



# 2014-2017

**SOUTHWEST  
WASHINGTON**

**WORKFORCE  
DEVELOPMENT  
COUNCIL**

**STRATEGIC PLAN**



**OUR MISSION:** To prepare and promote a skilled and adaptive workforce for a thriving economy in Southwest Washington.

# VISION

Residents have the jobs they want and employers have the workers they need.

Dear Community Members and Partners,

We are pleased to present the Southwest Washington Workforce Development Council's 2014-2017 Strategic Plan. This plan reflects the work of more than 125 individuals who analyzed the current state of workforce development and identified the needs and actions necessary to establish SW Washington as a place where residents have the jobs they want and employers have the workers they need.

Our unemployment rates remain higher than those in Portland, the state, and the U.S.; but throughout the development of this plan, we heard employers lament their inability to hire the trained workers they need. This is commonly called a skills gap: we have open jobs but lack the skilled workers necessary to fill those positions.

Several challenges exist. Many job candidates, and especially young job candidates, are unprepared to enter the workforce. Many are unaware of potential career paths, while others cannot afford the education and training they need. At the same time, employers are often unaware of

resources to help them identify and train employees, but they also occasionally find the available services to be low quality.

This plan is intended to address the workforce challenges we've identified by enlisting the support, guidance, and creativity of multiple partners including employers, educational institutions, social service organizations, government, and labor unions. Together, we believe that SW Washington can achieve our communal workforce goals. Join us!



Jeanne Bennett  
Executive Director

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeanne Bennett".



Jeff Graham  
Board Chair

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeff Graham".



# GOALS

SWWDC has identified five key goals on which it will focus its efforts in the next three years.



## A. Employers: Employers get the right workers at the right time.

Employers need skilled workers when their business demands it. This goal focuses on understanding employers' workforce needs and taking action to fill their job openings today, while also planning for the workers they will need tomorrow.

job openings and wage progression, and many of these require basic or advanced skills in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). This goal focuses on building awareness of industry demands and career paths and encouraging individuals to pursue these careers and complete related training programs.



## B. Job Candidates: Youth and adults develop professional and technical skills and find jobs that meet career and employer needs.

Job candidates come with different needs and desires at different points in their lives and careers. This goal focuses on developing the individual and helping them to find training, jobs, and/or work experiences to further their career goals and meet industry demand.

## D: Workforce System: The system is coordinated, easily accessible, leverages resources from multiple partners, and produces results.

The workforce system comprises many organizations that provide education, training, job preparation and support, and other contributions to develop and provide the workforce that employers need. This goal focuses on improving the capacity, quality, and performance of the workforce system.



## C: Targeted Education & Training: Youth and adults pursue and complete education and training to meet industry needs and to prepare them for the careers of today and tomorrow.

Certain industries and careers offer greater long-term financial opportunities, both in terms of

## E: Funding: Diverse funding supports the region's workforce needs.

Funding for workforce activities has been largely dependent on federal funds with limitations on who can be served. This goal seeks to increase and diversify funding to expand the number of individuals and employers participating in workforce development activities.



## Guiding Principles

- Collaborative: We will work with others to create a common vision, align strategies and initiatives, and develop funding.
- Proactive: We will look ahead to identify potential problems and find early solutions.
- Flexible: We will be open to change and will adjust to new information and opportunities.
- Efficient: We will employ discipline to maximize the use of time and resources.
- Accountable: We will measure our efforts to assure a positive impact.
- Exceed expectations: We will deliver high quality services.



The workforce system is a collaboration of partners that provide education, training, and job-seeking and support services. These partners include the SWWDC, K-12, community colleges, higher education, WorkSource, staffing agencies, training providers, employers, economic development organizations, labor, government agencies, and other organizations that work with job seekers and employers.



# WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

Owner: SWWDC Board of Directors  
 Sponsor: Jeanne Bennett, Executive Director

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Collaborative
- Proactive
- Flexible
- Efficient
- Accountable
- Exceed expectations

## MISSION

To prepare and promote a skilled and adaptive workforce for a thriving economy in Southwest Washington.

## VISION

Residents have the jobs they want and employers have the workers they need.

## 2014 - 2017 GOALS

Employers	Job Candidates	Targeted Education & Training	Workforce System	Funding
Employers get the right workers at the right time.	Youth and adults develop professional and technical skills and find jobs that meet career and employer needs.	Youth and adults pursue and complete education and training to meet industry needs and to prepare them for the careers of today and tomorrow.	The system is coordinated, easily accessible, leverages resources from multiple partners, and produces results.	Funding is diversified to support workforce needs

## 2014 - 2017 SUCCESS MEASURES

Employers	Job Candidates	Targeted Education & Training	Workforce System	Funding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• # of qualified candidates referred</li> <li>• # of incumbent workers trained</li> <li>• # of retained jobs</li> <li>• # of repeat customers</li> <li>• Increased employer satisfaction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• # of certificates and credentials earned</li> <li>• # of training-related placements</li> <li>• Increased participation in apprenticeships</li> <li>• Increased retention rates</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• # of youth and adults participating in and completing courses, programs, or events</li> <li>• # of employers participating in targeted industry and/or STEM programs</li> <li>• Reduction in unfilled targeted industry and/or STEM jobs</li> <li>• Increased employer satisfaction with targeted industry and/or STEM candidates</li> <li>• # of internships, mentorships and work-based learning experiences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• # of people served</li> <li>• # of job placements</li> <li>• # of qualified applicants provided to employers</li> <li>• # of employers using WorkSource</li> <li>• Increased employer and job candidate satisfaction</li> <li>• # of placements in targeted industry and/or STEM jobs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased funding from diversified funding sources</li> <li>• Increased amount of leveraged and matched funds</li> </ul>

## CURRENT STATE ASSESSMENT

GOAL	STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES
Employers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong business community</li> <li>• Solid base of well-paying jobs with career paths</li> <li>• Workforce partners committed to meeting employers' needs</li> <li>• Employers offering learning opportunities for youth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unable to find the right workers at the right time</li> <li>• Many job candidates are not qualified for available jobs</li> <li>• Training programs do not reflect workplace realities</li> <li>• Existing workers need new skills</li> <li>• Quality of referrals has been inconsistent</li> </ul>
Job Candidates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large pool of job candidates</li> <li>• Employers want to be involved</li> <li>• K-12 improving its focus on workforce readiness and workplace skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job candidates are not career or college ready and don't understand career options</li> <li>• Inconsistent quality of training programs and services</li> <li>• Scarce internships, on-the-job training, mentors, and entry-level opportunities</li> <li>• Difficult to access services in rural areas</li> </ul>
Targeted Education & Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expanding industry in Southwest Washington</li> <li>• Support for targeted industry and STEM programs</li> <li>• Access to industry and STEM training programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of a definition of STEM</li> <li>• Lack of skills to fill targeted industry and STEM jobs</li> <li>• Lack of interest in targeted industry and STEM careers</li> <li>• People are reluctant to enter targeted industry or STEM careers</li> </ul>
Workforce System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong base of committed partners</li> <li>• Recognition of need to improve the workforce system</li> <li>• Partners have a track record of leveraging funds</li> <li>• Strong relationships with regional partners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of understanding of the workforce system by employers and job candidates</li> <li>• Many employers and job seekers don't use WorkSource or other workforce services</li> <li>• Services are duplicated without funds being leveraged</li> <li>• Budget cuts</li> </ul>
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Track record of securing, administering, and delivering on large grants</li> <li>• Willingness of partners to work together to secure funding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reliant on a few sources of funding</li> <li>• Limited employer funding of programs</li> <li>• State's policies, legislation, and budget do not adequately support workforce preparation or expansion</li> </ul>

## ROOT CAUSE

GOAL	ROOT CAUSES
Employers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of professional curriculum and training and hands-on education</li> <li>• Rapidly changing technology with curriculum that does not quickly adapt</li> <li>• Limited educator experience in industry</li> <li>• Skilled workers who do exist don't access the system</li> <li>• System refers candidates who aren't qualified</li> </ul>
Job Candidates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marketing of careers, training, and jobs is limited</li> <li>• Training providers/employers are not adequately aligned or coordinated</li> <li>• Providers themselves do not have work experience in industry</li> <li>• Entry-level, internship, on-the-job-training, and mentor opportunities are difficult for employers to produce</li> <li>• Costly to deliver programs in rural areas</li> </ul>
Targeted Education & Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of understanding of targeted industry and/or STEM skills and careers</li> <li>• People don't understand the relevance of STEM</li> <li>• STEM is perceived as associated with higher education</li> <li>• Different educational and training providers have different goals</li> </ul>
Workforce System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employers and job candidates aren't aware of workforce services</li> <li>• Candidates referred to employers are not qualified</li> <li>• Limited coordination of partners and community-based organizations, churches, or city/county agencies</li> <li>• Some workforce facilities do not have a professional atmosphere</li> </ul>
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have not focused broadly on identifying non-WIA funds</li> <li>• Have not asked employers to invest in services</li> <li>• Have not sufficiently communicated system needs or return on investment achieved by the workforce</li> </ul>

# 2014 - 2017 ACTION PLAN

DEVELOP  IMPLEMENT  SUSTAIN

ACTION	2014		2015		2016		2017
	JAN-JUN	JUL-DEC	JAN-JUN	JUL-DEC	JAN-JUN	JUL-DEC	JAN-JUN
<b>Employers</b>							
Increase opportunities for employers and economic development partners to shape education and training programs							
Increase number of employers providing skill development experiences to educators, youth, and job candidates							
Provide support to employers to train workers							
Increase the quality of applicant screening							
<b>Job Candidates</b>							
Define professionalism skills, identify metrics, and create training guidelines that can be leveraged by partners							
Create and communicate career pathways							
Increase access to mentors/support services							
Develop framework for enabling employers to provide internships, career-related learning experiences, on-the-job training and apprenticeships							
Identify ways to serve those in rural communities							
<b>Targeted Education &amp; Training</b>							
Define targeted industry and/or STEM skills and career paths, and communicate to the community							
Increase participation in targeted industry and/or STEM careers and education							
Support targeted industry and STEM education and training							
Expand applied learning and career exploration programs in targeted industry and/or STEM subjects							
<b>Workforce System</b>							
Educate individuals and employers about the system							
Coordinate, standardize, and leverage programs and services							
Improve quality of referrals							
Ensure a professional atmosphere at workforce facilities							
<b>Funding</b>							
Increase non-WIA funding							
Integrate workforce-related funding and partnerships							
Increase employer investment in workforce training							
Educate legislators							

## ISSUES, RISKS, and MITIGATION

ISSUE / RISK	MITIGATION
Continued budget cuts	Increase and leverage resources, use Lean principles to eliminate non-value added activities, and maximize use of technology
Alignment of workforce partners is time consuming and constrained by institutional policies and funding	Identify areas of alignment and advocate for essential changes where necessary
Education and training programs don't change quickly enough to meet employer needs	Educate legislators and others to remove barriers that inhibit flexibility and nimbleness
Employers don't participate in programs	Clearly communicate value proposition
Overemphasis on STEM	Communicate definition of STEM as well as the non-STEM skills necessary for employment success
Unable to correctly forecast future training and employment needs	Continue to listen to employers to validate available data
Newly-trained workforce leaves the area	Leverage economic development partners to retain and recruit businesses with jobs that encourage retention of local job seekers and recruitment of new workers
Pursuit of new funding sources redirects SWWDC from its mission/goals	Retain focus; maintain a system of checks and balances
Time required to pursue new funding sources	Leverage partner resources and create a duplicable process for pursuing funding sources

# About Southwest Washington

## Current Economic State

The Great Recession of 2008 caused deeper job loss in Southwest Washington than in the Portland metro area, the state, and the nation. While economic indicators show improvement, challenges remain.

Unemployment rates in Cowlitz, Clark and Wahkiakum counties remain higher than state and regional averages at 10.6%, 9.7% and 11.0% respectively, while educational attainment and overall recovery are lagging.

## Employer Need

Local employers report a lack of professionalism skills in the workforce. Generally, professionalism skills involve: communications, customer service, team work, problem solving, work place etiquette, and work ethic (e.g., accountability, task completion, reliability, cooperation, communication, honesty, effort, timeliness, determination).

Employers see many applicants who cannot demonstrate required technical skills. These gaps are most pronounced in the manufacturing, technology, logistics, and distribution sectors. The majority of these positions require fundamental knowledge in at least one area of STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math).

Regional jobs requiring STEM skills are expected to grow at twice the rate of non-STEM jobs (Table 2). Though STEM is often associated with occupations requiring a four-year degree, in reality, more than 46% of STEM-related jobs in the Portland/Vancouver area require an associate's degree or less.

## Target Industries

The SWWDC's target industries (Table 3) are the focus of regional economic development partners and are predominantly high growth sectors with high wage occupations (Table 4). Many of these targeted industries employ STEM professionals, such as healthcare workers, machinists, technicians, metal and plastic workers, drafters, engineers, financial analysts, and logisticians.

TABLE 1  
Job Loss and Recovery

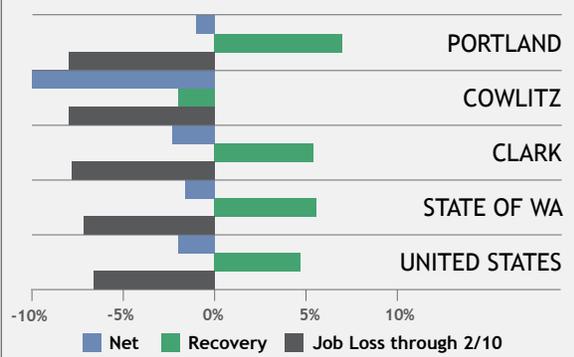


TABLE 2  
% Growth 2012 - 2017

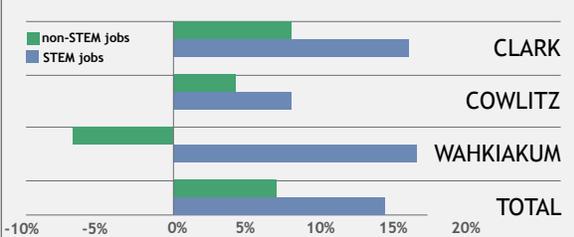


TABLE 3  
SWWDC Industry Cluster Focuses

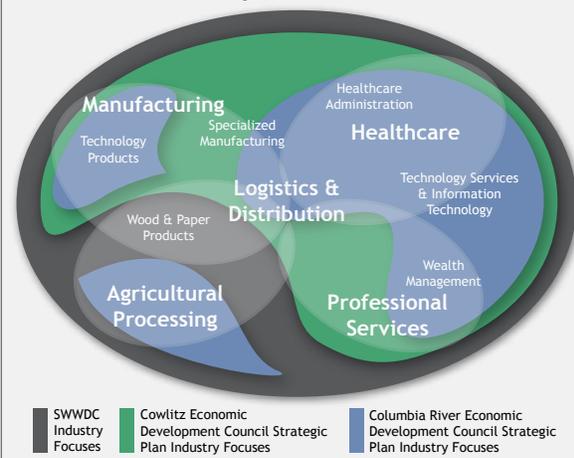
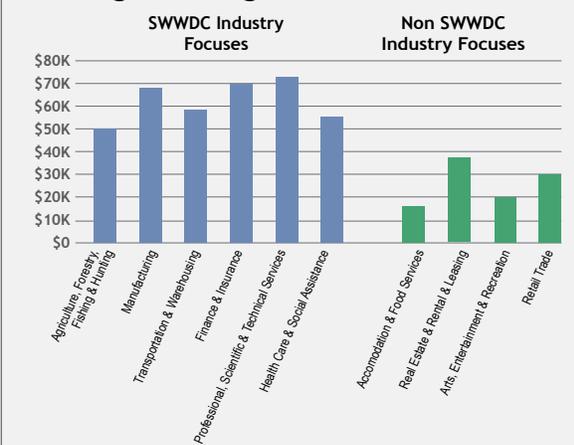


TABLE 4  
Average Earnings Per Job





## Our Strategic Planning Process

More than 125 people participated in interviews, focus groups, and a survey to provide thoughtful input into the development of SWWDC’s 2014-2017 Strategic Plan. Countless others provide insights and feedback to the SWWDC on a regular basis.



This year the SWWDC used a lean philosophy to develop its strategic plan. This process focused on defining strategic goals, along with metrics to measure progress and success, and identified the strengths and challenges that support and/or inhibit goal achievement. We conducted a root cause analysis to identify the root causes of the challenges and then identified the actions and timeline to achieve our goals.

As shown in the previous section, the outcome is a focused and concise plan known as an “A3,” that isolates key actions needed to address the challenges in achieving its goals. The SWWDC will work with its partners to develop, implement, and evaluate specific activities and make necessary adjustments as needed.

### Strategic Plan Focus Group Attendees & Interviewees

Individuals from the following organizations participated in interviews and focus groups. Many others contributed anonymously through the Strategic Plan survey. Together, we have created this Strategic Plan to lead our efforts for the next 3.5 years.

- American Paper Converting
- Battle Ground Public Schools
- Castle Rock School District
- Charter College
- City of Castle Rock
- City of Kelso
- City of Longview
- City of Vancouver
- Clark College
- Clark County Commissioner
- Clark County Skills Center
- Columbia River Economic Development Council
- Community Home Health & Hospice
- Cornell Pump
- Cowlitz County Commissioner
- Cowlitz Economic Development Council
- Cowlitz Wahkiakum Central Labor Council
- C-TRAN
- Dalke Consulting
- Department of Social and Health Services
- Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
- E.D. Hovee & Associates
- Educational Service District 112
- Employers Overload
- Employment Security Department
- Evergreen Public Schools
- Express Employment Professionals
- Fitcher-Henry Group
- Gaffney Counseling & Consulting
- Georgia Pacific
- Greater Portland, Inc.
- Greater Vancouver Chamber of Commerce
- Impact Washington
- Interstate Wood Products
- iQ Credit Union
- Kaiser Permanente
- KapStone
- Karcher North America
- Kelso Longview Chamber of Commerce
- Kelso School District
- Linear Technology Corporation
- Lower Columbia CAP
- Lower Columbia College
- Partners in Careers
- PeaceHealth
- Port of Camas-Washougal
- Port of Kalama
- Port of Vancouver
- Clark County Labor Roundtable
- Ryonet
- SEH America
- Share Vancouver
- Swanson Bark & Wood Products
- Tacoma Goodwill
- Thompson Metal Fab, Inc.
- Three Rivers Mall
- United Natural Foods, Inc.
- Vancouver Public Schools
- Wahkiakum Community Network
- Wahkiakum County Commissioner
- Washington Federation of State Employees
- Washington State University Vancouver
- Washougal School District
- Weyerhaeuser
- WorkSource



# SOUTHWEST WASHINGTON WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL



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**Philip Parker**  
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**Angela Simmons**  
iQ Credit Union

**Ted Sprague**  
CEDC

**Cindy Williams**  
Division of Vocation Rehabilitation

**Lydia Work**  
American Paper Converters

## About Southwest Washington Workforce Development Council

The Southwest Washington Workforce Development Council (SWWDC) provides leadership and resources to develop a trained and productive workforce in Clark, Cowlitz and Wahkiakum counties.

Since its establishment in 2002, the SWWDC has worked with business, economic development, education, government, and community-based organizations to develop and deliver flexible and results-oriented services for employers and residents.

It focuses on building and maintaining strong relationships among these partners to leverage resources and expertise and to develop an agile and future-focused workforce system to meet employers' and individuals' needs.

This foundation enables the SWWDC and its workforce partners to respond to emerging growth areas and address the growing gap between those engaged and disengaged in the workforce.