

REGIONAL DATA & ANALYTICS SUMMIT

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A Collaboration Between:

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OVERALL FINDINGS/THEMES FROM THE SUMMIT

The following represents a listing of themes that were heard across nearly all of the targeted industry sector breakout sessions. The most critical take-away was that “Urgency is Real” given the impacts of the talent shortages are expected to be most pronounced from 2030-2035.

The following themes are organized into buckets for which we believe results can be achieved, though all must be worked on immediately:

NEAR-TERM RESULTS (NOW AND WITHIN TWO YEARS)

EARLY, EXPERIENTIAL EXPOSURE IS CRITICAL

Students and job-seekers across all levels need multiple real-world touchpoints – internships, apprenticeships, mentorships, project-based learning – to connect education with careers.

TALENT RETENTION ISN'T OPTIONAL – IT'S CRITICAL

Workforce stability depends on internal culture, leadership development, upskilling, and visible career ladders.

TALENT ATTRACTION: IT'S A NUMBERS GAME

Population growth via targeted attraction from across the U.S.A., student attraction to our higher education institutions, and immigration are critical. Providing “soft landing” supports is essential to fill gaps.

MID-TERM RESULTS (WITHIN 3-5 YEARS)

MINDSET SHIFT: FROM “JOBS” TO “JOURNEYS”

Careers should be framed as evolving pathways, not endpoints – valuing character, growth, and adaptability as important as credentials. With rapid technological change (AI, automation), cultural alignment and learning agility are more sustainable hiring criteria.

ALIGNMENT OVER ADDITIONAL PROGRAMS

Programs abound – but fragmentation, lack of shared goals, and per-silo incentives reduce effectiveness. Unified coordination must be a requirement.

REMOVE THE ROADBLOCKS

Even the best workforce strategies can be derailed by unresolved structural barriers – childcare, housing, licensing, immigration, and regulatory friction.

EDUCATION-INDUSTRY POLICY REALIGNMENT

Current funding, credentialing, and procurement models are outdated; they must incentivize outcomes, alignment, and agility. Transformative progress requires deliberate partnerships across sectors, driven by aligned metrics that support employers' talent needs.

MANUFACTURING & TRADES

COMMON THEMES AND ACTION ITEMS



COMMON THEMES

CULTURE, CHARACTER & LEADERSHIP AS RETENTION DRIVERS

- Strong emphasis was placed on company culture, leadership development, and hiring for character.
- Employees stay where they feel valued and respected – poor leadership or lack of purpose leads to turnover.
- Leadership training for team leads, foremen, and emerging managers is key to sustaining teams.
- There's a lack of desire to move into leadership due to the perceived burden and lack of incentives.

NARRATIVE SHIFT & CAREER AWARENESS

- Participants highlighted a need to change the perception of skilled trades and manufacturing careers, especially among youth and parents.
- Many young workers don't see a future beyond entry-level jobs in these industries, when in reality, strong career ladders exist.
- Messaging needs to show opportunity, growth, and meaningful work – not just "you won't be in college debt."

HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE, APPLIED TRAINING & INTERNAL PIPELINES

- Companies are turning inward: training their own workers, creating internal academies, and partnering more with schools.
- Work-based learning, exposure at earlier grades, and earning-while-learning strategies are increasingly favored.
- There's a concern that even with school partnerships, students don't see enough real-world job exposure.

RETENTION OVER RECRUITMENT

- Many emphasized that retention matters more than outreach if organizations want stable staffing.
- Suggested shift in strategy: train and grow the people you have versus constantly chasing new recruits.
- Trailing spouses and internal promotions were noted as often overlooked pipelines.

COMMON THEMES CONTINUED

LIFESTYLE, FLEXIBILITY, AND PRACTICAL BARRIERS

- Realistic work-life expectations (like weekend work) are not always aligned with worker preferences.
- There's greater value placed on work-life balance and flexibility, especially post-COVID.
- Lack of affordable housing and childcare was a recurring theme across all industries and discussions.

GENERATIONAL EXPECTATIONS & WORK IDENTITY

- Young workers often value lifestyle over loyalty. They seek purpose, flexibility, and environments that match their identity.
- There's been a cultural shift away from "you must work hard and climb the ladder" to "you must find purpose and balance."
- Some generational disconnection between employer expectations and emerging workforce realities.

LOOKING AHEAD: REGIONAL BRANDING AND SYSTEMIC COLLABORATION

- The idea of telling the region's story (safe, connected, affordable, opportunity-rich) resonated across conversations.
- Success in 2030 was linked to collaboration between economic development groups, employers, education, and policy makers.
- AI and automation were named as concerns – particularly in white-collar or repetitive roles, but less so in hands-on fields for now.

WHAT THE EDC IS GOING TO DO...NOW AND INTO 2026

TALENT ATTRACTION

We're putting the FM region on the map with talent attraction marketing, alumni recruitment-focused campaigns, and targeted recruitment of critical occupations.

- With our Lightning Recruitment program, the GFMEDC is helping numerous companies locate and message individuals in hard to fill occupations. Let us know how we can support your company.
- Brand marketing of the region through www.LiveInFMArea.com. We are communicating with more than 21,000 individuals who have shown an interest in the region, and those relationships continue to grow.
- With the goal to attract more people into the region's manufacturing careers, we created a website that provides immersive virtual tours to allow users to more fully experience what it's like working at local companies. Companies also have virtual reality headsets to provide candidates a virtual experience at career fairs and other events. The GFMEDC was awarded grant funds in 2023 from the ND Department of Commerce and has partnered with Be More Colorful and Golden Path Solutions. www.WorkInFargo.com
- We are working on a student recruitment program to support our higher education institutions and are doing this in partnership with the Chamber and the Metro College Alliance.

TALENT RETENTION

- Company Culture Program – We currently have more than a dozen companies working with us to develop a survey and networking group to support great company culture.

POLICY ADVOCACY & DATA

- The GFMEDC is assisting The Chamber with gathering and analyzing policy-driven data from our Business Retention and Expansion Surveys (with company approval). Aggregating this information means more data getting into the hands of legislators to make informed decisions on what businesses in FM need.
- With the creation of the FM Data & Analytics Team, the GFMEDC is committed to gathering and analyzing data that continues to tell the story of the FM economy. This Fall, the GFMEDC along with partners will be conducting our second annual workforce survey.



The GFMEDC encourages our industry partners and key collaborators to commit to addressing some of the key themes in this report. Let us, and those involved in this important work, know how you and your organization will drive outcome-based results to ensure the “Rising Storm” of talent challenges ahead of us are met head-on, leaving our region and states resilient to win the war on talent.

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IMPORTANT RESOURCES



THE RISING STORM



DATA PROFILES