

Resources to Maintain and Invest in to Sustain a Tourism Workforce in Ocracoke, NC

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Executive Summary

Through interviews and focus groups with tourism business owners, residents, and policymakers two strategies were identified to sustain a tourism workforce in Ocracoke, NC: 1.) maintain existing resources that support the tourism workforce and 2.) invest in the resources that could be improved and would make Ocracoke a more attractive place to work.

Resources that currently support Ocracoke's tourism workforce

Recognition and celebration of support for community members

Practices which support tourism employees' quality of life

Efforts to cultivate a community-based culture

Conscious efforts by the residents and employers to support Latino members of the community

Quality of education provided at Ocracoke's public school

Quality beaches and ocean waters for recreational use by residents and tourists

Consideration of the value of consolidated development in facilitating community integration

Resources that require investment to support Ocracoke's tourism workforce

Increase NC elected officials' awareness of tourism workforce challenges on Ocracoke

Leverage the power of advocacy associations to voice concerns about the challenges of the H2B visa program

Establish an affordable housing taskforce

Increase access to medical and dental services

Expand child care offerings

Increase educational opportunities for Spanish-speaking community members

Establish programs to maximize high school students' tourism workforce experiences

Facilitate a tourism ambassador training program for residents and tourism employees

Host a job fair to identify potential tourism employees from surrounding areas

Develop a coordinated approach to marketing seasonal employment to college students

Introduction

Tourism is an industry that requires considerable labor in order to operate effectively. All sectors of the industry -- hotels, food and beverage, transportation, and attractions -- need both front and back of the house employees to deliver services and create satisfactory experiences for visitors. Employers in these sectors face challenges in identifying, hiring, and maintaining employees (National Restaurant Association, 2016)¹, particularly when unemployment rates are low. While sustaining the tourism workforce is a challenge for most destinations, it is particularly challenging for remote communities like Ocracoke.

Tourism is a vital component of Ocracoke's economy. In such tourism-based communities, factors like cost of living, geographic isolation, housing shortages, and seasonal employment increase barriers to recruit and retain quality employees. Lack of access to a reliable workforce makes the tourism industry vulnerable and can limit the quality of visitors' experiences and a destination's image. To limit this vulnerability and sustain the economic contributions of the tourism industry it is important to address the challenges related to the tourism workforce.

Because the success of the tourism industry depends on access to a sustainable workforce, tourism-based communities like Ocracoke should maximize their ability to attract and maintain workforce members. This report outlines two main strategies to help sustain a tourism workforce in Ocracoke, relying on findings from a 2017-18 study which convened local policymakers, business owners, and residents, including Spanish-speaking residents, and high school students. The first strategy is to maintain existing resources that support the tourism workforce. The second strategy is to invest in the resources that could be improved and would make Ocracoke a more attractive place to work. Specific recommendations for sustaining or investing in these resources are outlined in the following report.

¹ National Restaurant Association (2016). Hospitality employee turnover rate edged higher in 2016. Retrieved 5/1/18 from <http://www.restaurant.org/News-Research/News/Hospitality-employee-turnover-rate-edged-higher-in>

Findings: Resources that are currently supporting Ocracoke's tourism workforce

A variety of community resources currently support Ocracoke's tourism workforce according to interviews and focus groups conducted with Ocracoke residents². It is recommended that efforts be made to sustain these resources so they continue to support the existing tourism workforce and continue to attract future members of the tourism workforce. Broadly these resources include: social, cultural, human, and natural resources. Specific examples of these resources and the evidence of their value are provided below.

Support for Community Members

A key asset to maintain is the interpersonal support provided to members of the island's community. As noted by one business owner:

“People are ultimately judged on their [civic nature] and their integrity, and not on what kind of money they make. Everybody can be a member of this community.”

The focus groups and interviews yielded multiple examples of the support that one can expect when they are a member of the Ocracoke community. High school students described a fundraiser to help one of their peers pay for medical bills and the funding support provided by the community for a baseball team. Residents discussed how parents volunteered at the child care center to try to keep it operating. It was mentioned numerous times by residents that it was important to not burn bridges in the community because everyone relied upon each other, as described here:

“One of the things that I love about this community is, it continually reminds me that no matter what side of an issue you're on, there will be somebody who's vehemently against your position, there's still a time in the future where you will need something from that person and they're the only one who can provide it.”

These findings indicate that support for community members is a vital part of the appeal of staying on the island to live and work. Therefore, it will be valuable to sustain this level of community support in order to

Sustained resource 1 – Recognition and celebration of support for community members

² See Appendix A for methods used to collect information for this report.

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continue attracting and maintaining individuals who want to work in the tourism industry, particularly those who may be interested in staying in the community full-time. In order to sustain this resource, it is proposed that efforts should continue to recognize and celebrate the support for community within Ocracoke.

Another key social resource that currently sustains the tourism workforce on Ocracoke are the practices that maintain tourism employees' quality of life. Business owners and residents noted the potential for tourism employees to feel isolated and stressed due to the geography of the island and the emotional demands of working in the tourism industry. Business owners described practices to increase tourism employees' quality of life, such as maintaining lower priced dining options so employees can enjoy the food and beverage establishments on the island:

“One of the things that I find most appealing about Ocracoke, is the way that the business owners treat their employees on par with their customers, or actually give them a little bit of an elevated position within the community...When you go into a bar, or a restaurant, or a shop, even though you're making \$12 an hour, and you're in the room with tourists who have six-figure incomes, there's something on that menu that you can sit up at the bar right next to that tourist, and order your meal, and be a person.”

Efforts to make all tourism employees, even those who are seasonal, feel a part of the Ocracoke community and provide them with the chance to enjoy all that it has to offer will go a long way in helping to attract and maintain quality tourism employees. This may be accomplished through continuing efforts to make dining out affordable for tourism employees or establishing opportunities for employees, particularly seasonal ones, to participate in community events.

Sustained resource 2 – Practices which support tourism employees' quality of life

Culture Built Around a Sense of Community

The support for community members described above manifests itself beyond just the interactions between community members. The sense of community has become an overt part of Ocracoke's culture, felt by both community members and tourists alike. As articulated in the business owner focus group, the culture of community is a vital part of Ocracoke's tourism appeal:

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“I've had family after family say, ‘Oh, it's great. We live in Chicago. My 10-year-old gets five minutes of watched time outside. We come here, and they can go off on their bike, and go down and get an ice cream cone. We don't worry. We feel comfortable letting them go.’”

This same feeling of safety which is facilitated by the island's community-focused culture was described by Latino residents and high school students. They both articulated that trust in their neighbors and a feeling of being part of the community was something they greatly appreciated about living on the island. In one interview a policymaker drew the connection between tourists feeling this sense of community during their visit leading to a desire to stay in the community full time:

“[Tourists say] ‘Oh, I so love Ocracoke. How do you get to live here? How could I be here for the whole summer next year?’ or whatever. A lot of our workforce comes from that.”

Residents and business owners echoed the idea that sense of community attracts tourists, some of whom eventually return as residents or seasonal employees. Some business owners even suggested specifically recruiting previous visitors as employees. What these findings indicate is that the community-focused culture of Ocracoke is vital to the touristic appeal of the island, the development of a tourism workforce, and the well-being of residents.

Sustained resource 3 – Efforts to cultivate a community-based culture

Integration of the Latino community

As noted by several business owners, residents, and policymakers the tourism industry on Ocracoke could not function without the influx of Latino community members over the past two decades, as summarized here by one business owner:

“The whole island would shut down if it wasn't for the Hispanic workforce here.”

While some members of the Latino community work seasonally many have come to make Ocracoke their permanent home. The availability of work in the tourism industry is what initially drew many members of the Latino community to Ocracoke. The participants in the Spanish-speaking focus group noted that it was easy to find work and that they were well-compensated for the work they did. They also noted the ability to move up to higher paying positions, as described here by one participant:

“Because opportunity, for example, opportunities at work, the bosses never limit you to the fact that if you went to wash dishes, you're going to stay there all the time. If you want to learn, they'll say, ‘OK, do you want to learn how to prepare? You're going to prepare. You want to learn how to cook? You're going to cook.’”

While Latino residents noted the employment opportunities that attracted them to the island initially, it was the people of Ocracoke and the community-focused culture that encouraged them to stay. This sentiment is summarized here by one participant:

“The security, that everything is close, the bosses, the people of Ocracoke are good people. They have treated us well. I think that's why we've been here for many years.”

In the Spanish-speaking focus group members of the Latino described the challenges they faced in improving their quality of life due to language barriers. This situation has improved in recent years with the presence of an interpreter at the medical clinic. In addition to community support, resources like access to an interpreter for health care needs, encouraged Latino residents to stay on the island. One focus group participant articulated the value of an interpreter here:

“When I arrived 17 years ago, the biggest problem was the language, the interpreter. I think that now it is a bit less difficult because he helps a lot in the clinic.”

In addition to the interpreter, Spanish-speaking focus group members mentioned the value of the school teachers who work with students who are not native English speakers. This resource ensures that the Latino community has effective participation in the education system and has access to better employment opportunities in the future. These efforts represent good practices that reinforce the sense of community and inclusion necessary for maintaining and strengthening the Ocracoke's workforce.

As the tourism industry continues to rely on members of the Latino community to fulfil their workforce needs, it will be valuable to continue making efforts to attract, maintain and promote their advancement in the workplace. The community as a whole should maintain their efforts to include them in the community-focused culture of Ocracoke and continue supporting resources such as interpreters.

Sustained resource 4 – Conscious efforts by the residents and employers to support Latino members of the community

Resources at Ocracoke's Public School

The quality of Ocracoke's public school may be of concern to those considering moving to Ocracoke or staying in Ocracoke as permanent members of the tourism workforce.

Policymakers, business owners, and residents expressed pride in Ocracoke's school and the quality of education that students receive. The resources available to Latino students, namely access to English language classes and teachers who speak Spanish, were praised in the Spanish-speaking focus group. High school students noted the value of small classes size, as described here:

“Other schools don't have teachers that can help them one-on-one. It's good for us because we get the teachers to help us on everything.”

Continuing to invest in the quality of the schools and the resources made available to students may help improve the appeal of Ocracoke as a permanent home for those who may be considering moving or staying there as a member of the tourism workforce.

Sustained resource 5 – Quality of education provided at Ocracoke's public school

Benefits of the Island's Natural Resources

Geography was frequently cited as a challenge for attracting members of a tourism workforce, namely that as an island Ocracoke was isolated and difficult to access. Challenges related to infrastructure, namely the frequency and consistency of ferry services, were seen to compound this challenge. However, other natural features of being an island were seen to work to the advantage of attracting and maintaining a tourism workforce. The quality of the beaches, like the culture of Ocracoke, were seen as both a highlight of the tourism product and a motivator for people to want to live and work on the island as noted here by a participant in the business owner focus group:

“Certainly, a lot of people come down here to work because we've got the ocean and the beach.”

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This finding suggests that maintaining the quality of natural resources, namely the beach and ocean waters will help Ocracoke continue to attract tourists as well as potential tourism employees.

Sustained resource 6 – Quality beaches and ocean waters for recreational use by residents and tourists

Another feature of the island which benefits tourists and residents is the influence of the natural landscape on the built environment, which has resulted in a clustering of homes, businesses, and community resources on one side of the island, much of which is in walking distance. The social benefits of the developed infrastructure were described by a business owner in an interview:

“The village is all settled around this harbor. It's not a long strip. It fosters a sense of community, whereas some beach communities are just one long strip with businesses all down. Here, everything's integrated, and everybody's close to each other.”

While concerns were voiced by residents and business owners about the limited availability of open land on the island reduces opportunities for greater development, this finding suggests that it may be valuable to look at this challenge as a positive attribute of the island instead. In fact, high school students, residents, and business owners all agreed that a benefit of living on the island was the close proximity of everything. They appreciated that all they needed to get around was a bicycle. Such a feature may also appeal to future members of the tourism workforce.

Sustained resource 7 – Consideration of the value of consolidated development in facilitating community integration

Findings: Resources that require investment to support Ocracoke's tourism workforce

Results from the interviews and focus groups revealed a variety of community resources that require investment in order to support Ocracoke's tourism workforce. It is recommended that investment efforts be made to improve these resources so they can support the existing tourism workforce and attract future members of the tourism workforce. Broadly these resource include: political, built, and human resources. Examples of these resources and the evidence of their value are provided below.

Greater Support for Ocracoke Tourism from the State and Federal Government

Local policymakers and business owners identified a need for greater recognition of Ocracoke's opportunities and challenges at both the state and federal levels of government. As one business owner noted:

“I think Ocracoke is such a jewel in the crown of North Carolina. I really don't know that the state recognizes it as such. Just the attention and what we've dealt with -- with our infrastructure, with the ferries, the aging fleets, and the lack of funding there.”

If state policymakers had a better understanding of Ocracoke's contribution to the state's economy through tourism they may have an increased interest in and willingness to support the needs of its tourism workforce. Investment in this community resource would require members of Ocracoke's tourism industry advocating more strongly with their elected officials.

Investment opportunity 1 – Increase NC elected officials' awareness of tourism workforce challenges on Ocracoke

For some business owners and local policymakers, the unreliable nature of the H-2B visa program³ represented a challenge that limited the development of Ocracoke's tourism workforce:

“To be honest with you, the situation has got so unreliable, the H-2B program is so unreliable that we won't mess with it anymore. It ain't got nothing to do with the costs. It's just reliability. I'm afraid we come April 1 we won't have any workers.”

³ This visa is granted to non-agricultural temporary workers. The H-2B visa is particularly relevant to the tourism industry given that it fulfills recurring peak-load and seasonal needs.

Additionally, many tourism business owners noted that the H-2B program was too complicated and expensive to be a valuable tool for attracting workforce members. Combined, these sentiments suggest that reform is needed to improve the reliability of and access to this program. Such reform could be accomplished through partnerships with state and national tourism and hospitality advocacy associations, such as the North Carolina Restaurant and Lodging Association and the American Hotel and Lodging Association.

Investment opportunity 2 – Leverage the power of advocacy associations to voice concerns about the challenges of the H2B visa program

Creative Housing Options for Seasonal Employees

All of the focus group and interview participants made it clear that a lack of housing for seasonal workers was a major limiting factor in sustaining a tourism workforce on Ocracoke. This was well articulated by a business owner:

“As much as we have desires of how we want the ideal person to be, the fact of the matter is if somebody has a place to live, we're more willing to hire them.”

Affordable housing in tourism destinations remains a long-standing challenge which does not have easy solutions. However, business owners, residents, and policymakers were able to offer creative solutions to address this challenge. The solutions proposed required some element of increasing the built infrastructure on the island, but sought to address different aspects of the overall challenge of access to affordable housing. For example, one participant suggested developing a high speed ferry line between Swan Quarter and Ocracoke, which would open access to the mainland population as potential members of the tourism workforce. The ferry would not require additional housing to be built on Ocracoke, as employees from the mainland could return home daily on the ferry. This could also help address issues of unemployment on mainland Hyde County. Other participants saw opportunities related to housing for seasonal tourism employees that would allow them to live on the island, which may help them to feel more integrated into the community, an important attribute that currently helps to sustain the tourism workforce as outlined above. Here one business owner makes a suggestion for an investment in infrastructure that could house multiple seasonal employees, potentially helping to support several businesses across the island:

“I go back to the sort of the camp model where, if you've ever been to camp, you go in and there are 12 girls on bunk beds with a shared bathroom with no air conditioning, but you got the ceiling fans, and the showers, and the toilets. The weather's good. There's no reason why between May and September for that matter we could make big camp bunk things.”

While this type of housing may not be appealing to all members of a seasonal tourism workforce, college students who fill many of the seasonal service positions may find a low-cost, no-frills option like this suitable. A resident participant proposed improving access to amenities such as laundry and shower facilities for the seasonal tourism workforce which would improve the living conditions for seasonal employees who may already have access to housing:

“Just like dorms in colleges have a laundry, and a lot of apartments have a laundry room, [that] would almost help subsidize a cheaper living situation by having a place where people could come and do laundry, both people living there and people who are staying on sailboats.”

What these findings suggest is that members of the Ocracoke community have many ideas for addressing the challenges related to

Investment Opportunity 3 – Establish an affordable housing taskforce

housing options for the seasonal tourism workforce. Investment in a taskforce of tourism stakeholders – business owners, employees, policymakers, etc... – that will identify and prioritize housing solutions and pursue the necessary resources to support those solutions could help make progress towards solving the affordable housing challenge in Ocracoke.

Essential Services for Maintaining Permanent Residents as Tourism Employees

Conversations with tourism employers, residents, and policymakers indicated that while seasonal workers were an important part of the tourism workforce, permanent employees were even more important/desirable. However, all participants identified multiple essential services that required investment to further increase the appeal of Ocracoke as a community for people to live in permanently. Therefore, to attract and maintain permanent members of the tourism workforce there are several areas which require greater investment.

Medical and dental services were mentioned by policymakers, students, residents, and employers as vital resources to help maintain a permanent workforce on Ocracoke. Several respondents

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mentioned that lack of medical and dental services was not only a concern for the health of residents, but also a burden for them in terms of losing valuable time (and wages) having to go off-island for these services. This was articulated by a resident in a focus group:

“Or if your kid breaks their arm and then you're having to go back and forth to whatever it is. I would actually almost say for the workforce it can be more terrifying, because we're heavily dependent upon making money every day.”

Another resident proposed a solution to improving medical care which represents an opportunity for investment in community resources that would help maintain a permanent tourism workforce on Ocracoke:

“If there was a doctor on island who made regular house calls, who could do things like set bones or stitches, small minor medical procedure, and that came from inter-island funds or from Hyde County funds or state funds, then that would help some of the concern about having to take an hour and a half ferry ride.”

The mention of the necessity for financial support from the county or state for this solution to the challenge of providing medical services also emphasizes the need for members of Ocracoke's tourism industry to advocate for greater support from elected officials as noted in Investment Opportunity 1. Investment in spreading the awareness of option for virtual health care providers (e.g. the virtual exams provided by Vidant Health) may also help residents address minor medical conditions without having to leave the island.

Investment Opportunity 4 – Increase access to medical and dental services

Other essential services residents and business owners deemed vital to maintain a permanent workforce included more reliable and accessible child care. A lack of child care, combined with the long hours required to work in the island's tourism industry, was seen as a significant barrier for permanent residents to work in tourism, as described by this business owner:

“Especially if you're a single mother, for instance, or if both parents are working full-time, because Ocracoke's not a cheap place to live. Then, if you need childcare. We did have a childcare center [but it is closed] for lack of employees”

A lack of childcare was also seen as a more significant problem in the summer when students were not in school. One resident offered a solution to this by proposing that the National Park Service expand their educational program offerings to include more resident children:

“A lot of their programs are designed for people coming in and out, right? Tourists or day visitors, but there's no reason that it couldn't also integrate students who are here.”

Establishing childcare offerings throughout the year and particularly in the summer would go a long way in helping permanent residents participate in Ocracoke's tourism workforce. Finding resources to re-open the existing child care facilities on the island and maximizing the seasonal educational offerings through the National Park Service could address this challenge.

Investment Opportunity 5 – Expand child care offerings

Cultivating Skillsets of the Existing Workforce

One of the strengths of the current Ocracoke tourism workforce is that it is comprised of many different groups of people including lifelong residents, recent residents of Latino and non-Latino heritage, college students, high school students, and retirees seeking part time work. This heterogeneous workforce calls for attention to different needs when considering investment opportunities to support and/or grow the skillsets of each of these critical workforce subpopulations.

Spanish-speaking residents mentioned how learning English helped them be successful in the tourism industry and feel comfortable with everyday tasks (such as visiting the medical clinic). They also mentioned how the language barrier limits their ability to contribute to community challenges such as maintaining the daycare center, since providers must be able to speak English and take training courses that are only offered in English. The focus group participants recognized opportunities to learn English provided through the community, but also emphasized their desire to have a more formal learning environment that would help them master the language more quickly. As seen here, the idea of an English language course led by a trained educator who could assess learning levels, was introduced:

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“A professional teacher, because I have heard that outside like in Little Washington, Morehead City, the school offers classes at different levels and times for adults, but that has never been available here.”

Participants in the Spanish-speaking focus group noted that learning English was a priority so that they could learn additional skills. This opportunity to expand their skill base was demonstrated with their acknowledgement that a technology course for adult that was held at the high school was a good idea, though challenging due to the need for translation. Overall, though there was a desire to learn, as articulated here:

“Because if someone comes from a school to teach, I do go. I do want to learn more.”

Specific ideas for learning opportunities were also articulated. Focus group participants specifically mentioned an interest in business development classes, as seen here:

“There was a person from the community college in Washington, I do not know if he still comes. It came as two consecutive years. He was offering classes for people who wanted to develop a business and he came and taught, but it was in English nothing more.”

These findings indicate that investment in the Spanish-speaking workforce could entail offering additional and structured English-

Investment Opportunity 6 – Increase educational opportunities for Spanish-speaking community members

language learning courses. Members of Ocracoke’s Spanish-speaking community may also take advantage of other educational opportunities to develop additional skills. Such investment may open up new opportunities for the Spanish-speaking community and could help them increase their contributions to the tourism workforce in Ocracoke.

Interviews and focus groups with tourism business owners revealed the importance of high school students as a part of the seasonal workforce. A focus group with juniors from Ocracoke High School provided examples of how working in the tourism industry has helped younger members of Ocracoke’s population gain valuable skills in customer service, time management, leadership, and conflict resolution. However, data from the focus group with students also indicated that these students did not necessarily recognize the value of these skills and their potential benefits related to future employment or college admissions. In fact, many students

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seemed concerned that they were at a disadvantage in terms of college applications, compared to other high schoolers, as illustrated in these quotes from two student participants:

“We don't have a lot of things to put on our transcripts.” (Female participant)

“[Other schools] always have these clubs, all sorts of extra-curricular stuff, and we don't really have much.” (Male participant)

Investment in programs to help high school students maximize their experience as members of Ocracoke's tourism workforce could help to address their concerns about not being competitive in the college application process. For example, the establishment of chapter of DECA (Distributive Education Clubs of America), a national organization which gives high school students experience in leadership and entrepreneurship in marketing, finance, hospitality and management, could help create a new extracurricular activity for students to build upon the skills they gain from working in Ocracoke's tourism industry. Additionally, visits from university recruiters may help students learn how to communicate the value of the skills they gain from their seasonal tourism work.

Investment Opportunity 7 – Establish programs to maximize high school students' tourism workforce experiences

Tourism employers, residents, and high school students all mentioned how important it was for tourism employees to have knowledge of the island and its community. They also discussed the importance of having the ability to handle repeated questions about these knowledge areas, as described here by a tourism business owner:

“The person that I find the best worker is somebody who knows the island well, and somebody who is, at least, willing to learn the island well... You get a lot of the same questions asked over, and over, and over again. You just have to act like it's the first time you've been asked that question.”

High school students employed in tourism made similar observations about repetitive questions from tourists. They remarked on the importance of knowing where certain landmarks are, when other businesses are open, and the history of the island. Participants in the residents focus group also commented on the importance of knowing the island's history and tourism product:

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“I think we're all ambassadors of the island and of each other and of each other's businesses. We're kind of caretakers of each other's livelihoods all the time.”

Many tourism destinations have developed programs for residents and tourism employees to serve as “ambassadors” for the destination. Investment in such a program on Ocracoke could help to train members of the tourism workforce in the basics of customer service, the history of the island, and knowledge of island's tourism product. This could help them be more successful as employees and could improve tourists' experiences on the island as well.

Investment Opportunity 8 – Facilitate a tourism ambassador training program for residents and tourism employees

Identifying New Tourism Workforce Members

A common theme was the need to find employees that were the “right fit” for Ocracoke and the tourism industry. Employees, employers, and policymakers all noted the importance of work ethic, emotional intelligence, patience, and responsibility in tourism employees. Finding these traits in employees is challenging for any tourism business but is particularly hard for employers on Ocracoke given the other hurdles that potential employees face in living and working on the island. Therefore, it would be valuable to invest in opportunities to identify a large pool of employees who could hold these traits. Policymaker and business owner participants both suggested the establishment of a job fair as a means of identifying potential tourism employees for Ocracoke businesses, as seen here:

“I would say the county government being proactive into things like job fairs and housing, getting people to come over here, recruiting. It's going to take a significant effort and literally some brainpower to figure out what will work.”

As noted by one policymaker participant, the establishment of a job fair focused on attracting potential employees from the mainland of Hyde County or neighboring counties could help address the challenge of tourism employees finding affordable housing. It was acknowledged that this strategy would still

Investment Opportunity 9 – Host a job fair to identify potential tourism employees from surrounding areas

require the development of infrastructure (e.g., a high speed ferry from Swan Quarter to Ocracoke) in order to make bringing employees from the mainland to Ocracoke viable. Additionally, tourism employees coming from the mainland on a daily basis, rather than living

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on Ocracoke, may introduce challenges in getting tourism employees fully immersed in the Ocracoke community, an important element of the tourism product as discussed in the previous section. However, investment in a job fair may help to expand the pool of potential employees that are needed to help fill the tourism employment opportunities on Ocracoke.

As previously mentioned college students are also an essential component of Ocracoke's seasonal workforce. This population introduces its own set of challenges – chiefly the need for housing – but multiple employers identified it as a vital part of their workforce strategy. Another challenge lies in aligning college student's availability with the seasonal needs of Ocracoke's tourism businesses. Here one business owner illustrates this challenge:

“Also, in the college students, I don't like to hire everybody from the southern colleges because they all go back early. The most attractive ones actually are from the northern schools...If I could find the ones from the West Coast, the Midwest, the northern schools, it's much more attractive.”

Because so many employers on the island utilize college students for seasonal employment they could combine resources and invest in a strategy to attract a pool of students from schools whose calendars align well with the seasonality of Ocracoke's tourism industry. These employers could identify a leader tasked with building a relationship with the schools' internship coordinators for degree programs related to hospitality, tourism, or management and providing them with information about employment opportunities for students.

Investment Opportunity 10 – Develop a coordinated approach to marketing seasonal employment to college students

Next Steps

There are a variety of community resources already supporting the tourism workforce on Ocracoke. Support for community members, community-based culture, integration of the Latino and non-Latino communities, and local school resources contribute to the attractiveness of Ocracoke as a great place to work and live. Decision-makers in Ocracoke, Hyde County, and the state of North Carolina need to recognize the importance of these resources and continue to invest in them in order to support Ocracoke's tourism economy. Community members and decision makers should also seek opportunities to invest in additional resources, namely greater support for Ocracoke tourism from state and federal agencies, creative housing options for seasonal employees, essential services for permanent residents, cultivating the skillsets of the existing workforce, and identification of new workforce participants. Investment in these resources may help to attract and maintain the workforce needed to sustain Ocracoke's tourism economy. It is recommended that decision makers in the community and tourism stakeholders consider the strategies outlined in this report. The strategies for sustaining or investing in community resources should be prioritized and specific actions to implement the strategies should be made.

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Appendix 1: Methods

Interviews and focus groups were used to collect data for this study. Through a partnership with Ocracoke Alive! members of several stakeholder groups on the island were identified and invited to participate in the study. These stakeholder groups included: tourism business owners, permanent residents, policymakers, members of the Latino community, and high school students. Snowball sampling was also used with tourism business owners, residents, and policymakers to identify additional potential participants. Data collection continued until data saturation was achieved. Tourism business owners, residents, and policymakers were invited to participate in the study via email invitations and phone calls. Members of the Latino community were invited via a contact through Ocracoke Alive! High school students were invited to participate through their teacher who provided take home consent and assent forms for the students to share with their parents. Only students who provided both forms participated in the focus group. All participants in the interviews and focus groups signed consent forms which allowed for the audio recording of their conversations with the research team.

Interviews were conducted with five business owners, two policymakers, and one resident. Four focus groups were hosted, one with tourism business owners (five participants), one with Ocracoke residents (five participants), a Spanish-speaking focus group with Ocracoke residents (ten participants), and one with high school students (ten participants). The Spanish-speaking focus group was conducted with assistance from NCSU Ph.D. student Sara Brune and Freddy Contreras. All interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed for data analysis. Two members of the research team used nVivo software to conduct open coding, allowing themes to emerge from the data. Axial coding was then used to organize those themes into categories based upon the Community Capitals Framework⁴ (Flora, 2004) including, built, financial, political, social, human, natural, and cultural capital. These capitals can also be considered community resources. After coding was complete, the resources were examined to determine whether participants felt the resources needed to be sustained or invested in.

⁴ Flora, C. B. (2004). Community Dynamics and Social Capital. In *Agroecosystems Analysis*, edited by D. Rickerl and C. Francis. Madison, WI: American Society of Agronomy, Inc., Crop Science Society of America, Inc., Soil Science Society of America, Inc., pp. 93-107.