Workforce Readiness Committee (WRC) Charter

2025-2026

Table of Contents

Last Updated: January 28, 2026

Sponsors

Commitments in progress

- K S Venkatraman, Chair, WTDB
- Skip Newberry, Vice Chair, WTDB, Technology Association of Oregon
- Charlene Williams, Oregon Department of Education
- Jayathi Murthy, President, Oregon State University
- Oregon Business and Industry

Committee Leadership

- Charlie Hopewell, Chairman of the Board, Jewett Cameron Companies
- Tom Goodhue, Executive Director, Oregon Advanced CTE and Oregon Building Congress
- Todd Nell, Director, Workforce and Talent Development Board

Committee Purpose

The WRC's purpose is to empower Oregon's future workforce to enter jobs and careers ready, aware, and possess the foundational knowledge needed for job and career success.

Committee History

In 2019, the WTDB established the Essential Employability Skills (EES) Taskforce to explore research and best practices regarding EES, culminating in recommendations in the EES Taskforce's report, WTDB Report: Essential Employability Skills, Needed Now More Than Ever. The Oregon Employability Skills (OES) Advisory Committee formed in 2021 implemented many of the Taskforce's recommendations and developed the initial charter for the WTDB Workforce Readiness Committee (WRC). The WRC is exceptionally well attended and active. One of its crowning achievements is the establishment of the Oregon Employability Skills (OES) curriculum and framework, an industry-education collaboration.

Nine community colleges using funds from the USDOL SCC Grant, developed an Employability Skills Digital Badging Framework with 21 individual employability skills digital badges that have been embedded into select Manufacturing and/or Cybersecurity courses. The college framework, a continuation of the OES framework, was designed to be embedded into any CTE program and/or transfer level work so that colleges could expand the badges to multiple program areas. The nine colleges issued over 500 employability skills digital badges in 2023-24. In response to growing demand for alignment between secondary,

postsecondary, and workforce development, the WRC has increasingly collaborated with CTE and other education partners to ensure readiness not only for employment, but for lifelong learning and career advancement.

The WRC in 2025 committed to further expansion of EES, as well as new efforts focused on foundational STEM skills needed for career readiness in Oregon's economy. The WRC in early 2025, parallel to the WTDB's revision of their overall Strategic Plan, revised their charter, purpose, scope and two-year goals. This Charter shall be revised as needed, but at least every two years, as a mechanism for accountability and project planning.

Opportunity Statement

The WRC, as a committee of the WTDB, grounds its scope, purpose and goals in the overall vision and mission of the WTDB. The WTDB's 2025-26 Strategic Plan:

- Strengthens the Board's commitment to inclusivity and equitable prosperity,
- Increases expectations for alignment across education and training systems,
- Places new emphasis on shared impact and accountability to customers, and
- Sets higher goals for interactions, advising and alignment with the Governor's office.

Within this context, the WRC sees specific and new opportunities to empower Oregon's future workforce to enter jobs and careers ready, aware and with strong foundational knowledge. Unique opportunities guiding the Committee's updated purpose include:

- The Board's adoption of definitions of the Public Workforce System and the Larger Workforce System, the latter including partner agencies and systems beyond the mandated partners per the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, and the expectations that the Board can partner and influence alignment across the larger system.
- The Board's strength and role as a knowledgeable and networked convener and broker of connections across systems, system leaders, and programs, including knowing which existing programs to use as mechanisms to expand tools and strategies that work and/or innovate new tools and strategies that are needed.
- The Board's role as an informed and knowledgeable broker of industry needs, including leveraging its own membership and networks as well as curating and being accountable to industry research and coordination with Oregon's active Industry Consortia.
- The Board's emphasis on bold and innovative vision and action, specifically:

Last Updated: January 28, 2026

- The pursuit of innovations that have clear benefits for Oregon's workforce, including new technologies, partnerships and strategies that can lead to substantial improvements in workforce development.
- The taking of calculated risks and use of innovative approaches to overcome workforce challenges and barriers to inclusivity, pushing beyond traditional boundaries to find effective solutions.

- Alignment with the CTE State Plan, including a focus on strengthening the connection between Essential Employability Skills, CTE Programs of Study, and overall postsecondary readiness, ensuring learners can effectively transition from high school to further education and meaningful careers.

- The current Governor's prioritization of K-12 system improvements, including the Governor's new 8th grade math proficiency accountability measure, recognizing that math is a critical gateway to high-demand, high-wage, and high-skill occupations. Strengthening foundational math competencies is essential to ensuring equitable access to meaningful career pathways in Oregon's innovation economy.

- The national dialogue related to technology and AI tools that could fill growing gaps in K-12 outcomes combined with the federal trend of cutting K-12 education.

Committee Scope and Activities

The WRC commits to driving change through **two high-priority** key projects in 2025-26:

1. ***Operation Expand Oregon Employability Skills (OES)***

   a. Goal: Develop and catalyze a strategy and plan to scale the use of the Oregon Employability Skills (OES) framework and curriculum, including scope, schedule and budget to ensure successful expansion.

   b. Opportunities:
      - The work of OES has come so far, but it is not done. The window of opportunity to expand and make it a part of the fabric of Oregon's education and training systems is now.
      - The OES initiative has results and impressive rates and incidents of adoption. WRC and OES leads have the right data to make the case for expansion.

   c. Committee Actions:
      - Finalize recommended definitions of Career Readiness and Essential Employability Skills for formal approval by the WTDB and other partners.

Include a crosswalk with definition of Post-secondary College readiness in order to clarify distinctions with Career Readiness, and to catalyze wider understanding and adoption of definitions.

- o Map existing program/system partners that can and should be key to expanded implementation of OES for Oregon's youth, students, adults and Oregon's Workforce, Education and Training System.
- o Develop strategies to support educators with the integration of employability skills into existing curriculum that is aligned with industry need.
- o Ensure alignment between employability skills, CTE course outcomes, and postsecondary placement requirements to support seamless transitions from secondary to postsecondary education.
- o Identify and promote dual-credit or stackable credential opportunities that embed OES into CTE and academic pathways.
- o Use data on race, ethnicity and language to inform decisions and strategies for successful OES expansion.
- o Seek, engage, finalize either agency or braided public/private funded enterprise that provides consistent funding to support the expansion of OES, including supporting the baseline architecture (curriculum, website, training, marketing and distribution, updates) and expansion strategies above.

d. Measurable Outcomes:
- o Secure enough funding (new or leveraged) to support and sustain the existing and baseline architecture for a minimum of the next three program years.
- o Secure commitments from WRC's top 5 high-impact (numbers of students) thus far un-tapped program partners for adoption by August 2025.
- o Project plans and funding strategies for implementation for the top 5 new partners by December 2025.
- o Secure enough funding (new or leveraged) to support full implementation for top 5 new partners by April 2026.

2. *Project STEMLift*

a. Goal: Project STEMLift signals a comprehensive, future-ready approach to turning around Oregon's STEM proficiency and workforce pipeline. This approach includes researching, piloting and spurring innovation with technology and AI tools. These tools assist teachers and under-represented students with industry-relevant math and science concepts and pedagogy that is customizable to unique teaching conditions

Last Updated: January 28, 2026

and student learning needs.

b. Opportunities:
   a. A combined math and science initiative, targeted at a critical window of opportunity for maximum learning, grades 4th-8th, that strategically fills in where the system is failing in capacity and access to innovation, prioritizing and opening doors for girls and those most underrepresented in STEM fields by gender and race/ethnicity.
   b. Project STEMLift supports the Governor's priority focus on improved K-12 outcomes, and is likely to attract legislative support, particularly if tied to economic development and equity goals.
   c. Availability of strong partners (Oregon Business Council, for example) in fundraising and support, as well as informing design and outcomes, based on shared goal related to K-12 math and science foundations.

c. Committee Actions:
   a. Design and conduct research on contextualized industry need for foundational math and science in grades 4-8, partnering with Oregon's Industry Consortia where possible and meaningful, and aligning with Skills Gap research and reports published by WTDB. Make specific and deliberate connections to actual job titles and job families in high demand at entry, mid and advanced levels that require strong STEM foundations.
   b. Conduct due diligence on effective and cost-saving AI tools, as well as existing school districts and programs willing and able to pilot. Prioritize implementation in underperforming and underrepresented communities to close opportunity gaps.
   c. Partner with local tech and healthcare employers to co-create real-world STEM modules and career-connected learning experiences.
   d. Pilot AI Tools in Math & Science: Launch pilots in targeted districts using AI platforms that support both math and science learning, with a focus on 4th–8th grades.
   e. Develop and catalyze a strategy and plan for implementation and sustainability, including mechanisms to fund statewide adoption of AI-powered STEM tools and professional development for teachers. Incorporate ongoing evaluation and adaptation of piloted AI tools.

d. Measurable Outcomes:
   a. Research on need, design and tool options complete by September 2025;
   b. Advocacy and fundraising plan by December 2025; Full funding and commitments secured by May 2026.
   c. Six School District Pilots operational during 2026-27 School Year
   d. 30% Improvement over baseline of prior year in understanding of specified math and science knowledge areas in each grade 4-8 in pilot schools (or districts)

The WRC further commits to ***supporting*** two initiatives that will require broader and stronger partnership for success. The two initiatives are:

2a. Supporting efforts to systematize early college credit and dual enrollment opportunities:

This work is underway by offices and leads within HECC and ODE.

a. Committee Actions:

- Help identify opportunities to systematize dual credit programming that provides early college credit opportunities for high school students that align with career pathways, elevate career connected learning experiences, and fit with emerging workforce needs. The WRC could also:
- Assist with navigation of the "patchwork quilt" of ways Oregon offers early college opportunities, in partnership with state agency leads, colleges, K-12, and industry.
- Advise on design and strategy that will most likely secure the funding needed to succeed.

b. Measurable Outcomes:
- A time-limited ad-hoc work group to assist with navigation of opportunities and network connections, and design/strategy led by HECC/ODE, plus quarterly time on WRC agendas for updates and facilitated input from broader WRC membership.
- Signed support to a HECC/ODE strategy and plan, including recommendations to Governor, Legislature and Agency Directors.

Last Updated: January 28, 2026

2b. CTE for All:

In direct support of ODE's new efforts to connect schools to community.

      c. Committee Actions:

- Add data and research to make the case that students learning through contextual course work and employability skills, as a complement to traditional academic formats, results in better outcomes.
- Assist in the study of how CTE for All students can happen and its potential impact, or the opportunity costs if it does not.
- Assist with navigation and networking connections to support ODE in this shift.

      d. Measurable Outcomes:

- A time-limited ad-hoc work group to inform and support ODE, plus quarterly time on WRC agendas for updates and facilitated input from broader WRC membership.

Signed support to an ODE strategy and plan, including recommendations to Governor, Legislature and highest impact Agency Director partners.

Project Milestones

WRC Reporting:

- Provide WTDB and sponsors quarterly updates and reporting on project results to assure accountability.
- Present a Final Report for Approval at the WTDB 2025 December Quarterly Board meeting that will report on progress, challenges and opportunities, policy development, and legislative concept recommendations to the Governor and Legislature.

Partners, Members, and Staff

Partners for this project include, but are not limited to:

- Office of the Governor
- Oregon Business Council
- Oregon Legislature
- Higher Education Coordinating Commission
- Oregon Universities
- Oregon Community Colleges
- Oregon Employment Department
- Oregon Department of Education and K12 partners
- Local Workforce Development Boards
- STEM Council and STEM Hubs

Last Updated: January 28, 2026

- Business Oregon
- Community Based Organizations
- Oregon Department of Veteran Affairs
- Oregon Department of Human Services
- Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation
- Commission for the Blind
- Self Sufficiency
- Oregon AFL-CIO and/or other Labor organizations

Members of the Workforce Readiness Committee include:

- Charlie Hopewell, Co-Chair – Chairman of the Board, Jewett Cameron (ret.)
- Tom Goodhue, Co-Chair – Oregon Building Congress
- Matt Bisek – Oregon TRIO
- Christopher Brida – Portland Public Schools
- Howard Burns – Senior Director, Corporate & Workforce Education, Oregon State University
- Cherie Clark – Chemeketa Community College
- Georgia Conrad – Oregon Workforce Partnership
- Dean Craig – Willamette Workforce Partnership
- Lindsey Davis – Worksystems
- Doug Denning – Higher Education Coordinating Commission
- Tony Frazier – Executive Director, KROC Center
- Shalee Hodgson – Higher Education Coordinating Commission
- Eric Juenemann – Higher Education Coordinating Commission
- Maggie Mashia – Oregon Department of Education
- Deb Mumm-Hill – Oregon STEM
- Sarala Paliwal – Former Senior Engineering Director, Siemens EDA
- Susan Samek – Oregon Department of Education
- KS Venkatraman – Senior Director, AI Computing (ret.), Nvidia Corp
- Beth Wigham – Oregon Department of Education
- Stacey York – University of Oregon

Staff of the committee include:

- Todd Nell
- Clay Martin
- Alea Soboloski

Last Updated: January 28, 2026