

**DATE:** December 13, 2021  
**TO:** Commissioners Keller and Meyer  
**FROM:** Leslie Barstow  
**CC:** Eric Johnson, Sean Eagan, Judi Doremus  
**SUBJECT:** Workforce Development Survey Results and Recommendations

**A. BRIEFING**

This memo is intended to brief the Commission on the Port's employer survey of their workforce development needs. Staff seeks feedback and guidance on next steps from the Workforce Development Committee. While no formal action is request of the full Commission, staff always welcomes input from all five commissioners.

**B. BACKGROUND**

The Workforce Development Committee—with visibility by the full Commission—directed staff in May 2021 to focus the Port's workforce development strategy on well-paying jobs that do not require a four-year college degree. Fields of particular interest would include: the building trades, the manufacturing trades and transportation and logistics trades. The Committee also approved a roadmap for developing the Port's workforce development strategy.

The first step of that strategy would involve a survey of employer needs. In early summer, staff proposed utilizing Survey Monkey and the Port's Tideflats e-mail distribution list to conduct an initial survey of this group's workforce needs. The distribution list contains 170 executives and key personnel of companies located on the Tacoma Tideflats. Staff also proposed more in-depth executive interviews with selected firms. In late summer, the Committee approved moving forward. Surveys were conducted in the fall of 2021.

**C. SURVEY RESULTS**

Attached are the survey results.

Major themes resulting from the survey include:

- Most of the respondents plan to increase hiring but struggle to find qualified employees.
- Basic workforce and interpersonal skills (attendance, reliability, ethics, communication) are the leading challenge for recruiting new employees.
- Insufficient technical skills also are an issue. Most cited are CDL, forklift training, mechanic expertise.
- Individuals with high school and/or limited post-secondary training are preferred. Advanced degrees are not necessary.
- While most respondents would be willing to take on unpaid interns, the numbers are not overwhelming; most insist that the individual be at least 18 years of age.
- Employers are interested in additional technical skills development training for their existing employees.

#### **D. EXECUTIVE INTERVIEWS**

Attached are copies of the notes taken by staff from the executive interviews.

Major themes from the executive interviews include:

- As with the survey respondents, these executives cite youth exposure to these jobs as a challenge.
- While apprenticeships did not rank highly as a need in the employer survey, they are important for the construction trades.
- L&I currently offers a list of certified apprenticeship programs in the state. These programs provide the skills contractors need in their workforce and the barriers to entry are not complicated. The challenge is getting kids to think about the trades. For the construction industry, the top priority is recruiting high school kids to apply for the apprenticeships.
- Most companies are willing to train on the job or require just 1 year of experience; again, basic employment skills were deemed most critical.
- The marine manufacturing sector was an exception, with Motive Marine looking for 5 years of welding experience and Safe Boats, who gives a basic skills test to applicants to see if they understand a shop environment and basic tools. [NOTE: staff's interview of Silverback Marine will occur after the writing of this memo but before Monday's Committee meeting; we will have more information to share that that time.
- Tacoma Rail looks for one year of experience with short line railroad or with UP/BNSF, but is also willing to train on site with a motivated candidate, as only three rail training programs exist: in Vancouver, WA, the NW Rail Institute in Northern California, and in one in Kansas. Tacoma Rail has hired from all three. The question is whether students are aware fo these programs?
- The suggestion was made that the port increase its sponsorship of the Pierce County Trades Career Fair. Another employer wondered if there was a listing of outreach activities such as the PC Trades Career Fair that they could access to recruit at.
- Several companies noted a lack of exposure to youth regarding the trucking industry or becoming an owner/operator.
- Several companies work with military integration programs to look for potential candidates.
- All companies would be interested in a type of "open house" for youth and their parents to help expose youth to their businesses.

#### **E. PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on these interviews, some strategies the Port may wish to consider include:

- Invest in strategies that provide exposure to high school students to careers in the trades. This could include expanding its investment in the Pierce County Trades Career Fair, some type of high school recruiter similar to those employed by universities, and other engagement on the high school level.
- Invest in promotional materials (website and printed collateral material) promoting the trades and outlining workforce development pathways (e.g. L&I's apprenticeship programs, rail training programs referenced by Tacoma Rail, California Maritime Academy etc.)
- Invest in programs that focus on basic employment skills (e.g., attendance, reliability, ethics, communication).

- Invest in skills development programs specific to the marine manufacturing sector (e.g. aluminum welding etc.).
- Invest in skills development programs that produce CDLs.

Please note that the word “invest” should be construed in its broadest form. This could include financial contributions, in-house work, lobbying or communication strategies etc. Please also note that these are very preliminary recommendations that lack the benefit of upcoming steps laid out in the Roadmap approved by the Committee. Staff suggests that these recommendations should be considered “preliminary” only, subject to revision as we gain more information.

#### **F. NEXT STEPS**

The next step in the roadmap approved by the Committee in spring is to inventory existing workforce development programs in Pierce County to understand how these programs meet the identified needs of employers surveyed and where gaps exist that—potentially—the Port could assist.

Port staff suggest this review of existing programs focus on the following key questions:

- What programs target high school students in terms of basic workforce skills? What limitations do these programs face?
- Are there comparable post-secondary programs that exist and what limitations do they face?
- What organizations coordinate/offer internships (or comparable programs) for individuals over 18? What inherent barriers are faced by these groups?
- What organizations offer technical skills training specific to the marine manufacturing sector? What barriers exist?
- What organizations offer CDL training? What barriers exist?
- What programs designed to recruit high school students to the trades exist? What challenges do they face?
- How could the Port influence Pierce County High Schools or technical schools to add the Maritime Core Plus program?

Port staff propose bringing results of this inventory back to the Committee by March 1, 2022.

Once this step is accomplished, the original roadmap proposed that the Port then develop specific strategies for addressing these gaps in existing programs. However, after receiving feedback from others, we would suggest adding one more step—outreach to labor and communities of color for their perspectives. These groups might identify other inherent barriers that limit the successful of these programs that the Port may wish to be sensitive to.