



GCEDD Board Retreat Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, July 29th 2026

United Way 50 Waugh Dr, Houston, Tx

Members Present: Diana Grobe (virtual), Benjamina (virtual), Chad C (virtual), Mike Ferdinand, Guy Robert Jackson, Andrew Van Chau, Courtland Holman, Carlos Guzman, Joshua Owens, Elizabeth Huff, Stefanie Smith, Danielle Shiner

Members Absent: Mike Rozell, Patti Warf, David Hairel, Jimmy Henry, Kendric Jones, Lance Dean, Jay Knight, Tiko Hausman, Jason Smith, Matthew Beck, Gwen Tillotson, Josh Ellis, Megan Green, Gracie Knight

I. Call to Order

- a. Andrew Van Chau called the meeting to order at 10:06 am and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

II. Roll Call and Housekeeping

- a. Darryl Briscoe performed roll call and confirmed a quorum was not met.

Discussion:

- Tiko Hausman and David Hairel need replacements due to changes from Harris County and the City of Conroe. Staff is working to fill the vacancies.
- Several board members have terms that expired as of June 1st. According to bylaws, they remain active representatives until replacements are named. The government affairs team will work on appointing entities to update representatives.
- Guy Robert Jackson asked about the number of absences board members can have before replacement. Staff confirmed that missing 2 out of 4 annual meetings triggers outreach, and letters will be sent to appointing members for potential replacements.
- Bylaws already allow for alternates/proxies, but the challenge is getting non-attending members to designate them.
- Elizabeth Huff mentioned the value of having multiple signed alternatives, especially since the board is large.
- Joshua Owens suggested allowing for virtual participation to help with quorum, especially for members that travel long distances.
- Courtland Holman suggested setting meeting dates well in advance and not changing them, as members plan their schedules around these dates. Staff acknowledged challenges with venue availability but committed to setting four annual meetings (February, April, July, November) in January and providing at least one month's notice for any changes.

III. Public Comment

- a. There was no public comment.

IV. Action Items

- Due to a quorum not being met, the agreement with H-GAC was discussed, but no formal action could be taken. The Executive Committee will handle final approval. No action items were voted on.

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V. Information

Samina Umer provided a broadband update.

- Finalized selection goals and KPIs for the broadband program.
- Submitted first quarterly performance report to the Texas Broadband Development Office; received positive feedback.
- Received technical assistance grant from NTIA to develop a dashboard.
- Hosted first data center webinar on July 15 with good turnout; second webinar is scheduled for September.
- Building Partnerships with Fort Bend County representatives.
- Planning engagement with ISDs.
- Podcast potentially launching next month.

Discussion:

- Andrew Van Chau noted that notification for the July 15th webinar went out shortly before the event and requested more advance notice for future webinars. He also requested that the webinar recording be shared with all board members.
- Andrew Van Chau suggested looking at some low construction projects where there may be an opportunity to collaborate for middle-mile fiber.
- Quarterly report was submitted to the Texas Broadband Development Program with positive feedback; H-GAC noted as one of the most prepared Councils of Government in the program.
- Joshua Owens praised the data center webinar and noted the importance of broadband work, especially for rural communities and agricultural technology development.
- Survey is open until September 4th to gather input for future webinar topics and speaker suggestions.
- Discussion about alternative broadband technologies including wireless options (T-Mobile and other cellular providers), low Earth orbit satellites, and fixed wireless as cost-effective alternatives to fiber in rural settings, which can provide 80-100 megabytes service.
- Suggestion to leverage anchor institutions (schools and libraries) as infrastructure connection points.
- **Brandy Guidry provided staff activities updates:**
 - Completed first consulting opportunity with Pasadena EDC on grant submission.
 - Data center webinar completed; second webinar upcoming.
 - Economic Impact Summit scheduled for August 19th; flyers and QR codes distributed.
 - Multiple letters of support and technical assistance provided to communities in recent months.
 - Staff supported and attended DreamCon and Texas Film Conference
- **Darry Briscoe Entertainment Industry Update:**

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- Attended DreamCon focused on content creators (industry projected to generate \$460 billion this year).
- Hosted film conference in Galveston with state and local economic development/tourism representatives discussing film incentives and community preparation for filming.
- Noted Doris Guzman transitions to a Harris County position; Jessica will step into the role supporting the business subcommittee.
- **Loan Program Report – Christina Cornelius**
 - Fort Bend Loan Fund: ~\$500,000 available; \$800,000 outstanding
 - Cares Act 2: ~ \$120,000 available; ~900,000 outstanding
 - Cares Act 1: ~ \$218,000 available; ~\$1.3M outstanding
 - Revolving Loan Fund: ~\$182,000 available; ~\$538,000 outstanding
 - Total: ~1M available to lend; ~\$3.5M outstanding

Updates:

- Fort Bend Loan Fund has 53 applications under review; fund expected to be exhausted by next board meeting.
- Application deadline extended through Friday for current review cycle; fund will remain open but may be exhausted.
- Fund has grown from \$450,000 to \$504,000 due to repayments.
- Significant recovery efforts successful; one previously defaulted borrower made two \$5,000 payments.
- Strong pipeline of applications across all loan funds due to marketing efforts and community partnerships.
- Agricultural drone manufacturer cited as an example of loan fund success.

Omar Fortune discussed the agreement with H-GAC:

- Updated agreement between GCEDD and H-GAC reviewed (document is in information section).
- Agreement has been in development since 2025.
- H-GAC executive director requested attorney review of termination language.
- Original termination clause: either party may terminate with 90 days' written notice.
- Attorney rewrote the more extensive cure period language and 180-day transition process.
- Staff simplified the attorney version while retaining key elements (60 days to resolve issues, 180-day working period)
- Agreement formalizes relationship needed for grant applications, particularly for CDFI certification and other funding opportunities.
- H-GAC serves as fiscal agent for GCEDD.
- EDA planning grant operates on 70-30 match (70% federal, 30% H-GAC through cooperative purchasing program).
- Board directed that any substantive changes should be reviewed by the Executive Committee before final approval.

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VI. Committee updates

- Board Workshop

Key Challenges Identified (Workforce Discussion):

Soft Skills Gap

- Employers consistently report lack of soft skills in new workforce entrants.
- Sam Houston State University is incorporating soft skills training into internship programs.

Curriculum Alignment

- CTE programs often not aligned with regional growth industries.
- Need for better coordination between K-12, community colleges, and universities
- Research Triangle (North Carolina) cited as model where all education levels coordinate effectively.

Data Limitations

- Currently looking at historical data rather than forward-looking workforce needs.
- Thousands of jobs going unfilled annually, but lack of transparency on specifics.
- Need for better dashboard showing current state and future needs.

Life Sciences Specific Issues (Melissa, GHP)

- Job awareness lacking; life sciences conflated with healthcare.
- Middle management positions (5-10 years' experience) particularly hard to fill,
- Concern that growing industry will cannibalize existing employers' workforce.

Regional Coordination Gaps

- K-12 doesn't talk to community colleges, which don't talk to universities
- Described as the "Wild Wild West" with everyone working in silos.
- ISDs still primarily push 4-year degrees despite other viable pathways.

Legislative/Funding Issues

- High cost of CTE programs compared to academic programs.
- ISDs make program decisions based on student/parent demand rather than workforce needs.
- Need for legislative solutions to incentivize proper alignment.

Equity Concerns

- Bottom 20% of students (poverty level) not being reached effectively.
- Wraparound services needed: childcare, transportation, basic math skills
- Example: Ship fitting apprenticeship losing participants who can't read rulers or understand fractions despite \$15/hour pay

Awareness and Career Pathways

- 7th graders required to choose career pathways without adequate knowledge of available careers.
- Floral design still offered as CTE in some schools.
- Students taking the path of least resistance rather than high-demand careers.

Positive Developments/Solutions Discussed

- Sam Houston State University partnering with ISDs to align certifications with target industries.
- Gulf Coast Workforce Board hired industry liaisons for healthcare/life sciences and construction.
- Life sciences education ecosystem meetings convened by GHP (4-5 meetings to date)

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Governor's Task Force

- Lacy Wolf (Gulf Coast Workforce Board) serves on Governor's task force for labor workforce.
- Governor seeking legislative recommendations for CTEs and apprenticeships.
- Texas Workforce Commission funding supporting programs like MC3 (Multi-Craft Core Curriculum) pre-apprenticeship.

Technology Solutions

- Careers Next (GHP/Upskill Houston): AI-powered career navigation system launching pilot in coming weeks.
- 23 organizations participating, including Pasadena ISD, KIPP, Harmony, HCC, San Jacinto College, Lone Star, Alvin Community College, United Way
- System provides personalized career guidance based on individual interests and abilities.
- Connects users to appropriate education and training providers.

Industry Data Collection

- Greater Houston Partnership tracking project announcements (hundreds annually) with job forecasts, timelines, and needed skills.
- Can provide 3-year forward-looking data on workforce needs.

Regional Advantages

- Houston region has the youngest workforce of major metro areas nationally.
- Growing population while other regions are shrinking.
- Recent manufacturing roundtable indicated most companies not having difficulty filling positions (main issue was supply chain awareness)

Employer Perspective Emphasis (Andrew Van Chau)

- Need to shift from educator/service provider perspective to employer perspective.
- Example: Mitsubishi Heavy Industries cannot find enough welders, leaving projects/funding unused.
- Must drive employer needs deeper into education systems and policies.

GCEDD Role Discussion: Omar Fortune posed two potential roles for GCEDD:

- Convening Support: Bringing together industry, employers, government, k-12, trade schools, universities, workforce boards, GHP
- Direct Service: Working directly with communities to convene employers, understand needs, translate to education partners.

Takeaways/Marching Orders

- Connection needed across all education levels (K-12, community college, universities) and with employers.
- Explore legislative implications at state and local levels.
- Strengthen collaboration between H-GAC workforce programs and GCEDD.
- Focus on wraparound services for lower-income students (childcare/transportation).
- Promote GHP's new AI career navigation tool beyond initial 23 organizations.
- Consider generational assessment of workforce needs.
- Map out industry-specific programs, particularly distinguishing life sciences/biotech from healthcare.
- Determine GCEDD's support role (convening vs. direct service).
- Discuss in upcoming committee meetings.

HREDA Discussion

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- Suggested coordinating GCEDD board meetings with HREDA meetings (possibly 11:30 am – 1 pm HREDA, 1:30-2:30 pm GCEDD)
- Would improve efficiency and coordination for members who participate in both.

VII. Presentations

- Ron Borski provided a Workforce Solutions Gulf Coast Labor Market Update (June 2026 Data)
 - Unemployment Rate: 5.2% (highest since COVID-19 in 2021)
 - i. June typically sees an increase due to seasonal factors.
 - ii. Above state average.
 - iii. County range: Colorado 1.2% (lowest) to Liberty County 6.5% (highest)
 - iv. All 13 counties saw increases in June.
 - Job Growth:
 - i. Over the month: +14,000 jobs (+0.4%, slightly below 0.5% average)
 - ii. Primary drivers: professional/business services, hospitality, trade/transport/utilities (FIFA World Cup impact noted).
 - iii. Weaker sectors: Mining (-0.3% vs. historical average +1.1%), education/health services (-0.8% vs. +0.1% average), Other services (+1.6% vs. +3.9% average).
 - Three-Month Performance: +36,500 jobs)close to historical average.
 - Over-the-Year Growth:
 - i. +39,700 jobs (up from +21,200 in May)
 - ii. 1% increase – largest since July 2025 (+58,000 jobs)
 - iii. 7 out of 11 industry sectors showed growth
 - iv. Top Three: Construction, professional/business services, education/health services.
 - v. Construction strong due to petrochemical, LNG, and infrastructure projects (welder shortage noted)
 - vi. Weakest: information and mining.
 - **Purchasing Manager's Index:** 54+ (positive for 73 consecutive months)
 - **Forecast** (Parker Harvey, H-GAC Demographer):
 - i. Updated April 2026 forecast: +40,200 jobs December-to-December (up from +29,900 earlier estimate)
 - ii. Two-thirds of growth projected in: healthcare/social assistance, profession/business services, and construction.

Discussion:

- Andrew Van Chau asked about advanced manufacturing showing up in data (likely in durable goods, through purchasing managers' report weakness)
- Andrew Van Chau requested regular reporting on labor force participation rate, not just unemployment.

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- U3 (standard employment): 4.1%
- U6 (includes discouraged workers and underemployed): 8% for Texas.
- Labor force participation data not regularly available at local level; available through Census/American Community Survey
- Important for understanding who is not in the workforce and why.
- Example: US Steel in northeast Arkansas studying poor participation rates to address as an employer.
- Discussion of gig economy workers (DoorDash, Lyft, Uber) and self-employed individuals in minority communities potentially not captured in data.

VIII. Other

- Upcoming Events:
 - Business-to-Business Expo (Galveston/Joshua Owens): August 12th, \$25 registration for businesses looking to supply Galveston County projects.
 - Build America Summit (H-GAC & GHP): October 20th (tentative), connecting people to skilled, high-paying jobs.
 - HREDA meeting scheduled for September
 - i. Is open to all economic development professionals in the region.
- Closing Remarks
 - Andrew Van Chau emphasized the importance of collaboration between GCEDD, Workforce Board, Upskill Houston, and Greater Houston Partnership.
 - Need to be cognizant of geographic overlaps and gaps in service areas.
 - Requested board members contact absent colleagues to encourage attendance next meeting.
 - Next meeting currently scheduled for November (specific date TBA due to busy calendar; will not be during Thanksgiving week)
- Staff will provide follow-up on workshop discussions.
- Next Meeting – TBA November 2026 (In-Person)

IX. Meeting adjourned at 11:54 am.

