

Seven Workforce Summit Recommendations

One of the goals of the recent Workforce Summit held in Mitchell on November 15th was to come away with a list of actionable tasks that could contribute to a solution of the severe skilled-technician manpower shortage present in the James River Valley communities. While there were certainly a number of ideas that came out of that summit, the working group that put the summit together distilled these ideas into seven recommendations where there is a need for collaboration and partnership between industry, education, city leadership and South Dakota State government.

Clearly, a recurring theme of the summit is that we in South Dakota “have been here before” with the conclusion being the problem has never been addressed in a comprehensive way. While demographics may be a major contributor to the problem, there isn’t much that can be done to alter those demographics in the short term but there clearly are actions that can be taken to mitigate the impact of those demographics on industry both in the short and long term. Essentially, unless we can find ways to overcome our workforce issues in the James River Valley, our economy simply will not be able to grow to its potential.

The following recommendations are made as a start to a more comprehensive regional action plan to address the workforce shortage in technically skilled personnel—especially those associated with the manufacturing sector:

1. **Workforce recruiting**—We believe that there is a need for a dedicated workforce recruiter to work on the behalf of the James River Valley industries to address immediate workforce shortages. The country is in the midst of a recession and there are those that are looking for gainful employment. The window for recruiting will slowly close over the next two or three years as other parts of the country start to reduce their unemployment rates. If there was ever a time to actively recruit workers to move to South Dakota to fill jobs, the time is now. Instead of each industry or each city actively trying to recruit individually, we believe a recruiter working on behalf of the area would be able to identify the sources and methods of bringing skilled technicians into what is largely a similar industrial, geographic and demographic area. Additionally, we believe continued efforts to fund or support the following efforts at recruiting are also needed:
 - a. Continued funding of the current GED and ESL programs
 - b. Continued and expand support of the current SD DOL recruitment efforts, especially Dakota Roots and Dakota Seeds respectively
 - c. Assist in getting national headlines and overlaying media messages in markets in which the State has a media presence (i.e., out-of-state markets)
 - d. Support the efforts of independent agencies such as the Lutheran Social Services in resettling legal immigrants and refugees who will add quantitatively and qualitatively to the workforce where employers and communities decide upon this strategy
2. **Comprehensive media plan**—Recent recruiting blitzes by areas such as Gillette, WY and Williston, ND have gained national and even international exposure which resulted in a net migration into the state of workers to fill critical job openings. In both cases, there was a concerted effort on the part of the respective States and communities to engage nationally recognized media consulting firms to gain the widespread media coverage. A similar effort needs to be made for the James River Valley to gain the widespread media coverage needed to

attract workers to fill immediate or near term openings.

3. **Increase immediate training support**—Currently, South Dakota provides match dollars towards both in-house and Technical Institute training for new workers. The current State funding has fallen short of being able to train new workers to the needed skill set in welding in the month required for in-house training or the two weeks required for Technical Institute training. Both of these would need to expand in order to keep up with the growth being experienced by James Valley industry. The amount of funding support for training or retraining and the capacity of the Technical Institutes to conduct this training would need to be expanded if we are successful in bringing in new personnel from outside of the State—most of whom would probably not have the exact qualifications needed for immediate employment.
4. **Relocation assistance**—Past efforts at recruiting outside workers into the State demonstrated that these workers need to have comprehensive support in order to relocate them and their families. Bringing in a worker without his family simply ends in a short term employment engagement and not a permanent relocation. Communities need to take the lead in providing a centralized point of assistance and a smooth move into the communities. That may include housing assistance, spousal employment assistance, and a form of sponsorship that makes the family feel welcome and a part of the community.
5. **Housing/Infrastructure support**—Throughout the James River Valley, wherever there is growth, there is housing and infrastructure issues—even in the smaller communities that are nearby a larger community or a growing industry. There needs to be action taken to develop adequate housing for both near-term and mid-term new workers. Whether that is the creative use of Governor’s houses or some tax incentives for contractors to put up apartments or spec housing, there needs to be a plan that conforms to expected demand for workers. Without a housing solution, there will be no solution to the workforce problem.
6. **Secondary education changes**—The root of the long-term problem in the workforce in South Dakota is that there is a widespread perception amongst secondary school students, their parents and their teachers that technical education and jobs are ones of “last resort”. The push of secondary students toward a four year college as the primary emphasis both in secondary school curriculum and perception needs to be changed to present a balanced view of workforce needs—one that recognizes the value of technical education and jobs. In this regard, we believe the following actions should be taken:
 - a. Increase exposure to technical skills among secondary students by increasing the number of technical education courses and resources in secondary schools
 - b. Increase dual credit or concurrent credit technical courses in secondary school similar to AP or dual credit courses now existing for Regental schools.
 - c. Provide for the orientation of secondary school teachers and counselors to local industries and skilled technical jobs
 - d. Increase the number of technically skilled educators that have industry experience in order to increase both the quality of the technical education and the relevancy of the education to industry
 - e. Provide marketing support to introduce technical careers to secondary school students
7. **Training support**—Both industry and State government need to increase the support of post-secondary technical education. If our Technical Institutes are going to provide the training for those entering the technical workforce, they must have quality instructors that receive compensation close to what they would receive in industry, they must have modern equipment that provides relevant training to that needed when they enter industry, they must have a curriculum that reflects the current needs of industry, and they must have the necessary materials and supplies for training. The relatively dramatic decrease in per student funding over the last four years hampers the ability of these vital training venues to supply the skilled

workforce needed for industry growth in South Dakota. The following recommendations are made concerning increasing post-secondary training support:

- a. Initiate a layered approach to training that provides for both short-term and mid-term skill enhancement with an eye towards getting workers into the workforce in the shortest period of time and with a spread of skills that mirrors workforce demand:
 - i. Acceleration of the immediate specialized training required for basically trained workers as outlined in recommendation 3. (Above)
 - ii. An accelerated apprenticeship type program where students with some basic industry training could be brought up to production quality status in a matter of six to nine weeks by combining training conducted jointly by Technical Institutes and employers.
 - iii. A one to two year apprenticeship type program that would fully train non-skilled workers for skilled production positions by combining Technical Institute training with industry training resulting in a diploma or AAS degree, depending upon the skills required.
- b. While industry participates currently in the development of curriculum with all the technical institutes, it needs to increase its participation in supplying the training materials and scholarships needed to increase throughput.
- c. The State needs to find a way to support the development of new or expanded programs needed by industry and ways to modernize, in conjunction with industry, the equipment needed for training.
- d. The State needs to balance the funding of post-secondary education so that tax dollars are being spent in a manner that supports the economic development objectives of our State.