

Chamber project finds strong regional job market, but room for improvement

Consider the workforce analyzed.

Northeast Oklahoma's job growth is steady, key target industries are growing and regional education assets are producing workers.

But challenges abound — particularly in underserved neighborhoods.

Those are the conclusions of the Tulsa Regional Chamber's Workforce Analysis Project, which unveiled key observations about the state of the Tulsa area's economy in July and yielded recommendations for improving job opportunities for residents and maximizing the pool of skilled labor available to area employers.

The 24-week project, which included extensive data gathering and more than 50 meetings with residents and regional stakeholders, culminated in a 116-page report outlining workforce strengths, opportunities and challenges for the region as well as underserved areas of north, east and west Tulsa.

As part of the ongoing regional visioning effort to improve life and business in northeast Oklahoma, the Workforce Analysis Project report will serve as the basis for an unprecedented workforce development strategy intended to keep the area's economy competitive in the decades to come.

The Chamber and regional partners will begin immediately to engage residents and leaders at all levels of local education, business and government to review the consultants' findings and develop a strategy for ensuring that the region's workforce can meet their needs in the coming decades.

"If our region is to remain economically competitive, it is imperative that we have a comprehensive plan for dealing

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Workforce strengths

- **Overall STRONG JOB MARKET**, with unemployment rates expected to continue falling as regional **job growth of 4.2 percent outpaces regional population growth of 2.9 percent** between 2010-13.
- **Better-than-average LABOR PARTICIPATION RATES**, with **66 percent of Tulsans in the labor force** compared to 63 percent statewide and 65 percent nationwide.
- **NO RECENT NET JOB LOSSES** in underserved areas of north, west and east Tulsa.
- **Particularly STRONG JOB GROWTH IN WEST TULSA**, where **employment is up 9.9 percent in the last three years**, compared to 4.2 percent regionally, 4.7 percent statewide and 4.6 percent nationwide.
- **TULSA'S MANUFACTURING WORKFORCE**, which the consultants called one of the **"best in the country."**
- **Regional WORKFORCE TRAINING ASSETS**, including the Tulsa Regional **STEM Alliance**, **technology centers** and **quality higher education institutions** such as TCC, Tulsa Tech, OSU and others.
- **Oklahoma's EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**, which the consultants noted is **among the nation's best.**

Workforce weaknesses

- Many residents face **TRANSPORTATION ISSUES**, and **PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS ARE LIMITED.**
- It can be **DIFFICULT GETTING EMPLOYERS INVOLVED** in existing STEM Mentoring programs.
- Many organizations are operating in silos **WITHOUT COMMUNICATING WITH EACH OTHER**, which creates gaps and redundancies.
- **RECRUITING TOP-LEVEL TALENT CAN BE CHALLENGING** due to perceived quality of life issues and lower salaries than some cities.
- **MANY RESIDENTS ARE UNAWARE OF CAREERS THAT ARE GROWING LOCALLY** and training programs that are available to them.
- **THERE IS A NEED FOR MORE IN-DEPTH CONVERSATIONS AND UNIFIED DIRECTION AMONG WORKFORCE STAKEHOLDERS** such as education institutions and industry.
- **THE UNDERSERVED AREAS OF NORTH, EAST AND WEST TULSA EACH HAVE SPECIFIC CHALLENGES.** For example, job growth in these areas does not always benefit local residents, as jobs there are often filled by commuters; meanwhile, in North Tulsa, a relatively high percentage of ex-convicts in the workforce limits labor participation rates.
- **EAST TULSA LACKS ACCESS** to public post-secondary opportunities

WORKFORCE ANALYSIS PROJECT

with our workforce challenges,” said Mike Neal, Tulsa Regional Chamber president and CEO. “With the results of our Workforce Analysis Project and the continued involvement of stakeholders at all levels, we believe we have a solid foundation for moving forward.”

With help from funding partners, the Chamber hired a consulting team from CAEL (The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning) and Avalanche Consulting to lead public meetings and data-gathering efforts with the goal of gauging the state of the Tulsa region’s workforce.

 Explore some of the findings here, or find the full report at www.TulsaChamber.com/workforceinitiative.

Consultants’ recommendations

FOCUS EFFORTS ON HIGHLY-CONCENTRATED INDUSTRIES AND ASSOCIATED OCCUPATIONS:

Aviation and Aerospace, Energy and Advanced Manufacturing are highly concentrated industry sectors across the entire Tulsa region. The consultants recommend increasing the number of programs and credential levels (certificate, Associate, Bachelor and higher) available to residents in these fields across Tulsa.

SECTOR-DRIVEN ONE-STOP WORKFORCE CENTERS: The consultants recommend facilities to connect local residents to opportunities in each sector. “Centralizing services to support a specific sector provides a structure for a deeper understanding of workforce needs and enhances the relationship between education, training, the workforce system and sector employers.”

INCREASE EFFECTIVENESS OF INDUSTRY AND EDUCATION COMMUNICATION: The consultants recommended expanding the Roadtrip for Teachers program, which provides local educators a glimpse into real-life industry. They also recommended creating a regional structure for industry internships and externships.

DEVELOP CLEARINGHOUSE OF REGIONAL EDUCATION WORKFORCE-FOCUSED EFFORTS AND INITIATIVES: The consultants recommended identifying and documenting each effort to encourage transparency of all education, training, workforce and employer-supported initiatives underway currently.

IMPLEMENT A CAREER AWARENESS MARKETING CAMPAIGN TO EDUCATE RESIDENTS ABOUT THE CAREER AND JOB TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES IN THE REGION.

COLLABORATE ON REGIONAL FUNDING REQUESTS, ENGAGEMENT OF THE PHILANTHROPIC COMMUNITY: Create an inventory of philanthropic dollars coming into Tulsa in an effort to better aggregate education and skill development requests and support.

CREATE INDUSTRY AND EDUCATION REGIONAL ROUNDTABLE: The consultants suggested creating an advisory and discussion group of industry and education leaders to generate more in-depth discussion on workforce needs.

LOCALIZED SERVICES TO ADDRESS SPECIFIC BARRIERS IN EACH UNDERSERVED REGION (NORTH, EAST AND WEST TULSA): English as a Second Language and English Language Learner support to residents in East Tulsa; Ex-Offender outreach and employment programs and skill development in North Tulsa; and enhanced childcare services in West Tulsa

INCREASE HIGHER EDUCATION ACCESS TO NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS AND WORKING LEARNERS, including by expanding Prior Learning Assessment practices in higher education; increasing online and distance learning programs; and enhancing career services, networking and job placement.

INVEST IN SUPPORTIVE SERVICES AND OUTREACH EFFORTS TO RESIDENTS to increase labor participation rates, including through regional work- and education-based transportation options and investing in an ex-offender workforce pipeline.

TARGET SECTOR CONTENT ENHANCEMENTS AND SUPPORT: The consultants made recommendations for improving seven target sectors:

- 1. Advanced manufacturing:** Increase degree pathways for engineering technology and mechatronics beyond certificate and associate degree levels and incentivize welding.
- 2. Aerospace and aviation:** Increase high school and higher education support for aviation and aerospace programs.
- 3. Energy:** Increase high school and higher education skill development and awareness in this industry.
- 4. Healthcare:** Expand programming beyond healthcare delivery field to take advantage of booming healthcare industry.
- 5. Information Security:** Increase post-secondary education opportunities in this field to provide an outlet for students, who have numerous opportunities at the local high school level.
- 6. Professional Services:** Encourage connecting entry-level administrative and support services positions with higher-level business management opportunities, which are projected to grow in target neighborhoods.
- 7. Transportation and logistics:** Improve skill development opportunities in supply chain management, process technology and quality assurance, potentially through Bachelor programs or higher degree options.