

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

June 2014

Eastern Oregon Region

Contains summaries of the following

- Statewide Assessment
- LaGrande Forum
- Hermiston, Ontario & The Dalles Employer Focus Groups

A project of
**The Oregon Employment Department and
Local Workforce Investment Boards**

Report prepared by
**The Center for Public Service, Portland State University, and
Scruggs & Associates LLC**

The Future of WorkSource

Background

The Future of WorkSource is a joint project of the Oregon Employment Department and Oregon's seven Local Workforce Investment Boards. The objective of the project is to examine the effectiveness of WorkSource—what the system needs to provide in order to have value and impact to its customers, how these 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.

To understand where to focus attention and how to deliver services more effectively, the project obtained input from employers and partners across the state. From March 18 to May 10, 2014, the project held four local employer forums (Hermiston, Klamath Falls, Ontario and The Dalles) and eight larger regional forums (Eugene, Florence, La Grande, Medford, Redmond, Seaside, Salem, Wilsonville) that brought together employers, business groups, and workforce providers and partners. In total, more than 700 people participated in these forums.

Prior to the forums, the project surveyed a sample of job seekers that used WorkSource during the fall of 2013. From approximately 5,700 surveys sent, there were 912 responses (870 complete), which represented a 15% completion rate. This information was compared to forum input to understand the dynamics and connections between the supply side (job seekers) and demand side (employers) of the workforce system.

This report is a compilation of these activities, summarizing the direct input from stakeholders as well as regional and statewide analysis trends and perceptions. This report is divided into three parts:

- A statewide synopsis that combines all aspects of the project into a synthesis of statewide trends and regional differences.
- Summaries of regional forums and rural employer sessions.
- Appendix of job seeker survey data and analysis containing statewide and regional analysis of job seekers use and perceptions of the WorkSource system.

The information from this project will be used for in-depth discussion at both the state and local levels to improve services, responsiveness and the positive impact of the WorkSource system including:

- Strategic conversations and assessments, individually and collectively, with the Oregon Employment Department, Community Colleges and Workforce Development, and Department of Human Services,
- Planning and program development for local workforce investment boards (LWIBs),
- Closer coordination of services between LWIBs and multiple state agencies,
- Input to Oregon Workforce Investment Board (OWIB) and the state's workforce redesign effort,
- Coordination with community colleges, individually and collectively, on degree and certificate curricula and sector-specific training opportunities,
- Conversations with the legislature about workforce policy and resource allocations, and
- Conversations with the Higher Education Coordinating Council (HECC).

The report and analysis was compiled by the Center for Public Services in the Hatfield School of Government, Portland State University in collaboration with Scruggs & Associates LLC. The Center for Public Services provides research, education and consulting services to public and nonprofit organizations to improve governance, civic capacity and public management. Contributors include Patricia Scruggs, consulting staff; Catherine LaTourette, faculty; Thomas Swafford, associate staff; Deborah Kirkland, associate staff; and graduate students Caroline Zavitkovski, Valerie Walker, Bonnie Crawford, Ariana Denney and Troyler Fultz.

PART I: Statewide Assessment

This section of the report synthesizes what we heard from businesses, job seekers, service providers and workforce partners around the state--unedited perceptions about the WorkSource system as well as the broader community infrastructure that supports workforce development. While additional details can be found in the regional write-ups and job seeker survey analysis, this summary provides highlights and analyzes the common state themes and regional differences.

FORUM SUMMARY: Employer Highlights

Employers are the primary customers of WorkSource—the demand side of the system that must drive how services are developed and delivered. This section highlights three key discussions with employers; Understanding the workforce trends they are experiencing, how those trends translate into value-added services, and where WorkSource resources could be allocated or deployed to best meet with value.

Employer trends and concerns common throughout the state

Many applicants lack basic skills

Employers report basic skills are absent from a wide range of candidates from entry-level positions to college graduates. Writing and communication skills are among the most common missing skills, along with basic and applied math such as the ability to read a tape measure or making change from a sales transaction.

Applicants are missing other base skills critical to many Oregon industries

Employers consider customer service, basic knowledge of computers and common office software, and familiarity with standard workplace protocols (appropriate attire, punctuality, etc.) as basic skills. They observe older applicants often lack computer skills and have difficulty marketing their skills or experience. Employers also notice significant intergenerational workplace challenges with regards to workplace expectations, especially between millennials and baby-boomers. This suggests a need to better develop the talent of management in addressing those issues effectively.

Applicants lack technical and vocational skills

Employers in a wide array of industries, especially trades and manufacturing, note a significant gap in vocational and technical skills from previous generations. This included a range of skills from being able to read a tape measure or instrument panel to having basic mechanical skills or understanding of what constitutes quality control. Problem-solving skills that are valuable in many occupations, including college degreed jobs, are also missing. Businesses noted a lack in vocational education, statewide and nationally, and the focus on students to be college bound has hurt the competitiveness of many businesses, especially those in rural communities.

Employers are seeing far less early work experience and work readiness skills among job applicants under age 25

Applicants under 25 years of age tend to have fewer work experiences than in previous generations. Employers are seeing more college graduates with low work readiness skills, even in simple matters such as showing up on time. Employers are experiencing lower quality in younger employees' work and/or an attitude of "just doing enough to get by." They perceive the education system as not including job readiness as an important aspect of learning.

Use of staffing agencies and temp-to-hire continue to rise

Because of a lower overall quality of applicants, many employers are using staffing services to find employees through temp-to-hire situations where potential new hires are tested for skills and fit with the workplace. While this is more expensive for employers on a per person basis, it saves them money

in the long run due to the high percent of temps that do not make it through the trial period. If they do fit, however, turnover is greatly reduced and employers are more willing to make investments in training.

Employers rely heavily on different forms of work-based training

In addition to using temp-to-hire as a way to find employees with the right mix of skills, employers noted they are doing more basic skill training just to bring a new hire to an entry-level skill set. This basic training, combined with business or skill specific training means the return on training investment (training ROI) continues to take longer before a new employee is productive. Once an employee is up to speed, employers prefer to promote from within to maintain this investment. This results in a high demand and preference for incumbent worker training to “skill-up” existing employees to replace workers that have either left or retired.

Employers are struggling to use apprenticeship programs

The recession and pressures to lean operations have left many companies, especially trades and manufacturing, without adequate journey level staff to take on the number of apprentices that they need. Furthermore, a significant number of businesses reported that age restrictions on the use of equipment prevented them from attracting students into apprenticeships or pre-apprentice training.

Employers are concerned with retirement and succession planning

As the economy improves, employers are starting to see more of their older employees consider retirement. With little job growth over the past five years, there are fewer people in the pipeline to move up within the organization and recruitment from the outside is costly or difficult. This is especially a concern with smaller and rural businesses.

Structural cliffs in government assistance hurt lower income workers

Employers in all regions commented that unemployment insurance payments and wrap-around assistance such as food stamps or transportation assistance were an “all or nothing” program making it difficult for job seekers to take an entry-level job and risk losing the support they needed as they transitioned back into work. This meant that qualified applicants often declined jobs reducing the applicant pool even further for employers.

Additional Rural Trends

Employers in rural regions face additional challenges in finding, training and retaining workers. These challenges include:

- A **high portion of seasonal jobs** means many workers hold multiple jobs in a given year and rely on temporary seasonal unemployment to make it through leaner parts of the work year.
- **Geographically disbursed workforce and employers** often mean longer commute times, even for lower-wage jobs. Combined with seasonal industries, transportation costs are often a significant barrier to keeping employees.
- Employers having to go **outside the region to find professional, technical and management level** positions. Even after casting a wide net, recruiting mid to high-level occupations to rural communities is difficult, especially when there is a trailing spouse or partner who would also need employment. Often compensation packages are more costly and retention rates are low.
- A lack of a local qualified workforce encourages companies to steal good employees from one another—despite knowing this is not good for the long term regional economy.
- **Drug use**, especially methamphetamine, was noted as serious problem in eastern and southern Oregon with many applicants failing drug testing. The ability to address this issue as part of an overall employment strategy will be critical.

Rural employers also had a more **difficult time accessing WorkSource services due to the distance between the company and WorkSource offices**. It was suggested that for specialized or critical services

that a portion of WorkSource staff travel either directly to businesses or to partner offices throughout the region or that more services are offered in a virtual fashion.

What Employers Value and Want from WorkSource Services

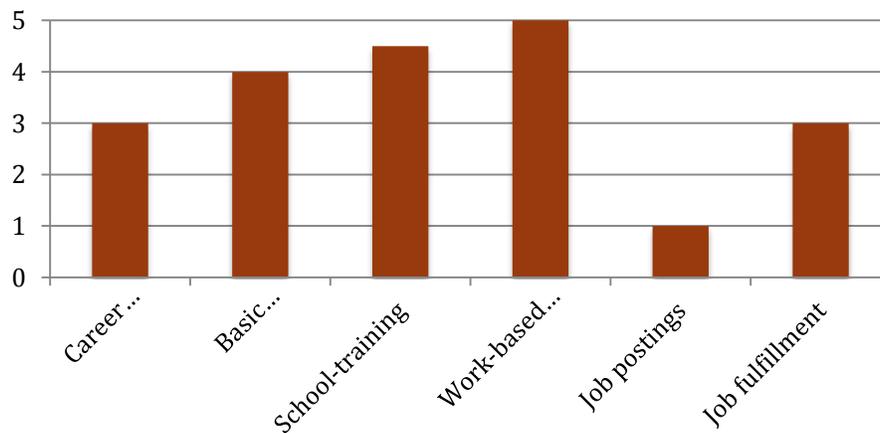
Employers view the WorkSource system as a set of inter-related services, where more efficiencies and impact could be gained through enhanced coordination and improved marketing of available services. To achieve this vision, businesses want WorkSource to have **a broader pool of applicants with a wider range of skills and education**. For example, they suggested community colleges and universities put graduates into the WorkSource system. With this broader set of applicants, WorkSource **could provide more services to a wider array of job seekers and employers**, rather than the perception that most resources are being spent on a low percentage of the unemployed with significant barriers to employment. These expanded services would include **significantly more training throughout a worker's employment history** and earlier focus on youth work experience to get Oregon's workforce off to a good start.

Employers envision **data systems that go beyond job matching**, which analyze regional and state employment trends and manage customer relationships in such a fashion that **informs the types of regional training or job preparation services needed**. With more robust information, employers imagine WorkSource **better connected with regional and state economic development organizations** to be more proactive and strategic about business expansion and recruitment efforts. Armed with better information and improved links to the regional economy, WorkSource's **connection to K-20** could be more effective in promoting the jobs and skills needed to grow local economies.

Allocation of resources

The forums asked employers to allocate where they would like to see WorkSource resources allocated by key six functions. Each employer allocated \$100 in \$5 increments across these functions. The results were then totaled and adjusted to a scale of 1-5, where 5 represented an area that employers wanted to see significantly more resources, and 1 was an area where they saw little value.

Employers' desired allocation of WorkSource resources



Training stood out as a highly valued and underserved function with WorkSource. The top three immediate issues for employers across the state were:

- Increasing **incumbent worker** training to help businesses maintain critical occupations and fill the increasing number of retirement jobs.

- 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, apprenticeships**, and **career-technical education pathways** to get new workers in the door and up to speed as quickly as possible.

There were also several overall **policy issues** that employers felt were limiting their ability to find, train or retain employees. Employers encouraged WorkSource and OED to examine:

- The **structural cliff of unemployment payments and other government funded services** that end abruptly at the time of employment and do not help workers with limited means transition into new jobs.
- **BOLI restrictions** on the use of machinery and equipment that prevent youth from obtaining early exposure (and interest) in trades and vocational occupations and journey/apprentice ratios that limit the number of apprentices business can have.

There were four high value services that employers identified as foundational services that maintained 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 skills centers, and to establish trade schools**.
- Enhancing access to **youth programs that provide early work experience and job readiness skills**, ensuring that these programs reach the broadest base of all youth, not just those at risk or high performing.
- Focusing **career planning and job preparation services on opportunities in regional industries**; Sharing this information with K-12, community college and other educational career counselors as well as their students so that information on a wide array of occupations (not just college-bound) is current and consistently promoted.

In terms of other value-added functions, employers wanted WorkSource to:

- Have a more **consistent brand** and overcome the outdated perception of the “unemployment” department and strive toward an image where all workers, employed, unemployed or under-employed would come to be connected with appropriate training or employment.
- Establish a **concierge type system** where there is no “wrong door” to enter. Where WorkSource partners have a clear understanding of each other’s programs and can share this information enabling employers to continually meet with or provide information to multiple organizations within the WorkSource system at one time.
- Utilize the information collected by WorkSource databases not just for job placement and referrals, but as a customer relationship management (**CRM**) **system** for proactive analysis that can develop forward thinking training and job preparation services and better two-way communication with employers.
- Assist with **intergenerational workplace dynamics**; helping employers understand how to accommodate style/expectation differences and helping workers understand the types of difference that are non-negotiable in certain workplaces.
- Provide **HR and succession planning** help to small businesses, as well as helping these companies with basic HR related needs like how to write good job descriptions or screen and hire employees. In rural areas this would mean having a specialist travel throughout the region.

*At the end of the day, employers defined WorkSource’s success as supporting a workforce that helps businesses grow, to hire new employees and sustain competitiveness by investing in **continuous skill development**.*

FORUM SUMMARY: Provider/Partner Highlights

The provider section of the regional forums started with the end in mind—specifically asking what an effective WorkSource system would look when it was adequately aligned with employer and job seeker needs. The forums then discussed how to reach this vision by identifying what was working and where innovation was needed. Many of the vision statements and suggestions for innovation were very consistent throughout the regions. Common themes and desired programs or services are described below.

A Shared Vision and Key Services of a High Performing WorkSource System

Acting as a cohesive system

- Having a more uniform branding of WorkSource with
 - Consistent use of WorkSource as the overall brand name,
 - Co-location of service providers, and
 - Joint marketing of partner services, all under the WorkSource brand.
- 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 by:
 - Sharing databases and linked program information,
 - Greater standardization of program eligibility, and
 - More consistent training and joint on boarding of staff.
- Developing a common set of customer-focused metrics that are used to set program metrics within individual agencies or organizations.

Focusing on high value, high impact services

- Allocating more resources toward work-based training that enhance employee productivity and helps employers to be more competitive and positioned for growth. Such training must accommodate 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 process for job seekers (rather than a one size fits all welcome process) that could quickly identify customer needs and the level of service required so those with fewer needs could quickly find assistance and those with greater needs could receive more coaching.

Being more proactive and customer driven

- Developing a more systematic way to work with regional industry sectors and business groups to identify potential hiring needs as well as basic, critical and hard to find skills that are common among groups of employers.
- Establishing methods by which hiring trends and critical skills can be more systematically analyzed by region and industry. Using this information to:
 - Develop cohort-training programs for skills common to an industry or multiple employers (such as customer service and basic office software skill for hospitality and related industries).
 - More complete and robust profiles of local industries that include desired skills and descriptions of the work environment and workplace expectations that can be used in career planning and job preparation services.
- Having stronger collaboration between small business development centers and chambers or business groups to help businesses, especially small businesses, 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, stressing to students and counselors the importance of these skills not just for jobs in manufacturing or the trades, but also for a wide array of professional/technical occupations where applied problem-solving skills are highly desired.
- Creating more strategic connections between WorkSource and K-12 educational partners to:
 - Share information about local career opportunities with students and career counselors, stressing all types of careers not just college bound occupations.
 - Help youth understand the importance of job readiness skills working earlier with youth on job preparation skills such as basic communication skills, interview conduct, and basic workplace expectations.
- Providing more opportunities for early work experience to all youth, not just those who are high risk or high performing.

Unique Rural Needs

Some challenges and desired services differed by region, with the most contrast occurring between urban and rural areas. Rural areas appeared to have some additional challenges, mostly due to geographically disbursed offices and customers that require more flexibility in how some services are delivered.

Establishing mobile service delivery

- With fewer concentrations of both employers and job seekers, rural regions identified a need for more ‘mobile’ services for staff to travel to different parts of the region, rather than having customers travel to WorkSource offices. This was especially true for staff with industry specialization or less frequently needed services such as HR and succession planning for small businesses. Two ideas were mentioned: 1) having a mobile office (e.g. the book mobile) that could travel directly to employers or places where job seekers gathered, and 2) having a place inside a local Chamber of Commerce, SBDC, or local government office where a staff person could conduct business.

Addressing unique challenges of seasonal workers

- With a higher reliance on tourism, agriculture and natural resource industries, rural regions noted more challenges with seasonal and part-time workers. Helping them find multiple jobs and work within unemployment insurance requirements is a constant dilemma. To help address this issue several ideas were suggested:
 - Have OED - at the state level - conduct an analysis of seasonal jobs for each region and note those with complementary skills and where the seasonality (the timing of work) dovetails with one another.
 - Use the above information to develop basic skills training programs that can build skill sets crossing industries or jobs. Work with employers on better job referrals for seasonal workers.
 - Examine UI restrictions to identify the means by which seasonal workers might be able to work a limited number of days without losing all or part of their unemployment insurance.

When asking WorkSource providers and partners about priorities—what they needed to “get right”—recommendations were broader than just more funding. In reviewing key issues, most did not require new or additional funds, rather a shift in how resources are being used. These high priority recommendations can be categorized in four segments:

- **Operational changes:** Issues that were not based on resource allocation such as having common metrics, developing joint strategic plans between agencies, more interaction among staff to share best practices, etc.
- **Policy refinements:** The ability to leverage resources and improve the impact of workforce services by examining and adjusting policies such as apprenticeship requirements, how UI impacts seasonal

industries and jobs, the use of technology and social media to reach and communicate with customers.

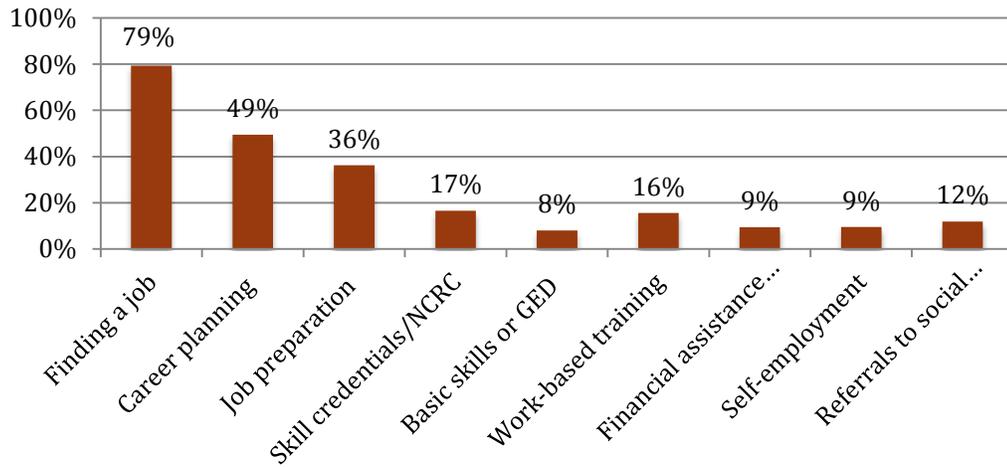
- **Resource reallocation:** Changes that would shift resources from services that had low value or impact to services with higher customer value. Examples include less resources allocated to job postings and more on work-based training and customized recruitment, more industry specific skills training through small groups (cohorts) rather than individual training not linked to local jobs, or moving to a multi-tiered triage/welcome process by simplifying I-Match Skills.
- **Resource enhancement:** Services or foundational issues that will require new or additional investment. A primary example includes the reinvestment in career-technical (vocational) education across the state.

Job Seeker Survey Summary

The job seeker survey asked questions related to the initial perception of WorkSource, the services used, the satisfaction with services, the reason for not using certain services, and what respondents would like to see in future services. Unless noted, responses were similar across regions, and issues with services were generally related to program restrictions rather than the knowledge or helpfulness of staff.

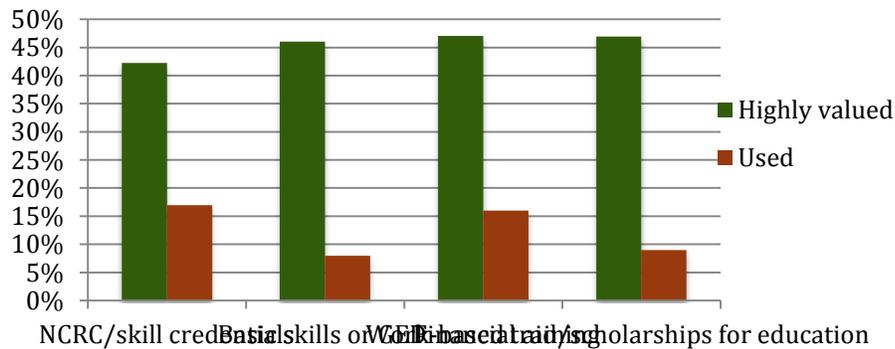
- More than 80% of job seekers knew little about WorkSource prior to their use or viewed it narrowly as a place for unemployed workers. This underscores perceptions of WorkSource still having the stigma as the “unemployment department.”
- Almost 90% of respondents first came to WorkSource due to their unemployment claim; few came because they were seeking services outside of unemployment. This reinforces the claims that the public does not know WorkSource offers training, skill development, youth and other workforce services.
- Once in the door, respondents used WorkSource primarily for three related job placement services— 79% used job referral services, 49.5% took advantage of career planning and assessment services and 36% used job preparation services.
 - More than 80% thought these services met or exceeded expectations.
 - More than 60% of those dissatisfied had some postsecondary education and commented that services were too basic or jobs did not match their skill/experience level.
 - Those that did not use the services felt they did not need them.
- Training and skill development services were far less utilized – ranging from 8-17%, often lower in rural regions, especially in Eastern Oregon. These included basic skills training, work-based training, GED courses, financial aid for school based training, and National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) or other credentials.
 - Approximately 70% of those using the services thought they met or exceeded expectations (lower than the job placement services).
 - Those dissatisfied with the services noted schedules were inconvenient or not offered often enough, or that the program restrictions or content made them less than optimal.
 - While many not using these services felt they did not need them, a significant portion of respondents noted they did not know about them or wanted to use them yet were told they did not qualify.

Use of WorkSource Services Statewide



- The current use of training and skill development services is low (approximately 12% of respondents noted using these services). This is due primarily to the amount of resources currently allocated to them. To understand the potential need and value for these services, job seekers were asked to what extent would they value or use these services in the future if they were more readily available. In general, over 45% of respondents viewed them as a very valuable part of WorkSource services (the green/left handed columns in the chart below), and another 38% said they had some to moderate value (not represented in the graph). Comparing the current use of training and skill development services to the percent of job seekers that placed the highest value on them, we can approximate a value gap for these programs. These gaps were most acute in rural areas of the state. The gap clearly indicates that current training services are not adequate to meet the potential demand. Write-in comments indicate that the content and delivery of these services also need to be updated.

The value respondents place on having skill development and training programs



- iMatchSkills (the job matching tool) was not well utilized; almost 60% of those starting iMatchSkills did not complete it. An overwhelming number of write-in comments used terms like complicated, hard to use, useless, cumbersome, or ineffective to describe iMatchSkills.
- Customer satisfaction with staff was very high. Statewide, over 90% of respondents had a favorable experience with WorkSource. When asked what their best part about the WorkSource experience was, respondents choose friendly and knowledgeable staff and a welcoming office three times more

often than other choices. Write-in comments underscored this with positive statements about how hard staff tried to assist even if program eligibility may have prevented the respondent from using a service.

Six implications from the job seeker survey data stood out that had high correlation to input from employers and providers. These were:

- People’s misperceptions about WorkSource prevent those not seeking unemployment insurance from using the system, narrowing the pool of more qualified applicants significantly.
- Employers report using WorkSource for posting mostly entry-level or lower wage jobs (due to their perception of who uses the system), while 39% of WorkSource users have an associates degree or higher. This has resulted in a lack of services, operating processes or job posting for those with higher education levels who are unemployed or looking for a new job.
- Current job matching tools (iMatchSkills) is ineffective; with job seekers noting that the one size fits all triage process is not working. They do, however, view the staff assistance and coaching as very useful.
- Training programs, especially work-based programs, are highly valued by job seekers and they wish to see more resources allocated to training and 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. This could imply that the capacity of basic skills programs may be inadequate; the content may not be well connected to jobs, or the marketing to job seekers is not effective.
- Regions with lower levels of partner integration and co-location had the lowest customer satisfaction rating, emphasizing the importance of intentional collaboration in providing a seamless delivery system.

EASTERN OREGON FORUM

La Grande

April 9th, 2014

On April 9th, 2014, approximately 97 employers, business groups and service providers gathered in La Grande to discuss workforce issues in the Eastern Oregon Region. Employers discussed trends and what they need from workforce services to find qualified workers and remain competitive; service providers and workforce partners discussed how the system could better respond to employer and job seeker needs. This is a summary of their strategy session.

Part I: Employer Session

Employer Workforce Trends in the Eastern Oregon Region:

We asked employers about the trends that are affecting how they find, train and retain employees. What challenges have they faced in this part of Oregon and how have these challenges affected their business?

Trends in finding qualified workers

- **Companies are leaner** and the recession forced downsizing and greater automation. The remaining jobs have changed, requiring a mix of different skills and/or higher technical capability.
- The way to **recruit younger workers is changing** and a greater on-line presence and use of social media is needed. How employers word job postings and feature their workplace is more important. Some employers expressed needing help with this transition to more creative and targeted marketing of their organizations.
- **There is a population drain** in parts of the region causing a shrinking labor pool with fewer workers from which to choose and many with poor basic skills. Seasonal workers are particularly hard to find.
- **Younger job applicants lack basic mechanical knowledge.** This lack of trade-related knowledge and skills extends from the youth populations through approximately age 35. This stems from a decrease in the vocational education programs in schools.
- **Local area workers don't have the same technology experience with phones, computers, tablets, etc. as workers from metro areas.** The lack of broadband service in rural areas may contribute to this skill deficit.
- Need to **hire professional, mid-management and technical positions from outside of the region.** Often trailing spouses and partners accompany the higher skilled workers creating a retention challenge. Many of the recruited candidates have shorter work service tenures than the longer commitment that employers prefer.
- **Basic skills seem to be lacking** even in professional candidates. There seems to be less job readiness in the areas of written, inter-personal, verbal communication skills. In addition, employers find the new workforce lacks fundamental business sense and financial knowledge.
- Manufacturers experiencing large numbers of retirements among their trade and higher skilled workers, and have a **significant skill gap between the entry-level level trainees they are hiring and the retirees who have left.** They believe this is caused in part by not being able to hire during the recession.
- A lack of qualified workers tend to force regional employers to **"steal" higher skilled workers from one another**—a practice they would rather not do.

Trends in training and retaining workers

- Employer report **generational differences in work-ethic and work styles**, causing friction between generations. In addition, there seems to be a sense of entitlement among the younger workforce. Employers recognized the need to understand the differences and find ways for the generations to meet in the middle.
- Businesses are using **temp to hire** via staffing agencies to assess basic skills, work ethic, attitude and organizational “fit” of potential employees. Once past this probation period, employers are willing to invest in training.
- **Employers want more apprenticeship programs** and have to overcome challenges in making these programs effective. Since the leaning down of organizations during the recession, there are fewer skilled journeymen to supervise apprentices. Paying journeymen to supervise as well as perform their regular work creates a sustained overtime situation that is unaffordable. Contracting out apprenticeships is more expensive.
- **Rural wages are not keeping up with the cost of housing**
- Employers report having to spend increasingly more **time learning and updating federal and state regulations rather than job skills training**.
- Employers find it difficult to recruit workers for temporary assignments during seasonal lay-offs because workers would jeopardize their unemployment benefits.

What Employers Value:

Employers were asked to describe valuable workforce services, regardless of who provides them. Where did services have the greatest impact on their ability to find or retain employees, or their ability to ensure that workers were productive contributors to the business?

Training Services

- Employers highly value state support for **on-the-job and incumbent worker training** that helps get new employees up to speed quickly and helps move existing workers up within the organization to meet expansion needs or replace workers that have left.
- With a large number of jobs in agriculture, manufacturing, and the trades, **vocational educations and trade programs** are of particular value, such as the successful example taking place at Perry Tech in Yakima.
- **Employers value short-term, high demand training** that can aggregate need of employers so they do not have to send employees out of region. This includes supervisory and team leadership, or specialized sector skills.
- **Businesses want better access to post-secondary training especially for Union and Wallowa counties** where employers can partner with schools for relevant adult training programs.

Workforce Preparation: career planning, job readiness skills and basic skills

- Employers value **career planning and assessment that is tied to local industry**, so the information shared with job seekers and the skills that are screened for have direct connection to local jobs. Businesses want a **stronger connection between employers and schools** to foster a real understanding of workforce needs so that the education system is consistently promoting regional careers to their students.
- Employers value programs that help **youth find and participate in early work experiences** such as internships, mentoring programs, summer jobs, job shadowing, etc.
- Employers also appreciate the job preparation function provided to applicants that help them with resume, interviewing, and work readiness skills.

Assistance with Talent Acquisition

- Employers think highly of **WorkSource’s customized recruitment service** and job fulfillment functions where applicant **skills and credentials are verified** and employers are assured that job seekers have the skill set that they say they have.
- **Receiving support from WorkSource professionals with organizational succession planning** and proactive recruitment for anticipated turnover as employees are working for shorter service tenures. Having this delivered by a unified WorkSource team who understands the specific employer. Such teamwork will eliminate duplication and scattered services from various agencies.
- Employers value OED’s **labor market information** function and would like additional information on comparative salaries to aid employers in attracting and retaining employees.

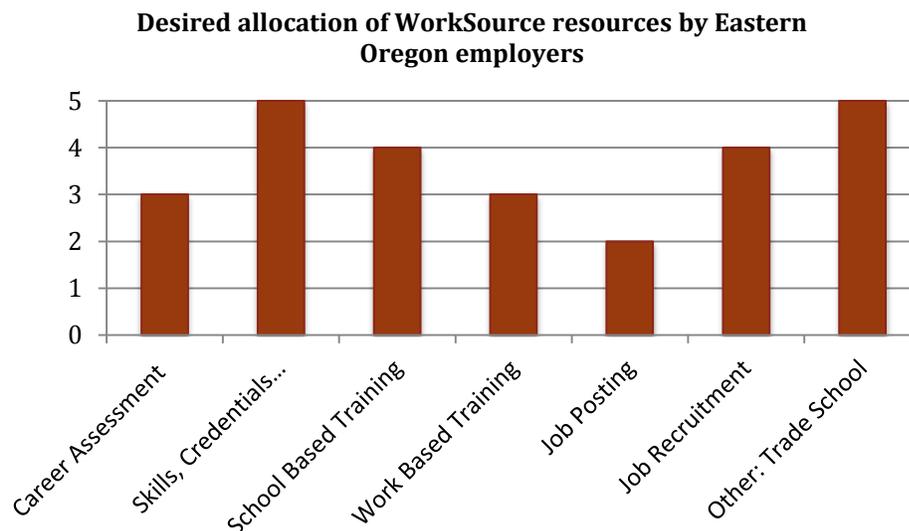
Collaboration with WorkSource Partners

- Employers would like **WorkSource branded and marketed as more than just a job-placement service**—where there is a user-friendly list of all services that is easy to find and navigate.
- With large geographic distances between resources, employers need **easier access to services**. They would like to see more **“traveling” staff**—specialists that are shared among partners and rotated to various offices throughout the region.

Desired Allocation of Resources

We asked employers to allocate where they would like to see WorkSource resources allocated by key functions of a) career planning and job preparation, b) basic skills training and credentials, c) work-based training for new or incumbent workers, d) school-based training, e) job postings, and f) active job fulfillment (recruitment and screening). They were also allowed to list any other services that were not part of the current service offering.

Each employer was given \$100 (of play money) in \$5 increments and asked to spend the money across these functions. The results were then totaled and adjusted to a scale of 1-5 where 5 represented an area that employers wanted to see significantly more resources, and 1 was an area where they saw little value.



During the report back from employers, we asked why they allocated their money to certain functions or types of services. The following summarized in order of importance what they hoped to see in the future.

For Eastern Oregon, employers were fairly consistent across industries and business size in terms of how they valued various WorkSource services and where they wanted workforce related funds allocated in their region.

Basic skills training and credential had the highest allocation rating of core services. Report back from employers indicate that they wanted **youth to have more opportunities to build basic job readiness skills** through summer and seasonal work experience, more internships and job shadows and more engagement by employers in helping students and career counselors understand the local job market. In addition, they wanted to see more basic skills training that include **customer service and business office basics**.

This suggests that WorkSource:

- More resources allocated to youth work experience that goes beyond barrier populations or youth at risk.
- Basic skills courses that include customer service
- Boot camp-type course that is applied learning for basic business skills/software common to employers.

Also receiving high marks was the desire to **establish a trade school**. Manufacturing and construction trades represent a significant number of jobs, and multiple tables agreed that younger workers, not just youth, had far fewer mechanical, applied math (reading a tape measure) and overall problem-solving skills that come from vocational education. There was much conversation that vocational skills are also needed for those going on to college in technical fields, so the value of a trade school went beyond middle-skill jobs.

This suggests that WorkSource:

- Have the local workforce investment board be active in efforts to establish a trade school
- WorkSource career assessment staff understand the needs of local trades and manufacturing and work with K-12 to ensure their career counselors have the same information.
- The state workforce board, BOLI and OED be advocates for vocational education.

Job recruitment and customized screening received the third highest rating. Employers of all sizes and industry sectors noted the importance of screening good candidates and helping those candidates **understand the work environment** of different employers leading to more successful hires and less turnover.

This suggests that WorkSource:

- Expand customized recruitment from a pilot and institute it throughout the region.
- Information about needed skills and work environments are aggregated and analyzed by region so patterns for skills sets can be identified and basic skills training can be developed in a more proactive fashion.

School-based training also received a significant amount of the allocated money. The conversation around this two core themes: the need to aggregate for common **incumbent skill training such as supervisory courses**, and **more sector-based training and funds for critical industry** shortages (e.g. commercial truck drivers) in both high school and community colleges.

This suggests that WorkSource

- Allocate funds for key incumbent worker skill training, especially for skills that prevent businesses from growing or being competitive.

- Have emergency training funds for critical occupational shortages that are impacting employer growth or competitiveness.
- More actively engage K-12 in sector based workforce strategies.

Employers also wanted to see additional resources for **work-based training**. Two issues dominate this conversation. One was being able to apply work-based training to **under and employed people that are trying to “skill-up”** in their jobs. The other was finding a creative solution to **overcome the bottleneck in apprenticeship** programs, specifically the lack of journeymen available to supervise apprenticeship.

This suggests that WorkSource:

- Revise restrictions on how work-based training can be used and allocate additional resources toward work-based training programs.
- Have discussions with BOLI to see if a temporary waiver or similar adjustments can be made to journeyman/apprentice ratio so get additional apprenticeships through the pipeline.

Part II: Provider-Partner Strategy Session

Immediately following employer input, WorkSource providers and partners conducted a strategy session to explore the following questions:

- Based on employer and job seeker input and your experience, what does an effective WorkSource system look like? What are the desired outcomes?
- Based on this vision, what's working?
- Where are opportunities to do things differently or to be more innovative?
- Of all the issues discussed in the above questions, what must we "get right" (what must be in place, what must we do first, etc.) in order to reach our vision.

What is the vision of an effective WorkSource system?

Overall

- Everybody wins--employers, workers and WorkSource because **there is a positive and clear mission** where partners **invest in a common outcome** and provide unified services to customers that are easy to access and navigate.
- WorkSource is an **employer driven model that understands the current and future needs of local industries** and builds services around those needs.
- The **system serves all job seekers**, not only the unemployed or entry level applicants.
- **We are "not your grandmother's workforce system"** because we have a brand and image of serving all types of workers and being responsive to employers.
- A more **proactive WorkSource that is better integrated with economic development** efforts in the region.
- **Services are seamless to customers.** There is no wrong door because staff is cross-trained and partners do not have turf issues. **Services have clear outcomes but have flexibility to address changing needs**, especially able to adjust during recessionary times versus periods of job growth.

Services employers, job seekers and youth

- **There are training services for various skill levels** that build upon one another and will assist job seekers in meeting position qualifications required by local employers. Workers can receive the **training they need regardless of employment status.**
- **There are services that help under-employed and employed job seekers** who want to develop higher skill and knowledge levels in order to increase their earning potential and prevent future unemployment.
- **We have a customized and user-friendly welcome process** that quickly identifies individualized services leading to greater customer accountability and success.
- **There are more services for professional and non-entry level workers** that make it easier for them to expand skills and connect to employers.
- **There are adequate resources for youth to gain work experience** that extends beyond at-risk-youth and includes more than summer programs.

Integration and Coordination among WorkSource Partners

- **WorkSource is truly a "WE & OURS" system** where:
 - Partners have a high level of understanding of what each organization brings to the table and can effectively co-market services as a group.
 - Information is shared among partners in a way that can follow a customer and reduces duplication.
 - There are resources to train staff and performance measures are tied to collaboration

- **WorkSource partners with local media on a cohesive marketing strategy** to raise awareness of services.
- **There is a coordinated effort among WorkSource partners to share information** internally in a way that maximizes opportunities for individuals seeking employment and training.
- **Schools and WorkSource partners have a coordinated career planning and job preparation strategy** that aligns with local career opportunities. Present and future workforce needs should drive vocational education and training programs.

What's working?

Overall

- **There is positive interaction and cooperation already existing among partners** to deliver workforce services to job seekers. We currently play well with others.
- **There are strong Oregon Employer Council chapters in Eastern Oregon** who are engaged with businesses in the region
- We have the support and **opportunity to pilot ideas and have been creative with our limited and dispersed resources.**
- WorkSource has been **successful in filling retail jobs** that do not require specialized skill.
- **WorkSource helps with applicant screening**, especially with small businesses that operate without distinct HR functions.

Services to Business and Industry Groups

- **Customized and exclusive recruitment services** with face-to-face and onsite interaction with employers. This type of recruitment has been successful in providing qualified applicants due to the deeper and specific knowledge of employer needs.
- **Services for small businesses** through the Small Business Development Center are well received and utilized.
- **On-the-job (OJT) through Title 1B** has been successful with some employers.
- **The work-based training program called ASPIRE has been implemented in Pendleton and Hermiston.** It is a good example of an effective on-site program that has been well-received by employers.

Services to Job Seekers and Youth

- **Orientation process where staff spends one-to-one time with new customers** is resulting in better referrals.
- There is **an increase in the number of job seekers completing their NCRC.** More employers recognize its value and it seems to be gaining momentum in Eastern Oregon.
- **Basic skills training and job search coaching** with interview tips and resume building tools are enhancing job seeker qualifications and presentation abilities. In addition, the CTUIR job club is a good example of career planning and job preparation program that is working.
- **Microsoft IT Academy has helped build computer skills among job seekers** assisting with their technology competency and aiding in their job readiness.
- **There has been some progress in developing and offering** entrepreneurial and business-related classes in schools at the K-12 level to broaden awareness and prepare young students for their future career paths.

Collaboration among WorkSource Partners

- **Collaboration between WorkSource and community college career centers is occurring** to produce targeted training for employers.
- Some promising collaboration is occurring with WorkSource and Title I-B programs preparing youth for academic and employment success.

Where can we do things differently or innovate?

Overall

- **Develop a shared vision among partners** and establish short and long-term goals that will institutionalize and incent strong and sustained collaboration.
- **Have more flexibility to help those who are under-employed or employed in lower wage jobs and looking to move up.** There are disproportionate resources spent on a small percent of job seekers who are chronically unemployed. The system must do more for other WorkSource customers through coaching, training and other targeted services.
- **Pilot an online chat format for specific job seeker and employer services** to test alternate ways to communicate with customers.

Enhanced Services to Employers and Industry Groups

- Have **work-based training options for incumbent workers** that fill urgent gaps such as millwrights.
- **Develop employer training and assistance for inter-generational workplaces** including sharing best practices, coaching and information about no-cost benefits that can help retain employees.
- **Work to modify the Bureau of Labor and Industries (BOLI) work rules** that restrict young workers and students from participating in certain apprenticeship programs.
- **Develop training for small businesses to assist with recruitment and hiring processes** such as writing job descriptions, establishing minimum qualifications, best interview techniques and onboarding new employees.
- **Have a deliberate strategy to integrate WorkSource and economic development efforts in the region.** WorkSource should host annual strategy sessions and/or other types of forums with economic development organizations to understand their direction and the links to regional workforce plans.
- Provide a short class such as “Office Management Basics Boot Camp” that prepared job seekers for entry-level office jobs.

Enhanced Services to Job Seekers and Youth

- **Develop a tiered triage process** to provide staff assistance and coaching for job seekers with greater needs and facilitating self-service for those who are job ready.
- Create more opportunities for **youth to have early work experiences** through summer, seasonal jobs, short projects, job shadowing, internships, etc.
- **Have a traveling road show** (the book mobile model) that can reach customers in **underserved areas.** The traveling team can provide initial welcoming services, skills assessment, career planning, job preparation, and other services.
- **Increase the pool of qualified workers through proactive training for basic and base skills required by local employers.** Such training may include customer service and/or applied computer skills typically used in most jobs today.
- **Provide a region-wide coordinated effort with schools to expose youth to the trades** and help career counselors understand the local opportunities for students wanting a vocational education. In addition, high schools can incorporate more job and workplace readiness skills training into the classroom. Perhaps have a pilot program that uses the National Career Readiness Certification (NCRC) program to connect high school curriculum to youth employment.
- **Ensure that job readiness classes are available for those who want them** as these are the job seekers most likely to follow- through on job referrals. Often the classes are filled by those required to attend regardless of how motivated or engaged they may be in the learning.
- **Ensure that all basic programs are accessible in each region.** For example Region 13 has no GED program.

Enhanced Integration and Coordination among Providers and Partners

- **Facilitate full awareness among all partners of the combined portfolio of WorkSource services.** One suggestion is to coordinate an annual “passport” event where all agencies represent their services in an exhibition hall setting and partners circulate and engage with one another getting their “passport” stamped by contacts with whom they are most likely to interface.
- **Identify people within agencies with specialized expertise or knowledge** and let them rotate to various offices where their expertise is needed. They can help train others as well as provide direct services to customers.
- **Create a shared data base** among partners that identifies all the regional and state training resources.
- **Develop a strong marketing strategy and brand for WorkSource** that moves beyond the perception that it exclusively serves the unemployed or low skilled workers. Then execute the marketing consistently and collaboratively throughout the system.
- **Modify iMatchSkills** to include a shorter initial process, modules that are more customized for job seekers with different levels of experience and education and a data base search engine for job matching and identifying relevant programs for job seekers. Once modifications are made, **rebrand the tool.**

What must we get right?

At the end of the day, we asked providers where to start. What aspects of the WorkSource system do we have to get right if the eastern Oregon region was to achieve their vision?

Work from a customer perspective. Truly having a customer driven model with employers defining local needs, and shared metrics that are based on customer expectations.

Develop a brand that overcomes the perception of an “unemployment department.” We need to get the word out that we do more than help those who are unemployed, that WorkSource is a full employment and training system. We also need to be more cohesive in the manner in which we market our services- having materials about all services provided by WorkSource partners, not just those of individual agencies.

Act as “We & Ours” with a positive, clear and shared vision of services. This will require that as partners, we are aware of each other’s services and provide the training for staff to understand the breadth of the system. This will require **inter-organizational collaboration** with networking mechanisms, information-sharing systems, ongoing communications and accountability through common measurable goals.

Have the resources and flexibility to assist all workers regardless of employment status. WorkSource is a comprehensive system that not only helps put people to work, but with the strength of all partners and the alignment with regional economic development efforts can also prevent unemployment and build stronger local companies.

Develop closer collaboration with schools to help youth understand local career opportunities, gain overall job readiness skills and provide more opportunities for **youth work experience.**

The Future of WorkSource

Employer Focus Groups

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 provide in order to have value and impact to its customers, how these customer needs vary region by region to be more responsive, and how state and local providers can work more collaboratively to provide integrated and seamless services to employers and job seekers.

In addition to eight larger forums where both employers and providers gathered (Eugene, Florence, La Grande, Medford, Redmond, Seaside, Salem, and Wilsonville), the project held four additional employer focus groups in rural parts of the state to ensure input from a wide array of industries and regions. This report reflects what we heard from employers at the four employer forums.

- April 10th 32 employers and business group representatives gathered in Ontario
- April 15th 46 employers and business group representatives gathered in Klamath Falls
- May 8th 11 employers and business group representatives gathered in Hermiston
- May 9th 15 employers and business group representatives gathered in The Dalles

Employer Workforce Trends

We asked employers what trends affect how they find, train and retain employees. What challenges they faced in their part of Oregon and how those challenges affected their business.

Hermiston Region

Trends in finding qualified workers

- **Increased reliance on certification** of existing employees. For example, the closest HVAC certification program is in Seattle. This necessitates several days away from work to complete training.
- There is a trend towards **more skilled type of labor using apprenticeships** and journeyman programs.
- There is a challenge with **seasonal work** where some employees are on the job for 6 months and then off for the next 6 months. It is difficult for them to **keep their mastery** of some skills when the talent lies dormant for half the year.
- Some have tried to **train for the “next level” in the off months** for seasonal workers so that there is no time lost on the job during the productive months. This allows for increased bench strength when production resumes later in the year.
- The local Chamber is working with Blue Mountain Community College to **bring more training closer in proximity** to the actual need so that lengthy commutes are not required.
- There is a continuing challenge with **workers who reside in Washington** but are employed in Oregon. Housing and benefits are not easy when dealing with the two states differing requirements in assistance programs.
- Several businesses said they are looking to **enhance the diversity of employees**; they feel a more diverse pool of applicants is highly desirable.

Trends in training and retaining workers

- There is a need for a more **intuitive approach to matching skills and available** jobs or seeing beyond the job descriptions. For example, if there is a similar job that is close in skills required, is there a way to source an applicant who possesses most of the qualities needed for similar jobs.
- By utilizing temp agencies some non-workplace related issues are handled such as **transportation or housing concerns**. These agencies will deliver the staff to agricultural producers and arrange for housing for them if it is needed. Business cannot afford to assist in those areas.
- Some operations are using what they refer to as **“reality training”** where a prospective employee is put into a real life work situation for a part of the day. This allows the applicant to see what the work is really like to determine if it is a good match for both parties.
- Due to the seasonality of many positions in the Hermiston / Boardman area, there is an accompanying **feast or famine style of competition between employers for the same limited pool of employees**. This is particularly difficult in agriculture, which is not required to pay overtime.
- The nature of the **shift work** in some industries makes it challenging for an employee who is trying to maximize their earning potential by way of a second job.
- **Additional training of existing employees** has worked at the hospital in Boardman to try and retain skilled nursing. This was a part of a federal program that while the funding is no longer in place, is still a model that works.

Klamath Falls Region

Trends in finding qualified workers

- Employers noted a **lack of applied, mechanical and technological skills** in schools, which makes it difficult to find qualified workers for jobs above entry level.
- There was a perception that some job seekers are unwilling to do entry-level work. **Employers are training for “work ethic” as well as job related skills** and functions.
- Some employers are using, or reverting to, **paper applications as a way to check job seekers’ writing abilities**.
- Employers view **young workers’ expectation of salaries, positions and advancement as unrealistic**. There is a greater concern among younger workers with work-life balance than in years past.
- **Management positions are difficult to fill** for a variety of reasons including trailing spouses, rural location, and limited transfer or promotion opportunities. As a result, employers are trying to grow from within.
- Employers are using **more temporary workers as a way to screen for job specific skills, motivation, reliability and fit**. This practice shifts the burden of unemployment and other costs from the employer to the staffing agencies that pays wages and taxes
- The **inability of many job seekers to pass a drug test** and/or a criminal records checks is a significant problem.
- Employers displayed a strong **perception that state and federal support programs create a disincentive to work**.
- Employers believe that their region wants to create **opportunities for youth employment**, but the demands of school, sports and other activities significantly limits their availability to work.
- Currently high schools focus on **preparing students for college over preparing them for the workplace**. Education, however, does not necessarily lead to a well-paying job.

Trends in training and retaining workers

Generational differences in performance and expectations in the workplace **require new skills of managers.**

- **People are changing jobs more frequently**, often after two years or less. The challenge heard from employers was they often invest in training only to have the person move to a competitor.
- As employees, especially youth, gain more skills and training, they often **leave for opportunities available in larger cities.**

Ontario Region

Trends in finding qualified workers

- **A lack of emphasis on trades and technical education** has resulted in a shortage of vocational and mechanical skills; significant gap in technical skills and insufficient capacity to train machinists and related occupations.
 - Programs like **Poverty to Prosperity** does provide needed technical training
- **The shortage of skilled workers means employers often wind up stealing from one another** which they acknowledge hurts the overall competitiveness of regional businesses.
- **The middle-skill worker group is shrinking.** There are more high and low skill jobs, especially in healthcare.
- **Low high school graduation rates** are hurting the skill level of entry-level workers and the opportunities for youth. Poor home settings reinforce the low emphasis on work or education.
- **Older displaced workers** are hard to hire because they have either limited or specialized skills from being employed with the same employer or position for many years. These employees find they **need to retool their skills to get rehired.**
- It is often **hard to attract and train professional positions.**
- **Technology has changed the way recruiting is done.** More employers use social media as a complement rather than a replacement to traditional recruiting methods. Older workers are not as adept in marketing themselves online. There is a difference in how to recruit and retain workers under 40 and workers over 40.
- **Younger workers expectation** of salaries, positions and advancement **seems unrealistic.**
- **Young people move away to go to college or join the military and don't return;** there is no coordinated community effort to attract these people back to the region.

Trends in training and retaining workers

- **Seasonal jobs** in construction, food processing, hospitality **make it difficult to retain good employees and for workers to make a consistent income**
- **Unemployment requirements are not well suited for regions or workers whose primary income is seasonal.**
- There is a growing **emphasis on Lean process** to stay competitive. This results in fewer middle level skilled workers who must be specialized to stay. Then there is a shortage when they leave or retire
- It is hard to retain employees, especially for businesses with little or no benefits or smaller businesses with limited growth opportunities.
- Transportation and housing needs for a range of workers;
 - There is **little housing stock for professional level recruits.**
 - **Distance** between home and work **can be a barrier** especially at lower wage jobs.

Other Issues

- Cultural values prioritize going to work rather than going to college. Those who complete a degree most often leave the area for better jobs. It was noted however that **education does not necessarily lead to well-paying jobs.**
- Border towns like Ontario have **multi-state regulatory issues** to deal with.
 - Large numbers of employees or community college students live in Idaho.
 - Difference in each state's minimum wage creates conflict.
 - **No reciprocity with Idaho for medical licenses**; this has helped to create a shortage of nurses and other medical skills.
 - **Unemployment and assistance is more liberal in Oregon than Idaho**, and therefore attracts more people for services.

The Dalles

Trends in finding qualified workers

- The employers have noticed **increased interest in relocating** to The Gorge as more jobseekers desire a healthier **work-life balance.**
- There is greater demand **for bilingual middle and upper management.**
- Concern was expressed regarding **regulatory restrictions for youth.** Most companies present said they were avoiding hiring anyone under 16 age as it is perceived the rules are too restrictive.
- Businesses have increased the use of **Realistic Job Previews** to help lower turnover in the first 90 days.
- The local hospital **is not interested in using temp to hire** as the cost is too great to the business for professionals with higher salaries.
- Due to the seasonality of the **Recreation Industry, a synergy has evolved between** the winter jobs on **Mt Hood** and the summer employment opportunities in **The Gorge.**
- There was considerable conversation from the employers about **K-12 Education**, its quality, the "increased focus" on college bound curriculum and the low level of skill attained at graduation.
 - Employers note workers are **concerned about the quality of the education** their children will receive should they choose to **relocate** their families to The Gorge.
- A lack of basic skills (math, English, people and communication skills) was noted.

Trends in training and retaining workers

- There was a request for greater training of individuals to use computers, specifically **MS Office Suite.**
- Rent and property values are climbing in The Dalles and some employers note that their **employees cannot live near their jobs.** This in turn creates transportation issues which the employee must weigh when looking at employment.
- For dual career couples, it is more **challenging to find career track positions for both spouse** and prospective employee.
- With a noted increase in **people holding two or more part time positions, greater flexibility** is required of employers.

What Employers Value

Employers were asked to describe what was valuable about workforce services, regardless of who provided them. Where did services have the greatest impact on their ability to find or retain employees, or their ability to ensure that workers were productive contributors to the business?

Hermiston Region

- Employers see significant value in **training**. It was suggested that perhaps some **UI benefits dollars could go to pay for more work based training**.
- Employers believe there is great value in **career and technical (vocational) education** and want to see the region and state reinvest in this form of education.
- Employers value **apprenticeship training** and see it as a growing area of opportunity for fields such as millwrights, electricians, and other trades. .
- Employers value **earlier work readiness** and want to see **a closer connection in high school to business values** where quality of work, work ethic and the “cost of failure” is incorporated along side academics and skill development. **Boardman High School** was put forth as having a **highly successful program for career exploration**. Businesses also wanted more programs similar to Junior Achievement, which give real life experience to youth.
- Employers expressed the need for help from WorkSource sourcing **potential mid-level and management employees from outside** the area.
- There was a consensus in **perception that local WorkSource employees are restricted by their processes from working together**. The suggestion was to reach across the board and collaborate regardless of where the program or its funding originated.
- A strong desire **to re-tool the iMatch program** was mentioned. It was suggested that there are better online programs in existence that would be more adaptable to the differing needs of the users who touch the system.

Klamath Falls Region

- **Employers highly value on the job training** as a way to bring employees up to speed as quickly as possible, and **incumbent worker training** as a way to promote from within and maintain a competitive workforce.
- Employers would like to see the **state’s 40-40-20 model include a focus on more career/technical education** at the secondary level so that young people can work and continue their education. This needs to be connected to career planning much earlier than the latter part of high school.
- Employers value the **customized recruitment** by WorkSource to screen and services to pre-qualify candidates and verify credentials based on specific employer needs. The staff knows the businesses well and what makes a job seeker a good “fit” for that employer.
- Along with customized recruitment, employers view it important to have **skills testing and verification** of a job seeker’s identified skills and abilities. This includes testing and proctoring services for a variety of credentials, including OSHA certification. There is also a need to help older workers update their technology skills.
- Employers value the complete set of workforce services offered and suggest **rebranding so WorkSource** is seen not just as a “crisis only” system for the unemployed, but a value added system for a larger market of employers and job seekers. Looking for a way to market to employers for skills improvement and credentialing, in addition to recruiting and hiring.
- Businesses recognize the importance of **youth services**. There is a strong desire for more programs and services for youth not just the highly talented and low skilled, but the vast majority in the middle. A “Turn-Your-Life-Around” approach that includes expunging records.
- **Employers highly value school-to-work type training**: New more focused, and specific training in technical/trades, pre-management skills, internships, apprenticeships, “soft skills” and how to adapt existing skills to new or different jobs and industries.
- Employers would like **more frequent and strategic** communications between WorkSource staff and employers, with quick follow up on requests and leads. All staff in the WS system need to be able to

represent ALL programs available to employers, and keep them informed of new programs available to help them strengthen their businesses.

- Employers appreciate **Labor Market Analysis** and the assistance to local governments and industries with analyzing growth and viability of industries for future regional projects.

Ontario Region

- Employers value and want to see **more career technical education**: vocational and trades programs linked to regional industry. **Having a trade school** in the region and delivering education in a way that includes workplace skills was one idea.
- Employers use and value **WorkSource's customized recruitment**: Services that WorkSource provides to screen and qualify candidates should be based on individual employer needs; like the front door to the HR department, where WorkSource staff can take the time to know the business and what "fits".
- There is a strong need for programs to **provide youth with job readiness skills as well as work experience**. Business people who can act as mentors for youth is highly valued such as student cohorts that partner with businesses or business groups to give students a reality check for workplace skills and help guide them to careers in the region.
- **There is a need for more ways to train and to match local industry needs**. Greater connection between workforce and local economic planning could involve:
 - Community planning to identify gaps and opportunities
 - WorkSource specialists available for different sectors
 - Technical training specialists
 - Easier ways to develop apprentice programs
- **Employers value assistance with incumbent worker training to train and promote from within, requiring more shared resources for work-based training** and better collaboration between WorkSource and the community college for supervisory and industry specific training.
- Employers would like to see WorkSource have **adequate resources to train for basic skills**, GED and other essential skills for entry-level jobs. (They are experiencing a demand for training that is greater than the supply.)
- **Help for employers to work across different cultures**. There is a growing Hispanic population, rarely engaged in these discussions.

The Dalles Region

- Employers values **more resources allocated toward training**, both school-based and work-based training with more flexibility for training resources to be used for existing workers.
- Employers noted a strong desired to have **comprehensive basic skills training tied to regional industries**.
- Employers see the importance of businesses working with the schools to **expose students to the options** that exist in The Gorge. Businesses can be (and want to be) great partners working with schools, letting teachers know what **skills and traits** are valued and necessary in the workplace. Employers recognize that not all students are bound for college, and there need to be options for exposure to the technical careers and trades, especially at earlier ages. The program at the end of the senior year called **Extended Application** was put forth as an **example of a successful program** yet concern was expressed that it was late in the education cycle. It was suggested that exposure begin in middle school followed by reinforcement throughout the remainder the public school. **Dufur High** has begun a program that starts in the **freshman year** of high school to highlight options and get students thinking about potential careers.

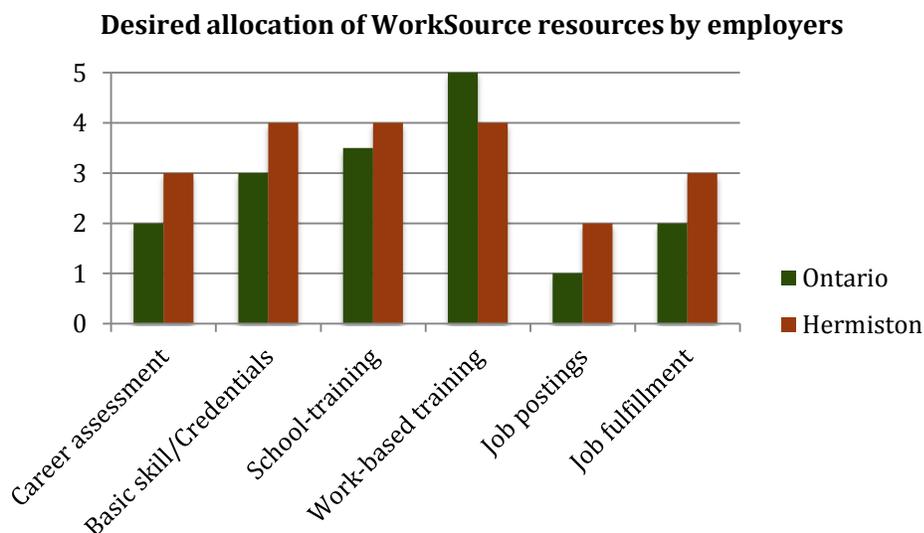
- Business organizations (e.g. Chamber of Commerce) expressed their commitment to **job fairs both large annual and more frequent “mini fairs,”** presented during off hours (not 8-5) to attract those already employed who may be looking to change careers or add a second job.
- Business leaders would like to see a **consistent brand of WorkSource** along with increased outreach into the community. It was put forth that **WorkSource could create networking events** beyond jobs and training, where employers could get together to meet one another, exchange best practices and further build community.
- Business value customized recruitment and prescreening of referrals to **validate applicant’s self-reported abilities** especially in areas like business writing, basic computer competence (Office Suite), communication skills and interpersonal relationship skills.

Desired Allocation of Resources

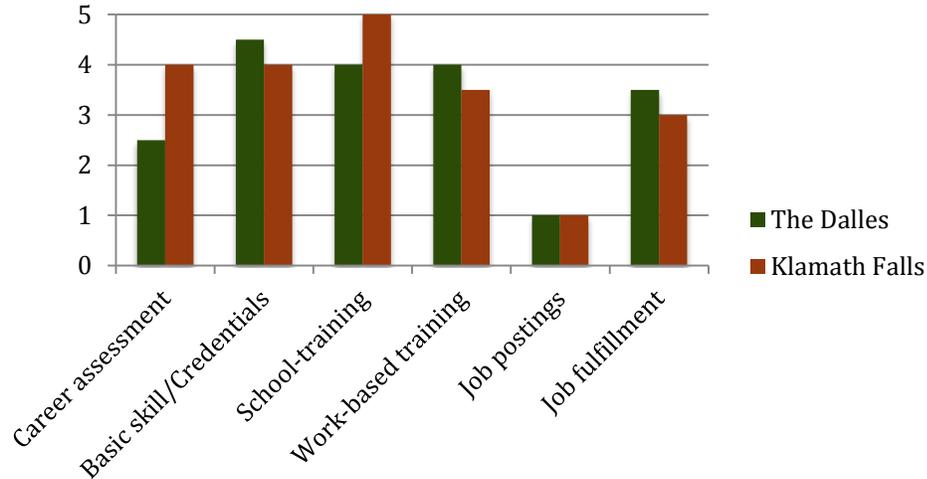
We asked employers to allocate where they would like to see WorkSource resources allocated by key functions of a) career planning and job preparation, b) basic skills training and credentials, c) work-based training for new or incumbent workers, d) school-based training, e) job postings, and f) active job fulfillment (recruitment and screening). They were also allowed to list any other services that were not part of the current service offering.

Each employer was given \$100 (of play money) in \$5 increments and asked to spend the money across these functions. The results were then totaled and adjusted to a scale of 1-5 where 5 represented an area that employers wanted to see significantly more resources, and 1 was an area where they saw little value.

The following summarizes in order of importance what employers at these forums hope to see in the future.



Desired allocation of WorkSource resources by employers



Throughout the Gorge, Eastern Oregon and South-Central Oregon, employers shared many concerns and wanted to see WorkSource focus staff and resources on similar issues. The overarching theme was strong basic education and training that taught both skills and work readiness and was aligned with regional industries. While employers noted the need for specific resources to assist their business or broader industry, there was also a sense of disconnect between their needs as employers looking for qualified workers and the education system producing the future pipeline of employees; that both industry specific needs and broader foundational aspects of workforce development needed to be addressed concurrently.. Specific suggestions included:

- Employers want to see additional resources allocated toward **school-based training that focuses on job readiness**, especially in the areas of:
 - Increased investment in **vocational education and career/technical training** in high schools and community colleges, exposing students much earlier in the education cycle.
 - **Job preparation and workforce expectations as a part of school curriculum** in K-12 and post-secondary.
 - **Customized training programs** that are better coordinated between the job screening functions of WorkSource and the customized training programs and community colleges.

Employers want to see this **education and training tied more closely with regional industry needs** to ensure the pipeline of new workers are better prepared for local jobs and have a shorter ramp-up time between the point of starting a job and becoming a productive contributor to the business. Over the long run, this would in turn reduce the amount of work-based training dollars spent by employers and WorkSource on basic skills and allow those funds to be focused on providing the workers continual training to remain a productive part of the workforce.

This suggests that WorkSource:

- Be a strong advocate for reinvestment in career technical (vocational) education, and that local workforce investment boards use their convening role to identify sector specific needs that would be tied to career technical education.
- **Develop more information about local jobs and careers** and the workplace expectations of regional employers. Work with K-12 to expose students to local careers, helping educational institutions connect with employers and providing career counselors with up to date information on local industries and jobs.

- Connect job readiness and workplace expectation skills to education and training programs offered by community colleges so graduates of degree or non-degree programs have both the skills and the understanding required of the work environment.

Work-based training was also an area where more resources are needed. By having WorkSource cost-share specific training, employers believe that this will help employees be more productive and have a greater likelihood of succeeding in a job, help employers be more competitive, and help retain employees by promoting them from within. This means that training resources need to be flexible enough to cover incumbent as well as new workers, and that apprenticeships are easier to use.

This suggests that WorkSource:

- Allocate more resources toward work-based training programs and enhance the flexibility for funds to be used on critical skill gaps whether those are for new hires or incumbent workers.
- Work with BOLI to examine apprenticeship regulations that may be preventing employers from maximizing apprenticeships as a way to fill critical skill gaps (e.g. age requirements, journeymen ratios, etc.)

Many jobs in rural areas do not require a college degree, however, they do require **strong basic and applied skills** that are often accompanied by industry **credentials**. This was one area where all employer focus groups reported a shortage of skills and where businesses wanted more resources to be allocated:

This suggests that WorkSource:

- Enhance basic skill training to include not only math, communications, writing, etc., but basic computer, customer services, or applied business basics that are aligned with local industry needs.
- Helping employers have a better understanding of the national career readiness certificate (NCRC) and how different NCRC levels are applied to different jobs so employers know how to use NCRC in screening and hiring new employees.

Employers want to maintain and **expand customized job screening** and job fulfillment activities offered by WorkSource. This was especially important for smaller companies where workforce staff acted as an extended HR function. There was little support for general job postings. .

This suggests that WorkSource

- Expand customized recruitment services and develop industry specialists within the region that have in-depth knowledge of local needs.
- Enhance screening functions that verify skills and credentials that job seekers state in applications.

Other Implications for WorkSource

- In **Klamath Falls**, employers were concerned with the high numbers of applicants failing drug tests. They see this as a workforce issue whereby community programs to target drug use are coordinated with employment and wrap around services within WorkSource agencies and partners.
- In **The Dalles**, employers expressed an interest in WorkSource playing a more active role in hosting job fairs and convening employers to share best practices.
- In **Ontario**, employers wanted to see more assistance in working across different cultures, acknowledging the growth in Hispanic populations and the need to integrate them more into workforce development.
- In **Hermiston**, employers had a need for WorkSource to help them source or recruit employees from outside the region when they could not find qualified workers within the area.