REIMAGINE OREGON: IMPROVING YOUTH-TO-WORK AND WORKFORCE SYSTEMS IN THE WAKE OF COVID-19

Summary Report & Recommendations

SEPTEMBER 2020
Prepared by: Kristin Wolff, thinkers+doers
About the Project

With the support of the National League of Cities, OregonASK partnered with four workforce boards and representatives from nearly a dozen Oregon cities and mayors’ offices to explore how their communities were responding to the COVID crisis.

In August 2020, we convened four online conversations involving 135 stakeholders using the Zoom video-conferencing platform. The convenings were informed by a pre-event poll completed by 54 community leaders. During the convenings, we documented needs, lessons, solutions, and crisis-driven innovations that might inform recovery going forward—especially in the areas of education, job-training and workforce development. On September 22, we convened 88 stakeholders from across the state, also on Zoom, to share findings and preliminary recommendations, and build support for solving critical challenges.

This document describes the genesis of the project, its purpose and goals, and summarizes the process used to engage participants. It concludes with four recommendations for advancing the changes stakeholders advocated throughout the process.

All images provided by The 50 State Afterschool Network.
Introduction

Prior to the COVID-19 crisis when Oregon’s economic growth was robust and its labor market the strongest in decades, Oregon’s business and government leaders pointed to the education-to-career pathway as a critical challenge facing the state: despite a litany of reform efforts, the share of Oregon high school graduates going on to college actually dropped between 2011 and 2016, educational achievement barely budged, and Oregon experienced a decline in economic mobility, even as the economy was at full employment.1

Once the pandemic struck, schools closed, learning moved online, millions of Oregonians lost jobs, others worked from home (often competing with family members for devices and high-speed wifi), and childcare became a rarity. Low-income workers, younger workers, Black, Indigenous, people of color and women were disproportionately negatively impacted by these tumultuous changes.

Responding to the Early Days of the COVID Crisis

In the early stages of the crisis, communities and institutions all over the state found themselves reinventing services and strategies in ways they had not imagined just a few months before. Some agencies were simply unable to meet the challenge—Oregon Employment Department’s struggle to implement new CARES Act programs is an unfortunate example.2

Communities and volunteers stepped up and pitched in through mutual aid, faith-based, and non-profit and community organizations, and by simply collaborating with their neighbors.

A few months in, concerns were mounting about the impact of another semester (or another year) of remote learning on young people (and their teachers), and on Oregon families and communities. By late July, without an extension or follow-up to the CARES Act pandemic relief package passed by Congress in March, state and community leaders warned of the collapse of key sectors of the Oregon economy and the increased likelihood of a protracted and painful recession. The state’s public agencies and institutions, including colleges and universities, began issuing their own warnings and even laying off faculty and campus support staff.

---


At the same time, the deaths of Breonna Taylor on March 13 (in Louisville, KY) and George Floyd on May 25 (in Minneapolis, MN), both at the hands of law enforcement, prompted a wave of protests and demonstrations across the nation and in dozens of cities and towns in Oregon—many far outside of Portland which generated more media coverage. Tensions flared all summer (and continue), increasing the importance of justice, equity, and inclusion in Oregon’s recovery.

Why Reimagine Oregon?

It was this context in which this Reimagine Oregon project was launched. Our goals included:

- Engaging unusual combinations of stakeholders in discussions about crisis response and recovery; and
- Launching a conversation about reimagining education, workforce and talent development systems to better support young people and adults in preparing for the (new) Future of Work.

One of [the key pillars of prosperity], especially in recovery, is connecting and preparing Oregonians for transitions in jobs and the economy—automation and technology, advances in key industries and sectors. This is one of the most important things we think we can do...It will take fundamental reform. This is no longer about tinkering around the edges.

—Industry Association Leader

By engaging experts, leaders, and practitioners from across sectors and disciplines who do not typically convene for generative conversations about education, workforce, and talent development, we hoped to identify:

- A broad-based group of stakeholders committed to change;
- Specific pilots, initiatives, interventions, and ideas responding to the current crisis effectively and that might serve as a foundation for system-level reform and reinvention; and
- New models for collaboration that encourage program and service alignment and co-investment in equity, prosperity, and community well-being.

---


4Another Reimagine Oregon Project was launched at the same time, focusing on ending systemic racism. We whole-heartedly support Reimagining in both and in other change efforts: [https://www.reimagineoregon.org/](https://www.reimagineoregon.org/).
Additional Crises Increase Appetite for Change

What we could not have foreseen in early August were the devastating wildfires that swept through our state (and the West Coast) in September, destroying whole communities and forcing many Oregonians, including those involved in the project, to evacuate from their homes. Having set the date and sent invitations prior to the worst of the fire disaster, and realizing no time would be optimal for convening in the near future, we proceeded with the planned September 22nd convening. Eighty-eight stakeholders were in attendance, despite the smokey haze and deeply felt grief. They included mayors, college presidents, executives, community leaders, and representatives from the National League of Cities in Washington, DC. Mayor Chuck Bennett opened the convening, described his experience navigating the myriad crises of 2020 as the chief elected official of our state’s capital city, and proclaimed the subject of our convening more urgent than ever.

It is now clear that fundamental change is more possible in this moment than at any time in recent memory. Schools, colleges, and workplace all over the state and nation have already demonstrated this as long-debated plans for remote working were implemented overnight. Citizens and residents in Oregon and elsewhere locked down and donned masks, again overnight. And despite the partisanship in our nation’s capital, the US Congress passed and the President signed the largest economic stimulus package in our nation’s history in the form of the CARES Act of 2020.

We urge Oregon leaders and lawmakers at every level to consider these disruptions and their magnitude as they craft recovery plans for our state and communities in which education and workforce development will play a critical role.

The Effects of the Pandemic to Date

Prior to the pandemic, preparing for the Future of Work was a key driver of education and workforce policy conversations nationally and in Oregon. Questions about automation and its effect on jobs, how Oregon would close critical skills gaps, and the best strategies for preparing the next generation of Oregonian students, workers, and businesses to thrive were central to the state’s prosperity agenda and Future Ready workforce strategy.

---

The COVID crisis may have disrupted almost everything about our daily lives, but it accelerated trends Oregon and the nation were already struggling with.

- **Job loss due to automation.** A recent report by the Philadelphia Federal Reserve⁶ found that the crisis increased job loss (and worker vulnerability) by encouraging the automation of more jobs (and increasing the likelihood of workers facing permanent displacement). Further, it found that Black, Indigenous, and other people of color are more vulnerable to job loss because they are overrepresented in occupations more likely to be automated. Dozens of industry and professional association surveys⁷ as well as research conducted by policy think tanks supports these findings.⁸

- **Income and wealth inequality.** The net-worth of the wealthiest Americans increased by nearly one-third during the early months of the pandemic⁹, while tens of millions of other Americans were losing their jobs. Even in average neighborhoods, wealthy households cut back on consumer spending, forcing income declines for the workers and small businesses that typically depend on them—from restaurants and retail to dry cleaning and dance studios.

- **Digital inclusion.** The lack of access to devices and high-speed internet service in American homes made the ability to access information, engage meaningfully in school, and otherwise communicate with neighbors, families, and public health officials very challenging. This gap affects some 17 million children and their families, including one-third of Black, Indigenous, and LatinX households.¹⁰

Data about some of these trends is emerging in Oregon, too.¹¹

Against this backdrop, OregonASK and workforce partners wanted to learn how different Oregon communities were experiencing these and other challenges, what was being done to address them, and what was needed going forward to support recovery. Education, workforce development, and talent pipeline issues comprised the lens through which diverse stakeholders discussed these issues in each of the four convenings.

---

⁷For example: https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/what-800-executives-envision-for-the-postpandemic-workforce
⁸For example: https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/09/15/training-during-and-after-covid-19/
¹⁰See: https://futureready.org/homework-gap/
¹¹State Leaders will be discussing these and other challenges during the fall Oregon Business Plan recovery series launching September 30, 2000 through the end of 2020.
Regional Convenings

The convenings were energetic—stakeholders expressed both frustration about why better solutions to critical issues were not more evident and also displayed pride in how their communities had come together and responded creatively to impossible challenges in the short term.

Several participants in different convenings emphasized the need to “do things differently” going forward. A summary of both key learnings and shared priorities from across the four convenings follows

Key Learnings

We drew three primary learnings from across the four Reimagine Oregon convenings.

1. Stakeholders from across sectors and regions want to grow, scale, and integrate career and technical education and work-based learning (for youth and adults) as a high-value activity within education and workforce programming. They see work-based learning and apprenticeship as central to Oregon’s recovery strategy.

2. The demand for proactive work supports and “wrap-around” services skyrocketed in the early weeks and months of the pandemic. Stakeholders expect these services will be essential for more people with a greater range of needs and circumstances going forward. They need new solutions to the provision of these essential services—childcare the most urgent among them.

3. Stakeholders are looking for business partners who can help them solve community problems, not just advise or participate on governing boards.

Work-based Learning

Participants across all four convenings advocated for work-based learning for youth and adults, emphasizing its importance within high-quality youth-to-careers pathways and systems that support recovery.

They agreed:

- Young people need education, training, or some combination beyond high school to get good jobs and four-year college degrees have been the preferred pathways.

---

12See: https://www.jff.org/resources/work-based-learning-framework
13 See: https://www.careertech.org/CTE

Defining Terms

Work-based learning: the completion of a meaningful job or tasks in a workplace that develops readiness for work, knowledge, and skills that support entry or advancement in a particular career field.12

Career and technical education (CTE): activities that provide students of all ages with the academic and technical skills, knowledge and training necessary to succeed in careers and to become lifelong learners.13
Too few students complete their degrees and at too great a cost.

In the current economic downturn, fewer families will likely be able to afford traditional higher education pathways and will need.

Oregon’s community colleges offer four-year degree alternatives—transfer degrees, terminal two-year degrees, registered apprenticeship, and technical training supplemented by certificates and credentials—but currently, information about these are not shared universally with students, particularly those students interested in pathways leading more directly to work or lower cost post-secondary options.

Place-based and online offerings—from code academies to remote-first providers of technical training and degree programs—offer additional opportunities. Better data and navigation support are needed to help people make choices that are right for them.

Participants strongly supported the idea that work experience can help inform decisions about post-secondary education and training. Most participants expressed concern that too few work opportunities are available for young people who need jobs. Even before the pandemic, about 4.5M young people in the US were ‘disconnected’—not in school or in work—with rural, Black, and Native American young people overrepresented in these numbers. Experts expect the size of this group to grow substantially over the coming months as the recession takes hold and even fewer jobs are available. In contrast, participants in two convenings pointed to good jobs (especially in the construction trades) going unfilled today because “there are no pipelines into them.”

Work-based learning can help address both challenges. It links school and work and can bridge the transition from high-school to post-secondary education, jobs, or both. For college students, internships have been a tool for making these connections for many years. Cooperative education programs (co-ops), practicums, labs, and project based learning are other examples of project-based learning participants cited that could be more widely employed. Apprenticeship, pre-apprenticeship and career and technical education (CTE) have been key priorities in education, workforce, and talent development policy at the federal level for the past five years. Grants in these areas have provided resources for many states, including Oregon, to develop new materials and pilot new programs.

Going forward, participants expressed enthusiasm for three types of

---


15See: https://www.brookings.edu/research/we-cant-recover-from-a-coronavirus-recession-without-helping-young-workers/

16Although the US lacks an apprenticeship “system” comparable to those elsewhere, legislative changes under both the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) in 2015 and the Carl D. Perkins Act (Perkins V) in 2018 have enhanced structural support for such programs. Coupled with federal, state, and foundation grants, new apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs have emerged in tradition and non-traditional sectors and occupations.
work-based learning innovation:

- **Remote work-based learning.** Because COVID-19 is likely to limit traditional work-based learning in the workplace, stakeholders seek to pilot and accelerate remote work-based learning that is paid, time-limited or project-based, and supported by an academic institution (for credit).

- **Apprenticeship in non-traditional sectors and occupations.** Apprenticeship is a structured, regulated training intervention. It may not suit every occupation. However, in the context of new kinds of jobs and occupations we are likely to see post-COVID, it is uniquely able to support job creation and job training. We have seen, for example, the emergence of new safety occupations in workplaces that have had to redesign work processes or physical infrastructure—and apprenticeships emerging to support these changes.

- **Explicit linkages between COVID recovery and wildfire rebuilding strategies** and work-based learning and apprenticeship. Business and university stakeholders in particular pointed to the importance of mission and purpose in post-COVID recovery—of tying work to community service—especially for young people who may have sacrificed in-person high school experiences (or left school altogether) or been forced to cancel their post-secondary education plans. Mayors and county staff pointed to procurement as a vehicle for explicitly connecting high-quality work-based learning and apprenticeship to the recovery process.

Participants noted that a built-in bias toward four-year degrees within the K-12 system and among parents and policy makers poses a major challenge in advancing more diverse and widely employed work-based learning strategies. Many also advocated for consistent and repeated exposure to work-connected learning prior to high-school to boost young people’s confidence, build their networks, and inform their choices.

**Innovations in Oregon:** Southern Oregon piloted the first Medical Technician Registered Apprenticeship in Oregon. Healthcare and technology are two non-traditional sectors in which we have seen considerable growth in both apprenticeship programs and the overall number of apprentices nationally. Stakeholders expressed interest in building additional healthcare apprenticeship, citing the highly regulated environment as one that lends itself to competency-based skills development. (See Appendix B: Summary of the Southwestern Oregon Regional Convening)

Prior to COVID, Oregon State University Cascades Co-Lab had implemented a program that paired local employers with students for project-based learning experiences. The program now supports remote experiences. The importance of structuring project work and coaching students has become more evident as the program has

---

Stakeholders emphasized COVID recovery during the regional convenings and added wildfire-related infrastructure rebuilding as a focus during the large convening on September 22, 2020.
We need to do a better job of communicating what opportunities are out there for young people. And build more onramps and pathways, especially to small businesses that are the heart of the economy, and especially now.

—Industry Leader

What we need to do is to start working with kids at a younger age to get them to start thinking about what they want to do when they reach high school/college age. Give them hope earlier. Much earlier.

—Parent, Community Stakeholder

Work Support & Wrap-Around Services

The most successful education and workforce programs, especially those serving people with social, family, health, economic, or other barriers frequently include high-quality “wrap-around” services. Typical services may differ for young people and adults, but they are important enablers of academic and professional success. Over and over again, well-designed wrap-around services have been shown to boost persistence and completion rates for students and workers, as well as the overall impact of the programs.

These services are also difficult to fund (or sustain) and change based on the specific needs of participants and the location and focus of programs.

Common Wrap-Around Services

- Academic or career counseling or help navigating programs, requirements, enrollment, services, or other programmatic requirements
- Financial aid, including tuition supports, assistance with books, supplies, tools, devices, or uniform expenses, or direct cash support
- Assistance navigating support services including housing, transportation, and nutrition
- Childcare assistance (cash support, no- or low-cost services or help securing childcare placement)
- Healthcare (for students or workers enrolled in programs)

See the National Wraparound Initiative at Portland State University: https://nwi.pdx.edu/wraparound-basics/

See the Institute for Higher Education Policy: http://www.ihep.org/guidebook/collegereadiness/chapter/three
Participants across all four convenings indicated they had seen a rise in the need for these services and changes in the mix of specific services in demand, stemming primarily from students having to adapt their participation to the realities of children at home, job loss and the decline of family income, health challenges including COVID, or the stress of the COVID crisis and the recession. The demand for mental health services for youth and adults had reportedly risen precipitously since early Spring.

Community College stakeholders reported boosting their capacity to provide these services by hiring staff, joining task-forces or other community groups seeking to meet these needs, or simply “doing their best.” Accessing relatively small amounts of flexible funds was cited as a critical need, especially in the context of remote-access services. Community college and workforce leaders in particular reported that in the short term, they needed resources to simply remove barriers without having to refer customers to additional programs or eligibility processes. Several expressed interest in technology—purpose-built apps and texting tools, for example—that could help better scale these services.

Telehealth has helped people with barriers to access services … Technology could help education and work in a similar way and create more equitable access to opportunity.
—Elected Official

Digital Inclusion

Access to devices and high-speed internet also proved a significant need. The COVID crisis made evident what many educators and technology watchers already knew: the absence of high-speed internet connectivity and technology infrastructure is holding Oregon students and families back. Some 75,000 Oregon students lacked devices when Oregon’s stay-at-home order was issued.

Oregon does better on internet connectivity—only 12% of households do not have an internet connection—but speed and cost remain serious challenges. Multiple users in the same household accessing school, work, or both, remotely have strained existing connections at a time many cannot afford to boost subscriptions.

—Elected Official

See: https://www.bizjournals.com/portland/news/2020/05/27/digital-divide-leaves-75-000-oregon-students-need.html
See: https://oregoneconometricanalysis.com/2020/07/22/working-from-home-and-broadband-access-in-oregon/
Although stakeholders offered many solutions to this first wave of need—from large-scale purchases of devices by school districts to lending programs for devices to installing wifi signal boosters to reach parking lots and other outside areas even when host organizations were closed—many expressed concern about how to address these needs going forward. (See Appendix B: Summaries of the East Cascades and Southwestern Regional Convenings.)

**Childcare & Early Learning**

Typically, childcare is one of a number of wrap-around services. For education and workforce programs, it has been a consistent need and also difficult to fund for decades. However, it does not often animate large-scale conversations about work and learning. At this moment, things are different.

Participants loudly declared the absence of childcare a crisis, not only for the students and workers who were the subject of our four conversations but for many of the stakeholders who attended the convening themselves. Some attended with children on their laps or otherwise visibly or audibly present making the point obvious to everyone.

"We try very hard to offer as many...wrap-around services we can to our community. We’ve really led the nation on high speed internet services through our Municipal broadband [effort]. This used to be a benefit and now it’s crucial."

—Local Elected Official

"We have 125 employees. Half are freaking out about school. There are no good solutions. I don’t know what my colleagues with first-graders are going to do while trying to work from home. How can [childcare] not be a target sector?"

—City Agency Leader
Participants expressed a high degree of frustration with absence of child care (0-12), the lack of clarity and guidance about care, and the inability to help solve the care crisis for their students and program participants.

They displayed a high degree of consensus on three points:

- Childcare is an economic and workforce issue and cannot be solved at the individual level.
- Communities urgently need short-term solutions, like “family pods,” faith-based community provision, camps, and other forms of care while schools are closed, but they also need long-term solutions to the cost, lack of capacity, and limited availability of care.
- Policy makers at state, county, and municipal levels, and the private sector, all have important roles to play.

Finally, workforce leaders and elected officials in particular pointed to the near immediate decline in both work hours and labor force participation by women since the pandemic began. This holds true nationally as well. In January, it was widely reported\(^\text{22}\) that women comprised the majority of the labor market for the first time since the end of the great recession and second time in US history.\(^\text{23}\) Between February and April over 12 million of them lost jobs —the current unemployment rate for women remains 30% higher than it was at any time during the Great Recession.\(^\text{24}\) Although there are many reasons for this, the absence of childcare is certainly one, making returning to work more difficult and putting the economic security of families and communities further at risk.

Participants offered numerous ideas stemming from their current efforts to solve this problem, none of them sufficient or sustainable at this time. (See Appendix B: Summaries of the Clackamas and Lane County Regional Convenings.)

---
\(^{22}\)See for example: https://www.wsj.com/articles/women-overtake-men-as-majority-of-u-s-workforce-11578670615
\(^{23}\)See: https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/01/10/january-2020-jobs-report/
HOW REGIONS ARE COPING WITH THE CHILDCARE CRISIS

- We asked stakeholders about solutions to childcare. They reported considering “any and all options,” citing the following:
  - Expanding or replicating accelerator and incubator programs for childcare (possibly modeled on Bend’s accelerator initiative25 or Milwaukie and Clackamas County’s Design Lab.26
  - Integrating childcare into education and training programs as many Oregon colleges27 and as the Pre-apprenticeship Childcare Initiative (PACCI) do.28
  - Providing employer incentives for onsite or sector-centered childcare
  - Launching childcare co-ops that invite community engagement and participation
  - Employing shared service models for childcare
  - Subsidized “pod-centered” pilots29
  - Experimenting with multigenerational or community-centered care pilots
  - Early learning and childcare sector support that links provision with training (such as university or college based learning and care centers)
  - Expanding care options at public institutions such as libraries, or schools.
  - Providing incentives for after-hour or second- or third-shift care.
  - Exploring the limits of care offered by enrichment programs, camps, sports, and aftercare (most participants were not clear about the law governing informal family care30 or care among non-familial neighbors or friends).
  - Building cross-sector partnerships and enhancing communication between Child Care Resources and Referral services and community stakeholders, because the context is changing so quickly and the level of concern among stakeholders is so high.
  - Prioritizing building permits for childcare centers, and finding ways to waive fees, extend parking, and make the business more attractive and sustainable.
  - Considering ballot initiatives like the one planned in Multnomah County31 (November 2020)
  - Learning from informal approaches, social innovation, and mutual aid efforts (“Pandemic partners”) that have been providing crisis-response childcare since March.

26See: https://www.clackamasprosperity.org/milwaukie
27See: https://www.collegesimply.com/colleges/oregon/colleges-with-daycare/
28PACCI offers no-costs childcare to participants enrolled in select pre-apprenticeship programs in the building trades (while they are not earning wages) and subsidized care once they begin earning wages as part of a Registered Apprenticeship program. This program and two others designed to support pre-apprentices and apprentices in the constructions and building trades (childcare for highway-related trades and Labor Littles) are profiled in Hegewisch (2020). https://www.icsaportland.org/childcare
29See: https://www.kezic.com/content/news/Parents-turn-to-pandemic-pods-571999191.html
31See: https://upnow2020.org
Business as Partners

Many of the solutions discussed require engaging businesses as partners in community problem solving, not solely as sources of information about industry needs or the demand for labor and skills. Scaling affordable childcare, addressing the digital divide, tackling equity and inclusion, and preparing for the future of work all require the participation of employers with an interest in achieving these community-wide goals.

This will become more urgent going forward as CARES Act income supports expire.

Stakeholders expressed confidence in their partnerships with key business leaders in their regions while also advocating for higher quality, more enduring, and more efficient ways to work collaboratively at a larger scale. Participants in two of the regional convenings expressed particular interest in partnering with small and medium-sized firms more likely to be rooted in their communities. Businesses themselves were well-represented in the regional convenings and pointed to industry associations, chambers, and workforce boards as natural conveners on specific issues. They too were interested in more efficient ways to increase the (positive) impact of their participation in their communities. (See Appendix B: Summary of the Clackamas County Regional Convening.)

Stakeholders identified key opportunities for collaboration that could advance education, workforce, and community goals in the short term and improve economic recovery over time.

- **Improving safety in the workplace.** Each of the 549 COVID deaths in Oregon was a tragedy, all of the 32,581 cases are worrying. It is also true that Oregon has managed to contain outbreaks better than many other states. As we resume economic activity in a measured

---

way, continued vigilance will be critical. Training, job-crafting\textsuperscript{33}, and co-designing workplace and supply chain interactions—even how whole sectors, like hospitality, work going forward—provide opportunities for new kinds of partnerships and better quality jobs.

- **Expanding opportunities for work-based learning and community based organizations.** Participants agreed that Oregon needs employers to support training at work linked to education and credentials for youth and adults, and pointed to mounting evidence\textsuperscript{34} that training increases productivity, retention, and employee engagement especially among younger workers so many companies with long-term skills gaps are eager to recruit. Many employers currently partner with workforce boards, colleges, and private providers of job training. Linking more of this training to credentials and degrees will better protect workers over time, cultivate a more adaptable workforce across industry, and boost Oregon’s recovery.\textsuperscript{35}

- **Advocacy and participation in childcare and other services essential to recovery.** Stakeholders emphasized the need for “all-hands-on-deck” in addressing the childcare issue and other essential work-support needs.

- **Adopting “high-road” employment policies and practices.** Two of the regional convenings emphasized future-focused employment strategies, policies, and practice, such as those associated with the Good Companies/Good Jobs Initiative\textsuperscript{36}, good jobs strategies\textsuperscript{37}, and the high-road employment practice movement.\textsuperscript{38}

Although views on engaging employers in advocacy and good jobs strategies were not universal, stakeholder interest in shifting away from narrow discussion about skills demands as the primary anchor for business engagement, and collaborating with existing industry conveners (e.g., industry associations), was widely shared.

---

**We need to rethink public-private partnerships so we can tackle big challenges.**

—Industry Leader

**Businesses will close – this will shift the character of some communities. We’ll need to look more broadly at the ecosystem and invest in rebuilding communities.**

—Community Leader

\textsuperscript{33}See: https://hbr.org/2020/03/what-job-crafting-looks-like

\textsuperscript{34}See: https://www.pwc.com/us/en/library/workforce-of-the-future.html

\textsuperscript{35}During the September 22 convening, the MECOP (https://www.mecopinc.org/) and REAP (https://www.reapusa.org/) programs were also cited as examples. Connected Lane County (https://www.connectedlane.org/home/) was cited as an effort to build the capacity of K-12 educators to support this work.

\textsuperscript{36}See: https://www.aspeninstitute.org/programs/economic-opportunities-program/good-companiesgood-jobs/

\textsuperscript{37}See: https://www.zeynepton.com/book/

\textsuperscript{38}See: https://www.asbcouncil.org/principles-high-road-employers
The biggest thing that’s changed for me is that I wake up every day thinking about the safety of my employees. We’ve learned a lot and appreciate that so many regional partners have reached out to us to share and learn during this critical time.

—Tribal Government Administrator

Innovations in Business and Community Partnerships

The Southwestern Workforce Investment Board (SOWIB) responded early and quickly to the need for personal protective equipment (PPE) and became a regional distribution hub for local business, government, and community organizations. (See Appendix B: Summary of the Southwestern Workforce Investment Board Regional Convening.)

The Clackamas Workforce Partnership has collaborated closely with the entire range of stakeholders working on the childcare crisis, including Chamber of Commerce, city business permitting services, and county-based innovation labs. It also co-sponsored, with Greater Portland Inc and Clackamas Child Care Resource and Referral, a viewing and community-wide discussion of the award-winning film No Small Matter, a 2019 documentary on early learning and childcare.39 (See Appendix B: Summary of the Clackamas County Regional Convening.)

First Principles & Priorities

In addition to communicating the three key learnings, stakeholders also advocated for a set of first principles—base assumptions on which strategies and solutions are built—as the foundation for change.

These include:

- **Equity**—across race, gender, age, sexual-orientation, disability status, geographic location, and other demographic or socioeconomic characteristics. Citing past and current injustices and widespread social unrest, participants expressed support for “equity-first” approaches to rebuilding and recovery strategies.

- **Family**—and community—centered solutions not just those aimed at individuals. Stakeholders emphasized that family and community context have always been important contributors to individual success. During the COVID crisis, the family unit (including chosen and extended families) and location-based communities subject to common rules (e.g., closures) must be given greater consideration in designing recovery strategies and approaches.

- **Shared funding models** that prioritize flexibility and efficiency. Stakeholders acknowledged looming budget cuts coupled with increasing demands for services, and advocated for

39See: [https://www.nosmallmatter.com/](https://www.nosmallmatter.com/)
models and processes that encourage braided, shared, joint, or otherwise leveraged funding and increase efficiency.

- **Data, technology & network-based distribution** of information and assistance. Stakeholders expressed a need for better and more easily shared data, so that investments could be made where they matter most, and technology tools and engagement processes that prioritize efficiency, so that needed information and services can reach people who need them quickly and at lower cost.

- A focus on **transitions between programs and systems** not just within programs or institutions. Stakeholders expressed a strong desire to avoid “letting people fall through the cracks”—especially young people. It is a truism in workforce that it is far more expensive to identify and re-engage people who have dropped out of high school or education and training programs without having earned credentials or lost a job than it is to prevent these from occurring in the first place. Prevention requires better system alignment (data and tracking systems, performance measures, eligibility requirements, etc.) as well as the adoption of more human-centered practices (decision support, navigation, warm hard-offs, etc.). These should be the central to recovery strategies across programs and institutions.

> We have learned the importance of engaging an all-inclusive demographic. To help our students get the skills set they need to launch businesses…and expose them to what success looks like…help them thrive in their entrepreneurial aspirations…to not just be the employee but the employer.

> Workforce spends a lot of time and money making up for failures of past systems. It’s time we invested more effectively upstream so that more people get the help they need in the first place.

—Workforce Leader
Recommendations

Nearly 200 people participated in our Reimagine Oregon project. Their candid descriptions of needs and experiences and near real-time efforts to solve myriad serious and urgent problems faced by Oregon students, workers, and families informed four recommendations for action going forward.

1. Establish purpose-centered partnerships to aid in recovery.

Partnerships are central to the work of the community leaders who participated in our regional convenings. Partnerships are how these stakeholders get work done. The approach to partnerships most familiar to stakeholders, however, is a permanent (or near permanent) subject-centered committee or governing board supported by administrative staff of a single agency or organization. Oregon’s recovery demands something different.

We call for more time-limited, cross-agency, multi-sector partnerships convened around purpose. We envision a bias toward action (e.g., convening ideation or prototyping sessions, or hackathons rather than meetings) and a preference for inclusive participation (e.g., based on ability to contribute rather than membership, title, or institutional role). We envision local, regional, and state-level stakeholders participating at the level best suited to context, and a significant emphasis on communication and documentation so that learning can occur across partnerships, communities, and regions ongoing. We encourage the designation of cross-pollinators (members of multiple partnerships) who can ensure relevant information is shared, boosting the effectiveness of such partnerships.  

At a tactical level, and further building on solutions regional stakeholders offered throughout the process, such partnerships could offer a vehicle for engaging, learning from, and disseminating information about the practices of high-road employers—those that offer good jobs, invest in people, and play important community roles—and for meeting needs beyond addressing short-term hiring or skills gaps. Another activity of near-universal interest from industry members was simply participating in ongoing conversations about the economy, labor market, and the future of work in recovery. Participants noted that industry associations were convening these conversations

---


41[https://www.oregonlive.com/topworkplaces/](https://www.oregonlive.com/topworkplaces/)
in some regions already, whereas other regions would benefit from workforce boards or colleges stepping forward to play this role.

Consistent with our key learnings, three areas of focus for such partnerships were surfaced by participants:

- Improving youth-to-work pathways (and systems transitions)
- Expanding and diversifying opportunities to participate in work-based learning and apprenticeship
- Piloting sustainable and affordable solutions to the early learning and childcare crisis

We need a lot more cross-sector problem solving that gets us out of our silos. If we did, we’d also see more diverse contexts for collaboration around work—like the restoration economy or local food systems.

- Corporate Philanthropy Leader

2. Explore shared emergency funds, shared service models, and other jointly-supported efforts to meet local and regional needs.

Several stakeholders emphasized the need for frictionless access to resources to meet unpredictable crisis-centered needs in their communities. These included small scale needs, such as short-term childcare, gas for a vehicle needed for work or school, education and training-related tools or devices, or utility bills. Other stakeholders recognized the need for additional help from navigators, tutors, support specialists, remote-learning experts and others their organizations may not be able to hire directly but could potentially contract or share (e.g. partially fund). Grant-funded nonprofit organizations and even organizations operating state or federal grants reported working toward renegotiating terms, performance outcomes, and timelines in an effort to create more flexibility to respond to local needs. This context provides an opportunity for investing in shared resources and even shared service delivery. Specific examples suggested include jointly-accessible emergency funds and shared services models.42

The need for flexible resources that help meet community needs is clear. Grantmakers of Oregon and Southwest Washington (GOSW) have

42The Oregon Worker Relief Fund is an example of such a resource. Foundation administered and donation and grant supported, the fund directs resources to workers who have lost jobs due the crisis and do not qualify for Unemployment Insurance assistance. https://nonprofitoregon.org/sites/default/files/uploads/file/OWRF-Project-Proposal.pdf
helped coordinate a joint response on the part of the philanthropic community spanning community foundations, credit unions, corporate foundations and others, including the Oregon Community Recovery Fund managed by the Oregon Community Foundation. This response will likely evolve in the context of the Oregon wildfires, the expiration of CARES Act programs, and longer-term recessionary trends. It was not clear how familiar stakeholders were with these foundation-led strategies but local and regional education and workforce partners could act now to assess the impact of the initial philanthropic response and plan a coordinated approach to longer term needs. Rather than individual nonprofit organizations requesting resources for their operations or program participants, for example, community organizations might develop shared applications for resources that aid in recovery or work with funders to develop community-wide recovery support strategies.

Shared service models were also raised as an approach to leveraging resources and capacity in response to the crisis. Although most nonprofit organizations and agencies manage their core administrative functions (office rent, human resources and payroll, IT infrastructure, etc.), some use shared service models that allocate resources from across organizations and agencies to support these and other functions in a collaborative way, reducing traditional overhead expenses and potentially aligning or complementing the efforts of multiple organizations to greater effect. For organizations seeking to advance system-level reforms (e.g., childcare systems, youth support systems, etc.), shared service models may also help boost service connectivity.

These and other collaborative responses to common or connected needs should be a priority going forward.

3. Launch “sandboxes,” innovation labs, or similar anchors for testing, sharing, and learning about promising practices and approaches.

During our regional convenings, participants identified dozens of initiatives, practices, policies, or funding priorities they had adopted or adapted since the crisis began. As we discussed these,
several participants used chat to share resources or arrange subsequent meetings. Others lamented having worked on problems their colleagues in other communities had already solved. They demonstrated why documentation and shared learning is essential during a crisis in real time: change occurs so quickly and the demand for effective responses is so urgent, there is no time, as one participant observed, to reinvent the wheel.

If ever there was a time to learn from one another and avoid repeating mistakes, it is now.

—Jenny Perelman Robinson & Molly Curtiss, Center for Universal Education, Brookings in *The COVID-19 crisis and reflections on systems transformation*

Innovation is really driven by collisions...but during a pandemic is not a good time for collisions among people. We have to pivot almost all of our operations online. We launched an expanded micro internship program in May. Since then, use has quintupled...Students get real-life experience, coaching and even though we’re in central Oregon, we’re adding value to businesses across the state.

—Director of University Startup Accelerator

It was evident from our convenings that most stakeholders lack structures and support for shared learning activities. We recommend launching one or more efforts, anchored by a lab, sandbox, or similar applied research methodology. The idea is to curate and share effective solutions, providing enough information about them to help other stakeholders learn, or, under the right circumstance, replicate what worked. There are many models for such efforts:

- The City of Milwaukie’s effort to find childcare solutions in collaboration with the Clackamas County Design Lab (See Appendix B: Summary of the Clackamas County Regional Convening)
- The National League of Cities’ Action Tracker
- The National Governors Association Resource Matching Tool and State Action Tracker

Innovation competitions such as the US Department of Education’s Re-Think Adult Ed Challenge to Advance Pre-apprenticeship, the Workers Lab Innovation Fund or traditional grant proposals can help focus documentation and learning activities and also provide an incentive to scale, improve, or adapt promising approaches.
Establishing anchors for learning can also help improve the quality and process of learning and replication itself. Effective data collection processes and tools and the use of proven implementation science methods can help stakeholders identify innovations and ideas best suited to their needs and circumstance and scale them quickly. (See: Appendix B: Summary of the Southwestern Oregon Regional Convening.)

4. Designate or implement shared platforms for working, learning, and communicating with Oregonians themselves.

A central problem across education, workforce, and economic development is agency “silos.” Programs and agencies are working on shared problems but often lack shared infrastructure for collaboration. Email and applications like Slack and LinkedIn can help facilitate communication, but are not the whole answer. Multi-organization collaboration across geographic boundaries on grants or programs can also help, but does not, for example, remove the financial incentives that cause schools and colleges to compete with one another (e.g. reimbursement by student). Further, during this crisis in particular, in which responses are occurring in so many areas (health, safety, employment, housing, education, nutrition, etc.), stakeholders reported having a hard time keeping up with the policy, legislative, and institutional responses, and sharing the right information with the right people at the right times, while avoiding adding to “information overload.”

Stakeholders also reported engaging with participants, customers, and volunteers as part of community-led solutions or collaborating with Mutual Aid initiatives that do not always sit comfortably alongside official programs listed on government websites.

Stakeholders expressed a need for more shared platforms that multiple organizations can use and to which they can contribute. One example is OnwardOR.org—a philanthropy-supported tool designed to help states respond to the COVID crisis. Oregon launched the platform in April to provide displaced Oregonians with easy-to-understand information and access to resources, training, and jobs to help them take their next steps. Onward is like a workforce-focused 211 and 311 combined. Nearly a dozen states have launched versions of the platform, including

---

46 Mutual Aid networks are local mostly volunteer initiatives that enabled neighbors to help neighbors for the benefit of the wider community. Active networks have been responding to community needs in the Portland metro area (https://www.portlandmutualaid.org/), Eastern Oregon (https://eohla.org/easternoregonmutualaid/), Grants Pass (https://www.grantspassoregon.gov/541/Mutual-Automatic-Aid), and many other Oregon communities, including highly-localized neighborhoods.

47 See: https://onwardus.org/

48 The Federal Communications Commission’s (FCC’s) designated dialing code for community information and referral services.

49 A dialing code used by many cities to respond to citizens’ and residents’ non-emergency requests, complaints, and inquiries.
Washington and California. A few participants in the four regional convenings were familiar with it. Many more were not but advocated for something similar.

Shared platforms like Onward also help address other challenges participants raised, such as the difficulty of accessing current information about community needs and aligning resources to address them. Shared platforms with low-barriers to entry can provide basic user demographics and information about search-queries, enabling partners to jointly analyze the data and develop collaborative responses to demonstrated needs.

Four Recommendations:

- Establish purpose-centered partnerships to aid in recovery.
- Explore shared emergency funds, shared service models, and other jointly-supported efforts to meet local and regional needs.
- Launch “sandboxes,” innovation labs, or similar anchors for testing, sharing, and learning about promising practices and approaches.
- Designate, implement, or participate in shared platforms for working, learning, and communicating with Oregonians themselves.
Conclusion

Our recommendations require the engagement of state agencies but are not meant for these stakeholders alone. Rather, they aim to support more and more effective collaborative problem-solving around short-term needs, while laying the foundation for broader system-level change. We recognize, as many stakeholders noted, there is no one magic solution for all of the challenges Oregon faces. That is why our starting point was the crowdsourcing of solutions through local convenings and why partnerships are a key focus of all of the recommendations.

We encourage readers to review the summaries in Appendix B for a wealth of ideas, solutions, and innovations already at work and in need of support across four of Oregon’s regions.

Students feel the pressure of leaving high school and securing employment or heading off to college. They often wonder if they’ll be ready and question their workforce readiness. Locally, employers seek employees with job-ready skills and they often seek applicants with previous experience. Afterschool experiences and summer job internships play a crucial role in helping young people gain skills and make real world connections to mentors, opportunities and local employers.

—Heidi Sipe, Superintendent, Umatilla School District

Making sure young people are equipped with the skills they need for a successful future is a win for everyone, especially as more employers have jobs that America’s youth are eager to fill,” said Sen. Wyden. “The Workforce Readiness Act puts workforce readiness front and center to set our young people on the fast track to earning a living wage.

—Senator Ron Wyden, Oregon