Talent & Workforce Futures Sub-Committee

Meeting Summary | April 22, 2026

Executive Summary

The inaugural meeting brought together stakeholders from higher education, economic development, health innovation, and the private sector to establish a shared agenda for New Jersey's workforce development challenges. Members identified a persistent mismatch between the skills being taught and those demanded by employers — across sectors from AI and advanced manufacturing to healthcare and life sciences. The conversation moved from reporting individual initiatives toward identifying opportunities for cross-sector collaboration, shared infrastructure, and policy alignment. The group unanimously appointed Anindya Sengupta of Prudential as Chairman.

Cross-Cutting Themes

- **Skills-to-Market Gap:** A fundamental disconnect between educational outputs and employer expectations — universal in nature but sector-specific in form, from AI literacy in technology to clinical credentials in healthcare.
- **AI as a Unifying Challenge:** Artificial intelligence is both a driver of new workforce needs and a tool for reshaping training. Several members are developing AI curricula, apprenticeships, and employer programs — creating real potential for coordination.
- **Early & Continuous Pathway Development:** Career pipelines must start at K–12 and run through post-secondary, apprenticeships, and continuing development — not be treated as a one-time intervention.
- **Retention, Not Just Placement:** Workforce development cannot be measured by job placement alone. Career progression, retention, and re-skilling — especially for professionals adapting to AI — are equally critical.
- **Equity & Accessibility:** Reaching underrepresented communities and offering affordable pathways is essential.
- **Data as a Shared Asset:** Better employer feedback and skills gap data are needed to inform training design. OSHE's feedback loop and NJ AI HUB surveys are early models.

Member Initiative Highlights

Building AI Talent Pipelines — NJ AI HUB

The NJ AI HUB has built one of the most comprehensive AI workforce portfolios in the sub-committee:

- **Faculty Futures AI Studio:** A five-month cohort with 11 NJ higher education institutions to co-develop AI teaching resources and governance frameworks.
- **Community College Network:** Partnership with 18 community colleges through the NJ Council of County Colleges for AI training.

- **ML/AI Apprenticeship:** New Jersey's first machine learning and AI apprenticeship, developed with NJCCC, OSHE, and the Department of Labor.
- **SMB AI Training:** A program with Anthropic to deliver AI training for small and medium-sized businesses.

The HUB is also surveying AI-related market needs and curriculum gaps from K–12 up. Key open questions: the trainer shortage and financial sustainability at scale.

Aligning Higher Education with Labor Markets — OSHE

OSHE's Career Accelerator Internship Grant Program (CAIGP) funds approximately 600 summer internships annually for NJ college students with NJ employers. Beyond placements, CAIGP collects employer feedback on talent readiness gaps — data OSHE is willing to share with SIC partners to inform future initiatives.

Economic Mobility & Workforce Equity — African American Chamber of Commerce of NJ

The ACCNJ focuses on ensuring workforce development advances economic mobility for underrepresented communities:

- **Training & Development Institute (TDI):** Structured program for credential attainment and career readiness.
- **Workforce Innovation Hub (in development, Trenton):** An integrated center for career readiness, credentials, work-based learning, and employer connection. NJ AI HUB is already exploring collaboration pathways.

ACCNJ's participation opens the possibility of connecting TDI-trained talent directly to SIC employers, advancing both diversity and pipeline goals.

Sector-Specific Workforce Development — Healthcare & Life Sciences

- **MIHIA:** Focused on training the perinatal workforce through stackable credentials and academic-hospital partnerships.
- **Coriell Institute:** Runs CAIGP internships across research, bioinformatics, and business development tracks; also engages high school students through the Coriell Summer Experience.
- **Rowan University:** Aligning pipeline with sector-specific credentials; using the sub-committee to identify in-demand roles, not just skill sets. NJ AIM involvement creates further SIC collaboration opportunities.
- **HAX:** Sources interns from local universities for portfolio companies; looking to use the sub-committee to better communicate competency needs.

Models for Deepening Talent Pipelines

- **Princeton Plasma Physics Laboratory (PPPL** PPPL operates a broad portfolio of workforce development programs — including apprenticeships in fusion energy for community college students, graduate and undergraduate summer programs, and K–12 pipeline initiatives.

PPPL's model of building career pathways from early education through professional development was highlighted as a transferable framework for other SICs.

- **Prudential:** Prudential shared insights on innovative financing models for workforce development. One example is CLASP (https://www.clasp.com/students), a platform that connects clinical students (nurses, respiratory therapists, optometrists, etc.) with employers across the US before graduation and ties employer loan repayment benefits to post-hire retention — effectively creating early employer-employee commitment. Prudential also emphasized the need for reskilling current professionals in AI, not just training new entrants.

Next Steps & Deliverables

#	Action
1	**Shared Knowledge Repository** - Each member shares a one-page overview of their workforce initiative— what it does, who it serves, and where they need partners.
2	**Inventory of Statewide Workforce Initiatives -** Staff provides information on existing initiatives on workforce development State-wide that could be relevant for SICs. Members identify opportunities to leverage existing programs.
3	**Priority Setting & Joint Initiatives -** Members identify 3 top gaps and 1-3 concrete joint initiatives to address shared gaps. Solutions should identify how to leverage existing assets/initiatives across organizations — e.g. placing trained talent with a SIC employer; engaging TDI etc., replicating initiatives of other SICs, and the affordability of such initiatives.
4	**Employer Feedback Mechanism -** Establish a simple feedback mechanism to collect employer input on talent needs from members — e.g. data OSHE, NJ AI HUB survey results, etc.

Corporate Engagement & Market Strategy Subcommittee

Purpose: Offer strategic guidance on corporate partnerships and market positioning for SICs.
Strategic Responsibilities:

- Analyze industry trends and advise SICs on priority sectors for engagement.
- Recommend partnership structures that maximize innovation and commercialization opportunities.
- Provide insights into corporate investment patterns and suggest strategies for SIC attraction.
- Advise on branding and thought leadership initiatives to elevate SIC visibility.

June 22, 2026 Meeting Lead-off Questions

- What goals or priorities should be addressed first to build momentum in this initiative?
- How should we gather and organize input from stakeholders to ensure their needs are accurately represented?
- What types of guidance or tools would help streamline the path from early ideas to implementation?
- What barriers or process challenges do participants most need help navigating?
- What are the most important metrics we should track to show progress and impact?

Executive Summary (from the subcommittee session)

- The SIC-AC meeting on **April 22, 2026** set the **subcommittee structure** and called for dashboards/KPIs, governance rhythm, and shared infrastructure—including a statewide engagement calendar.

The subcommittee aligned on making the SIC platform a **trusted, visible "connective tissue"** between corporates and startups, with structured ways for companies to engage, test solutions safely, and see measurable impact. The group emphasized: a **NJ Corporate Demand Index** to surface real corporate problem statements; **sector specific commercialization playbooks**; a **statewide innovation sandbox** to derisk pilots; and **public facing storytelling/metrics** to elevate SIC visibility. Near term, the team will set a cadence, prioritize the idea list, and assign owners in partnership with the NJEDA committee lead.

Subcommittee discussion highlights from notes:

- Corporates help signal startup attractiveness; if they **don't** select a startup out of an SIC, we should learn **why** (macro vs. Firm specific).

- Focus should shift to **how we advertise SIC startups and connect them to enterprise buyers/customers**.
- **Weigh if out of state corporates** are welcome; the SIC platform should draw them into NJ through partnerships—even if they're not domiciled here; but, the corporates could draw startups out of State.
- **Reverse pitch** concept (corporations pitch needs to startups), potentially at the **NJ Innovation Expo**; plus, a **heat map of corporate challenges** linked to SIC capabilities/companies.
- Post program engagement models: gather corporate input, **anonymize**, and feed back to SICs to keep startups engaged and signal "dollars behind engagement." Consider a partner (e.g., TechUnited) to help gather input.
- **Statewide innovation testbed**: longtail, but start now. Broaden "investment" beyond dollars (community engagement counts).
- **Branding/visibility**: train SIC-AC members on talking points; develop media kit; consider **airport showcase** and cobranding with corporate partners. **Liberty Science Center** offered support to refine identity.

Summarized Strategic Objectives

Surface Corporate Demand Signals

Establish the **NJ Corporate Demand Index** as the central source for identifying corporate research needs, exploration areas, and sector-specific pain points.
Outcome: A concise brief that helps corporates and SICs align their activities and priorities.

Standardize Pathways to Commercialization

Publish **Commercialization Playbooks** across key sectors (such as Fintech, Insurtech, Biotech). These outline regulatory requirements, buyer journeys, data needs, and expected time-to-revenue benchmarks.
Outcome: More predictable, repeatable paths moving startups from pilots to formal contracts.

De-Risk Pilots with a Statewide Innovation Sandbox

Launch a **state-sanctioned NJ Innovation Sandbox**, leveraging platforms like Naya One or Plug & Play to provide compliant environments for piloting early-stage solutions that may not pass internal corporate risk or compliance screens.
Outcome: More compliant pilot trials and faster demonstrations of value.

Unblock Corporate Procurement & Compliance

Create an **Initiatives Tracker** for stalled innovations and host sessions where corporates explain procurement and risk expectations to SIC startups. Explore options for **pre-negotiated MSAs** and **standardized security reviews**.
Outcome: Shorter pilot-to-contract cycles and fewer drop-offs due to process barriers.

Elevate SIC Visibility & Thought Leadership

Deploy **statewide positioning campaigns** (e.g., Newark Airport and other high-traffic locations) and a public impact dashboard showing metrics and case studies. Provide SICAC members with a media kit and unified talking points.
Outcome: A stronger statewide and national brand presence for SICs.

Cross-SIC Knowledge & Executive Engagement

Set up a **Cross-SIC Insight Exchange** to consolidate learnings and prevent duplication. Convene **C-Suite Advisory Circles** organized by theme to pressure-test major ideas and align on shared infrastructure (e.g., an AI testing sandbox).
Outcome: Better pattern recognition across sectors and deeper executive buy-in.

Action Plan

- Build the **NJ Corporate Demand Index MVP**, including taxonomy, intake process, confidentiality rules, and initial challenge sourcing through corporates.
- Develop the concept and structure for a **Reverse Pitch** at the NJ Innovation Expo.
- Create initial **Commercialization Playbooks** for priority sectors by assembling expert pods.
- Design the **NJ Innovation Sandbox Blueprint**, including guardrails, risk requirements, and pilot selection criteria.
- Deliver **procurement and risk enablement sessions**, and begin drafting standardized MSAs and security questionnaires.
- Produce a **public-facing dashboard** and **media kit**, exploring options for an airport showcase and leveraging Liberty Science Center for brand alignment.
- Launch the **Cross-SIC Insight Exchange** and form the first **C-Suite Advisory Circle** to validate sandbox and policy priorities.

Startup Growth & Retention Strategy Subcommittee

Discussion Guide — June 22, 2026

Executive Summary

Building on themes from the April 22 Startup Growth & Retention Strategy Subcommittee session and insights shared in other subcommittees—Talent & Workforce Futures and Corporate Engagement & Market Strategy—focus moves to defining strategic levers to strengthen New Jersey's attractiveness and long-term value for startups. Discussions at high level emphasized establishing consistent supports across SICs, creating structured pathways to scale, improving coordination with corporates, investors, regulators, and research partners, and designing mechanisms that increase the likelihood of startups growing and staying in New Jersey.

Sub-Committee Strategic Responsibilities (Reaffirmed)

- Identify best practices for startup support and recommend models applicable to SICs.
- Advise on capital strategies informed by market trends, investor behavior, and member expertise.
- Recommend structures that maintain long-term engagement with companies after initial program participation.
- Propose innovative retention mechanisms tied to procurement, regulatory pathways, talent access, and shared infrastructure.
- Monitor and interpret innovation trends, policy developments, and ecosystem shifts that should inform SIC strategy.

Notes Summary from April 22 Session

- Need for Consistent Engagement and Support Structures Across SICs — Members emphasized the value of predictable pathways for startups engaging with SICs, including streamlined onboarding, clear expectations, and harmonized dashboards.
- Gaps in Post-Program Continuity and Ecosystem Connectivity — Members noted the challenge of maintaining structured support after early-stage programs and identified opportunities for a statewide alumni structure and regular convenings.

- Capital Access Gaps Persist — Members observed the need for more coordinated investor visibility, standardized readiness indicators, and a consolidated NJ Startup Portfolio Index.
- Market Access as a Determinant of Retention — Members highlighted the importance of pilot opportunities, regulatory navigation, technical expertise, and talent access (common themes across each sub-committee).
- Shared Infrastructure Accelerates Scale and Anchors Companies Locally — Members stressed the importance of shared AI compute, regulatory resources, prototyping access, and a statewide innovation sandbox.

Key Themes and Bread Crumbs

- Standardizing the Startup Journey Across SICs — Members proposed a Unified Founder Journey Map documenting intake, support pathways, commercialization channels, and retention mechanisms.
- Retention Mechanism Spectrum – Retention can be strengthened through a flexible spectrum of tools ranging from simple encouragement to formal programmatic or legal requirements. This continuum allows programs to calibrate expectations based on maturity, strategic importance, and stakeholder needs. It also creates a structured way to increase commitment without undermining accessibility or participation.
- Strengthening Market Access and Corporate Integration — Opportunities identified include a Reverse Pitch Series, Corporate Challenges Heat Map, and pilot-readiness criteria.
- Capital Access Strategy — Members recommended industry-clustered showcases, and exploration of a Retention-Linked Investment Vehicle.
- Cohesive Startup Community and Alumni Network — Members emphasized statewide alumni structures, a shared Ecosystem Calendar (construction underway), convenings, and digital platforms.
- Shared Infrastructure and Statewide Sandbox — Members supported defining shared compute, regulatory supports, and prototyping access.

Prospective Actions

Foundations & Continuity

- Conduct startup founder growth and retention survey
- Develop MVP: Startup Journey & Engagement Playbook — Document ecosystem friction points, draft templates, and identify policy improvements.
- Establish Post-Program Engagement Model — Design alumni structures, convenings, and asset access tiers.

Mentorship & Expertise

- Build a New Jersey Advisor/Mentor Network — Establish a curated pool of experienced advisors and mentors, including retired executives and engineers, that startups can draw on for guidance. Groups like SCORE (Service Corps of Retired Executives) offer a ready model and potential partner.
- Match Startups with Mentors — Develop a simple process to pair startups with the right mentors based on stage, sector, and need, so the network produces real working relationships rather than a static directory.
- Pilot a Fractional Expert Pool — Build a pool of experts available for fractional or part-time engagements, giving startups affordable access to specialized help (legal, finance, technical, go-to-market), including exploring whether and how to fund such engagements.
- Explore a Subcontracted Talent Model — Investigate a subcontracted-group model (referenced from the Ireland approach via Virginia/Eckuity) as a structured way to deliver shared talent or services to startups. Exploratory, pending more detail.

Market, Capital & Cross-SIC Collaboration

- Launch Reverse Pitch Pilot — Collaborate with Corporate Engagement sub-committee to design initial sessions and gather challenge statements.
- Convene Corporate Functional Leaders — Bring together functional heads from established corporations (CTOs, CFOs, heads of engineering) to gather input on talent and technology needs and open channels between startups and corporate partners.
- Develop a "Why New Jersey" Pitch Deck — Produce a reusable deck startups can use to make the case for building and staying in New Jersey, highlighting the state's assets, programs, talent, and ecosystem advantages.
- Align with Talent & Workforce Futures Subcommittee — Map skills gaps and collaboration opportunities across AI and sector-specific pipelines.

Lead-Off Questions for the June 22 Discussion

- What are the top issues to startup growth and to startup retention? What modes should we pursue to gather additional input?
- What specific practical actions can SICs take in the near-term to strengthen startup support and reduce friction in the growth or retention journey?
    - Which existing assets, relationships, or programs (within members' organizations or across the state) could be activated to support startup growth or startup retention?

- What do you see as productive growth tools or retention tools so startup teams can “dial up or down” the level of commitment at their key decision points to improve outcomes without adding unnecessary friction?
    - Which NJ-specific incentives could most strengthen startup retention?
- What near-term opportunities exist already for collaboration across SICs or between SICs and member organizations that would produce visible progress in the coming months?
    - How can cross-SIC collaboration be strengthened without creating bureaucracy?