

The Future of WorkSource

Input from employers, job seekers, and service providers on the need for and vision of an effective workforce system in Oregon

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Executive Summary

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**The Oregon Employment Department and
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Executive Summary

The Future of WorkSource is a joint project of the Oregon Employment Department and Local Workforce Investment Boards to examine the effectiveness of WorkSource—what the system needs to do in order to provide value and meaningful impact to its customers, how customer needs vary region by region, and how state and local providers can work more collaboratively to provide integrated and seamless services to employers and job seekers.

Large regional forums with employers and service providers were held throughout the state, as well as four additional employer focus groups in rural areas. In total, more than 700 people participated in these forums. As part of the project, job seekers who recently utilized WorkSource services were surveyed and over 870 responses were received.

The following is a synthesis of what businesses, job seekers, service providers and workforce partners around the state wanted to share with the Oregon Employment Department and Local Workforce Investment Boards about their perceptions and experience with WorkSource.

Employer Highlights

Employers from around the state shared common concerns and challenges. These included:

- Many applicants lack basic skills.
- Applicants are missing other base skills like customer service, use of common software, etc. critical to many Oregon industries.
- Many applicants, especially those under 35, lack technical and vocational skills.
- Employers are seeing less early work experience and work readiness skills among those under age 25.
- Use of staffing agencies and temp-to-hire employment strategies continue to rise.
- Employers rely heavily on different forms of work-based training.
- Employers are struggling to use apprenticeship programs.
- Employers are concerned about retirement and succession planning.
- Structural cliffs in government assistance make it difficult for lower income workers to transition back into work.

Employers in rural regions face additional challenges in finding, training and retaining workers including:

- A high portion of seasonal employment is filled with workers holding multiple jobs.
- Geographically disbursed businesses often mean longer commute times and higher costs for job seekers.
- Having to go outside the region to find professional, technical and management level positions.

Drug abuse, especially the use of methamphetamines, is a serious problem that needs to be addressed as part of an overall employment strategy. Rural employers also had a more difficult time accessing WorkSource services due to the distance between company sites and WorkSource offices.

What Employers Value and Want from WorkSource Services

Employers view the WorkSource system as a set of inter-related services, where more efficiencies and impact could be gained through enhanced coordination and improved marketing of available services and where there was a broader pool of applicants with a wider range of skills and education.

Training stood out as a highly valued and underserved function within the WorkSource range of services. The top three immediate training-related needs expressed by employers across the state were:

- Increasing incumbent worker training to help businesses maintain critical occupations and replace the increasing number of skilled jobs available due to retirements.
- Enhancing basic skills training that improve the quality of the current applicant pool and for which WorkSource should verify self-reported skills and credentials prior to a job referral.
- Expanding on-the-job training and apprenticeships to get new workers in the door and up to speed as quickly as possible.

There were four high value services that employers identified as foundational services for maintaining the pipeline of qualified workers. These were:

- Expanding WorkSource’s customized recruitment process and developing industry sector specialists as the program expands.
- Advocating for and working with K-12 and community colleges to expand career and technical (“vocational”) education and skill development centers, and to establish trade schools.
- Enhancing youth programs that provide early work experience and job readiness skills.
- Focusing career planning and job preparation services on opportunities in regional industries.

Finally, employers wanted to see a more consistent branding of WorkSource and a concierge type system for more seamless services. Employers also sought assistance with intergenerational workplace dynamics and succession planning.

Provider/Partner Highlights

WorkSource service providers and partners were asked to define what a customer-based system should look like and what was required to deliver effective services. When asking what they needed to “get right,” most recommendations did not require new or additional funds, rather a shift in how resources are being used. The shared vision and key services included:

Acting as a cohesive system

- Having a more uniform branding of WorkSource with consistent and collaborative marketing.
- Establishing a system where partner services are well known to each other and those services are better coordinated among providers, appearing seamless to the customer.
- Developing a common set of customer-focused metrics that are used to set program goals and measures within individual agencies or organizations.

Focusing on high value, high impact services

- Allocating more resources toward work-based training that accommodates unemployed, under-employed and incumbent workers.
- Expanding customized recruitment, which includes verifying skills and credentials of candidates and connecting employer information to job preparation and career planning services.
- Having a multi-tiered triage assessment process for job seekers (rather than a one-size-fits-all welcome procedure).

Being more proactive and customer driven

- Developing a more systematic way to work with regional industry sectors and business groups.
- Systematically analyzing hiring trends and critically needed business skills to develop proactive training programs and in-depth profiles of local industries for career planning and job preparation services.
- Having stronger collaboration between small business development centers and chambers of commerce in order to be more strategic about HR and succession planning.

Helping youth become job and career ready

- Reinvesting in vocational and career/technical education in high schools and community colleges.
- Creating more strategic connections between WorkSource and K-12 educational partners to share information about local careers and help youth understand the importance of job readiness skills.

- Providing more opportunities for early work experience to all youth, not just those who are high risk or high performing.

Rural areas appeared to have some additional challenges, mostly due to geographically disbursed offices and customers that require more flexibility regarding service delivery.

Job Seeker Survey Summary

Job seekers were asked questions about their perception about WorkSource, services used, the satisfaction with services, the reason for not using services, and what they would like to see in future services.

- More than 80% of job seekers knew little about WorkSource prior to their use, or viewed it narrowly as a place for unemployed workers.
- Almost 90% of respondents first came to WorkSource due to their unemployment claim; few came because they were seeking services outside of unemployment.
- Once in the door, respondents used WorkSource primarily for related job placement services.
 - More than 80% thought job placement services met or exceeded expectations.
 - More than 60% of those dissatisfied had some level of postsecondary education and commented that services were too basic or jobs did not match their skill/experience level.
- Training and skill development services were far less utilized – ranging from 8-17%; often lower in rural regions.
 - Approximately 70% of those using the training-related services thought they met or exceeded expectations.
 - Those dissatisfied with the services noted schedules were inconvenient or not offered often enough, or that the program restrictions and/or content made them less than optimal.
 - A significant portion of respondents noted they did not know about certain services, or wanting to use them learned they did not qualify.
- Job seekers value and want to see more accessible training and skill development services. The gap between services that respondents valued and those that they used clearly indicates that current training services are not adequate to meet the potential demand.
- iMatchSkills (job-matching software) was not well utilized; almost 60% of those starting iMatchSkills did not complete it.
- Customer satisfaction with staff was very high. Statewide, over 90% of respondents had a favorable experience interacting with WorkSource providers.

Findings from the job seeker survey data had high correlation to input from employers and providers.

- Misperceptions about WorkSource prevent those not seeking unemployment insurance from using the system, narrowing the pool of more qualified applicants significantly.
- Services are not geared toward those with higher education levels.
- Customers view personalized coaching as very useful.
- Customers value training programs, especially work-based programs, and seek increased flexibility in being able to utilize these programs.
- There is a disconnect between the low use of basic skills training and the high percent of job seekers with low educational attainment levels.
- Regions with lower levels of partner integration and co-location had the lowest customer satisfaction rating.