

2010 Employer Survey

With openings down, every job matters

Tracking employer practices over time

As the only comprehensive survey of its kind in Washington, the 2010 Employer Survey sheds light on how well our workforce is meeting the needs of business, and the ongoing challenges we face in preparing Washington's workers for existing and future jobs. Since 1999, the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board has surveyed employers statewide six times.

Boom times vs. recession: A chance to compare

The 2007 Employer Survey captured employer opinions during a high-growth economy. In contrast, the latest survey was taken during the spring and summer of 2010, deep in our current recession. The numbers tell the story:

- **20 percent fewer firms** – The total number of Washington firms operating in 2010 was 175,800 –down 43,000 from 2007.
- **38 percent fewer firms hiring** – In 2007, 80 percent of the firms surveyed said they had hired new employees in the last 12 months—indicating that 175,000 firms were hiring back then. The most recent survey results indicate that 66,000 fewer firms were hiring in 2010.
- **Plenty of good workers to choose from** – In 2007, 60 percent of firms who were hiring had difficulty finding suitable candidates. That percent dropped to 26 percent in 2010.

The 2010 Employer Survey confirms what many of the 300,000 unemployed Washington residents understand too well. Job openings were infrequent while competition for the few jobs that were available was stiff. Until this year's survey, the percentage of employers reporting difficulty in hiring had never dropped below 45 percent.

Certain occupational skills still in demand

Results of the 2010 Employer Survey indicate that over 28,000 employers statewide had difficulty hiring. Over 11,000 of those employers, or 41 percent, had difficulty finding potential employees with vocational certificates. Almost 24,000 employers said they had difficulty hiring employees with occupation-specific skills. Looking to their future hiring, the percentage of employers who expect their demand for workers with vocational degrees and certifications will grow or at least stay the same in the next three years increased by 10 percent over 2007.



Hiring difficulties translate into lost opportunities

The Workforce Board projects how the survey results translate into numbers of employers statewide. While only 17 percent of employers experienced difficulty hiring in 2010, that percentage indicates that 28,000 employers had difficulty finding good candidates for at least some of their job openings. Employers' reports of the consequences of those hiring difficulties indicate that:

- 15,000 firms had lower productivity.
- 11,000 firms left at least one position unfilled.
- 8,000 firms did not develop new products or services.
- 6,000 firms outsourced more.
- 2,500 firms moved some part of their operation out of state.

More details are available at:
www.wtb.wa.gov/EmployerSurvey.asp

Employer Survey goes directly to the source

Every two years, the Workforce Board invites business and industry across Washington to participate in a survey that features detailed questions about everything from hiring challenges to employee skill gaps to company training practices. It's the only comprehensive statewide survey of its kind, and shines a light on common workforce issues across a wide range of industries.

By listening closely to local companies, the Workforce Board is able to advocate for workforce education and training programs that meet the needs of business and industry in every corner of the state.

Conducted in collaboration with the Washington Chamber of Commerce Executives and the Association of Washington Business, the survey received approximately 3,000 employer responses.

Some areas see steeper drop in hiring than others

While the percentage of firms hiring in 2010 declined substantially from 2007, some of the steepest drops occurred in Northwest Washington and the Olympic Peninsula. The only area not to experience a decline in percentage of firms hiring was Tri-Cities (Benton-Franklin counties) where there was no change. In the 2007 survey, Tri-Cities had the lowest percentage of firms hiring than of any other region.

Occupation and Employment Skills Hard to Find

Employers reported the greatest difficulty finding workers with occupation-specific skills, such as those required of an emergency room nurse. Employers also had a hard time finding employees with general workplace, or soft skills.

- **Occupation-specific skills**—85 percent of those reporting difficulty hiring.
- **Communication skills**—76 percent.
- **Ability to adapt** to changes in duties—75 percent.

Wanted: Workers with Vocational Training

As has been the case since the Employer Survey launched in 1999, the largest shortage of skilled workers continues to be middle-skill employees who have gone beyond high school to obtain a vocational certificate. About 11,400 firms are estimated to have had difficulty finding employees with an appropriate vocational certificate.

Employers Continue to Invest in Employee Training

Despite the downturn, employers continued to provide training to their employees. Nearly 60 percent of Washington employers paid for educational opportunities for at least some of their workforce during 2009-2010.

- **Large employers** with 100-plus employees—85 percent.
- **Medium employers** with 20 to 100 employees—75 percent.
- **Small employers** with 2 to 19 employees—55 percent.

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