Greater Wichita Partnership
PRINTED WEBSITE REPORT



Written by Emily Younger

The Greater Wichita region is home to the most highly trained and advanced workers in the world. Yes, the world! It's paramount we, as a global, vibrant community, invest boldly and prepare our workforce for the future.

Ensuring workers for today and the future was the focal point of the Partnership's first of three talent workshops on March 29 at USD 259's Future Ready Center. The manufacturing workshop brought more than 100 local CEOs, HR, and education leaders together, giving them the opportunity to discuss how they can cohesively create and tighten the feedback loop between industry and education.

"While we all work for different organizations, we are in the same business, the people business. Whether that is to hire people, or provide them with skills, we want people who can live here, work here, and – if needed - move here for opportunities that will improve lives and our economy," said Greater Wichita Partnership President Jeff Fluhr as he welcomed attendees to the event.



"In education we know we need to work with business and community to build stronger partnerships, but it is hard to find time to do so. Events such as this create an easy path for schools to learn more about workforce demands and hear directly from employers about skills of the future," said Kelly Bielefeld, executive director of college and career readiness/career and technical education and incoming Wichita Public Schools superintendent.

Bielefeld along with Keith Lawing, president and CEO of Workforce Alliance of South-Central Kansas, Inc., and Debra Franklin, associate vice president of strategic initiatives at Wichita State University, sat on the leadership panel facilitated by Victor Reyes of Deloitte.

Each panelist, who represents expertise in the feedback loop of education, workforce, and talent pipeline, presented how business and education leaders can navigate the changing workforce needs through skills, strategies, and competitive advantages.

"We need to break down barriers. We must know what the business community needs to help those job seekers connect to well-paying jobs and help our economy," said Lawing.

Lawing described the need to match resources and strategies to emerging jobs, pointing to current opportunities such as work-based learning, on-the-job training, and apprenticeships.

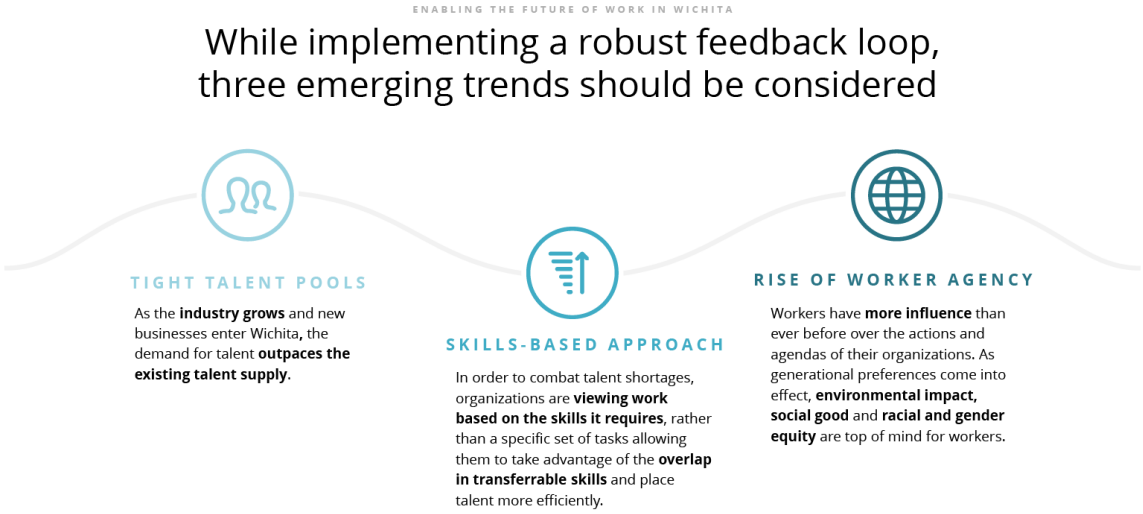
Franklin echoed Lawing's point saying we must think of Wichita in a global context and be able to scale our foundational and transferrable skills.

"We are the Air Capital of the World, and we want to stay that way," said Franklin.

Accelerating the Workforce in Wichita

Following the expert panel, employees with Deloitte, a global consulting firm that helped the Partnership develop the Talent Roadmap, presented workforce trends: a tight talent pool, a skills-based approach and the rise of worker agency.





The Talent Roadmap shows that as industries grow and new businesses enter the Wichita region, the demand for talent is outpacing the existing talent pool. To combat talent shortages, organizations can explore untapped and unique talent sources, and can take a skills-based approach to recruit employees. Skills-based organizations view work based on skills it requires, not on a specific set of tasks and responsibilities, or job titles.

Finally, as workers have more options and stronger preferences, it's important that organizations align their strategies, policies and actions with workers' personal values – including social, environmental and diverse and inclusive cultures.

During round table discussions, business and education leaders were asked to answer two questions:

1. How can we come together across the manufacturing industry to address changing workforce needs?

2. What new approach/tactic can we try to prepare the community for future talent demands?





In one round table, representatives from Textron Aviation, Spirit AeroSystems, Integra Technologies, Inc., and WSU Tech discussed the need to create a common language in job postings and job descriptions. The participants learned talent may respond better to consistent job titles and descriptions that are more skills-based rather than task-based.

“We are small right now, but we are expanding so it was great to absorb what these larger companies such as Textron and Spirit are able to accomplish and hear their experiences,” said Chelsie Ness, vice president of human resources of Integra Technologies Inc.

Another discussion revolved around the opportunity to create a more cohesive way for industry and education to communicate, whether that be advisory committees, internship programs or other training offshoots.

“It’s an ecosystem. We have a lot of great conversations, but it feels a bit fragmented right now,” said Scott Lucas, vice president of aviation, manufacturing, and institutional effectiveness at WSU Tech.

Another group, which included representatives from Textron Aviation, Spirit AeroSystems, USD 259, and the Workforce Alliance of South-Central Kanas, Inc., touched on the need to interact with talent in all stages of life.

“When I was young, I was told to go to college, go to the business world. No one talked about nonprofit, manufacturing, and all the different career opportunities,” said one attendee. “We need to make sure the manufacturing industry is in front of students. We have to be on the front of change.”

What does that change look like? Participants agreed it starts with workshops such as this where industry and education can bridge the communication gap, but ultimately it takes strategic action by all parties involved to prepare and train the future workforce and seek out new talent pool opportunities.

“Feedback is an important first step, but we all need to act on the feedback coming out of today's workshop. Simply by learning about opportunities at our schools, such as the Future Ready Center or CTE Pathways, business leaders can share and promote these to the people around them. Encouraging students to get the training they need to become future-ready, this can really impact both our talent pipeline and our community as a whole,” Bielefeld said.



Key Takeaways

At the conclusion of the talent workshop, participants were asked to reflect on what they learned and share one key takeaway. They included:

- "Industry must focus on skills-based and transferable skills to engage the workforce of the future."
- "Finding a way to share our organization's identity, values and story will help attract talent that shares (and) appreciates those same things."
- "We need to share with students that manufacturing careers are good careers and start early."
- "Connect with high schools to start building connections and relationships for future summer internships/partnerships to build future workers for our business."
- "The importance of career mapping with consistent coding and job naming for ease of students."
- "Provide industry better information on skills-based and certification mapping of programs."
- "All companies are struggling with similar issues around workforce development and upskilling their current workforce, but they are competitors for talent. How can educational institutions play a more prominent role in serving the community and offer pre-competitive skills development?"
- "Create teen internship at our company."
- "Open the opportunities up for individuals with disabilities by modifying equipment. Ramps for CNC machinists is an easy start to capture individuals in wheelchairs."
- "We need to engage the unusual suspects to expand the talent pool. We need to engage with organizations that work with individuals who aren't currently considered as potential employees – individuals with disabilities that can be trained on tasks with minor accommodations."