

BC Skills Force Initiative

Summary of Focus Group Session

May 24, 2005

Osoyoos, BC

AGENDA

1. Introduction of facilitators Paul Wiest & Ron Trepanier
2. Introduced the BC Skills Gap Initiative
3. Introduction of participants
4. Overview of project
5. Background Research
6. Focus Group Discussion
7. Next steps
8. Wrap Up

Comments & Discussion

Employer Labour Needs:

- Majority of the focus group participants have positions to be filled
- Local job board has seen a significant increase in job postings compared to previous years
- Qualifications are listed as part of the job description - however it is difficult to find individuals with the desired set of qualifications
- The lack of available workers has required employers to lessen their expectations regarding the skills and experience of job applicants
- Finding seasonal employees is a big challenge for this year
- Need for seasonal workers from the May long-weekend to the end of September
- There is a big demand for experienced, trades people
- Trades that are in demand include:
 - o Carpenters
 - o Plumbers
 - o Electricians
- There is a lack of entry level employees who can operate small tools, electric drills, and saws
- Workers with food safety training are needed in the hospitality sector
- Most applicants that do apply for vacant positions are older workers (45 years plus)
- Most key staff are 45 years and older
- Employers are looking for both entry level and higher skilled positions
- Not enough students in the labour pool
- There are skilled immigrant workers but they do not have the basic language skills for the available positions
- Very few positions within a small business operation can accommodate a "low" skill level

Skills & Education:

- CAP program is good in theory but needs input from business as to how it should be delivered
- Schools need to have input from the business community in the development of business education curriculum
- Need English as a Second Language training for immigrant workers
- Need basic computer skills training
- Employees should know how to operate small equipment (i.e., drill, skill saw, etc.) Lack of these basic skills represents a WCB issue for employers
- Employees need basic life skills training (i.e., showing up to work on time, having a positive attitude, basic interpersonal skills, etc.)
- Skilled employees have the ability to move from job to job (they have the pick of jobs)
- Local Aboriginal Band has been successful in training highly skilled employees
- Targeted Wage Subsidy is a good program in assisting employers train unskilled workers
- Need for skilled workers who can operate mechanical equipment as well as computer equipment
- It is difficult to hire employees with mid-entry skills; they either have technical training but no experience, or some experience but not the technical skills
- The school system needs to focus on basic skill development such as life skills training
- A large number of high school graduates lack basis skills - students appear to be taking "the easy route" to graduation and then must upgrade their skills at the workplace
- CAP program needs to be revisited; more interaction is needed with the business community on how the program is delivered
- Co-op education works well at post secondary levels - needs to be better applied in the high schools

Attitudes:

- Service sector has a poor image as low paying, low skill. In fact it can be high paying and highly skilled
- Students have a low participation rate in the labour pool - especially noticeable this year
- Parents allow their children to stay at home rather than find a job

- Younger workers lack basic life skills and a proper work ethic
- Difficult to find front-end staff with the proper work ethic in the hospitality sector
- Key is to find people who like their job
- Employers need to create a culture where workers enjoy their work, and bring a smile to the workplace
- Employers need to motivate their employees; example of West Jet employees having a positive attitude towards their job

Infrastructure:

- Need more affordable housing to attract workers. Finding affordable housing for workers is a problem
- Real estate costs are very high; presents difficulty for younger workers
- Seasonal workers have to live in campground
- Construction workers are now using the campgrounds for accommodation. This causes a problem for other seasonal workers looking to find campground space to live
- Lack of transportation system within the Penticton to Osoyoos corridor. No local transit makes it especially difficult for seasonal workers
- EAS providers not allowed to contact the schools because of federal/provincial jurisdictional issues; this situation needs to be addressed
- Common housing system needed within Oliver and Osoyoos
- Flexibility needed regarding the number of hours an employee can work within a week. Employers sometimes need to exceed 40 hours per week but can not afford the overtime
- Need for co-op transportation between Penticton and Osoyoos

Hiring Practices/HR Strategies:

- Most employers have formal job descriptions for vacancies
- Employers are willing to invest in training their employees
- Employers need to develop a human resource strategy
- For many, their current human resource strategy is day-to-day- "make it up as you go"
- Employers need to consider profit sharing through tips and sales targets help attract and retain employees
- Key is finding motivated employees, hiring for attitude

- Many employers need to learn process of how to hire the right employees for the jobs they have
- Employers need assistance with training new employees (i.e., faster and more convenient training assistance)
- Employers need a guide for staff hiring/orientation/training/compensation
- Pay level is an issue for skilled workers. They have the ability to find higher paying jobs outside of the community
- Business owners need to budget properly so they can retain workers during the slow season
- Employers need to manage cash flow internally in order to improve the quality of their employees
- Employers need to work on improving capacity of their existing workers rather than looking to hire new staff
- Employer Youth Fairs would be helpful

Succession Planning:

- Many employers will need to look at the issue of key staff retiring within the next 5 to 10 years
- Many employers lack a formal succession plan
- Employers do not see an immediate need to address succession planning for themselves

Final Comments:

- Need to look at ways of increasing the participation rate of youth for seasonal positions
- Employers recommended that a bus system be available from Penticton to Osoyoos to help transport workers within that corridor
- Suggestion was made that local groups should get together at the community level to address the issue of skills/labour shortages.

Stakeholders should include:

- o Businesses
- o Municipality
- o EDO
- o Schools
- o Community Futures
- o First Nations
- o Chamber