



Skills2Compete-Oregon Policy Platform



VISION



A skilled workforce is crucial to Oregon's productivity and competitiveness. Every Oregonian should have access to at least two years of education or training past high school so that they have the vocational credential, industry certification or associate's degree needed to succeed in today's economy. Working adults should have opportunities for lifelong education and career advancement. Everyone should have access to the basic skills and financial aid needed to pursue such education.



NATIONAL SKILLS COALITION
Every worker. Every industry. A strong economy.

POLICY PRIORITIES



Provide working adults with opportunities to move up the skill ladder.

Support educational institutions to utilize career pathways to design courses and services that accommodate the needs of working adults and those supporting families. Career pathways allow workers to build skills over time by accessing a variety of institutions and programs. Ensure that the system provides opportunities for Oregonians of all skill levels and experience. Increase the flexibility of financial aid to better meet the needs of working and returning students. Expand training opportunities for employed workers.



Provide all Oregonians access to high quality postsecondary education and skills training.

Increase the share of students who successfully complete a certificate or degree; create multiple avenues of opportunity (four-year degree programs, two-year academic and vocational degree programs, industry-provided on-the-job training, current worker training, union and other apprenticeships). Keep costs affordable and maintain a strong, flexible needs-based financial aid system to increase access to these trainings. Ensure that all Oregonians understand the opportunities available to them.



Align workforce and economic development strategies at the local level to build prosperous and competitive communities.

Expand existing requirements for Local Workforce Plans to better align programs with industry needs, linking workforce programs and institutions to create pathways to high-wage jobs. Forge disjointed education and job training programs into a coherent system of skill development that is responsive to the long-term needs of the Oregon economy.



Invest in public private partnerships (sector strategies) to further align workforce and economic development strategies at the local level.

Expand funding and incentives for local workforce planning and industry-based partnerships; link workforce and economic development initiatives; leverage private and public resources.

BACKGROUND

Oregon, like the rest of the country, is in the midst of a jobless recovery. However, even in this difficult economic climate there is still more demand for middle-skill jobs than there is supply. In fact, the largest part of Oregon's labor market—approximately 49 percent of all jobs—require more than high-school diploma but less than a four-year degree. Jobs like firefighters, nurses, and technicians. Yet Oregon continually struggles to produce the skilled workers required to fill these jobs.

These shortages come at a critical time for our state. Much of the joblessness in the last two recessions was caused by significant structural shifts in key industries rather than cyclical factors. These shifts require current and new workers to constantly upgrade their skills to survive.

The challenge for Oregon is to promote the state's economic competitiveness through the development of sustainable, effective workforce solutions to increase workers' skills and advance families to self-sufficiency. Oregon's economic success will depend on its ability to consistently produce a highly skilled workforce with the prerequisite basic and technical skills needed for the 21st-century economy.

We need to make smart and strategic investments in workforce development, building on a foundation of federal infrastructure and resources, if we are to spur Oregon's economic growth.

Over the next two decades, the highly skilled baby boom generation will be retiring, and many projections indicate that Oregon's replacement workers will have lower levels of educational attainment if current trends persist. Already many Oregon industries face critical skills shortages and some recent studies warn that soon more of the state's employers may be unable to find workers with the skills they need to remain competitive.

At the same time, there is mounting evidence that Oregon's workforce is unprepared for the jobs of the future: many young people are not graduating from high school; too few high school graduates are getting middle-skills education or training; and working adults have limited opportunities for lifelong education and career advancement.

The next governor and legislature must implement a broad, coherent, and well-integrated workforce strategy that addresses the skill needs of employers and provides opportunities for all Oregon residents.