

LWDB 21 Palm Beach County EDUCATION AND INDUSTRY CONSORTIUM of the Palm Beaches: Hospitality QUARTERLY REPORT

A. GENERAL INFORMATION

Report quarter: Q 3

Date of meeting: 09/22/2026

Report prepared by: Julia Dattolo, President & CEO

Local Workforce Development Board contact: Julia Dattolo, President & CEO

B. ATTENDANCE

See attached attendance of Consortium members and industry specific guests below.

C. SUMMARY REPORT

Summary:

Education, workforce, and hospitality leaders assessed Palm Beach County's talent pipeline and workforce needs.

- Hospitality supports over 95,000 county jobs
- More than 1,900 hotel rooms are planned
- Palm Beach State launched a culinary apprenticeship
- Housing and wages constrain worker retention
- AI should improve efficiency, not replace service
- Digital literacy and transferable skills remain essential

Hospitality Education and Apprenticeship Participation:

Representatives introduced their roles in hospitality education, workforce development, and industry support. Palm Beach State College described its hospitality, culinary, event-management, and newly launched cook-apprenticeship programs, while other institutions outlined related education and articulation responsibilities.

CareerSource Palm Beach County Resources and Talent-Pipeline Strategy:

Julia Dattolo explained CareerSource's convening, labor-market, job-fair, internship, and apprenticeship functions. The discussion emphasized connecting education with employers, retaining local youth, and showing students that hospitality offers career pathways rather than only seasonal work.

Internships, Job Fairs, and Education Pathways:

CareerSource presented the hospitality learner pathway, which maps local education and training offerings and is updated quarterly. The group also reviewed InternPalmBeach.com and upcoming job fairs, including Paychecks for Patriots and October events including upcoming Hospitality Job Fairs by Discover Palm Beaches at Palm Beach State College and in Greenacres.

Hospitality Labor Market and Priority Skills:

CareerSource reviewed county unemployment, hospitality employment, tourism impact, occupational demand, and education-to-employment connections. Culinary roles, food preparation, frontline supervision, housekeeping, baking and pastry, banquet operations, engineering, and leadership emerged as important talent-pipeline areas.

Compensation, Mobility, and Industry-Education Alignment:

Participants considered the gap between hospitality wages and the cost of living, including housing and transportation constraints that affect retention and local economic mobility. Julia Dattolo then posed questions about hard-to-fill roles, missing applicant skills, valuable credentials, curriculum gaps, and community solutions.

Tourism Growth and Hospitality Expansion:

Heather Andrews, Discover the Palm Beaches reported record visitation and continued growth in hotel development. Planned and anticipated properties, including nearly 2,000 additional rooms through 2029 and a potential 400-room headquarters hotel, are expected to increase hospitality hiring needs.

Workforce Expectations and Student Exposure:

The discussion shifted to higher service, technology, and talent expectations associated with Palm Beach County's luxury hospitality market. Discover the Palm Beaches described job fairs and high-school exposure programs designed to encourage students to pursue hospitality education and enter the expanding industry.

Palm Beach State College Culinary Programs and Apprenticeships:

Kimberly Lea and Michael Campagne described Palm Beach State's recently added culinary associate degree, current enrollment, and plans to expand recruitment. Christine Whiteleather then explained the one-year culinary apprenticeship, including its educational prerequisite, 2,000-hour work requirement, employer partnerships, and nationally recognized certification.

Employer Partnerships and Adult Culinary Education:

Christine Whiteleather invited hotel and resort representatives to establish apprenticeship partnerships, while the workforce board offered additional support and proposed an industry connection session. Fred Barch described Historic Carver's adult education culinary program, its temporary partnership with the Palm Beach County Food Bank, its current cohort, upcoming graduation, and planned kitchen renovation.

Middle- and High-School Culinary Pathways:

The discussion outlined pre-culinary academies in seven middle schools and culinary or hospitality programs across numerous high schools. Students may graduate with as many as seven years of experience and certifications in practical skills, creating pathways into employment, Palm Beach State, or both.

University Hospitality Education and Workforce Gaps:

Peter Ricci described FAU's hospitality programs, certificates, degree offerings, work-experience requirements, and job-posting support. He highlighted a statewide shortfall in hospitality graduates, the challenge of having hospitality recognized as a program of strategic emphasis, and FAU's efforts to provide affordable education, scholarships, and advancement pathways.

Keiser University's Developing Local Offering:

Keiser University explained that its culinary programs are offered at several Florida campuses but not in South Florida. Loraine Jackson said the West Palm Beach campus is developing a possible local associate degree in hospitality, although the launch date and expected enrollment have not been determined.

Employer Feedback and Internship Development:

Employers were invited to describe how the education and workforce offerings could support their recruiting needs. A convention center representative said the available pathways were largely new information and described an eight-week rotational internship being developed with Palm Beach State, while expressing interest in the apprenticeship model.

AI and Labor-Cost Pressures:

The group examined wage pressures and the difficulty of increasing labor costs for county-contracted and corporate operations. Participants considered using AI to streamline automatable support functions and redirect resources toward frontline roles that depend on human service.

AI-Powered Efficiency and Digital Literacy:

Participants emphasized that AI should support, rather than replace, hospitality employees and should remove administrative work that interferes with guest-facing service. They discussed employee discomfort with new technology and the need for practical digital-literacy support.

Digital-Literacy Grant and Workforce Transition:

Julia Dattolo discussed a Comcast-supported digital-literacy program that CareerSource offers as helping people use computers and phones for job applications, recognize scams, and use AI in the job search. The discussion reinforced the value of advancing the related grant and teaching transferable skills for career mobility.

AI Adoption and Transferable Skills:

Participants shared examples of AI reducing the time required for reports, comparisons, spreadsheets, and payroll work. They also stressed that basic AI and technology education can help employees build transferable skills and move into new industries.

Employer Technology Requirements:

The group discussed which computer programs students should learn to improve employability. POS systems were identified as particularly useful for food-and-beverage roles, while hotel-specific platforms vary by brand and are less transferable.

Transferable Skills and System Fluency:

Employers discussed the challenge of recognizing candidates with transferable experience when managers expect specific luxury-hospitality or platform backgrounds. The group agreed that comfort with system categories such as HRIS and POS is more important than knowing one specific application.

Technology Complexity and Hiring Credentials:

A resort's use of roughly 15 software applications illustrated the operational demands placed on guest-service employees. The discussion ended with agreement that basic digital skills can be learned during orientation, while ServSafe and alcohol-service certifications provide immediate hiring value.

Palm Beach State College Update:

Kimberly Lea shared that Palm Beach State College is seeking guest speakers who can speak with students about their experiences and career journeys within the hospitality industry. She also noted that the college is partnering with CareerSource to assist students with resume development and is seeking employers willing to host student field trips. Additionally, opportunities are available for employers to participate in mock interviews and provide students with constructive feedback to help prepare them for the workforce.

Action Items:

- * Julia Dattolo will introduce Christine Whiteleather to Charles Duval regarding local employer partnerships for Palm Beach State College's cook apprenticeship.
- * Julia Dattolo will send online participants the handouts, and slide presentation.
- * Julia Dattolo will update the hospitality learner pathway to include Palm Beach State College's culinary apprenticeship.
- * Hospitality employers will post internship opportunities on InternPalmBeach.com or provide CareerSource with links to their internship listings.
- * Interested employers will contact Heather Andrews about reserving a table at the October 15 Greenacres job fair.
- * Interested employers will contact CareerSource about reserving a table at the November 4 Paychecks For Patriots Job Fair.
- * Christine Whiteleather will provide her email address and phone number to interested hotel and resort representatives.
- * Christine Whiteleather will meet with hotel human-resources representatives, chefs, and food-and-beverage managers to establish apprenticeship partnerships.
- * Kathrine Griffin with the convention center will continue developing the eight-week rotational internship program with Palm Beach State.
- * Julia Dattolo will schedule a follow-up meeting for May or June of next year.

EDUCATION & INDUSTRY CONSORTIUM OF THE PALM BEACHES MEETING HOSPITALITY (FOCUS)

ATTENDEES CONTACT INFORMATION

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