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Midwest Urban Strategies: Region-wide Workforce Consortium

KELLY O'BRIEN: Today's last panel is a demonstration of true regional collaboration, and the discussion will be led by Anne Edmunds, the Alliance Workforce Team Manager. Anne serves as Regional Vice President for the Chicago/Wisconsin/Minnesota Metro Region. She leads all aspects of the operation of Manpower's commercial staffing business in the Greater Chicago region, as well as Wisconsin and Minnesota.

Her duties include strategy development and implementation, employee selection, development and retention, sales and service execution, and client satisfaction retention. Anne is also responsible for the proper alignment and prioritization of the region's activities to ensure the attainment of Manpower's visions, goals, and objectives.

Anne and I have worked together now for many years, going back to the days when the Alliance was headquartered at the Chicagoland Chamber. And then Anne came with us as

we incorporated as a 501(c)(3). We are so privileged and grateful for your leadership, and really excited about what you're going to hear today in terms of having the workforce leaders from the three sub-regions coming together, and working on an initiative that I know you're going to be happy to hear about.

So with that, Anne --

ANNE EDMUNDS: Well, thank you very much, Kelly. It's really a pleasure today to have such an outstanding panel with us. I have a chance, in my role, to be able to view a lot of businesses, and what's happening in the world of work today. And one of the big issues that occurred is that companies and academia and government have a problem working together to get to a solution to find talent.

And our excellent panel, from my observation, is one of the best groups in the country. They're very innovative. They've done some tremendously creative things. And I'm really looking forward to hearing about their compelling journey in award-winning initiatives.

I'd like to introduce Karin Norington-Reaves, President and CEO of the Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership. And Karin, if you could tell us just a little bit about your background, that would be great.

KARIN NORINGTON-REAVES: Good afternoon, everybody.

Thank you for the few who have hung in there with us. So, we won't disappoint. I'm Karin Norington-Reaves. I oversee the Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership. We are the nation's largest workforce system. We have the City of Chicago, as well as Cook County. I am an attorney, by training. I guess, the LAP lawyer, as they say. I also have a background in early childhood education, and I actually was the founding CEO of the Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership. And before that, I was running workforce programs in the county, and before that with the state.

MS. EDMUNDS: All right, thank you, Karin. Linda Woloshansky, President and CEO of the Center of Workforce Innovation, I believe, in Indiana. Correct?

LINDA WOLOSHANSKY: Thank you, Anne, and I too thank colleagues who have stuck with us today, and those from Indiana that are still here. I appreciate it.

My background is running workforce boards for a number of years. I have a lot of focus on education and economic development, and workforce development. It is my kind of passion, and has been a passion for a long time. I represent a seven-county region in Northwest Indiana, and feel very fortunate to be working with my esteemed colleagues here.

MS. EDMUNDS: I would like to introduce Earl Buford.

If anyone's from Milwaukee, they know Earl. I told him that today, just as we were standing out there. Earl is President and CEO of Employ Milwaukee. So, Earl, would you tell us a little bit about yourself?

EARL BUFORD: Yeah, thank you, Anne. First of all, again, like everyone else has said, thank you for hanging in there. And you waited for the best, so this be worth your while. It's a lot of fun, and a lot of exciting things we're going to talk about today.

I'm the President and CEO of Employ Milwaukee, which is the largest workforce board in the State of Wisconsin, located in Milwaukee County. My background was in education. I previously worked for the workforce board, about 20 years ago, in youth programs. I left about 1998 to run an organization called, Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership, which is one of the nation's oldest and first intermediaries in that whole market of intermediaries.

Mayor Tom Barrett persuaded me to come back. Actually, he said, "Come back, and run the damn workforce board" -- direct quote. So I've been an agitator to the system. It's been four years now, and it's really exciting to work in Milwaukee. But, what I'm really excited about is the work we're doing together, collectively throughout the Midwest.

MS. EDMUNDS: Great. They've had, as I said, a very compelling journey. And it's a journey that's been an award-winning journey. I find listening, and looking at the presentation that they've put together, you'll really take some very huge nuggets out of how to be collaborative, and how to get things done. So, I'm going to turn it over to Earl, who will start the presentation, and talk through how you collaboratively made a difference.

MR. BUFORD: I'm going to ask Tracy to go back one slide to the map. So, Midwest Urban Strategies is a collection of now 12 workforce development boards throughout the Midwest. We're also known as Department of Labor Region 5. If you look at the map, you have an idea who's involved, but I will try to name off all twelve.

I always start, west to east, it's easier for me that way. So Kansas City and St. Louis in Missouri. We just added Wichita, Kansas. Minneapolis, Chicago -- I'm sure I missed something somewhere. Milwaukee, Detroit, and Gary, and Indianapolis, and the three-Cs of Ohio, Columbus, Cleveland and Cincinnati. Who did I miss?

MS. EDMUNDS: Did you get St. Louis?

MR. BUFORD: I got St. Louis right away. It's always easy to first start off with it. So, you get the idea. And the idea behind this was really, as workforce

development boards, it's urban workforce, that's a key thing. It urban boards throughout the Midwest coming together to create a community of practice. That's how it all started.

On the onset of WIOA, for those who understand the Workforce Innovation Opportunities Act, is the law that governs our world, although we add a lot of other things to that world. We were all on the onset of that, around 2014. A lot of other things were going on in our respective communities, whether they were turmoil in Ferguson, and Detroit, and some in Milwaukee as well. And so, we needed a collective body of friends and colleagues and practitioners to bounce ideas off of. So, that's how it started. It started with, I think at the time, it was four cities. And now it's grown to 12.

We're going to run slides. We aren't going to walk you through the slides, because we want you out of here before five o'clock. But you can follow that. We can also have the presentation sent out to you. But just to give you the basic ideas of where it started. About two and a half years ago, we had our first conference call as a group, and decided we liked each other, which is nice. But what we found out, more than anything else, was really the implementation of WIOA with so many tentacles to it, the

federal government wasn't even ready for it, let alone states. I think the local boards were ahead of the states and the Department of Labor, in most cases.

The idea was community practice. But what we found is any time you have scalable partnerships coming together, funders like that. And so, we'll get more into some of the funding vehicles that have come together on the public discretionary side, but also on the philanthropic and corporate side, as well.

But the important piece is, how do you communicate best practices, the will, and strong programs? And so today, what we're hoping to do is just walk you through what's developed, where we're at now, and then turn it over to each of us individually, and let you know what we're doing in our cities respectively, and then how this all comes together collectively. If that makes any sense at all.

Vision-wise, as we're flying through the screens, you get the idea that this is the first of its kind, so our understanding. While there's lots of collaboratives around the country, a lot of associations like collaboratives. But again, this is the first workforce development-led, urban-focused collaboration.

And so, one thing that came to mind from a resource

standpoint, if those who were around for the ARRA days of the Obama Administration, a lot of the grants that came out, the various training, and things that came out, they were going to a lot of the same groups. A lot of those groups are my friends, so I'm not going to speak ill. But Jobs for the Future, National Fund, Lourosa (phonetic), all those groups accumulated a lot of those grants. What was interesting was, while as workforce boards, we were mandatory partners to sign off on it, we weren't really involved at a large level. So a lot of times, the grants were awarded, and then they'd come back to say, "Will you work with us now, or will you sign off on this, and get out of our way."

As the recognized public workforce system, that's a little hard to swallow for us, and it's not coordinated, it's not connected. And so, again, by coming together in this community of practice and this partnership, we now have a way to really look at how to strengthen and leverage, and scale of the public workforce system throughout the Midwest.

So, with that, from a funding standpoint, so we're now responsible for three major Department of Labor discretionary grants. American Apprenticeship, which is -- the number is on the board -- but that includes three of

the partners, Milwaukee, St. Louis, and Detroit. And then there's the Tech Hiring Initiative, and again you see the number trained, which is St. Louis, Milwaukee, and Cincinnati. And then for America's Promise, more of us have come together. I believe 8 of the 12 cities have partnered on America's Promise to train more than almost 1,500 individuals, and really upgrading pathways into middle school jobs, and good paying income in supporting jobs.

So I'm really excited about those opportunities, but we've also received other philanthropic support and infrastructure support.

One of the things that we're really excited about -- so we, as a group, we have a monthly phone call, and again, the in early stages of our collaboration, we had a lot of what I call speaker meetings. Just get your phone out, hit speaker, and go from there, which can be tough. So, we were fortunate recently to get an upgrade grant to connect us all technologically. So, we're excited to now have more face time technologically, as a group, to really work out some of the strong initiatives that we're working on. And we also, as a group, meet twice a year. So we were just in Cincinnati last week, thanks to our host city there. And we will be in Minneapolis in the spring, and Kansas City.

Which I haven't told Karin yet, in Kansas City next fall.

So a lot of proximity, a lot of time together, a lot of work, a lot of goodwill. And one of our next big initiatives, aside from the community practice, and the resource development, is developing our relationships. So we really are going to be really fortunate to start to look at how our local partners can expand it regionally. So, where it's development of industry advisory boards across regions, or whether it's just looking at best practices. We were just in a meeting earlier, transportation logistics. What can we do from a regional standpoint on that footprint?

So again, these are all things that we do in our local areas, but to really go to scale, and that's the ever-elusive workforce is scale, I think we have an opportunity to finally talk about what scale looks like. Now to move people and companies to really connect at a large level. In Wisconsin right now we're dealing with a little phenomenon called box (inaudible 0:08:20) and right now we're talking about 23,000 jobs across construction and manufacturing. Let's be honest, Milwaukee and Greater Wisconsin can't fulfill that. We're going to need our regional partners to really make that work. While the Governor will never say that publicly, we all know that.

Again, for me, from an infrastructure standpoint, I couldn't be more excited to have a partnership linkage to fulfill the needs of our local economy, and our local employers.

MS. WOLOSHANSKY: Thank you, Earl. What I would like to do is first thank Kelly for having us serve on this panel, and allowing us to tell the story. And Earl, of course, for his leadership in organizing the Midwest Urban Strategies. I said, out of the things that I've done over my career that has been collaborative, this is the time where the initiative is really collaborative, and it is very powerful, and has resulted in direct benefits to, I think, everyone. Certainly to our area, right from the get-go, not only from the federal grant standpoint, but just the community of practice, and having an opportunity to learn from each other. It has been outstanding.

You know, on the slide, you can see where Northwest Indiana is. We support the Northwest Indiana Workforce Board, which is the workforce board for the seven counties of Northwest Indiana. Rooted in employer demand, we're really looking at how the workforce can develop to be self-sustainable, and have a great quality of life.

We really are in a prime position, I think, in Northwest Indiana, because we're right in the hub of four

U.S. interstates, a lot of highways, the international port. We also have the Gary/Chicago International Airport, plus other airports. We can drive to about 80 percent of the population in 24 hours or so. I must admit that's not a drive I really like to have. Years ago, I drove to Marco Island and Naples in 24 hours, and I won't be ever doing that again, because that was quite a haul. But, you can get there in 24 hours.

We really boost the sector strategies. We focus on the sector strategies, manufacturing, logistics, healthcare, and retail, as our primary strategies. Essentially when we first started out working with employers, and that started in 2000, the employer engagement and what do employers need in order to be productive, and to be strong. And how to support the economic development of strategies of Northwest Indiana.

Those beginning days were really focused on more transactional work, and working one-on-one with employers. It moved to more relationship-based. And now, into more of a consortium-based effort, because we can get to a lot more employers at any given time, when we've got them clustered together. And they are all then sharing their ideas, not only with us, but with each other in terms of their skillset needs. And from that, some very interesting

things actually occur.

So, we have a manufacturing consortium, Conexus, which is a statewide initiative in Indiana that focuses on logistics. It has a workforce committee, and so we both work on, partner, and share with folks on that particular committee. A healthcare consortium which has started. There was one in Northwest Indiana. It somewhat fizzled. And we stepped in and have taken that over, and it is really starting to blossom now, focused on different ideas that are needed in terms of skill training. But also, different ways they could help each other in the industry, which is pretty exciting, including possibly taking a look at pools of employees that they can draw from, and share from in those areas where it is hard to recruit.

And last, but not least, our retail strategy, which certainly wasn't in play. But as a result of a grant from Walmart and the Chicago Cook partnership, certainly it has helped launch that, including having a very interesting retail training center at the largest mall in Northwest Indiana, the Southlake Mall, where they've donated space, and have allowed us to do all of the training right there on site. Which allows individuals, not only to learn the skillsets they need, but to practice them on the job, so to speak, in their retail connections. So that has just been

fabulous.

The second piece that is really important to us in Northwest Indiana, because of our geographic size and somewhat some of our disparity, because we're a community of urban, but we also have a lot of suburban and a lot of rural communities. And so, what has become really important in order for our employers to get the best scale of the potential talent, and for us to really see traction in the development of the workforce pool, is to align the pipeline. And as you can see there, we have a multi-faceted, grassroots initiative that started six years ago as we brought and invited individuals from the K through 12 system, the public corporations, the universities, economic development, employers, and labor leaders, and workforce to develop a plan about what was really needed to focus on the jobs of today, and tomorrow.

This initiative is called READY. It is a, as I said, a grassroots initiative. It has really focused on college and career readiness, which clearly is a key to everything that we are all doing. And with us today, we have Dr. Carmine Polito, who is also one of the co-chairs of the education committee, and has been just critical. We have 29 of the 36 public school corporations that are participating in this initiative. They've done so

voluntarily. I always say, READY is not encumbered by funding whatsoever. It really is an effort of love, and just of will by the folks that are participating.

And the college readiness focus has really resulted in some outstanding outcomes that we've tracked over the last couple of years, including increasing graduation rates, reducing remediation needs, persistence rates at the colleges, and has really resulted in a connection with the employer community, who essentially were initially responsible for the READY initiative, as they kept saying that the pipeline needed to be developed. They didn't have the pipeline. And essentially, the schools that said there were no jobs. And lo and behold, how surprising it was for both parties to see that they ultimately could work together, and could benefit from this kind of relationship. It has been phenomenal.

And the third piece of our pillars, I guess we call them, and we talk about these more than we do about programs. Because if you don't have the right infrastructure in place, you don't have the right foundation, a single program is not going to resolve the workforce issue. And so that was, first and foremost, incredibly important to us. And that's where we've been putting a lot of our energies the last number of years.

So, the last piece relates to the development of the pipeline. We also have four pieces in terms of that development. What we found out is that the foundational skills of the folks in Northwest Indiana were really lacking. And I hesitate to even share how many folks did not have a high school diploma and had some literacy issues. But, what has happened is that there has been an incredible movement on adult basic education line of work. Where there are now 20 providers also collaborating, and working together, not only to help people get their high school diploma, that have dropped out of school, starting from the age of 16, unfortunately, up to the 50 and 60-year-old individual who still wants to be employed.

But it focuses on both remediation and basic skill enhancement, and clearly connects the folks that are in these different programs to focus on credentials, and continuing their education so that they can see the development of a pipeline for their own futures related to careers.

The second piece is related to career pathways, and career advising. And what we're seeing, once again across the board, a focus on helping people understand what those career pathways are. Through numerous conversations, I think amongst all of our colleagues, we can understand that

unless people have an understanding of what a career pathway is, what are the occupations within that pathway, what kind of transferable skills they might develop to move to a different pathway, there is a kind of lack of excitement about different jobs, and different career opportunities.

And we have been attacking that through the work of career coaches, and career facilitators, and career online efforts that, once again, cut across all the programs whether it's adult education, it's the one-stop career center. We see much of this occurring in our post-secondary institutions. And so, we are starting to see that equal playing field in all those areas to really make a difference.

Employer readiness is another one of those pillars because without understanding what employers really need, and having that connection with them, it just doesn't seem like a very genuine kind of strategy. So, what has now happened with all those employers that are involved in these consortiums, and want to get engaged? They are now engaging, both the job seekers, the students, the faculty, the staff, everyone that's working, the teachers, the counselors, they are engaging all of those folks to help them really understand what these jobs are all about.

And they do so in a number of ways, including providing tours, doing panels, coming to one-stop career centers, to colleges. At the one-stop centers, they actually come in every week, and do on-site discussions with the individuals that are seeking employment. We also have resulted in a weekly newsletter. What's the hot job with the hot information, that goes out to all the partners and all the providers to keep them connected

and to help them understand what's occurring.

And the last piece is integrated training. And clearly when we also talk about integrated training, we're thinking about the work-and-learn concept, which is so critical to folks. Once again, really developing not only the academic skills, but the experience skills in order to move into employment. And, we have some sterling examples from the work that has happened with Purdue Northwest and the Mechatronics program. And how they have taken the classroom training, and made sure that there's internships involved for all of those students.

The Skill UP initiative, which has occurred in Northwest Indiana that has, for us, focused on manufacturing. And has done the same thing in manufacturing with the work-and-learn strategy. But also, one of those unintended consequences, was the fact that a

lot of the employers who are in more of the rural settings that actually do not have any college or university, or solid training institution available in their communities, are now offering the training being taught from, for example, a iD Tech Community College, but taught at their plant site for incumbent workers, incumbent workers from other companies, and job seekers, which is pretty phenomenal, and we think is clearly a model.

And so I think when we look at, last but not least, some of the products that we've been able to deliver on, these have been very long-standing products. Our work ethics poster, which generated early in the 2000s when we did a survey of over 100 employers, and asked them what the skillsets were that were needed of their employees.

And they essentially came back with these attributes of work ethics, work readiness. Instead of just doing a report, we created a poster. That poster has been modified slightly over the last 15 years. Every three years we do a survey of employers, and they update this. And this is in high school, elementary, middle school, one-stop, adult education centers, and in our universities across the board.

And our State of the Workforce Report, which was the first, and still may be, the only document like this in

Northwest Indiana, which really integrates the economic development, employer, and workforce education components, the data that is out there, to really talk about what our workforce is like, and where employers can turn for the right individuals, and the right industries.

As so, with that, I guess I will turn this over to Karin, who will talk about what's happening in the Chicago Cook partnership.

MS. NORINGTON-REAVES: Quick question, how many of you think about workforce, and think of social services? Raise your hand. I'm also trying to make you wake up. Come on. Come on. Let me see. All right. How many of you see workforce development as a tool for economic empowerment and growth? Thank you. So you would not believe -- you would not believe the amount of time that we spent in Chicago trying to change that paradigm. Because so much of the work that was done in workforce development was done in conjunction with human services, social services. We spent a lot of time helping to reframe the approach to what workforce development meant, and what it meant to our communities, and what it means to our employers.

So the Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership was born a little over five years ago. We were the brainchild of President Tony Preckwinkle, who you saw earlier today, and

Mayor Rahm Emmanuel. And prior to our existence, if you were an employer in this region and wanted to look for talent through the public workforce system, you could work with the local workforce investment area that was run by the City of Chicago. You could work with Cook County South and West Suburban workforce development system, or you could work with Northern Cook County workforce development system.

And you could also speak to the policy and strategy arm for the City of Chicago, which was then known as CWIC, the Chicago Workforce Investment Council. Now, I'm sure I just lost you explaining that. Can you imagine what you are as an employer coming into the area looking for talent?

Rather than sending our employers to four different sources for talent, and rather than forcing all of our delegate agencies to submit RFPs in every single one of those areas in order to actually become service providers, everything was collapsed into one organization. We built an entirely new structure, and we also made sure that there was a focus on local business demand.

Before that, there was very much a train and pray philosophy. Train them up, pray they get a job. Job done. We really wanted to focus on strategic engagement of employers, and strategic engagement when it came to our

pipeline, our talent pipeline development. We have two clients in mind, one being job seekers, one being employers. And then we work with them through a variety of tools. So, training providers, career coaches and advisors, and then we built up this entire ecosystem around workforce development. And there's now this robust partnership and robust synergies between what we're actually training people in, and the local demand.

We focused on the seven high-growth, high-demand sectors for this region only. That is what we put our training dollars toward. I'll tell you a little ditty. When we first started, we did this analysis of the labor market. We looked at where were the actual jobs? Where were the jobs projected to be? What were those sectors? And then, what were those key occupations? And we said, all right, that's what we're going to focus our dollars on.

Well, we brought in all the training providers, had this big meeting to explain, this is what we're going to fund. And one of the categories that was actually available for funding was dog grooming. Well, there was a dog groomer in the audience when we made this announcement. And I stepped out of the room. The staff said, "You can't leave the room anymore. There's a dog groomer here, and he's really mad."

And he said, "You know, I want you to take another look at those numbers. There's jobs in dog grooming." And I said, "I'm sure you're right, but we're focused on high-volume, high-growth, high-demand." And he says, "I have successfully trained, and placed people in dog grooming." We said, "Great, can you tell us your percentage? Can you talk to us about your outcome?" "I've had 80 percent. I've got an 80 percent placement rate." "That's great, 80 percent of what?"

He has placed 13 people in dog grooming jobs in the previous three years. That was not the volume or scale that we were looking for. And so we said, "Listen, the other side of this about demand. And so, if we get Petco to ring the county with 100 new stores, and they need 500 dog groomers, we will train for that demand. But you gotta be able to articulate it." The way this story goes is that when we got back to the office there was a call from the National Dog Grooming Association. But anyway, I say all that to say we are all about the demand.

As I mentioned, we were formed about five years ago. We are the largest workforce system in the nation. And I know workforce does not sound particularly sexy, but it is exciting, and it is rewarding to connect people to their future. And connect employers to the talent that they need

to grow, and compete in this global economy, and even regionally.

We do our work -- we don't do the direct service. We fund 53 workforce development organizations. We operate 10 workforce centers. We have 8 satellite locations. And we do three sector-based centers, one in information technology, one in healthcare, and as Linda alluded to, one in retail and hospitality, and I'll talk about that in just a moment.

We do this through a competitive bid process, just as you might well imagine. And we work with a host of different partners to make sure that we are meeting the local demand. We serve approximately anywhere from 100,000 to 140,000 people a year that actually come and visit one of our centers, to avail themselves of a host of services. Typically, we enroll anywhere from 12,000 to 19,000 people in direct training services in any given year.

I just brought samples of a host of different initiatives that we're involved in. Some of the work that we do on the frontline involves creating awareness of the jobs report. We do a quarterly retrospective. We identify the top employers for the quarter in the county. We also identify the occupations that they have been seeking people in, and the credentials that are necessary, as well as the

skills. So that tool is used on the frontline. We have about 700 people on the frontline serving folks on any given day.

In addition to that, we have done targeted occupational profiles. We give people an overview of what it means to work in a particular career, a particular occupation. And those are tools, again, that are used on the frontline.

But getting to the larger point around the regional collaboration, before we could even be in a place to collaborate with the Midwest Urban Strategies, we had to do a lot of collaboration and internal work here, within our region. Over the past several years we've focused on -- we were launched as a nonprofit organization. We're not connected to government. We are the designee for the City of Chicago and Cook County. As a nonprofit, we have now been able to bring in an additional \$50 million in philanthropic funds that has helped us to grow initiatives and bring in partners.

And as Earl said, so often I know early on, we were an afterthought to many partners. Or we were the box that they had to tick off, right, in order to be able to apply for federal funding. There was not this, let's consciously bring these folks to the table, and let's have these

intentional strategies around how we engage with workforce development.

And that has completely shifted. And I think because of the work we've done with our local collaboration, we've been able to then do these larger, regional collaborations.

One of the most significant has been our \$10.9 million dollar award from the Walmart Foundation. It's focused on career pathway advancement with respect to the retail and hospitality sectors. Recognizing the fact that one in four Americans have a job in the retail sector. How many of you started out in retail, your first job, McDonald's, Burger King, Starbucks, grocery stores? We did this exercise with our board members, and it was overwhelming. It was like 98 percent of the board, their first job was like at McDonald's.

Given the way that the economy has recovered, and the number of jobs that have started off in retail, despite the fact that you may start at a low-paying job, there's great opportunities to advance quickly, and advance to higher-paying wages. That grant has actually allowed us to not only advance our own retail sector center, but to sub-grant now to 10 other workforce boards around the country, where we lead a community of practice around retail careers and development.

We also focus again, on those high-demand, high-growth areas. Manufacturing and TDL are other areas where we've had great partnerships, and great collaborations on a local level. And then specifically focusing on the needs of young people, folks over the age of 50. We've got a great relationship with AARP, and the Back to Work 50+ from their foundation. We're actually doing a symposium tomorrow around seasoned workers, and those folks seeking those encore careers after 50.

I'll stop there, and let Anne get back to sort of facilitating, and see if we can answer any questions for you.

MS. EDMUNDS: I'm looking at a simpler -- since we're close to running out of time, I'm going to open it up to the audience to ask questions, and then we can come back. Question, yes.

MALE SPEAKER: You shared success stories, thank you. I'm really impressed. Apart from the obvious one that we all face, resource constraints, what would you say, though, each of you, are the biggest obstacles that you faced, and secondly, and it might be related, the biggest frustration?

MS. NORINGTON-REAVES: Sure. I would say from my perspective, the greatest challenge was just creating the sea change, the paradigm shift, getting people to think

about the fact that it didn't matter how many people you trained up. If there was not a demand for those skills, it was all for naught, right? And so, we really had to create this sea change even amongst our system, around business engagement. What does it mean to really engage with employers and industry associations? Discerning their needs, building programs that are really aligned specifically with what they're asking for, and being able to project and understand the future.

I would say my greatest frustration is around scale. Because as large as we are, as big a system as we have, as many people as we serve, as great a placement rate as we have, there are so many people in need. And when I look at the communities in my city, when you listen to the news, and I hear it's five percent unemployment rate, six percent unemployment rate. I know that in communities in the City of Chicago, and in suburban Cook County, if I sliced demographics by age, by gender, and by race, I get 60 percent unemployment for African American males in some communities. I get 40 percent unemployment if you're Latino. That to me is the biggest frustration, that no matter what we do, it just isn't enough.

MS. WOLOSHANSKY: I think our greatest challenge has been one of trust, because we have had such a disparate

region with so many different pockets of schools, and local elected officials, and communities that, at one point, did not trust each other; always thought that somebody had a hidden agenda if they were reaching out to work with you.

Now that has changed tremendously over the last five years to be far more collaborative and trusting. And I think, still my greatest source of frustration is the fact that we do not have a single large city. I mean, Gary is one of our major drivers, but we don't have a Chicago or a Milwaukee, where folks see that as kind of a center of the universe in our region. We also don't have a single media source that we could use to communicate. Both of those things really contribute to the challenges that maybe others don't face. Although we all face numerous challenges.

MR. BUFORD: Nice, but about one-third we can say, ditto-ditto. But I want to add a couple pieces. So, as workforce development boards, we're funders. I think that's also lost in these conversations. So we are the handlers of these federal job training dollars, and other need dollars. When there is a reduction on those dollars, you're obviously not whole right away. I think people are being resourceful enough to find other ways to do what we do, or whatever we're responsible for, whatever our mission

is. And Karin said it best. We have a lot of customers, but really two key customers, industry employers' demand, and then of course our supply side, the folks we deal with.

Anything we can do for a resource standpoint, whether it's dollars and cents, or other collaborative situations, we're going to do whatever we have to do to find a way to serve those two customers at the kind of scale we are trying to achieve. And I think Karin said it best, our economy is doing great right now, low unemployment, but not in the pockets that we're dealing with. Retention of employment, retention of apprentices, and all those key things. We're never going to work ourselves out of a job. I can tell you that right now.

If the economy's bad, we're busy. If the economy's really good, we're really busy. We're always having stuff to do. Which is nice to be at a conference like this, talking to you all, is that as you're driving the engine of economic development in your markets, workforce boards are ready to be a part of it. I'm going off your question a bit, but I think what happens sometimes is, we don't know to talk to you, and you don't know to talk to us.

As a publicly-anointed workforce board in your area, we can work with you side-by-side to ensure that those instruments are in place, as you are developing new

projects, or developing a relocation. So, think of us as a vehicle in response to whatever it is that you're trying to develop.

MS. EDMUNDS: I can take one last question. Anyone?
No.

MS. NORINGTON-REAVES: The one thing I wanted to just piggyback on, the point that Earl made. To the extent that you've never had to know what your workforce board does, that you've never had to go personally visit a workforce center, that's a blessing, right?

We get people when they are at their absolute lowest. When they feel devalued. When you think about in this country that we tie so much of our own personal worth in value and dignity to work. Our responsibility is to meet people where they are, along the spectrum of preparedness.

I tell folks, we work with folks who have never worked a day in their lives, who may have a sixth-grade education, all the way up to PhDs. We have placed CFOs at local corporations. And so, it's easy to be lost because you've not needed us. But we are here. Consider it a blessing you haven't needed us, but we're here, and we're eager to work with you.

MS. WOLOSHANSKY: And you know, another point to the whole workforce development arena is that we have not been

a very structured system whatsoever across the country. And we've not had the opportunity to actually get degrees in workforce development.

Back to the community of practice, and why the urban strategies piece is so important to us, is because then we are able to, once again, share with each other, learn from each other, as you would in other occupations where you do have that kind of discipline, and structure to get you to where you need to be, and other folks to turn to in order for you to get advice and support. So, looping it back from the urban strategies and why we're here today, that's really critical for us.

MR. BUFORD: So, your walk-away notes are two things. No matter where you're located, there's a workforce board in your area. So, just know that. We've illustrated three right here, Milwaukee, Northern Indiana, and Chicago. Those are three. But also note that there's a network, the first of its kind of boards coming together, as Linda just described with our community practice, and other tangible relationship-building situations.

As systems, we're trying to strengthen ourselves, and leverage ourselves so that we can do more. We have to do more. Those people are depending on us to do more.

Those are your walk-aways: Locally you know what we're

doing, and you also know there's some in your area, but collectively, we are really trying to make an impactful design in this system.

MS. EDMUNDS: I wanted to certainly thank Karin, and Linda and Earl. I know what they do. I've worked with all three of them, and they do amazing work. I also want to thank you for your contribution to the changing world of work. This collaboration is going to be, I think, record-setting, certainly for your business, and for what we do as business owners. Excellent conversation, and thank you again.

(END)