Dear friends,

Last month IEI hosted more than 1,000 business leaders, policy makers, educators, and nonprofit organizations at its 31st annual Emerging Issues Forum, FutureWork. This year’s event focused on the changing economy and the challenges that lie ahead as North Carolina seeks to ensure job growth and prosperity amongst a backdrop of increasing technology. New to this year’s Forum model, IEI convened five concurrent sector-focused hackathons with industry leaders on Day Two. Participants offered in-depth assessments of five key NC sectors projected to be impacted heavily by technology, and simultaneously poised to experience high job growth.

Watch the FutureWork Forum here!

What’s needed to position North Carolina’s workforce for the future? Check out the Day One panel on economic development.

How does your county rate on the Disruption Index?

Is your county more vulnerable to future jobs disruption due to automation and technology? See IEI's FutureWork Disruption Index for North Carolina and access interactive maps of your county.

Hear from North Carolina Leaders on the Future of Work

Miss the North Carolina Channel’s televised interviews and tabletop conversations with business, education and government leaders from the FutureWork Forum? Watch
Future Impact to Government/Smart Communities:

Participants of the Smart Communities session focused on the growth of technologically-smart communities across the state of North Carolina. While there are several competing definitions of what a smart community is, we collectively defined it as: A community that brings together its human capital, physical infrastructure, communications networks, and data analytics to better enable the community to deliver its essential services with greater efficiency and reliability.

Industry experts have underscored the importance of communities operating from this more integrated framework to boost sustainability, resiliency, and citizen satisfaction, as well as expand the opportunity for economic development.

People (especially millennials) have come to expect a high level of responsiveness from organizations and institutions, and a high level of connectivity. The growth industries of tomorrow are no different. If a community is to be successful at attracting the talent and the job growers of the future, it is imperative to ensure that they are making inroads toward becoming a smart community.

Of course, it is difficult to discuss smart communities without also talking about infrastructure. Session participants confirmed that many communities in North Carolina lack the necessary infrastructure for technological organization and growth. Encouraging, however, was the idea that emerging wireless services will likely soon rival the speeds of fiber optic internet.

Thus, it is very conceivable that the barriers to ubiquitous connectivity across the state will disappear in the coming decade. With that in mind, participants dove into crafting a set of priorities for realizing the growth and develop of smart communities in North Carolina:

**Improve Access to Technology in Rural and Impoverished Areas of the State:**

The various labor markets across the state will require infrastructure to fuel the emergence of smart communities that can support the growth of tomorrow’s jobs. A key component of that infrastructure includes the necessary wireless, cable, and satellite internet access. Participants discussed the pressing challenges of rural North Carolina and highlighted that many communities are falling farther and farther behind. They championed the idea of a Marshall Plan for bringing rural North Carolina into the modern economy to ensure their capacity to compete.

**Increase Education System Equity:**

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Session attendees embraced the wisdom of the collective, and decided that increasing educational system equity is critically important for the development of a smart community. They voiced the idea that smart communities can only thrive when all of its citizens are prepared, engaged, and capable of meeting the challenges of tomorrow’s economy. They articulated a vision of North Carolina that recognizes that we are building a bridge to the future of our communities. They noted that this future should reflect a North Carolina where young people are fully engaged in civic life, where there is equality of opportunity, and an elimination of stark pockets of underachievement.

**Develop more interest in Government Jobs:**

The group identified the need for a strong cadre of talented government workers to usher in the new era of smart communities across North Carolina. Participants articulated this strategy as a necessary step toward ensuring that communities have the pipeline of talent necessary to usher in the move toward becoming a smart community, and to sustain the transition. Participants identified the need to rebrand local government service, as well as the need to develop career pathways in the government sector. The realization of this renewed interest in government service would lead to greater retention of public service employees and the attraction of bright young minds.

**Next Steps:**

Very soon, we will be coming to a city or town near you. If any of the strategies listed above are of interest to you, or if you would like to get connected to the FutureWork plan of action in your community, contact me directly and let me know. Thanks to generous support from the Duke Energy Foundation, IEI will be hosting community forums in each of North Carolina’s eight Prosperity Zones. Prior to these sessions, IEI will be connecting with many of you across our various online engagement platforms. The information from the Forum session, along with our online engagements, will figure prominently in the community-based engagement sessions scheduled for this summer. Visit IEI’s FutureWork website for more information.

I hope to hear from you soon.

Best,

Donnie Charleston