



OREGON WORKFORCE
PARTNERSHIP

Better Skills • Better Jobs

For Immediate Release

September 3, 2010

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Oregon Workforce Partnership Publishes Framework to Get Oregonians Back to Work

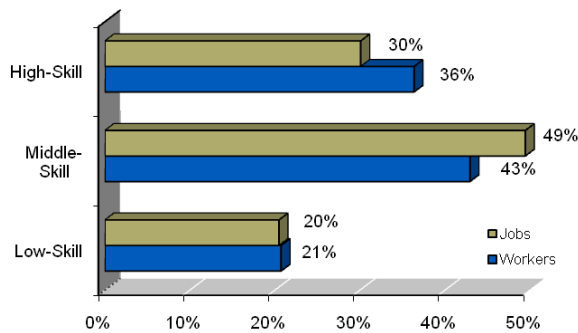
Eugene, OR – In honor of Labor Day, the Oregon Workforce Partnership (OWP) is pleased to present *Putting Oregon Back to Work*, a framework for developing a more highly skilled workforce.

“Our current budget crisis requires us to think differently about our public investments and services related to education, training and workforce development,” states Andrew McGough, OWP board member and Executive Director of Worksystems Inc. “We can’t keep spending our limited resources on the same approaches. We need new ideas and the collective will to do things differently.”

Putting Oregon Back to Work identifies a number of factors that require new thinking to help Oregon’s workers and businesses recover from the current economic situation. Since early August, articles have appeared across the country calling attention to our nation’s “jobless recovery.” Economists are beginning to define a “new normal” where high rates of long term unemployment are the norm, even as industries begin to recover.

For Oregon, this situation is even more serious. According to the Oregon Business Plan website, Oregon's per capita personal income slid to 90% of the U.S. average in the last 10 years, reducing individual prosperity and resources for state services. In addition, Oregon has not produced a sufficient number of skilled workers to fill the approximately 49% of jobs that require more than high-school but less than a four-year degree, the largest sector of our economy.

**Oregon Jobs and Workers by Skill Level,
2007**



Sources: US Department of Labor & US Bureau of the Census

More than 360,000 assessments of adults seeking jobs show that 45% of those assessed have a basic skills gap in math and 34% have a skills gap in reading. In other words, based on their basic skills, it is likely that these Oregonians will only be able to qualify for about one-third of the job openings in Oregon's economy.

In addition, the lack of employment opportunities for younger workers creates a permanent "lost generation" of workers. Research shows they will never be able to catch up in terms of wages and career advancement.

As the Oregon Business Plan points out, the state is spending more of its limited public resources on human services and prisons and less on education and skill development. Significant structural shifts in key industries will require current and new workers to constantly upgrade their skills to survive. And the reality is that most of these people will have to find ways to acquire new skills while still employed – creating a generation of working learners. We need to change how our publicly funded systems skill people up, based on this reality.

"We need our policy investments to recognize new realities. We need to get young people into jobs so they can learn the skills they need to become our workforce of tomorrow. We need to get more training to people while they are still employed. We need to expand the tools we have available to make it more cost effective for employers to skill up their own workers. And we need to better align resources at the local level with the needs of local economies," states Agnes Balassa, Executive Director, Oregon Workforce Partnership. "Oregon has become recognized nationally for innovative programs, but most of these are funded with very limited federal resources."

Putting Oregon Back to Work defines three strategies for moving Oregon's economy:

1. ***Grow jobs.*** Align incentives and programs to maximize job growth, while targeting critical industries with high growth potential and/or large numbers of replacement jobs.
2. ***Align workforce and education programs to create a comprehensive, articulated skill development system.*** Build on Oregon's recent investments into career pathways, system integration, youth employment, On-The-Job Training, current worker training and other approaches to skill building to assure that all Oregonians are able to develop their skills while supporting their families and the businesses for which they work.
3. ***Assure that investments into skill building align with the needs of industry by expanding the role of Local Workforce Investment Boards for greater efficiency and maximum return.*** Local Workforce Investment Boards are already charged with developing local plans that align education and training services in their communities with the needs of business and economic development. Expand the authority of these boards by requiring that state investments into skill building are integrated into local workforce development plans creating comprehensive skill building plans. This will result in greater efficiencies, alignment and return on investment

“We recognize that this is a long term strategy, and we’re in for the long haul,” states Jim Fong, OWP Board member and Director of The Job Council. “We believe there are some things that are absolutely mission critical and low cost, like better utilizing Local Workforce Investment Boards. Many of our suggestions focus on getting paychecks into people’s hands and keeping them employed, like current worker training, investing in the youth employment program and expanding Oregon’s current On-The-Job Training program. Even modest investments like these can generate significant return on investment to our local economies.”

The Oregon Workforce Partnership (OWP) is a non-partisan, private/public, statewide association. Our mission is to build a more highly skilled workforce to support and expand the state’s economy.

Putting Oregon Back to Work is available at <http://oregonwfpartnership.org/>

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