

The Convening on Workforce

Tabletop Discussion Feedback Report

Wisconsin Economic Development Association 2017 Fall Conference
Sept. 27-29, 2017 – Elkhart Lake, WI

The Wisconsin Economic Development Association's 2017 Fall Conference – the *Convening on Workforce* – employed a new format this year to gather feedback from Wisconsin private and public stakeholders on the state's workforce development challenges and potential solutions. The conference, co-hosted by the Wisconsin Workforce Development Association, featured a series of tabletop discussion sessions on critical workforce issues. Most of the conference's 160 attendees, which included Wisconsin businesses, economic development professionals, and workforce development professionals, participated in the discussions.

For the conference's first tabletop discussion session, attendees assembled into two groups led by professional facilitators and were asked to respond to five questions regarding workforce challenges facing Wisconsin businesses; the strengths and weaknesses of current state workforce programs; and potential improvements to Wisconsin workforce programs and policies. The following five questions were asked:

1. What are the main workforce development challenges your company or the businesses in your community are facing?
2. How are the workforce shortage challenges your company or the businesses in your community are facing effecting business growth?
3. Which current state workforce development programs and policies have been effective for your company or the businesses in your community?
4. If your company or the businesses in your community do not take advantage of current state workforce development programs (e.g. Fast Forward, etc.), what is the reason?
5. How can current state workforce development programs and policies be improved?

The subsequent pages of this report provide an overview of the feedback gathered during the tabletop discussion and through a written survey that asked the same five questions. The report identifies common themes generated during the discussion (and through the written survey) and attaches a response percentage to the top themes that emerged. Please note the survey is in no way scientific. However, WEDA believes it reflects the opinions of WEDA Fall Conference attendees on critical workforce development issues facing Wisconsin.

Question 1: What are the main workforce development challenges your company or the businesses in your community are facing?

Answers	Response Percent
Lack of available workers (both skilled and unskilled)/shortage of candidates	21%
Lack of available childcare	16%
Lack of reliable transportation to work for employees	15%
New hires/candidates are not work ready	13%
Lack of housing/affordable housing	10%
Potential hires have difficulty passing pre-employment drug screening	9%
Benefits cliff (need a tiered benefits system to incentivize work)	6%
High employee turnover rate	3%
Lack of effective talent recruitment programs/efforts	3%
Economic development tools need to incorporate talent attraction and not just business attraction	2%
Company is losing entry level employees to Amazon and to Foxconn	2%

Question 2: How are the workforce shortage challenges your company or the businesses in your community are facing effecting business growth?

Answers	Response Percent
Unable to grow or expand	44%
Turning down new customers and business opportunities	17%
Can't hire enough workers to operate at peak capacity	14%
Limiting investment in current business location	5%
Contractors have difficulty completing projects on time and on budget	5%
Takes much longer to fill open positions	5%
Losing businesses and potential new development projects to other areas/states	5%
Difficulty attracting new business and encouraging existing businesses to expand	5%

Question 3: Which current state workforce development programs and policies have been effective for your company or the businesses in your community?

Answers	Response Percent
Wisconsin Fast Forward	23%
Youth apprenticeship programs	17%
Talent Upload program (Fox Cities)	13%
Academic and Career Planning	13%
Inspire program	10%
Workforce Advancement Training (WAT) Grant program	7%
WTCS customized training programs	7%
Business and education partnerships	7%
Business partnerships with Veterans Affairs	3%

Question 4: If your company or the businesses in your community do not take advantage of current state workforce development programs (e.g. Fast Forward, etc.), what is the reason?

Answers	Response Percent
Too much red tape; application and reporting requirements too cumbersome	33%
Not aware of state programs; lack of outreach from state	15%
Fast Forward application and reporting requirements are too time consuming	11%
Payout under Fast Forward is too slow; huge lag time between application process and grant award	11%
Most programs are hard to understand; difficult to navigate	9%
Programs not flexible enough	7%
Programs don't provide enough return on investment for businesses	7%
Wage requirements for Fast Forward are an obstacle	7%

Question 5: How can current state workforce development programs and policies be improved?

Answers	Response Percent
Simplify; streamline workforce grant programs (e.g., Fast Forward)	25%
Create/highlight programs that attract and retain talent	17%
More focus on soft skill training/employability skills	9%
Workforce programs should not be tied to job creation	9%
Increase awareness of programs	9%
Remove wage requirements for Fast Forward	7%
Seek more input on programs from private sector	7%
Focus on increasing skill level of existing staff/workforce	7%
Eliminate the benefits cliff	5%
Strengthen collaboration between business and education partners	5%