

As vice president of Longview Economic Development Corporation in Texas, Heather Malone shared her valuable insights on the workforce challenges that her community faces in a friendly and informative manner. One key point she highlighted was the importance of reliable transportation for workers to meet the demands of their employers. Additionally, she discussed the ongoing skills gap in the Longview region and the proactive measures being taken to support both the workforce and employers.

Heather emphasized the current top workforce challenges and how employers are adapting their job descriptions to align with the specific skills required for open positions, rather than solely focusing on a bachelor's degree requirement. In the Longview region, employers are also exploring reentry programs that cater to their labor needs and finding innovative ways to provide employee support, such as offering childcare services, to help fill jobs and support their valuable workforce.

Voices of Excellence on Episode 38



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Links and Resources

- [Episode 38 of Podcast](#)
- Video Interview with Heather Malone: [Part One](#) and [Part Two](#)
- [ACT Workforce Summit Agenda and Registration](#)
- [Recap Video of 2022 ACT Workforce Summit](#)
- [ACT Work Ready Communities](#)
- [ACT Workforce Solutions](#)

Transcript of Episode 38

Jingle Open with Music: Let's Get Ready for Work

Heather Malone: With new economic development projects, lower number of jobs, the wages will be higher and then your skill level is going to be higher. Automation is the future and it's already in so many spaces. So how do we prepare our workforce to fit that need and provide quality jobs, inequality, wage, and a great quality of life.

Jasen Jones: Travel with us to Longview, Texas as we hear from Heather Malone with an economic developer's perspective to conquer workforce challenges.

Ready for Work Podcast Open: Ready for Work is a podcast from ACT spotlighting excellence and innovation throughout the workforce ecosystem. Jasen Jones hosts this journey with trends and ideas to help your region's workforce reach its highest potential. Now, let's get Ready for Work!

Jasen: We had the pleasure of hearing from Heather Malone, the vice president of Longview Economic Development Corporation in Texas, during ACT's most-recent Workforce Summit. One key point she highlighted was the importance of reliable transportation for workers to meet the demands of their employers. Additionally, she discussed the ongoing skills gap in the Longview region and the proactive measures being taken to support both the workforce and employers.

Heather emphasized the current top workforce challenges and how employers are adapting their job descriptions to align with the specific skills required for open positions, rather than solely focusing on a bachelor's degree requirement. In the Longview region, employers are also exploring reentry programs that cater to their labor needs and finding innovative ways to provide employee support, such as offering childcare services, to help fill jobs and support a valuable workforce.

Let's get underway with Episode 38, as Heather sets the stage for us on the top workforce challenges faced in Longview.

Heather: I think there are several things, and I think mindsets have to change, both from an employee standpoint and an employer standpoint. And I think we're starting to see some of those changes because COVID forced us to. We see many job descriptions from employers who require a bachelor's degree when we know that a bachelor's degree really is not necessary for the job that they need to do. We are working with employers to identify where those descriptions don't necessarily meet their actual need and trying to change those and show them that they can use the NCRC as a way to hire and show them what the O*NET job description shows in conjunction with what the NCRC certificate level recommends and encourage them to use that certificate as a way of hiring, not just the education level.

We are seeing some changes from employers. We are seeing that employers are becoming more open to some reentry programs. There's a wonderful organization in the state of Texas, I think, out of Dallas, called the Cornbread Hustle. And they are a firm that places prior felons into jobs. And they work with companies throughout the country. And they train them on how to be good employers for those who are felons and how to work with them. And then they train felons on

how to go into the workplace. They've been very successful. I'm not giving them a plug or anything, but I am. It's kind of a cool program. I believe that employers are more open to that as an opportunity now because they are in need of more people and they're willing to train. They're willing to be flexible as much as they can. They're willing to be creative not just with increased wages, but with helping with childcare, helping with transportation. I mean, we're seeing more and more employers that are looking at those other challenges to try to bring people back to work.

From an employees' standpoint, we've got to change the perception of not everyone has to go to college. We can learn a technical skill and be just as successful in life as going to college. I believe that we have some misperception on your wages when you get out of college. So, I'm not sure if we're quite there yet. I think that our entry level job seekers are expecting a little bit more on the wage side than what you would typically expect whenever you start into the workforce. So, I think just some changes and realistic expectations need to be thought through on both the employee and employer side.

Jasen: Digging deeper, Heather shared her insights on challenges for equity, access, and opportunity.

Heather: So, I believe that our communities have always faced challenges with diversity, equity and inclusion, and we've always worked on programs to try to improve that within communities. However, I do feel like over the past few years we've been more intentional about our efforts and making sure that all of our leadership is included in that conversation and coming up with ways to really pinpoint where those challenges are and how we can overcome those.

In Longview specifically, I do know that our city is working on developing a position to focus on that. In addition, we as an economic development corporation are looking at how do we offer childcare options for those who are on shift work, who may need a 24-7 daycare opportunity. Employers have asked for that because they are having a hard time meeting the need for that second shift, especially with their female population. And they're asking for a solution to that.

We're just seeing not enough daycare operations that can support that as employment continues to increase within our manufacturing, or not even manufacturing, but with health care, also. We're seeing that with our hospitals. They're having a hard time with the second shift with their nursing staff as well. So, we are looking at ways to overcome that challenge and how we can participate as an economic development corporation.

In addition to that, we're looking at transportation. It's hard to get to work a lot of times. We are fortunate to have public transportation in Longview, but we are seeing with workforce being regional, everyone does not live in Longview. So how do you get those employees that live outside of Longview to the industry inside of Longview? So, we're looking at ways that we can partner with our county systems and then just other creative ways that we can bring that workforce into those employers to meet their need. And we know that a lot of the communities that do not have adequate transportation are those that cannot find employment because they can't get to work and we're trying to be intentional about how we meet the need of that group.

Jasen: Next, we hear from Heather on groups of people who may need targeted training or workplace support.

Heather: Yes. So, believe that groups in every community have a skills gap of some sort. And as we grow and diversify our economy, we're seeing new sets of skills being developed. We're seeing a lot more automation within our industries. And how do we scale up to be able to supply the workforce for those employers? I feel like employers are seeing and realizing that there needs to be more support and training. I feel like that the Work Ready Community system and the WorkKeys, the NCRC, does help with that because we can offer the WorkKeys to provide that basic skill set or that capability to show employers, this job seeker is capable of performing that job and then work with other programs. There's on the job training or, some state training programs that we can offer, to train that person up to the skills that are customized for that employer. So no longer are the days where you just walk out of high school and walk into the manufacturing facility and start working. There has to be some customized training that goes along with that to be able to fit the need of the employer.

Jasen: In conclusion, we asked Heather what workforce innovations need to take place in the next five years for companies and their employees to be successful.

Heather: From an employer standpoint, I believe that we're going to see innovation through automation and robotics. That's definitely the transition that we're seeing with manufacturing, which we'll see, I believe with new projects, new economic development projects, higher capital investment because of that, but we'll see lower number of jobs. I do feel, however, that the wages will be higher and so your payroll may still be about the same, and then your skill level is going to be higher. So, I think there's a real opportunity here for us as a community and our educators to see this as a way to up our skillsets and prepare our students and transitioning workforce to be prepared for that automation and robotic New Age innovation and that we could see a real opportunity there because truly we just do not have enough people to do the work.

The great news is that we are seeing reshoring. We're seeing manufacturing coming back to the US, which is amazing and we want to encourage that and help grow that. But automation is the future, and it's already in so many spaces - McDonald's, manufacturing, and everything in between. So how do we prepare our workforce to fit that need and provide quality jobs and a quality wage and a great quality of life.

Jasen: We recorded this interview at our most recent ACT Workforce Summit in New Orleans. As this podcast is released, we've opened registration for the 2023 Summit in Nashville. Here is a quick recap of the attendee experience.

Eddie Thomas, Arkansas Division of Workforce Services: I always enjoyed the ACT Workforce Summit. I think it's a great platform, a great opportunity to connect with other workforce development professionals who come together to the table, a lot of times raising problems, but leaving with solutions.

Mike Longo, Loraine County (OH) Workforce Development Agency: So, I attend the Workforce Summit because it's a great opportunity not only to share our experience for what we've done, but also as a means of learning from others. The networking opportunities, the support that the ACT staff provides, they're just all such wonderful opportunities to be able to grow.

Ja'Queta Stevenson, Roanoke-Chowan (NC) Community College: A community-based approach is important and effective because it builds partnerships with different agencies to allow individuals to have different opportunities to be self-sufficient.

Josh Christenson, Wheelhouse Group: There are so many jobs right now that companies need that are open and filled, and we can do it, and we have to work for it.

Tammy Green, Metropolitan Community College (NE): One of the things that we have really always focused on is how do we ensure that when we are providing educational opportunities and scaling people up for jobs, that we focus on those skills and align it with what the job is actually needing them to do?

Josh: I'm thrilled to be here because I want to socialize apprenticeship as an incredible tool for young people and mid-life career change, for them to be able to go get credentialed, have families sustaining wages, and have marketable skills, for now and in the future.

Lottie Ryans, First Tennessee Development District: You know, I've really enjoyed all the summits I've been able to participate in to attend. There are always great speakers. And because several of us went through the Work Ready Communities Academy together, then I get to connect with

friends, but I also get to steal their best practices, and people are so willing to share what's working, and the challenges they've overcome, and I always take back something I can use at home.

Tammy: The most valuable component of that is when you see everything working together, it truly is a mechanism that can be used to transform your community, and move people from low wage jobs into high wage-earning jobs. Because at the end of the day, it is about helping people and your community, be educated, move into jobs, and flourish and grow.

Jasen: Visit act.org/workforcesummit to check out the lineup and register today.

Closing with Jingle: Ready for Work is a service from your friends at ACT, a mission-driven non-profit dedicated to helping people achieve education and workplace success. Discover more at act.org/readyforworkpodcast. Now, let's get to work!