



**Across the country, many regions - including Tampa Bay - have been challenged by difficult-to-fill job vacancies within rapidly expanding industries, and workforce skills gaps that are limiting business growth.**

In 2009, a group of business leaders and private philanthropic organizations in Sarasota and Manatee counties sought to address this challenge by backing a cutting-edge initiative to transform the community's approach to workforce development.

The [CareerEdge Funders Collaborative](#), a workforce initiative of the Greater Sarasota Chamber of Commerce Foundation, uses privately donated funds to help low-skill/low-wage workers advance to higher-skill/higher-wage careers, while providing employers with the trained workers they need to accelerate growth. Today, the program is supported by funders including Charles and Margery Barancik Foundation, Regions Bank, Bank of America, Boeing, Gulf Coast Community Foundation, JPMorgan Chase, John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, Microsoft, and the National Fund for Workforce Solutions among others.

"CareerEdge is designed to work on both sides of the labor market – the demand side and the supply side – as well as among intermediary organizations, such as higher education institutions, to fuel the pipeline of skilled labor needed by the region's employers," explained Kristi Hoskinson, Vice President for Workforce with the Greater Sarasota Chamber of Commerce.

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## Key Programs

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To participate in the CareerEdge program, businesses must be located in Sarasota or Manatee counties and be in one of the following industry focus areas: Manufacturing, Healthcare, Insurance or Skilled Trades (automotive, plumbing or HVAC).

A workforce council has been formed for each target industry. Council meetings are held three times a year to collect feedback and insights from industry employers, which then

guide the development of its programs. By partnering directly with employers in these fast-growing sectors of the regional economy, CareerEdge helps meet business needs, while also helping individuals enter the workforce and move up the career ladder.

CareerEdge offers **Upskilling Workers Grants** to eligible businesses to fund skills training that will accelerate promotions and provide wage increases for existing employees. Employers may request grants of \$15,000 to \$50,000 to implement training programs up to 12 months in duration by submitting a letter of intent addressing their workforce issue and the proposed solution. The Funders Governance Council evaluates each application for approval, and employers must report employee wages and employment status for two years upon training completion.

**Bridges to Careers/Fast-Track Training Programs** provide hands-on, accelerated training to assist individuals in securing employment in high-demand positions. An alternative to the one-year certificate programs offered by many technical schools, the Fast-Track Training Program is just four months long. The curriculum is developed by employers, who determine what the student needs to know to be successful on the job as an entry-level employee. Training is held in the evening, allowing students to work during the day.

“CareerEdge really helped me find my dream job,” said Adam Elg, a CareerEdge trainee in the Fast Track Automotive Training program. Elg is currently working as an automotive lube technician at Sunset Automotive Group. He enjoyed the hands-on aspects of the training and the attention teachers gave to each student.

“CareerEdge gave me the push I needed to move forward. I’m making more money than I ever have. It’s really changed my life.”

The **Internship Reimbursement Program** helps students obtain the necessary skills required to succeed in today's work environment, while also offering them supplemental income. CareerEdge will fund up to two internships per year, reimbursing an employer up to \$1,500 per intern at \$13 per hour. Feedback is collected at the end of the internship to evaluate the program's effectiveness and determine next steps.

**Apprenticeships or Practical Training** is for companies in target industries looking to train both new and current employees. Using a hands-on teaching method, workers gain the knowledge, skills, and competencies needed to perform a specific job. Practical training reduces the costs of onboarding or upskilling employees through salary reimbursement during the training period. Employees earn a paycheck while learning in the actual environment where the work is performed, while businesses are reimbursed a portion of the employee's salary. CareerEdge can provide companies with a 50% salary reimbursement up to \$13 per hour for six weeks.

The collaborative is working to increase the philanthropic resources invested into

workforce development, particularly for underserved segments of the labor force, and leverage those investments to grow the financial support of public agencies and private employers. CareerEdge is also influencing workforce policy decisions by reframing public discourse, inspiring data-driven decisions and educating leading advocacy groups and philanthropists on recent innovations and new directions in workforce development.

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## Measuring Success

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CareerEdge encourages accountability by rigorously measuring program outcomes, communicating results and applying lessons learned to foster future success.

In the past decade, CareerEdge reports that it has invested **\$13.2 million** in regional workforce development programs, resulting in: **407** employers engaged; **6,161** workers trained; **8,172** certificates earned; **4,284** raises received; **1,259** promotions earned; and **\$32.4 million** in cumulative annual earnings gains.

An overview of this data can be found in the 2020 Evaluation Report, which was released in February 2021.

### 2020 EVALUATION REPORT

*For more information on the CareerEdge Funders Collaborative, please contact Kristi Hoskinson at [khoskinson@sarasotachamber.com](mailto:khoskinson@sarasotachamber.com).*

*We're looking for local organizations that are moving the needle on the critical indicators tracked in our [Regional Competitiveness Report](#) and [Regional Equity Report](#). If your organization (or one you're familiar with) has a "Promising Practice" to share, we want to learn more.*

*Please contact us at [info@stateoftheregion.com](mailto:info@stateoftheregion.com), and provide a brief description of your program, along with the key areas it's impacting. We'll use this information to help us select the organizations we'll highlight in future editions of the State of the Region Community Report.*

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