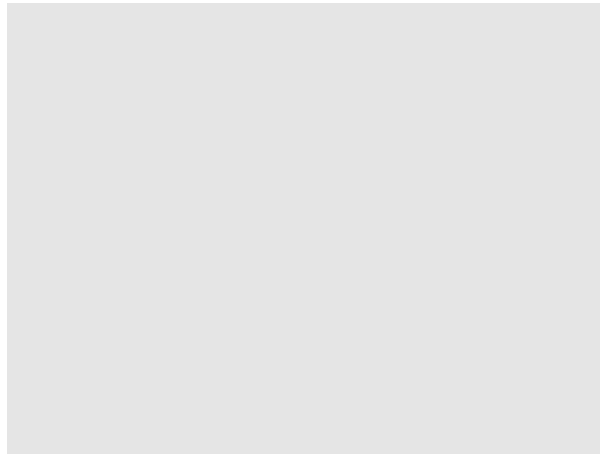


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New workforce grant aims to keep college grads in town

By DON SERGENT dsergent@bgdailynews.com Dec 7, 2019



Jon Sowards

Submitted



Robert Boone

Daily News file photo

Students of Western Kentucky University and Southcentral Kentucky Community and Technical College already provide a boost to the Bowling Green economy and serve as a good source of seasonal employees. Now, local workforce development professionals aim to ensure more of those students remain part of the region's workforce long after their final exam.

The South Central Workforce Development Board has procured grant funding to develop what's being branded as the Career 270 initiative that will focus on keeping WKU and SKYCTC graduates close to their home campuses.

The \$85,000 grant from the Kentucky Cabinet for Education and Workforce Development will be used to hire a staff member at the workforce board who will serve as a liaison between the local colleges and local employers.

“We want to work more closely with college students and recent graduates to help them find employment opportunities in our 10-county region,” said Robert Boone, the workforce board’s president and CEO.

Boone explained that the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act funding that makes up most of the workforce board’s budget can’t be used for retaining college graduates. This grant will fill in the funding gap while also helping address the region’s large number of job openings.

According to the open jobs report produced by the JobsEQ research firm, the 10-county southcentral Kentucky region currently has more than 7,000 open positions.

It only makes sense, says workforce board Vice President of Operations Jon Sowards, to use local higher education to fill some of those openings.

“As a region, we don’t do a good job of connecting students to local

employers,” Sowards said. “The education liaison will be an intermediary who will get in front of those students and connect them with our services.

“Instead of letting that talent run off to Nashville or Louisville or somewhere else, we’ll try to keep them here.”

Boone said the Career 270 initiative will start in January. He believes it fits well with the workforce Board’s KY hirED program that places WKU and SKYCTC students in part-time jobs and offers them the opportunity to earn scholarship money.

The education liaison hired for the Career 270 initiative will provide a more focused service than the career services offices at WKU and SKYCTC, Boone said.

“The career services offices have job openings from across the country,” he said. “We’re only concerned with our 10 counties and connecting students to jobs in our region.”

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