

**HIGHER EDUCATION COORDINATING COMMISSION  
FUTURE READY OREGON**

*Manufacturing Industry Consortium*

**EMPLOYER FOCUS GROUPS**

**INPUT SUMMARY**

*October 1, 2024*

**JENSEN STRATEGIES**

# JENSEN STRATEGIES

## Management consultants since 2012

- ✓ Portland Based
- ✓ Public Sector Focus (State and local government)

## Services:

- ✓ Collaborative Decision-making / Facilitation
- ✓ Organizational Development
- ✓ Policy Analysis
- ✓ Executive Recruitment

# JENSEN STRATEGIES

## Focus Group Facilitators



**Erik Jensen**

*Principal*  
Healthcare and Tech  
Facilitator



**Amelia Wallace**

*Senior Associate*  
Manufacturing  
Facilitator

# PROJECT OVERVIEW

## OBJECTIVE:

To **inform the Manufacturing Consortium's discussions and recommendations**, through a series of focus groups, obtain information and perspectives from **Oregon manufacturing employers** on their experience and needs related to **workforce planning, recruitment, training, development, and retention.**

# FOCUS GROUPS

Four, in-person facilitated group sessions held around the state.

Additional input collected via 1:1 interviews.



# FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

## Manufacturing Employer Participants:

- COOs/CEOs
- HR, recruitment, and talent acquisition leaders and professionals

## Manufacturing Sectors:

- Wood
- Metal
- Food and agriculture
- Semi-conductor production
- Regional specific producers
- Large and small company representation (60 - 1000+ FTE)
- Local, state, and globally operating businesses

## Results:

- 21 Employer Participants
- 1-7 per session
- Two Manufacturing Consortium members participated as an employer



# FOCUS GROUP PREPARATION & DEVELOPMENT

Conducted 4 pre-assessment interviews with 6 Consortium members and/or other manufacturing industry leaders.

Interviews provided foundation for..

- Preliminary identification of key issues
- Understanding what information would be helpful to the Consortium
- Seeking potential focus group participants

Collaborated with HECC staff **and many partners** to help identify employer representatives to invite

# DISCUSSION PARAMETERS

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Based on the Foundational Focus Areas per HECC Consortia:

## DEMAND PLANNING

in the context of workforce demand. What data do employers use? How do they predict their workforce needs?

## SKILLS, CREDENTIALS, EDUCATION, AND TRAINING NEEDS

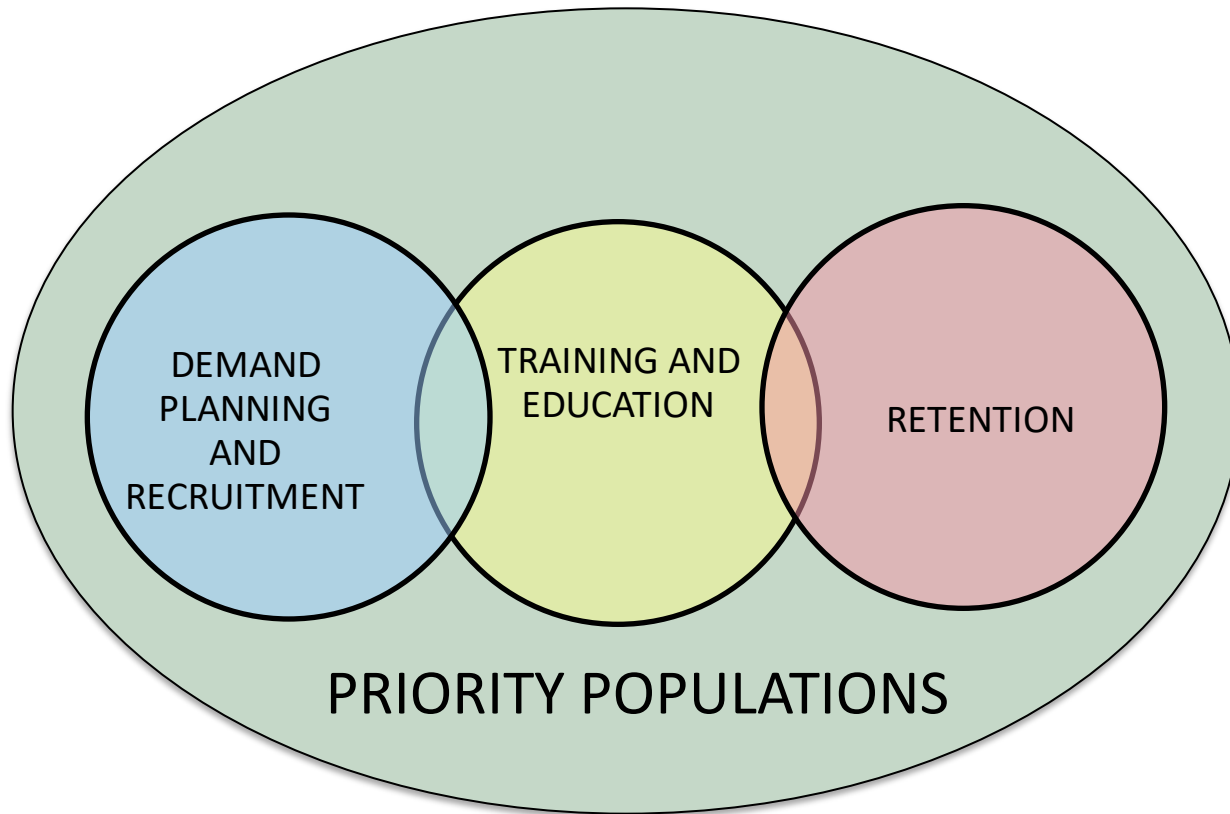
What are the high value and industry recognized credentials for that specific sector? Are there clear pathways and opportunities from entry to mid-level credentials that are in high demand? What are the perspectives of employers about how we can integrate education and training resources to meet the needs of the employers?

## EQUITY AND INCLUSION / DIVERSIFYING WORKFORCE

the strategies employers are deploying to recruit and retain a diverse workforce? What are the biggest challenges in that specific industry sector to recruit and retain a diverse workforce?

## SECTOR SPECIFIC QUESTIONS





# FOCUS GROUP FRAMEWORK

## AGENDA

- Welcome / Overview
- Focus Group Introductions
- Discussion Overview
- Discussion Topics\*
  - Demand Planning / Recruitment
  - Training / Education
  - Career Pathways
  - Retention

## HANDOUTS

- Agenda
- Manufacturing Consortium Member List
- Future Ready Oregon Information

\* All topics included discussion of priority population workforce approaches

# FOCUS GROUPS EXPERIENCE

- Participants appreciated being invited and the regional approach
- Full and robust participation by all attendees
- Input was constructive, thoughtful, and solution-oriented
- Recognized addressing workforce issues does not rest solely on the State
- Participants developed connections among each other
- Participants desire continued involvement and dialogue with HECC/State



# FOCUS GROUPS FINDINGS

# FINDINGS: GENERAL CONTEXT DISCUSSION NOTES

- ✓ Insights are based on on participants' input
- ✓ Perspectives were shared by a majority of employers
- ✓ Findings presented today are a summary
- ✓ Most findings are relevant across the regions, but some are region specific

# FINDINGS: GENERAL CONTEXT

## STATE OF THE WORKFORCE

- Employers recognize traditional recruitment and retention approaches aren't working – and it's not just the manufacturing industry
  - Generational change
  - Mobility of workforce, increase of online hiring,
  - Cost of living (housing, childcare, food, transportation, etc.,)
  - Other socioeconomic challenges
- Community colleges and other training programs have valuable assets, but are facing high costs and other challenges
- COVID-19 Impacts
  - Essential workers - domestic importance of industry and employee burnout
  - Temporary funds/policies- unemployment benefits, hiring bonuses
  - Long term changes in economic expectations for employers and employees

# FINDINGS: GENERAL CONTEXT

## STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

- Manufacturing often has tight profit margins – efficiency and resiliency tradeoff
- Many face historic, often negative general perception of industry
- Challenging industry conditions are often baked in – primarily in person work, often inflexible production schedules, low to high physical demands, and safety
- Industry impacts are highly interrelated with local, national, and global macroeconomic and political forces. As well as core domestic production needs or goals (e.g., CHIPS act)

# FINDINGS: EMPLOYER EXPERIENCE

## DEMAND PLANNING

### Data or information sources

- Internal - month/quarter/annual basis
  - Sales forecast
  - Production goals
  - Organization retirements
  - Current vacancies
  - Overtime/leave utilization
- Production/Manufacture site details
  - Regulatory environment
  - Cost of living
  - Demographics / Population Trends
- Other data Sources
  - Bureau of Labor Statistics
  - Commodities markets
  - County / Regional sources

### External factors or drivers

- Global / national economic trends
- Raw material / supply chain impacts
- Legislative measures
  - Pay equity
  - 55-hour rule
  - Paid leave
  - Meals and breaks



# FINDINGS: EMPLOYER EXPERIENCE RECRUITMENT

- Different recruitment challenges for entry and skilled labor
  - Essential skilled roles are most critical workforce need (technical and management)
- Entry level - applications up, but struggling with quality/follow through
- High expectations on earning/advancement timeline
- Companies feel they are trading employees
  - Some employees squeezed out by life circumstances or chase superficial wage increase
  - New normal of moving around companies – hard to interpret resumes and break cycle
- Creative analysis and approaches needed to effectively recruit for non-degree path roles

## Difficult Positions to Fill:

- Electricians
- Technicians(assorted)
- Mechanics
- Welding
- Middle management

# FINDINGS: EMPLOYER EXPERIENCE RECRUITMENT (cont.)

- Recruitment Approaches for Existing Vacancies

  - Entry Level

    - Online Advertising\*/Postings (e.g., company website, Indeed, Craigslist)
    - Radio, TV, billboards, streaming, social media
    - Employee referral and word of mouth\*
    - Temp Agencies\*
    - Employment Department platforms
    - Temporary International Worker Resources
    - Job fairs

  - Management or Skilled Roles

    - Internal recruitment
    - LinkedIn (some Indeed)
    - Recruiters

NOTE: Despite increase used of automated tools, most screen by hand

- Engagement for Future Recruitment (and, sometimes retention)

  - School engagement: partnering on programs to build awareness/experience around manufacturing jobs and careers – elementary to high school
  - Higher Education: partnering with institutions for certifications, training, apprenticeships, etc.
  - Community engagement: sponsoring local businesses, events, charities, etc.

# FINDINGS: EMPLOYER EXPERIENCE EDUCATION / TRAINING

## Gaps and challenges

- **Rapidly changing field** – hard for workforce or academia to keep up
- **Skills gap** – physical/physics aptitude, problem solving, basic finance, management
- **Barriers** – cost, transportation, bank access, language, job security, time commitment/training schedule
- **Availability** – geographic distribution of programs, instructor shortage
- **Limited by initial interest in the field** – self selecting pathway with persistent gender and workforce composition perceptions

Employers want to engage more, but..

- Informal, individual relationships with training organizations and instructors
- Limited time and resource capacity (leadership or designated roles)

HOWEVER - long standing conversation, and some progress has been made

# FINDINGS: EMPLOYER EXPERIENCE EDUCATION / TRAINING (cont.)

## Entry-level Labor

- Employers know they have a role and unique inhouse training needs – many take pride in supporting universal workforce development
- Key needed skills: communication, timeliness, professional conduct

NEED: More exposure to field and basic employability coaching

## Skilled Labor

- Some high demand, essential roles require very high level of hours and credentialing [i.e., electrician – journeyman requirement], and which may or may not be transferable for out of state candidates
- Technical skill does not necessarily follow training or management aptitude

NEED: A larger, local, qualified workforce to recruit from  
and new management training approaches or resources

# FINDINGS: EMPLOYER EXPERIENCE

## CAREER PATHWAYS

- All valued ability to provide pathway for current or prospective employees – some have robust materials, but recognize resource intensive
- Companies can be limited by amount of sustainable, inhouse, advancement opportunities they can offer incumbent employees
- Employee advancement – self selecting, high expectations, union/exempt
- For non-degree path roles (i.e., technician versus an engineer), not clear path or overall understanding of potential careers overlaps
- Traditional degree-based career advancement opportunities can be more challenging for incumbent employees and priority populations to pursue

# FINDINGS: EMPLOYER EXPERIENCE RETENTION

- Contributing factors to retention are changing
- Turnover rates – highest in first days, up to 90 days to one year
- It's all about culture – being the employer of choice

## STRATEGIES IN USE:

### *Culture/Workplace*

- Standard schedules
- Overstaffing when possible
- Honoring leave requests/sabbatical
- Employee engagement committees and satisfaction surveys
- Internal service navigator(s) for employee benefits
- Onsite physical therapist
- Many types of at work and community based social or benefit events

### *Direct/Indirect Financial Benefits*

- Staying competitive, as possible, with wages and benefits
- Bonuses
  - Hiring (limited now), retention, referral, use of PTO
- Shift differential pay
- New skill/cross-training differential
- Tuition – payments, reimbursements
- Housing or transportation assistance



# TAKEAWAYS AND OPPORTUNITIES

# KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **There are more opportunities for Oregon manufacturing employers and higher education institutions to enhance their working relationships and communication related to connecting education with workforce needs.**
  - Curriculum development
  - Career pathway definition and promotion
  - Student preparation and exposure to their future workplaces/positions/careers
- **Oregon manufacturing employers are experiencing the most challenges with...**
  - (1) general professional preparedness of entry level workers and
  - (2) limited pool and challenges training up qualified candidates for skilled and management positions.
- **The location, duration, and specificity of training programs matters for employers when evaluating the feasibility to support access to these resources for incumbent workers.** And, tuition support is not enough to make accessible for employees (e.g., earn/learn, job security, health benefits, transportation, etc.,)



# KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Employers are interested in further exploration of ‘tried and true’ opportunities for workforce development that would be appropriate for Oregon.**
  - Results tracking
  - CTE enhancement
  - Initiatives from other states or countries
- **Manufacturing employers stress the importance of a continued voice in State policy and regulation development as well as implementation.**

# OPPORTUNITIES: GENERAL

Foster and support opportunities for manufacturing employers and higher education practitioners to collaborate on developing and implementing educational curriculum and associated programs that support student success in the workforce.

# OPPORTUNITIES: DEMAND PLANNING

1. Can the State support or lead efforts to research what the “new normal” workforce planning trends are? Such as, supply chain, workforce preferences, and legislative requirements.

## Sample list:

- Lead time standards for domestic and global supply chain assumptions
- Industry workforce condition (position vacancy/retention statistics by position, category, sector, regional and statewide)
- Demographics and population trends (regional, state, national)
- Workforce behavior and preferences (attractive benefit types, job features, valuation of salary vs. life balance, utilization of leave, projected retirement age, tenure in positions, overtime preferences, etc.,)
- Labor planning recommendations or consultation support for new legislation implementation

# OPPORTUNITIES: RECRUITMENT

1. Identify partnerships or collaborative efforts the State and businesses could undertake to improve the perception of manufacturing careers to potential employees.
2. Continue efforts to improve Oregon's reputation as an attractive, affordable location for employees and businesses.
3. Support further work to identify and compile results from skill mapping efforts between complementary industries to facilitate partnerships that promote mutually beneficial workforce development and recruitment opportunities.
4. Support review and consideration of changes to Oregon's trade certification requirements (e.g., electricians) to increase depth and diversity of candidate pool. Related, consider reciprocity agreements or a similar programs, that allow for transferability of trade based/technical professionals with other states.

# OPPORTUNITIES: EDUCATION AND TRAINING

1. Support creation of more locally based, standalone, short term, training opportunities and resources that can better meet incumbent and priority population employee needs.
2. Establish or promote existing resources and opportunities for regional employers to collaborate more consistently in partnerships with local educational institutions.
3. Continue and enhance general exposure to manufacturing skills and potential careers in childhood education. If possible, start in elementary school.
4. Evaluate how program availability and acceptance criteria for degree based training impacts access for nontraditional candidates (e.g., formerly incarcerated, older adults, ESL, etc.,).
5. Explore training approaches and equipment, and opportunities that may be more accessible for entry level priority population candidates of all abilities (e.g., training on smaller forklifts).
6. Help employers provide cross training/other opportunities.

# OPPORTUNITIES: EDUCATION AND TRAINING

## (cont.)

### Key Beneficial Training and Preparedness Areas (for new and incumbent workers)

- Professionalism - workplace expectations/preparedness, standard office platform proficiency (e.g., Microsoft Outlook/Word, other), career planning
- “Pragmatic finance” - business and personal financial education
  - Profit and loss statements
  - Company finance or sales forecast information
  - Life financial planning (budgeting, college/loan financing, long term career / retirement planning, etc.,)
- Management and leadership

# OPPORTUNITIES: CAREER PATHWAYS

1. Encourage K-12 and manufacturing related higher education programs to help students meaningfully consider and evaluate career options for their best interest earlier before reaching their first position.
2. Provide additional models, resources, and consulting support to help businesses to define and promote internal career pathways - especially for small or emergent companies.
3. Provide models of “bridge positions” or role adjustment opportunities to provide additional advancement levels and increase staff / team capacity.
4. Support and enhance mentorship programs that can promote skill building as well as grow the representation of priority population employees throughout the workforce.

# OPPORTUNITIES: RETENTION

1. Help employers identify, fund, and appropriately provide holistic, often individualized, employee support to avoid losing from workforce due to nonperformance related challenge(s).
  - E.g., local cost of living (housing, transportation), child or family care needs availability or cost
2. Provide education and resources to help manufacturing employer leadership and staff operate effectively, and safely, in multi-cultural environments.
3. Support research to help employers identify most meaningful benefits and workplace culture features from workforce perspective to prioritize mutually beneficial human resource investments.





# QUESTIONS

Q & A

THANK YOU!

