



WORKFORCE NEEDS ASSESSMENT REPORT

An Our Valley, Our Future Action Item

Action Item Description: Complete a workforce needs assessment with the major employers in Our Valley that will guide our school districts and higher education institutions in developing programs to educate and train students to meet those workforce needs.

Lead Partner: Express Employment Professionals

Team:

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A key component of a thriving community is providing area businesses with a robust and well-equipped workforce. Our team was tasked with discovering the workforce needs of local major employers in our valley. A variety of employer feedback surveys have been implemented from national to local levels. We explored state and local levels of these resources and conducted our own Workforce Needs Assessment with major employers in Our Valley.

PROCESS

Members of our team met six times exploring existing data and considering if it was appropriate to compile national, regional and local information, or if a local Workforce Needs Assessment was necessary. We agreed that a local effort should be undertaken, creating an initial online survey sent to AVHRA members, to be followed up with one-on-one interviews with employers. The determination was made to use AVHRA membership as the criteria for “major employers.” A sub-group developed and deployed the online survey, collecting the data. In addition to “major employers,” we wanted to reach out to our Latino community. Mario Cantu submitted the survey to the NCW Hispanic Chamber of Commerce.

We received a 37 percent response return (27 of 73), which is good for an online survey; six respondents indicated they would be available for follow-up conversations. The data has been reviewed and is indicative of similar local and state results regarding skill gaps that employers are facing. Though the responses from the Hispanic Chamber were limited, they reflected similar findings of the “major employers.”

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Respondents:

14 percent of organizations have 500-1000 employees
63 percent of organizations have 50-500 employees
23 percent of organizations have 50 or less employees

Notable Results:

59 percent of respondents indicated some difficulty hiring qualified applicants in the last 12 months.
30 percent of respondents indicated significant difficulty hiring qualified applicants in the last 12 months.
81 percent indicated Moderate to High difficulty with poor communication skills (applicants or new hires).
78 percent indicated Moderate to High difficulty with poor work habits (applicants or new hires).
70 percent indicated Moderate to High difficulty with job-specific/occupational skills (applicants or new hires).
66 percent have had difficulty finding qualified, experienced applicants.

Positive Results:

20 of 27 respondents stated that they have low difficulty with dishonesty.

Question 7 provided the opportunity for employers to respond with open ended feedback:

What are the three highest priorities for training topics you would like to see addressed by local schools and agencies? 15 out of the 22 respondents listed soft skill deficits as one of their three top priorities. These soft skills include work ethic, responsibility, motivation, attendance, appearance, attitude, and social/communication/customer service skills. Work ethic was specifically repeated by six different respondents. Math, writing, computer and occupational specific skills were listed by five of the 22 respondents.

Here are some responses to Question 7:

- Attendance and punctuality (problems with late arrival or calling in last minute taking unplanned time off - because they have the benefit of paid leave)
- Understanding workplace goals/project/work expectations (seek clarification and understand the scope of your task - don't just do what you think is good enough move on to the next project and figure the employer will have to live with it. We see a lot of re-work because employees are just going through the motions)
- Motivation to do a good job/do it right the first time by following instructions or guidelines. Follow up or double checking work to meet criteria.
- Applicants should be able to complete an online application professionally (using proper punctuation and spelling), and be able to write a cover letter.
- We'd love to see applicants who have great customer service skills.
- Teach individuals how to interview (appearance, attitude, not checking their cell phone, calling if late for the interview, etc.).
- Teamwork, conflict resolution
- Perseverance, work ethic, problem solving.

For more on these results, please visit:

<https://poll daddy.com/share/sb8c089f4567d1d30d6a2a7b8b22d216a2048229430/results/7414616>

Employer follow-up interviews:

The open-ended, follow-up interview questions posed to employers and a sample of their responses are listed below. One focused on basic and occupational skills, the other on soft skills, and one on high skilled positions.

Q: Describe workforce difficulties you have encountered, if any:

- Finding and hiring lifeguards. We offer classes but it seems that some do not want to put the work into becoming certified. Not everyone can pass the class and we now offer to pay back the participants who take and pass the class, get hired and work so many hours a week for a period of time.
- A couple of years ago we began pre-employment drug screening — this also cut down on the number of applicants.

Q: Of your applicant pool, are you lacking primarily experienced or entry level applicants, and what qualifications do you find most lacking?

- The ability to fill out the application, it is amazing how many don't fill in the personal reference section, even when it says at least three are required.
- Very specific - must have current certification for Lifeguarding, CPR, First Aid, AED and O2.
- It isn't the skillset or the experience of the applicant that's lacking. It's, can they operate in the system, within that authority and receive criticism. Qualified truly means to be able to meet the qualifications of the job. Show up on time, be able to communicate, be able to take constructive criticism and have open dialogue. It's not the skillset that's lacking. You can train any one if they're willing to apply themselves.
- Our difficulty comes with harder to fill positions such as engineers, software developers, programmers and specific IT professionals, those jobs that require 4-year degree and experience.

Q: What recommendations would you suggest that might help our local educators improve training or develop programs that would better address workforce needs in that area?

- The expansion of WVC to a 4-year degree is going to be instrumental in helping us attract more qualified applicants, locally (those jobs that have specific education requirements).
- It would be helpful to explain to young people (we hire a lot of people and this is a first job) to take their time and complete the application. Read the instructions and turn the page over - our application is 4 pages and it specifically says to fill out the job or volunteer experiences - not to see resume.
- The consensus is: We know we have to do something. There are programs in place that address these issues, but they are not mandatory. Our educators are limited, and the kids that are choosing those programs are already the go-getters. We need to change how we're holding kids accountable. These are outcomes we believe we need to address as a community and as a nation. The resources are there. We have a lot of training programs, work advisory groups at the college, etc., but the training that we all keep addressing is how we grow up, parental messages. We need to change the cultural mentality of entitlement. It is prevalent in all our lives. It will likely need to start through the state, mandating the rules.

OTHER RESOURCES

Local Data

Regional Workforce Plan 2016-2020, conducted by the North Central Regional Workforce Development Board. This report contains a variety of regional economic development data as well as the results of recent interviews with 50 employers who were queried about their

strengths, challenges and capacity issues for on-the-job training. 32 of the 50 employers interviewed spontaneously offered work ethic and soft skills as a workforce challenge.

http://skillsource.org/index/Announcements/NCWDC_16_20_PLAN_Sub_Approved.pdf p30.

State Surveys

Washington Employer Survey: A survey of employer needs and practices, January 2013 conducted by the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board.

<http://www.wtb.wa.gov/Documents/Employersurvey2012-Summary.pdf>

A Skilled and Educated Workforce 2015 Update conducted by the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, Washington Student Achievement Council and Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board.

<http://www.wtb.wa.gov/Documents/SkilledandEducatedWorkforce2015.pdf>

Employer Perspectives on Soft Skills, 2014 Washington State Human Resources Council Survey Report:

<http://www.seattlejobsinitiative.com/wp-content/uploads/Soft-Skill-Survey-Rpt-Sum-of-Findings-032515.pdf>

RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the survey carried out by this committee indicate a gap in the area of soft skills in the current workforce and among youth.

'Soft skills' is an umbrella term covering various applied skills such as communication and interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, leadership qualities, team skills, negotiation skills, time and stress management and business etiquettes. 'Hard skills', by contrast, is a phrase usually used to describe job-specific skills. Examples of such skills include professional skills like bricklaying or accountancy, medical expertise such as diagnosis and treatment, or other skills that can be taught and whose presence is testable through exams. Soft skills are necessary in the workplace for professional success. They are vital at every level of an organization if it is to function smoothly and productively. Companies search for a mélange of both soft and hard skills among their employees to deliver goods and services effectively to their clients. It is rightly said that people rise in organizations because of their hard skills and fall due to a shortage of soft skills.

The findings of this committee at a local level are further supported by national trends among young people. The Indiana Business Research Center (IBRC) found that while credentials (degrees and certificated) are important, it is the development of soft skills that is critical to developing a strong, vibrant workforce. Interestingly, research also suggests that soft skills are not just important to first-time employees. According to a 2008 poll by the Society of for Human Resource Management, many workplace soft skills have become more important for the experienced professional.

The results of our study mirror the results of many studies that have been undertaken, both nationally and statewide. Employers are clamoring for workers who have soft skills, also known as employability skills. Soft skills continue to be highly valued in both education and workplace settings and employers are indicating that these skills are lacking in the current and upcoming workforce.

It is our recommendation that public and private partnerships be established to address and improve the development of these skills in youth and in the current workforce. A collaborative effort will be necessary to address this pressing skills gap. We see the need to implement both legislative and local changes. Logical local partnerships can and should be developed connecting educational institutions with regional employers. Career Fairs are very helpful events, but attendance is optional and a large portion of our upcoming workforce is slipping through the cracks. Recommendations might include incorporating local employers as guest speakers into current educational curriculum, increasing the messaging of Employability Skills and Workplace Expectations. Writing classes could include job applications and resume writing workshops. Our educational institutions are already asked to do a great deal with very limited resources, so any recommendation would need to be respectfully approached, and integrated with existing coursework. Additional programs that might be considered could be requiring community service hours in lieu of senior projects, work-based-learning opportunities for class credit or promoting trade work exposure through skilled trade class opportunities.

A member of our team, Wendy Fishburne, was invited to be a guest speaker at the Omak/Okanogan Washington Business Week. She observed that they have incorporated into their junior class high school curriculum this one-week per year program, required for the entire class making this resource available to many kids who would typically opt out of this valuable learning opportunity. Local businesses are involved, guest speakers and Human Resource panels are brought in, and the students enjoy an interactive, hands-on week, learning about product development, fund-sourcing, budgeting, marketing and sales. Teamwork and soft skills training happen throughout the week. The kids were energized and engaged in the real-life learning experience.

Currently, our local high school seniors have the opportunity to participate in Project Citizen, a program that requires students to research a civic related topic, work in teams, interview an individual in the community and then publicly present their findings before a panel of judges. This program provides several opportunities for professional presentation skill development. Wenatchee Learns Connect also partnered with the Wenatchee Valley Chamber of Commerce and SkillSource to host an Employment Summit. They have plans to increase high school participation in the event next year, allowing students to participate in a soft skills/leadership workshop and then have the opportunity to meet with employers. Our high school programs are attempting to respond to the known skills gap, but could use increased support. Additionally, by the time these skill opportunities are provided to high school seniors, we may have missed a critical window of training. Implementation of work ethic and employability skills training at earlier ages must be considered.

The results of this Workplace Needs Assessment give clear voice to and acknowledge what employers are saying: There is an urgent need to increase Employability/soft skills in our current workforce. This is not just a regional issue. It is a national issue. If our collaborative efforts to address this skills gap are successful, we have the opportunity to make statewide recommendations that could potentially improve lives well beyond Our Valley. Regardless of those potential aspirations, it has to start here; it has to start now and it has to start with us, joining public and private resources to better equip our workforce with the skills they need to succeed that will allow the businesses in Our Valley to flourish.