

Skilled workers drive business growth

Key strategies give Washington industry an edge

High skilled workers help drive growth, foster innovation

The ability of Washington's economy to pull out of this lengthy recession rests in part on our ability to seize market opportunities when they arise. For many businesses, success will depend on a skilled workforce to create new and improved services and products.

The Workforce Board research shows that when employers do not have available workers with the right skills, jobs go unfilled and productivity suffers.

Low-skilled workers are always in demand, but it is high-skilled workers and the work they do that can drive innovation, expand business opportunities and produce incomes that support families and community services.

Lining up skills with needs

Even with fewer job openings and more workers eager to fill them, an estimated 28,000 Washington employers had difficulty finding the right person for at least some job openings last year, based on the Workforce Board's 2010 Employer Survey. Getting enough skilled workers to align with the open positions employers need filled requires a well-tuned education and training system, coordinated employer outreach, plentiful on-the-job training options, and a focus on helping successful industries grow even stronger.

Aligning training system with high-demand fields – Our current skill gap forecast shows a 10 percent gap in skilled workers in 2015 if college and apprenticeship enrollments stay at current levels. Expansion in enrollments needs to be targeted to high-demand fields.

Coordinated business outreach – Local WorkSource Centers are working with local and state partners to increase their outreach to businesses and improving job referrals.

Fine tuning the workforce - Expanded on-the-job training and customized training opportunities at community and technical colleges can boost business output and get people back to work quickly.

Ramping up successful industry clusters – Many of our most successful employers in Washington started here and decided to stay. But for these businesses to continue to be successful in a global marketplace, they need the concerted focus of workforce and economic development resources.



High Skills, High Wages A State Strategic Plan

High Skills, High Wages 2008-2018: Washington's Strategic Plan for Workforce Development outlines key strategies for how Washington's business and industry can maintain its competitive edge through a skilled and productive workforce.

The plan has a 10-year horizon to give us time to realize our vision of a stronger economy. Because we take a broad view of the many programs and initiatives aimed at boosting the job skills, paychecks and opportunities for Washington's workforce, we're able to recommend best practices that lead to real gains for both workers and the businesses that employ them.

We focus on three main groups: youth, adults and industry.

High Skills, High Wages Industry Strategies

From preparing workers for family-wage jobs to supplying industry with a skilled workforce, *High Skills, High Wages 2008-2018: Washington's Strategic Plan for Workforce Development* offers a comprehensive look at our state's workforce challenges and opportunities. Below are key industry-related strategies.

Industry clusters build on regional success

Whether it's wine in Walla Walla, aerospace in King and Snohomish counties or boat building in coastal communities, Washington's industry clusters help drive regional economies.

Washington is learning how to sustain and build on the successes of clusters, which are a network of inter-related businesses in a geographic region. By bringing together local, state and federal workforce and economic development resources, new ideas are generated and shared.

This process takes the form of Industry Skill Panels, a private-public partnership where employers, some of whom are competitors, work with a team of regional professionals to meet an industry's common economic and workforce development needs.

For example, in the case of the IntraCoastal Marine Alliance, the Skill Panel has been pivotal in helping grow Washington's share of the export boat building business in the global market.

Tipping the scale for creating new jobs

Recently, Washington has developed strategies that can boost an employer's ability to hire and help unemployed workers get jobs. This project, part of the Retooling Washington's Workforce initiative, is building on the state's current On-the-Job Training and Direct-Connect Training programs. The goal is to quickly expand these programs, boost business output and get people back to work.

Focusing resources on high employer demand fields

As education resources tighten, it's essential that post-high school programs continue to focus on high employer demand fields—that is, fields of learning where employer demand for people with a certain level of education exceeds the supply of graduates coming out of state colleges, universities and apprenticeships.

Year after year, Workforce Board surveys consistently show employers have the greatest difficulty finding workers with occupational skills that meet their needs. This "skill gap" has narrowed since the Workforce Board began monitoring it, but still represents a drag on our economy.

Linking employers with employment services

Every week, employers and jobseekers find each other through services provided by the state's network of WorkSource Centers. These career centers bring together a wide range of programs under one roof, making it a one-stop resource for job seekers and employers seeking workers.

While larger employers know to use WorkSource Centers, smaller employers have not taken advantage of the employment services available. By doing a better job of reaching out to smaller employers (under 50 employees) and area Chambers of Commerce, we hope to help these employers hire the workers they need to prosper, while getting more unemployed Washingtonians back to work.

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