

## MEET TARGETED WORKFORCE NEEDS OF INDUSTRY

### Objective

Creating and retaining a world-class workforce is an integral part of a prospering economy. If Oregon is to compete globally, it must be able to attract, retain, and train a workforce that can compete with any in the world. To achieve this end, we must create new high performance work environments and flexible, responsive education and job training programs that are competency-based, responsive to the demands in a rapidly changing labor market, and are tied to new technologies, customer needs, and evolving production processes. To address the upcoming labor shortage, Oregon must drastically expand its pool of qualified workers, and we must take steps to ensure that all Oregonians are able to participate in the workforce.

### What Oregon Has Accomplished Thus Far

This is a new initiative for the Oregon Business plan, but it incorporates some items that were included previously in other parts of the plan. Industry leaders have repeatedly raised workforce quality as a critical issue for business success in Oregon. In the opening section of this booklet, *Learning to Compete*, we discussed the importance of bolstering Oregon's manufacturing workforce. The PreK-20 initiative outlines ways to restructure the way we deliver, budget for, and evaluate education in Oregon. The Economic Innovation initiative connects university research to industries and focuses on key innovation opportunities within clusters. Here, we complement those efforts by tackling two of Oregon's biggest workforce challenges and opportunities as they relate to the *People* part of the Four-P strategy.

- Connecting education and training with workforce needs through an aligned set of certificates and credentials – and through greater employer collaboration with educators
- Increasing participation and stability in the workforce by attracting people of diverse backgrounds, Oregonians with disabilities, and Oregonians with young children, while taking bold steps to stem drug use in job seekers and high school students with a goal to dramatically increase the number of drug-free workplaces.

### The Agenda for 2006 and Beyond

#### Better Connect Education And Training With Skills That Meet Employer and Worker Needs

Oregon must take steps to ensure that students are prepared for the demands of the industries in which they will be employed. To meet this goal, employers and industry associations should work with the various education boards and workforce systems to develop curriculum and credentials to better connect education with economic opportunities. Specific recommendations include:

- **Renew the Value of the High School Diploma.** Employers should participate extensively as the Board of Education reviews the high school diploma requirements. Employers should advocate for: aligning high school graduation requirements with entry requirements to Oregon's colleges and universities and with workplace credentials used for employee selection and advancement. Student demonstration of proficiency should also be a requirement of graduation, using assessment tools that assure consistency throughout the state and that document both basic and workplace readiness skills
- **Develop a standardized skills assessment tool and accompanying work readiness certificate.** Employers should work with Oregon Workforce Investment Board (OWIB) to develop the assessment tool and readiness certificate. These items should be used by all Worksource Oregon centers and in all Oregon community colleges, and should be consistent with the assessment tools and certificates utilized by the education system. Test this concept, prior to adoption, to understand the financial implications and ensure that it has value for businesses and workers, and has currency in the marketplace.

**Adopt a policy that clarifies the state's role in incumbent worker training.** OWIB should take the lead in developing the policy, and should identify flexible resources to assist businesses with training needs, especially for low-skill adult workers.

- **Tailor community college training programs to better reflect current and future employer needs.** Oregon desperately needs to develop a culture of continually monitoring employer needs as they change over time. Larger structural reforms are needed, but a good start includes increasing collaboration between employers and community colleges. Recommendations include:
  - Involving business leaders in academic instruction and in developing skills assessment tools, utilizing

employers as technical training instructors/partners, including education system staff in workforce development discussions, and forming common agreements on worker readiness standards and certification.

- **Modularize training & build flexibility into curriculum.** Community colleges should build modularized training and career pathways for adult workers. These programs should adhere to the standards and certification discussed above.
- **Review OBP Cluster Submissions to identify clusters with specific workforce challenges,** such as the need for regulatory (FDA) training for the bioscience industry, replacement workers in the metals industry, entry level through high level candidates to fill jobs in the semiconductor industry, etc.
- **The state should continue to support three critical workforce priorities:**
  - **Engineering.** Increasing the number of engineers through the leadership of the Engineering Technology Council (ETIC). Develop a state- supported marketing campaign to highlight the benefits of general interest and options for careers in Math and Science that reaches a broad audience. Meet our goal of doubling the output of engineering and creating a top tier program by 2009.
  - **Manufacturing.** Manufacturing is at the heart of many of Oregon's most important traded sector industries. With looming retirements, we need to secure a pipeline of talented new employees. Build on the Cross-Industry Skills Standards project, using the career pathways model that reduces cycle time in training. The state should also work with employers and manufacturing associations to develop a sustainable media/communications campaign to promote Oregon manufacturing and careers
  - **Health Care.** Establish a public-private healthcare workforce institute to provide consistent and reliable research about healthcare occupational shortages and develop policies and resources to resolve the shortage. Review and apply strategies outlined in the Oregon Nursing Leadership Council's strategic plan, Solutions to Oregon's Nursing Shortage, and the Oregon Center for Nursing's annual report.

#### **Increase Participation and Stability in the Competitive Workforce**

- **Launch OBP diversity task force with the goal of developing a comprehensive diversity initiative for the December 2006 Leadership Summit.** For Oregon to be globally competitive, its public and private entities must be a reflection of the communities that they serve. The demographics of Oregon and the nation are changing rapidly, and its future workforce will, and should, change accordingly. The bottom line: Diversity is a business issue. Oregon companies are being presented with a new pool of potential talent, a new customer base, and new consumer preferences. Making diversity a top priority will be critical to the success or failure of these companies in the future. This effort must be statewide and begin with delivering a quality education to every Oregonian, from grade school through graduate school. The OBP Diversity task force will convene in early in 2006 to begin developing this initiative. Please contact the workforce initiative leaders to become a part of this effort.
- **Increase inclusion of people with disabilities in the competitive workforce:** Individuals with disabilities represent a highly qualified worker pool that, with proper accommodation, can bring much needed skills and talent to the workforce. We must adopt business strategies that demonstrate that recruiting and retaining workers with disabilities is good for business. The Oregon Business Leadership Network, together with Oregon businesses and public sector partners, should work to:
  - **Develop** a private/public clearinghouse of accommodation resources and brokerages that provide quick access for businesses to Oregon resources around workplace accommodation in a way that meets business needs within sectors.
  - **Initiate** a dialogue between businesses and state resource organizations around creating mechanisms for a smoother interface between accommodation expertise and Oregon business.
  - **Maintain** an interactive website that provides a forum for business-to-business networking, and establish strategic links with national, regional, state, and local expertise on accommodation.
  - **Provide** a series of business-led leadership forums on linking accommodation strategies and measures to business plans.
- **Make Strategic Investments in Early Care and Education.** Over the next decade, it is projected that 85 percent of Oregon's workforce will consist of working parents. Our future economic success is tied to making childcare accessible for workers, affordable for employers, and of the highest possible quality for children. Oregon businesses and public sector partners should work together to:

- Create a committee of policy makers and business leaders to evaluate Oregon’s existing employer child care tax credits. If necessary, recommend changes to make them more attractive to business, and advocate for those changes at the Legislature. If the tax credits are viable in their current form, assist in educating employers about their availability.
- Champion the use of structural indicators to assess and improve the quality of childcare in Oregon communities. There are seven structural indicators that lead to high quality childcare. A pilot project to evaluate facilities and distribute quality information is currently taking place in the tri-county area.
- **Build a Drug-free Oregon Workforce.** Businesses in five of nine Oregon Business Plan Bus Tour stops in 2004 identified drug use as a key obstacle to hiring otherwise qualified workers, and the percentage of Oregon employers identifying on-the-job drug use as a great concern has risen to an all-time high. Oregon employers (public and private), under the leadership of the Workdrugfree Employer Task Group, should:
  - **Mount a statewide campaign to boost the percentage of certified drug-free workplaces from 25 percent in 2006 to 75 percent in 2008.** The campaign should include employer-to-employer education and mentoring, technical assistance and training, and a drug-free workplace certification program. It should also engage insurers and legislators in exploring financial incentives that encourage drug-free workplace programs.
  - **Raise legislators’ awareness of the impact of drugs on business competitiveness.** Continue to engage them in developing legislation to better align employer responsibility to accommodate medical marijuana cardholders with workforce safety and productivity needs
  - **Assist Oregon’s Workforce Investment Board in establishing a Substance Abuse Prevention Standard for job seekers that meets employer needs.** Include a workforce development agency policy statement and supervisor and staff training, and insure improved linkage with substance abuse evaluation services. Evaluate the standard through a demonstration project.
  - **Assist the State Board of Education in creating a Career-Related Learning Standard to prepare students for employment in a drug-free workplace.** Assist education agencies in strengthening school drug policies and administrator training and encourage state agencies to include student preparation for the workforce in drug prevention initiatives.

Business Initiative Leaders	Public Sector Partners
Eileen Drake, PCC Structural, Inc. Elizabeth King, ESCO Corporation Don Skundrick, LTM Inc.	Lucy Baker, Oregon Business Leadership Network Claire Berger, Workforce Policy Coordinator, Office of the Governor Mimi Bushman, Workdrugfree Lita Colligan, Workforce Policy Advisor, Office of the Governor Tom Olson, Oregon Employment Department Greg White, Executive Staff, Oregon Workforce Investment Board

**Background Resources**

“Building a Drug-Free Oregon Workforce.” Oregon Business Plan initiative proposal (October, 2005)

“Enhance the vitality of Oregon’s business and workforce climate through increased inclusion of people with disabilities in the competitive workforce and the buying power of this customer base.” Oregon Business Plan initiative proposal (October, 2005)

“Build Oregon’s Economy and Workforce Through Strategic Investments in Early Care and Education.” Oregon Employment Department (August, 2005)

Oregon’s Manufacturing Workforce Strategy (December, 2005)

Oregon Center for Nursing, <http://www.oregoncenterfornursing.org>.

**Tell us what you think:** to make the Oregon Business Plan stronger, we need your comments. **Tell us what you think!** And it will help us refine this initiative.