fact that you have already been investing in human infrastructure. I'll call it that for the moment. The human infrastructure, the workforce workforce. And Caroline, I wondered if you could talk to us a little bit about your work with strategic community partnerships and your ambassador program?

Caroline Goddard (09:49)

Sure. So my work really focuses on maximizing those cross-sector partnerships. I work collaboratively with organizations to combine their strengths with our strengths and create equitable opportunities for our job seekers. I secured additional non-federal funds to develop the Workforce Academy Program to really create this curriculum that's designed to help organizations better understand our vision, our programs, career and employment services, and how our organization really contributes to the workforce ecosystem. So once individuals participate in three sessions, we do a workforce 101, which is like a high level, we do workforce programs and then workforce business services.

They get a toolkit, a \$25 gift card, a tote bag with all of our marketing materials, and then the knowledge to carry out our mission. Those ambassadors play a vital role in connecting people to our mission and also people to services. So that academy really drives those conversations and educates those individuals about our services, expands our brand awareness and our outreach. And then I use that kind of model to say, "This is our grassroots approach," to drive those conversations, and then the Aspen Workers Leadership Academy was really those grass tops to the existing model so that we could talk about systems development.

Sheila Maguire (11:12)

Right. So I think you said you have 500 of these ambassadors across the system who have had a chance to get deeply embedded in the way the system works and drive out that knowledge as well as the work that you've done with us. So let's talk with the three of you a little bit about why you think these kinds of investments are important. Adrian, do we want to start with you? You are on mute.

Adrian Perez (11:50)

I knew I was going to do that at least once. So I think from the workforce support perspective first and then from an overarching ecosystem perspective, I think for us in particular, we're fortunately part of a pilot project with TWC that in January released an action plan for us to focus on three overarching goals to be Texas talent experts, partnership managers, among other things, and we are really committed to seeing through that mission. And so these kinds of investors are extremely important because I think it really provides a way for us to have a broader perspective and deepen how we serve by creating a space where we can have multiple perspectives come into play in a very structured way. So I would offer that as why these types of investments are so important.

Sheila Maguire (12:43)

Yes.

Caroline Goddard (12:46)

I'll add to that. I think the system we work in with the Texas Workforce Commission and the Department of Labor is very structured. We administer those programs. That can be very confusing to a lot of individuals, but we want to consciously focus on securing additional funds as well on different grant opportunities like this that let us have those discretionary funds so we can be a little bit more innovative. The approach that Aspen, the Leadership Academy provided to us was an incredible framework to give individuals a common landscape. We talked a lot about race equity too, and we also talked about being data-driven and making sure that we have that equity lens so that we can gather perspectives from the entire ecosystem. The fellows that came to the table brought all different perspectives and it was really unique to us because as Adrian mentioned, we are one of the most segregated major metro cities in the United States too.

Sheila Maguire (13:42)

Perfect. Kat?

Kat Pipoly (13:46)

Just lifting up what Caroline and Adrian mentioned and highlighting, investing in creating this leadership group I think created an approachableness to our local workforce system. So Caroline being a fellow within the Aspen Fellows, and then just this really wonderful relationship that was built between our local workforce board and these other leaders that we worked with on a daily basis, but how often do you carve out the time to sit down and think about what's happening and have these prompting questions like Aspen gave with all of the information behind it and really the architecture and the framework to really move these conversations forward? How often do you sit down and have those? So I think this was really critical for our community to create that space and that time, that these leaders could sit down with the largest workforce entity in our region and have them be at the table, but also be influencing what we were talking about as well. It just made it more approachable, creating those relationships for long-term sustainability.

Sheila Maguire (14:57)

What were some of the challenges in being the convener of this kind of community? Where did you find yourself saying, "This is tough," either given your role or given what was going on in the local community? Can one of you pick up on that question?

Kat Pipoly (15:16)

I'm happy to add to that too, if that's okay with the team. I think what I observed is one of the things, and we talked about this at the very beginning when we were first entering into our relationship with Aspen, was how are you as the 800-pound elephant in the room one of the most influential organizations, entities with the state funding that you have behind you, with grants that you have behind you going to step into the room and not drive the conversation, but facilitate the conversation? Many times, and we see this with Kronkosky Charitable Foundation, as a funder in the room, how do you step into the room and honor the community in what they're saying and do things with them and not to them?

And so I think building that trust with the fellows to say, "Workforce is here as a partner in this because we know that you are working within this same space as us," and we often are working side by side, but are we really going to what some people call big C collaboration? That relationship where we really trust each other, how do we get there? So I would say that was one of the biggest hills we had to climb was building that trust that we were in the room to facilitate this moving forward and not just dictate what we thought it needed to look like.

Caroline Goddard (16:28)

Sheila, we brought in people more powerful than ourselves too. I think that was really important. And for me, being a staff member as well as a fellow, I kind of had to take my staff hat off and be open to criticism and how to be vulnerable. We really had to create an environment that helped us improve and then helped us deepen relationships and partners because we recognize that we have blind spots and we also can't do this alone. We aren't the entire ecosystem. The ecosystem is a combination of where the fellows came from and the partnerships that they bring to the table as well.

Sheila Maguire (17:12)

Great. Any other challenges that you found in thinking about you? I think you hit on some really important topics, which is one of the things that's difficult in the collaboration, is that there's people with all different kinds of power relationships and how do you make that really work in a learning group where everyone's taking on common ownership of the ecosystem as a whole, not just their part of it?

Adrian Perez (17:40)

I would probably express this, that the entirety of the partnership was over nine months. And so if you think about that arc, it's all kind of tied together by a common narrative. You start having this conversation, you provide perspective, there's this cross-examination of ideas. So there's this continuity that's required, and so as the agency that was convening or creating this space and partnership,

obviously with Aspen, the challenge, if there is a challenge, there could be one about continuity. So if you have turnover in your agency, if there's turnover in other agencies that are partnering over that period of time, which are completely natural and really where we are post-COVID... that's happening quite a bit. People are shuffling around and moving through these agencies... that might be one of those things that somebody who steps up to do this work would maybe look at as a risk.

If I go in and try to create this space, I'm now kind of committed to maintaining this continuity for this narrative to have its full arc and hopefully its full impact at the end. And so obviously we had the fantastic Kat with us as COO and then she moved on, and so luckily we're lucky enough to have her still kind of part of this conversation and kind of carrying on. So we're very fortunate in that regard, but that's part of the challenge with this type of work is in order for it to be effective over time, there is this line of consciousness that has to be kept for the narrative to kind of hold, to get to the end. And so I would just offer that as one of the challenges to consider as well.

Sheila Maguire (19:09)

Great. I know that's some of the things that you've done that you've been pleased about in terms of the work that's come out of the academy. Would one of you like to speak to that?

Kat Pipoly (19:26)

I can kick us off there. So throughout the academy we only lost two fellows during the process, so we only had two individuals out of the 24 not able to complete. So we were very proud of that because it was a tremendous amount of dedication of time, and these are individuals within their organizations that hold leadership roles and are pulled in multiple directions. Also, I think the composition of roles, across all of these organizations, we had two board members from our local workforce board, which was huge in thinking through what is Workforce's buy-in and how do we keep this moving forward? We had a city council member, we even had private business, which brought such a wonderful lens to this group. And that was actually some feedback from the fellows as they dive further into this work, having businesses be part of these conversations.

Because again, looking at the community that we're serving, we don't want to do things to businesses, we want to do it with them. And if their voice is not at the table, that's something that Workforce Solutions Alamo prioritizes is how do we make sure businesses around the table? So very, very proud that we actually had business represented on our fellowship. And then we had staff support, so the leadership at Workforce Solutions Alamo actually dedicated an administrative person to be able to support this role moving forward. Sheila, I think you fell in love with Vanessa the same way we did because she actually kept the train moving. If it was not for Vanessa, who I hope is on this call, none of this would've been as incredible as what it was. So that's really just this key role.

Adrian Perez (21:07)

If I could add, Sheila, there was really two things that I think were really tremendous that came out of this. One is because this occurred and you had this broad group coming together in this very structured way, it raised the question regarding, "Well, why aren't we doing this consistently? Where do you go to have these broader conversations?" If it's not just with one agency or one piece of the ecosystem that I

want to talk about, but how it all works together, we can now ask that question point to this and say, "Well, this is how it can work as a community, so where is that venue and can we do that?"

The second is some of the solutions that came out of this really focused on this idea that we're going to have to figure out new and better ways to work together around the client in perpetuity over a longer temporal scale. And so I think those two things are changing how we look at that five-year arc in terms of how we need to work together and what expertise we need to build within our organizations to do that effectively. So those are the two things that I think really stick out to me as really wonderful outcomes.

Sheila Maguire (22:03)

Right. And it seems also the advantage of the local workforce board sponsorship of it means too that you can move some of the ideas, and I think we've chatted the link, Caroline, into the sorts of ideas that came out of their work. But Caroline, let me give you a moment to speak.

Caroline Goddard (22:24)

Well, I was just going to shout out the work that the fellows did. We came up with four brilliant projects and during the process, we didn't talk much about what our projects were. Not that it was like a secret process or anything, but we were all focused on different topics and when we presented to each other, it was kind of incredible to see how they crossed and they were really blended in with each other. So I would encourage you, if you have time, to check out the link. We do have our PowerPoints up, and then also a YouTube video of our actual presentations. We want this to be a systems level change, so these are things that can be replicated outside of the 13 county Alamo region, so I'd encourage you all to look at that. Another thing I would say is the development outside of the actual fellowship as well, the partnerships that we worked on, we had incredible opportunities to spend extra time together.

We also did field trips to industry partners, so I think that was something different that I hadn't seen other leadership academies do. I researched a lot of leadership academies before applying for the grant, but I wanted to add in some of our sector-based models and make sure that these individuals were going to be ambassadors to our work and like I said, help the overall ecosystem. So we did go on quite a few tours to some of our industry partners that I think helped. They also participated in the Ambassador Academy as well, and then we worked to tour each other's facilities, so we had a fellow from Haven for Hope. We toured the largest homeless shelter in San Antonio and one across the nation to see how we can work together to develop those workforce strategies that are going to improve over time. We toured, like I said, not only each other's facilities, but different industry facilities that I really think helped us think outside of the box and move the ecosystem forward.

Sheila Maguire (24:18)

Great. So given your investments not only at the grassroots and at the grass tops and across the system in terms of structures of the way the sector work is set up and the collaboration works are set up, what are some of the lessons or thoughts you might share with those other workforce boards, other types of organizations that might be thinking about how to invest in their own workers, how to invest in the

ecosystem development as a whole? What might you share? What lessons might you share or what advice might you share?

Adrian Perez (25:06)

I'd be happy to take a stab at that. I think through this process, I think really committing to and trying to find those mechanisms. We were very fortunate to have this as a mechanism we could use, but to find a way to engage those other partners, to understand your role in the ecosystem as an agency, as a workforce board. You're not the ecosystem, you're one piece of it, and trying to pull together those folks who could provide additional perspective. And I think if the boards are moving in that direction and that makes sense for them to do that, I think what they'll find is it's going to set very interesting conversations in motion about the things that we have been doing and what we need to be doing going forward.

The complexity and velocity of how those things are changing can really only be appreciated through somebody else's lens, through somebody else talking through those issues and giving you insight to those blind spots. And so I'd encourage them to do some form of this if possible. There is a lot of context that goes into that. I think our organization sort of evolved to this point where there was a credible sense that if we pulled folks together, the right folks would come together and trust that we would not try to advance our agenda. We would be a neutral convener, we would listen, we would be open to criticism and take that risk, but that only came from the period of time through COVID under our existing leadership, Mr. Adrian Lopez, our CEO.

His leadership doubled our budget from \$100 million to \$200 million, put us in a place where we're the prime contractor for the ready to work effort and really put us in a position where we were partnering through a lot of the work Caroline did with nonprofits who were really deep in serving specific populations. So there was a level of credibility there to say you're doing the work in a way that makes sense. If you could pull it together, folks will get involved and give you that perspective that you need as a workforce investment board to continue to evolve over the next five years. We submit four-year plans to the state of Texas called local plans, so there is that arc, that horizon that you have to be thinking about consistently. And so I would encourage Workforce boards to make some sort of investment in something like that as it makes sense for them in terms of where they are.

Sheila Maguire (27:20)

Anyone else from the Alamo team on that?

Caroline Goddard (27:25)

I can add. I think I mentioned earlier that most of our funds are from the Department of Labor or the Texas Workforce Commission, so I would highly encourage other boards that are considering an investment like this to think outside the box a little bit. We did have to apply for some additional funds to support this initiative, so just thinking about that. And I know we mentioned Vanessa, shout out to Vanessa. So think about the staff capacity as you facilitate, but also the administrative tasks and the time it takes to put on this sort of work, just to think about that as well.

Sheila Maguire (28:09)

I think we have a couple of minutes for the last question here about what are some of the changes in the way we in the workforce feel to fund and support workforce organizations. Do you think it would help facilitate more investments in the human capital, in the human infrastructure, in the human connectivity of local systems? What are some of those things that come to mind?

Adrian Perez (28:39)

I would offer that continuing to do or to undertake this kind of work that was executed through this partnership consistently on a regular cadence, I come back to these points of once you're able to pull together perspective and get people's opinions around what are the issues we could focus on? I think for us, what it did is help us to understand that when you set the table five years from now, it really is a place where we're going to have to work together in new and more innovative ways. And so it makes us think about our internal talent development strategy. Are our people currently working with us trained or looking in that direction?

Are we providing them the perspective and then the skill development opportunities to answer that call as it continues to evolve over time? Because as Caroline said, speaking from a Workforce Program perspective particularly, our focus sometimes is excellence at program implementation, being great at deploying those programs, and they're very focused and it's very easy to get caught up in that as your core goal. And so I would think that that's how this is changing how we look at how we invest in our talent. Are we investing in our people to solve the problems that we're going to have to solve over time and be at that place in five years that we need to be to serve this increasingly complex workforce system?

Sheila Maguire (30:18)

Yes, Kat?

Kat Pipoly (30:20)

No, no. Go ahead, Sheila.

Sheila Maguire (30:24)

I always make the joke that I was an auctioneer in a previous life, so if you even wink a little bit, I'm going to ask you. I can talk, but it's harder on Zoom. Great, thank you. We'll keep chatting now, Brad, but really like to turn to you and talk a little bit as you listen to the dialogue today, what stood out for you? What do you see looking out at our talent needs, at our infrastructure capacity needs from a national point of view and in this role at the National Association of Workforce Development Board?

Brad Turner Little (31:01)

Well, Sheila, thank you so much for inviting me to be a listener in this conversation. I would've joined anyway because this is really compelling. I just get the opportunity to talk a little bit and provide some

reaction, which I'm grateful for. So thank you Sheila and Dee for inviting me into this space. And Adrian and Kat, even though you've taken a new role and Caroline, thank you for the work that you've done in this space. San Antonio holds a special place in my heart based on my own career and some of the things that I've done, so I'm grateful for the investments that you're making to drive economic vitality for business and all of your neighbors there in the greater San Antonio area. I'm in awe.

I want to hone in, Sheila. Actually, the thing that you said at the very end, Adrian, to me was the crux of what this whole first, although Sheila did probably five minutes of intro, so 25 minutes of conversation has been about. The challenge and the opportunity we have within workforce boards, within the ecosystem to I don't want to say shift, but build on and evolve our approach to building our teams in a way that it is inclusive of delivering high quality service, but it's building the capability and the competency set to be problem-solvers when we don't know what the problems are yet. What a powerful construct, Adrian, and you just sort of flippantly sort of passed it on. But that to me, that is the crux of I think the issue that I see all across the country when I've talked to directors and I've talked to boards has been.

You all sit at the epicenter of massive, I think we're probably past economic disruption, we are deeply in economic transformation and we don't know what it's going to look like in five years. We just don't. And our jobs are to help our neighbors and help businesses come together to create a competitive business model, what a challenge we have in front of us. And so I think about that particular frame that you just gave us is such an important question. And I see, like I said, when I've talked with directors and I've talked with boards, one of the things we struggle with, and I appreciate all three of you have talked about, it's really important to talk about our blind spots and it's really important to talk about our vulnerabilities because that's how we are able to build paths forward. The system, if you would, writ large, doesn't have a bench.

We just don't, and I think some of that is driven by the fact that you guys have 17 performance measures you got to meet and all that stuff, Caroline, that you talked about, that you got to comply with this reg and do this and do that and whatever. And so to think about things like succession planning and being too deep in every position and being ready when Kat takes a new opportunity, what do we do? And you guys may have had one, but more often than not, boards have not been afforded the luxury of being able to think in those ways. But this conversation today is a great example of a different way of coming at that, right? Because also, those 500 ambassadors, Caroline, that you've unleashed across the Riverwalk, they're also talent magnets for you. There are different ways of creating access to competency and capability that you didn't have before.

And so to me, that's really exciting to see how that will change the way you do business because you've got all these new inputs and all these new perspectives now circling around the core of what you do. And it's a different view on how to think about succession planning and building a bench, and it's really exciting and I'm really intrigued by that and what that holds for not just the way that you'll be positioned to support the greater San Antonio area, and I think you said 13 surrounding communities or counties, in five years, but what you're going to look like, because I'm betting it's going to look really different.

And to me, that's exciting and I want to be able to continue to learn from you all and with you all about what your experience is. I know we here at NAWB greatly value our relationship with the Aspen Institute, and personally I've known Sheila and Dee for quite some time, as well as Maureen Conway. And the work that you all do is really important to bring people together around these issues and to come at a challenge within the system from a very different perspective, and create a different path that can

open up new possibilities to address really, really important things because the fact that our system writ large doesn't have a bench puts us at risk moving forward.

And so I think it's critically important, the work that you all are doing, not just because of what it means for the people in San Antonio and for the businesses in San Antonio, but for what this sort of an approach can mean for communities all over the country. Interestingly, and I'll pause here in a moment, Sheila, and turn it back to you, but it's a way for you to identify those bright and shining stars within your system and put them on a path to really drive change and transformation in a really different sort of way. And they don't even have to work for you, which is the beautiful play here, which I think is really, really powerful.

Sheila Maguire (38:14)

Yeah. Thank you, Brad. And once again, getting that young talent out of master's programs. Where are our master's programs? Where are our preparatory career paths? But I'll stop. Dee, we have time for some answers. Do we have a couple of questions that might be useful?

Dee Wallace (38:37)

We did have a question come in about influencing the planning that's going on for WIOA plans right now. And Adrian, you touched on this, but do you guys have any specific recommendations for local communities, local boards that are writing, working on their plans right now, how they can influence those plans to support, as we've been talking about, talent development and strategic thinking for leaders in the community?

Adrian Perez (39:12)

I would say with the local plan, if that's what we're referring to in relation to WIOA or other types of regulatory guardrails we have to live within, in the local plan, I think we are going to focus on trying to ensure that we lay in some mechanism to indicate that this is a part of how we do the work. And so as we lead up to our local plan, which we're starting on this year, we're very fortunate in that this work that we've done here is sort of informing how we start the plan. And hopefully what we could do is every two years, inject at least some mechanism that has the same type of discipline, same type of cadence and linear process, and bring people together for a conversation that hopefully will have a consistent cadence in order to support the work that's being done. And again, reinforcing what are those pieces of connective tissue and how do we continue to strengthen them over time?

And so the local plan is usually a four-year plan that gets updated kind of midway in two-year spurts, and so that's what I would suggest. As far as specific recommendations, it's really interesting that every community has its own DNA, right? Every community has its own sort of story how things actually happen in a community, and so I'd stop short of saying these are the four things you definitely have to have in there other than create yourself a venue where the free exchange of ideas can happen to set the table for your community over that arc, understanding the landscape and how you all play a role. So that's what I'd offer.

Dee Wallace (40:50)

Thank you. We had another question just come in, thanking you guys for sharing your transformative story. And a question that they had is how do we stay inclusive going forward? How do you pay attention to being an inclusive community?

Adrian Perez (41:14)

I would offer one thing around that. So as part of our response to this ready-to-work opportunity, as I mentioned, the city of San Antonio passed a sales tax initiative funding workforce development over a number of years for \$200 million. When WSA looked at that opportunity and thought about we can go at it ourselves or we can put together a consortium of non-profit partners who have expertise in working with verticals, if you want to call it that, of our population and specialize ways that we simply don't as an agency, whether it be the justice involved, whether it be women's issues and social and mobility, whether it be other types of entities, that idea of putting together a consortium and really digging into and partnering with and really dynamic ways, meaning increasing their capacity.

Telling them, "Hey, let us do the accounting. Let us do it administratively. You do what you do and you work with the people you work with, and feed them to us in a way that all of us are better." I think there's a way of speaking to it, setting that goal, setting that vision and saying, "This is who we are," but really trying to build those partnerships and understanding what that entails. And sometimes it entails trust, sometimes it entails being open and honest in ways that maybe aren't pleasant in order to get the job done. But that's a very practical, I think, way of saying, "Well, how do we stay inclusive?" and partner with those folks who are doing the work on the front lines in a way that makes sense.

Brad Turner Little (42:43)

And not to influence what Adrian just articulated, but I thought Caroline, one of the things that you said earlier really connects to what Adrian said. Was that from an academy perspective, it was interesting, I wrote it down, that you engaged people who were more powerful than you, which was interesting, right? And you engaged, it was people... oh, dadgummit. Where did I write it down? That one really struck with me, but I wrote down the two things that you said, in that there was intentionality in recognizing that you needed more than what you had, which is kind of where you're headed in that, Adrian. Right? There were levers that you knew you needed to pull in order to move the needle, to move the ball down the field, and you didn't have access to those levers. So you needed others who could pull those levers to be able to get them pulled for you, right?

And Adrian, from a youth services perspective, it's the same scenario. You need groups that can pull those levers, can access that client segment in a way that you can't. And so to really be able to deliver and to keep focused on the big end game, which hopefully from my perspective is economic vitality, if that's the big end game, my ego gets set aside because I'm trying to get to that. And so I thought, Caroline, what you had articulated in the earlier part of the conversation, I thought that was really interesting. I failed to mention it earlier, but it popped back up for me, Adrian, when you were talking about it because it's the similar type of thing. There are groups who have power with youth because they have presence, they have trust. They have an on-ramp that you may not have. And so to really be able to deliver for them, how do you bring those people together to create a pathway, clear the path

really for this really significant investment around youth in your community? So I just wanted to add that I thought that was really compelling.

Sheila Maguire (44:58)

So this is why we do the after-party. We are at our one-on-one time. There are many options to continue this conversation, but with us, we will post a link to another room if you want to chat for a little more together about this topic. We will be holding another three of these Workforce Leadership Cafes focused with our Chamber of Commerce partner, our local funder partners, and oh goodness, I'm losing the other one.

Dee Wallace (45:37)

Our statewide coalitions.

Sheila Maguire (45:38)

Our statewide coalitions. All different types of organizations that also sponsor these organizations are going to be sharing their experience, so please register for those. Please click on the Zoom if you'd like to keep on chatting for a little while, and thank you all so much. Thank you to the panelists. You were fantastic, open, just putting out the reality in front of everybody for a really great discussion. Thanks Brad, Adrian, Caroline, Kat, thank you all, and Dee. And we will see you perhaps in the after-party.