

# What's Next for Gen Z?

*June, 2013*

***Generation Z is one year older, and one step closer to shaping our future.***

In our Institute for Emerging Issues' report, *The Face of Gen Z*, we introduced "Jane" to characterize today's 11- to 23-year-olds. She helped us understand how Gen Z is different from previous generations. Her attributes were a compilation of stories we heard from hundreds of youth across our state about what they want and expect from their future, both personally and professionally. We also heard from hundreds in older generations eager to understand and embrace Generation Z as the emerging core of our state's labor force.

Across North Carolina people of all ages are working hard to identify and implement investments that will make our state a better place to live, work and play for Gen Z. Following is a progress report of the work of IEI's partners and collaborators.

# GEN Z TAKES ACTION

To talk thoughtfully about how to prepare for the next generation, we needed youth to be a part of the conversation, and our Generation Z ambassadors stepped up to help. At the 2012 Emerging Issues Forum, *Investing in Gen Z*, 200 Generation Z ambassadors identified three investments that they believed had the potential to yield lasting returns for their future: coworking spaces, healthy eating, and business mentorship.

## **Coworking**

The Gen Z ambassadors recognized that their generation is highly entrepreneurial, and more likely to reject the traditional 9-5 office environment. However, they do not want to work in isolation at home. Coworking spaces offer an alternative. These spaces provide an opportunity for entrepreneurs and employees from varying sectors to work in the same space and share resources. In addition, it allows for creative interaction with and collegial support from like-minded individuals.

The Coworking Task Force aimed to increase awareness and connectivity among coworkers and coworking space owners to help develop best practices, build industry connections to spark ideas on improving spaces, and better promote coworking as an alternative working arrangement.

The group succeeded in connecting more than 20 independent coworking spaces across the state. Additionally, they drafted a well-researched paper on the best coworking practices to help those interested in starting coworking spaces in their communities. Inspired by the demand for this kind of information, coworking was selected as a plenary topic for the 2012 North Carolina Entrepreneurship Summit in Asheville. More than 250 attendees received the coworking research paper and were shown an inspiring video highlighting three coworking spaces in North Carolina: Wilmington, Raleigh and Star.

Inspired in large part by what they learned about coworking at the Entrepreneurship Summit, the Town of Holly Springs is now starting to investigate the best way to design and market a new downtown business space. Other communities are exploring similar options, as coworking – and entrepreneurs' attraction to it – becomes a strong focus for community developers as they design innovative ways to invigorate small business growth in communities.

## **Healthy Eating**

Of every 100 Gen Z kids, 47 will be obese by the time they reach adulthood. This is partly due to a more sedentary lifestyle in the rising digital era, but unhealthy diets are also to blame. In a time of shrinking family budgets, the cheapest food options are often the unhealthiest.



***Even when healthy food options are available – in schools, for example – young people do not always make the healthy choice.***

The Healthy Eating Task Force aimed to increase both access to and education about healthy foods in our schools, in an effort to increase the overall health of Gen Z. The Task Force designed a pilot program for the Wake Young Women's Leadership Academy. Students formed student-led advocacy campaigns for making healthy food choices in each of the academies in 2012-2013.

According to federal guidelines, all North Carolina schools are required to serve healthy foods, but students often do not eat them. These pilot programs offer an opportunity for school children to educate themselves on healthy choices and take personal responsibility for their health. Students also gain valuable experience in how to develop and implement an effective advocacy campaign – skills that will benefit Gen Z in other ways.

## **Business Mentorship**

Gen Z Ambassadors heard loud and clear the importance of developing the professional skills they will need as they enter the workforce. Despite near-constant digital communication, many members of Gen Z have no experience translating those communication skills into the business environment where tradition and structure is often revered.

The Business Mentorship Task Force was created to increase opportunities for students to enter into mentorships with professionals to improve their business communication skills. They released a short best practices document on business mentorships to serve as a how-to guide on starting a business mentorship program, including determining the feasibility of such a project, identifying potential funding opportunities, building community partnerships and developing an action plan.

The document pulls from established programs across the state, such as the Powered for Life program for faith-based organizations, local rotary clubs' "lunch buddy mentoring programs" and the newly established North Carolina Entrepreneurship Center at UNC Greensboro. In addition, it builds on successful national programs such as BuildDC, Create Here and the Company Lab.

## **INVESTING IN YOUR TOP EIGHT IDEAS**

Youth weren't the only group who moved from thinking (and talking) to action after the 2012 Emerging Issues Forum.



**More than 1000 attendees collectively offered more than 100 ideas for action.**

Over the course of our two days together, we discussed, refined and narrowed the ideas to a list of the top eight recommendations for investments our state must make to support Gen Z:

- Rethink standardized testing
- Cultivate mentorships
- Emphasize public speaking and conflict management skills
- Invest in technology
- Entrepreneurial education
- Universal wireless/broadband access
- Promote service learning
- Teach risk-taking

For those wanting to pursue action on these investments, IEI hosted live webinars about service learning, entrepreneurial education and access to broadband. 75 people engaged in this series, learning about these topics from experts and discussing the best ways to apply what they learned in their own communities.

As a result of the service learning webinar, IEI education policy manager Kendall Hageman was asked to present at a Communities in Schools conference in Greensboro on the importance of service learning. Several participants in the NC REAL program cited the entrepreneurial education webinar as a key resource for rural instructors, and planning director Amy Nelson used the broadband webinar to approach her board about Internet access in Southport, NC.

IEI also hosted the skills-based "Supporting Gen Z: Moving to Action Faster" webinar series. More than 60 participants tuned in to hear experts share ways to better communicate ideas to different groups, organize communities for collective action and find funding to get ideas off the ground.

For communities unsure of where to start prioritizing investments in Gen Z, IEI developed a Community Guidebook. The guidebook offered communities methods to evaluate current assets, identify existing problems and opportunities, and refine ideas.

All IEI-hosted webinars are available online at [www.youtube.com/emergingissues2](http://www.youtube.com/emergingissues2).

The Community Guidebook is available for download at [www.emergingissues.org](http://www.emergingissues.org).

## **Reducing The High School Dropout Rate: EMERGING ISSUES PRIZE FOR INNOVATION**

Generation Z has really taken the issue of education into their own hands. Competing for the 2012 Emerging Issues Prize for Innovation, groups of high school and college students developed projects that would help reduce the high school dropout rate. With a record number of applications, five finalist groups in each age category were selected, and after more than 12,000 votes, two winners were selected and awarded \$5,000 to implement their ideas.

Studio Lounge from Richmond Senior High transformed an old classroom by designing a comfortable place where mentors and mentees will work together to prepare for end-of-grade tests and complete other assignments. The space also houses technology for students to use as they study together.

University of North Carolina at Greensboro students developed a LinkedUp mentorship program, in which ninth grade students are paired with fifth graders over the course of eight years to develop a strong mentor-mentee relationship. They researched mentorship practices and have selected the first group of mentors and mentees to participate in the program.

The winners of this year's Prize were not the only ones to carry on with their proposed work. Using the prize competition as an initial launching point, finalist Julian Wooten turned his prize idea into a brand new business. Students and Teachers Employing New Criteria in Learning (STENCIL) is a software program that uses attendance,

behavior and other information to predict whether a student is at-risk for dropping out of school, prompting teachers and others to give special attention to youth who may need it. The software is currently in development, but Julian hopes to launch a pilot in a Triangle-region high school early next year.

Finalists from Greene Central High School's AIM (Achieve, Inspire, & Motivate) team also are continuing with their mentorship program.



***A recent survey of a pilot effort conducted by a Duke research team indicates that early STEM awareness could have impact on potential dropouts.***

With \$8,500 in grants, AIM is working closely with faculty and staff in identifying populations for extended mentorship, tutoring and resource support. Additionally, the AIM team recently partnered with STEM Robotics to form "STEM Society" club to highlight STEM content and outreach.

## **GEN Z AND THE WORKFORCE**

Preparing this generation for the workforce became a strong priority for North Carolina over the past year, as did adapting new methods for integrating these youth into the job market.

IEI brought together dozens of human resource managers from large companies in the Research Triangle Park, including Quintiles, Wake Med, Dex One, Aon Hewitt, Gilbarco Veeder Root, SECU, AW North Carolina, BB&T, and Lenovo to discuss how to embrace these youth and their workforce potential. These companies pledged to incorporate this new understanding of Generation Z into overall company culture. The conference served as

a starting point and set the tone for a continuing series on recruitment in the Research Triangle Park region.

The Human Resources Conference in Research Triangle Park was just the beginning of a much larger, statewide conversation about how to prepare Generation Z and incorporate them into the overall workforce.

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***Ultimately, more than 1,400 people have been engaged in these workforce discussions across the state in the past year.***

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The Wake Forest Chamber of Commerce realized this potential at its 2012 State of the Chamber event. With a strong young entrepreneurship focus and a relatively younger demographic target, the chamber not only embraced this new knowledge, but also will host several working groups to continue these types of discussions on Gen Z and how to best serve them in their community moving forward.

City government has also made these youth a priority. The North Carolina League of Municipalities Annual Conference focused on multigenerational workforces and the best way to engage all age groups in promoting city development.

Community developers also recognized the importance of this generation at the Olive Hill Community Economic Development Corporation as they debated facility options for a newly rehabbed manufacturing space. Prominent ideas included supporting entrepreneurial business and recruitment that entices this incoming generation.

Education leaders have been an integral part of this conversation. At the Statewide Career Development Conference (which included generation expert Terri Manning from Central Piedmont Community College), and at the

statewide Workforce Development Conference. leaders and conference participants discussed how to best prepare youth for the work ahead of them in our state, and how companies can prepare to integrate them into their culture.

## THE FUTURE OF GEN Z

Generation Z may be facing a series of unique challenges, but we are already learning how members of this generation are using innovative ways to overcome these hurdles.

During the 2012 Emerging Issues Forum, Lindsey Tilley, a recent high school graduate, shared her experiences from a business class in which she became the CEO of a virtual enterprise firm. Matt Moss, a junior teaching fellow at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, told attendees how he worked with teachers in Guilford County to find new ways to prepare youth with the skills they will need as part of our new workforce.

In order for Lindsey, Matt and countless other members of Gen Z in North Carolina to continue to succeed, we need to ensure that we have the right ropes to help young people reach for their dreams.