



## Five Ideas from the 2018 Iowa Ideas Conference

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In September, hundreds of Iowans convened in Cedar Rapids at the DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Convention Complex for in-depth discussions about the opportunities and the challenges facing the state.

The Gazette's second-annual Iowa Ideas Conference connected attendees with thought leaders from around Iowa and elsewhere — and with each other — to explore key issues in the areas of agriculture, education, energy and environment, workforce, health care, human and social services, policy, and regional development.

Some 75 sessions were held. Tracks also were dedicated to NextGen Summit and Diversity Forum.

During the day-and-a-half conference, about 550 panelists and audience members worked through topics ranging from new technologies in agriculture and the challenges facing Iowa's Medicaid managed care program to the economic impact of diversity and inclusion programs.

Here are synopses of only a few of the ideas that were shared.

We'll be back in the next edition of Iowa Ideas magazine, out Dec. 18, with broader coverage of the 2018 Iowa Ideas Conference.

### 1

Direct-care workers need to be a part of the state's workforce discussion

As Iowans age, a thriving direct-care workforce will be critical to providing necessary long-term care services. Yet the direct care industry, which includes occupations such as nurses aides and in-home caregivers, consistently experiences high rates of job vacancies and turnover due to low pay, lack of training and difficult working conditions, among other factors.

With an emerging sentiment that the industry is in crisis, elected leaders in Des Moines should include direct-care occupations when addressing Iowa's workforce challenges, some participants said.

From a Health Care panel — "Workforce Challenges and Solutions"

Panelists were Di Findley, executive director of Iowa Caregivers; John Hale, president of the Hale Group; and Bob Russell, public health dental director and chief of oral and health delivery systems at the Iowa Department of Public Health.

### 2

Conversations about college should occur sooner rather than later

Most college financial aid goes to those with either the highest ability or the greatest need — leaving a large group in the middle the most underserved. For those students, early planning is important to understand their career options, funding sources and actions they can take in high school — such as seeking out college-level credits — that will lessen their costs, some panelists noted.

From an Education panel — "Keeping College Affordable and Accessible in Iowa"

Panelists were Brent Gage, associate vice president for enrollment management at the University of Iowa; Dr. Mark Wiederspan, executive research officer for the Iowa College Aid Commission; Rob Miller, president of the Iowa College Access Network; and Chad Olson, assistant director of the Office of Student Financial Aid at Iowa State University.

### 3

Vibrant rural communities invite everyone to the table

People are the key to a community's economic engine, and the rural communities that survive and thrive are those that have figured out how to tap into the passions and talents of their citizens.

Leaders can emerge from anywhere. Whether seeking buy-in for a community development project or filling vacancies on city councils, a community must look to all segments of its population — young people, retirees, the disabled and immigrants included.

From a Regional Development panel — "Leveraging Your Community's Economic Engine"

Panelists were Christopher Ball, community development director for the city of Bloomfield; Bill Menner, executive director of the Iowa Rural Development Council; and David Heiar, senior adviser and community coach for Jackson County Economic Development.

### 4

Services provided in bundles are more effective than those provided in stovepipes

While funding and regulation encourages "stovepipes" in which a family's or individual's human services needs — housing, health care, education and transportation, among other necessities — are addressed separately, a holistic approach leads to more successful outcomes.

Through coordinated services and strong collaboration among agencies, families are able to get out of crisis and obtain the training and soft skills needed to earn a living wage, participants noted.

From a Human and Social Services panel — "Paycheck to Paycheck: The Working Poor"

Panelists were Alicia Murphy, chief organizational effectiveness officer at Van Meter; Anne Gruenwald, president and chief executive officer at Four Oaks; and Leslie Wright, senior vice president of community building for the United Way of East Central Iowa.

### 5

Municipalities can sell their sustainability efforts by focusing on economics

Sustainability shouldn't be a political issue, but it can be. A community can break down resistance to its sustainability efforts by communicating the expected benefits of the project in terms that people understand — lower utility bills, the creation of new jobs or a reduced risk of flash flooding.

From an Energy and Environment panel — "Going Green: Municipal Sustainability Efforts"

Panelists were Eric Holthaus, sustainability coordinator for the city of Cedar Rapids; Cori Burbach, assistant city manager for the city of Dubuque; Brenda Nations, sustainability coordinator for the city of Iowa City; and Stratis Giannakouros, director of the Office of Sustainability and Environment at the University of Iowa.