PARTNERSHIP LEADERS VISIT GREENVILLE, CHARLOTTE TO EXPLORE ECONOMIC MOBILITY STRATEGIES

By Emily Barnwell

Members of the Partnership's talent, workforce development and community engagement team recently returned from Greensville, South Carolina, and Charlotte, North Carolina, to learn how these communities tackle economic mobility and workforce development. They explored strategies that create pathways to opportunity, especially in traditionally underserved areas, to help build a strong internal workforce pipeline.

Amber Dunn, program manager for NXTUS, and Cole Schnieders, continuum of care planning manager of the United Way of the Plains, accompanied the Partnership on the site visit.

Together, they engaged with local leaders to gain insights into urban planning, transportation, entrepreneurship for underserved youth, homelessness and city economic development efforts.

Left to right: Ricki Ellison, director of talent, workforce development, and community engagement at the Partnership; Amber Dunn, program manager for NXTUS; Tami Bradley, senior strategic advisor for Talent Roadmap and workforce development at the Partnership; and Cole Schnieders, continuum of care planning manager of the United Way of the Plains pose in front of a Charlotte, North Carolina sign during their trip.

Learning from Greenville and Charlotte

Greenville has embraced intentional urban design, public-private partnerships and proactive leadership to foster economic mobility.

To learn more about this, the Wichita team met with leaders from the United Way, city officials, urban planners and the Greenville City Economic Development Corporation. A downtown walking tour, led by Councilmember Russell Stall, also provided a firsthand look at the city's initiatives.

Charlotte adopted a systems-level approach to economic mobility, prioritizing workforce development, housing affordability and transportation accessibility.

Wichita representatives met with key leaders and stakeholders in Charlotte to explore how regional partnerships, targeted initiatives and strategic planning can create sustainable pathways for economic mobility.

Key Takeaways

Discussions in both cities reinforced the importance of several foundational elements of economic mobility.

- **Intentionality in Community Planning:** Establishing a shared vision with clear, actionable steps is crucial for long-term success.
- **Public engagement and Strong Leadership:** Balancing community input with decisive leadership helps drive forward progress, even when difficult decisions must be made.
- **Access to Opportunity**: It is critical to ensure that individuals from underserved communities have direct access and proximity to the people, programs and resources that can improve their quality of life.

Moving Forward in Wichita

The insights gathered from these visits will help shape Wichita's economic mobility plan, which will be presented to the Kansas Health Foundation later this year. To support this initiative, the Foundation provided a planning grant to Opportunity Wichita, an affiliate organization of the Partnership.

By learning from the successes of other communities and adapting their best practices, Wichita can build an opportunity-rich environment where all residents have the chance to thrive.