Just a few weeks ago, many of you joined the Institute for Emerging Issues for our annual Emerging Issues Forum, FutureWork. While more than 1,000 people attended, my attention fell on just over a dozen young citizens who volunteered to serve among our Forum Ambassadors as a part of our youth engagement work.

I had the pleasure of convening a small group discussion—somewhat of a rarity in an otherwise bustling, crowded meeting—after the Forum concluded; these truly spectacular youth specialists sought to examine the implications of FutureWork and technology-driven unemployment. The conversation was robust, and we created a series of priorities for youth and youth specialists in North Carolina to address in the coming...
1. Create new opportunities for young citizens to work in Makerspaces—areas designed to foster, nurture, and facilitate the creation of new ideas or products.
2. Address increasing diversity in and out of the classroom by ensuring that businesses and civic organizations that reach out to youth have adequate resources for working with young citizens who do not speak English as a native language.
3. Provide mentorship and advising opportunities to expose youth to careers and interests they may not otherwise encounter.

In the coming months, IEI will cross the state to visit North Carolina’s prosperity zones. In each region, we will be intentionally engaging with our young citizens, ensuring they have access to the knowledge necessary to prepare them for the future of work.

But we can’t do it alone. We need our partners and friends to join us in sharing information with our next generations of workers, letting them know about disparities in their region and trends in their fields of interest.

If you or your organization lacks experience working with younger audiences, we’ve got you covered. In fact, our friend Aidil Ortiz-Hill, from Youth Empowered Solutions (YES!), shared some impactful advice for effective outreach on our Civic Engagement Blog. Be sure to check it out if you’re feeling inspired to reach out to youth in your community.

As the dust settles following the FutureWork Forum, one thing is abundantly clear to me: While we face many challenges, we also have some truly extraordinary opportunities before us. The path we choose today will determine the vitality of North Carolina tomorrow. I hope you will join us as we seek to move North Carolina forward.

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