

Willamette Workforce Partnership

Regional Input Sessions Summary



WILLAMETTE WORKFORCE
PARTNERSHIP

Prepared by: Heidi East McGowan
Principal
Healthy Business Systems & Associates, LLC

Table of Contents

	Page
I. <u>Executive Summary</u>	
A. Overview.....	1
II. <u>Regional Input Sessions</u>	
A. Location and Attendance.....	2
B. Input Session Questions and Process.....	3
III. <u>Regional Themes, Strengths, Challenges and Future Workforce Needs</u>	
A. Regional Themes	4
B. Regional strengths, challenges and future workforce needs	6
IV. <u>Project Summary</u>	
A. Closing Comment.....	8

I. **Executive Summary**

A. **Overview**

In the fall of 2018, the Willamette Workforce Partnership held a series of community input sessions to hear from community and industry partners across the four-county region of Yamhill, Marion, Polk, and Linn, to inform and guide strategic development of initiatives that will promote a robust and strong workforce.

Four input sessions were held across the four-county region and one webinar was offered to listen to community and industry partners share their experience, insights and expertise related to the current and future workforce needs. One hundred individuals provided input, with attendees representing a range of perspectives from business leaders, government agencies, higher education, non-profits and community-based organizations. Twenty percent of the individuals attending represented private industry and regional business leaders.

Consistent themes were echoed throughout the region, while individual themes surfaced within each county. The most common themes that were heard across the region were the following:

- Current and prospective workforce need soft and essential skills
- More opportunities for career technical education and the trades
- Businesses need training and support systems that lead to increased recruitment and retention of the workforce.

II. **Regional Input Sessions**

A. **Location and Attendance**

Representatives from a cross-section of sectors and industries offered insights and expertise in each of the four counties, in addition to one webinar. Fifteen participants attended in Polk County, twenty-three in Yamhill, twenty-eight in Marion, and twenty-seven in Linn counties. The last input session was a webinar held with five participants attending.

B. Input Session Questions and Process

The input sessions provided opportunities for small group discussions that included a report out of themes discussed within each group and concluded with a full group discussion about future workforce needs. The questions were responded to using the following format:

- What is going well for recruiting and retaining a qualified workforce?
- What is challenging? Why?
- What bold action would you like to see funded in this region that would have a significant impact on enhancing a qualified and robust workforce?
- In five years, what do you think your future workforce needs will be?

III. Regional Themes, Strengths, Challenges and Future Workforce Needs

A. Regional Themes

The most common themes heard throughout the four-county region were the need for the workforce to have soft and essential skills, increased exposure and opportunities in career technical education and the trades, and business training and supports that lead to increased recruitment and retention of a qualified workforce.

Soft and essential skills

Soft and essential skills of the workforce were highlighted at each input session as a high need for businesses and organizations seeking to recruit and retain quality and qualified employees. A range of desired skills include problem solving abilities, inter-personal relationships, communication with co-workers, appearance, punctuality, loyalty to the business, staying on task, critical thinking, and having a prepared resume and interview skills.

Career technical education and the trades

Increasing career technical education and access to employment in the trades were identified within each county. Strategies ranged from industry forging partnerships with high schools increasing exposure early, to marketing and promoting the trades broadly as high-quality jobs for a prospective workforce. A consistent sentiment was expressed that there will always be a need for employees in manufacturing and welding. The plumbing and electrical trades also will remain in high demand.

Business training and supports

A range of training and supports for business were consistently identified as a need across the region. The following business training, supports and services were highlighted:

- Creating onboarding, orientation and retention plans
- Creating a family friendly culture and flexible work environments
- Recruiting, retaining and working with younger generations
- Recruiting and increasing a bi-lingual workforce
- Providing mental health services for employees

There was significant discussion about providing education, training and support to businesses as they address their internal retention, onboarding and culture. Additionally, it's worth noting that the need for mental health services of employees was identified at most of the county input sessions.

Additional themes

The following themes were highlighted across the region, with some of the themes emerging in only one to three counties. The following themes include transportation, child care, and housing; internships; incumbent worker training; peer support and mentorship; changes needed in the law to increase youth exposure; and apprenticeships.

Transportation, child care, housing

Transportation, child care, and/or housing were raised at most input sessions as a barrier to recruitment and retention of the workforce. Transportation was raised as a need in three of the four counties, with a particular focus needed for weekend and night transportation in rural parts of the region. Affordable housing was identified as a critical need within Oregon's infrastructure for recruitment and retention of employees, in particular for industry considering expansion. Access to child care was also highlighted as an essential part of infrastructure and supports to recruit and retain employees. Child care was mentioned in most counties with Linn county highlighting this as a critical need for families, specifically during an employee's first or second year, when turnover is the highest.

Internships

Internships were raised as a strategy to support training and exposure of a future workforce in various industries, while also enabling businesses to preview a potential employment relationship. It was suggested that several types of internships be encouraged and supported, starting them earlier in a young person's education and career life.

Incumbent worker training

Increasing training and support for the incumbent workforce was mentioned in most of the input sessions, with a particular focus on providing English as a second language and leadership development to increase advancement of the workforce within their workplace. Additionally, providing funding to businesses would enable the release of employees for training, and in turn, enable those employees to return to the business to train others.

Peer support/mentorships

Developing a peer support and mentorship system for employees and employers was identified as a strategy to increase recruitment and retention of a robust workforce.

Law changes to allow youth exposure

At each of the input sessions, law changes from the Bureau of Labor Industry (BOLI) were highlighted as a critical need to enable youth to work in key industries. Recruitment of youth was highlighted frequently across the region for employment, paid internships and industry exposure, though due to current laws, this option is limited and in many industries, not allowed.

Apprenticeships

While apprenticeships were not mentioned as frequently as other themes, the topic was raised in most of the counties. It is worth noting, that several areas of input relate to apprenticeships including industry strategies such as the success of on-the-job training to “grow our own.” This term was expressed throughout the input sessions as a successful strategy to build upon in looking to the future workforce.

B. Regional strengths, challenges and future workforce needs

Across the region strengths, challenges and future workforce needs were highlighted in the recruitment and retention of a robust workforce.

Strengths

Each input session agreed that a strong economy and the availability of good jobs are a strength across the region. It was also noted that there is a large and robust labor pool, with an increase in diverse applicants.

Additionally, Linn and Polk counties highlighted that there is a strong relationship between businesses and their local community colleges, with Linn county highlighting

their “Pipeline” model as a success in recruiting people into the workforce. Yamhill county noted that there are several programs available to industry and job seekers, and Marion noted that there are many jobs available for those with barriers. There was an overarching theme that there are strong partnerships between industry, K-12, higher education and agencies.

Challenges

While there is a large labor pool, it is challenging to find a qualified and experienced employee, in particular those with soft and essential skills. While the majority of input sessions highlighted the lack of soft skills, they also identified that there are barriers to employment such as affordable housing, transportation and child care. It should also be noted that the term “job hopping” was frequently raised, as employees leave for another opportunity with a minimal pay increase.

Additionally, Linn county added that access to child care was a very high need in their region in addition to affordable housing. Polk county raised the need for transportation, in addition to a challenge of finding qualified supervisors with technical skills. Yamhill county noted that while there are several programs available, many businesses don’t know that they exist. Marion county noted that recruiting across diverse cultures and in rural areas is a challenge and that the I-9 verification is a barrier.

Future workforce needs

Closing discussions focused on future workforce needs in five to ten years. In addition to the current workforce themes identified above, there was an emphasis that the region will need more workers to employ and employers will need to be prepared to recruit and retain an increasingly diverse workforce and the emerging younger generation. The themes below echoed throughout the regional discussions:

- A need for enhanced diversity and equity training for employers
- Strategies to increase youth engagement, including changing laws and regulations
- A continued focus on the need for soft skills that include communication, resiliency, leadership, critical thinking and interpersonal relationships
- A growing need for essential skills with adaptability, flexibility and ability to learn and utilize multiple skills (computer, operations, maintenance)
- A need for higher skills in the emerging workforce, including in technology and in the trades
- A workforce that demonstrates commitment and engagement that leads to increased retention

IV. Project Summary

A. Closing Comment

Inputs across the four-county region echo that a strong economy and a large labor pool are pillars of a strong and robust workforce, though the challenge of recruiting and retaining a qualified workforce remains high. As participants reflected upon the bold action they would like to see implemented across the region, common themes were strategies to support the current and prospective workforce increase soft and essential skills; expanded opportunities for career technical education and the trades; and for businesses to have training and supports that lead to increased recruitment and retention of the workforce.

This valuable input will inform the strategies of the Willamette Workforce Partnership as they continue to support the development of the areas' workforce.