

Employer Focus Group

Dayton Park Apartments Community Room

OCTOBER 11, 2001, 12:00 - 2:00 PM

Purpose of the Focus Group

The purpose of the focus group was to gather opinions of regional employers on the subject of the workforce development system in Southeast Texas, pursuant to a survey of the region and the development of a workforce development map of Southeast Texas.

Focus Topics

- Employability skills
- Sources of employees
- Workforce training issues
 - What services do schools provide?
 - What services do you use?
 - What services would you like for them to provide?
- Workforce Development Board
 - What services do they provide?
 - What services do you use?
 - What services would you like for them to provide?
- Who do you ask for local labor market information?
 - What kind of labor market information do you need?
 - How fresh does the labor market information have to be?
- Other workforce development issues.
- What do you want from the regional workforce map?
- Rate the workforce system in Southeast Texas.
- Job skill shortages
- Turnover and absentee problems

What Employability Skills do you look for?

- Attitude
- Communication
- Show up for work on time
- Appearance
- Basic learning abilities, receptive to learning
- Basic math skills
- Willing to work overtime.
- Basic manners, respect, and courtesy

Sources of Employees

- Walk-ins
- Career fairs
- Word of mouth
- Workforce Development Board
- Current employees
- Bulletin board
- Job referral
- Local newspaper advertising
- Job Fairs – businesses like to come back with 14-15 names

Job Skill Shortages

- Accounting-basic accounting skills
- Basic computer skills- All areas of occupations.

- Willingness to accept pay for this area vs other areas.
- Common sense
- Willingness to commit to the time it takes to acquire skills
- Better to start with someone who is trainable with emphasis on dependability
- Don't accept the learning opportunity

Turnover and Absenteeism Problems

Each member of the group responded with the following diverse perceptions of the turnover/absentee problem:

- Turnover has improved, absenteeism okay
- Turnover high, Absenteeism high.
- Turnover for year of 34%. Corporate acceptable is 24%. Absenteeism is addressed through a liberal award system for good attendance.
- Turnover is terrible, 15%. Absenteeism 5% - Moderate. Older employees are more dependable.
- High school attendance policy is so liberal that it is a shock to students to find out how strict the attendance policy is in the workplace.

Workforce Training issues

What services do schools provide?

- Skills training-Lee College
CAD, Welding, Instrumentation, Operators
- Cooperative Education

What services do you use?

None of the participants could think of any educational services used by their company.

What services would you like for them to provide?

- We rotate shifts; typical college can not accommodate the shifts.
- Never been approached by schools to coordinate skills training.
- Something similar to Skill Masters

Workforce Development Board (WFB) issues

What services does the WDB provide?

- Not familiar with them
- Thought it was TEC, now called Career Centers.

What WDB services do you use?

At this point the facilitator described the TWC system and how the WDB fit into the local workforce development system. Upon hearing this information, several of the participants realized that they were somewhat familiar with the WDB and some of its services as follows:

- Do place job orders with them. They have sent folks.
- Only one person came through their office
- OJT training

May create a double standard by using this type of system. When the OJT salaries are paid by the government, employers may treat OJT students more leniently than employees being paid by the employer.

What services would you like for the WDB to provide?

- Basic skills training.
- Communication with businesses to determine their needs
- Screening services, pre-employment skills evaluation
- Counseling applicants so they know the qualifications of the job they are seeking vs. the skills they possess and make suggestions for training needed to fill the gap
- Educate workforce about value of benefits vs. salary with no benefits

Who do you ask for labor market information?

- POST.
- Dayton Community Development
- Chamber of Commerce.
- Internet, Texas Workforce Commission

What kind of labor market information do you need?

- Wage information by occupation, by community
- Labor statistics within within 20 mile radius (driving range) of community
- Demographic information on white-collar/blue collar workers, segregate by income level.
- Looking for stability, longevity, length of residency
- Some way to measure transient workforce.

How fresh does labor market information have to be?

- Couple of years
- 12 to 18 months
- yearly updates

Other workforce issues

- Schools need to better prepare students for the workforce. Hard to fire 19 year olds. That one bad experience could be potential disaster for one's esteem.
- Absenteeism (tardiness) reason for termination. Theft is also an issue.
- Zero common sense from high school graduates.
- 1, 2 & 5 day in house orientation for new hires.
- Lack of family life has led to a transient workforce
- Communication/language barriers with workers from a variety of ethnic groups

What do you want from the regional workforce map?

- Local data and issues included
- Segregate the data by individual areas and combined areas
- A way to link the availability of jobs with those looking for jobs.
- Schools need to be informed about non-college bound student employment opportunities and responsibilities.
- Resource guide to organizations and services offered for individuals, employers, and trainers
- Reference guide to EEO laws
- Reference guide to assist businesses in understanding the local workforce system

Rate the workforce system in Southeast Texas

The system was rated as an average of 2 from a range of 1 - 10 with 10 being the best.