



Professional Developers of Iowa

Vision • Action • Growth

The Professional Developers of Iowa (PDI) was established in 1973 as an organization of economic development professionals working to grow and develop Iowa's economic base. PDI's more than 350 members come from a variety of disciplines: community, county and regional developers, utilities, legal and financial firms, universities, community colleges, and engineering and construction firms.

The Professional Developers of Iowa are keenly interested in the workforce issues facing our state. We recognize that workforce shortages not only impact our existing businesses ability to grow, but also our ability to recruit diversified job opportunities from outside the state.

There is no question that the topic of Iowa's workforce involves complex issues much broader than just availability. There are shortages of specific skills needed to keep Iowa's businesses competitive and productive. The ability to attract skilled workers and professions to a rural state is complicated by sometimes real, but more often a perceived lack of quality of life opportunities. Declining population and school enrollments is exacerbated by the outmigration of our college graduates which continues to plague the state.

With such a broad range of challenges, PDI believes our state must be creative and aggressive in its approach to solving the worker shortage dilemma. The Iowa Values Fund is an example of state's creativity that has focused our efforts on growing highly skilled and high wage jobs in our state.

PDI members feel it is important to highlight a few programs that deserve special attention and continued support.

Statewide Laborshed Studies

This program has been an invaluable tool in profiling Iowa's existing workforce and its potential workforce. It is truly a competitive advantage that is demonstrated by other states' interest in replicating the tool. In a time with very low unemployment it is difficult to demonstrate an available labor pool but the laborshed studies allow us to graphically show commuting patterns and the source of workers in any geographic location of the state.

A few findings from completed surveys since June 2007 include:

- One-third of respondents said that they need training with 38.7% stating they need a college degree and 26.9% needing computer training.
- More than 61% of respondents are between 45-64
- Nearly 60% said they are not likely to seek training. Financial reasons (29.4%) and lack of time were (24.6%) the biggest obstacles identified to seeking training

The Iowa Jobs Training Programs (260E & 260F)

These programs provide job training services to new and current employees. The 260E uses a portion of an employer's payroll tax to train new employees of expanding businesses, while 260F and other initiatives use appropriated funds to retrain existing workers to help brush up on existing skills or learn new skills. In sum, these programs assist businesses with the training and upgrading of skills for their current workforce ensuring that Iowa's businesses remain competitive in their markets. The Iowa Jobs Training Programs, particularly 260F, is critically underfunded based on the need and demand.

Community Enhancement Programs

The Vision Iowa, Community Attractions and Tourism and Main Street Iowa programs have all been successful initiatives to enhance Iowa's livability. As we seek to market Iowa as a great place to work, live and play, we need to continue to invest in quality of life initiatives that current and future workers are seeking. Each of these programs have leveraged state dollars with local funding to generate excitement enhancing our communities. PDI strongly supports continuation of these programs and additional commitment of state resources.

Bigger, Bolder Ideas

A solution to the worker shortage dilemma is limited only by our ability to think creatively and cooperatively. Initiatives such as:

- a student loan forgiveness program that encourages Iowa's college graduates to stay in the state;
- a housing assistance program that encourages new comers to the state and helps retain current workers in the state;
- internship programs that allows students to experience the variety of jobs available to them in Iowa;
- K-12 initiatives to bring schools, businesses and economic development professionals together to talk with kids about opportunities in Iowa and workforce needs; and
- tuition assistance programs for the targeted industry clusters.

Collaborative Regions

One of the obstacles to understanding the current and future needs of Iowa's workforce and the resources currently available is the lack of continuity among the state departments, education, the business community, and local service providers. Iowa currently has numerous workforce related initiatives at Iowa Workforce Development, the Community Colleges, local and regional workforce development programs, economic development organizations, Career Ladders, the Iowa Careers Consortium, and higher education careers programs and Alumni Groups to name a few.

PDI recommends the following:

- 1) Bolster aforementioned programs, especially those that involve workforce training
- 2) Empower Regional Workforce Investment Boards (RWIBs) to coordinate workforce programs in their region, communicate these programs to job-seekers and employers, assess gaps in existing services and creatively come up with solutions. Grant RWIBs the funding and decision making authority they need to make this difference.
- 3) Provide visibility to current workforce programs through enhanced marketing
- 4) Recognize the regional Iowa Workforce Development offices as the point-of-contact for workforce development programs in the region
- 5) Extend funding for the regional marketing program initiated several years ago by the Iowa Department of Economic Development to allow for expanded regional workforce efforts. These regions have enhanced discussions between development groups in a cooperative way and strengthened relationships with workforce and economic development agencies.

If the Legislature is hesitant about providing this approach on a statewide scale, PDI proposes that the Skilled Workforce Shortage Committee consider establishing two regional pilot area with these objectives in mind, one in a rural-based region, and another in an urban region, and assess progress after a reasonable period of time.

PDI appreciates the opportunity to share our thoughts with the committee and stands ready to assist however we can to identify and promote workforce enhancements in Iowa.