**Listening Session #2 Summary Report**

This session occurred on via an online Zoom video conference. Participants numbered nine. Tammy Molinelli and Miriam Salerno led the session, aided by Jane Armstrong, Andrea Lubin, Alison Draikiwicz and Sarah Tomasello.

Throughout the session, participants answered informal poll questions using the “Yes” and “No” buttons on the Zoom video conference platform. Session facilitators provided instructions at the beginning of the session on how to find and use these buttons to answer questions. Not all participants were able to answer each question using these buttons, so the poll results are not complete and are only meant to give a general sense of participant responses.

**PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS**

**DISCUSSION SUMMARY**

**Introductions**

Participants were asked to introduce themselves with their position, company, location, industry, and number of employees.

**Challenges Related to Covid-19**

Participants first answered several informal poll questions regarding Covid-19 related challenges related to their workforce. Of nine participants, # shared that they have had to reduce employee hours, while # have not. # employers have furloughed or laid off employees, while eleven have not. # participant indicated that they would need to lay off employees in the coming months, while # did not expect more layoffs.

They were then asked to provide feedback on the “new normal” as a consequence of Covid-19. The main ones discussed were childcare, transit usage by employees, the need for more staff and the willingness of employees to be unemployed.

A manufacturing firm also mentioned that it was initially difficult to get staff up the same page in terms of adapting to social distancing restrictions. A few participants talked about challenges in disinfecting their work areas. Another participant mentioned they did a daily newsletter to employees on the dos and don’ts of social distancing and hygiene in the workplace to better acclimatize employees to this new work environment, as maintaining these norms was also a challenge for them.

Other participants also talked about the fear of employees coming back to work in light of the spread of Covid-19 across the state.

Participants were then asked about their single most challenge in the next six to twelve months. Two firms said adapting to the new norms and the fear of a second wave of Covid-19. Other responses included reopening and staff buy-in and and medium-term issue with staff retention.

**Telecommuting**

Participants were asked whether they had allowed people to work from home. # said they did. Participants were also asked to mention the challenges and opportunities related to telecommuting that they saw as a firm, and also whether it was working or not.

Firms agreed that telecommuting tends to work, but there were some issues to work on. One participant mentioned that managers felt that there was a trust deficit with the employees because they cannot monitor them, so they make employees send an email at the end of the day with the tasks that they had accomplished. They also talked about participants with children who would have their kids inadvertently come into meetings, but as a whole the employees were rising to the task, and management has to work on trusting them. Another participant said that 43% of their employees were telecommuting and it was going well.

**Resources Used**

Participants were asked whether they had applied for the Paycheck Protection Program and the Economic Injury Disaster Loan. Six had applied for the former and one for the latter. All have received the funds from these programs.

They were also asked about applying for the NJEDA grants, to which one participant mentioned the grant money was gone in one morning of the applications being opened.

One person applies for unemployment as a self-employed individual and received the money from that scheme.

Another said staff morale and employee participation were flagging and they were offering spot bonuses in order to try and alleviate those issues.

**Resources Needed**

Participants were then asked on what resources were needed. One participant said that processing unemployment claims and transportation were issues and would like to see more guidance in those areas.

There were two questions asked on the level of state guidance with regards to health and safety and Covid-19, but participants answered with their own contingency plans. The defence contractor respondent mentioned they made employees do 14-day temperature checks if they have come into contact with someone with Covid-19, and have worked with the US Army facility to set up standard operating procedures in this regard.

The cybersecurity firm mentioned that a lot more resources are going to be needed to address security issues on personal networks as opposed to corporate networks with the rise of telecommuting.

One participant talked about the need for crosstraining employees to work in different departments so they can help areas more affected by Covid-19. Also mentioned this would have been done regardless as it would have improved business efficiency.

**Changes in Office Space**

Several participants talked about reducing/divesting in space and using what they have currently in a more optimized manner as to meet social distancing protocols. One was looking at selling their space and another had already told their landlord to reduce theirs by 50%.