

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

Mid Willamette Valley Region

Contains summaries of the following

- Statewide Assessment
- Salem Regional Forum

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

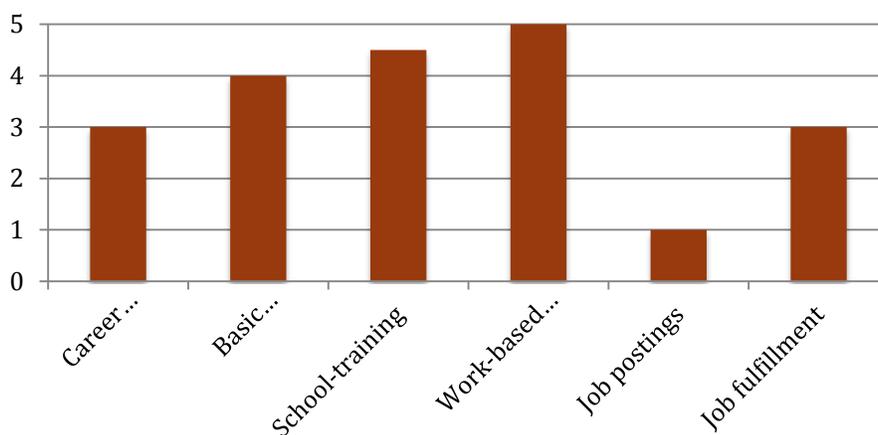
Employers view the WorkSource system as a set of inter-related services, where more efficiencies and impact could be gained through enhanced coordination and improved marketing of available services. To achieve this vision, businesses want WorkSource to have **a broader pool of applicants with a wider 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 less 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.

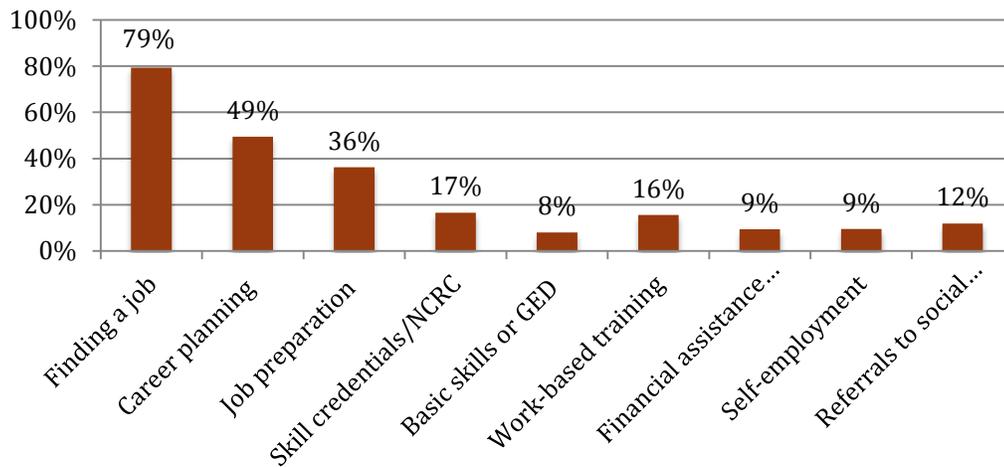
- **Resource reallocation:** Changes that would shift resources from services that had low value or impact to services with higher customer value. Examples include less resources allocated to job postings and more on work-based training and customized recruitment, more industry specific skills training 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.

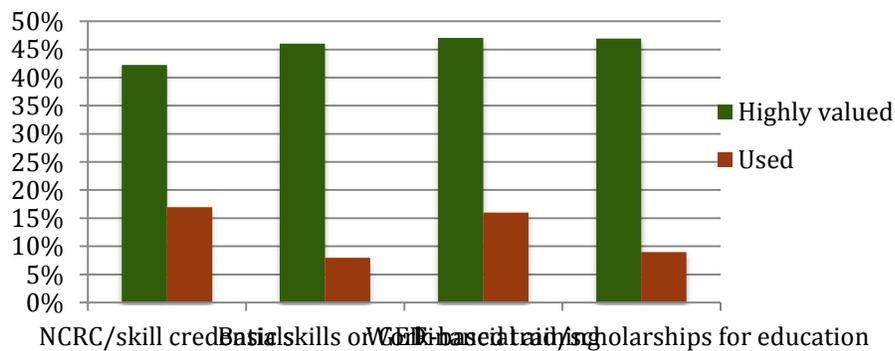
- More than 80% of job seekers knew little about WorkSource prior to their use or viewed it narrowly as a place for unemployed workers. This underscores perceptions of WorkSource still having the stigma as the “unemployment department.”
- Almost 90% of respondents first came to WorkSource due to their 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 are 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.

MID WILLAMETTE VALLEY FORUM

Salem

March 20, 2014

On March 20th 2014, approximately 63 employers, business groups and service providers gathered in Salem to discuss workforce issues in the Mid-Willamette Valley 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 Mid Willamette Valley 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

- **Employers are placing a greater emphasis on soft skills** and paying more attention to attitude and fit.
- **Increased automation** in the workplace is requiring **higher technical skills** by employees. This is true in a retail store or a manufacturing setting.
- Companies **need to be lean to compete** today. Therefore, employers are leery of investing in an employee who isn't the right one.
- With a lack of basic skills in the workforce, employers are experiencing a longer "ramp-up" period for new workers to be productive. To ensure new employees will be a good fit, businesses are using more **staffing agencies and temp to hire** arrangements to ensure basic skills, communication skills, and fit with their work environment.

For these employers, the temp to hire process greatly reduces permanent turnover, since most potential hires that did not fit fell out during the probationary period.

- There seem to be **more barriered populations among applicants in the Mid Valley**, such as the disabled and ex-offenders.
- Employers are seeing a trend where employees want to feel good about the organization they work for—there is **more desire for workers to align their personal values** and interests with jobs.
- Employers noted that **employees are showing less willingness to work hard and be trained** than in the past. Businesses experienced this trend with workers in lower wage jobs and those in more skilled entry-level jobs.
- Businesses **hiring at low entry-level wages** noted it was very **difficult to compete with applicants receiving unemployment insurance (UI)** since their starting pay may be less than what they receive on UI.
- Employers are **seeing youth without basic job readiness skills and not seeing many younger applicants with the same level of work experience as years past**. They believe there is very little emphasis in K-12 to expose youth to job-related skills and knowledge of local industry sectors. They recognize that employers have a responsibility to help and participate in community led programs such as the model taking place at **McMinnville High School**.

Trends in training and retaining workers

- **The older workforce is moving on.** People during the recession held on to their jobs; now there is movement toward more retirement. Recession also meant businesses didn't hire new workers so it will be necessary to create a path for employees to move up in the organization.
- The lack of job readiness in the region means **employers are doing more internal training that involves back to basics and social skills.** Employers large and small are conducting more OJT and supervisory training in an effort to advance their own employees into higher level jobs.
- Since many employers note difficulty finding skilled workers, they are **changing the way they "skill up"** entry level workers and are providing **more mentoring** at the earlier stages in the workplace.
- The fluctuation in **government regulations**, especially in construction-related industries, has caused businesses to **spend their limited training time and dollars on regulations education rather than skill development.**
- Competition for workers is occurring and some employers are **strategically positioning themselves to be an employer of choice** with good wages, good management, cross-training, providing employee training and development, educational support and adapting to various languages in the workplace. These employers are showing an overall **willingness to meet the challenges of the new and changing workforce.**

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?

Training Services

- Since employers have more success training and moving people up from within, they strongly support **on-the-job or work based training efforts.**
- **Vocational education and training** was highly valued not just for the training of workers for jobs in the trades, but for the applied learning and problem-solving skills it taught to all students.

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

- Employers see significant value in investing in **youth programs** that provide young people work while building **job readiness and essential workplace skills.**

Assistance with talent acquisition

- Since small businesses have few HR resources and little time, they value the **customized recruitment and screening services** that staffing agencies and WorkSource provide. In addition they often want help in writing job descriptions and developing their own interviewing skills.
- Larger employers valued methods that could **verify skills or credentials** so there was a common baseline of skills with candidates.

Collaboration with WorkSource Partners

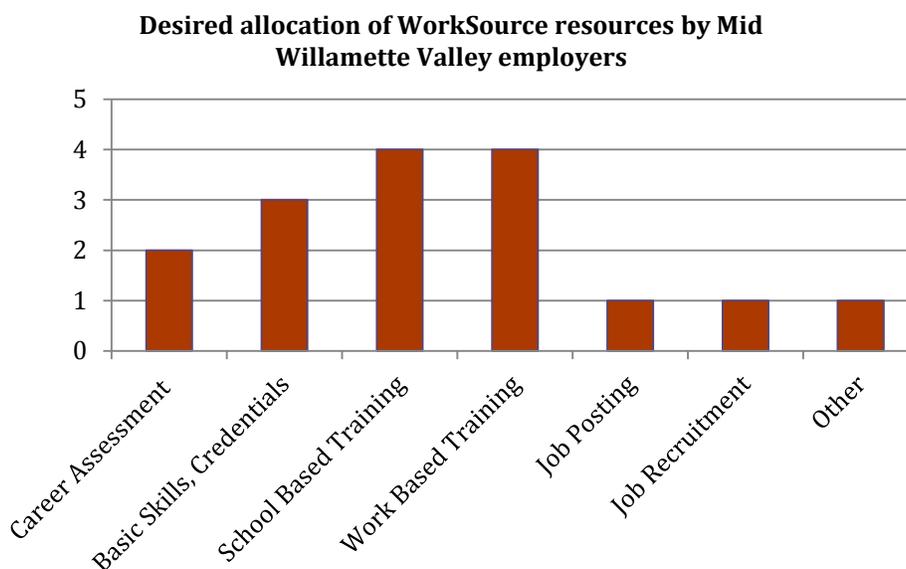
- Employers want to see state agencies and state-supported **workforce partners work more collaboratively around employment issues.** A more central entry point or seamless referral system that helps them quickly find workers and get the support they need to train and retain their employees. The DMV model was used as an example.

- With a higher than average percent of ex-offenders in the region, employers would value greater **collaboration between the Department of Corrections and WorkSource** to ensure successful re-entry into the workforce.
- Employers would like to see aggregated **information about local industries, the respective career paths that they produce and skills needed for jobs in the region**. They want that that information to be updated and readily available to students, educators and workers.

Desired Allocation of Resources

We asked employers to note 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 or the need for resources to be allocated.



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.

In the mid-Valley region, employers' vision for where they wanted resources allocated **varied by type of industry**. Manufacturing and trades wanted more work-based training, while service sector businesses were more focused on basic skills. Job recruitment functions were less important for large employers, but important for small employers with no HR staff.

Since almost all employers preferred to train up their existing employees with organizational knowledge and a proven performance record rather than trying to recruit someone with higher skills, but no experience with their business, **incumbent worker training** was key to their success.

This suggested that WorkSource:

- Allocate not only **more resources toward OJT**, but allow at least part of work-based training funds to be used for incumbent worker training.

- Allow employers using temp-to-hire services to access OJT without having to do a “work around” that required significant paperwork and time.
- WorkSource training programs staff work closer with community college to develop and **deliver more sector-specific or cohort training** for skills that have a common need across an industry sector. (Employers noted a disconnect between the two partners)

The Mid-Valley forum had a significant number of manufacturers, construction trades and logistics related employers that attended. Their **greatest need in school-based training was for vocational (Career Technical) education** especially in high school. They wanted to see more internship or work experience related to vocational education, although many noted that BOLI regulations prevented youth under 18 from gaining hand-on experience in many situations. This lack of hand-on experience meant that students had not only fewer skills but less interest or understanding of career possibilities.

This suggests that WorkSource:

- Work with K-12 and community colleges to have a collaborative effort to enhance and coordinate vocational training programs and connect them more closely with area employers.
- Work with BOLI to examine and change policies related to the regulations restricting students and young workers from actively participating in workplace operations.

Businesses stressed the importance of **early youth work experience and career exposure**. They find young workers lack base skills critical to job success. The **combination of career assessment and school-based training** was important to these employers. This combination included 1) having good information about regional industry sectors and about the skills needed for local jobs; 2) having more interaction between high schools and local employers with opportunities for students and career counselors to learn about local jobs; 3) providing job readiness skills to youth through summer or seasonal programs.

This suggests that WorkSource:

- Has **current sector information on regional employers**, careers and their related skills, and that this information is shared and coordinated with education providers from a career guidance perspective as well as a skill development perspective.
- WorkSource and schools work together to **get employers into the schools** to talk to students and counselors.
- More resources are allocated to **youth work experiences that go beyond youth at risk populations**. Shorter or project-based experiences that are 2-6 weeks in length, including **more partnerships with community organizations** and nonprofits (such as Habitat for Humanity) as a place for work experiences that could fulfill community service/project requirements and provide job readiness skills at the same time.

The Mid-Valley employers also stressed that the WorkSource system needed to do a better job is **skills assessment and credential verification**. Employers noted a need to verify skills or credentials that job seekers indicated they had. Employers also found it hard to understand which credentials or level of credential had meaning to their company. For example, employers knew about the NCRC but many did not use it because they were confused about which level had the best fit for their company.

This suggests that WorkSource:

- Have a system or way by which key credentials can be verified prior to job referrals.
- Business specialists and other staff working directly with employers are trained on how to help businesses understand which credentials are meaningful to them and how they can be best used for effective screening and hiring processes.

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 the 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

- The WorkSource system provides easy access for job seekers and employers. For employers—they need to get who and what they need quickly. For job seekers, the access needs to be extremely easy so that no matter where someone enters the system there is seamless service and common enrollment. **The system as a whole is simple to navigate with great tools that are well-connected and user friendly.**
- The **WorkSource system will have a sufficient number of locations** to serve customers and **intentional connection among partners** including better connections with employers, schools and WorkSource system.
- WorkSource is **effectively marketed** so customers can see all possible services and that the system is easy to understand and simple to access.
- Customers want to use services because we use simplicity in our processes from start to finish. **The system is customer centric**—not process centric.
- **The value provided by the WorkSource system is so obvious**—it's the first place to go... "top of the list."
- A WorkSource system where every **provider and partner is open to REALLY changing** how we do things to be more effectively.

Services to employers and industry groups

- **Increased responsiveness to employers** by providing services that customers truly value and which are customizable to business needs with their specific outcomes and goals in mind.
- A WorkSource system that **builds awareness of the services, achievements and challenges with employers at periodic interval**. In addition, provides a **feedback loop to groups of employers** on state and regional levels.
- WorkSource markets itself as a **coordinated system that is effective and efficient for employers to access** and receive the full scope of relevant services.
- WorkSource is **very involved with and understands the special needs of small businesses**.

Services to job seekers and youth

- WorkSource is a system where **job seekers can see and understand the whole process**.
- **The welcome process is where job seekers can receive a personal touch, quick assessment of job needs and proper progression of services**. There is a simple menu of services inclusive of K-12 and community college programs, certifications, OJT, etc. In addition, **the system is flexible** enough to allow for customization to their specific needs and goals.
- Work-based **skills and education are integrated** to improve progression, and job seekers receive coaching at appropriate times.

- Students and **youth have a clear understanding of career opportunities** and skills needed when they enter the workforce so they are informed and **prepared** to go to work.

Partnerships and systems integration

- WorkSource has **clear goals and expectations across the system** so that all providers and partners strive for consistent system outcomes and report on similar measures.
- **All partners act as the collective “we”** cross-promoting and utilizing all resources and understanding what others do. This minimizes all duplication and leverages all of the partnerships. (Envision the “Olympic rings” as the system with connection and overlap, but not duplication.)
- Workforce provides easy and **warm hand-offs throughout the system without “bouncing” the customer**. This includes streamlined career planning that is coordinated between WorkSource, K12 and community colleges.
- Provide **staff training to all WorkSource professionals** to understand the full scope of system services, develop a useful and sustainable network among offices and agencies, **support strong relationships** among staff and foster a professional work environment and flexible culture **throughout the system**.
- **WorkSource continues to provide co-location** where possible among providers and partners – OED, LWIBs, DHS, Community Colleges, etc.
- **Tools and technology are integrated across providers** so information is shared; Greater integration of IT systems.

What’s working?

Overall

- WorkSource staff recognizes their desire to provide helpful and meaningful customer service and that they **currently have and want to retain good working relationships with each other and employers** in this region.
- WorkSource staff is pleased to have **access to a significant community college**.

Services to employers and industry groups

- Job postings and referrals work well for **employers who engage with more depth and intention** around their needs—this represents about 10% of employers.
- **Customized recruitments for employers** and job seekers are working well. This has resulted in the development of strong WorkSource-employer relationships with on-site visits and **in-depth understanding of jobs and operations leading to qualified referrals** and placements.
- There has been **success with vocational rehab referrals** and job placements with small businesses within the region.
- WorkSource working in alignment with **sector strategies to identify skills essential to groups of employers** for their recruitment and training needs.
- **OJT programs** have aligned with various employers to support unemployed job seekers in gaining occupational skills specific to current business needs.
- **NCRC works well for some employers** who need a way to assess basic skills.

Services to job seekers and youth

- The **WorkSource welcome process is very effective when it utilizes one-on-one assessments** and coaching and when job seekers are willing to engage and take advice from staff.
- **Youth programs continue to grow and receive attention** in this region. There have been positive results from a cognitive behavioral workshop model that is being piloted with adults. It focuses on the behavioral issues involved with a person’s ability and motivation to do well in the workplace.
- **Veteran services** have worked well in this region because they use a **“wrap-around” service model** and partners have a shared interest in the outcome.

- **Barrier and special populations** such as ex-offenders and TANF recipients receive services due to the availability of funding streams and resources to support needs involving transportation, child care and other job-specific costs such as uniforms.
- Sheltered work environments are successful in giving actual work-relevant exposure to job seekers and WorkSource training programs and workshops are effective in covering job readiness skills.

Partnerships and systems integration

- There generally is an **effective hand off from DHS to WorkSource** when dealing with job prep and work readiness coaching.

What do we need to do differently or innovate?

Overall

- **Follow consistent protocols** across the system for effective assessment and triage of job seeker needs in alignment with employer opportunities.
- Establish procedures to **allow adequate time with customers** in providing quality assessment and job prep services.
- **Increase the awareness of WorkSource** services across the region through **high quality, consistent and effective marketing**.

Enhanced services to employers and industry groups

- Improve the **WorkSource system to interface with employers' applicant tracking systems**. This would simplify the process of posting jobs, avoid double entry and reduce the frustration some employers have experienced.
- **Help employers write better postings** and job descriptions, particularly the smaller businesses that do not have HR departments.
- **Have more care about the quality match between the job seekers and employers' needs**. The outcome of a good fit and relevant referral is the desired outcome, not just sending a person to fulfill a WorkSource measure. This may include working with employers to match skills vs. specific industry work experience.
- Provide staff with adequate resources as well as flexibility to **perform more on-site meetings with employers to achieve quality referrals and "fit"**.
- Work to modify rules **that would allow incentives to job seekers** to take positions that may pay less than their welfare benefits.
- **Increase the amount of training that is designed to develop basic skills**, work ethic, grooming, integrity, communications, follow-through and getting along with others in the workplace.
- **Examine policy changes to adjust BOLI rules** to support work based training for students and young workers in trades and vocational occupations.

Enhanced services to job seekers and youth

- **Enhance career planning programs at the K-12 levels**—start earlier and have students gain exposure to workforce needs and how their interests and skills align with occupations.
- **Provide ways for remote job seekers to gain access to a "person"** by phone and possibly by live chat when it is their preference at various stages of seeking WorkSource for services.
- **Revive vocational, career exploration and technical trade education** in high schools. High schools are in the best position to foster student thinking about future careers and provide exposure to work environments and jobs. There is a good example of a ready-to-work program at Salem Keiser S.D.
- **Increase funding through Career and Technical Education (CTE) resources** with a particular focus on disconnected youth.
- Explore ways to **provide some childcare and transportation assistance for the non-TANF** population that need transitional help when re-entering the workforce.

- **Find more ways (beyond iMatchSkills) to communicate** with job seekers that includes an easy way to get back in touch with them.

Enhanced partner collaboration and system integration

- **Encourage WorkSource staff to take opportunities to partner with other programs** such as parent classes that focus on soft skills that have relevant application to the development of job readiness skills. Such classes will strengthen desired workplace behaviors for success on the job.
- **Develop stronger collaboration between WorkSource and the Department of Corrections** in supporting the work readiness needs of ex-offenders.
- Enhance the **collaboration between WorkSource staff and community college workforce professionals**. There are opportunities to be more proactive in sharing employer needs and job seeker readiness for referrals.
- **Refurbish the data and information systems** used by WorkSource and give access to all providers and partners for effective communication throughout the system resulting in faster and up-to-date information to customers.

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 Mid-Willamette Valley region was to achieve their vision?

Continue to focus on programs for youth and strategic integration with trades and vocational education. Career planning programs at the K-12 levels must be robust and align with local industry sectors and employment opportunities and sustainable career paths. Programs need to start earlier and have students gain exposure to workforce information and experiences and explore how their interests and skills align with occupations.

Develop an employer-driven culture in a way that results in actual ROI for businesses when working with WorkSource. This means employers need information and easy access to the full range of services and incentives available to them. Building deeper relationships with the businesses in the region will lead to better understanding of their challenges and workforce needs resulting in well-matched referrals and successful hires.

Think and act like a system. This means all partners must learn the best ways to work effectively together in order to provide services that are streamlined for our customers. We need to have a common data base system with one eligibility and assessment process that can feed to all programs with access to all providers and partners as appropriate and have system-wide shared measures for success.

Recognize that job seekers have various needs at different stages of their careers and job search efforts. This translates to a system that can assess and triage initially and provide the needed services quickly and effectively; providing only the right and relevant services. This results in using WorkSource resources wisely and providing services on a more individualized basis. Work-based training and educational programs, for example, are integrated to improve career progression so customers receiving support and coaching at appropriate times.