https://www.bgdailynews.com/news/city-county-helping-pay-for-new-workforce-position/article_60e613fc-e2d3-5241-b63b-ef4e58d2280e.html

City, county helping pay for new workforce position

By DON SERGENT dsergent@bgdailynews.com
Oct 14, 2022



Jon Sowards, CEO of the South Central Workforce Development Board, shown speaking at a Bowling Green Area Chamber of Commerce news conference to introduce the new heavy equipment operation program, will soon be overseeing a new workforce participation lead staff position.

Daily News file photo

MORE INFORMATION



Workforce board adds presence at Fort Campbell

ARPA funds to help workforce board

County, city partner to address workforce participation

Already heavily invested in addressing the issue of workforce participation, Warren Fiscal Court and the city of Bowling Green are anteing up again, with help from the Western Kentucky University Innovation Campus.

Warren Fiscal Court approved on Monday spending $20,000 in Local Government Economic Assistance funds from the state, with the money going toward funding a new workforce participation lead position to be housed at the Innovation Campus on Nashville Road.

The city of Bowling Green is also contributing $20,000 to address an issue that the Bowling Green Area Chamber of Commerce and the South Central Workforce Development Board have identified as a problem with the potential to hamper the region's further economic growth.

In addition to housing the new workforce participation staff position, the WKU Innovation Campus is helping finance the effort through a five-year, $250,000 grant from the U.S. Economic Development

Administration procured in partnership with the University of Louisville.

These investments come on the heels of spending by the city and county to fund a campaign aimed at addressing workforce issues and attracting workers.

The two local governments have partnered on an initiative to spend $243,000 annually for the Bowling Green-based CrowdSouth marketing and advertising agency to develop and execute a campaign intended to motivate local people to take jobs here and entice others from outside the region to move here to work.

“Our objective on the project with the city and CrowdSouth is to meet the demands of our growing economy better and faster than any other area in the nation,” Warren County Judge-Executive Mike Buchanon said. “We all have workforce participation shortfalls. We must do a better job than other regions in order to attract the best talent.”

Now the city and county are moving beyond a simple marketing campaign by creating a position dedicated to addressing what workforce development board President and CEO Jon Sowards has called “the topic of our time.”

Low workforce participation is indeed an important topic, as U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports demonstrate.

Defined as the percentage of working-age adults either working or looking for work, the national labor force participation rate has plummeted from 67.3% in 2000 to 62.3% in a September report.



Cut Like Butter Through Sizes with This Genius D
SuperBrand Tools

Those numbers are of concern nationally but are more pronounced in Kentucky, where the participation rate hovers around 58%.

In a region where industrial recruiters have been landing such big fish as the 2,000-employee Envision AESC electric-vehicle battery plant now being built in the Kentucky Transpark, such workforce numbers can be alarming.

That's why the workforce board held a series of regional summits on the issue and why the chamber of commerce pulled together a task force made up of local government officials and educators to tackle the problem.

“We’ve been meeting locally on the topic of workforce participation,” said Sowards, “and one of the ideas that came out of those meetings was that we really need someone focused on this full-time.”

Now Bowling Green, Warren County and WKU Innovation Campus leaders have pulled together the resources to create such a position.

The new workforce participation lead will take direction from Sowards and Innovation Campus CEO Buddy Steen.

“The position will focus heavily on research, looking at what are the national and local trends,” Sowards said.

Steen said the new workforce staffer will benefit from the interaction with various technology companies and others that are housed in the 30,000-square-foot “collaborative smart space” that is part of the Innovation Campus.

The workforce participation lead will "work with all the entities on innovative ideas and new ways of improving workforce participation," Steen said.

Sowards said interviews for the position have been held. He hopes to have someone hired "by the end of the month."

– Follow business reporter Don Sergent on Twitter @BGDNbusiness or visit bgdailynews.com.

Privacy - Terms