



Alaska Workforce Career Needs Assessment

January 2025 | *DRAFT*

PREPARED FOR:



ALASKA WORKFORCE
INVESTMENT BOARD

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Executive Summary

Overview

The Alaska Workforce Investment Board (AWIB) is a public, volunteer board composed of members of the workforce development and training sectors. AWIB is the Governor of Alaska's appointed, lead planning and coordinating entity for Alaska's public workforce and development system. The Board provides policy oversight of state and federally funded job training and vocational education programs.

Workforce Needs Assessment

To assess the current state of Alaska's workforce development system, AWIB engaged McKinley Research Group (MRG), an Alaska research and consulting firm. MRG worked in collaboration with AWIB's Executive Director to hone assessment priorities such as identifying opportunities for statewide outreach, relationship building, and aligned stakeholder engagement.

METHODOLOGY

To create a broad understanding of statewide workforce gaps and training needs in each of Alaska's six economic regions, MRG engaged a two-phased approach:



PHASE 1:
Listening Sessions



PHASE 2:
Online Survey



Alaska Voices

In statewide listening sessions, Alaska employers provided insights and shared experiences regarding workforce development needs and current development efforts in their region and statewide. These facilitated sessions explored three core topics.



ORGANIZATIONAL EXPERIENCES

Recruiting, hiring, and retaining qualified employees



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

Effective approaches and need



ALASKA WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD

Role and reach

Organizational Experiences

HIRING CHALLENGES

Employers noted significant hiring challenges in each economic region statewide — including both rural and urban locales. These include:



HOUSING

The lack of housing or affordable housing



CHILD CARE

The lack of affordable and reliable child care



CHANGING WORKFORCE

A declining population and aging labor pool



SALARIES AND BENEFITS

Widening gap between public and private sector wages

Executive Summary

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

The listening session participants shared thoughts on effective recruitment and retention strategies. Three notable strategies include:

WORK SCHEDULES

Flexible schedules, hybrid positions, and remote work options

APPLICATION AND ONBOARDING

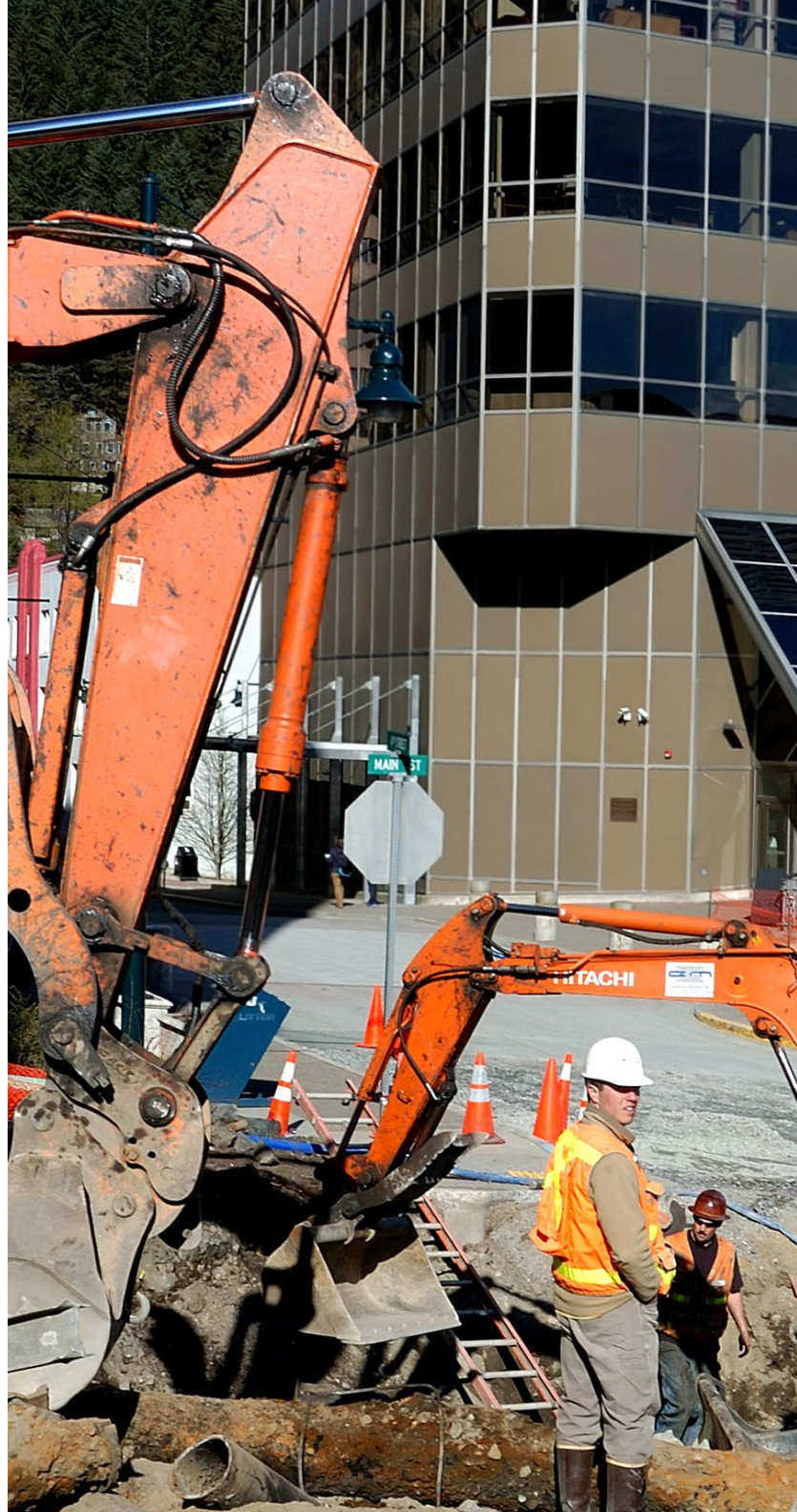
Streamlined application or admission processes and flexible onboarding timelines

STIPENDS, INSURANCE, AND RETIREMENT BENEFITS

Housing stipends, competitive health insurance, and robust retirement benefits

IN-REGION HIRING

While employers indicate a preference for qualified candidates that live in-region, they claim a mix of in-state and out-of-state hires. Most entry level jobs are local hires; executives are from out of state.



Employers' ability to recruit employees in the region has been negatively impacted over the last several years.

Executive Summary

Workforce Development and Training

ORGANIZATION-BASED TRAINING

Several organizations described operating their own professional development and internship programs. For numerous employers and job types, fully qualified employees are needed on day one.

EFFECTIVE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PIPELINES

Regional training and apprenticeship programs are well understood in rural settings. However, some employers say they do not have the time to establish formal training-to-employment mechanisms.

UNMET NEED

Available workforce development and training pipelines do not meet the spectrum of employer workforce needs. Organizations continue to recruit from outside Alaska; a remote workforce is an increasingly popular option

Statewide, a strong public school system is a critical workforce development pipeline.

Trades industries need stronger relationships with training partners. There is an expressed need for supplemental management, leadership, and soft skills training.



Executive Summary


Alaska Workforce Investment Board

STATE RESPONSIBILITY

Listening session participants generally agree that the State has a responsibility for education, training, and workforce development. There is a disconnect between the State and regional communities about the reality of workforce development.

IMPACT MAKERS

Specific employers and regional organizations are making the most impact, not an industry or the State.



Select school districts and mining organizations are developing their internal workforce development pipelines.

Health care employers, among others, are tackling recruitment and retention challenges by investing in employee housing projects.

ROLE AND REACH

Overwhelmingly, respondents had little to no awareness of AWIB. There is a perceived disconnect with AWIB; much workforce development has moved forward without AWIB engagement or awareness.

There is an opportunity to expand awareness across industry sectors and strengthen partnership engagement in an equitable manner.

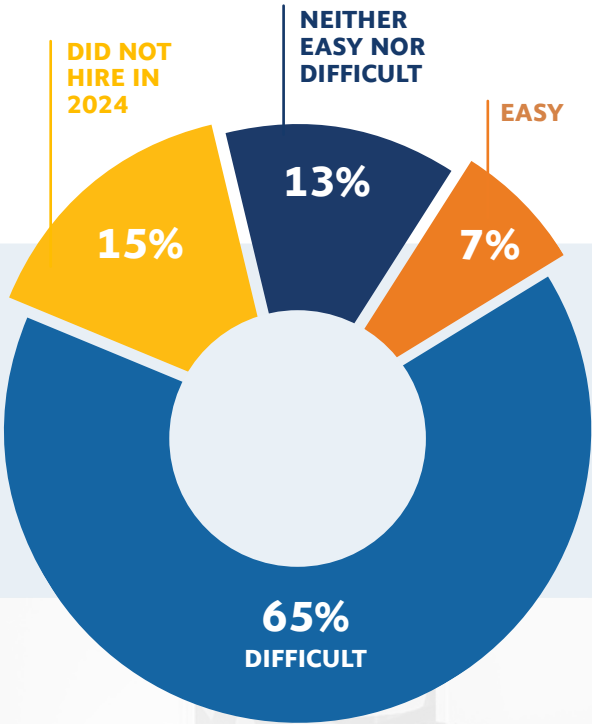
Survey Results

An online survey was distributed to businesses across Alaska to learn about Alaska’s current workforce needs, recruitment and retention challenges, availability of workers by skill level, and familiarity with workforce programs. Key survey results are highlighted below.

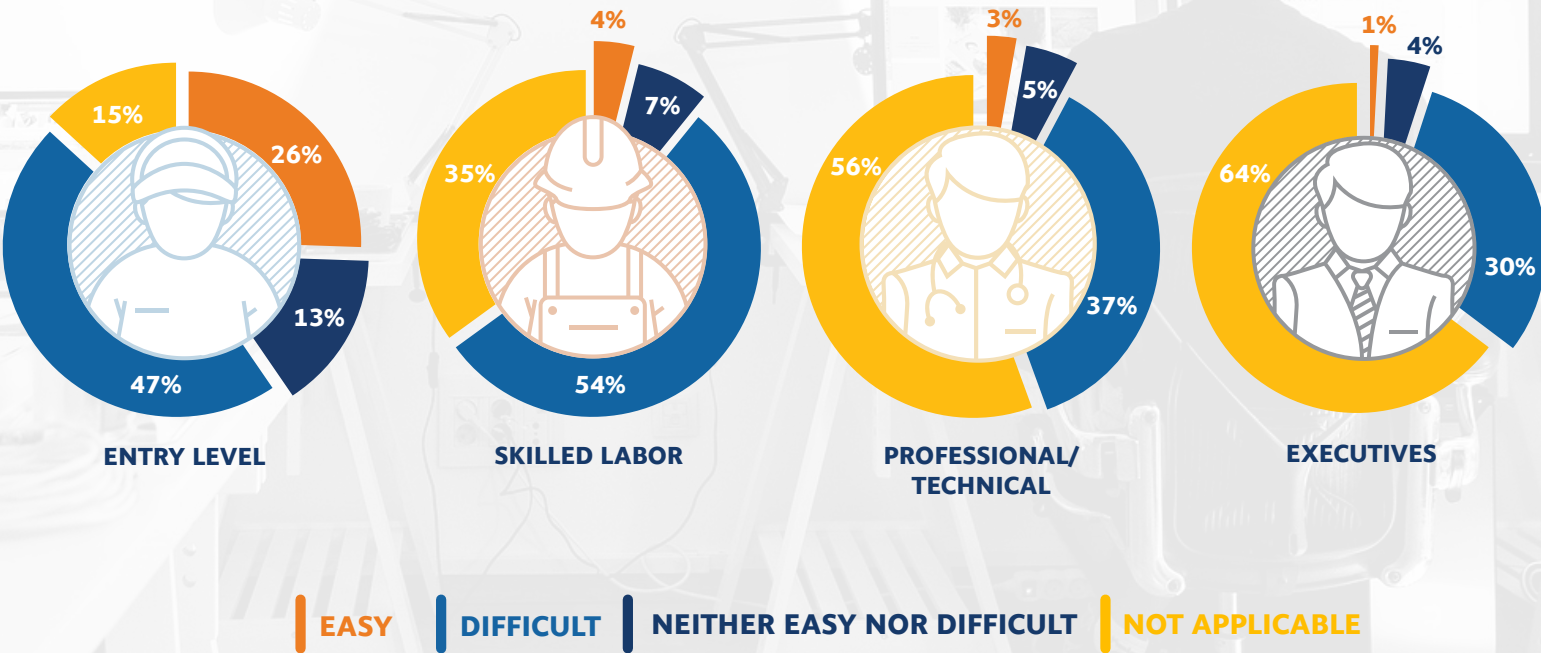
DIFFICULTY HIRING

When asked how easy or difficult it had been to find qualified employees in Alaska, nearly two-thirds (65%) of respondents said hiring had been somewhat or very difficult in 2024. Employers were most likely to report hiring entry-level workers as easy compared to skilled labor, professional/technical staff, or executives.

IN 2024, HOW EASY OR DIFFICULT HAS IT BEEN FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION TO FIND QUALIFIED EMPLOYEES IN ALASKA?



DIFFICULTY FINDING QUALIFIED WORKERS BY SKILL LEVEL



Executive Summary

HIRING PLANS AND STRATEGIES

About 81% of respondents plan to hire in 2025, and the types of positions they plan to fill represent a broad range of occupations.

Alaska’s employers have individually pursued many tactics to improve recruitment and retention against a difficult hiring backdrop. Most survey respondents (72%) had engaged in a variety of initiatives over the last several years to enhance recruitment and retention, including methods to better connect to potential employees; increasing compensation through wages, traditional employer-sponsored benefits, or new forms of financial incentive; or reducing employment requirements.

TOP TEN METHODS TO BETTER FIND AND/OR RETAIN QUALIFIED EMPLOYEES

Increase visibility of job postings	44%
Pay for training	27%
Streamline application process	19%
Remove degree/certificate requirements	12%
Provide housing assistance	10%
Provide transportation assistance	9%
Increased pay	8%
Remove drug/alcohol testing	6%
Remove background checks	5%
Increased benefits	4%

TOP JOBS EMPLOYERS PLAN TO HIRE FOR IN 2025

Customer service representatives/receptionists	19%
Construction trades (carpenters, painters, roofers)	14%
Cooks/food prep workers	13%
Retail workers	12%
Bookkeepers	12%
Secretaries/administrative assistants	8%
Accountants/financial analysts	7%
Janitors/housekeepers	7%
Computer/information systems workers	6%
Heavy equipment/automotive/aircraft mechanics	6%
Waiters/bartenders/servers	6%
Data entry clerks/mail clerks	6%

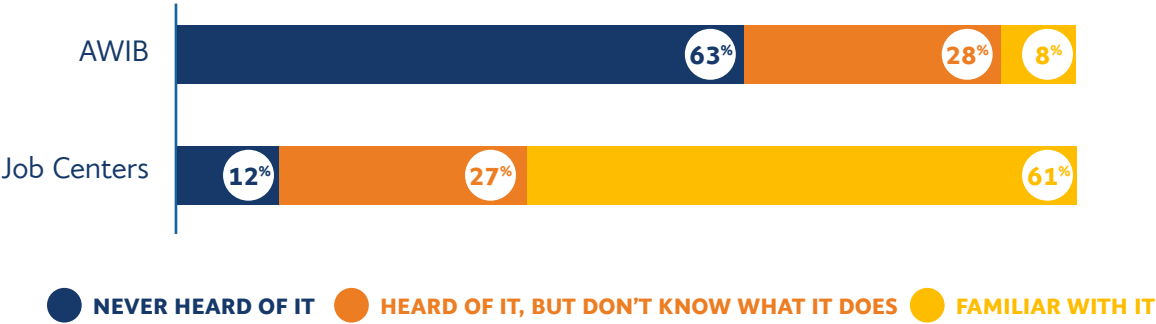


Executive Summary

FAMILIARITY WITH WORKFORCE PROGRAMS

Familiarity with AWIB was very low among survey respondents, with just 8% of respondents saying they were familiar with AWIB, and another 28% reporting they had heard of AWIB but were not sure of its mission or activities. In contrast, only 12% of respondents said they had never heard of the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development’s Jobs Centers.

FAMILIARITY WITH DEPARTMENT OF LABOR AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

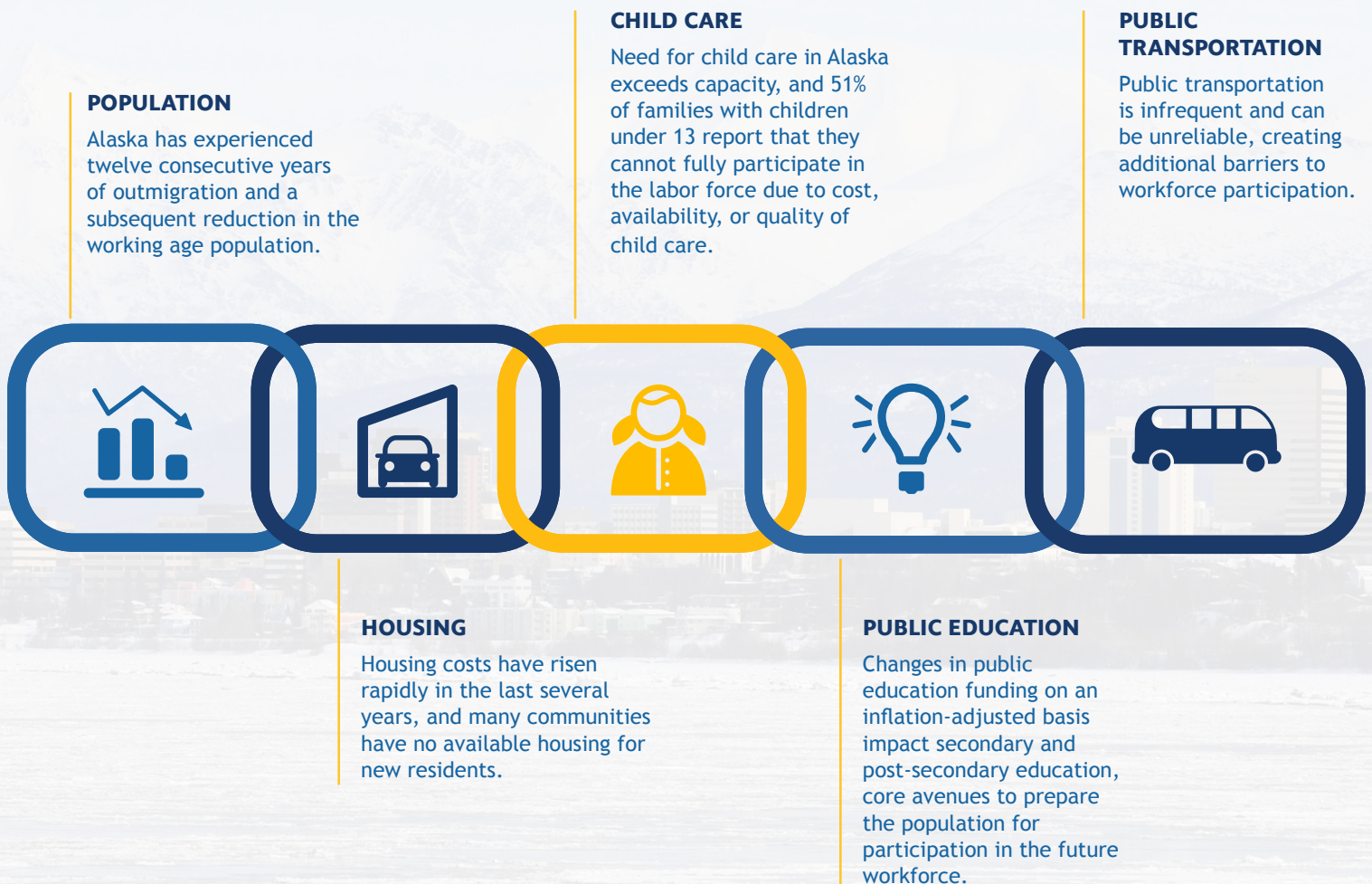


Contextualizing Alaska's Employer Experience

Policymakers and training providers seeking to engage Alaska employers in workforce development initiatives must do so with a clear understanding of the complex business and economic environment in which these employers operate.

Alaska's employers are acutely aware of workforce shortages and have invested in strategies to recruit and retain qualified employees. However, all employers – whether private or public – face important financial and capacity constraints in relationship to workforce development. Their ability to coach prospective employees, resources to launch widespread recruitment campaigns, and capacity to project exact labor needs by occupation are all limited.

Statewide, employers have devoted their available resources to fulfilling their own workforce needs against a backdrop of difficult economic conditions. Regardless of what training is provided, the following all impact employers' ability to retain employees and attract new workers to their organization, their community, and the state.



Recommendations and Next Steps

DEFINE AWIB ROLE

AWIB’s purpose is not well understood by employers across Alaska’s economic regions. Employers are not aware there is a State entity responsible for managing statewide initiatives and coordinating the workforce system. Identifying AWIB’s mission and a communication strategy consistent across regions, sectors, and sizes will help create solid connections with Alaska-based companies.

PRIORITIZE KEY RELATIONSHIPS

Alaska’s regional and business landscape is complex; a one-size-fits-all approach to employer communication is unlikely to result in broad-based engagement. To develop relationships with Alaska’s employers, the Board must develop a communication strategy that clearly defines six components.

1	AWIB’s goal in pursuing employer relationships	2	Sector and region priorities
3	Engagement by sector	4	Appropriate setting for employer engagement
5	Timeline for interactions	6	Financial resources needed for strategic engagement

SURVEY PROCESS

Given the wide range of regions, industries, and sizes of participating employers, using a survey research method does not lend itself well to meaningful prioritization of training programs by occupation. Many organizations in Alaska have recently undertaken workforce training needs assessments which include identifying needs of specific occupations. Engaging directly with organizations who have completed this type of prioritization process at the regional and sector level will be the best method for AWIB to provide support within their specific role.

FOSTER ALASKA’S JOB CENTERS

In rural Alaska in particular, offering job application guidance and visibility in person is still an important part of new workers’ process to connect with employers. Having an Alaska Jobs Center with staff available to work with prospective employees or students in person as a key role for the State of Alaska in workforce development.

Employers have a much higher level of familiarity with Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development Job Centers compared to AWIB. The State of Alaska should leverage the higher brand recognition of the Job Centers to offer the type of connections between job seekers, training entities, and employers that meet the distinct needs of each community.



Introduction and Approach

Alaska Workforce Investment Board

The Alaska Workforce Investment Board (AWIB) is a public, volunteer board composed of members of the workforce development and training sectors. AWIB is the Governor of Alaska's appointed, lead planning and coordinating entity for Alaska's public workforce and development system. The Board provides policy oversight of state and federally funded job training and vocational education programs. Its comprehensive focus is on developing a workforce system that is useful, accessible, and understandable to all of Alaska's workforce customers. This includes businesses looking for qualified workers, unemployed Alaskans looking for jobs, and incumbent workers wanting to upgrade their skills in a changing work environment.

AWIB held a convening in the fall of 2023 to develop new project objectives and to define and align the next phase of Alaska's workforce development system. The objectives of this next phase are:

- **Build relationships between stakeholders and a shared commitment to progress.**
- **Assess the current state of the workforce development system to understand the gaps.**
- **Define a collective vision and support thinking around the change participants would like to see in Alaska's workforce development system.**
- **Align the roles of stakeholders and next steps.**
- **Act by developing short- and medium-term priorities and taking action to implement them.**

AWIB's vision is to

**“build connections
that put Alaskans
into good jobs.”**



Introduction and Approach



Workforce Needs Assessment

To assess the current state of Alaska’s workforce development system, AWIB engaged McKinley Research Group (MRG), an Alaska research and consulting firm. Workforce development needs assessments identify key workforce needs, assets, and related factors (i.e., community, relational, economic, demographic) through data analysis. Needs assessments can play an essential role in better understanding the workforce landscape, identifying gaps, and developing priorities for system improvement, including aligning the roles of stakeholders and developing short- and medium-term action plans.

MRG worked in collaboration with AWIB’s Executive Director to hone assessment priorities. The study team proceeded with the understanding that AWIB desired to use assessment findings to identify opportunities for statewide outreach, relationship building, and aligned stakeholder engagement.

Methodology

To create a broad understanding of workforce gaps and training needs by economic region and employment sector and to develop a comprehensive needs assessment, MRG engaged a two-phased approach:

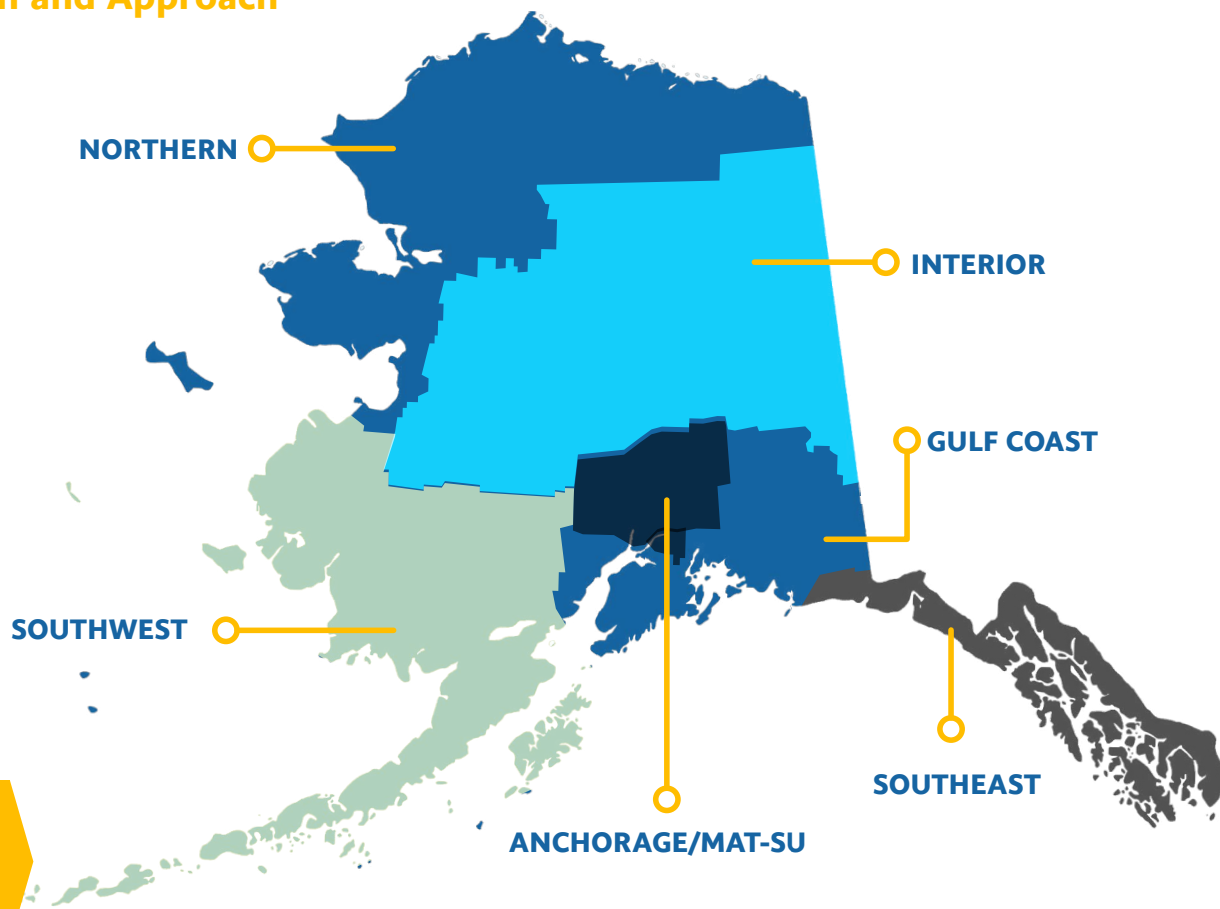


PHASE 1:
Listening Sessions



PHASE 2:
Online Survey

Introduction and Approach



Listening Sessions

REGIONAL REACH

A series of listening sessions were held across six economic regions in Alaska to facilitate in-depth discussions and gather qualitative feedback from employers, leading industry personnel, and workforce development entities.

Nine sessions were conducted to ensure opportunities for statewide participation. The sessions were a mix of in-person and virtual due to budget limitations and the high cost of travel in Alaska. Seven sessions were held in-person. Two virtual sessions were held, one for the Gulf Coast and one for the Interior region. MRG worked closely with AWIB to determine priority regions for in-person sessions.

Anchorage / Mat-Su:
ANCHORAGE AND WASILLA
Two in-person sessions

Gulf Coast:
SOLDOTNA AND VALDEZ
One virtual session

Southeast:
JUNEAU
One in-person session

Interior:
FAIRBANKS
One virtual session

Northern:
NOME AND KOTZEBUE
Two in-person sessions

Southwest:
DILLINGHAM* AND BETHEL
Two in-person sessions

** The in-person session held in the Dillingham (Southwest region) occurred in conjunction with the 2024 Bristol Bay Sustainability Summit. The multiday summit brought together Bristol Bay residents and organizations. A portion of the agenda was devoted to regional workforce development and training.*

Introduction and Approach

PARTICIPATION

MRG developed a list of potential listening session participants. Dedicated consideration was given to identify the key industry sectors, employers, and workforce development and training entities within each region. Individuals and organizations were contacted by email and/or phone and invited to participate in a listening session. Refreshments were provided for in-person session participants. No formal compensation was offered.

A total of 49 individuals participated, reflecting representation from 18 distinct sectors listed below.

Aviation • Banking • Health care

Maritime transportation/shipping • Mining • Municipal government

Non-profit • Oil and gas • Power and utilities • Philanthropy

Public education (including K-12 school districts and higher education)

Public safety • Regional economic development • Technology

Telecommunications • Tribal corporations and nonprofit services

Visitor industry • Workforce development and training

FACILITATION GUIDE

Members of the study team used a facilitation guide to engage participants in focused discussion. The guide centers on three core topics and includes a series of complementing questions. MRG collaborated with AWIB to identify and confirm these topics of inquiry.

The listening session facilitation guide is in *Appendix A*.



Introduction and Approach



Survey

A 12-question survey was designed in conjunction with AWIB staff leadership. The survey was emailed using Constant Contact to a list of 12,000 email addresses the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development associates with business licenses in Alaska. The email addresses were also linked to specific regions and industries, so that individual responses to the survey could be grouped together by company type, size, and location.

The survey was fielded electronically from Oct. 4 until Oct. 28, 2024. An incentive of \$350 towards an Alaska Airlines or Amazon.com gift card was provided as a prize drawing for those that took the survey and left an email address to be contacted. A total of 552 surveys were completed during that time for a response rate of 5 percent.

See Appendix B: Online Survey Questions.



Analysis and Reporting

MRG analyzed survey data, summarized qualitative data from listening sessions, and gathered other relevant information to identify regional workforce needs, gaps, and opportunities. Assessment findings are detailed in this report.

Report Organization

In addition to the Executive Summary and Introduction and Approach, the report is divided into four chapters.

Chapter 1: ALASKA VOICES

Presents thematic findings from statewide listening sessions including perspectives on recruiting, hiring, and retaining qualified employees; workforce development and training needs and approaches; and AWIB's role and reach.

Chapter 2: ONLINE SURVEY RESULTS

Presents topline findings on current workforce needs, recruitment and retention challenges, availability of workers by skill level, and familiarity with workforce programs.

Chapter 3: CONTEXTUALIZING ALASKA'S EMPLOYER EXPERIENCE

Presents contextual findings reflective of the broader business and economic context impacting employer and workforce considerations.

Chapter 4: RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Offers considerations for AWIB's short- and medium-term strategic planning.





Chapter 1

Alaska Voices

In statewide listening sessions, Alaska employers provided insights and shared experiences regarding workforce development needs and current development efforts in their region and statewide. These facilitated sessions explored three core topics.



ORGANIZATIONAL EXPERIENCES

Recruiting, hiring, and retaining qualified employees



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

Effective approaches and need



ALASKA WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD

Role and reach

Based on the analysis of listening session data, MRG identified several statewide themes. Regional and/or sector differences also emerged. Key findings are summarized below by core topic.



Organizational Experiences

Hiring Challenges

Listening session participants were asked to identify their top challenges or barriers to hiring qualified employees. Four significant hiring challenges were noted in each economic region statewide—including both rural and urban locales.

HOUSING

The lack of housing or affordable housing is a dominant hiring challenge across employment sectors and each economic region. It is a primary barrier to hiring and retaining qualified employees.

While the statewide housing shortage adversely impacts hiring potential of all position types, housing affordability affects hiring for lower-pay entry level, middle management, and public service positions to a greater extent.

“

The high cost of housing is a real deterrent when it comes to hiring good candidates. It doesn't really matter what position you are trying to fill. Everyone needs a place to live.” - Nome

“

Currently, we have a principal living in a classroom. We've also had teachers that have had to do it. There is just no housing.” - Bethel

Chapter 1: Alaska Voices



“

Employee retention involves supporting all aspects of life, such as housing, child care, and a spouse's need for employment.”

- Juneau

“

Preschool and school-aged child care have become such an issue [impacting hiring and retention].”

- Anchorage

CHILD CARE

Along with housing, the lack of affordable and reliable child care is a barrier to hiring and retaining qualified employees statewide. Within each economic region, child care is a central issue adversely impacting organizations' employees.

The Alaska-based workforce needs child care as do potential hires from out-of-state. When employers attempt to recruit out-of-state candidates with child care needs, they are confronted with hiring challenges directly related to limited local child care.

CHANGING WORKFORCE

Shifts in Alaska's workforce, including a declining population and aging labor pool present topline challenges for employers. There is steep regional competition to hire qualified employees. Alaska's aging workforce has sparked concern about how organizations will fill leadership positions in the future

Large employers in rural communities compete for a limited number of qualified applicants, particularly those individuals with advanced training and/or higher education. Urban employers cite a labor shortage for entry-level jobs and are in stiff competition to fill mid- to high-level management and professional positions from a shallow local applicant pool.



“

Slope jobs get better traction, but an IT or mid-level professional workforce is hard to find.”

- Anchorage

“

Higher-level jobs are full. People have been in those positions for a while, and we're going to start losing them because of their age. I worry about the gap coming.”

- Kotzebue



Chapter 1: Alaska Voices



SALARIES AND BENEFITS

Employers face multiple hiring challenges associated with salaries and benefits. Municipalities, public safety, and education report a widening gap between public and private sector wages.

Commonly cited factors included static or reduced funding that does not allow these public employers to offer competitive wages, and decrease in the type or quality of employer-provided benefits (e.g., state retirement changes from defined benefits to defined contributions).

“

It’s those jobs that have minimal qualifications you’d think we’d be able to fill here. But we can’t because of salary and housing.” - Nome

“

We used to be top of the line. Now teachers in Houston [Texas] are making more money than our teachers and the cost of living is a third.” - Bethel

Recruitment and Retention

Listening session participants shared their thoughts on effective recruitment and retention strategies and associated factors. Three notable strategies are reflected below.

WORK SCHEDULES

Flexible schedules, hybrid positions, and remote work options have become a workforce expectation across employment sectors statewide. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a higher expectation of flexibility, making it a de facto benefit. Therefore, employers are offering various work options as a key recruitment and retention strategy.

“

Our solution has been to let our staff work very wonky schedules and it’s not equitable.” - Anchorage

“

To retain a seasonal workforce for next year, we’ve developed hybrid job positions in which an employee’s job duties change seasonally.” - Nome



APPLICATION AND ONBOARDING

Some employers have seen recruitment success with streamlined online application or admission processes and flexible onboarding timelines. Others have developed specific hiring platforms. For example, some municipalities have used “attract and hire” platforms to target and contact qualified candidates. Others, such as institutions of higher learning, have used similar platforms to find applicants that meet minimum requirements. However, more recent funding cuts have eliminated this approach.

STIPENDS, INSURANCE, AND RETIREMENT BENEFITS

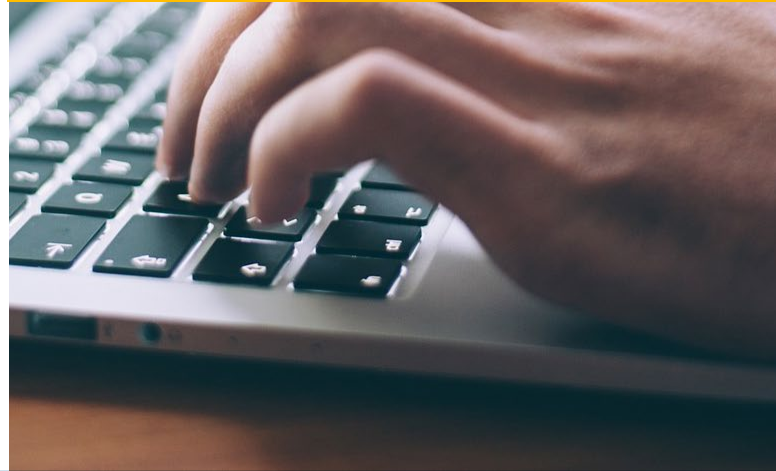
Participants note housing stipends as one method to improve the ability of local organizations to hire new employees from outside the region. However, the effectiveness of this strategy is limited by the availability of housing. Organizations with competitive health insurance and robust retirement benefits have a significant recruitment and retention edge.

“

People do things online nowadays; they don't want to talk in person.” - Fairbanks

“

We cannot advertise like we used to [on hiring platforms] because of funding cuts.” - Valdez



In-region Hiring

While employers indicate a preference for qualified candidates that live in-region, they claim a mix of in-state and out-of-state hires. Most entry level jobs are local hires and executives are from out of state. Employers' ability to recruit employees in the region has been negatively impacted over the last several years. Changes in compensation levels and retirement benefit packages, as compared to employers in the Lower 48, were offered as contributing factors along with the high cost of living in rural Alaska.

Two recruitment strategies emerged as somewhat effective—leveraging personal and professional connections and recruiting already-employed individuals.

“

Indeed does not work. Poaching and word of mouth has worked best.”

- Anchorage

“

Stealing qualified people. Poaching is very real now. You used to be more open about it.” - Dillingham



Workforce Development and Training

Organization-based Training

Several individual organizations described operating their own professional development and internship programs, including scholarship funding to pay for candidate training. One barrier to in-region training that participants noted is difficulty attracting and affording instructors. Poor high school performance also makes it challenging to identify qualified in-state training candidates.

For numerous employers and job types, organization-based training is not a realistic option. Fully qualified employees are needed on day one for school districts, middle management, and technology, among others.

“

We are maxed out on full-time staff to do what we do. Instructors cost a lot.”

- Kotzebue

“

We struggle with employees we can't train ourselves: mechanics, IT, HR specialists. They need to come with experience.”

- Juneau

Effective Workforce Development Pipelines

Regional training and apprenticeship programs are well understood in rural settings. Employing organizations have an informed understanding of program opportunities and limitations. They know what these programs offer and what they do not. However, in some cases employers say they are aware of training pipelines but do not have the time to establish formal training-to-employment mechanisms.

Statewide, a strong public school system is a critical workforce development pipeline. School districts need more funding to adequately fill this role as well as offer career pathways in high school. The university system is repeatedly cited as an effective pipeline, but funding cuts and loss of accredited programs increasingly challenges its capabilities and effectiveness.

“

The challenge in health care is bridging high school programs with our own. The systems don't bridge effectively.”

- Anchorage

“

A strong, competitive education system is the most effective workforce pipeline.”

- Juneau



Unmet Need

Available workforce development and training pipelines do not meet the spectrum of employer workforce needs. Trade industries need stronger relationships with training partners. There is an expressed need for management, leadership, and soft skills training to supplement the training programs already available.

Despite challenges competing with the national market for qualified employees, organizations continue to recruit from outside Alaska. Participants note most of their new hires come from the Lower 48 and international locales. A remote workforce is an increasingly popular option as employers grasp to fill unmet needs. However, some rural employers have restrictions on hiring remote or out-of-region workers, a factor further complicating their workforce landscape.

“

Alaska has many ports. There are specific occupations associated with ports. There are no training programs that provide this type of workforce development.” - Nome

“

The high school programs will eventually feed to us but won't bring us the mid-level professional group we need NOW.”

- Anchorage

“

Other than construction and labor trades that the college offers there is nothing here.”

- Valdez





Alaska Workforce Investment Board

State Responsibility

Participants generally agree that the State has a responsibility for education, training, and workforce development, though many felt the State was not meeting its obligations. There is universal sentiment that State of Alaska unemployment office closures, staff reductions at local Job Centers, or perceived changes in school funding contrasted with the stated intent to enhance workforce development. There is a disconnect between the State and regional communities about the reality of workforce development.



“

If the State is playing a role, it is so disjointed it's not apparent.” - Anchorage

“

Education and training are part of the constitutional responsibility of the State, and they need to provide it in all areas of the state with equity.” - Dillingham

Impact Makers

Specific employers and regional organizations are making the most impact, not an industry or the State. For example, select school districts and mining organizations are developing their internal workforce development pipelines. Health care employers, among others, are tackling recruitment and retention challenges by investing in projects to better provide employee housing. Although educational institutions and training programs may be workforce development pipelines, factors such as limited housing and child care may cause the trained workers to go elsewhere.

“

The college is doing what we can, but I don't think it's creating an impact in Valdez. The people we train go elsewhere.” - Valdez

“

Workforce development is moving to the top of the list of different organizations' priorities as expansion happens.”

- Nome

“

The role of the State is to put the purse strings where the investments need to be.”

- Bethel



Reach and Role

In each listening session, participants were asked about their awareness of and engagement with AWIB and the board's role.

REACH

Overwhelmingly, respondents had little to no awareness of AWIB, including its mission, vision, and activities. The exceptions were respondents from two training programs which currently receive AWIB funding and individuals from the Southwest region with extensive knowledge of AWIB's stated purpose, governance structure, and board membership.

There is an opportunity to expand the awareness of AWIB across industry sectors and strengthen partnership engagement statewide in an equitable manner. The current AWIB board may not adequately represent rural Alaska in general and tribes and tribal organizations statewide.

Participants perceive a disconnect with AWIB and note much workforce development statewide has moved forward without AWIB engagement or awareness. A common sentiment is that AWIB has not positioned itself to know what is occurring within the workforce development arena overall.

“

If AWIB wants us to sign a MOU, we need a seat at the table. Rebuild the partnership. It is not fair not to give us a seat at the table.” - Dillingham

“

I have a friend on the board, and I ask ‘What do you do? What have you done to help us?’”

- Juneau

ROLE

In funding select workforce development and training programs in Alaska, AWIB plays an important role. Listening session participants who were AWIB grantees cited the opportunity to strengthen this role through updated grant management systems and streamlined processes.

The workforce needs assessment identified a functional gap in the current workforce development and training continuum. There is a distinct workforce development need for basic skills required in every employment sector, such as professionalism (e.g., showing up, being present). Participants offered that AWIB might play a partnership role in this specific regard with established workforce training programs.

Most participants were unfamiliar with AWIB prior to the listening session. As such, they had limited expectations or thoughts on how AWIB might play a different or new role. Some expressed skepticism that their input would be considered by AWIB. There is an identified need to expand AWIB outreach statewide, build trust, and further explore its role.

“

Pick just one thing and try to make meaningful progress on that one thing. Don't try to do everything.” - Juneau

“

You don't have to learn how to have the job but learn how to try and get the job.”

- Fairbanks

“

We can provide input but is it truly going to be taken into consideration?”

- Kotzebue



Chapter 2

Online Survey Results

A 12-question online survey was distributed to businesses across Alaska to learn about Alaska's current workforce needs, recruitment and retention challenges, availability of workers by skill level, and familiarity with workforce programs.

Survey Respondents Characteristics

The highest percentage of Career Workforce Needs Assessment survey respondents represented businesses operating in Anchorage and/or the Mat-Su area (45%), followed by businesses in the Gulf Coast (18%), Southeast (16%), and the Interior (13%).

Respondents were asked to share the number of workers employed by their organizations. Across all regions, the majority of respondents worked at organizations with fewer than ten employees (77%). Twenty percent worked at companies with 10 to 50 employees. The average company size represented by respondents was 17 employees. No respondents worked at organizations with more than 500 employees.

TABLE 1. SURVEY RESPONDENTS BY ECONOMIC REGION (%)

Anchorage/Mat-Su	45
Gulf Coast	18
Southeast	16
Interior	13
Southwest	4
Northern	1
Unknown	4

TABLE 2. NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES [BY REGION] %

Number of respondents are indicated by "n" in the tables below.

	Total n=552	Anchorage/ Mat-Su n=244	Gulf Coast n=98	Southeast n=89	Interior n=69	Southwest n=21	Northern n=8
Up to 9	77	75	82	72	77	81	63
10 to 50	20	23	16	21	19	14	25
50 to 99	2	1	-	3	3	5	-
100 to 499	2	2	2	3	1	-	13
Avg. Number of Employees	17	16	15	23	16	12	48



Chapter 2: Online Survey Results

Respondents were asked to provide industry classification for their respective organizations. Results by region follow.

TABLE 3. NORTH AMERICAN INDUSTRY CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM CATEGORY [BY REGION] (%)

	Total n=552	Anchorage/ Mat-Su n=244	Gulf Coast n=98	Southeast n=89	Interior n=69	Southwest n=21	Northern n=8
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, and Hunting	3	1	7	3	3	-	-
Construction	10	10	10	8	12	19	25
Manufacturing	4	4	5	6	1	-	-
Wholesale & Retail Trade	15	14	16	22	9	24	-
Transportation and Warehousing	5	3	7	9	7	-	13
Professional Services	18	20	8	11	20	24	13
Administrative and Support Services and Waste Management/Remediation	7	10	6	1	4	-	-
Education, Public Administration	5	3	2	7	4	24	25
Health Care and Social Assistance	9	13	6	6	13	-	-
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	5	3	8	4	10	-	-
Accommodation and Food Services	10	8	13	12	13	5	-
Other Services (except Public Administration)	8	10	8	8	3	5	25



New Employee Hire

Survey respondents were asked about the number of new employees hired in 2023 and 2024. About one in five businesses (19%) reported hiring no new workers in 2023 and 2024. Of businesses who did hire new employees, nearly two-thirds of respondents hired ten or fewer. These responses align with the characteristics of businesses responding to this survey, which were predominantly small businesses.

TABLE 4. HOW MANY NEW EMPLOYEES DID YOUR ORGANIZATION HIRE IN 2023/2024? [BY REGION] (%)

	Total n=552	Anchorage/ Mat-Su n=244	Gulf Coast n=98	Southeast n=89	Interior n=69	Southwest n=21	Northern n=8
None	19	17	22	18	20	10	13
1 to 5	50	52	55	48	48	52	25
6 to 10	14	16	9	13	12	24	25
11 to 25	9	6	8	11	13	5	25
26 to 100	6	5	4	7	6	10	13
Over 100	2	2	1	2	1	-	-



Change in Hiring Difficulty

Employer responses about ease of hiring in 2024 compared to 2023 were fairly consistent across most regions. On average, 41% expressed that hiring new employees stayed about the same level of difficulty from 2023 to 2024, 13% found it easier, and 34% found it more difficult.

In the Northern region, 13% of employers responded that hiring had become much easier in 2024, the highest rate for all geographic areas. Employers from Southwest regions (39%), Interior and Northern regions (both 38%), and Anchorage/Mat-Su (36%) reported the highest level of difficulty finding workers in 2024 compared to 2023.

TABLE 5. COMPARED TO 2023, HOW EASY OR DIFFICULT HAS IT BEEN TO HIRE EMPLOYEES IN 2024? [BY REGION] (%)

	Total n=552	Anchorage/ Mat-Su n=244	Gulf Coast n=98	Southeast n=89	Interior n=69	Southwest n=21	Northern n=8
Easier TOTAL	13	10	17	13	13	19	13
Much easier	2	1	2	2	-	5	13
Somewhat easier	11	9	15	11	13	14	-
About the same	41	41	40	46	36	38	50
More difficult TOTAL	34	36	29	29	38	39	38
Somewhat more difficult	16	16	12	17	22	10	13
Much more difficult	18	20	17	12	16	29	25
Did not hire in 2023/2024	13	13	13	11	13	5	-

Large businesses (those with 100 to 499 employees) reported the highest level of difficulty in hiring new employees in 2024 compared to 2023, with 45% saying it had become more difficult than the previous year.

Small- and medium-sized businesses were the only company sizes with respondents reporting that they did not hire in 2023/2024. Businesses with 50 to 99 employees reported more ease hiring in 2024 compared to 2023, with 33% reporting that hiring had become much or somewhat easier, and none reporting that hiring had become much more difficult from one year to the next.

TABLE 6. COMPARED TO 2023, HOW EASY OR DIFFICULT HAS IT BEEN TO HIRE EMPLOYEES IN 2024? [BY COMPANY SIZE] (%)

	Total n=552	Up to nine n=424	10 to 49 n=108	50 to 99 n=9	100 to 499 n=11
Easier TOTAL	13	11	15	33	27
Much easier	2	2	1	11	-
Somewhat easier	11	9	14	22	27
About the same	41	42	38	44	27
More difficult TOTAL	34	32	43	22	45
Somewhat more difficult	16	15	19	22	27
Much more difficult	18	17	24	-	18
Did not hire in 2023/2024	13	15	4	-	-

Difficulty Finding Qualified Workers

Respondents were asked about ease and difficulty of finding qualified workers in Alaska in 2024. Two-thirds of respondents (65%) expressed that it was somewhat or very difficult to find qualified workers. Thirteen percent of respondents said it was neither easy nor difficult to find qualified workers, and just 7% found it easy.

By industry category, those in the construction, manufacturing, and health and social services sectors were most likely to report that it was very difficult to find qualified workers, with 45%, 43%, and 41% reporting it was very difficult to hire, respectively.

TABLE 7. IN 2024, HOW EASY OR DIFFICULT HAS IT BEEN FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION TO FIND QUALIFIED EMPLOYEES IN ALASKA? [BY REGION] (%)

	Total n=552	Anchorage/ Mat-Su n=244	Gulf Coast n=98	Southeast n=89	Interior n=69	Southwest n=21	Northern n=8
Easy TOTAL	7	6	10	6	6	5	13
Very easy	1	1	1	2	-	-	-
Somewhat easy	6	5	9	4	6	5	13
Neither easy nor difficult	13	13	15	12	9	14	25
Difficult TOTAL	65	68	62	68	68	71	63
Somewhat difficult	34	34	39	35	35	33	-
Very difficult	31	34	23	33	33	38	63
Did not hire in 2024	15	14	12	13	17	10	-



Chapter 2: Online Survey Results

Difficulty Finding Qualified Workers by Skill Level

Survey respondents were asked how challenging it is to hire for entry level, skilled labor, professional/technical workers, and executive level staff. Responses by skill level and region are provided in the summary table below, with further detail provided for each skill level in the tables that follow.

TABLE 8. SUMMARY TABLE, DIFFICULTY FINDING QUALIFIED WORKERS BY SKILL LEVEL AND REGION: EASY (VERY + SOMEWHAT) VS. DIFFICULT (VERY + SOMEWHAT) (%)

	Total n=541	Anchorage/ Mat-Su n=242	Gulf Coast n=97	Southeast n=86	Interior n=67	Southwest n=21	Northern n=7
Entry-Level Workforce							
Easy	26	25	28	23	21	34	43
Difficult	47	46	42	48	62	43	57
Skilled Labor							
Easy	4	2	4	1	-	14	43
Difficult	54	56	56	50	55	72	57
Professional/Technical Workforce							
Easy	3	1	1	4	3	-	14
Difficult	37	37	24	37	36	72	71
Executive-Level Staff							
Easy	1	<1	-	2	-	5	29
Difficult	30	27	29	25	39	47	57

Employers across all regions were more likely to report finding qualified workers as difficult. Those seeking entry-level workers had the highest percentage of easy ratings, at 26%. Those hiring skilled laborers, professional/technical workers, and executive staff were far less likely to report that it was easy to hire qualified workers, with fewer than 5% of employers reporting it was very or somewhat easy to hire.

Entry-Level Workforce

- Entry-level workers were the only group for which more than 1% of respondents said it was very easy to find qualified workers (6%).
- Respondents representing the Interior region of the state were most likely to report difficulty hiring entry-level workers (62%).
- Among those seeking entry-level workers, employers in agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting industries reported the highest level of difficulty hiring, with two-thirds (67%) saying it was either somewhat or very difficult to hire entry-level workers.
- Those hiring employees in the accommodation and food service sectors were the only group with over one-third of respondents reporting it was either somewhat or very easy to hire entry-level workers (38%).

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TABLE 9. HOW EASY OR DIFFICULT HAS IT BEEN TO FIND QUALIFIED WORKERS AT EACH SKILL LEVEL? [ENTRY-LEVEL WORKFORCE, BY REGION] (%)

	Total n=541	Anchorage/ Mat-Su n=242	Gulf Coast n=97	Southeast n=86	Interior n=67	Southwest n=21	Northern n=7
Easy TOTAL	26	25	28	23	21	34	43
Very easy	6	5	7	8	3	10	-
Somewhat easy	20	20	21	15	18	24	43
Neither easy nor difficult	15	17	18	15	7	14	-
Difficult TOTAL	47	46	42	48	62	43	57
Somewhat difficult	29	27	28	28	37	33	43
Very difficult	18	19	14	20	25	10	14
Not applicable	13	12	12	14	9	10	-

Skilled Labor

- Among all job types, employers seeking to hire qualified workers to provide skilled labor found hiring most difficult, with 54% reporting that it was either somewhat or very difficult to hire.
- Respondents in the Northern region of the state were far more likely than other regions to report hiring workers for skilled labor as either somewhat or very easy; however, results should be interpreted with caution due to the region's small sample size.
- Among sector categories, those in the construction industry were most likely to report that it was very difficult to hire skilled labor (64%), followed by those in agriculture/forestry/fishing/hunting (47%) and manufacturing (43%).

TABLE 10. HOW EASY OR DIFFICULT HAS IT BEEN TO FIND QUALIFIED WORKERS AT EACH SKILL LEVEL? [SKILLED LABOR, BY REGION] (%)

	Total n=541	Anchorage/ Mat-Su n=242	Gulf Coast n=97	Southeast n=86	Interior n=67	Southwest n=21	Northern n=7
Easy TOTAL	4	2	4	1	-	14	43
Very easy	<1	<1	-	-	-	-	-
Somewhat easy	4	2	4	1	-	14	43
Neither easy nor difficult	7	7	6	6	7	10	-
Difficult TOTAL	54	56	56	50	55	72	57
Somewhat difficult	20	21	26	16	15	29	-
Very difficult	34	35	30	34	40	43	57
Not applicable	35	35	34	43	37	5	-



Professional/Technical Workforce

- Those in the Southwest and Northern regions of the state were most likely to report difficulty hiring professional and technical workers (72% and 71% respectively) compared to other regions of the state, where fewer than 40% of respondents reported it was somewhat or very difficult. However, results should be interpreted with caution due to small sample sizes for both Southwest and Northern regions.
- Several sectors were more likely than others to respond that hiring professional/technical workers was difficult, including employers in education and public administration (57% difficult or very difficult), professional services (57%), and health and social services (52%).

TABLE 11. HOW EASY OR DIFFICULT HAS IT BEEN TO FIND QUALIFIED WORKERS AT EACH SKILL LEVEL? [PROFESSIONAL/TECHNICAL WORKFORCE, BY REGION] (%)

	Total n=541	Anchorage/ Mat-Su n=242	Gulf Coast n=97	Southeast n=86	Interior n=67	Southwest n=21	Northern n=7
Easy TOTAL	3	1	1	4	3	-	14
Very easy	1	-	1	2	-	-	-
Somewhat easy	2	1	-	2	3	-	14
Neither easy nor difficult	5	5	3	6	4	5	-
Difficult TOTAL	37	37	24	37	36	72	71
Somewhat difficult	16	18	13	14	6	29	14
Very difficult	21	19	11	23	30	43	57
Not applicable	56	57	71	52	57	24	14

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Executive-Level Staff

- Asked about difficulty finding qualified executive staff, 30% of respondents reported it was either somewhat or very difficult to find qualified workers. Sixty-four percent said it was not applicable, 4% said it was neither easy nor difficult, and just 1% said it was easy.
- Among all regions, those in the Northern, Southwest, and Interior regions were most likely to report hiring executive staff to be very difficult (57%, 33%, and 30%); however, results should be interpreted with caution due to small sample sizes.

TABLE 12. HOW EASY OR DIFFICULT HAS IT BEEN TO FIND QUALIFIED WORKERS AT EACH SKILL LEVEL? [EXECUTIVE-LEVEL STAFF, BY REGION] (%)

	Total n=541	Anchorage/ Mat-Su n=242	Gulf Coast n=97	Southeast n=86	Interior n=67	Southwest n=21	Northern n=7
Easy TOTAL	1	<1	-	2	-	5	29
Very easy	<1	-	-	1	-	-	-
Somewhat easy	1	<1	-	1	-	5	29
Neither easy nor difficult	4	4	3	7	3	5	-
Difficult TOTAL	30	27	29	25	39	47	57
Somewhat difficult	8	8	11	3	9	14	-
Very difficult	22	19	18	22	30	33	57
Not applicable	64	69	68	65	58	43	14



Recruitment and Retention

Hiring Plans

Most respondents reported that their companies plan to hire in 2025, with the majority planning to hire one to five employees (55%). One in five (19%) were not planning to hire, 9% plan to hire six to 10 employees, and a combined 11% plan to hire more than 10 employees.

- Larger companies were proportionately more likely to be planning to hire new employees, with nearly three-quarters of respondents from companies of 100-499 employees (72%) planning to hire ten or more employees.
- The smallest companies were most likely (23%) to say that they did not intend to hire in the next year.
- Those in the accommodation and food services sector and in arts, entertainment, and recreation were most likely to be hiring in 2025, with just 6% and 8% not planning to hire new employees in 2025, respectively.

TABLE 13. HOW MANY NEW EMPLOYEES DOES YOUR ORGANIZATION PLAN TO HIRE IN 2025? [BY REGION] (%)

	Total n=541	Anchorage/ Mat-Su n=242	Gulf Coast n=97	Southeast n=86	Interior n=67	Southwest n=21	Northern n=7
None	19	17	30	17	18	10	-
1 to 5	55	60	55	53	51	67	43
6 to 10	9	8	5	9	15	10	14
11 to 25	7	7	6	9	6	-	14
26 to 100	3	3	-	3	4	10	14
Over 100	1	1	1	-	-	-	-
Don't know	5	5	3	7	6	5	14



Employee Recruitment and Retention Efforts

Most survey respondents (72%) had engaged in a variety of initiatives over the last several years to enhance recruitment and retention; 28% said they had not, or this was not applicable to them. The most frequently mentioned recruitment effort was increasing visibility of job postings (44%), followed by paying for training (27%) and streamlining application processes (19%).

Though average wages have increased statewide over the last several years, only 8% of survey respondents said they had raised wages as a method to find and retain qualified employees. A significant number of respondents made structural changes to recruitment, such as improving application processes and removing certification requirements, to bring in more qualified candidates or keep existing employees.

Among all sectors, respondents in the transportation and warehousing sector were most likely to provide housing and transportation assistance as a method of recruitment and retention (39% and 29% respectively). Respondents in the manufacturing sector were most likely to say that had increased pay (14%), while just 2% of respondents in the accommodations and food services industries had increased pay.

TABLE 14. WHAT HAS YOUR ORGANIZATION DONE TO BETTER FIND AND/OR RETAIN QUALIFIED EMPLOYEES? [BY REGION] (%)

	Total n=534	Anchorage/ Mat-Su n=238	Gulf Coast n=97	Southeast n=84	Interior n=67	Southwest n=21	Northern n=6
Increase visibility of job postings	44	48	39	39	37	43	50
Pay for training	27	24	26	33	28	43	33
Streamline application process	19	20	19	17	19	5	17
Remove degree/certificate requirements	12	12	12	10	18	5	-
Provide housing assistance	10	3	13	20	12	33	33
Provide transportation assistance	9	7	12	14	6	19	17
Increased pay	8	10	7	10	7	5	-
Remove drug/alcohol testing	6	6	6	10	6	-	-
Remove background checks	5	5	4	4	4	5	-
Increased benefits	4	4	2	2	7	-	-
Increased flexibility/allowed WFH	3	1	5	4	1	-	-
Provide child care assistance	2	1	2	4	1	-	-
Change training location	2	2	2	1	-	-	-
Other	4	3	5	2	4	14	-
None/not applicable	28	26	33	25	39	19	-

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Open-Ended Responses

In addition to selecting multiple-choice answers, respondents mentioned the following recruitment and retention efforts:

More lenient 90-day probation periods	More temporary, part-time, and seasonal positions	Incentivized employee referral programs
Improved office facilities	Internship programs	Increased family-friendly workplace policies
Integration of culture into workplace wellness and retention initiatives	Lower barriers to entry and expanded qualification requirements	Greater focus on career development and recruitment starting with high school students

Expanded recruitment efforts to include in-person recruitment, professional recruitment services, sector-based outreach, and networking events and recruitment activities outside the state and internationally



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Expected Recruitment Activity by Occupation

The most commonly mentioned positions employers planned to recruit for in 2025 were customer service representatives and receptionists (19%), followed by construction trades workers (14%), cooks and food prep workers (13%), and retail clerks and bookkeepers (both 12%).

TABLE 15. WHAT SPECIFIC JOBS WILL YOU BE HIRING FOR IN 2025? [BY REGION] (%)

	Total n=529	Anchorage/ Mat-Su n=237	Gulf Coast n=95	Southeast n=83	Interior n=67	Southwest n=20	Northern n=6
Customer service representatives/receptionists	19	21	14	19	28	-	-
Construction trades (carpenters, painters, roofers)	14	12	14	18	18	25	33
Cooks/food prep workers	13	11	17	18	15	-	17
Retail workers	12	10	12	24	12	10	-
Bookkeepers	12	8	14	17	15	20	17
Secretaries/administrative assistants	8	10	6	7	9	10	-
Accountants/financial analysts	7	5	6	10	3	10	17
Janitors/housekeepers	7	5	11	8	9	5	-
Computer/information systems workers	6	7	7	5	4	-	-
Heavy equipment/automotive/aircraft mechanics	6	5	7	5	9	25	-
Waiters/bartenders/servers	6	4	11	11	6	-	-
Data entry clerks/mail clerks	6	6	5	8	7	5	-
Heavy truck drivers	5	5	4	5	9	10	-
Tour guides	4	2	5	10	6	-	-
Teachers/instructors	4	4	2	6	1	5	17
Physicians/dentists/therapists	3	5	3	-	-	-	-
Personal care aides	2	4	-	-	3	-	-
Water transportation workers	2	-	2	7	-	5	-
Fish processing workers	1	<1	2	4	-	5	-
Nurses	1	2	-	-	-	-	-
Miners	<1	<1	-	-	-	-	-
Other jobs	32	37	27	28	21	40	50
Don't know	4	3	5	2	3	5	-
None/not applicable	16	15	18	12	19	10	-

Those who said they were hiring for “other” jobs included the following: solar project managers, pest control, paralegals and attorneys, fisheries technicians and deckhands, insurance adjusters, sales agents, engineers, biologists, arborists and landscapers, welders and fabricators, and veterinarians.

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Online Survey Results

Diversity of Jobs by Region

Respondents based in Anchorage/Mat-Su planned to hire for the greatest diversity of positions, with 21% of companies hiring for customer service representatives/receptionists, and 5% or more hiring in all other top ten job categories. Among all regions, the Interior had the highest concentration of companies hiring customer service (28%), construction trades (18%), and food preparation workers (15%).

The Southeast region had the highest rate of employers seeking retail workers (24%) and tour guides (10%). In the Southwest region, 25% of respondents were seeking heavy equipment, automotive, and aircraft mechanics, the highest among all regions.

Challenging Vacancies

Respondents were presented with a list of occupations based on those they planned to hire for in 2025 and asked to select the position that was hardest to fill. Across most regions, construction trades and food prep/cook positions were hardest to fill, cited by 10% of all respondents. Retail workers followed (8%), along with bookkeepers (7%) and customer service representatives and receptionists (6%).



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TABLE 16. WHAT SPECIFIC JOBS ARE HARDEST TO FILL? [BY REGION] (%)

	Total n=529	Anchorage/ Mat-Su n=237	Gulf Coast n=95	Southeast n=83	Interior n=67	Southwest n=20	Northern n=6
Construction trades (carpenters, painters, roofers)	10	8	12	12	12	15	33
Cooks/food prep workers	10	8	13	13	12	-	17
Retail workers	8	5	6	17	10	10	-
Bookkeepers	7	5	7	10	7	10	17
Customer service representatives/receptionists	6	6	3	4	12	-	-
Heavy equipment/automotive/aircraft mechanics	5	5	5	4	6	15	-
Accountants/financial analysts	5	3	6	8	1	5	17
Heavy truck drivers	4	4	3	4	6	-	-
Secretaries/administrative assistants	3	3	1	2	4	10	-
Computer/information systems workers	3	3	2	2	1	-	-
Janitors/housekeepers	3	3	4	4	1	-	-
Waiters/bartenders/servers	3	1	4	7	3	-	-
Data entry clerks/mail clerks	2	3	3	-	3	-	-
Physicians/dentists/therapists	2	4	2	-	-	-	-
Personal care aides	2	3	-	-	3	-	-
Teachers/instructors	2	2	1	4	-	5	-
Tour guides	2	<1	2	4	6	-	-
Water transportation workers	1	-	1	6	-	5	-
Fish processing workers	1	-	1	1	-	5	-
Nurses	<1	<1	-	-	-	-	-
Miners	<1	<1	-	-	-	-	-
Other jobs	28	34	21	25	16	40	33
Don't know	4	3	5	2	3	5	-
None/not applicable	16	15	18	12	19	10	-

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Employee Retention

Asked about the percentage of employees retained, 19% of employers reported that all employees hired in Alaska in the last two years were still working with their organizations. Of note, only organizations with fewer than 50 employees had retained 100% of their workers.

Seventeen percent of respondents said 51%-75% had been retained and 16% said 25%-50% had been retained. The average across all regions was 53% retention of employees, with the highest retention in the Gulf Coast (56%) and lowest in the Southwest (42%).

Sectors reporting the highest average retention rates included education and public administration (61% average two-year retention) and professional services (60%).

Manufacturing appeared to have the highest level of turnover, with 24% of respondents reporting that 0% of employees hired in the past two years were still employed by their organizations.

TABLE 17. OF ALL THE EMPLOYEES YOU HAVE HIRED IN ALASKA IN THE PAST TWO YEARS FOR PERMANENT POSITIONS, WHAT PERCENTAGE ARE STILL EMPLOYED WITH YOUR ORGANIZATION? [BY REGION] (%)

	Total n=534	Anchorage/ Mat-Su n=238	Gulf Coast n=97	Southeast n=84	Interior n=67	Southwest n=21	Northern n=6
0%	10	10	7	10	9	10	-
<25%	15	16	12	14	13	24	-
25-50%	16	19	12	11	16	24	67
51-75%	17	14	19	24	22	14	17
76-99%	9	9	8	11	7	10	-
100%	19	21	19	19	7	10	17
Not applicable	14	10	22	12	22	10	-
Avg. % of New Hires Still Employed	53	52	56	55	47	42	52



Familiarity and Use of Workforce Programs

While most respondents to the survey had either not heard of AWIB or did not know specifically what AWIB does (91% combined), almost two-thirds were familiar with the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development (ADOLWD) Job Centers, with only 12% reporting they had never heard of them.

Familiarity with Alaska Workforce Investment Board

Just 8% of respondents were familiar with AWIB, with another 28% reporting they had heard of AWIB, but were not sure of its mission or activities. The region with lowest familiarity was Southeast, where 72% of respondents had not heard of AWIB.

TABLE 18. BEFORE TODAY, HOW FAMILIAR WERE YOU WITH THE ALASKA WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD? [BY REGION] (%)

	Total n=528	Anchorage/ Mat-Su n=237	Gulf Coast n=95	Southeast n=83	Interior n=66	Southwest n=20	Northern n=6
Never heard of it	63	60	61	72	67	60	33
Heard of it, but don't know what it does	28	31	31	19	26	30	67
Familiar with it	8	9	8	8	8	10	-





Familiarity with ADOLWD Job Center

Asked about familiarity with ADOLWD Job Centers, 61% of respondents were familiar and 27% had heard of them, but weren’t sure what their function was. Just 12% had never heard of them.

The highest level of familiarity was in the Northern region (100%), though results should be interpreted with caution due to small sample size. The next highest level of familiarity was in the Gulf Coast region (76%) followed by Southeast (63%).

TABLE 19. BEFORE TODAY, HOW FAMILIAR WERE YOU WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF LABOR JOB CENTERS? [BY REGION] (%)

	Total n=528	Anchorage/ Mat-Su n=237	Gulf Coast n=95	Southeast n=83	Interior n=66	Southwest n=20	Northern n=6
Never heard of them	12	14	8	8	6	5	-
Heard of them, but don't know what they do	27	27	16	29	38	50	-
Familiar with them	61	59	76	63	56	45	100

Chapter 2: Online Survey Results

Candidate Recruitment in Alaska

Asked about their use of specific workforce organizations, few respondents had recruited candidates through the organizations listed. The most frequently mentioned organization was the University of Alaska Career and Technical Education Center, which was used for recruiting by 26 of the total survey respondents, including those from Anchorage/Mat-Su, the Interior, and Southeast regions. One company in the Northern region, representing 17% of responses there, had successfully recruited from Alaska Technical Vocational Educational Program (TVEP) but the other six companies answering from that region said they had used “None of the Above” for recruitment.

The Interior had the most diverse use of training programs for recruitment, with 15% reporting that they had recruited from University of Alaska Career and Technical Education Center, three recruiting from TVEP, two recruiting from Alaska Vocational Technical Center (AVTEC), and one respondent each reporting they had recruited from Northern Industrial Training and Alaska Construction Academy. The overwhelming majority of respondents (91% total from all regions) said they had not used any of the aforementioned organizations for recruitment in the last two years.

TABLE 20. IN THE PAST TWO YEARS, HAVE YOU RECRUITED CANDIDATES THROUGH ANY OF THE FOLLOWING ORGANIZATIONS? [BY REGION] (%)

	Total n=528	Anchorage/ Mat-Su n=237	Gulf Coast n=95	Southeast n=83	Interior n=66	Southwest n=20	Northern n=6
University of Alaska Career and Technical Education (CTE)	5	4	-	6	15	-	-
Alaska Vocational Technical Center (AVTEC)	4	3	3	6	3	10	-
Alaska Technical Vocational Education Program (TVEP)	2	1	1	2	5	-	17
Alaska Construction Academies	1	<1	1	1	2	-	-
Northern Industrial Training	1	<1	1	-	2	5	-
Alaska Laborers Training School	<1	-	-	1	2	-	-
Alaska Area Health Education Centers	<1	<1	-	-	-	-	-
None of the above	91	92	94	90	83	90	83





Chapter 3

Contextualizing Alaska's Employer Experience

Alaska's employers operate in a challenging environment. Aspects of the state's geography, climate, and distance from other markets are all components of that environment. However, businesses in Alaska are also contending with labor force, support services, and other socioeconomic conditions experienced by firms nationwide over the last several years. Many of these themes emerged during the listening sessions and survey research performed for this assessment. This section provides contextual findings of the assessment process which are important for stakeholders to consider as they engage in workforce development in Alaska.

The Business Context

Alaska employers, like those nationwide, have been acutely aware of workforce shortages in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. As evidenced by survey results presented in Chapter 2, Alaska employers have implemented a range of methods to better attract or retain qualified employees. While many have invested in these recruitment strategies, all employers—whether private or public—face important financial and capacity constraints in relationship to workforce development. Businesses have limited resources to coach prospective, untrained employees; many do not have the resources to launch independent widespread recruitment campaigns, and employers must balance pay and benefits increases with available revenue.

Engaging employers in this needs assessment process was difficult against this backdrop of limited capacity and resources. Many employers expressed a general sense of fatigue related to workforce development conversations and a reluctance to engage in what many considered to be a duplicative process for their region.

Employer capacity constraints often extend to employers' ability to project labor needs by occupation, particularly among larger firms with more complex operations and vendor arrangements. Survey results presented in Chapter 2 also indicate a broad diversity in the specific jobs for which employers plan to hire in 2025. To the extent individual employers do have the ability to forecast and prioritize labor needs, these needs may shift rapidly based on investment decisions, available capital, or project stage.

These factors indicate that communicating directly with employers at a statewide, cross-industry level will not provide a systematic way to identify training gaps or prioritize training needs. AWIB and other stakeholders should expect that employers have limited human resources, and potential low willingness, to engage in prioritization.



The Broader Economic Context

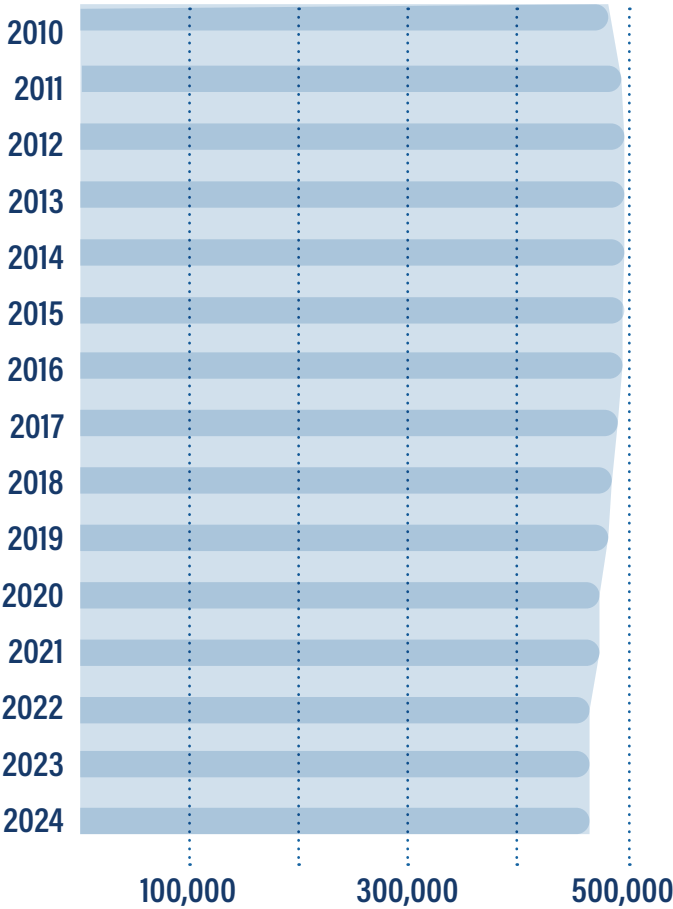
Outside of the financial and capacity constraints of recruiting at the business level, employers are also working to attract and retain employees within a broader, challenging economic landscape.

Alaska has experienced twelve years in a row of outmigration (more people moving out of Alaska compared to moving in) and a subsequent reduction in working age (16-64) population. As of 2024, the statewide working age population declined by about 28,700 (-6%) residents compared to the period before the Alaska statewide recession (2015-2018).

The most consistent theme expressed by employers in the listening sessions across all economic regions was that there are not enough people to fill all available positions in their region. Competition for talent was acute before the pandemic, but since 2021 employers have said that they cannot fill positions even with increases in pay, benefits, and flexibility, and most say they have had to learn to do more with fewer staff.

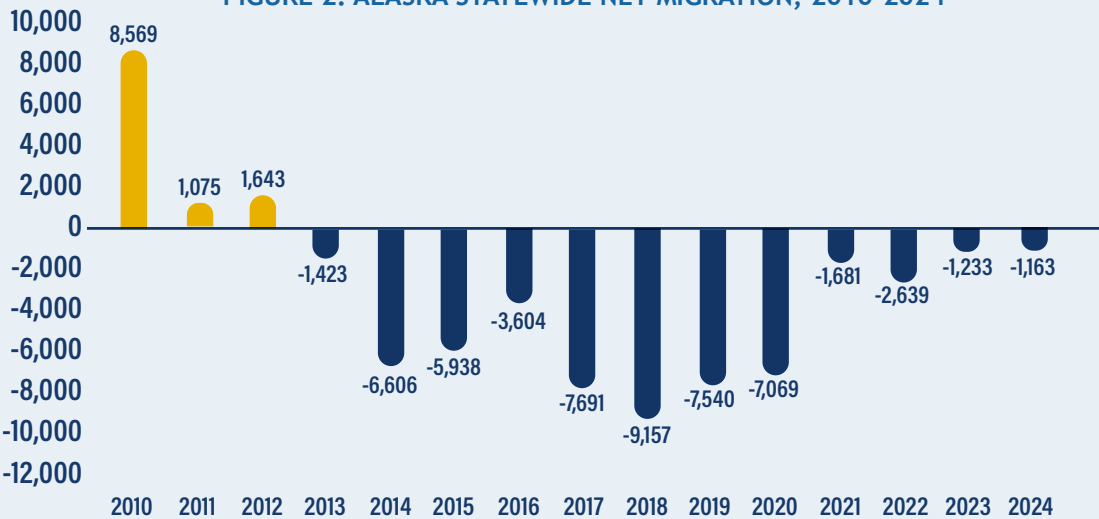
Given this people gap, employers are often grappling with methods to attract job candidates to their firm, and to live in their community in general. Throughout this assessment process employers routinely cited housing, child care, public education, and transportation as barriers or considerations in attracting new workers to their community.

FIGURE 1. ALASKA STATEWIDE WORKING AGE POPULATION, 2010-2024



Source: ADOLWD, Research and Analysis Section, based on residents aged 16-64.

FIGURE 2. ALASKA STATEWIDE NET MIGRATION, 2010-2024



Source: ADOLWD, Research and Analysis Section

Chapter 3: Contextualizing Alaska's Employer Experience



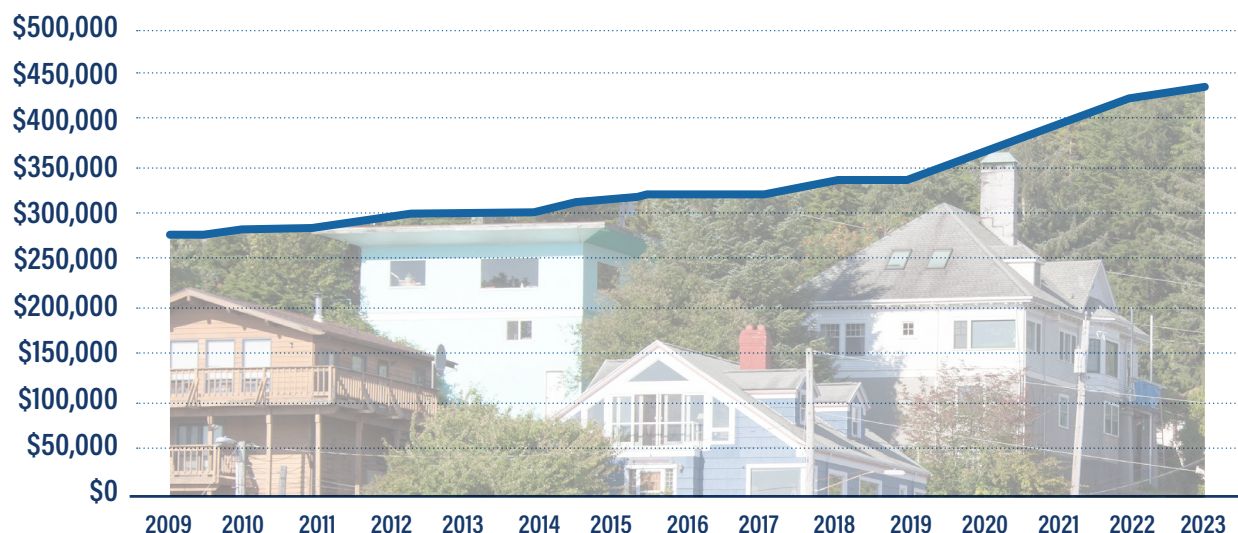
Housing

The availability, affordability, and quality of Alaska's housing stock has long been a source of concern across the state. Rapid increases in the cost of housing have brought these considerations to the forefront over the last several years. Through this assessment process, housing was mentioned as a challenge for most communities in attracting and retaining new employees. Some online survey respondents answered that they had made efforts to provide housing assistance in order to attract more workers.

Most employers' ability to adjust compensation to account for high housing costs—whether by increasing wages and salaries or offering an additional bonus—is limited. Even for those employers with financial resources to counteract high housing costs, there are many communities in the state with no available housing for new employees. Some larger employers are investing resources into developing workforce housing to bring new workers to their region.

Fundamentally, attracting new workers to Alaska from the Lower 48, and retaining the state's current workforce, depends on those workers having somewhere to live that is affordable and available.

FIGURE 3. AVERAGE SINGLE-FAMILY HOME SALES PRICE IN ALASKA, 2009-2023



Source: ADOLWD, Research and Analysis Section and the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation

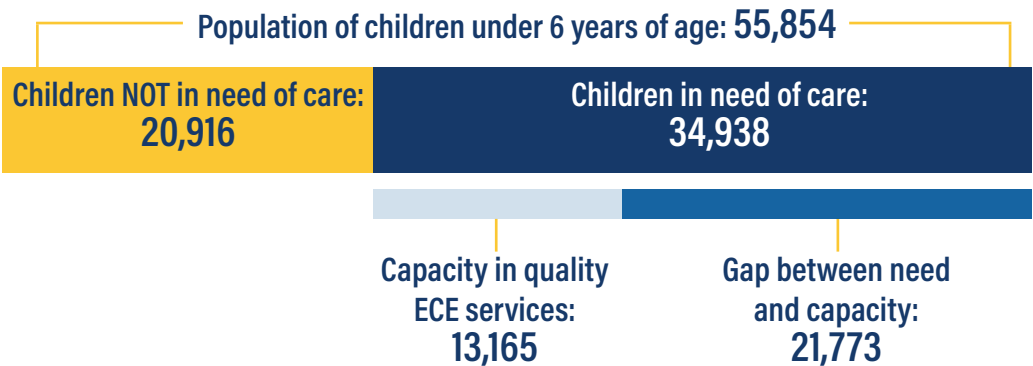


Child Care

Alaska is struggling with a statewide child care shortage, one that has been exacerbated since dozens of child care facilities closed during the COVID-19 pandemic. In Valdez, for example, there is only one licensed child care provider, and the wait list is over a year long for an infant spot. Statewide, the number of children under six years of age in need of child care services exceeds the capacity of Alaska’s child care services by about 21,700.¹ Residents wanting to go back to work after having children are unable to do so without reliable, safe, and affordable child care, something that is scarce in almost all Alaska communities.

Some employers are working to help provide guaranteed child care to employees by paying local providers a fee to hold child care spots open for their staff, operating their own child care center for staff use, or otherwise subsidizing care. Despite these measures, availability and affordability of child care is a barrier to Alaska’s residents in their ability to participate in the labor force. As of 2023, an estimated 51% of Alaska families with children under 13 years of age reported that they cannot fully participate in the labor force due to cost, availability, or quality of child care services.²

FIGURE 4. SUPPLY AND DEMAND FOR LICENSED OR REGULATED EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION (ECE) SERVICES



Source: Alaska’s Early Childhood Education Data Dashboard. Prepared by MRG for thread. Spring 2023.

1 Alaska’s Early Childhood Education Data Dashboard. Prepared by MRG for thread. Spring 2023.
2 The Role of Early Care and Education in Alaska’s Economy. Prepared by MRG for thread. October 2023.



Public Education

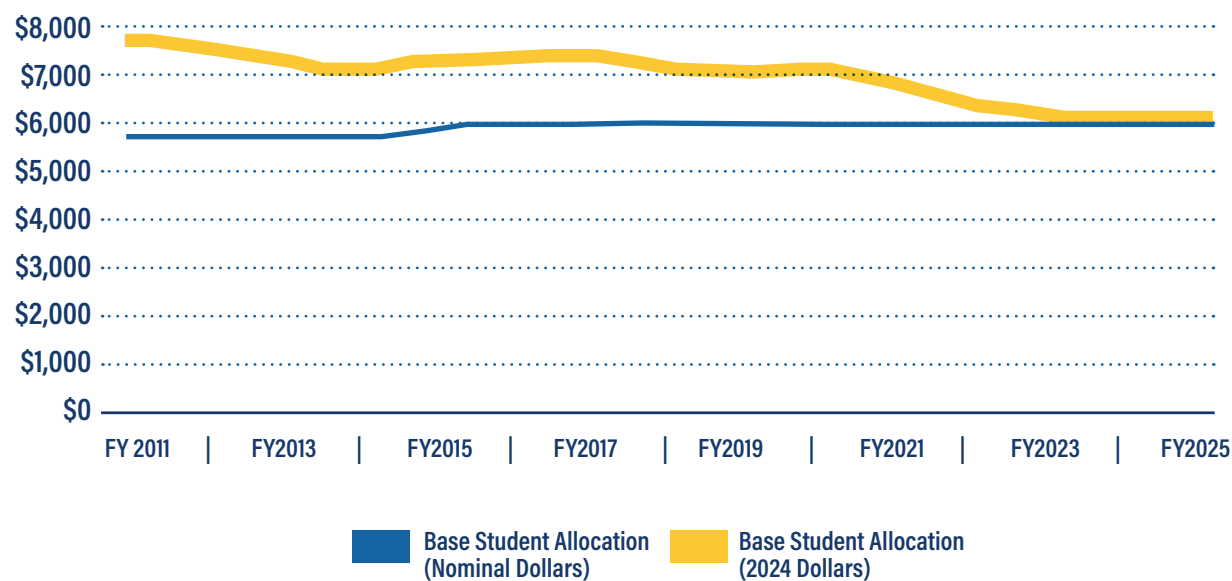
Public education in Alaska spans preschool to post-graduate education, and is the pipeline relied upon most by employers to find local talent. The last two decades have been a time of significant change in Alaska’s public education system, and this was addressed by many employers at listening sessions.

Public education plays a significant role in workforce development. Secondary education is a core avenue to prepare any population for participation in the future workforce. Beyond secondary education, the university system is the chief provider of associate and bachelor’s degrees in the state, preparing students with career-specific skills and knowledge.

In most of the listening sessions, employers noted frustration with the lack of consistent, high prioritization of public education over the last ten or more years. The long-term impact of reduced real dollars invested in K-12 and university education is a lower rate of graduates that are prepared and qualified for entry level jobs at local companies.

Additionally, public education systems such as regional school districts are among the largest employers in many parts of rural Alaska. Perceptions that K-12 school district funding has been stagnant and not kept pace with inflation, changes to Alaska’s state employee retirement system, and the end of the Alaska Student Loan Forgiveness Program that formerly helped Alaskans repay student loans were all noted as changes that have significantly impacted the ability of schools across Alaska to attract and retain staff.

FIGURE 5. ALASKA K-12 BASE STUDENT ALLOCATION, FY2011-FY2025



Source: Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Urban Alaska Consumer Price Index, and MRG calculations.

Chapter 3: Contextualizing Alaska's Employer Experience



Public Transportation

Anchorage and Fairbanks employers noted the challenges of transportation for workers who do not have access to a private vehicle. Public transportation in both communities is often infrequent (some routes run once an hour or even less) and can be unreliable in poor weather conditions. Employees who are otherwise strong additions to the workforce are frequently absent or late because of public transportation issues. Some parts of the city (the Anchorage hillside, or North Pole), are not serviced by public transportation at all, creating an additional obstacle to recruiting any of the residents of those areas who do not have a private vehicle.

While some urban employers partner with the city or municipality and provide bus passes to employees, the challenges of Alaska's public transit systems continue to affect the reliability of employees that depend on them. In recent years, problems with snow removal have also contributed to high levels of absenteeism from employees who depend on public transportation, because buses cannot run when the streets are not plowed.





Chapter 4

Recommendations and Next Steps

This section provides recommendations for AWIB and considerations for the broader Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development (ADOLWD).

Chapter 4: Recommendations and Next Steps

Define AWIB Role

Employers working across Alaska's economic regions had varying exposure to AWIB and understanding of the board's purpose. In particular, employers were not aware that there was a state entity responsible for managing statewide initiatives and coordinating the workforce system. Many participants in listening sessions noted that the workforce system seems disorganized and piecemeal. They did not think there were any state entities responsible for workforce development except for the University of Alaska. In addition to low familiarity with AWIB, the current workforce development priorities central to AWIB's 2023 convening are not well known.

AWIB must clearly define its role as a component of Alaska's workforce development and how that role impacts employers, students, and workers. Clearly and consistently articulating this role will be an important step to fostering meaningful connections with Alaska's employers. Identifying the mission and a communication strategy that is consistent across regions, sectors, and sizes of employers will help to create solid connections with Alaska-based companies.

Prioritize Key Relationships

One of AWIB's objectives for this assessment was to increase their ability to develop relationships with Alaska's employers. The state's regional and business landscape is complex, and a one-size-fits-all approach to communicating with employers is unlikely to result in broad-based engagement.

Desirable formats or locations for engagement also differ; employers based in Anchorage/Mat-Su are much likelier to attend in-person events in Anchorage, whereas those based off Alaska's road system often lack the financial resources to participate in that setting.

The Board must develop a communication strategy to move forward in creating these employer relationships. The following components should be clearly defined by AWIB as part of this strategy.



AWIB's Goal in Pursuing Employer Relationships

The Board should carefully consider its objective before increasing employer engagement. Examples of goals for these relationships may be to identify specific occupations requiring more training programs, increase funding allocated to training organizations or regions, or identify improvements needed at current training institutions.

Employers face time and capacity constraints; they generally need to see a benefit to their company or industry from engagement. Clearly identifying benefits to AWIB and the employer from these relationships will be important to elicit participation.

Chapter 4: Recommendations and Next Steps

Sector and Region Priorities

Many entities across Alaska—individual businesses, nonprofits, Alaska Native organizations, and others—have been deeply engaged in their own workforce development planning. These entities have often identified regional or industry-specific workforce development needs. AWIB should access and review region and sector plans to avoid duplication of effort as the Board prioritizes and plans employer engagement. Understanding the workforce development planning and efforts already underway will help AWIB set meaningful goals for pursuing employer relationships and can give the Board more credibility with other organizations.

AWIB should also consider the role of new projects or investments within the process of prioritizing employer engagement. For example, a Board goal may be to establish initial communication with a current or prospective Alaska employer upon announcement of any final investment decision meeting specific dollar value thresholds.

Engagement by Sector

AWIB's communication strategy should be tailored specifically to each priority industry within the context of the Board's goals for engagement. Some industries, such as oil and gas or mining, have relatively few large employers who may be available to engage directly with AWIB. Others, such as construction, have hundreds of employees with complex union relationships. Direct engagement with employers in these industries may not be as effective in creating or strengthening workforce development.

Individual employers operating in a sector with relatively few large businesses may be well positioned to lend insights into the industry's needs overall with more accuracy. For small businesses operating in a large industry, individual employers' workforce needs can be significantly impacted by decisions or plans specific to that business, which may not lend themselves well to sectorwide analysis.

For priority industries with dozens or hundreds of employers, AWIB's relationship strategy should include communications with industry associations to increase the likelihood of systematic, high-level engagement.



Chapter 4: Recommendations and Next Steps

Setting

The appropriate setting for employer engagement will depend on important regional differences across Alaska. For example, participants in rural listening sessions conducted for this assessment noted that there was little physical presence from the State within their communities. In many of these same communities, the ability of employers to participate in virtual options may not be technically feasible or appealing. AWIB's employer communication strategy should clearly match the preferred setting of employers in priority regions and sectors.

In urban and rural areas, AWIB's strategy should also consider attending key events hosted by industry trade associations. Participating in conferences such as the annual Resource Development Conference may be appropriate to improve connections with employers and stay updated on current project progress to better understand emerging workforce needs. Given employers' capacity constraints, AWIB should prioritize going where employers already gather compared to drawing employers to a separate conference.

Timeline

Relationship development of any kind requires communication to be routine and consistently provide value to both parties. AWIB should not approach relationships with employers as a single event. Timelines of the interactions should be collaboratively developed between AWIB and the employer or industry trade associations to provide mutual benefit.

Financial Resources

Estimates of the staff time and direct expenses related to strategies and tasks within the employer communication strategy should be a component of AWIB's process to prioritize relationships between regions and industries.



Chapter 4: Recommendations and Next Steps

Survey Process

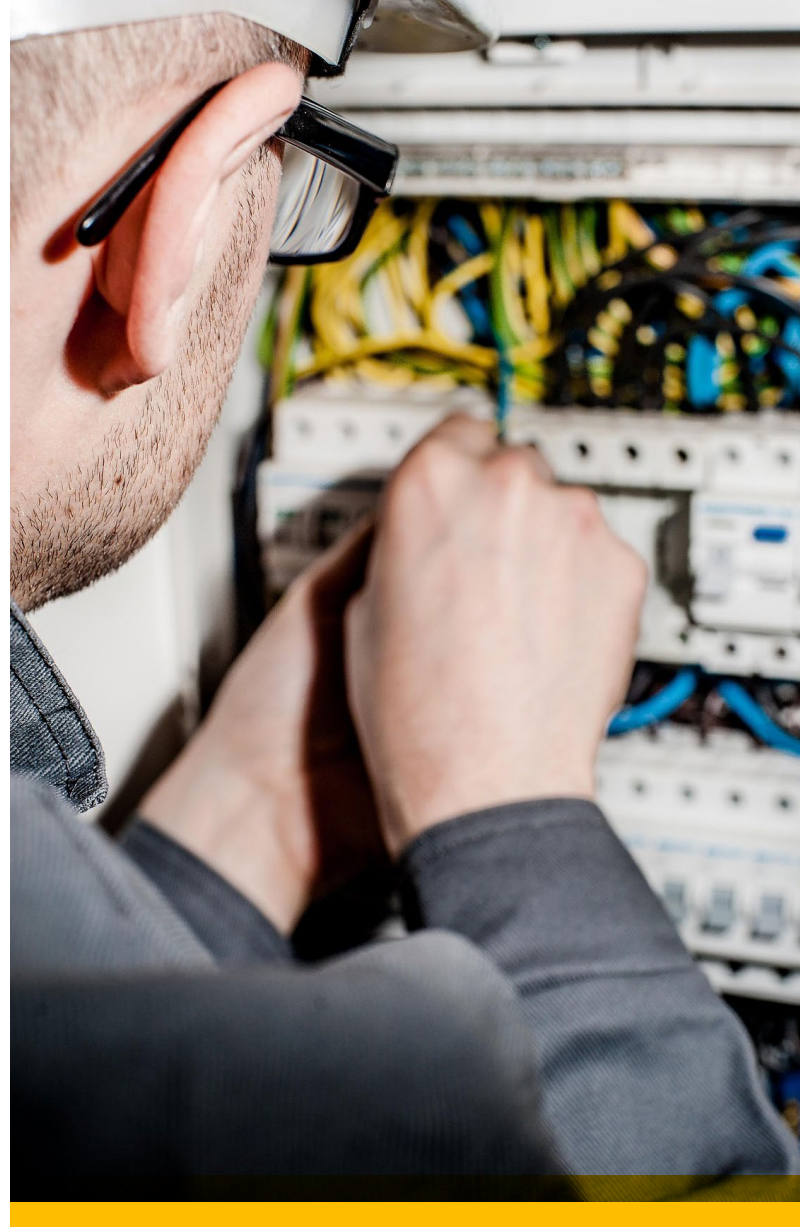
The assessment process described in this report included a web-based survey of Alaska employers. Given the wide range of regions, industries, and sizes of participating employers, this research method does not lend itself well to meaningful prioritization of training programs by occupation. As described in Chapter 3, employers have limited capacity to project their own labor needs. Even where projections are possible, employers may not have a well-defined understanding of the workforce training gaps required to address their needs or how these needs reflect consistent patterns across their industry.

As described previously, many organizations in Alaska have recently undertaken workforce training needs assessments which include identifying needs of specific occupations. For example, the Nome Workforce Needs & Career Pathways report published by the University of Alaska Fairbanks Northwest Campus in July 2024 specifically identifies a need for welding and metal shop space to provide training for welders.³ Engaging directly with organizations who have completed this type of prioritization process at the regional and sector level will be the best method for AWIB to provide support within their specific role.

Foster Alaska's Job Centers

Increasing the visibility of job postings was a primary method used by employers to attract new workers. This process can take on many forms: Employers with financial capacity may use private job posting sites or travel to job fairs while other employers may leverage personal networks.

In rural Alaskan in particular, offering job application guidance and visibility in person is still an important part of new workers' process to connect with employers. In listening sessions conducted as part of this assessment process, rural employers noted the importance of having an ADOLWD Job Center with staff available to work with prospective employees or students in person as a key role for the State of



Alaska in workforce development. Employers routinely noted changes in the number of staff or days and hours of service at these centers due to perceived funding cuts.

Employers have a much higher level of familiarity with ADOLWD Job Centers compared to AWIB. The State of Alaska should leverage the higher brand recognition of the Job Centers to offer the type of connections between job seekers, training entities, and employers that meet the distinct needs of each community. This may include bolstering in-person staffing and hours of operation at rural Job Centers.

ADOLWD has significant internet infrastructure in place to connect job seekers, training entities, students, and employers. Routinely reviewing these resources and inviting training providers to review and amend their program's profile, are key to ensuring these tools are used to their full advantage.

³ *Nome Workforce Needs & Career Pathways*. Prepared by Northwest Planning LLC for the University of Alaska Fairbanks Northwest Campus. July 2024.



Appendix A

Listening Session Facilitation Guide

Organizational Experience

1. What are your organization's top challenges/barriers when it comes to hiring qualified employees?
2. What has your organization done to address barriers in finding, hiring, and retaining good employees?
3. When it comes to hiring and retaining qualified employees, what are others in your region doing well?
4. What types of recruitment approaches are more, or less, effective in providing qualified candidates?
5. Over the past several years, have your new recruits been people primarily living in the region before you hire them, or have they moved into the region to take the job?

Workforce Development and Training

6. Does your organization provide any training to meet basic job requirements? If so, describe.
7. What types of workforce development/training pipelines are more, or less, effective in providing qualified in-state candidates?
8. Employers only: considering the workforce development pipeline for your organization's jobs, what training are you aware of that is currently available in your region and does it meet your needs?
9. What training needs do you see that could supplement what's currently available in your region?

Alaska Workforce Investment Board

10. Do you believe the state is currently playing a role in training prospective employees? If so, please provide examples.
11. Who in your region or industry is playing a strong role and making an impact on workforce development?
12. Tell us what you know about Alaska's Workforce Investment Board, or what you knew prior to this discussion today?
13. Where do you see the Workforce Investment Board playing a different, or new role, to make the workforce development/training continuum more functional?

Appendix B

Online Survey Questions

1. How many new employees did your organization hire in Alaska in 2023/2024?

- A. None
- B. 1-5
- C. 6-10
- D. 11-25
- E. 26-100
- F. Over 100
- G. Did not hire any new employees
- H. Don't know

2. Compared to 2023, how easy or difficult has it been to hire employees in Alaska in 2024?

- A. Much easier
- B. Somewhat easier
- C. About the same
- D. Somewhat more difficult
- E. Much more difficult
- F. Did not hire in 2023/2024

3. In 2024, how easy or difficult has it been for your organization to find qualified employees in Alaska?

- A. Very easy
- B. Somewhat easy
- C. Neither easy nor difficult
- D. Somewhat difficult
- E. Very difficult
- F. Did not hire in 2024

4. How easy or difficult has it been to find qualified workers at each skill level in Alaska?

	1 Very Easy	2 Somewhat Easy	3 Neither easy nor difficult	4 Somewhat Difficult	5 Very Difficult	6 Not Applicable
A. Entry level work force	1	2	3	4	5	6
B. Skilled labor (equipment operators, carpenters, plumbers, and others in vocational/technical jobs)	1	2	3	4	5	6
C. Professional/technical workforce (requires a Bachelor's degree or higher)	1	2	3	4	5	6
D. Executive level staff (senior management such as executive directors and CEOs)	1	2	3	4	5	6

Appendix B

5. How many new employees does your organization plan to hire in Alaska in 2025?

- | | | |
|---------|---------------|-------------|
| A. None | C. 6-10 | E. 26-100 |
| B. 1-5 | D. 11-25 | F. Over 100 |
| | G. Don't know | |

6. What has your organization done to better find and/or retain qualified employees in Alaska? (Check all that apply)

- ☐ Increase visibility of job postings
- ☐ Streamline application process
- ☐ Pay for training
- ☐ Change training location
- ☐ Provide child care assistance
- ☐ Remove drug/alcohol testing
- ☐ Remove background checks
- ☐ Provide housing assistance
- ☐ Remove degree/certificate requirements
- ☐ Provide transportation assistance
- ☐ Other _____
- ☐ None/not applicable

7. Of all the employees you have hired in Alaska in the past two years for permanent positions, what percentage are still employed with your organization?

- | | | |
|-----------|-----------|-------------------|
| A. 0% | D. 51-75% | G. Not Applicable |
| B. <25% | E. >75% | H. Don't Know |
| C. 25-50% | F. 100% | |



Appendix B

8. What specific jobs will you be hiring for in Alaska in 2025? (Check all that apply)

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accountants/financial analysts | <input type="checkbox"/> Nurses |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bookkeepers | <input type="checkbox"/> Physicians/dentists/therapists |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Computer/information systems workers | <input type="checkbox"/> Personal care aides |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Construction trades (carpenters, painters, roofers) | <input type="checkbox"/> Retail workers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cooks/food prep workers | <input type="checkbox"/> Secretaries/administrative assistants |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Customer service representatives/receptionists | <input type="checkbox"/> Teachers/instructors |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Data entry clerks/mail clerks | <input type="checkbox"/> Tour guides |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fish processing workers | <input type="checkbox"/> Waiters/bartenders/servers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Heavy equipment/automotive/aircraft mechanics | <input type="checkbox"/> Water transportation (captains, mates, crew) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Heavy truck drivers | <input type="checkbox"/> Other jobs_____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Janitors/housekeepers | <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Miners | <input type="checkbox"/> None/not applicable |
-

9. What specific jobs are hardest to fill? (Check all that apply)

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accountants/financial analysts | <input type="checkbox"/> Nurses |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bookkeepers | <input type="checkbox"/> Physicians/dentists/therapists |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Computer/information systems workers | <input type="checkbox"/> Personal care aides |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Construction trades (carpenters, painters, roofers) | <input type="checkbox"/> Retail workers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cooks/food prep workers | <input type="checkbox"/> Secretaries/administrative assistants |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Customer service representatives/receptionists | <input type="checkbox"/> Teachers/instructors |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Data entry clerks/mail clerks | <input type="checkbox"/> Tour guides |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fish processing workers | <input type="checkbox"/> Waiters/bartenders/servers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Heavy equipment/automotive/aircraft mechanics | <input type="checkbox"/> Water transportation (captains, mates, crew) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Heavy truck drivers | <input type="checkbox"/> Other jobs_____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Janitors/housekeepers | <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Miners | <input type="checkbox"/> None/not applicable |

Appendix B

10. Before today, how familiar were you with the Alaska Workforce Investment Board?

- A. Never heard of it
- B. Heard of it, but don't know what it does
- C. Familiar with it

11. Before today, how familiar were you with the Alaska Department of Labor Job Centers?

- A. Never heard of it
- B. Heard of it, but don't know what they do
- C. Familiar with them

12. In the past two years, have you recruited candidates through any of the following organizations? (Check all that apply)

- ☐ Alaska Vocational Technical Education (AVTEC)
- ☐ University of Alaska Career and Technical Education (CTE)
- ☐ Alaska Construction Academies
- ☐ Alaska Technical Vocational Education Program (TVEP)
- ☐ Alaska Area Health Education Centers
- ☐ Alaska Laborers Training School
- ☐ Northern Industrial Training
- ☐ None of the above

13. Are you interested in learning more about Job Centers? (Your responses to this survey will not be associated with your contact information.)

- A. Yes (fill-in email address and name)
- B. No





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Governor Mike Dunleavy
STATE OF ALASKA

February 5, 2025

Dear Fellow Alaskans,

I am honored to share Alaska's Workforce Future with you, a cross-industry plan that reflects the concerted efforts of State of Alaska agencies, industry partners, and dedicated Alaskans across the State. This plan represents not only our shared vision but also a carefully coordinated strategy to prepare Alaska for the opportunities ahead.



We are at a critical juncture in our State's history, with growing opportunities in many sectors, including resource development, infrastructure, healthcare, and technology. With rapid advancements on the horizon, it is vital that we create a workforce ready to meet those challenges. Alaska's Workforce Future serves as a blueprint for industry-specific action, giving all sectors the tools needed to strengthen its workforce and maintain competitiveness in a fast-changing world.

Thank you to the many individuals and organizations that participated in surveys, interviews, and focus groups. Your collective knowledge has shaped this living document, which will evolve to meet Alaska's future needs.

With a unified vision and commitment to our workforce, I am confident that together, we will continue to build a bright and prosperous future for all Alaskans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Mike Dunleavy".

Mike Dunleavy
Governor

ALASKA'S WORKFORCE FUTURE

Executive Summary

Introduction

Alaska's Workforce Future is a partner-based initiative spearheaded by the Alaska Safety Alliance¹ (ASA) and the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development (DOLWD), with support from the Denali Commission.

Inspired by the outcomes of the Alaska Workforce Investment Board's (AWIB) 2023 Industry Convening, AWIB and their partners set out to systematically organize the feedback from the event, engage with a wide array of stakeholder groups to gather additional insights, and integrate all collected information—derived from the convening, surveys, follow-up forums, and interviews—into a comprehensive action plan. DOLWD is focused on efforts to improve career awareness, to remove unnecessary barriers for employment, and to work with industry partners on a new workforce plan, *Alaska's Workforce Future*, to chart a path forward. This plan outlines specific steps and ensures that all organizations and stakeholders are recognized as essential partners in shaping *Alaska's Workforce Future*.

Alaska's Workforce Future is a call to action – a guide for industry, government, nonprofits, and educators to collaborate in preparing Alaska's workforce for the future. The following pages are a blueprint for a coordinated statewide effort to address the pressing workforce shortages affecting all industry sectors in Alaska. Its primary goal is to ensure that Alaska remains economically vibrant, enhancing the lives of all Alaskans by developing a skilled, competitive workforce that can meet the evolving demands of the State's diverse industries.

Purpose and Need

Alaska is experiencing an exciting and unique time of economic growth. Private investment and infrastructure funding is on the rise, creating opportunities for employers and Alaskans. However, every Alaska industry is experiencing significant labor shortages with an abundance of jobs going unfilled. Workforce shortages are evident in every industry and region, which continue to be impacted by the trend of declining working-age population.

Alaska employers will be further challenged by billions of dollars invested in new infrastructure and resource development projects over the next several years. These projects, funded in part by the federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), will create thousands of new jobs across various sectors. As the economy grows with these investments, another 20,000 new workers will be required to fill jobs in both private and public sectors, particularly in support fields such as healthcare, transportation, and public service, while also replacing workers leaving employment.

¹ The Alaska Safety Alliance is a member-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit with over 135 member companies. ASA established a subsidiary organization, Alaska Workforce Alliance, in July of 2025.

The success of these projects and the positive economic impact they represent depend on a well-prepared workforce to meet the demand.

Though Alaska is facing significant workforce challenges, there is a shared commitment among stakeholders to collaborate on strategies that will retain young and working-age Alaskans, provide them with essential skills, and create an employment climate that will enable them to become the workforce of tomorrow. Through this collective effort, Alaskans will be equipped to fill high-demand, well-paid positions, increase local employment opportunities, and retain our Alaska residents.

Plan Development

BROAD-BASED COLLABORATIVE ENGAGEMENT

The development of *Alaska's Workforce Future* was a collaborative effort that prioritized continuous engagement with a wide spectrum of stakeholders across the State. This process was carefully designed to ensure that the resulting shared goals and strategies reflect the diverse needs and challenges of Alaska's workforce, industries, and regions. Through virtual and in-person forums, key informant interviews, and collaborative sessions, input was gathered from employers, educators, students, job seekers, State agencies, Alaska Native corporations, rural and regional community representatives, and nonprofits, among others. The contributions of these diverse stakeholders were vital in shaping *Alaska's Workforce Future*.

AWIB INDUSTRY CONVENING

A pivotal catalyst of this collaborative work was the 2023 Alaska Industry Convening, coordinated by the AWIB. The event brought together industry leaders, educators, government officials, and workforce development professionals from across the State for a two-day strategic workshop. The convening served as a crucial platform for stakeholders to share insights, identify challenges, and collaborate on solutions, further solidifying partnerships and infusing momentum into the collective effort to address Alaska's workforce needs.

DATA-DRIVEN APPROACH

Alaska's Workforce Future was informed by extensive data collection and analysis, including labor market trends, industry projections, demographic studies, and existing workforce plans. Surveys, interviews, and forums with employers, educators, and workers were conducted to gather firsthand insights into the workforce challenges and opportunities across different regions and sectors. This data-driven approach ensured that the recommended strategies were grounded in the real-world experiences and needs of Alaskans.

Shared Goals

Goal 1: Enhance Career Awareness and Pathways

Focus on expanding and improving career awareness initiatives across Alaska, ensuring that students, parents, educators, and the public are informed about high-demand industries and the skills needed to succeed. By strengthening career pathway programs and increasing visibility of career options, we aim to guide more Alaskans into fulfilling, well-paying careers that align with the state's economic needs.

Goal 2: Develop a Skilled and Qualified Workforce

Close the gap between the skills required by Alaska's industries and the current workforce. By enhancing education and training programs, particularly in critical sectors, we seek to equip Alaskans with the qualifications necessary to meet future labor demands. The focus is on ensuring that our workforce is prepared for upcoming infrastructure and resource development projects, as well as emerging opportunities in various fields.

Goal 3: Retain Alaskans and Attract New Alaskans

To retain and attract young and working-age Alaskans, emphasize the creation of attractive career opportunities and reduction of barriers to employment and education and communicate these opportunities through coordinated marketing efforts. By fostering a supportive environment that encourages local talent to stay and thrive in Alaska, we aim to maintain a robust and dynamic workforce that can sustain the state's economic growth.

Goal 4: Foster Regional Workforce Development

Recognize the unique needs and opportunities of different regions across Alaska. Promote the establishment of regional teams to coordinate efforts within their regions, ensuring that local knowledge and resources are leveraged to address workforce challenges effectively. Collaborate and communicate across regions and with the AWIB to align statewide plans with regional priorities.

Goal 5: Improve Infrastructure and Access to Support Services

Ensure that Alaska's workforce has the necessary infrastructure and support services to succeed. Work with partners to increase access to housing, transportation, childcare, and other essential services to create an environment where workers and their families can thrive, enabling full participation in the state's economic opportunities.

Goal 6: Ensure Sustainability and Continuity of Workforce Development Efforts

Achieving long-term sustainability in Alaska's workforce development requires a dynamic and enduring ecosystem of strategic partnerships. Central to this goal is the identification of a coordinating entity that will be charged with guiding the next phase of this effort, including developing and periodically revising a collaborative action plan, securing funding to support ongoing initiatives, fostering partnerships across sectors, and ensuring that all efforts remain coordinated, effective, and on course toward achieving shared goals.

The AWIB, under AS 23.15.575, serves as the State’s lead planning and coordinating entity for state human resource programs as well as employment training, vocational education, and workforce development, playing a key role in program sustainability. Comprised of members from various sectors including industry, education, organized labor, and State government, the AWIB provides policy oversight for a myriad of critical State and federal workforce development programs, advancing its mission to “build connections that put Alaskans into good jobs.”

AWIB, working with its private and public sector partners, will bring additional resources and expertise to enhance established roles and responsibilities as outlined in its bylaws. Partners working with AWIB will add value in areas such as securing private-sector funding and developing flexible strategies that respond to changing circumstances. These efforts are designed to complement and support the AWIB mission, where partner organizations work together synergistically to achieve shared goals for Alaska’s workforce development.

Work in Progress: Key State-Led Initiatives Underway

The strategies and actions outlined in this plan are already being set in motion, with active participation from industry leaders, State agencies, and educational institutions. Immediate steps are being taken to address Alaska’s workforce needs, reflecting the dynamic collaboration of stakeholders. The following activities demonstrate the State of Alaska’s commitment to cultivating a skilled workforce that meets the diverse needs of employers across the state.

2023 Alaska Workforce Convening

In 2023, DOLWD was tasked by Governor Mike Dunleavy to host an industry led convening to gather stakeholders around broad workforce outcomes for Alaska. The 2023 Industry Convening was a first-in-a-decade effort to assess where we are, where we need to be, and to hear first-hand of the challenges that employers face. Working together with industry partners and stakeholders, DOLWD is focused on efforts to improve career awareness, to remove unnecessary barriers for employment, and to work with industry partners on a new workforce plan, *Alaska’s Workforce Future*, to chart a path forward.

In follow-up to the Convening, the AWIB has begun work facilitating nine listening sessions in the six economic regions. These sessions expand upon the findings of the 2023 gathering and online surveys. The Board is seeking input on current workforce and training efforts, familiarity with current or past industry workforce development efforts, priority skill sets (hard and soft skills), credentialing, and other qualifications.

Strategic Partnerships

Alaska’s Workforce Future builds upon established strategic partnerships. Whether in maritime training and the nationally recognized Alaska Maritime Education Consortium (AMEC), a partnership of the Alaska Vocational Technical Center, the University of Alaska and the Alaska Safety Alliance, or a recent partnership with Yamaha International to support engine repair

trainings throughout the state, a key to unlocking Alaska's potential is in the strength of our regional and State partnerships.

Career Counselor Pilot Project

In early 2024, starting with several rural school districts, the Departments of Education and Early Development (DEED) and DOLWD initiated a pilot project utilizing Job Center resources and career counselors at local high schools. This work builds on input received during the industry convening, specifically that young Alaskans need more information and exposure to various career opportunities available and the training needed for success.

Targeted Campaigns

Targeted media campaigns in rural Alaska and the Southcentral region have resulted in an increase in the number of Alaskans successfully completing industry certifications through federal and State training support.

Retain and Attract Alaskans

The DOLWD recognizes that industry demands require skilled workers beyond Alaska's current capacity. To meet demand, DOLWD seeks to train and employ local Alaskans, and pursue opportunities to attract new residents, focusing on military personnel as they exit active service, legal immigration, and skilled workers from other states. In these areas, the DOLWD has strengthened military partnerships using tools like the SkillBridge program, a partnership with the Department of Defense (DOD), which allows service members to come to work at a partner organization during the six-month period prior to leaving active service, with wages covered by the DOD during that period.

Office of Citizenship Assistance

Another key to meeting employment goals is through legal immigration. The Office of Citizenship Assistance (OCA) opened its' door at the Anchorage Midtown Job Center, as a navigation center for legal immigrants, helping with employment, credential translation and training. The OCA will also help to identify barriers to employment so that policy makers can address issues that may inadvertently keep people from gaining full employment. A recent example was illustrated in the difficulty in obtaining a State issued commercial driver's license for legal refugees, that has since been addressed via legislative changes.

Childcare

Improving Alaska's child care system is important to address Alaska's workforce challenges. Governor Dunleavy Administrative Order 346 established the Governor's Task Force on Child Care. The Alaska Department of Health has been leading efforts to introduce two reports with recommendations that seek to improve accessibility, affordability and quality across the State. DOLWD Commissioner Cathy Muñoz was a member of the Task Force, and helped guide recommendations to build Alaska's child care workforce.

Housing

Access to affordable housing is an important factor for all Alaskans. Housing shortages and struggles to maintain affordable housing options throughout the state puts strains on workforce development goals, especially in rural Alaska. The Governor's fiscal year (FY)26 budget includes support for the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation's (AHFC) Rural Professional Housing Grant Program, supporting housing for teachers, health professionals, and public safety workers.

Licensure

To meet the demand for more electricians and plumbers, the DOLWD has addressed certificate of fitness licensing barriers. Recent legislation now permits third party testing, provisional licensure and has removed some of the barriers for trainees. The Department has also increased reciprocal licensure and is looking at regulatory changes that would allow the State of Alaska to recognize licensure from states with similar licensing requirements.

The Alaska Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development (DCCED), Division of Corporations, Business and Professional Licensing, oversees over forty professional licenses in Alaska. DOLWD, DCCED, and its industry partners, will continue to work to identify regulatory barriers for obtaining and maintaining professional licenses in high-demand careers, including healthcare.

Summary

The State of Alaska plays a pivotal role in shaping the future of the State's workforce, leading the charge in addressing critical workforce needs through innovative initiatives. However, lasting success requires the continued support and active collaboration of industry leaders, educators, and communities. Together, these strategic partnerships are forging a workforce ready to meet the demands of Alaska's diverse industries and unique economic landscape.

This plan represents a unified call to action, equipping Alaskans with the skills and resources needed to seize new opportunities and drive economic growth. To remain effective, the implementation of this plan must be adaptive, continually responding to evolving industry demands and the unique challenges faced by our State. With strong leadership from the State and the dedication of all stakeholders, we are building a resilient workforce that will secure Alaska's future prosperity.

ALASKA'S WORKFORCE FUTURE

Background

Alaska stands at a pivotal point in its economic and social development. The State's unique geographic location, abundant natural resources, and diverse cultural heritage have long been its strengths, driving economic growth and providing opportunities for its residents. However, in recent years, Alaska has been facing a series of challenges that necessitate a comprehensive and forward-thinking workforce development strategy.

Alaska is experiencing a confluence of workforce challenges. Workforce shortages are impacting all major industries, from construction and healthcare to energy and maritime sectors. The challenges and opportunities outlined below have spurred action and partnership among stakeholders, forming the basis of this collaborative work. Through the strategies and actions recommended in this plan, we aim to address these pressing issues and leverage the opportunities to strengthen Alaska's workforce and economy.

From 2013 to 2021, Alaska saw a significant decrease in its working-age population, which declined by approximately 5.6%. This contrasts with the national average, which experienced a 2% increase during the same period. This decline in Alaska's working-age population is due to several factors, including net migration loss, an aging population, and lower birth rates. The shrinking labor pool resulting from these trends has placed increased pressure on existing workers and poses a considerable challenge for the State's economy.

As economic recovery occurred in many places in the lower 48, Alaska experienced a smaller number of new residents re-locating and settling in the state, causing net-migration losses. This has exacerbated workforce shortages across various industries making it increasingly difficult for Alaska to meet its labor needs.

Alaska faces challenges in making access to education and training broadly accessible. There are training facilities located in every region, but the State's geographic dispersion and small population limits availability of certain training programs, particularly in rural and remote communities. Ensuring access to educational resources is essential for developing a competent and prepared workforce that can meet the diverse needs of Alaska's economy.

Amidst the challenges above, the federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) presents Alaska with unprecedented opportunity. With over \$20 billion in planned infrastructure and resource development projects by 2030, these initiatives have the potential to create thousands of jobs across the state. However, this opportunity also underscores the urgent need for a skilled and prepared workforce that can meet the growing demand for labor in these vital sectors.

Technological advancements are rapidly transforming industries and the nature of work in Alaska, necessitating continuous upskilling and reskilling of the workforce. As new technologies emerge, workers must adapt to remain competitive in the global market. This ongoing evolution presents

both a challenge and an opportunity for Alaska, as the State must ensure that its workforce is equipped with the skills required to thrive in a technology-driven economy.

Finally, Alaska's workforce must continue to adapt and prepare for work within the renewable energy sector. By acquiring new skill sets relevant to these emerging fields, Alaska's workforce can contribute to a more resilient and sustainable economic future.

Given Alaska's vast geography, small population, and diverse industries, a coordinated, strategic response is needed that can unify stakeholders across sectors and regions. The development of a comprehensive, cross-industry workforce initiative, endorsed and supported by all major stakeholders, is critical to ensuring Alaska's long-term economic resilience and growth.

Methodology

The methodology employed in the development of *Alaska's Workforce Future* involved a multi-faceted approach, integrating stakeholder engagement as well as quantitative, qualitative, and meta-analysis methods to assess Alaska's workforce needs. The process was guided by collaborative efforts among key participants, including industry leaders, Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development and other State agencies, workforce development experts, educational institutions, Alaska Native organizations, and community members.

Stakeholder Engagement and Collaboration

This report relied heavily on the guidance and feedback provided by stakeholders that participated in the Alaska Workforce Investment Board's Fall 2023 Industry Convening.

The Industry Advisory Council (IAC), comprising representatives from various sectors including energy, transportation, healthcare, education, construction, and others, played a key role in guiding this planning process. Regular meetings and work sessions were held to gather insights and recommendations.

Surveys

A student and job-seeker survey was designed to understand the perspectives of Alaskans entering the workforce regarding their knowledge of career education and training opportunities and their aspirations. The survey was distributed statewide over six weeks, reaching a wide geographic spread, and gathered responses from 353 participants. The survey results provided insights about individuals' career aspirations and perceived barriers to employment in Alaska.

A comprehensive employer survey aimed to capture the challenges faced by Alaska employers in their efforts to recruit, train, and retain workers. Conducted over three weeks, the survey achieved 576 responses from employers of all sizes and economic regions across 23 industries, providing a broad understanding of the workforce needs in Alaska.

Appendices 1 and 2 are summary reports of the surveys conducted for Alaska's Workforce Future.

Focus Groups and Key Informant Interviews

Targeted discussions were held with educators, administrators, and training providers from Alaskan institutions. These sessions identified gaps in current career awareness efforts, funding, and programming, and explored opportunities for alignment with industry needs.

Regional focus groups and key informant interviews were conducted with organizations representing rural communities to ensure that the unique challenges and opportunities in Alaska's diverse economic regions are represented in setting goals, developing strategies, and defining desired outcomes.

Appendices 3 and 4 are summary reports of the focus groups and key informant interviews conducted for this report.

Meta Analysis

This report reviewed and analyzed over 50 publications, including industry specific workforce plans, regional plans, Alaska Native tribal organization workforce plans, and Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies (CEDS) to include relevant information reflective of Alaska's diverse workforce needs. Other publications reviewed in development of *Alaska's Workforce Future* include related education-led reports such as the [*Alaska Career and Technical Education Plan*](#) and the [*Alaska College and Career Guidance*](#) report.

To capture a comprehensive view, research spanned several of Alaska's critical industry sectors, reflecting the input from a broad but representative cross-section of the State's economy. This involved analyzing employment data, training requirements, and the potential impact of upcoming mega-projects on workforce demand.

A careful review of the industry data allowed us to identify consistent themes impacting Alaska's workforce. These insights, combined with findings from student surveys and broader research, were essential in shaping the strategies presented in *Alaska's Workforce Future*.

Vision

The vision of *Alaska's Workforce Future* was carefully crafted from the collective input and feedback of stakeholders. This inclusive approach ensures that the vision embodies the shared aspirations and priorities of Alaska's workforce development community. It is anchored in the belief that a well-coordinated workforce development effort is essential to the State's economic prosperity and the well-being of its residents.

Shared Goals and Strategies

Goal 1: Enhance Career Awareness and Pathways

Strategy 1.1 – Boost Industry Career Marketing and Branding

Organize career awareness campaigns targeting students, parents, teachers, counselors, and working-age Alaskans to increase knowledge of high-demand industries and required skills. Catalog agencies and organizations engaged in career awareness initiatives locally, at the state level, and nationwide to share resources. Establish and maintain regular communications. Apply best practices for industry-specific outreach from example organizations such as Alaska Resource Education (ARE), Alaska EXCEL, Alaska’s Area Health Education Centers (AHEC), and others.

Utilize social media to expose young and working-age Alaskans to various job opportunities, featuring testimonials from current workers and employers, and guidance from career counselors and industry professionals.

Support, promote, and enhance websites and e-tools available in the state, working with partners to provide linkages between compatible tools, as appropriate (University of Alaska’s Career Coach, ACPE’s AKCIS etc.). Work with partners to explore other successful models such as “My Colorado Journey” to enhance and increase accessibility of Alaska’s available career information resources.

DOLWD, DCCED, DEED, and industry partners will pursue partnership to market Alaska’s industries and employment opportunities to Alaskans.

Strategy 1.2 – Strengthen Career Pathway Programs

Increase and improve career pathway programs at all educational levels, ensuring alignment with industry needs. Establish ongoing, scheduled methods for leveraging industry feedback related to career pathway programs impacting specific industries; ensure current and future needs are being addressed. Apply best practices, scale up effective programs, and expand to new industry sectors.

DEED, the University of Alaska, DOLWD, and industry partners will explore ways to improve CTE curriculum at the secondary and postsecondary levels to ensure that graduates at the secondary and postsecondary levels are prepared to enter Alaska’s workforce.

Provide support for developing and certifying current and new CTE instructors statewide at secondary and post-secondary levels, including industry trainers for job-based learning and apprenticeship programs. Assist in recruiting new CTE teachers.

Establish and expand Career Guidance initiatives as described in the Association of Alaska School Board's Interview [Finding and Resources: Alaska College and Career Guidance](#) report published in August of 2023.

Advocate for consistent training for all career guides/navigators across the state.

Strategy 1.3 – Support Career Planning and Mentorship

Explore the feasibility of introducing required career planning classes for high school graduation.

Increase mentorship opportunities and support services, particularly for youth, to guide them into successful career paths.

Assist employers to engage in rural outreach and develop work-based learning initiatives. Launch employer communications plan to connect employers with cohorts graduating from training/certification programs essential to their industry.

The DEED, with DOLWD, through its Career Guides program, will work with school districts and employers to connect Alaska's high school students with career counseling, internship opportunities, and mentorship, exploring potential career opportunities within the State.

Goal 2: Develop a Skilled and Qualified Workforce

Strategy 2.1 – Address Workforce Readiness

Organize Pre-Job Workforce Forums, especially for entities involved in IIJA projects, to prepare workers with the necessary qualifications.

Leverage large infrastructure projects to link economic development efforts with workforce development planning.

The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF), DCCED's Broadband Office, DOLWD and industry partners will coordinate efforts to prepare workers for IIJA projects.

Strategy 2.2 – Expand and Improve Training Programs

Identify potential resources for high school and postsecondary CTE (Career and Technical Education) programs.

Build on strategies and recommendations from the [Alaska Career and Technical Education Plan](#).

Support educational and training programs that prepare the workforce for emerging skills and technologies required by the changing Alaska workforce landscape.

DOLWD, DEED, the University of Alaska, and regional CTE training providers will coordinate efforts to identify gaps in Alaska's training providers that are not meeting industry needs and make recommendations to policymakers to address those needs.

Strategy 2.3 – Promote Apprenticeships and Internships

Create internship/apprenticeship expansion programs modeled after best practices in other states, potentially including employer subsidies and tax incentives.

AWIB will explore the establishment of a State Apprenticeship Agency (SAA) to streamline and expand apprenticeship opportunities.

Goal 3: Retain Alaskans and Attract New Alaskans

Strategy 3.1 – Improve Access to Post-Secondary Education

DEED and the University of Alaska will work together to assist students and parents with job and training program applications to reduce barriers to young Alaskans.

Consider tuition reduction and student loan forgiveness for long-term residents and encourage non-resident students to attend post-secondary programs in Alaska.

Strategy 3.2 – Strengthen Talent Pipelines

DOLWD, DEED and industry partners will increase career awareness and exploration opportunities among Alaska youth and working-age residents.

Establish programs that connect students to work experiences, particularly in rural areas.

Strategy 3.3 – Utilize All Alaska's Talent

Leverage the talent of all Alaskans, including veterans, legal immigrants, Alaskans with disabilities, and formerly incarcerated individuals. DOLWD, DEED, and industry partners will explore more areas of emphasis to connect more Alaskans to employment and training opportunities.

Strategy 3.4 – Market Alaska's Opportunities: Recruit In and Out of Alaska

Organize a marketing campaign to encourage working-age adults to find work in, and relocate to, Alaska. Emphasize the "adventure" lifestyle that is unique to the State; seek to collaborate with organizations engaged in marketing Alaska as a place to live, such as the Kenai Peninsula Economic Development District.

Share information about incentives that may be created through partnerships and/or put in place by State or local government agencies. Incorporate focused messaging for past Alaska residents that have moved away, encouraging them to return.

DOLWD and DCCED will partner to market Alaska's employment opportunities to the Lower 48.

Strategy 3.5 – Elevate Programs that Foster New Alaskans

Support recruitment campaigns that bring new workers to Alaska and leverage opportunities to encourage seasonal, temporary or transient workforce to make Alaska their permanent home.

Continue to improve occupational licensing processes, regulatory compliance such as background checks, improving access to DMV services, enhancing CDL testing procedures, and streamline access to apprenticeship opportunities.

Simplify processes for reciprocal licensing for professionals and journey level trades; reduce waiting times. Expand reciprocal licensing agreements with other states.

DOLWD's Office of Citizenship Assistance will support Alaska's employers to consider hiring legal immigrants to fill critical gaps in Alaska's workforce. DCCED will continue efforts to expedite the licensing process.

Goal 4: Foster Regional Workforce Development

Strategy 4.1 – Establish Regional Teams

Identify or create regional teams to coordinate cross-industry workforce development planning based on regional knowledge of gaps and assets. AWIB will formally recognize partnerships between regional teams, the AWIB, and industry-led coordinating entities.

Align statewide workforce planning with regional efforts to ensure that initiatives reflect the unique needs of each area.

Strategy 4.2 – Leverage Regional Knowledge for Workforce Projects

Support regional efforts to employ community representatives who act as liaisons between residents, State agencies, and employers to foster clear communication and retain local talent.

Use models like Bristol Bay Native Corporation and Bering Straits to guide regional workforce development.

Advocate for regional involvement in workforce development related to IJA projects to prepare workers for those specific opportunities.

Goal 5: Improve Infrastructure and Access to Support Services

Strategy 5.1 – Address Infrastructure Gaps

Advocate for infrastructure projects to include investments in housing, transportation, childcare, and eldercare, which are essential for enabling workforce participation and economic development.

Strategy 5.2 – Collaborate with Partners to Enhance Support Systems

Work with partners to address issues related to housing, transportation, childcare, and access to other critical services that affect workforce stability and mobility.

Drawing from the recommendations in The Governor’s Task Force on Child Care reports, DOLWD will work closely with the Alaska Department of Health, to support improving pathways for the development of a robust child care workforce in Alaska, including the development of apprenticeship programs for early childhood education professions.

Housing remains a challenge, especially outside Alaska’s urban centers. The Alaska Housing Finance Corporation, with support from DOLWD and industry partners, will work together to identify forward-looking opportunities for investment in areas of Alaska where infrastructure projects and other economic development efforts will continue to drive demand for affordable housing.

DOLWD will continue to work with DOH, AHFC, and other State agencies to implement the Governor’s initiatives to increase affordability for Alaskan families.

Goal 6: Ensure Sustainability and Continuity of Workforce Development Efforts

Strategy 6.1 – Identify the State Coordinating Entity

AWIB, with its partners, such as the Alaska Workforce Alliance and with feedback from industry, through the Business Education Compact, and other private and public sector entities, will coordinate the implementation of these strategies. Together with its partners, AWIB will facilitate ongoing workforce development efforts, ensuring that all stakeholder feedback is incorporated, and progress is continuously measured.

AWIB and its private and public sector partners will coordinate and facilitate specific activities to advance shared goals, including support for regional teams and aligning

workforce development activities with other State agencies such as DEED, DCCED, DOT&PF, the Office of Infrastructure, and others.

Strategy 6.2 – Facilitate Engagement and Communication for Long-Term Sustainability

The AWIB will serve the collaborative effort by:

- Identifying, establishing, and maintaining sustainable funding streams to support long-term workforce development initiatives, ensuring goals can be met over time.
- Actively engaging with industry and other partners to keep the workforce development plan dynamic and responsive to changing needs.
- Convening statewide training providers to determine where support can be best directed so that Alaskans can access regionally relevant training near their communities.
- Working closely with the Alaska Business Education Compact (BEC) to utilize this forum as a feedback resource; continue to build BEC engagement across industry sectors, public and private training institutions, State and local agencies, and nonprofits and others providing supportive services.

Expected Outcomes

A Resilient Alaska Workforce and Economy

The implementation of *Alaska's Workforce Future* is expected to significantly strengthen Alaska's workforce, making it more adaptable, skilled, and capable of meeting the demands of a rapidly changing economy. By aligning training programs with industry needs and enhancing career pathways, the strategies are designed to reduce workforce shortages and ensure that Alaskans are well-prepared to take on high-demand roles across various sectors.

Retaining Alaska's Talent

Providing clear career pathways, improving access to local education and training opportunities, and promoting the benefits of staying in Alaska, are steps we can take to stem the outmigration of young talent. This will help maintain a robust and dynamic working-age population that can support the State's long-term economic growth.

Growth in Every Region

The establishment of regional teams is expected to lead to more effective and tailored workforce strategies across different regions of Alaska. By addressing the specific needs of local economies, these teams will help ensure that all areas of the state benefit from economic growth, leading to more balanced and inclusive development.

Ready for Alaska's Growth Opportunities

Proactively preparing the workforce for upcoming infrastructure projects funded by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) will ensure that Alaska is ready to capitalize on these opportunities.

meet the demand for skilled labor, maximize the economic benefits of these projects, and secure long-term prosperity for its residents.

Unified Workforce Efforts

AWIB will coordinate communication and collaboration among all stakeholders involved in workforce development. This centralized approach is expected to lead to more efficient use of resources, better alignment of efforts, and stronger partnerships between employers, educators, and government agencies.

Next Steps

As we move forward with implementing *Alaska's Workforce Future*, the following initial steps will lay the foundation for our collective efforts. These steps are designed to be flexible and adaptable, recognizing that strategies will evolve as we receive feedback from stakeholders and the broader community. We anticipate that once the report is published, new ideas and strategies will emerge, offering valuable insights that will help us refine and expand our approach. Our commitment to these shared goals requires an openness to incorporate these contributions, ensuring that our efforts remain responsive and effective.

Formal Endorsement from Key Partners

- **Obtain AWIB Resolution of Support:** *Alaska's Workforce Future* will be presented to the AWIB to secure a formal resolution of support. The formal endorsement will demonstrate the public-private partnership established through this process and unified support for strategic implementation.

Identifying and Securing Funding

To successfully implement the strategies outlined in *Alaska's Workforce Future*, securing sustainable funding sources is essential. The plan's goals, including the development of a comprehensive career awareness campaign, and the creation of a central hub for workforce opportunities, require dedicated resources. This includes funding for staff, website development, marketing, communications, and the deployment of recurring survey tools.

- **Initial Funding Secured:** The Alaska Safety Alliance has already been awarded \$260,000 from the Denali Commission to support this critical work. This initial funding will be instrumental in jump-starting key initiatives and building the infrastructure necessary for ongoing implementation.

- **Pursue Federal and State Grants:** Identify and apply for relevant federal and State grants that align with the objectives of this plan. This could include workforce development grants, education and training program funds, and infrastructure support from initiatives like the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). Collaborate with State agencies, such as the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, to leverage existing funding streams and explore new opportunities.
- **Engage Private Sector Partners:** Seek financial support from industry partners who will benefit directly from the plan's success. This could involve creating sponsorship opportunities for specific initiatives, such as the career awareness campaign or the development of a centralized workforce information platform. Building on the established public-private partnership, private sector investment will be crucial in sustaining long-term efforts.
- **Explore Philanthropic Funding:** Approach philanthropic organizations and foundations that focus on workforce development, education, and economic growth. These organizations may offer grants or donations to support specific components of the plan, such as outreach programs, workforce surveys, or the creation of educational resources.

Ongoing Stakeholder Engagement

- **Establish Regular Communication Channels:** Set up regular meetings and forums to engage stakeholders across all sectors, including industry leaders, educators, government agencies, and community organizations. Utilize virtual platforms to ensure broad participation, particularly from remote and rural areas.
- **Create a Stakeholder Advisory Group:** Form an advisory group comprised of representatives from key sectors and regions to provide ongoing guidance and feedback throughout the implementation process. This group will act as a bridge between the coordinating entity and broader stakeholder networks.
- **Conduct Periodic Surveys or Focus Group/Key Informant Interviews:** Implement regular surveys to capture stakeholder perspectives and experiences as the plan progresses. Use survey findings to refine strategies and actions, ensuring they remain aligned with stakeholder needs and priorities. Qualitative methods such as focus groups or key informant interviews may also be used for this purpose.

Communication of Plan Progress

- **Develop a Public Dashboard:** Create an online dashboard that tracks the progress of the plan's implementation. This dashboard should be updated regularly with key metrics, milestones, and outcomes, providing transparency and accountability to the public and stakeholders.

- **Issue Regular Progress Reports:** Publish biannual or annual progress reports that summarize the achievements, challenges, and adjustments made during the implementation. These reports should be widely distributed to all stakeholders and made available on the plan's website.
- **Host Public Forums:** Organize public forums or town hall meetings at key milestones to share progress, gather feedback, and discuss any necessary course corrections. These forums should be accessible to all Alaskans, with options for in-person and virtual participation.

Adjustments and Revisions

- **Implement a Continuous Improvement Process:** Establish a mechanism for regularly reviewing and updating the plan based on new data, stakeholder feedback, and changing economic conditions. This process should be flexible enough to adapt to emerging opportunities and challenges.
- **Conduct Annual Review Sessions:** Hold annual review sessions with the coordinating entity and key stakeholders to assess the effectiveness of the strategies and actions. Use these sessions to identify areas for improvement and to update the plan as needed.
- **Incorporate Feedback Loops:** Ensure that all feedback from stakeholders, whether through surveys, forums, or direct communication, is systematically reviewed and used to inform ongoing revisions to the plan. This will help keep the plan responsive to the evolving needs of Alaska's workforce.
- **Ongoing Leadership, Adaptation, and Engagement:** AWIB is tasked with advancing this plan, guided by the recommendations of the 2023 Convening. This includes securing additional resources, hiring the necessary staff, and supporting the ongoing initiatives identified by the Convening.

In addition to these responsibilities, AWIB will focus on maintaining widespread stakeholder engagement through future convenings, events, surveys, and forums. The Alaska Business Education Compact (BEC) will be utilized as a core feedback resource, helping to sustain engagement across diverse sectors, training institutions, agencies, and service providers. AWIB's role is to lead with a focus on long-term sustainability, fostering innovation, building resilience, and adapting to evolving workforce challenges.

Conclusion

Alaska's Workforce Future is not just a workforce plan; it is a shared vision for the State's economic prosperity and the well-being of its residents. This comprehensive, data-driven approach was built on the collaborative efforts of stakeholders from across the State, reflecting the diverse needs and opportunities that exist within Alaska's workforce. The goals and strategies outlined in this plan are designed to address the pressing workforce challenges we face, while also seizing the opportunities that lie ahead.

As we move into the implementation phase, the success of this plan will depend on the continued dedication and collaboration of all partners involved—industry leaders, educators, Alaska Native organizations, government agencies, and community groups. The early actions outlined in the Next Steps section will set the foundation for our efforts, but flexibility and adaptability will be key as we incorporate feedback and adjust to evolving conditions.

Together, we can build a stronger, more resilient workforce that meets the demands of today and prepares for the challenges and opportunities of tomorrow. By staying committed to our shared goals and continuously engaging with all stakeholders, we can ensure that Alaska's Workforce Future is one that benefits every Alaskan, securing the State's economic vitality for years to come.

Acknowledgements

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The Alaska Safety Alliance is an Alaska 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization comprised of more than 135 members, including private sector employers, education and training providers, Alaska Native corporations, and partner nonprofit organizations. In July 2024, ASA established a subsidiary organization, the Alaska Workforce Alliance (AWA), to advance initiatives that align with our mission *to ensure the availability of a highly trained workforce sufficient to staff Alaska's industries safely and competitively, now and in the future.*

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Acronyms

ACPE	Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education
ADOLWD	Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development
AHEC	Area Health Education Centers
AKCIS	Alaska Career Information System
AMEC	Alaska Maritime Education Consortium
ASA	Alaska Safety Alliance
AWIB	Alaska Workforce Investment Board
BEC	Business Education Compact
CTE	Career and Technical Education
DEED	Department of Education and Early Development
FAFSA	Free Application for Federal Student Aid
IIJA	Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act
IAC	Industry Advisory Council
SAA	State Apprenticeship Agency

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