

# **KEY RECOMMENDATIONS WORKFORCE ASSESSMENT STATE OF WYOMING**

Prepared for:

**State of Wyoming Department of Workforce Services  
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Prepared by:

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# BACKGROUND

This report contains detailed, pragmatic and comprehensive recommendations for action to remediate the challenges observed by WDG/YA in its workforce assessment prepared for the State of Wyoming. The workforce assessment was the product of a contract between the Wadley-Donovan Group (WDG) and the Wyoming Department of Workforce Services (WDWS). Younger Associates (YA) served as a project partner with WDG. The assessment provided a summary of the workforce conditions in Wyoming including skill and labor availability gaps, business analysis and a workforce assessment. Based on the overall assets and challenges observed in the assessment, this document has been created to form a foundation for future actions that can be taken by WDWS and the private sector. It contains an overview of the key assets and challenges of the state and regions and detailed recommendations based on our findings.

The workforce assessment uses data obtained through two surveys of workforce-related issues among employers and households in the state; focus groups with representative employers, educators, elected officials, and community leaders; and a review of key statistical and other secondary-source information. The employer survey gathered information from employers in each region on the availability and quality of labor in the state, the quality of the state's training resources, and future labor demand. The household survey results allowed us to quantify and profile the state's regular labor force and hidden workforce reserves. The results of the survey have not only been provided in this report but are also available through a unique online data delivery system. This web-based query system allows a user to retrieve customized survey data based on geography and type of data required. This type of centralized website is a very powerful tool and is particularly helpful when the study region is as broad as Wyoming.

Data in this report and in the online data delivery system is provided for the state and each of the six WDWS regions, which together, include all of the state's 21 counties. The counties in each of the regions are as follows:

<b>Region</b>	<b>Counties</b>
Northwestern	Big Horn, Fremont, Hot Springs
Northcentral	Johnson, Sheridan
Northeastern	Campbell, Crook, Weston
Southeastern	Albany, Goshen, Laramie, Niobrara, Platte
Southcentral	Carbon, Converse, Natrona
Western	Lincoln, Sublette, Sweetwater, Teton, Uinta

The findings presented herein are those of YA/WDG only. We have examined the region from a corporate perspective and our own knowledge of labor markets across the U.S. gained from our corporate location and economic development practices.

The Wadley-Donovan Group is the nation's oldest independent management consulting firm that specializes in location consulting and economic development. Its corporate clients include many of the world's leading companies including over one-third of the Fortune 500 companies. WDG's economic development practice provides expertise to workforce and economic development agencies and utilities in sales and marketing, strategic planning, database development, overall product development, and assessment. Clients have included Eastern Idaho; Albuquerque; Tampa; Tulsa; Rochester, NY; Buffalo, NY; Boise, El Paso, Great Falls, Phoenix, Asheville, NC; Conway, AR;

Richmond, VA; Tallahassee; Tunica County, MS; Collier County, FL; Charlotte County, FL; Lee County, FL; Jackson, TN; and the states of Delaware, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, New Jersey, Oregon, Wyoming, Wisconsin, and Maryland.

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## Key Recommendations

1. **Strengthen current and form new, strong, regional workforce partnerships to coordinate regional labor- and workforce-related efforts, including transfer of best practices, goal setting, networking assistance, state legislative lobbying efforts, and funding.** These partnerships would consist of employers, the Department of Workforce Services, the Wyoming Business Council, community colleges, the University of Wyoming, and other key stakeholders. Goals of the partnership would include: enhancing the use of the region's educational resources by employers for employee training and recruiting; alerting employers to the full breadth of educational resources available in the region; providing educators with information on the comprehensive training needs of area employers; identifying industry and technology skill standards; lobbying for required training programs; and generally promoting improvements in the workforce-development systems region-wide. Recommended issues for the partnership to address encompass:
  - Improve recruiting relationships between industry and educational institutions.
  - Develop a system between regional partnerships in order to better identify regional job shortages and surpluses and resulting recruitment opportunities within the state.
  - Demonstrate the need for educational institutions to better prepare students for the demands of the workplace.
  - Develop co-op, intern, or apprentice programs as a role in workforce training.
  - Identify educational service and employer needs and ways to synchronize those needs through effective training/retraining.
  - Develop better communication between area educators and employers.
  - Demonstrate the need for a dedicated outreach individual(s) from the community colleges and university to serve as the point(s)-of-contact with area industry. The point(s)-of-contact would regularly or frequently visit or call on area employers to see where training programs can be offered or developed.
  - Demonstrate the need for high school and post-secondary training programs to pace the needs of area employers.
  - Explore the potential for a much stronger role in workforce development by the private sector through the following efforts or programs:
    - developing systems to bridge the gap between underemployed and not-employed residents who want to work and employers who are facing labor shortages
    - identifying best practices for encouraging/developing internal career advancement among employees
    - identifying and creating enhanced job opportunities for younger workers
    - lobbying for funding for company expansion opportunities
    - implementing salary and wage studies to make sure the private sector can compete with other areas that it hopes to draw workers from
    - work/study
    - positive peer development

- mentoring, shadowing programs
- career planning
- teaming with educators and community groups
- monitoring the effectiveness of educational programs and workforce development efforts
- providing tests for students that evaluate their preparedness for the needs of business
- conveyance of opportunities and skill/training requirements to young people and their parents
- guaranteed jobs for educational performance programs
- special scholarships for sponsored youth, apprenticeships
- in-house training programs (job skills, life skills, career development)

2. **Develop systems to bridge the gap between underemployed and not employed residents who want to work and employers who are facing labor shortages.** The primary goal of these systems would be to connect employers with workers who are looking for new or enhanced employment opportunities even if some workers are from different regions. Special emphasis needs to be placed on connecting with underemployed workers. This pool of workers is younger and better educated than the overall population and can be a valuable resource for new and expanding employers. A number of steps can be taken, primarily by the private sector, to make these connections.

- Employers should be encouraged to promote from within when they need to fill positions.
- Training opportunities must be provided to employees who show an interest in higher level positions for which there is a demand by employers. Employers need to communicate their workforce needs to existing employees and arrange training when there is a match.
- Employers must create opportunities for younger workers that allow them to see future advancement possibilities within the organization. This will encourage
- Existing job bank databases need to be broadly publicized (i.e., Wyomingatwork.com and Wyoming's Job Bank) to employers.

3. **Spearhead a program to encourage employers to evaluate their human resource practices. For instance, flextime was cited as very important to workers in their decision to remain employed. Employers should identify and implement other workplace characteristics that could impact their ability to recruit and retain workers.**

4. **Make an effort to keep more recent college graduates in the state.**

5. **Educate employers and residents on the value of local Workforce Centers.** Less than one-half of employers utilize local Workforce Centers, and only 23% of not-employed residents use these services. These could be a good source of employees with skills needed by employers. It is important that the appearance and quality of service at the centers is comparable to what would be received at private employment service operations.

- The Department of Workforce Services has an excellent website – *wyomingatwork.com* – that provides comprehensive recruiting and workforce development information for employers and job seekers. It will be critical to educate more residents and employers on the value of the website.
  - A public relations campaign is needed to educate residents and employers on the role of local Workforce Centers. Prior to significant outreach to residents, it will be important to make sure that all employers, especially smaller ones, are using the Workforce Centers and the *wyomingatwork.com* website as their first avenues for recruitment so that jobs are available when residents look for them.
  - It is important to have visual as well as written material on job duties and skills required for various occupations for job seekers to review.
6. **Develop training programs to address the unique workforce development needs of the various age groups in the not-employed-but-interested component of the workforce.**
    - Younger workers under the age of 25 are just beginning their careers and may need more guidance on job and career options and training opportunities.
    - Middle-aged and older workers may have explored various opportunities and have a better understanding of what they would like to pursue.
  7. **Administer salary and wage studies to ensure that the private sector can compete with other areas from which they hope to draw workers.** Wyoming earnings are below national figures and vary from region to region. Wyoming employers need to adjust salaries to remain competitive with other areas.
  8. **Create and distribute materials that counter any negative images of Wyoming. The quality of life in Wyoming is not seen as a particularly strong asset by surveyed employers.** Efforts should be made to expand upon the current recruiting program in Michigan by three communities in the state. Initiate national recruiting campaigns to attract workers to Wyoming job opportunities. Activities must be developed and promoted that attract young people (single and married) to Wyoming. Assistance from residential realtors and public school officials in developing a quality-of-life-focused program would be very helpful. An effective job assistance program among area employers would be helpful in placing the spouses of relocating personnel. An increase in housing stock is needed.
  9. **Make an effort to build affordable housing.** If workers from outside the state wish to relocate to Wyoming, they may be discouraged from doing so due to limited housing options. Such efforts are underway in several sectors of the state.
  10. **Encourage small Wyoming companies to provide more challenging opportunities in order to keep employees from moving to larger companies that can offer better opportunities and higher wages.**
  11. **Encourage entrepreneurial development among the underemployed.** This is recommended as a means to keep the underemployed in the state and as an alternative retention program to career-laddering efforts among employers.