



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT IN ARKANSAS

***Strategies For Lifelong Learning
& Preparation For Work***

Prepared for the Arkansas State Chamber
of Commerce in 2019 by



Business matters.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Great Recession sometimes seems long ago. Since 2010, a strong national economy has included the longest continuous job expansion in our history, benefitting both employers and employees. In Arkansas, good economic news has been common, and there is a general sense that the future looks bright. But complacency is a dangerous mindset in times of rapid change. **While we are enjoying job growth and economic expansion, our state is also experiencing a mounting labor quantity and quality crisis.**

The old metaphor of a **frog in a pot** suggests that when the danger is self-evident – when a frog is placed in a pot of boiling water – it will immediately jump out of the pot. But when the water is slowly heated from room temperature, the frog may be oblivious to the rising danger and suffer a dire future. If we want to maintain a bright economic future, workforce is our biggest threat.

A strong economy, low unemployment, and some population growth (in some regions of the state) have lulled us to ignore our state's labor force threats:

- Very low labor force participation;
- Low education attainment;
- Low young worker attraction;
- High numbers of at-risk and disconnected youth; and
- High poverty rates.

Arkansas is also experiencing workforce gaps in technical skills and soft skills, an aging workforce, and very uneven job growth across the state. Within regions and statewide, Arkansas has implemented a number of innovative and effective workforce development initiatives. We can be proud and work hard to scale our successes, but they are not enough.

Across most of America, the strong economy has combined with demographic trends to create a very tight labor market. Arkansas' recent unemployment rate of 3.5 percent is lower than the U.S. average. Nationally, the number of unemployed people per available job fell in 2018 to less than one person per job opening, a historically low figure. Demographic challenges such as low labor force growth, declining labor force participation, and the lowest labor mobility since WWII – half what it was a generation ago – are trends likely to continue.

Labor quantity will be an issue for the foreseeable future.

Labor quality is also a barrier to growth. Arkansas employers echo sentiments heard across the nation that a gap exists between the skills of those entering the workforce and the skills needed for workplace success. These include basic skills such as reading and math, soft skills like reliability and communication, and specific technical skills. Across Arkansas, numerous positions are available for healthcare specialists, ammonia refrigeration technicians, truck drivers, diesel mechanics, and many other skilled positions, and the needs remain unmet.

Our survey of Arkansas State Chamber of Commerce members underscores their strong desire to focus state and Chamber resources on skill development at all levels: K-12 education, higher education and adult job training. **The big question is - what can realistically be done to improve the quantity and quality of the workforce in Arkansas?** This report looks at the continuum of education and training efforts across a person's lifetime and work career, detailing innovative initiatives in Arkansas and around the United States. It explores strategies to build a stronger ethic of lifelong learning and work preparation. It recommends specific actions to engage more citizens in the workforce and attract and retain talented young people.

8 Recommendations

Attention to the workforce challenge in Arkansas is not new. There are successful efforts around the state, along with national best practices. Many of the recommendations in this report involve expanding on success in one part of the state and bringing it to other regions. Although some areas of Arkansas start with fewer economic resources, the goal is to create a shared vision and real cooperation for success in every region of the state.

1. IMPROVE CAREER AWARENESS TO PARENTS, STUDENTS, EDUCATORS, AND POLICY MAKERS

- Develop regional websites and other public awareness tools that promote career opportunities close to home; highlight the income potential, and detail the education, skills, and work experience needed to get them.
- Develop the College and Career Coach program in every region, and bring mentors to all middle and high schools.
- At the state level, provide challenge grants for each region to develop a networking entity that connects companies, educational institutions, and training organizations.

2. INCREASE PROGRAM FLEXIBILITY

- Increase flexibility in state K-12 education regulations (such as seat time requirements) to make it easier for schools to implement innovative career readiness and work experience programming.
- Increase the flexibility of education and training funding, or provide more designated funding for (shorter-term) training programs.

3. EXPAND WORK-BASED LEARNING

- Expand apprenticeships in growing, non-traditional sectors like healthcare and information technology, and promote their adoption by businesses.

4. ENGAGE MORE DISCONNECTED YOUTH

- Expand successful efforts like YouthBuild to other regions of Arkansas.

5. PREPARE MORE EX-OFFENDERS FOR JOBS

- Involve a higher percentage of current inmates with in-prison job readiness and off-site work experience opportunities.

6. ORGANIZE AROUND INDUSTRY SECTOR STRATEGIES

- Provide state funding and technical assistance for every region to develop a current, business-led sector strategy.

7. PRIORITIZE TALENT DEVELOPMENT AND RETENTION

- Create young leadership events (such as a young leader's summit) in every region.

8. USE DATA FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

- Continue to develop reports on the longer-term outcomes of workers by education and training background, and share with policy makers annually.
- Use workforce and education data to examine differences in outcomes by region, and highlight regional gaps between in-demand jobs and educational offerings. An annual gathering should stress the programming changes needed to address gaps in each region.

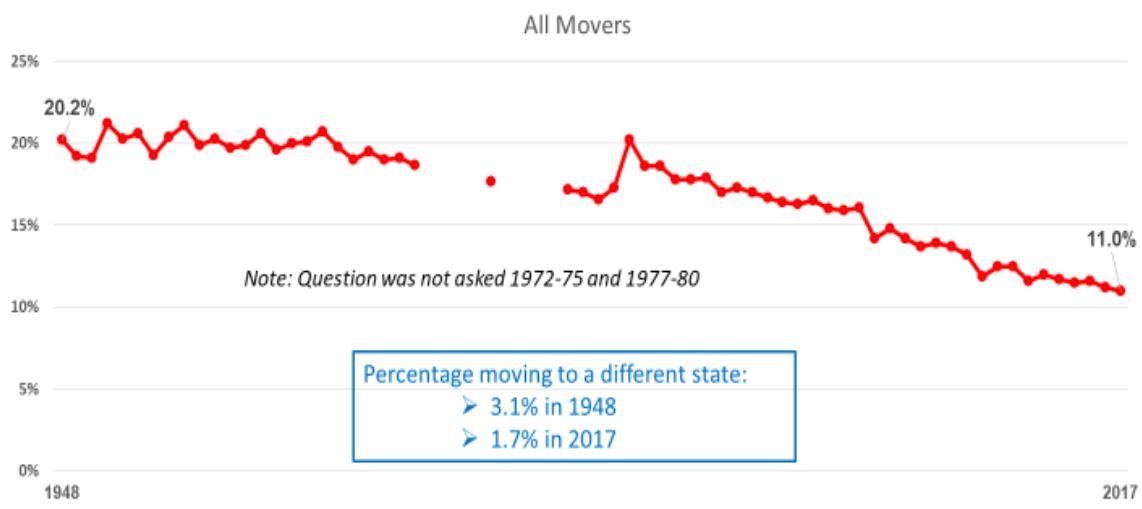
A. UNITED STATES WORKFORCE OVERVIEW

The nation's long recovery after the Great Recession has produced strong economic conditions but an increasingly constricted labor market. November 2018 saw the 98th consecutive month of net job gains across the United States. The national unemployment rate of 3.7 percent is the lowest since 1969. The number of unemployed people per available job, which peaked in 2009 at 6.6, reached a stunning and historic low of 0.9 in 2018.¹

The labor market is further affected by demographic changes and what has been labeled a decline in the 'dynamism' of our economy. These conditions include:

- **Aging population**
- **Labor force participation on a 20-year decline**
- **Labor force growth predicted to be the slowest since 1950**
- **Lower rates of entrepreneurship and small business job creation**
- **The mobility of U.S. residents dropping by nearly 50 percent since the 1960s (see chart).**

U.S. Mobility Rates 1948-2017



The Skills Gap:

Despite the ever-increasing education attainment of Americans there exists a nearly universally-recognized skills gap between the workplace skills employers say that they need and the abilities of those coming into the workforce.

This misalignment of education and the skill requirements of in-demand fields may be the reason that an estimated 33 percent of college graduates are underemployed, holding a job that does not require a college degree.ⁱⁱ Half of recent college graduates say that they are not using skills learned in college at work.ⁱⁱⁱ At the same time many employers have trouble finding people with specific degrees and credentials.

Researcher Jeanne Meister argues that these are the 20 core “power skills” that will be needed for success in the workplace:^{iv}

Core Power Skills for the Future Workplace

1. Complex problem solving	11. Strategic thinking
2. Critical thinking	12. Executive presentation
3. Creativity	13. Project management
4. People management	14. Analytical skills
5. Coordination	15. Understanding the impact of AI
6. Emotional intelligence	16. Leadership ability
7. Service orientation	17. Change management
8. Judgment	18. Team intelligence
9. Negotiation	19. Digital literacy
10. Cognitive flexibility	20. Computational thinking

SOURCES: Created by author from World Economic Forum and Future Workplace LLC.

Arkansas Chamber members agree that the skills gap is real and a serious problem. In our survey of more than 420 Chamber members, 64 percent said that businesses are having trouble finding people with the right **technical skills**, and an equal percentage indicated that companies have trouble finding people with the right **soft skills**.

Another 46 percent cited generational changes in **work ethic** as a challenge. In our one-on-one interviews, skills also emerged as the top issue facing businesses. Interviewees consistently mentioned both technical skill and soft skill shortcomings – in the latter category, lack of reliability and commitment being prominent concerns.

There are skill development needs across the board. With an estimated 80 percent of jobs now found in the service sector as opposed to the goods-producing sector, more education and training focus is needed for service sector careers.^v However, the increasing use of technology and automation in manufacturing

64 percent of businesses say they are having trouble finding people with the right technical skills

64 percent of businesses say they are having trouble finding people with good soft skills

is rapidly transforming the skill sets in goods-producing jobs as well. Deloitte’s new study for The Manufacturing Institute forecasts a potential shortage of 2.4 million manufacturing workers in the next decade.^{vi} Executives rate skilled talent as the number one driver of manufacturing competitiveness, and 89 percent agree that there is a talent shortage in U.S. manufacturing.^{vii} Despite job disruption from technology, Deloitte expects nearly 2,000,000 new manufacturing jobs in the next ten years – along with 2.6 million baby boomer retirements.^{viii} By 2028, the shortage of skilled workers could risk \$454 billion of manufacturing GDP in America.^{xi}

To combat the worker shortage, manufacturing companies are offering higher pay and signing bonuses. Others are relaxing certain hiring requirements. Increasingly, firms are willing to outsource tasks

to contract manufacturers – but this creates the opportunity cost of failing to develop new, high-value employees. Finally, businesses are starting to create niche roles for older and already-retired workers to contribute their knowledge and expertise.^x

Rural Challenges:

Workforce, education, and training issues can be particularly challenging in rural America and rural Arkansas. Students often must drive further for training opportunities, it can be harder to attract and retain qualified teachers, and there are fewer business partners. Increased use of distance learning platforms has great promise for delivering high-quality education and training in remote areas, but adoption of these technologies has been modest.

Next, we will explore strategies for Arkansas businesses and their workforce partners to improve education and training across a person's entire lifetime, and make Arkansas a leader in work preparation. Research indicates that the private sector spends eight to ten times more than the public sector (federal plus state spending) on training annually. More private sector training is focused on highly educated, top-level workers. Can businesses develop stronger collaboration with schools and workforce agencies to better train all workers, lessen the need for the remedial training that firms currently provide, see reduced turnover and a higher return on investment?



B. ARKANSAS OVERVIEW

Arkansas Chamber members report positive economic conditions, with 47 percent of survey respondents rating the state's economy as Good and 31 percent as Very Good. Eighteen percent judge economic conditions as Fair, two percent Excellent and two percent Poor. Overall, 89 percent think that Arkansas is generally on the right track.

Unemployment is lower than the U.S. average, at a 3.6 percent rate in December 2018. Employment increased by 17,100 over the previous year, with 4,800 of those jobs coming in Professional & Business Services.^{xi} Although the state's population has grown modestly in recent years, it faces an aging workforce like the rest of the nation. Other statewide challenges include bottom-five rankings labor force participation and education attainment (share of adults with a bachelor's degree), and a poverty rate that ranks among the nation's highest.

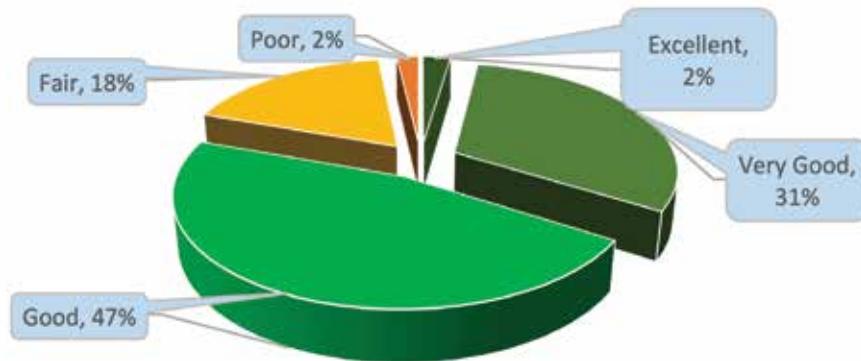
The makeup of the population is changing, with 30 percent of residents expected to be non-white

by 2020. The Hispanic population increased 337 percent from 1990 to 2000, doubled again by 2010, and continues to grow.

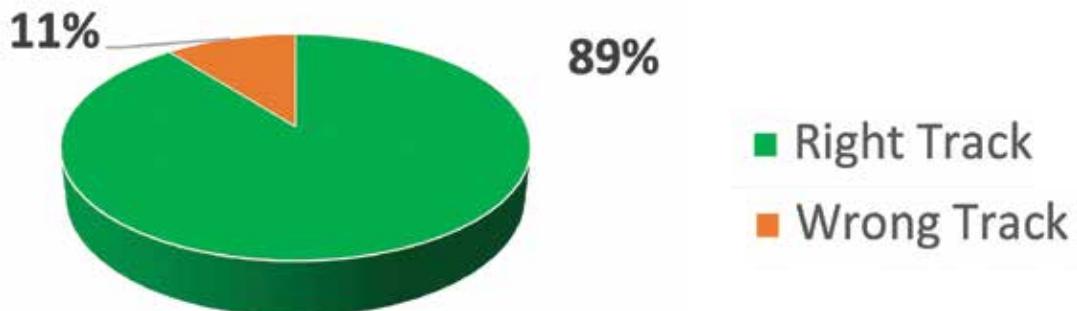
Similar to other states, data points to a middle-skill jobs gap in Arkansas. **The National Skills Coalition estimates that 58 percent of Arkansas jobs require education or training beyond high school but not a four-year degree, while 48 percent of the workforce is trained to that level.**^{xii}

Technological advances, changing consumer preferences, efficiencies, intense competition and demographics have all combined to change the state's demand for specific occupations. In the last five years over 24,000 new jobs were created for registered nurses, personal care aides, freight hand-movers, food prep workers, cooks, and cashiers. During the same period, we experienced thousands of job losses among accountants, assemblers, secretaries, carpenters and construction laborers.

Arkansas Economic Conditions



Arkansas is On the Right Track



Top 10 Occupations with the Greatest Number of New Jobs	2013 Jobs	2018 Jobs	2013 - 2018 Change	2013 - 2018 % Change	2018 Average Hourly Earnings
Personal Care Aides	11,045	16,839	5,794	52%	\$ 9.96
Combined Food Preparation and Serving Workers, Including Fast Food	30,465	35,908	5,443	18%	\$ 9.43
Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand	21,884	25,177	3,293	15%	\$12.57
Stock Clerks and Order Fillers	15,621	18,032	2,411	15%	\$12.13
Registered Nurses	22,635	24,703	2,068	9%	\$28.31
Cashiers	31,480	33,436	1,956	6%	\$ 9.74
General and Operations Managers	19,129	20,964	1,835	10%	\$40.93
Cooks, Restaurant	8,946	10,541	1,595	18%	\$11.13
Customer Service Representatives	14,554	16,129	1,575	11%	\$15.68
Market Research Analysts and Marketing Specialists	3,383	4,747	1,364	40%	\$33.39

The outlook for new jobs over the next ten years looks similar, with strong projected job growth for personal care aides, food prep workers, registered nurses, nursing assistants, and home health aides.

Top 10 Occupations with the Greatest Number of Projected New Jobs	2018 Jobs	2028 Jobs	2018 - 2028 Change	2018 - 2028 % Change	2018 Average Hourly Earnings
Personal Care Aides	16,839	23,031	6,192	37%	\$ 9.96
Combined Food Preparation and Serving Workers, Including Fast Food	35,908	42,081	6,173	17%	\$ 9.43
Registered Nurses	24,703	28,576	3,873	16%	\$28.31
Retail Salespersons	37,394	40,489	3,095	8%	\$12.06
Janitors and Cleaners, Except Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners	20,007	23,005	2,998	15%	\$10.93
Home Health Aides	7,660	10,628	2,968	39%	\$10.38
Laborers & Freight, Stock, & Material Movers	25,177	27,803	2,626	10%	\$12.57
Nursing Assistants	18,172	20,471	2,299	13%	\$11.54
General and Operations Managers	20,964	23,219	2,255	11%	\$40.93
Customer Service Representatives	16,129	18,035	1,906	12%	\$15.68



Workforce and Skill Policies:

The National Skills Coalition (NSC) evaluates all 50 states for workforce-related policies, and Arkansas gets generally high marks. NSC finds that Arkansas has state-level policies to promote integration of education and training; alignment of programs; stackable credentials; job-driven financial aid; and work-based learning.^{xiii} One area in which NSC cites Arkansas as needing improvement is in creating industry sector partnerships. Although there are sector-related initiatives, employers are not a required member of alliances, and the state does not provide sufficient funding or technical assistance for robust sector strategies in regions across the state.^{xiv}

Workforce and Education Data:

Another relative strength is Arkansas' production of labor market information and education data. The Discover Arkansas site offers useful data tools and special reports such as Career Watch (focusing on various career clusters) and "Healthcare Jobs You Can Get Without a Bachelor's Degree." Additional opportunities to use data to fine-tune education and training paths to match employment demand are discussed later.

State Workforce Plan:

Every state has a workforce development plan required by the Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA), the federal legislation that guides training funds. Arkansas' current WIOA plan highlights the major strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges facing the state's workforce system, as summarized below.

STRENGTHS

- Many business leaders at the table, serving as champions
- Economic development officials are increasingly involved
- Partnerships strong at the state level

WEAKNESSES

- Shrinking and aging labor force
- Involvement by secondary educators needs to improve
- Career awareness (by students and parents) needs to be improved
- Education funding models are inadequate; community college funding is insufficient

OPPORTUNITIES

- Registered Apprenticeships
- Strong industry/system partnerships in some regions
- Community colleges – aim to increase their capacity and involvement
- Expand distance learning for adult education

CHALLENGES

- Younger workers lacking skills to replace retirees
- Misalignment of services and programs; duplication of efforts
- Some "systemic" issues in secondary and higher education
- Lack of workforce training funds
- Adult education funding stagnant "for the past 20 years"

Selected Plan Objectives:

- A. Partner with economic development to refine sector strategies.
- B. Increase use of Registered Apprenticeship programs.
- C. Promote portable skills sets and credentials.
- D. Improve analysis of basic skill, soft skill, and technical skill gaps.

Key Strategies:

- 1. Regional planning efforts using industry sector partnerships.
- 2. Career Pathways Initiative.
- 3. Registered Apprenticeships.
- 4. Closing the Gap Master Plan for higher education.
- 5. Jobs for Arkansas' Graduates – comprehensive services for middle and high school students with barriers to graduation, including work-based learning opportunities.
- 6. Career Coach Program – allows students to work with a career coach beginning in 7th or 8th grade.

ACT Work Ready Communities:

A nationally-popular initiative to quantify the work-readiness of individuals is the non-profit ACT's Work Ready Communities program. Work Ready Communities uses its WorkKeys evaluations to grant National Career Readiness Certificates (NCRC). Across the United States, 4.4 million people have obtained the NCRC, over 22,000 employers are supporting the program, and 437 counties are official participants. In Arkansas, 22 of 75 counties (29 percent) are participating, and three counties are Certified Work Ready Communities. All of these are located in the east and southeast parts of the state. An opportunity exists to promote this program in all counties throughout Arkansas.

Chamber Survey Priorities:

Three additional results from our survey of Chamber members are highlighted here. Survey answers underscore the strong desire for the Chamber and state government to focus on workforce development. A full summary of the survey is provided in Appendix II.

Reason for the Skills Gap in Arkansas (multiple responses allowed):

- 61% - Mismatch between work skills needed and what's being taught in K-12 schools
- 51% - Mismatch between work skills needed and what's being taught in higher education
- 45% - Government assistance is a disincentive to working

Chamber Policy Priorities (multiple responses allowed)

- 48% - Invest more in job training
- 47% - Reduce government regulations
- 46% - Invest more in K-12 education

Most Important Role for State Government (multiple responses allowed):

- 59% - Provide high-quality education for the workforce
- 57% - Reform the tax code
- 49% - Train and retrain workers



C. CREATING LIFELONG LEARNING AND A PREPARED WORKFORCE IN ARKANSAS

The old model of a person's education ending in young adulthood no longer works, either for the individual or to meet the rapidly evolving workplace needs. This section explores seven strategies to create a stronger continuum of education and training in Arkansas, from childhood through the end of a career. In many cases there are effective programs in parts of the state that could be expanded to other regions at modest cost and effort.

I. CAREER AWARENESS AND EARLY SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Chamber of Commerce interviewees emphasized **career awareness as one of the state's most pressing workforce issues**. In this case, career awareness is defined as the ability of students and parents to understand: a) career options available within their own region of Arkansas, and b) career paths requiring less than a four-year college degree.

Interviewee suggestions to improve awareness included:

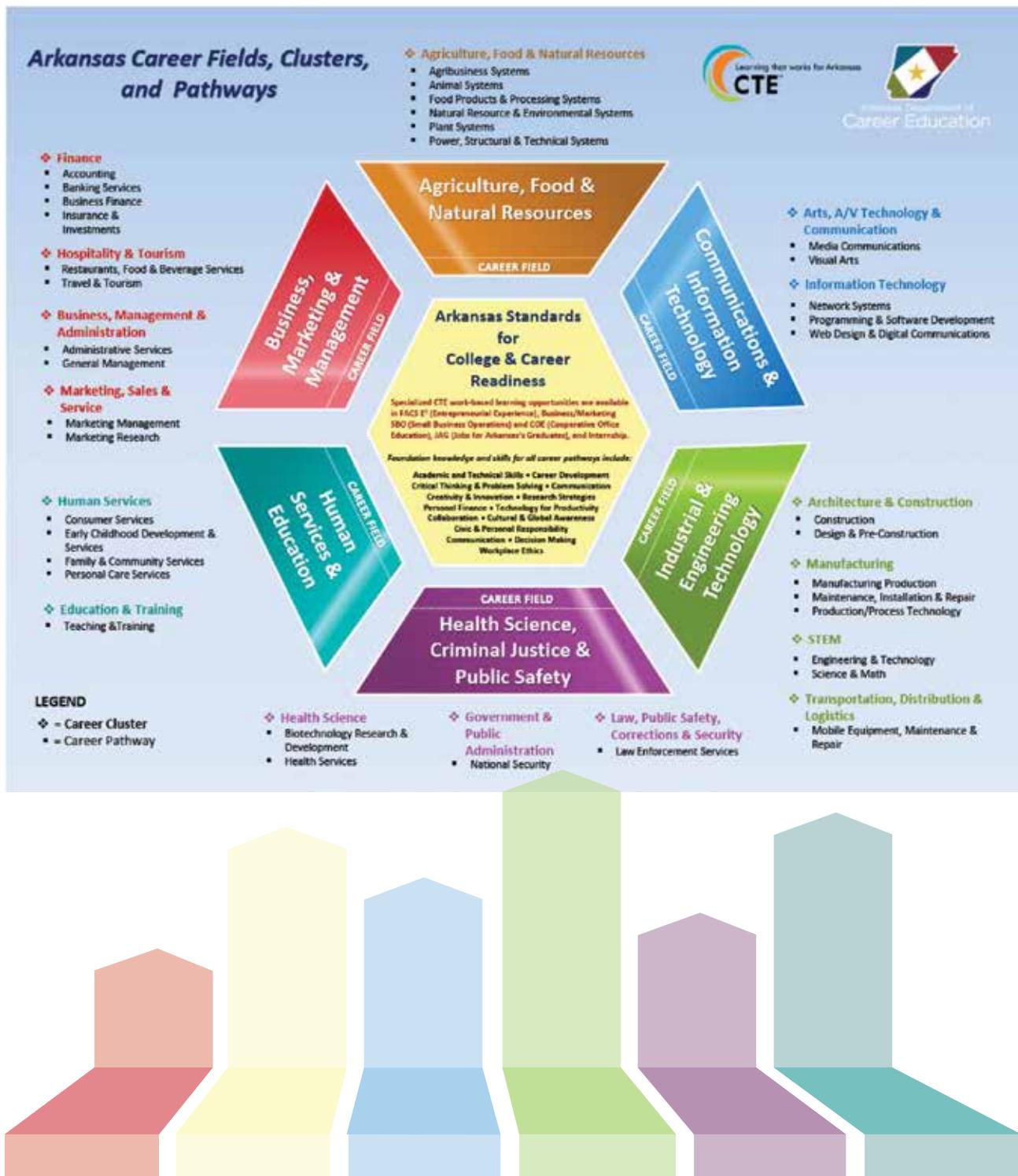
- Starting much earlier – one school superintendent is working on a program to begin in kindergarten, and to expose students to 300 occupations by the 9th grade.
- Sufficient numbers of career coaches and/or community mentors in all schools.
- Work to reduce the stigma of technical work and the “societal unwillingness” to appreciate the value of anything other than a four-year degree.

Arkansas has a strength in its career and technical education (CTE) programs. A 2016 study showed that Arkansas students focusing in CTE have a significantly higher high school graduation rate, are more likely to be employed, and have higher wages. They're more likely to enroll in two-year college and just as likely to pursue a four-year degree. The study suggested that CTE offerings particularly benefit low-income families.^{xv} The state's CTE programs are summarized using 16 national career clusters and state-defined pathways in the graphic on the following page.

Other assets include the Secondary Technical Centers across the state which draw students from nearby high schools. Despite the strength of CTE programs, a common refrain from Chamber members is that **career awareness needs to increase in every classroom and with every student**, not just a smaller subset of the student population. Among broader initiatives, the Modern Workplace Program connects educators with industry representatives through teacher workshops and business tours. Also, the governor's STEM career awareness initiative using Learning Blade software reached 240,000 students during its first year, the 2016-2017 school year.^{xvi}

One individual lamented the “astounding” lack of career awareness, while others described the level of career awareness as “abysmal” and “nonexistent.”

The state's **College and Career Coach** program is an important effort to support students in the 7th to 12th grades, and one that could be expanded. Services include individual career planning; tutoring and study groups; support services for low-income students; and workplace experience. Recently, career-focused metrics such as credential attainment and work-based learning were incorporated. College and Career Coach started in 2010 in 21 impoverished counties. It expanded to 28 counties, and is now available throughout the state. But 2015 data indicated that less than 20 percent of Arkansas middle and high school students were in participating districts. Bringing this program to all students could have a significant impact on career awareness.



Around Arkansas, other programs are strengthening both awareness and early skills development:

Be Pro Be Proud. This heralded effort by the State Chamber of Commerce and Associated Industries of Arkansas takes a common-sense approach to promoting career opportunities in technical positions and skilled trades. The BPBP website notes over 70,000 positions available and that these types of jobs pay \$16,000 more than the state average. Jobs are searchable by ZIP code. The program's traveling workshop is another asset, but an interviewee noted that having only one mobile workshop limits the impact.

EAST Initiative. An Arkansas non-profit of the year, the EAST Initiative works to give students experience in technology careers and community service. Its teacher professional development focuses on "integrating technology into any classroom, regardless of subject." Started in 1996, the program is now operating at 255 schools in four states, primarily in Arkansas.

Bentonville Ignite. The Ignite Professional Studies program strives to give students "post-secondary options aligned to their passions and strengths" in their own community. Bentonville Ignite provides workplace experience and business mentors in eight career strands including Construction Management, Health Services, and Technology.

National Best Practices:

Career-Focused Websites. In addition to sites like www.petrochemworks.com for the petrochemical industry along the Gulf Coast, statewide sites such as Mississippi's www.getonthegridms.com and Arkansas' www.beprobproud.org, there are smaller regional websites that focus on opportunities closer to home. Inspire Rock County (www.inspirerockcounty.org) connects students, teachers, parents, and employers in southern Wisconsin. Inspire Rock County focuses on career planning, work readiness, and work experience opportunities for local students.

Career Ambassadors. Nebraska-based Behlen Manufacturing helped develop a Career Dream Team Ambassadors model. The Career Dream Team is a group of young employees from area manufacturing firms bringing career awareness to middle and high schools through career fairs, classroom visits, company tours, and job shadowing. Having young

employees in regional career ambassador teams across Arkansas could reduce the stigma associated with technical and skilled trade careers.

2. APPRENTICESHIPS AND OTHER WORK-BASED LEARNING

In October, Brookings released a study looking at the job outcomes of 29-year-olds from disadvantaged backgrounds. The top three factors from earlier in life that affected the quality of their employment at age 29:

1. **Earlier experiences** in the labor market.
2. **Work-based learning** incorporating positive relationships with adults.
3. **Educational credentials and training.**

The study notes that work-based learning "can link students to employers and contacts they would likely never reach on their own, especially if they and their families have limited social and professional networks."^{xvii} To help students become work-ready, work-based learning (WBL) initiatives are incorporating a wider mixture of skills (basic skills like English and math; social skills like communication and reliability; and job-specific technical skills) and including more support services.

Long-term paid **apprenticeships** are something of a foreign concept in America, at least compared with places like Germany and Switzerland where the practice goes back for centuries. However, they are popular in Arkansas and growing stronger, with around 6,000 individuals currently in federally-registered apprenticeships in 117 fields.^{xviii} Arkansas is using federal grants to increase apprenticeships in high-demand occupations and in fields that traditionally have not used this type of training.

"I taught in the apprenticeship program for 10 years, and a good percentage of the people coming in had gone to college...agotten a degree, gotten a job, and said this isn't what I want to be. I want to do something with my hands...."

*from Investing in America's Workforce,
Volume 3*

There is more focus on developing apprenticeships for fast-growing healthcare and information technology jobs. As one Little Rock tech firm noted, “We have a hard time trying to find our skill set in Arkansas and the rest of the country,” and so “we decided we would grow our own talent.”^{xx}

Apprenticeships and other WBL programs can be harder to arrange in rural areas, where employers are fewer and farther between. Small and mid-sized firms have difficulty creating WBL programs without technical assistance. But with help from the statewide Apprenticeship Carolina, Greenfield Industries established youth and adult apprenticeships in Seneca, SC in the western corner of the state.^{xx} In central North Carolina, Apprenticeship Randolph (County) now has 16 partnering businesses.^{xxi} Schools in rural locations are also developing hands-on, in-school skill development facilities like Makerspaces and Fab Labs, bringing in local company employees to help when possible.

Innovative examples of work-based learning programs in Arkansas:

Bryant School District Internships.

After 93 percent of Bryant students said they'd value real-world work experience, the district obtained a 'seat-time' waiver and began an internship program. Bryant School District currently shows 59 nearby work opportunities in 21 categories, from sports training to veterinary services. The program is for seniors who must sign a contract and expect to work at least 10 hours weekly. Businesses also sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the district.

University of Central Arkansas. UCA started the state's first information technology Registered Apprenticeship in 2017. After a paid 12-week training program, completers are offered a job with local mobile app developer Metova.

Nestle Project Opportunity. Nestle began its apprenticeship program in Kentucky in 2015 and expanded it to its Jonesboro, AR operation after realizing that the increasing automation of their facilities required “a more complex set of skills.” The emphasis on improving the skills of its workforce has changed “our whole strategy of developing people and maintaining our workforce,” said a Nestle training supervisor in Kentucky.^{xxii}

Transition Employment Project (TEP).

For youth with disabilities, two Arkansas agencies have created the four-week TEP pre-employment program focusing on job readiness and including work-based learning. The Hot Springs-based program is for high schoolers completing the 11th grade.

“For any industrial technician, three years of experience and training means a lot. I’m hoping to graduate being able to call myself the best-of-the-best.”

Nestle apprentice in Jonesboro

National Best Practice:

Charleston, SC Youth and Adult

Apprenticeships. The Charleston region is fortunate to be experiencing robust job growth, and is also able to attract new residents. But despite the area's population growth, major employers such as Boeing, Bosch, and Volvo have difficulty finding enough skilled workers. The Charleston Regional Youth Apprenticeship Program and Trident Technical College are addressing the workforce pipeline with two-year paid youth apprenticeships in 17 fields. The program is open to high school juniors and seniors, who also receive one year of college credit at no cost. There are 130 participating companies in the region.

Many companies also partner with Trident Tech for adult apprenticeships, available in 13 occupational areas. South Carolina provides a \$1,000 tax credit per apprentice hired. The manufacturing firm Bosch has had an apprenticeship program in Charleston since 1979. A company official notes that retention of those completing a Bosch apprenticeship is five times the retention rate of external candidates, and the average tenure of a skilled trade employee at this location is 17 years.^{xxiii}

https://www.tridenttech.edu/career/workforce/car_youth_apprentice.htm

https://www.tridenttech.edu/career/workforce/car_apprentice.htm

3. INCREASED PARTICIPATION BY DISCONNECTED YOUTH AND ADULTS

Labor force participation in America has been dropping for the past 20 years, and is often markedly lower for many subgroups: young people under 25; adults from impoverished backgrounds; minorities; ex-offenders; military veterans returning to civilian life; and those with disabilities. Many Chamber interviewees noted the generational poverty found in some regions of Arkansas that makes it more difficult for residents to succeed in the workplace. With labor force availability expected to be limited for years to come, it is increasingly important to increase participation rates among all citizens.

Bill Stovall, former Executive Director of Arkansas Community Colleges and former Speaker of the House, wrote in September 2018 about the 'Common Employability Skills' needed for career stability and success. He suggested that many long-term unemployed in Arkansas lack skills such as communication, professionalism, teamwork, critical thinking, and problem solving. For many, basic English and math skills are additional hurdles, along with obstacles such as substance abuse, lack of preventive healthcare, lack of child care and transportation.^{xxiv}

Arkansas has acted to address workforce disconnections. Its most heralded program is the **Arkansas Career Pathways Initiative (CPI)**, which started in 2005. Using federal TANF funds, CPI helps low-income parents get back in school and earn a degree or certificates at any of the state's public two-year colleges. In a recent year, 92 percent of CPI students were female, a majority were single parents, and the average age was 30. Racial breakdown was 59 percent white, 35 black and 4 percent Hispanic.^{xxv} Since the program's inception over 30,000 adults have been helped, with impressive results:

- Fifty-two percent of CPI participants obtained at least one credential or degree, compared with 24 percent of non-CPI students.
- In 2016, 72 percent of program completers found employment, and 92 percent of graduates who found a job were still employed after 12 months.
- CPI completers earned \$3,100 more per year than TANF recipients who did not participate in CPI.
- In one year, CPI participants earned associate degrees at eight times the rate of the general community college population.

- Arkansas receives \$1.79 in benefits for every \$1.00 invested in CPI, due to increased state tax revenue from earnings and reduced public assistance outlays.^{xxvi}

Two other Arkansas programs are geared toward increased workforce participation for adults.

Accelerating Opportunity uses the nationally-acclaimed I-BEST approach of pairing a basic skills instructor with a CTE instructor to help adults get a high school diploma along with an occupational certificate. Accelerating Opportunity is offered through four community colleges. The **WAGE** program aims to increase skills of the unemployed or under-employed by earning an Employability certificate and more specific certificates in areas such as Office Technology, Industrial, and Customer Service.

Disconnected Adults

Around Arkansas:

 In Blytheville, Arkansas Northeastern College has a grant-funded **Opportunity Bus** that travels to impoverished neighborhoods - using churches as bus stops – to bring residents to ANC. In order to earn their free bus pass, students must meet with an advisor weekly. ANC also has a **Success Navigator** position. That individual goes door-to-door at barber shops, salons, and diners to recruit adult students, bring them to campus and help them with the enrollment process. ANC's president says that people in poverty "don't receive our normal communications" and need grass-roots outreach to connect with opportunities.

National Best Practice:

Community-Based Employment and Financial Services. The Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) has expanded its Financial Opportunity Centers (FOCs) from a pilot location in Chicago to 80 centers in 30 cities, serving about 20,000 people. The FOCs focus on individuals' financial stability through one-on-one coaching. The FOC model bundles services for a) financial counseling, b) employment assistance, and c) income support. The model has significantly improved the ability of clients to retain a job in their second year after entering the program. LISC has learned that it is important to provide nearby training



and employment opportunities, and that it takes persistence to move the long-time unemployed (many with prison records and basic skills deficiencies) into steady employment. <http://www.lisc.org/our-initiatives/financial-stability/financial-opportunity-centers/>

Disconnected Youth

Nationally, teen employment is at its lowest level in over 50 years.^{xxvii} In the 2018 *America's Health Rankings*, 15.0 percent of Arkansans aged 16-24 were 'disconnected' – not working and not in school – compared with the national average of 11.7 percent.^{xxviii} A 2018 report by WalletHub ranked Arkansas 6th-highest across 14 factors determining at-risk youth; 5th-highest in disconnected youth; and 5th in the youth poverty rate.^{xxix}

In Arkansas:

 **YouthBuild** in Little Rock targets young people 18 to 24 years old. Seventy-five percent of participants are high school dropouts, and 25 percent are lacking in basic skills. YouthBuild's Education and Occupational Skills component operates for 32 weeks of the year, with content 50 percent in academics; 40 percent in occupational skills; and 10 percent in community service and leadership development. In addition to existing career pathways in construction, nursing, and commercial driving, YouthBuild recently received funding to add paths for home healthcare and industrial technician certifications.



Ex-Offenders

In a recent year, one of every 110 American adults was in prison or jail, and one in 52 was on probation or parole. Less than half of previously incarcerated people are employed full-time, and a history of incarceration is shown to reduce annual earnings by 40 percent. Only six percent of the U.S. prison population has any post-secondary degree, compared with 37 percent of the U.S. household population.^{xxx}

In Arkansas:

 The Little Rock Workforce Development Board won a \$1.2 million grant in 2017 to develop the **Rock City Reentry Project**. Rock City Reentry is for newly-released offenders. It partners with service providers such as

Goodwill Industries for classes in education, soft skills training, financial empowerment, and health and wellness. Paid work experience is coordinated through the Arkansas Construction Education Foundation, Arkansas Food Jobs, and Pulaski Technical College. Participants also receive intensive case management services including mental health and substance abuse counseling as well as mentoring.^{xxxii}

 The Arkansas Department of Corrections operates a **Think Legacy Program** for inmates at 13 prison units across the state. As they approach their release date, inmates take a 24-week curriculum including employment readiness, budgeting, life skills, and healthy relationships. Think Legacy also features in-prison job fairs. With a statewide enrollment of 619 out of the approximately 9,000 inmates released per year, there appears to be an opportunity to expand this program's impact.^{xxxiii}

National Best Practice:

Indiana HIRE. The Hoosier Initiative for Re-Entry (HIRE) began in 2012, operated by Indiana's Department of Workforce Development and Department of Corrections. The model focuses on inmates with a felony conviction and provides services in three areas:

1. Classes on financial literacy, budgeting, interviewing, networking, conflict resolution, and resume preparation.
2. Outreach to community businesses for job placement.
3. Coordinating with support service organizations to assist with housing, clothing, and transportation.

Importantly, a mentor works with each participant for one year after their initial job placement. In 2017, HIRE helped 2,211 former inmates secure employment, and 97 percent remained at the job after three months. HIRE participants have shown lower recidivism rates than the general prison population.^{xxxiv}

Military Veterans

Veterans make up about five percent of the U.S. labor force. While older veterans have lower unemployment rates than non-veterans, newer veterans experience much higher rates of unemployment.^{xxxv} Outcomes in Arkansas are better than the national average, with veterans entering employment at a rate of 67 percent (vs. 57 percent

nationwide) and a job retention rate just above the U.S. average.^{xxxv}

In Arkansas:

 **Walmart's Veterans Welcome Home Commitment** is to hire 250,000 veterans between 2013 and 2020. In addition, the company added a new initiative in the fall of 2018 to give hiring preference to military spouses.

National Best Practice:

Building the Talent Pool by Focusing on Veterans. Sweden-based manufacturer Sandvik Coromant, with numerous facilities in the United States, has capitalized on the veteran talent pool for decades. Sandvik allocates six percent of its research and development budget to training opportunities for veterans, with a full-time, dedicated employment trainer.^{xxxvi} Sandvik also supports related organizations such as the San Diego-based Workshops for Warriors.

Those with Disabilities

In May 2017, less than 21 percent of people over age 16 with a disability were participating in the labor force, compared with over 68 percent of those without a disability. The 2016 unemployment rate for those with a disability was more than twice that of individuals without a disability. This comes despite employers reporting that their employees with disabilities have longer job tenure, lower absenteeism, fewer safety incidents, and performance equal to or better than other employees.^{xxxvii} Better engagement of people with disabilities would seem to be a smart bet for increasing labor force participation.

In Arkansas:

 **Goodwill Industries of Arkansas** notes that 32 percent of state residents with a disability are employed. Goodwill operates a 16-week intensive career education program called

Beyond Barriers.

Beyond Barriers strives for participants to achieve the National Career Readiness Certificate, and provides financing coaching, Social Security benefits counseling, and transportation assistance.

 In addition to the **Transition Employment Project (TEP)** mentioned under work-based learning initiatives above, 32 schools across the state are working with Arkansas' Vocational Rehabilitation office to offer work experiences for disabled students through the **OWL program (Opportunities for Work-Based Learning.)** OWL served about 400 students in the past school year, working with 160 businesses.

4. IMPROVED INDUSTRY SECTOR STRATEGIES

Author Steven Dawson writes that strategies to align education and training with jobs in growing sectors require at least three things:

- A. The strategy must be **placed-based.** That is, it must be created on a regional level, where all partners are committed to embracing a workforce strategy designed to succeed in that specific place.
- B. The strategy must be **sector-specific.** Workforce development should focus on those industries that are growing locally and nationally, those that export goods or services outside of the region, and those in which employment is expected to increase. A workforce strategy that attempts to be all things to all groups in a region is likely to have little impact.
- C. The organization executing the strategy should be an **independent intermediary** – a partnership incorporating the experience and wisdom of both industry experts and workforce specialists.^{xxxviii}

Arkansas Chamber members portrayed relationships between businesses and workforce partners as fairly good – in most cases, getting better – but varying widely from region to region. In some places, communication was described as “hit and miss.” Often this is because businesses are accustomed to handling training needs in-house, on their own, and workforce agencies are used to carrying out federal programs that each come with their own funding stream, regulations, and a host of acronyms. Meanwhile, K-12 schools may lack awareness of workplace needs in their community and region.

Chamber interviewees viewed school CTE programs as eager participants in regional workforce efforts, but stressed that entire schools, not just CTE students, need to be connected to career opportunities in leading sectors. Meanwhile, some educators believe that it is difficult to keep businesses engaged in cooperative efforts. However, other school leaders insisted that workforce partners simply need to “deliver” on commitments to win the business community’s trust, and that if you demonstrate a positive return on a firm’s time and investment they will be enthusiastic team members.

Arkansas Economic Development’s 2018-2019 Strategic Plan lists eight key industries in the state:

- Aerospace and Defense
- Food and Beverage
- Distribution and Logistics
- Metals
- Paper and Timber Products
- Corporate and Shared Services
- Software Development and Data Management
- Transportation Equipment



Across the state, there appears to be wide variation in the implementation of regional, sector-based strategies. Northwest Arkansas is a leader, as shown in a 2017 presentation in Hot Springs by consulting firm Maher & Maher. Northwest Arkansas is highlighted for building the talent pipeline in healthcare, manufacturing, I.T., and construction, with close interaction between industry, educators, and other partners. Maher & Maher suggested other best practices for successful sector strategies:

- Tie delivery of workforce services to regional high-growth industries.
- Focus on long-term career development and transferable skills (not just short-term training specific to one company).
- Take locally successful relationships to the regional level.
- Move from ‘engaging’ businesses to having them lead the process.^{xxxix}

Other regions with fewer resources are not as far along in this process. West Central Arkansas’ 2016-2019 local workforce plan mentions advanced manufacturing as an “emerging” sector strategy, noting that the partnership has worked with one employer and is in the process of coordinating with another. The region was “exploring” additional sector strategies in healthcare and tourism.^{xli}

Similarly, the Southeast Arkansas Workforce Development Board states that the region “has only begun to scratch the surface of sector initiatives” in its 2016-2019 regional plan. It notes that “territorial issues” and “conflicting regulatory processes” have kept groups in silos, though the situation is improving. Southeast Arkansas began partnering on a diverse manufacturing sector strategy in 2017, and also hopes to use the goal of becoming an ACT Certified Work Ready Community to build collaboration.^{xlii}

Given the difference in resources across Arkansas, the state should consider providing the needed funding and technical assistance for all regions of Arkansas to create a high-quality, customized sector strategy. Many workforce partners are unused to interacting with one another, and communicate with businesses on a ‘transactional’ basis to fulfill one-time needs. It will take a concerted effort to build the consistent collaboration needed to develop the workforce pipeline for key sectors in each region.

National Best Practice:

Floor 360. The area around the small northwestern Georgia city of Dalton produces a majority of the world’s carpet and other flooring. After the Great Recession, leading employers such as Shaw and Mohawk retooled their manufacturing processes, which created the need for higher skills from the regional workforce. The region entered a U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) program called the *Investing in Manufacturing Communities Partnership* in 2014, and received an EDA grant to develop an Advanced Manufacturing Strategy.



Important players in the partnership included the Northwest Georgia Regional Commission; the Greater Dalton Chamber of Commerce; Georgia Northwestern Technical College (GNTC) and Dalton State College; high schools featuring a College & Career Academy; and Georgia Tech.

Participants say keys to success included getting major international competitors together at the same table to solve common issues, and having influential champions such as the chamber of commerce president and the head of the industry's Carpet and Rug Institute.

One outcome of the partnership was a major expansion of the GNTC campus with a new flooring training center. Georgia state government contributed over \$20 million for the project, and industry donated most of the equipment. An inland port was established nearby, improving logistics. Georgia's U.S. Senators have been enthusiastic supporters. Ongoing workforce pipeline efforts include a free summer camp focusing on 'DEM' – Design, Engineering, and Manufacturing; school field trips to industry sites; Manufacturing Day; educator tours; and sponsorship of robotics teams.^{xlii}



5. INCREASING THE SKILLS OF EXISTING WORKERS

More than ever, businesses are viewing their workforce as not just an expense but the company's most valuable asset. Upskilling existing employees can be a cost-effective investment to boost productivity, increase retention, and decrease the very expensive process of finding, hiring, and onboarding new workers. Meanwhile, most adults now believe it is "essential" to keep learning and updating their skills throughout their careers.^{xliii} To improve incumbent worker skills, most companies are used to going it alone. A new Deloitte study found that just 30 percent of firms partner with private training institutes, and only 20 percent partner with government agencies. Deloitte calls this status "ripe" for improvement and notes that partnering with outside agencies can not only provide cost-effective training for existing employees, but can also open up another source for finding new workers.^{xliv}

Arkansas has opportunities to benefit from upskilling the existing workforce. For example, the National Skills Coalition (NSC) found that Arkansas has 143,000 foreign-born residents, about five percent of the state's population. Eighty-three percent of immigrants are between the ages of 18 and 64, versus just 59 percent of native-born Arkansans. In addition, Arkansas immigrants have

a labor force participation rate (68 percent) that is much higher than for native-born citizens (57 percent).^{xlv}

However, the foreign-born population has lower education attainment, which is often connected to lower skills. Forty percent of immigrants in the state have not finished high school. In addition, about 73,000 working-age residents in Arkansas have limited English proficiency.^{xlii} NSC argues that bringing this group's education and skills up to the middle-skill level will help to meet business needs for an increasingly skilled workforce.

Other programs in Arkansas can help lower-skilled workers to become eligible for higher-level work. As described earlier, the **Accelerating Opportunity** and **WAGE** programs provide a way for adults to get a high school diploma and credentials for high-demand occupations. Another trend is the increase in use of **Prior Learning Assessments** that confirm existing workers' knowledge often gained on the job. ASU Mid-South in West Memphis uses Prior Learning Assessments to credit students with college-level knowledge acquired outside of the classroom, so that adult workers can save time, money, and focus on those classes necessary to complete a program or degree.



In Arkansas:

Walmart has developed programs for employees to earn a **high school diploma, GED, associate or bachelor's degree**. After starting with a GED program, Walmart teamed with Northwest Arkansas Community College and education firm Cengage to connect workers with a **Career Online High School (COHS)** where adults can earn a diploma and a career certificate. COHS takes into account that "adults learn very differently," and uses a competency-based approach where adults can learn at their own pace covering more relevant material.^{xlvii} Walmart also subsidizes associate and bachelor's degree programs in Business or Supply Chain Management, available to all associates for a worker contribution of \$1 a day. Walmart is partnering with three universities for the degree programs, and the Lumina Foundation has agreed to research and report on the programs' effectiveness.^{xlviii}

 The State of Arkansas offers four categories of workforce training grants for businesses:

1. **Skills Gap** grants to improve specific skill sets.
2. **Customized Technical** grants tailored to a company's needs.
3. **Professional Development** grants for training in soft skill areas such as teamwork, leadership, and conflict management.
4. **Grow Our Own** grants for Arkansas-headquartered firms with 250 or fewer employees.

National Best Practice:

State Leadership on use of Industry Credentials.

The proliferation of more than 300,000 work-related credentials and certificates makes it hard to use them and assess their value. However, the rise of the national non-profit Credential Engine is helping to make use of credentials more uniform. In 2017, the State of Indiana began to promote the use of Credential Engine for one of the state's most important sectors, healthcare. The statewide Ivy Tech Community College and state agencies help healthcare employers to take advantage of a shared credential database.^{xlix}



6. STRENGTHENING TALENT ATTRACTION AND RETENTION

As noted earlier in the U.S. overview section, Americans' willingness to move has dropped by about 50 percent since the 1960s. Whether this is due to two-income families, an aging population, or hesitancy caused by economic uncertainty, worker mobility has been sharply reduced. Despite this trend, most Chamber interviewees reported at least some success in attracting employees from other regions and other states. Still, as one interviewee put it, Arkansas doesn't want to be in the position of having to "import our entire workforce." This section looks at ways to nurture and retain talent internally as well as attract talent from elsewhere.

At the state level are talent development initiatives such as the long-running **Arkansas Leadership Academy**. Since 1991, the Academy has focused on improving the leadership abilities of school

executives, principals, teachers, and students. A newer initiative is the **Arkansas Future Grant** program, which funds up to five semesters of college for those pursuing an associate degree in a STEM field. Recipients must work in the state for three years after graduation, or the grant will convert to an interest-bearing loan. Also, in 2017 the governor announced a new \$25 million action plan to build on the state's strength in computing and data analytics, with I.T. talent recruitment and retention being a major focus.^l

Around Arkansas:

 The non-profit group **Noble Impact** in central Arkansas has a three-pronged approach to keeping young, local talent:

1. Connect students to the community.
2. Give them a reason to stay.
3. Give them experience.

Noble Impact aims to succeed in talent development and retention by

nurturing kids' "real-world interests, strengths, and aptitudes" as early as primary school and providing apprenticeships that connect students with local business leaders.^{ll}



 Northwest Arkansas holds an annual

Young Professional Summit to develop young talent in the region. At its first event in 2016, more than 280 young professionals from across the region attended. On a broader scale, the Northwest Arkansas Council's **Finding NWA** program and website helps corporate recruiters with easy access to the information they need to communicate with out-of-state prospects. The Finding NWA site features a *Cool Jobs Alert: Do What You Love!* section, along with descriptions of entertainment, outdoor recreation, and education options.



The Winthrop Rockefeller Institute's **Under 40 Forum** annual reports provide a host of suggestions from young leaders on improving talent attraction and retention in Arkansas. Among their recommendations over the past three years:

- Develop a web portal to collect and share "authentic, positive Arkansas stories."
- Create an ambassador network and an online #ARHome campaign for local bloggers and influencers to highlight the state's assets and entrepreneurial spirit.
- Improve mentoring and internships for students and young leaders, tapping the faith-based community as well as business leaders. This is especially important in less-prosperous regions of the state.
- Recruit native college alumni living out of state, emphasizing the in-state opportunities for entrepreneurship.^{lii}

National Best Practice:

State + Regional Strategies.

For talent attraction, Wisconsin is taking aggressive action at the state and regional levels. Its



\$6.8 million, statewide **THINK MAKE HAPPEN** initiative targets alumni of Wisconsin universities, workers living in adjacent states, and members of the military returning to civilian life. At the regional level, communities and companies in east-central Wisconsin's Fox River Valley collaborate to recruit college students from around the Midwest. The Fox Cities Regional Partnership hosts an annual three-day Talent Upload event to introduce engineering, business, and computer science majors to leading employers, career opportunities, and the region's quality of life.

"The key to finding the right people is skills validation, not necessarily what they know, but what they can do, with what they know."

Based in Springdale Arkansas, Tyson Foods is one of the largest food companies in the world and is growing. Tyson has a company commitment to worker safety and to value-adding to worker skills. The company is a national and Arkansas leader in proactive, innovative programs to ensure that they can find, and retain the team members they need. To meet the emerging workforce where they are, Tyson has worked with dozens of school partners to identify students and strengthen their skills. Once hired the training process for new team members has just begun.

Tyson Foods' Upward Academy, an in-plant education program that provides classes at no cost, recently surpassed 100,000 hours of instruction to more than 1,000 of the company's team members. Upward Academy launched in 2016 at the company's plants in Springdale, Arkansas, and is expanding to all Tyson facilities. In partnership with local community organizations, Upward Academy provides team members with important life skills by offering free and accessible classes in English as a Second Language (ESL), General Educational Development (GED), citizenship and other essential life and workplace skills. In addition, driver education, computer literacy and financial literacy classes have also been offered at some locations.

Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson and the Arkansas Department of Career Education recognized Upward Academy as a Champion for Arkansas' workforce.

Mike Rogers

Tyson Food, Senior Director of Maintenance and Refrigeration



7. MAKING BETTER USE OF DATA

Arkansas is excelling in some areas of education, training, and workforce data. In a 2017 national study, the Center for Data Innovation ranked the state as tied for first for its educational data systems.^{lvi} Another study in 2016 praised the state's links between K-12 and post-secondary data, but found that workforce information was not linked with education data.^{lvii} However, this is changing. The statewide **Economic Security Report** for 2018 was developed by the Arkansas Research Center, Department of Workforce Services, and the Department of Higher Education. This report looks at first-year employment and earnings outcomes of graduates from public colleges and universities in Arkansas. It includes:

- Average first-year earnings by degree, from a high school diploma to doctorate.
- Average degree program costs and average debt for bachelor's degree programs.
- Number of graduates by major.^{lv}
- First-year earnings for certificate holders and degree holders by major.

Of course, Arkansas businesses, educators, and workforce agencies would always like more data. Chamber interviewees said it would be valuable to have work outcome data for one, three, and five years after a student leaves school. Others asked for more details on workers' longevity in their field of study, pay progression, and the skills needed for various job descriptions. To take the Economic Security Report to the next level, Arkansas agencies could borrow from the West Virginia University Bureau of Business & Economic Research's *From Higher Education to Work in West Virginia*, which also covers:

- Work participation in the state by student residency (in-state vs. out-of-state students).
- Work participation rates (how many students stayed to work in-state) by degree, gender, race, by student's age when the degree was earned, and by level of tuition assistance.
- In-state work destination by county and metro area.^{lvii}

Around Arkansas:

Some regions are making access to workforce data more user-friendly for businesses and residents. The **East Arkansas Planning & Development District** offers a tutorial and online tool for analyzing the 12-county region's workforce, identifying potential business and education partners, and even potential industrial sites based on available workforce. Users only need Google Earth, and the delivery of data is designed for a "technical or non-technical audience."



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National Best Practices:

Data sites for students, parents, and adult



workers. The State of Washington's Career Bridge site is viewed by more than 190,000 people a year. It shows in-demand jobs, and "performance" data for education and training programs. Consumer Report Cards detail program completion rates, employment rates, median earnings, and the industries in which program completers are working.

<http://www.careerbridge.wa.gov/default.aspx>

Use data to adjust program offerings and service

delivery. Data showed that adult students in a manufacturing program at Illinois' Oakton Community College had lower persistence and completion rates than younger students. In response, Oakton: a) developed new work-based learning options, and b) increased the ability to get credit for prior learning, to help adult success rates improve.^{lviii}



D. 8 RECOMMENDATIONS

Arkansas cannot afford to be lulled into complacency by its current strong economic performance. Emerging threats such as the quantity and quality of the workforce, low labor force participation, wide skills gaps, lagging education attainment, and uneven economic conditions around the state could choke off economic prosperity unless business and government leaders address them aggressively.

Many of the recommendations below involve expanding on success in one part of the state, and bringing it to other regions. In an Under 40 Forum report from the Winthrop Rockefeller Institute, young leaders praised the effectiveness of the Northwest Arkansas Council while understanding that other regions have fewer economic resources. Still, they noted that it does not necessarily require a great deal of funding to establish a shared vision, formal cooperation, and professional staff in every region of the state.

I. IMPROVE CAREER AWARENESS TO PARENTS, STUDENTS, EDUCATORS, AND POLICY MAKERS

- Develop regional websites and other public awareness tools that promote career opportunities close to home; highlight the income potential, and detail the education, skills, and work experience needed to get them.
- Develop the College and Career Coach program in every region, and bring mentors to all middle and high schools.
- At the state level, provide challenge grants for each region to develop a networking entity that connects companies, educational institutions, and training organizations.

2. INCREASE PROGRAM FLEXIBILITY

- Increase flexibility in state K-12 education regulations (such as seat time requirements) to make it easier for schools to implement innovative career readiness and work experience programming.
- Increase the flexibility of education and training funding, or provide more designated funding for (shorter-term) training programs.

3. EXPAND WORK-BASED LEARNING

- Expand apprenticeships in growing, non-traditional sectors like healthcare and information technology, and promote their adoption by businesses.

4. ENGAGE MORE DISCONNECTED YOUTH

- Expand successful efforts like YouthBuild to other regions of Arkansas.

5. PREPARE MORE EX-OFFENDERS FOR JOBS

- Involve a higher percentage of current inmates with in-prison job readiness and off-site work experience opportunities.

6. ORGANIZE AROUND INDUSTRY SECTOR STRATEGIES

- Provide state funding and technical assistance for every region to develop a current, business-led sector strategy.

7. PRIORITIZE TALENT DEVELOPMENT AND RETENTION

- Create young leadership events (such as a young leader's summit) in every region.

8. USE DATA FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

- Continue to develop reports on the longer-term outcomes of workers by education and training background, and share with policy makers annually
- Use workforce and education data to examine differences in outcomes by region, and highlight regional gaps between in-demand jobs and educational offerings. An annual gathering should stress the programming changes needed to address gaps in each region.

APPENDIX I

Additional National Best Practices in Workforce Development

I. CAREER AWARENESS AND EARLY SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

NCDA Career Counselor Certifications.

The National Career Development Association (NCDA) recently unveiled a Certified Career Counselor credential program, and is rolling out a Certified School Career Development Advisor credential aimed at K-12 school counselors.

<https://www.ncda.org/aws/NCDA/pt/sp/credentials>

Women in Manufacturing. Women make up only 29 percent of the manufacturing workforce. To highlight the contributions of women in science, technology, engineering, and production careers and encourage greater participation, the Manufacturing Institute created the STEP Ahead initiative and awards. In the Chicago region, Triton College's annual GADgET two-week summer program introduces 30 to 40 girls ages 12-16 to the world of manufacturing and engineering. Activities include manufacturing site tours and meetings with prominent female executives and engineers.

2. APPRENTICESHIPS AND OTHER WORK-BASED LEARNING

Simulated Workplace – West Virginia.

The West Virginia Chamber partnered with the state workforce agency to transform high school classrooms into authentic workplace environments in which student teams create their own businesses. The initiative started in 2013 and by 2015 there were over 500 Simulated Workplace classrooms serving over 13,000 students. A 2017 *New York Times* article lauds West Virginia for “leading the way in transforming vocational education.” In 2016, 37 percent of seniors across the state completed a CTE program, compared with 18 percent in 2010.^{lviii}



Partnership to Advance Youth

Apprenticeship. The non-profit New America is partnering with the National Fund for Workforce Solutions, Advance CTE, CareerWise Colorado, and JFF to expand youth apprenticeship opportunities

for high school students nationally. Corporate supporters include Siemens and JPMorgan Chase. The CEO of Home Advisor states that the youth apprenticeship program has “fundamentally changed how we think about talent acquisition and productivity.” “Rarely have I seen a program that is ROI positive, helps build much needed internal talent, and materially benefits America’s youth....”^{lix}

<https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/partnership-advance-youth-apprenticeship/>

REAL Entrepreneurship. Born as Rural Education through Action Learning in the 1980s, REAL Entrepreneurship offers K-12 curricula to provide rural students hands-on learning leading to certification. Certified facilitators around the country lead students in popular fields such as agricultural entrepreneurship and healthcare.

<http://www.realentrepreneurship.org/>

3. INCREASED PARTICIPATION BY DISCONNECTED YOUTH AND ADULTS

Momentum Urban Employment Initiative.

The Kalamazoo, Michigan-based Urban Alliance developed Momentum as a six-week intensive curriculum to improve the employability of long-term unemployed and underemployed citizens. About 88 percent of participants have been incarcerated, and to enter the program they must face that or other barriers such as substance abuse, homelessness, or limited education. Momentum provides a combination of job readiness training, social/emotional and life skills training, and job placement assistance. Since 2014, 84 percent of participants have completed the program and 92 percent of those secured employment.

<https://uainc.org/momentum-urban-employment-initiative/>

Pre-Apprenticeship Training for Incarcerated Adults.

The State of Washington partners with unions for carpenters, ironworkers, laborers, and cement masons to operate the Trades Related Apprentice Coaching (TRAC) program for women inside prison. The 16-week program provides 460 hours of instruction in skilled trades, as well as soft skills training including financial management. Graduates get preference for union apprenticeships upon release, with starting wages around \$25 per hour. Graduates also receive help with paying union dues and rent, and obtaining work tools and clothing. About

20 women per year complete the program, and Washington is expanding it to a second prison.

<https://www.npr.org/2018/12/25/679265632/changing-the-mindset-female-inmates-in-training-for-a-life-after-prison>

<https://www.washingtonci.com/skin/frontend/WACI/primary/docs/content/about-ci/trac-program-brochure.pdf>

4. IMPROVED INDUSTRY SECTOR STRATEGIES

Colorado Sector Strategies. Colorado has been a leader in developing industry sector partnerships. The state offers technical assistance to regions, and boasts that 750 Colorado firms are now active participants. Colorado is also a founding member of the national Next Generation Sector Partnerships initiative.

New Jersey Talent Development Centers. Industry, colleges, and universities across the state have combined to develop seven regional Talent Development Centers, each focusing on one of seven key industry sectors. Each location strives to be a 'Center of Excellence' for industry training aimed at both existing workers and dislocated workers needing retraining.

5. INCREASING THE SKILLS OF EXISTING WORKERS

Industry Partnering with Higher Education.

Education. The British firm National Grid supplies electricity and gas in New York, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts. The utility has great needs in developing employees' technical, mechanical, communications, and public relations skills. It created the National Grid Academy to support worker skill development, and has eight partnerships with State University of New York colleges and several community colleges. A relationship with Hudson Valley Community College resulted in creation of an Associate of Occupational Science degree, and partners have worked together to transfer successful training ideas from one part of their service territory to other regions.^{lx}

Incentives for Adult Upskilling. Starting in 2016, Virginia put \$12.5 million into its New Economy Workforce Credential Grants. The grants offer free non-credit training leading to a credential in a high-demand occupation. In the first year, the average student was 35 years old.^{lxii}

6. STRENGTHENING TALENT ATTRACTION AND RETENTION

Focus on Young Professionals. Belknap County is a rural county of about 61,000 people in the Lakes Region of New Hampshire. It is experiencing very low unemployment, recently less than 2.5 percent. Several years ago the Belknap Economic Development Council undertook a multi-pronged strategy to attract and retain young professionals – particularly natives who have moved away. Efforts include radio and social media campaigns, and a website with testimonials from professionals under 40.

<https://www.belknapedc.org/meet-our-young-talent>

Innovative Employee Benefits. Universal Woods, a small manufacturer based in Kentucky, has taken numerous steps to improve employee retention. Almost all employees have a 401(k) plan, quarterly bonus structure, healthcare benefits, unlimited vacation time, and access to a \$1,000 loan for emergencies. Financial planning is offered as well. Jefferson Community Technical College leads on-site classes including English as a second language. Since instituting a wider array of benefits, Universal Woods' employee retention rate has increased by 43 percent.^{lxii}

7. MAKING BETTER USE OF DATA

Driving Policy and Program Changes.

Montana's recent statewide report, *Meeting State Worker Demand*, is notable for:

a) including data from private colleges, b) extensive use of the state's UI system wage data, and c) analysis of career paths for which a bachelor's degree provides little or no wage benefit over an associate degree. The report has led to concrete changes in offerings by two-year and four-year colleges to meet regional gaps, particularly in healthcare.

<https://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/news/blog/montana-sets-example-for-other-states-by-using-data-to-drive-policy>

In addition to Montana, both Rhode Island and Pennsylvania are increasing use of gap analysis to reveal supply vs. demand mismatches between college degrees and in-demand occupations. Rhode Island changed its college funding formula to reward institutions preparing more students for high-demand, high-wage fields. Pennsylvania has developed workforce gap analysis reports for every region of the state and every public college and university.^{lxiii}

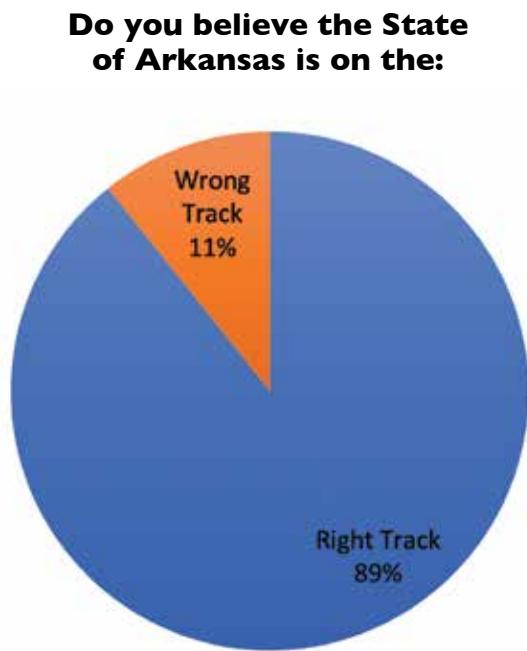
APPENDIX II

Arkansas Chamber Workforce Survey

The following survey was sent out to respondents. The survey was opened on Tuesday October 30th and was closed on Monday November 26th. The survey had 424 respondents. A summary of the responses follows.

Question 1

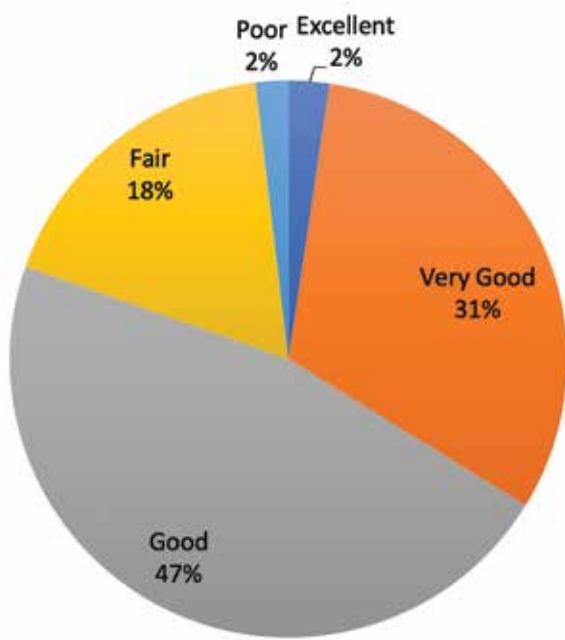
In question 1 we asked, "Do you believe the State of Arkansas is on the..." and provided the options of "right track" and "wrong track". 89% of respondents believe the State is on the right track.



Question 2

In question 2 we asked respondents to rate the current economic conditions of Arkansas as a whole today. The majority of respondents believe the economic conditions in Arkansas are "Good" (47%).

Please rate the current economic conditions of Arkansas as a whole today.



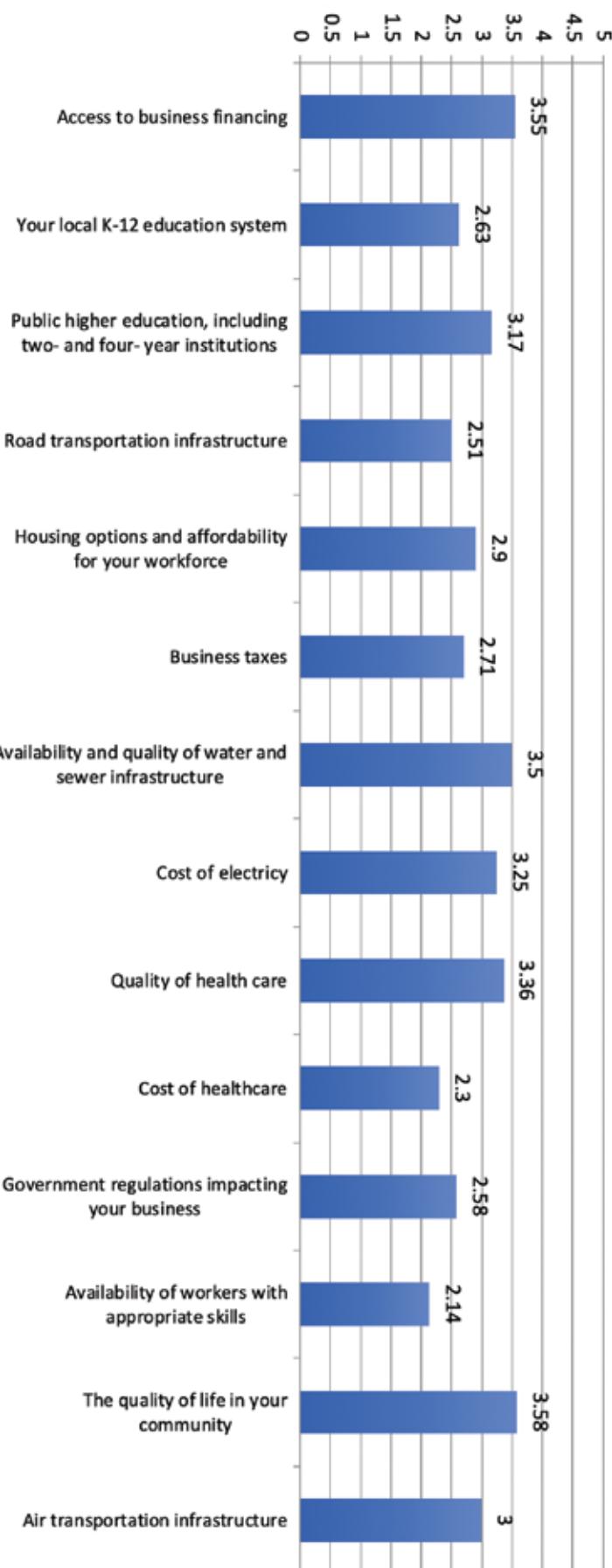
Question 3

In questions 3 we asked respondents to rank their satisfaction with a number of factors. The options they were given were:

- Not at all Satisfied (ranking – 1)
- Slightly Satisfied (ranking – 2)
- Moderately Satisfied (ranking – 3)
- Very Satisfied (ranking – 4)
- Completely Satisfied (ranking – 5)

The closer the weighted average to 5, the higher the satisfaction of the respondents.

The top factors respondents were satisfied with were “quality of life in your community” (3.58) and “access to business financing” (3.55). The factors respondents were least satisfied with were “availability of workers with appropriate skills”(2.14) and “cost of healthcare”(2.3).



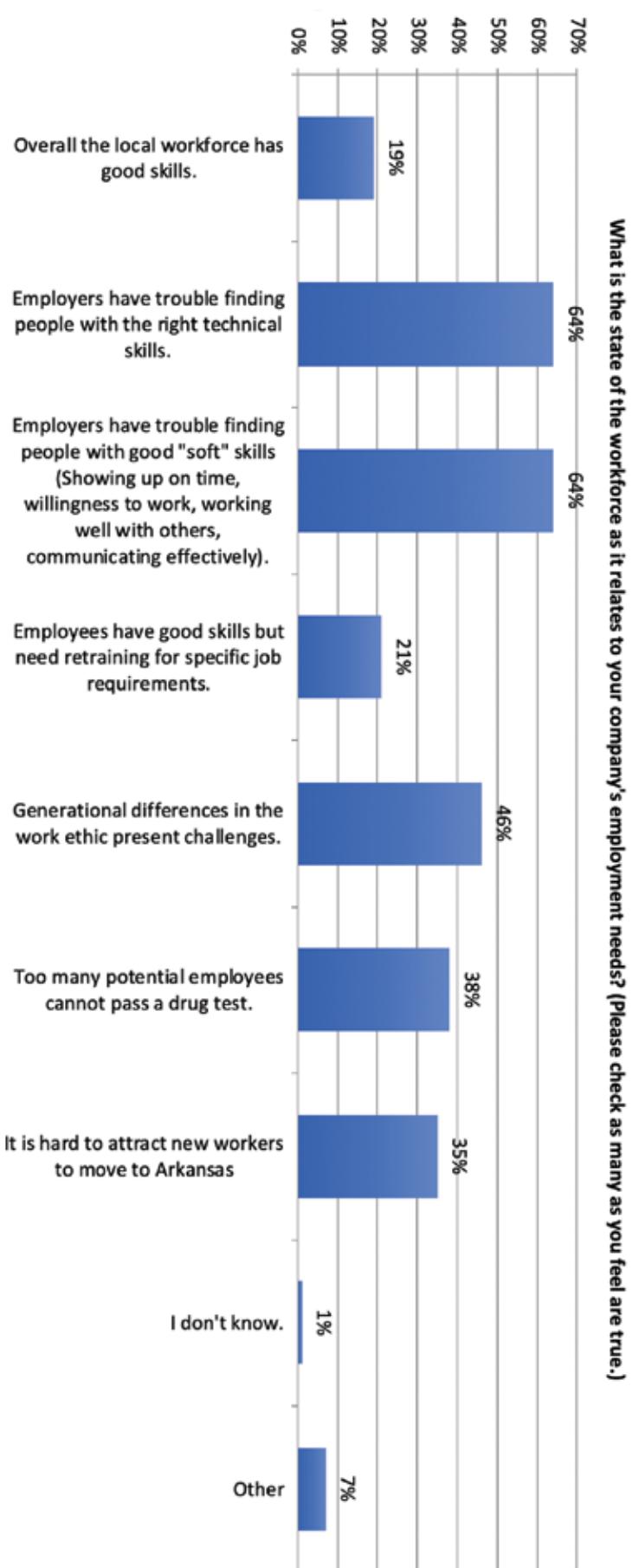
Question 4

In question 4 we asked respondents to comment on the state of the workforce as it relates to their companies employment needs. The answer choices were based off of the most common comments we hear from communities and companies related to the workforce.

The most common responses were that employers have trouble finding employees with the appropriate skills, both "soft skills" (64%) and "technical skills" (64%). 19% of respondents believe that the current local workforce has good skills.

The 7% that responded "Other" had this to say:

- Local School and Crime Scores are a detractor to outside talent
- Too many talented young people leave for other cities
- Salary



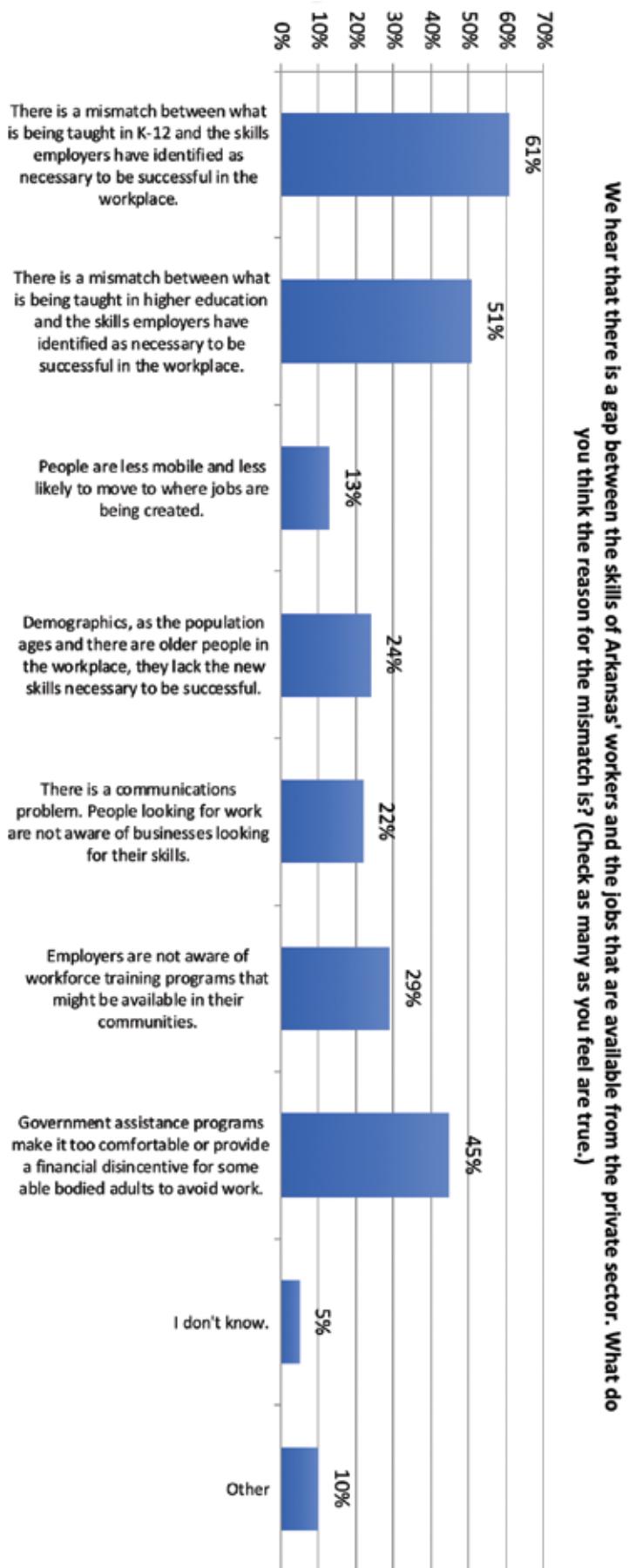
Question 5

Question 5 asked respondents to further dive in to the concept of potential employees lacking in skills. We asked respondents to identify where they believe the mismatch in skills is coming from.

The two most common responses were “There is a mismatch between what is being taught in K-12 and the skills employers have identified as necessary to be successful in the workplace” (61%) and “There is a mismatch between what is being taught in higher education and the skills employers have identified as necessary to be successful in the workplace.” (51%).

The 10% that responded “Other” had this to say:

- I feel we need a stronger push for non-college bound high school students to educate/train them for technical and manufacturing jobs.
- There is not appropriate funding for the programs that can make a difference.



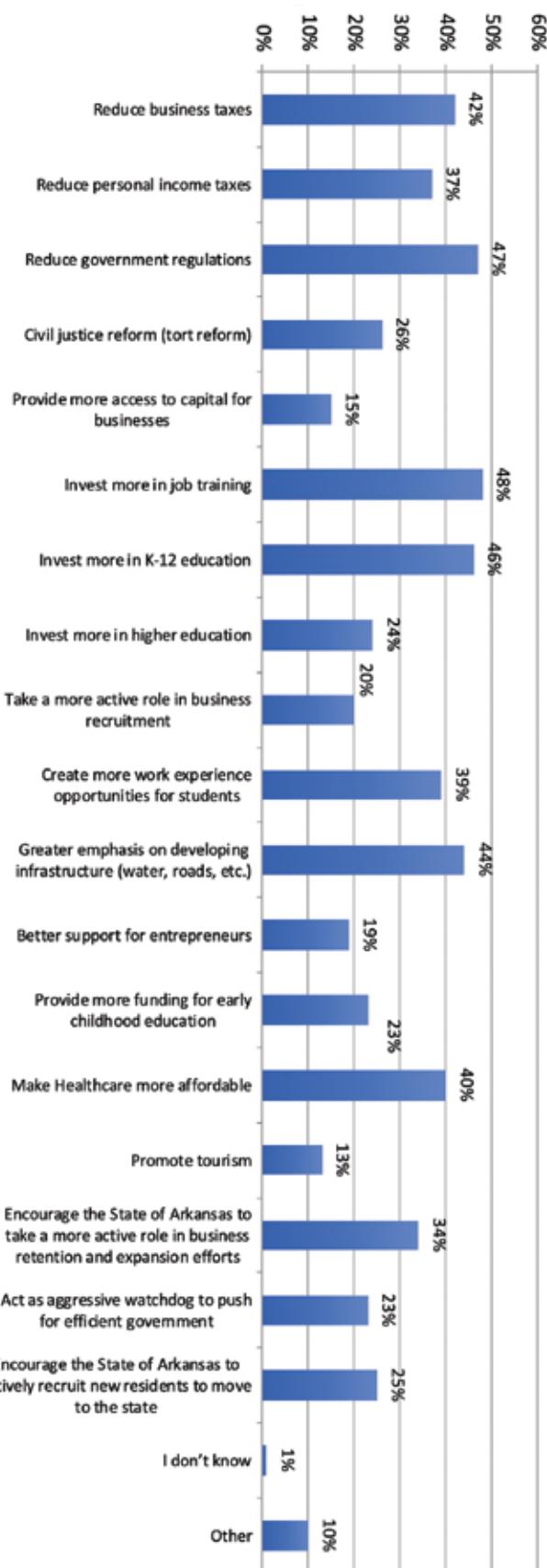
Question 6

Question 6 asked respondents to identify factors that would help the State Chamber improve the state's business climate.

The top two answers were "Invest more in job training" (48%) and "reduce government regulations" (47%). The least popular answer other than "I don't know" (1%) was "Promote Tourism" (13%).

The 10% that responded "Other", had this to say:

- Promote technical, manufacturing and blue-collar skills in our public school system
- Promote regional collaboration
- Look at ways to reduce the spend for prisons and jails. Provide programming and job opportunities for rehabilitation.



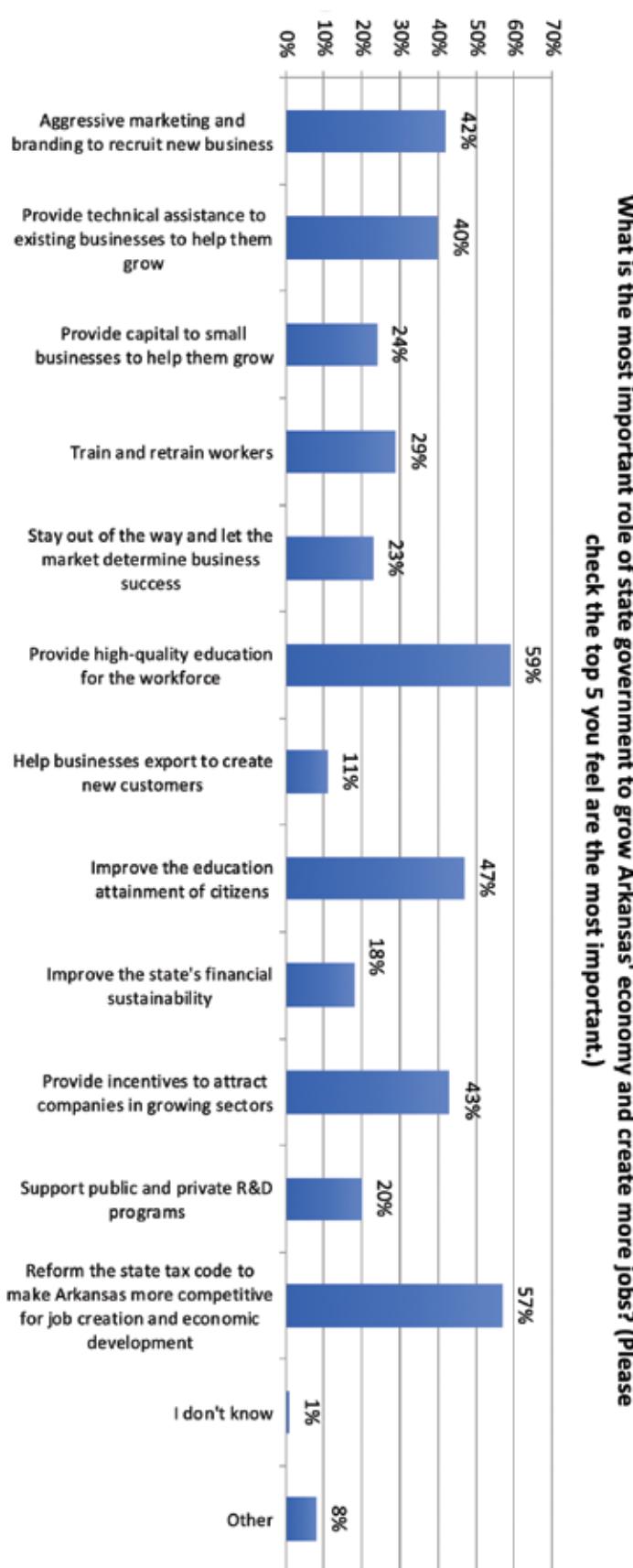
Question 7

Question 7 asked respondents to select the most important role of the state government of Arkansas to grow the economy and create more jobs.

The most common responses were “Provide high-quality education for the workforce” (59%) and “Reform the state tax code to make Arkansas more competitive for job creation and economic development” (57%). The least popular response other than “I don’t know” (1%) was “Help businesses export to create new customers” (11%).

The 8% that responded “Other”, had this to say:

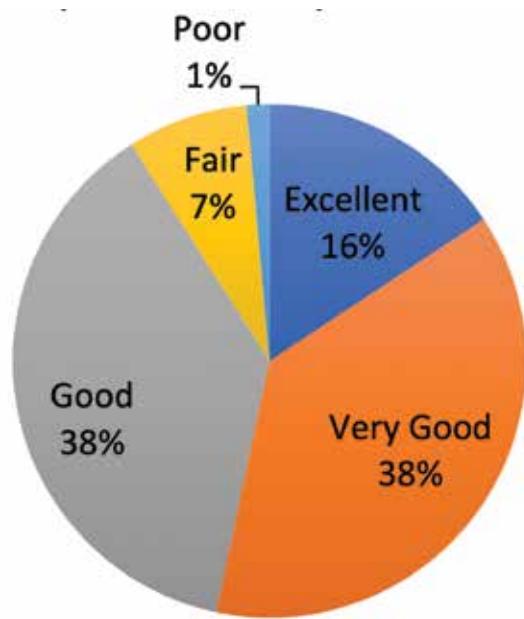
- Partner with those businesses willing to invest in talent development and acquisition
- Improve infrastructure and emphasize technical education
- Improve compensation and work environment to retain.



Question 8

Question 8 asked respondents to rank the performances of their businesses over the past 12 months. Most respondents believe that their businesses are doing “Very Good” or “Good” (both 38%).

How would you describe the performance of your business over the past 12 months?



Question 9

Question 9 asked respondents, “what would it take for your business to grow by 10% in the next year, or what barriers are preventing this growth”?

- Improvement of workforce development, thus creating more eligible workers.
- Lack of access to capital. Regulatory constraints - slowness of government agencies.
- The overall economy has to do well in order to sustain fees and needs - need people with skills to do the job
- Public funding for infrastructure. Primarily roads.
- Burden on business to make up for government deficiencies, particularly in public K-12 and higher education.

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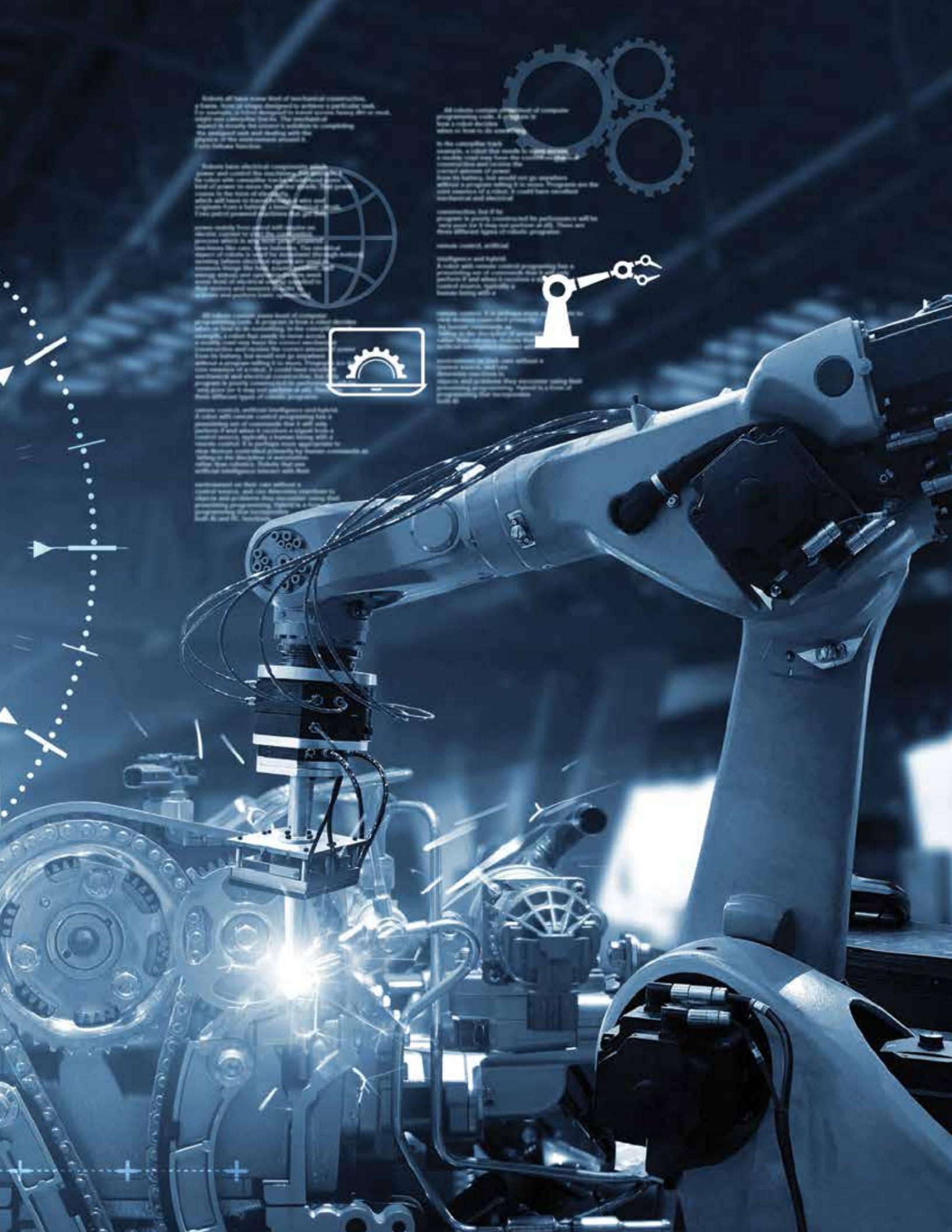
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Mechanical Engineering
Mechanical engineering is a broad field of engineering that deals with the design, development, and production of mechanical systems. It involves the application of principles of mechanics, thermodynamics, materials science, and electrical engineering to create functional components and systems. Mechanical engineers work on a wide range of projects, from simple tools and machinery to complex aerospace and automotive components.

Computer Programming
Computer programming is the process of writing instructions for a computer to perform specific tasks. It involves the use of programming languages to create software applications, web pages, and other digital content. Programming is a fundamental skill for anyone working in the technology industry, as it is used to create the software that powers our world.

Robotics
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