

Closing the Gap: Connecting through the Atlanta Beltline Executive Summary

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**Rosalia Arora
Akhil Chhabra
Stu Lipkin
Toni Sargeant**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Redevelopment Plan for the Atlanta BeltLine promises the creation of 30,000 new full time jobs over the 25-year implementation of the project. These are in addition to the 48,000 one-year construction jobs resulting from the building of the BeltLine and surrounding private sector developments. Hailed as a national model for creating sustainable cities, the Beltline allows residents to live in close proximity to employment centers or to use public transportation to get to and from work, thus reducing Atlanta's dependence on the automobile. Therefore, the overall success of the BeltLine will depend on its ability to connect residents living near the BeltLine with the jobs that are being created along it.

Our team was tasked with outlining how the private sector, workforce development, and community organizations can work together to "tweak" the existing employment pipeline so that current and future jobs created along the BeltLine can be filled by residents who live along the Beltline. This report proposes a process to achieve this end by connecting employers with employees within the BeltLine area.

To better understand current hiring processes along the BeltLine and to identify any gaps related to our project, we surveyed 50-60 BeltLine businesses and organizations using a telephone questionnaire. The high-level findings from this survey are:

- There is a lack of confidence in the BeltLine and uncertainty about its relevance and value for the local business community;
- Employers do not always see the value of participating in local hiring practices;
- Beltline employers are currently using disjointed hiring practices which do not lend themselves to a place-based hiring model;
- Employers see a lack of well-trained candidates and experience difficulty retaining employees for mid-level jobs; and
- There is a lack of awareness of businesses, industries and resources that exist on the BeltLine and therefore a gap in understanding how to connect them with one another.

In order to identify potential remedies to these issues, we researched hiring strategies and place-based models currently being used by other organizations in other locations. This revealed a number of options to address the various gaps outlined above. In a thorough analysis of best practices regarding workforce development, public-private partnerships,

human resources, job sourcing initiatives, and participation incentives, we determined the following to be essential to the BeltLine's job sourcing process:

- Make all relevant information accessible via one central location;
- Create strategic partnerships that allow private sector participants to contribute to workforce development;
- Determine what skills are most needed to fulfill current jobs on the Beltline;
- Outsource and centralize HR functions where possible; and
- Clearly define and publicize specific incentives for place-based job sourcing.

This latter point is critical. Currently, BeltLine businesses hire with little regard to place. Creating proper incentives that target the development and training of residents living along the BeltLine is a key step towards connecting local employees with job openings along the Beltline.

However, workforce development is not enough. In order to meet our place-based objectives, the BeltLine must also create a set of centralized offerings that facilitate the job connection process. This centralized hub for the Atlanta BeltLine should incorporate the following:

- Create a structure (virtual and/or physical) that provides a clear identity for BeltLine employers;
- Foster strategic partnerships and then aggregate information in this central location;
- Create a marketing channel to promote the BeltLine businesses both within the BeltLine community and beyond; and
- Provide a centralized HR sourcing solution for participating BeltLine employers.

With these guiding principles, we outline a web-based solution that should be implemented for the BeltLine, which we have named "ABLiSS," or Atlanta BeltLine Sourcing Solution. ABLiSS serves as a "one stop shop" sourcing solution model staffed by a dedicated group of people whose primary focus is to match appropriately-skilled BeltLine residents with open employment opportunities for businesses located around the BeltLine. ABLiSS incorporates valuable incentives and auxiliary services made available exclusively to BeltLine businesses so that they might better fulfill their human resources functions and talent development needs. Some of these incentives include:

- Free or low-cost resume and job postings for residents and employers;
- A up-to-date library of resources regarding industry and employment best practices and industry white papers;
- A calendar of Atlanta BeltLine events that are specifically of interest to Beltline employers and residents;

- An accompanying physical space for partnerships to promote community-building activities and to share information; and
- A leading-edge “Beltline Business Directory.”

These tailored programs will help develop a strong supply-side rationale for BeltLine businesses to both flourish and become more robust employers. This will in turn provide a strong foundation to encourage potential growth and partnership among the BeltLine businesses and community.

By aggressively marketing ABLiSS, our proposal addresses the current ambivalence among employers towards the BeltLine as a business locale while developing a unique mechanism that helps them successfully find and hire skilled employees. It also provides Beltline employers with additional HR services that will generate long-term business benefits both for themselves and for the Atlanta BeltLine community in which they operate.