

Executive Summary & Recommendations



Mission: To impact cultural and economic values and advantages through collaboration and education to support the business case of diversity.

Diversity Definition: The inclusion of human differences that foster and promote economic and community growth in Sarasota County.

Funded by the Economic Development Corporation of Sarasota County, (EDC) Diversity Sub Group of the Business Climate Work Group of the EDC.

Prepared by Manatee Community College, September 2006.

The Economic Development Corporation of Sarasota County commissioned the Corporate and Community Development Division of Manatee Community College to conduct a series of focus groups to develop a better understanding of the needs and diverse composition of local companies and how they handle diversity issues within their organizations. These clients included, but were not limited to, local businesses and decision-makers within businesses that meet the profile of businesses in Sarasota County that had, have or seek to have a diverse employee population.

KEY FINDINGS

In general, most minority populations are underrepresented in many of the occupational clusters of Sarasota County as compared to their representation in the county, state and nation's general populations.

The most critical workforce and community diversity issues as perceived by the focus groups appear to be *Economic Status* (group of people differentiated on basis of income) and *Race/Ethnic Status* (groups of people differentiated on basis of race and/or ethnicity) followed by *Language*.

Most participants in the study reported few problems regarding diversity in the workplace, although a small percentage had either observed or experienced unfair treatment due to differences of racial/ethnic group, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion and country of birth.

Many of the participants' businesses addressed the various diversity issues by providing language and literacy training; offering competitive wages; succession planning; offering housing/mortgage options as part of the benefits package; and teamwork training.

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

Some of the most prevalent recommendations for the EDC of Sarasota County include:

- To be a catalyst for language, literacy, diversity and cultural awareness, employability and skills training;
- To sustain a vibrant economy and advocate for competitive wages, affordable housing, and transportation;
- To continue the diversity sub group of the business climate work group;
- To promote the social/business climate of the county as a way to attract diverse population groups.

RECOMMENDATIONS of the FOCUS GROUPS

For the EDC of Sarasota County

- Continue to partner with the Suncoast Workforce Board and educational institutions to increase diversity in the workforce.
- Assist in the recruitment of diverse candidates for employment.
- Continue to promote language and literacy training.
- Continue to promote career and technical education-post secondary adult vocational (PSAV) and associate's degree programs.
- Assist in the formation of "active" diversity business and industry focus groups to explore mechanisms for continuous promotion of workplace and community diversity.
- Sponsor diversity/cultural awareness training for business leaders.
- Collaborate with educational institutions to develop solutions for preventing/decreasing the dropout rate, especially of minorities.
- Continue to encourage and advocate for affordable housing, health insurance, convenient transportation and other cost-of-living parameters.
- Promote job-related internships.
- Encourage employability skills training.
- Advocate for government housing loan programs.
- Market and promote the social climate of the county as a way to attract diverse population groups.
- Encourage businesses to clearly state their commitment to diversity in the companies' mission statement and promotional materials, including the companies' Web sites.
- Advocate diversity mentoring and career development opportunities to businesses.

RECOMMENDATIONS of the FOCUS GROUPS

For businesses

- Continue to provide literacy and language training in both workplace and community settings.
- Continue to market and recruit employees through minority media and other venues for reaching these population groups.
- Use internal employee surveys as a mechanism for assessing employee satisfaction regarding diversity issues. Use results to enhance cultural awareness and to design specific diversity training.
- Promote diversity organizationally beginning with management.
- Continue to promote and advocate for affordable housing and convenient transportation.
- Create diversity goals and accountability measures; continuously evaluate progress; hold management accountable for achieving diversity goals.
- Continuously improve diversity marketing and recruitment innovations.
- Champion and provide diversity mentoring and career development opportunities.
- Support and promote diversity through use of diverse contract workers and suppliers, flexible hours and employment choices.

To learn more about the EDC or its Diversity Initiatives, contact

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To view the complete "Workplace Diversity Focus Group Report," go to:

www.edcsarasotacounty.com