

Grow Oklahoma Strategic Plan

I. Problem Statement:

Oklahoma is facing a two-fold problem in human capital policy. We have both a workforce shortage and a worker skills shortage, with both representing long-term trends unless action is taken. Without improvement on both dimensions, Oklahoma will not meet the needs of our key state industries.

II. The Stakes for Oklahoma:

Unless these two challenges are solved, our future will likely be:

- A. Too few Oklahomans with the skills to fill our industry needs;
- B. Fewer companies that can expand in Oklahoma;
- C. Fewer companies that choose to locate in Oklahoma;
- D. Stunted economic growth that inhibits our citizens from gaining wealth and acquiring the assets needed to function in a volatile labor market;
- E. A state at a competitive disadvantage against other states and nations that have transformed themselves into agile communities, ready to adapt to ongoing change.

III. Assumptions:

- A. Without strategic action, many Oklahomans, such as those with disabilities, ex-offenders, high school dropouts, public assistance recipients, immigrants, etc., will continue to be excluded from being part of a positive, productive workforce.
- B. Unless bold, sustained actions are taken, it is assumed that Oklahoma will continue to make moderate, and in some case, limited improvement in educational attainment and job skills – insufficient to ensure we can meet industry needs.
- C. Without bold action, Oklahoma’s high school student dropout rate will continue and possibly increase from its present level.
- D. Oklahoma can increase in its percentage of adults with bachelor’s degrees from the present 22.2%.
- E. According to data and statistical research, educational attainment, personal income, and economic strength will continue to fall without an affirmative plan that presents workability, desirability, and feasibility to address shortages in the impending knowledge economy.

IV. Conclusions:

- A. Oklahoma can solve both the worker shortage and the skills shortage that our industries face by committing ourselves to a strategy of “Grow Oklahoma.”
- B. Focusing on ensuring that Oklahomans have the opportunity and the support needed to increase their knowledge, skills and education attainment by:
 - 1. Increasing awareness of students, families and educators of career options and opportunities and of how knowledge and skills development will meet industry needs and give Oklahoma a competitive advantage.
 - 2. Increasing the skills and knowledge of young people entering the workforce.
 - 3. Helping Oklahomans who are not now in the workforce to gain the skills they need to enter career pathways.
 - 4. Supporting workers in obtaining skills they need to transition from one job or career to another.
 - 5. Investing in ongoing learning and skill development for our existing workers who are already employed, benefiting not only our workers, but their employers, as well.
 - 6. Informing employers of the availability of under-utilized members of the workforce.

7. Increase the number of Oklahomans who are receiving highly technical skills and advanced degrees required by the knowledge economy.

V. **Recommendations:**

- A. The Governor's Council for Workforce and Economic Development will lead the development and implementation of a transformational strategic plan for the State of Oklahoma. The plan will be audacious, yet essential, to attract and retain businesses that are competing globally on a basis of using skilled workers effectively. The result of Grow Oklahoma will be a skilled and continually learning workforce that will be the centerpiece of Oklahoma's economic development strategy. We need to be able to give a clear and supportable message to companies – "If you grow your business in Oklahoma, you will be able to find the skilled workers that you need to make that growth possible." Our message to workers – "If you locate to and stay in Oklahoma, you will have diversified and attractive employment opportunities."
- B. The Core Principles that guide our strategic plan include:
 1. **Focusing on key industries --** We will develop our solutions consistently within the context of meeting the needs of key industries, whether statewide or within a region. Initially those industries will include aerospace, advanced manufacturing, and healthcare. We will engage employers in these key industries in shaping strategies to ensure relevance.
 2. **Everyone needs to grow** – Our strategies will focus on ensuring that all Oklahomans are part of our state's future success. That means everyone will need to progress to the next level of skills periodically, from low skill workers obtaining basic skills to university graduates obtaining advanced and continuing learning and certifications.
 3. **Removing barriers** – We must enable workers who want to take advantage of continuous learning to do so. Examples of barriers include child care, transportation and employer awareness that time off for skills enhancement can positively affect their bottom line.
 4. **Being accountable for results** – Our strategies cannot be mere rhetoric. We will develop metrics for our progress and use them to drive our actions.
 5. **State agencies will align** – We are embarking on an explicit, long-term joint venture of all relevant state agencies involved in economic development, workforce development, education, and human services, committing to set priorities and resource allocations to support and align with the goals and action strategies we are undertaking.
 6. **Growing will occur within regions** – Economies work at a regional level, rather than statewide. Our actions must encourage and support development of agile and appropriate regional partnerships and solutions.

C. **Organizing Initiatives – Policy Infrastructure**

The Council and the state agency partners are engaged in several strategic initiatives which will provide crucial support for each of the strategies listed below:

- ◆ We will follow a sector-based model using the NGA Sector Academy to frame this work.
- ◆ We will organize our work around regions wherever possible.
- ◆ We will use Career Readiness Certificates as a way to demonstrate skill attainment at multiple levels and with multiple populations.
- ◆ We will use the Career Management System as a universal tool for career exploration and navigation.
- ◆ We will use www.GrowOklahoma.com as a major vehicle to reach the public about opportunities and options under both major goals below.

- ◆ The Council will develop an overall accountability system to track progress against our short and long goals, our individual initiatives, and the organizing initiatives listed here.

D. **Major Goals**

We have two overarching goals that will drive our work and against which we will measure our long-term success:

1. **Increase the education/skill attainment levels of all Oklahomans**
2. **Increase the labor pool in Oklahoma**

E. **Major Strategies:**

So that we can ensure Oklahoma employers have access to a skilled workforce and that Oklahomans have the education and training to succeed, we will engage in three critical major-strategies in addressing the two overarching problems we face – a labor shortage and a skill shortage:

- ◆ ***Develop career pathways and career exploration strategies that all Oklahomans can access.***
Identifying where good jobs are in the economy, and what skills, knowledge and experience are needed to obtain them, is a recurring issue for everyone from an 8th grader understanding the connection between their education and having good job opportunities to workers seeking to enter or progress in career pathways. Obtaining the learning and credentialing needed to advance in those pathways at all stages of life is crucial to success.
- ◆ ***Create a paradigm shift among Oklahomans and employers toward valuing lifelong learning with a high value on skills development.***
We will achieve success in Growing Oklahoma only if we place learning at the center of Oklahoma's paradigm about success. That will require sustained work over several years on the part of leaders across Oklahoma, and the engagement of our families and employers in turning this into a core value.
- ◆ ***Develop coordinated, responsive and proactive service delivery and talent recruitment models to meet the needs of individuals and employers.***
Even with the all the efforts to grow Oklahoma talent we will not have all of the talent needed to fill the needs of current and future Oklahoma employers.

As we develop and recruit talent, we must also ensure that the array of economic development and employment services that are delivered to individuals and employers is organized in a way that will align with our vision of Oklahoma as a state that embraces continuous learning. That will require rethinking of how economic and workforce development services will be delivered.

F. **Objectives For Goal 1 – Increase the educational/skill attainment levels of all Oklahomans**

1. Reduce High School and Post-Secondary Drop-Out Rate and Re-Engage Drop-Outs
 - a. Why do this? Reducing the drop-out rate is a major priority of the Governor, who sees it as a crucial step in creating a more educated and valuable workforce and in helping youth who get disconnected from society when they drop out of school.
 - b. Tactics for Implementation
 - i. State Youth Council
 - ii. Identify root causes that cause students to drop out, such as drug abuse, and develop comprehensive and joint strategies to combat the issues.

- iii. Incorporate “Character First” type of programs through middle school.
 - iv. Mentoring programs
 - v. Internships in major sectors
 - vi. Develop career information specialists
 - vii. Early childhood initiatives – increase number in pre-school programs
 - viii. Leadership body of interested school superintendents (can be used for multiple strategies)
 - ix. Define career pathways for major industries and occupations and inculcate all systems (teachers, guidance counselors, etc) with pathways knowledge and use
 - x. Determine alternative learning methods based on sector needs
 - xi. Career awareness marketing campaign at all grade levels – in and out of school
 - xii. Test early to determine those at-risk and provide alternative learning environments
2. Increase Rate of Postsecondary Education Attainment
- a. Why do this? For Oklahoma to be competitive globally and against other states set as a standard achievement of at least a 2 year degree or comparable certification as a minimum expectation of all students, and prepare youth for career advancement in family sustaining jobs.
 - b. Tactics for implementations
 - i. Incentives for expanding education capacity in key sectors and occupations
 - ii. Build education pathways, including articulation agreements, that link the full continuum of education including credit transfer between institutions
 - iii. Public/private funding streams to encourage education on key sectors
 - iv. Create fast track to high school diploma – use 2 + 2 + 2 approach
 - v. Link CareerTech certifications with higher education diplomas
 - vi. Create leadership body of key educators who will test new models of learning and integration of curriculum at all levels
 - vii. Awareness campaign for Oklahoma’s Promise – OHLAP
 - viii. Sector-based summer camps-students, teachers, counselors
 - ix. Industry sector blogs for information on careers
 - x. New scholarship initiatives in key sectors
3. Undertake skill development initiatives for all including at-risk populations - tied to sector and CRC efforts
- a. Why do this? Most of our potential workforce is already of working age; we need to take advantage of all of those resources and ensure they have the skills to be useful to themselves and to employers
 - b. Tactics
 - i. Make Career Readiness Certificate (**CRC**) an outcome for all at-risk population programs
 - ii. Create adult transition centers – pilot models and evaluate overall plan for expansion
 - iii. Campaign for employer acceptance of Career Readiness Certificate in hiring process
 - iv. Expand profiling to more industries/companies

- v. Develop initiatives that link special populations to key sectors
 - vi. Develop career advancement models for all
 - vii. Create subgroup of agency leaders who serve special populations to agree on common approaches and common metrics as well as ways to integrate services
4. Campaign to change the Culture about the Value of Education/skills attainment
- a. Why do this? For there to be a real change in how we in Oklahoma value education and skills attainment, we need to engage people in changing attitudes and behavior. This is no small task; it will take a large scale, sustained campaign to make it happen.
 - b. Tactics
 - i. Develop community engagement models to push the issue.
 - ii. Expand GrowOklahoma.com as vehicle for delivering value message
 - iii. Test attitudes and pilot regional approaches for action
 - iv. Supplement GrowOklahoma.com with PSAs and other outreach on public opinion change
 - v. Create messaging for Council members to use in their spheres of influence about valuing education and skills attainment
 - vi. Create leadership team to drive this campaign with high visibility members and support
5. Create incentives for lifelong learning
- a. Why do this? Just as people have to change their attitudes and behaviors about the value of education and skills attainment, there must be change in the structures that incent such behaviors; we need to ensure our resources are being best used to promote lifelong learning.
 - b. Tactics
 - i. Bring back incumbent worker training grants tied to key sectors
 - ii. Explore use of Unemployment Insurance funding for training
 - iii. Explore new ways to integrate work and learning
 - iv. Encourage (maybe through tax incentives) employer funded training, particularly in key sectors
 - v. Provide discounted funding for special populations at education institutions – older workers, incarcerated individuals, ex-offenders, public assistance recipients, etc.
6. Create new models for integrated service delivery that bring workforce and economic development closer together
- a. Why do this? The old models are not responsive to the new needs of the global economy; they don't leverage funds or other types of resources to ensure employers and job seekers get the services they need.
 - b. Tactics
 - i. Pilot Oklahoma Advantage Centers in key regions
 - ii. Develop data sharing mechanisms that promote integrated service delivery
 - iii. Ensure economic development entities are part of the planning and execution of any new models
 - iv. Assess needs for new services on a regional basis and allow flexibility in design to meet those needs while adhering to core statewide principles

- v. Align measurement systems to support integrated services
- vi. Assess infrastructure needs and ways to fund new models

G. Objectives for Goal 2 – Increase the labor pool in Oklahoma

1. Create marketing campaign to attract high skilled workers to Oklahoma
 - a. Why do this? Even with the all the efforts to grow Oklahoma, we will still need to attract high caliber, skilled workers to help fill our skills and labor gaps
 - b. Tactics
 - i. Use GrowOklahoma.com as major vehicle for outreach campaign to showcase Oklahoma advantages
 - ii. Advertise outside state, including a focus on convincing Oklahomans living elsewhere to “come home”
 - iii. Create recruiting campaign for colleges
 - iv. Offer incentives for skilled workers in key sectors to come to Oklahoma
2. Create incentives for Oklahoma graduates in key disciplines (math, science, engineering, nursing., etc.) to stay in Oklahoma
 - a. Why do this? The “brain drain” is obvious to all – we lose too many of our highly qualified graduates to other states
 - b. Tactics
 - i. Create incentives for key industry sectors and occupation graduates to stay in Oklahoma e.g. student loan forgiveness or tuition rebates
 - ii. Select key national measures and track Oklahoma progress against them – trying to move the needle on things like entrepreneurship and investment capital opportunities
 - iii. Create special incentives for teaching in hard to fill areas related to key sectors
 - iv. Create campaign on retention of graduates – track progress
 - v. Create leadership group to drive these initiatives
3. Create incentives to expand capacity to educate more Oklahomans in key disciplines
 - a. Why do this? If education and skills attainment are going to be real for a large numbers of people so that we can grow our labor force, we have to have the capacity to provide the training and education necessary to meet what will be vastly increased demand; we need to avoid bottlenecks in the development system so that we can actually produce more skilled workers all along the continuum
 - b. Tactics
 - i. Provide incentive for those who go into teaching in critical skill areas
 - ii. Assess capacity needs in key sectors e.g. nursing training or engineer training
 - iii. Explore alternative ways to get credentials e.g. assessing and giving credit for prior learning experience.
 - iv. Look regionally at needs and help regions make decisions about their local needs
 - v. Map needs for all levels of education including adult basic education to advanced degrees – determine what we think our needs will be
 - vi. Create plan to fill the needs identified

4. Create models to increase labor force participation rates of underutilized populations
 - a. Why do this? We have many population groups that are not able to contribute to our growth – we need them in order to grow all of Oklahoma
 - b. Tactics
 - i. Map needs – numbers and skills gaps of populations
 - ii. Assess barriers to greater labor force participation
 - iii. Identify the groups – needs differ and approach will also
 - iv. Use Career Readiness Certificate as core but determine approaches for all aspects of this agenda and how it relates to needs of the offender population, individuals with disabilities, military discharges, at-risk youth, public assistance recipients (all types of assistance including Food Stamps)
 - v. Develop separate but then integrated strategies for each group that follow the sector models
5. Create model for certified work ready communities
 - a. Why do this? This is a new approach being used in some areas of the country to promote community action toward ensuring there are well qualified workers available to attract new or expanding businesses; it has promise to make economic development efforts more productive since there is a demonstration that a quality workforce exists
 - b. Tactics
 - i. Explore the concept and applicability in Oklahoma regions
 - ii. Determine costs and benefits – test whether potential employers respond to the certification in their location decisions
 - iii. Develop criteria and mechanism for certification
 - iv. Pilot in a sample of communities
 - v. Determine results of pilot and decide whether to move forward on larger scale – using timetable developed as part of the process
 - vi. Get all communities players at the table