

**NEBRASKA WORKFORCE  
LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT**

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Prepared for Accelerate Nebraska by

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## FOREWORD

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Nebraska Workforce Landscape Assessment study was undertaken to highlight workforce program perception and efforts in Nebraska. Zeece and Associates, LLC noted many individuals and organizations engaged in a wide variety of exceptional workforce development activities in nearly every Nebraska community. They work in government, education, private foundations, nonprofit organizations, and in successful businesses throughout the state. Their work positively alters the lives of people in Nebraska. Though it was not possible in this engagement to highlight many of those efforts, they deserve equal recognition and the thanks of fellow Nebraskans for rolling up their sleeves and making a difference. In addition, Zeece and Associates, LLC would like to thank the study participants and people who contributed to this work. A list of contributors is included in the acknowledgements section of this report.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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In October of 2017, Zeece and Associates, LLC (ZA) began the Nebraska Workforce Landscape Assessment (NWL) study for Accelerate Nebraska. ZA reviewed information and study data from a breadth of programs and sources. Over the course of ten weeks, ZA interviewed a cross-functional group of stakeholders throughout the state. The NWL study was conducted with the intention of helping to shape collective understanding of an inherently complex and broad topic by illuminating diverse stakeholder perceptions and program efforts in Nebraska. Given the voluminous nature of the subject matter and the duration of the engagement, ZA opted to highlight the landscape of workforce challenges and efforts in Nebraska, with a primary focus on scalable-model public-private partnerships and statewide programs that partner with local efforts. Local efforts and functions are described primarily in terms of how they operate and interact with larger initiatives and needs. Thus, the NWL study is intended to serve as a potential building block in the ongoing effort to identify, understand, and further develop effective program relationships.

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## ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

Nebraska is a state with unique economic and workforce strengths and challenges. The Cornhusker State economy has shown consistent growth and has demonstrated properties of resiliency during times of national recession. Previous studies have well documented economic and workforce conditions in Nebraska. ZA has provided a brief contextual overview of some of those recent study findings.

### **Most People are Working**

Economic conditions are important to the understanding the Nebraska. They set the parameters of workforce challenges in the state. Nebraska has approximately 1.9 million residents and a consistently low unemployment rate of 2.4% (Nebraska Department of Labor, 2017), coupled with a high labor participation rate, currently at approximately (Nebraska Department of Labor, 2017) 69%. This means that a comparatively high number of the people available to work are working.

## **Skilled Labor Shortages Exist**

General workforce shortages exist due to very low unemployment, in addition to shortages of highly skilled STEM positions and what the SRI report referred to as “middle-skill” employment shortages. (Dr. Roland Stephen, 2016)

## **Underemployment is an Issue**

Skilled labor shortages are a contributing factor to underemployment. As the Accelerate Nebraska-FSG Report noted: “The majority of Nebraska’s jobs are low and middle wage and four-year degrees are not always aligned with in-state job opportunities.” (FSG, 2016)

## **A High School Diploma Is No Longer Enough**

- According to the FSG report, more than two thirds of jobs will require a high school diploma. (FSG, 2016)

## **Misalignment Exists**

Nebraska is minting postsecondary graduates that cannot find work commensurate with skill level in the state. “Nebraska is producing more postsecondary graduates than can be employed at their appropriate skill level in the state; however, some community colleges are making efforts to align with middle-skill jobs”. Graduates with bachelor’s degrees are often underemployed or leave the state ...” (FSG, 2016)

## **Nebraska Has a Skills Gap**

Since 2014 the Nebraska State Chamber of Commerce annual survey of employers has consistently identified availability of skilled workers as a top concern (Nebraska State Chamber of Commerce, 2017). Nebraska’s low unemployment rate also serves as a limiting factor upon growth for companies and for state GDP. Nebraska’s approach to workforce challenges is inevitably intertwined with its effort to sustain and improve the economic growth of the state. Workforce challenges identified in the “Nebraska’s Next Economy” report completed by SRI in 2016 include:

- A shortage of IT and other STEM graduates.
- An acute shortage of workers with qualifications in the building trades.
- A need to integrate underserved and non-English speaking populations.

- Difficulty in retaining university graduates.
- A significant skills gap between job seekers and the available labor pool in high growth positions.
- Constraints of available worker housing stock in rural Nebraska communities.

(Dr. Roland Stephen, 2016)

### **Soft Skill Challenges Exist**

Though soft skills challenges may not be as recognized, companies are reporting issues. “Soft skills are lacking in a percentage of new workforce entrants. According to a national survey, 87% of college graduates feel prepared for work, but only 50% of hiring managers agree.” (Dishman, 2016)

Despite U.S. high school graduation rates reaching all-time highs, many employers are finding that recent graduates are unprepared to succeed in the workforce because they lack foundational “soft skills. “While technical skills are often industry-specific, soft skills such as professional communication, critical thinking, collaboration, and time management are valued by employers across sectors. The importance of these skills is widely acknowledged; yet, they are not taught with consistency or given prioritization.” (U.S. Chamber of Commerce, 2017)

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## SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES

Workforce, educational, and economic challenges in Nebraska are indeed macro-level issues. However, variegation of conditions within local economies requires that workforce solutions be precise and contextually relevant. This study is intended to provide insight into perceptions of current workforce efforts, and to serve as a foundation for aligning programs at the local, regional, and state levels. ZA took a participant-based approach to examining industry challenges and existing efforts, and to provide a baseline of perceptions for future efforts. This study is also intended to identify potential linkages to meaningful outcomes that may assist Nebraska in defining strategy and evaluating progress toward workforce goals.

This study is divided into three primary areas of focus:

- A sample of existing Nebraska public and private workforce efforts;
- An analysis of qualitative data, gathered and organized from stakeholder interviews;
- Summary analysis consisting of observations and recommendations.

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## METHODOLOGY

Zeece and Associates, LLC undertook an interview process that utilized key stakeholder observations. To this end, ZA observed that qualitative methods that recognize the native understanding and capacities of key stakeholders are most likely to be successful. In addition to research efforts, Zeece and Associates, LLC conducted key stakeholder interviews from a cross-functional group of 47 participants throughout the state. ZA utilized an interview format that subscribed to a naturalistic approach in capturing and evaluating input. Qualitative data that emerged from engaged stakeholders allowed ZA the opportunity to identify issues and themes in a relatively short period of time. Specific knowledge of the complexity of localized issues inherently dilutes at every level of progression away from participants directly engaged in workforce efforts. Thus, industry, education, government, and community stakeholders whom are truly immersed in initiatives possess valuable intrinsic knowledge of workforce challenges and solutions. Collectively, they offer the best means to quickly identify existing gaps, challenges, and solutions. In short, ZA methodology in this part of the engagement represents faith in the knowledge and commitment of key business leaders, educators, and government professionals who are deeply engaged in workforce issues in Nebraska. In developing this report, ZA utilized the following information-gathering processes:

- Reviewed research reports, program documents, and other background materials;
- Conducted one-on-one interviews with key stakeholders; and
- Facilitated group meetings.

This information was then aggregated into findings included in the Existing Programs and Stakeholder Perceptions sections of the report.

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## EXISTING PROGRAMS

Many workforce efforts are ongoing in Nebraska and in the nation. Many local efforts serve specific customers and needs. The breadth of programming is significant. For example, public, private, government, and education workforce programs exist at the local, regional, state, and national levels. In Nebraska, they cover a broad range of needs, including but not limited to: veteran employment, training and employment services for people with disabilities, employment services for people exiting the corrections system, outreach and STEM learning pathway experiences for underserved communities, manufacturing career pathways promotion and outreach, trade skills development, high school and community college dual credit, earn-and-learn apprenticeship opportunities, community college and university articulation agreements, career academies, education and industry collaboration grants, and workforce housing.

Zeece and Associates, LLC reviewed existing workforce development initiatives in Nebraska at the federal, state, and local levels. This report highlights a sample of existing program mitigations at each level in Nebraska. A summary of a selection of programs follows. As previously stated, there are many other exceptional workforce efforts in nearly every community in Nebraska. The number of programs and length of this engagement precluded ZA from examining all of them. It is also important to realize that this survey represents a static snapshot of selected program effort in Nebraska during the fourth quarter of 2017. That picture will inevitably continue to change. Thus, it is recommended that research efforts follow up and expand upon this work at regular intervals.

The following list provides a sample variety of workforce and community development efforts. Though descriptions are included from a variety of sources, including directly from public website data, the information below should not be considered complete in term of describing any single organization's goals, priorities, programs, or processes. The intent of this list is to promote awareness of a sample of all resources that contribute to workforce development

efforts. ZA reviewed and has included a description of organizational and program efforts in the categories that follow.

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## NATIONAL PROGRAMS, PUBLIC AND PRIVATE

National programs connect Nebraska to successful curriculums and resources in other places.

### **U.S. Chamber of Commerce Talent Pipeline Management program (TPM).**

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce Talent Pipeline Management program constitutes a demand-driven approach to close the skills gap. “TPM utilizes supply chain management principles. Emphasis is placed on employers playing an active role as the customer in education and workforce efforts. TPM has been evaluated for use in several communities in Nebraska. Many successful case studies from the program demonstrate the ability of employer efforts to help education and workforce programs align with their needs.” (U.S. Chamber of Commerce, 2017)

### **The Manufacturing Institute, Dream it. Do it.**

The Dream It, Do It initiative is an advanced manufacturing career pathway outreach program designed to raise awareness of advanced manufacturing and STEM careers. Dream it Do it, programs help young people understand advanced, high-tech manufacturing and the value of those positions. “Students learn that advanced manufacturing positions provide contributions to innovation, productivity, and economic growth. The program promotes a modern image of manufacturing aimed at students, parents, educators, and other influencers that reinforces the high-tech, clean, high-skilled nature of manufacturing and related businesses. In Nebraska, the Nebraska Advanced Manufacturing Coalition (NAMC) directly supports the program, helping students, parents, and educators understand the skills and education pathways to well-paying manufacturing careers. Efforts also include support of the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) -endorsed Manufacturing Skills Certification System, and creation of a youth ambassador manufacturing careers Dream Team.” (Nebraska Advanced Manufacturing Coalition, 2017)

## **SkillsUSA**

Formerly known as the Vocational Industrial Clubs of America, SkillsUSA is a national nonprofit organization. The program partners with students, teachers, and industry. SkillsUSA serves students in age groups ranging from middle school to college. The program “offers development of skills for technical, skilled and service careers. SkillsUSA also focuses on educational opportunities and events for students. ““The purpose of the SkillsUSA Nebraska Fund is to support the SkillsUSA chapter, along with Industrial and Technology teachers and instructors.” (SkillsUSA Nebraska, 2017)

## **National Institute of Metal Worker Skills (NIMS)**

NIMS creates skill standards for the metalworking industry. They have developed training materials and entire apprenticeship programs that are registered with the U.S. Department of Labor and are made available to participating industry members. NIMS also provides packaged assessments and program materials to employers implementing its apprenticeship programs. The programs offer national accreditation as education and industry-based training. NIMS also offers professional training for trainers and instructors, and supports the development of apprenticeship programs nationwide. In Nebraska, MetalQuest in Hebron has examined NIMS apprenticeship materials in consultation with public schools, community colleges, and the Nebraska Department of Labor. (National Institute for Metalworking Skills, Inc., 2017)

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## STATE AND FEDERAL GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

State and federal programs provide the backbone of government and educational system support for workforce development efforts.

### **Federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)**

WIOA is the result of federal legislation that was intended to bring together a variety of federally-funded labor, workforce, and human service efforts that each included elements of skills training. Programs and services under the WIOA umbrella provide job seekers with access to employment, education, training, and support services to succeed in the labor market and match employers with skilled workers. In Nebraska, WIOA programs are primarily administered by the Nebraska Department of Labor, Vocational Rehabilitation [(VR), a division of the Nebraska Department of Education], and the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired

(CBVI). WIOA also authorizes other programs administered in Nebraska by the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services. Categories of WIOA programming include:

- WIOA Nebraska Department of Labor, VR, and CBVI Programs;
- Employment and training services for adults, dislocated workers, and youth;
- Wagner-Peyser employment services - Nebraska Department of Labor “One Stop” Service Centers;
- Adult education and literacy programs;
- Vocational Rehabilitation programs that assist individuals with disabilities in obtaining employment administered by the Nebraska Department of Education;
- Job Corps;
- YouthBuild; and
- Indian and Native Americans, and Migrant Seasonal Farmworker programs.

(United States Department of Labor, 2017)

### **Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)**

Vocational Rehabilitation assists people with disabilities in efforts to prepare for, find, and keep jobs. VR also helps businesses recruit, train, and retain employees with disabilities. VR in Nebraska is known for actively engaging clients in innovative ways. Nebraska has won awards for its use of social media as a two-way communication system with clients that are sometimes untraceable and unreachable by traditional means. VR focuses on both the job seeker and companies in what it refers to as a dual-client approach. VR helps customers with injuries or impairment prepare and compete for jobs. It also assists business owners and employers through full-service business consultation in a variety of business and disability-related areas. According to the Nebraska VR website, Nebraska VR provided employment services to nearly 7,000 Nebraska residents with disabilities in 2016, with 2,026 successfully employed. VR also maintains both the Assistive Technology Partnership (ATP) and the Client Assistance Program (CAP). ATP connects people with assistive technology devices and services, and CAP is a service that assists clients in meeting individual needs. (Nebraska Vocational Rehabilitation, 2017)

### **Nebraska Department of Labor - Registered Apprenticeships**

Registered apprenticeships are administrated by the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) and the Nebraska Department of Labor (NDOL). The registered apprenticeship is a job. Individual participants are employees of a company that has designed and registered the apprenticeship with the USDOL and NDOL. Completion of the apprenticeship generates a credential for the

employee. For employers, apprenticeships are designed to provide a stable and predictable pipeline of workers. Over the last two years, the Nebraska Manufacturing Advisory Council (NeMAC) led a cross-functional workforce team with representatives from the Nebraska Department of Economic Development (NDED), the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE), and NDOL. The results led to the findings that young Nebraskans (as young as sixteen years of age) are eligible to participate in most registered apprenticeship programs.

Registered apprenticeships have been utilized in other states and in industries, such as the utility industry, for many decades. Registered apprenticeships are also prevalent in other traditional industries, such as construction. Apprenticeships have long been utilized by companies in partnership with craft guilds and trade unions. Registered apprenticeships are also fully compatible with non-unionized workforces and do not require collective bargaining participation.

Apprenticeships can also be designed to provide high school and community college credit. New models are beginning to appear in the United States to address modern workforce issues. Careerwise Colorado, for example, is a nonprofit youth apprenticeship program modeled after the Swiss approach. (Careerwise Colorado, 2017) Careerwise is facilitated by a nonprofit intermediary and utilizes industry partnerships to allow businesses to help define experiential needs and outcomes.

In Nebraska, registered apprenticeship programs have been developed and certified by Ariens Company in Auburn, Nebraska to help develop a pipeline and mitigate a shortage of skilled workers. Apprenticeship programs are also being evaluated in conjunction with a joint effort between the Grand Island Chamber of Commerce, the Grand Island Manufacturing Group, the Career Pathways Institute, and Central Community College. The Hastings Area Manufacturing Association (HAMA), the Hastings Economic Development Corporation (HEDC), Central Community College, and Hastings Public Schools are also evaluating registered apprenticeship programs. (Nebraska Department of Labor, 2017)

### **Nebraska Department of Economic Development (NDED) - Developing Youth Talent Initiative (DYTI)**

“Nebraska Developing Youth Talent Initiative (NDYTI) creates collaboration between Nebraska businesses and public schools. The NDYTI exposes students to careers in Manufacturing and Information Technology (IT) to support a youth talent pipeline for these industries in the state. Applicants for NDYTI grants must partner with local schools to design and implement a program

to engage 7th and 8th grade students in hands-on career exploration and workplace learning opportunities.” (Nebraska Department of Economic Development, 2017)

NDYTI is one of three statewide programs that bridges the gap between education, industry, and government. The program has also shown positive results. In the words of Governor Ricketts: “DYTI metrics from previous grant recipients, such as Flowserve in Hastings, indicate a significant increase in student interest and participation in these industries. For example, Hastings High School has a 16 percent increased enrollment in skills and technical sciences classes from incoming freshmen who participated in a full year of DYTI programs in the eighth grade.” (Moseley, 2017)

### **Nebraska Department of Education - reVISION**

“reVISION is a strategic approach for Nebraska schools to analyze their current career education system and make adjustments to more effectively prepare students for college and careers.” (Nebraska Department of Education, 2017)

The Nebraska Department of Education reVISION program facilitates the transformation of workforce programming in Nebraska schools. reVISION brings together industry, community, government, and education. reVISION is “ a process that provides Nebraska schools with the opportunity to analyze and transform their current career education systems in order to improve their ability to educate a qualified workforce that meets industry needs within an ever-changing economy. Working in collaboration with postsecondary education and regional workforce/economic development leaders, the reVISION process links career educators, school administrators, school counselors, and industry professionals. Under the leadership of the Nebraska Department of Education and in partnership with the Nebraska Departments of Labor and Economic Development, the reVISION process is a strategic approach for schools to analyze their current career education system and make plans, as needed, for adjustment.”(Nebraska Department of Education, 2017)

The purpose of reVISION is to:

- Provide a mechanism for innovative and collaborative local workforce development programs designed by schools, communities, and employers;
- Align and support career and technical education systems with Nebraska’s economic initiatives;
- Develop Nebraska’s talent pipelines for economic growth and workforce development;

- Strengthen high school CTE programs to align with Nebraska postsecondary education entrance expectations; and
- Create a common language between local employers and education.

(Nebraska Department of Education, 2017)

One school that utilized reVISION is Boone Central High School in Albion. Boone Central students worked with Sentinel Building Systems to design a gauge for use in the manufacturing process using a 3-D printer and other advanced instruments from the high school’s skilled and technical sciences program. The students tested the prototype and the company now plans to use it in its operations. (Omaha World Herald, 2017)

reVISION provides an initial grant to facilitate planning and development of programming at the local level. This allows for local flexibility and ability to better match programming with local opportunities and needs.

### **Nebraska P-16**

“The Nebraska P-16 Initiative is a coalition of 26 Nebraska organizations in education, business, and government that strives to improve success rates for Nebraska students at every level, preschool through college. One of 30 states that now have P-16 programs, Nebraska concentrates on:

- Helping all students reach their full potential;
- Improving coordination among the various sectors of education;
- Increasing two- and four-year college-going rates;
- Helping students develop the core skills needed to succeed in careers; and
- Improving Nebraska's economic competitiveness by helping keep more well-educated people in the state. “ (University of Nebraska, 2017)

The priorities of Nebraska P-16 are to:

- Help increase Nebraska’s two-year and four-year college-going and graduation rates;
- Help increase the education level of Nebraska’s citizenry and workforce, thereby enhancing the quality of life and economic competitiveness of our state;
- Help keep well-educated young people in Nebraska; and
- Provide all students with the science, technology, and math skills needed to succeed in postsecondary education or the 21st-century workforce; and increase the number

and diversity of individuals who pursue careers as educators and professional in the areas of science, technology, engineering, and math. (University of Nebraska, 2017)

## **Community College Regional Programs**

### Regional Training Centers

Community colleges in Nebraska offer regional training centers to assist individuals and employers. Central Community College has training centers in Holdrege, Kearney and Lexington, in addition to its Grand Island and Hastings Campuses. Southeast Community College has training centers in Nebraska City and Hebron, in addition to the Lincoln and Milford campuses. Western Community College and Mid-Plains Community College also offer outreach. Employers commend these outreach services in rural areas, though it is sometimes difficult for colleges to gain the critical mass of trainees needed to hold classes in such areas. (Southeast Community College, 2017)

### Regional Career Academies - Southeast Nebraska Career Academy Partnership (SENCAP)

“Southeast Community College has formed partnerships with 43 school districts in Educational Service Units 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 within southeastern Nebraska. SENCAP offers high school students the ability to enroll in several different career academies, including Agriculture, Business, Construction, Criminal Justice, Education, Health Sciences, Information Technology, Manufacturing in Energy, and Welding. To date, some offerings are dependent upon school location.

SENCAP allows high school juniors and seniors to take college courses and partake in hands-on experiences, such as job shadowing and field trips. Students also practice resume building and develop communication skills by participating in mock interviews.

SENCAP offers school districts that are not located in population centers the ability to connect students to a career academy and dual credit opportunities”. (Southeast Community College, 2017)

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## NEBRASKA PUBLIC GRANT PROGRAMS

The public grant programs listed below fund industry initiatives in areas of training and workforce development.

## **Nebraska Department of Economic Development - Customized Job Training Grant (CJT)**

The Customized Job Training Grant is a flexible direct-to-employer grant that is most often utilized for business recruitment and expansion training needs. The program offers a training amount per employee that the company can use for training costs. From the NDED website: “The Customized Job Training (CJT) grant program provides assistance for employee training to businesses that create or retain quality jobs in Nebraska.

CJT prioritizes training projects that:

- Result in increased investment and employment in Nebraska;
- Provide a significant incentive for new jobs or investments to be undertaken in Nebraska rather than a different state; and
- Involve retraining of existing workers to upgrade their skills as a result of investment in new capital”

(Nebraska Department of Economic Development, 2017)

## **Nebraska Department of Economic Development – Intern Nebraska Grant Program**

The Intern Nebraska program provides grant reimbursement for qualified and approved internship experiences in Nebraska. From the NDED website: “The Intern Nebraska Grant Program (InternNE) provides financial assistance to businesses who create new internships in Nebraska. Business and organizations that may receive support from an InternNE grant must:

- Be located in Nebraska; and
- Be a for-profit company or a nonprofit. Government entities, as well as both public and private colleges and universities, are not eligible.

Internships receiving support from InternNE must employ a student who is:

- In the eleventh or twelfth grade in a public or private high school;
- Enrolled full-time in a college, university, or other institution of higher education; or
- A recent graduate from a college, university, or other institution of higher education”.

(Nebraska Department of Economic Development, 2017)

The InternNE program seeks to build relationships between qualified interns and employers that will help retain talent in Nebraska.

## **Nebraska Department of Labor - Worker Training Board Grants**

Nebraska Department of Labor Worker Training Board Grants provide opportunities for a wide variety of businesses to help employees build critical skills. According to the NDOL website, the “training programs proposed for funding by the program:

- Promote the retention of Nebraska workers;
- Promote the expansion of Nebraska businesses and increase their competitive edge;
- Train new employees of expanding Nebraska businesses;
- Develop program participants’ marketable skills and competencies, increase their earning power and result in secure jobs for those who successfully complete training;
- Assist in attracting skilled workers to Nebraska; and
- Encourage business investment in private job training programs designed to train, retrain, or upgrade work skills of existing Nebraska workers.”

(Nebraska Department of Labor, 2017)

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## STATEWIDE COUNCILS

Nebraska is fortunate to have active industrial councils and trade groups that promote and expand workforce development initiatives in respective industries.

### **Nebraska Manufacturing Advisory Council (NeMAC)**

“The Department of Economic Development created groups to focus on key industries and enlisted help from industry to focus joint efforts on the most critical issues. This led to the creation of the Nebraska Manufacturing Advisory Council.

The Nebraska Manufacturing Advisory Council (NeMAC) is an industry-driven advocate and advisory council to Nebraska state agencies and leaders in maximizing global competitiveness in the manufacturing industry. The council provides a forum for discussing industry-related problems and resolutions and serves as a voice for manufacturers to strengthen Nebraska’s second largest economic driver.

The Nebraska Manufacturing Advisory Council is invested in promoting career and technical education and growing a skilled, globally competitive workforce.” (Nebraska Manufacturing Advisory Council, 2017)

The following activities have been identified by the council as priorities:

- Seek and identify funding for career/technical education statewide;
- Market career opportunities available in modern manufacturing and educational programming needed to achieve employment in the field;
- Collaborate with industry partners statewide to demonstrate the value of manufacturing in Nebraska; and
- Build the manufacturing talent pipeline in Nebraska schools

(Nebraska Manufacturing Advisory Council, 2017)

### **Nebraska Advanced Manufacturing Coalition (NAMAC)**

NAMAC is active in workforce training initiatives and promoting advanced manufacturing career pathways. NAMAC's website offers a detailed description of organizational purpose and NAMAC programs:

“NAMC is a statewide, all-volunteer partnership between business, education, government and labor. The NAMC is addressing the skills gap in Nebraska by reaching out to students, parents, educators and the community to identify education paths to achieve skills leading to good-paying careers in advanced manufacturing and related businesses. NAMAC initiatives include:

#### Dream It. Do IT. Nebraska

The Dream It. Do It. Initiative is designed to raise awareness of manufacturing and related careers. Dream it. Do it, promotes pathways that encourage students to develop high-tech, in-demand skills. Dream it. Do it, creates programs that support students, identify global challenges, and promote education paths that lead to successful careers in advanced manufacturing and related businesses.

#### STEM Match Initiative

THE STEM Match Initiative encourages business leaders to reach out to students in an effort to help them understand the types of careers that require STEM skills. The initiative aims to increase the number of students who enroll in STEM-related courses, better prepare young people for success, and align educational opportunities with workforce demands.

## Nebraska Career Dream Team

The Nebraska Career Dream Team Ambassador Program is a nationally endorsed best practice by the NAM and Manufacturing Institute. Career Dream Team (CDT) Ambassadors are spotlighted on the Husker Sports Network pre-game radio show, live with Greg Sharpe. CDT Ambassadors talk to students about their company, career, and education path through classroom visits, career fairs, presentations, etc. They are the front-line ambassadors for companies and education in their area.” (Nebraska Advanced Manufacturing Coalition, 2017)

## **BioNebraska**

BioNebraska is the trade group organization for the life sciences in Nebraska. Active in Biotech and AgTech development in a state with an agriculturally based economy, BioNebraska works with industry on workforce and capacity issues. The opening sentence in the “about us” description of the organization’s website highlights its focus on workforce: “ In Nebraska, the life sciences industry is thriving because its workforce has a flare for technology ... Nebraska is home to production facilities for Novartis, Zoetis, Celerion, Merck Animal Health, and Novozymes. The above, combined with Nebraska’s major medical centers in Omaha, the University of Nebraska bioscience research centers in Lincoln, and two technology parks, make Nebraska an appealing place for the life sciences community to do business.”.(BioNebraska, 2017). BioNebraska collaborates with economic development, university, and industry leaders in workforce and industrial development issues central to the life sciences industry in Nebraska. (BioNebraska, 2017)

## **Technology Association of Nebraska (TAN)**

The Technology Association of Nebraska (TAN) is a statewide organization that was created via a partnership between the Nebraska Department of Economic Development (NDED) and Nebraska Information Technology partners. TAN is entirely industry directed and “dedicated to strengthening Nebraska’s technology ecosystem. This cultivation of industry leaders committed to strengthening Nebraska’s reputation as a tech-sound state to grow world-class companies, retain top high-tech talent and pioneer technology expansions into the state’s 21st century.” (Technology Association of Nebraska, 2017)

TAN’s areas of focus include:

- “Visibility: Measure the impact of technology jobs in Nebraska;
- Educate: Partnerships and platforms for technical educational advancements;
- Development & Recruitment: Developing talent for the state; and

- Policy: Educate political leaders to ensure sustainability.”

(Technology Association of Nebraska, 2017)

### **AIM Institute**

“The AIM Institute is a not-for-profit membership organization that provides entrepreneurship and information technology leadership to Nebraska and the surrounding region. AIM provides a range of services and programs to build individual and organizational capacity in effectively applying IT to business development, workforce recruitment, and career development. AIM’s signature annual event is Infotec. IT professionals, business leaders, in-the-know educators, and savvy entrepreneurs attend Infotec because it’s the region’s most comprehensive IT conference that provides them with up-to-date information on the latest technologies, current trends and unparalleled networking opportunities. AIM also supports entrepreneurship, business development and workforce attraction through its Careerlink.com service, the region’s premier online recruitment and hiring management system.”

(Lincoln Partnership for Economic Development, 2017)

(AIM, 2017)

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## FOUNDATIONS

Nebraska foundations provide sustainability and support to a variety of workforce and community development efforts. Though descriptions are taken from public website data, the information below is not complete in terms of describing any single foundation’s goals, priorities, or funding processes. The foundations on this list have been long-term Nebraska community development partners, with diverse missions and highly evolved standards in determining where and how to use resources to make an impact. As stated at the beginning of this section, this list is not intended to be a complete listing of any organizations efforts. The intent of this list is to promote awareness of a sample of resources that contribute to workforce development efforts.

### **Lincoln Community Foundation**

Prosper Lincoln is an effort supported by the Lincoln Community Foundation. Among other objectives, Prosper Lincoln targets skills development and early childhood education goals as a part of its strategic plan. From the Prosper Lincoln website:

“Employment Skills - Having a workforce with the talent to do well is vital to Lincoln’s prosperity. The demand for increased knowledge and capabilities is at an all-time high. Developing employment skills helps make sure careers with advancement opportunities, higher wages and good benefits are possible. The goal is to provide opportunities for people to realize career aspirations. By the year 2020 Prosper Lincoln will:

- Increase cross-sector initiatives to advocate for and improve workforce development;
- Increase ways for employers and potential employees to connect; and
- Increase opportunities and support for skill training that address workforce needs.”

(Lincoln Community Foundation, 2017)

### **Omaha Community Foundation**

The Omaha Community Foundation Fund for Omaha provides opportunities for qualified Omaha-focused nonprofits to submit workforce development grants. (Omaha Community Foundation, 2017)

### **Nebraska Community Foundation**

FutureForce Fund is focused on workforce development outcomes for Nebraska. A description is provided by the Nebraska Community Foundation: “The mission of FutureForce Fund is to support the charitable works of FutureForce Nebraska. FutureForce Nebraska’s mission is to facilitate effective collaboration among employers, education, economic, and workforce development resources to support a well-educated, highly skilled workforce for Nebraska. The Fund seeks to enhance awareness and provide career preparation and training for students (K-20) and adults, and to emerge as a national leader in developing model pathways for career preparation and workforce development.” (Nebraska Community Foundation, 2017)

### **Peter Kiewit Foundation**

The mission statement of the Peter Kiewit Foundation is “to create opportunities for people to live and help build strong vibrant communities, achieve economic success, and have a high-quality life.” (Peter Kiewit Foundation, 2017) Several of the impact areas identified by the Peter Kiewit Foundation impact to workforce issues in Nebraska. The following program descriptions are available on the Peter Kiewit Foundation’s website:

## Youth Pathways to Success

“Goal: Increase the number of youth who progress in their education and secure meaningful employment.

## Cradle-to-Career Alignment

Goal: Better align P-16 education systems, out-of-school time programs, community and family supports, and employers.

- College Access and Success: Ensure youth are able to gain admission to, attend, and complete higher education ready to enter a meaningful career.
- The Peter Kiewit Foundation has a particular focus on efforts that improve student persistence and success, strengthen the capacity of the community college system, and better connect high schools, postsecondary institutions, and employers at a regional and statewide level.

## Postsecondary Access and Success

Goal: Ensure youth are able to gain admission to, attend, and complete higher education ready to enter a meaningful career.

- Peter Kiewit Foundation has a particular focus on efforts that improve academic and personal readiness for postsecondary education (two-year, four-year, and vocational-technical), provide admissions and financial aid counseling, and improve postsecondary affordability.

## Youth Development

Goal: Enable youth, particularly vulnerable youth, to access the programs and services they need to be prepared for academic, personal, and professional success.

- Peter Kiewit Foundation has a particular focus on efforts that improve the quality, capacity, coordination, and reach of the out-of-school time sector.”

## Economic Growth and Opportunity

The objective of the Economic Growth and Opportunity impact area is to bolster a vital, diverse and growing economy that advances individual and community prosperity. Priority strategies include:

## Economic Development

Goal: Support initiatives and projects with the potential to significantly improve Nebraska's economic competitiveness, strengthen regional economies, and revitalize distressed communities.

- Peter Kiewit Foundation has a particular focus on efforts that drive economic activity and improve employment in the Omaha-Council Bluffs urban core, in low-income neighborhoods in the Omaha Metro, and in key regions of economic activity across Nebraska.”

(Peter Kiewit Foundation, 2017)

## Talent Development

“Goal: Cultivate a skilled workforce that fuels economic growth through efforts that develop and recruit talent for high wage jobs, foster entrepreneurial activity and engage and retain professionals.

- Peter Kiewit Foundation has a particular focus on efforts that support key sectors that drive economic growth and promote high-wage, high-skill, high-demand jobs.

## Economic Opportunity

Goal: Expand opportunities for low-income workers to develop skills, secure and sustain higher paying jobs, build assets, and achieve greater economic independence.

- Peter Kiewit Foundation has a particular focus on efforts that provide education, job training, and support services to people working hard to improve their economic circumstances.”

(Peter Kiewit Foundation, 2017)

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## LOCAL PROGRAMS

### **Empowerment Network**

The Empowerment Network is an Omaha-based community development organization that provides outreach, partnerships, and multiple programs that impact workforce development.

A mission statement from the Empowerment Network website:

“Working together to transform the economic condition and quality of life of African-Americans, North Omaha residents, and citizens of the Greater Omaha area by implementing the Empowerment Covenant & 7 Step Empowerment Plan. The vision is complete with short-term and long-term goals, strategies, activities, and measurable outcomes. We will close long-standing gaps in employment, entrepreneurship, education, housing, and other quality of life factors that have been traditionally based on race and geographic segregation.” (The Empowerment Network, 2017)

The Empowerment fosters and develops cradle-to-career strategies and programming partnerships, including the Summer Training, Employment Pathway and Urban Pipeline (STEPUP) program.

#### Summer Training and Employment Pathway and Urban Pipeline (STEP UP) Omaha

From the STEP-UP Omaha Urban League website: “STEP-UP Omaha! provides jobs and paid internship opportunities to youth and young adults during the summer. Program participants gain valuable job training, work experience, vocational training, academic recovery and remediation, life skills training, and community service opportunities. STEP-UP Omaha! is an initiative by the Empowerment Network and the City of Omaha in collaboration with community partners, including the Urban League of Nebraska.” (The Urban League, 2017)

#### **Midlands Latino Community Development Organization (MLCDO) Omaha**

MLCDO serves the Omaha area and provides software training, child care program training, and entrepreneurial services and support. From the MLCDO website:” MLCDC provides Latinos with opportunities to generate economic growth by providing financing products, development services and community development that advances their ability to develop a sustainable future in the Midlands.”

“Financial education: Through this program, Latinas can learn about a variety of money management skills, such as: saving, insurance, taxes, compliance with labor laws, maximizing cash flow, and retirement plans. MLCDC has a computer lab with 15 computers and offers training in QuickBooks, budgeting, invoicing, and pricing. “ (Midlands Latino Community Development Organization, 2017)

## **Big Brothers Big Sisters**

Big Brothers Big Sisters matches adult mentors to children that are facing issues of poverty and addresses other issues that impact the availability of mentors. In Hastings, participants have looked for ways to further establish workforce mentoring in the program.

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## **TALENT PROGRAMS**

### **Urban League Omaha**

“The Urban League currently operates and serves residents within the tri-county area, with a primary target in the northeast region of the city. We are one of 93 affiliates in 34 states of the National Urban League movement.” (The Urban League, 2017)

“The Urban League’s vision is to lead Nebraska in closing the social economic gap in the African American, other emerging ethnic communities, and disadvantaged families in the achievement of social equality and economic independence and growth.” (The Urban League, 2017)

“The Urban League provides a number of opportunities to access free career-building services at our Empowerment Center, participate in job fairs, and learn and network. Such opportunities include:

- College Tours;
- Community Coaches;
- Girls Summer STEAM Academy;
- Project Ready;
- Scholarships;
- Striving for Success: African-American Male Summit;
- Study & Computer Lab;
- Urban League University;
- Summer Credit Recovery Program;
- Whitney M. Young, Jr. Academy; and
- Youth Attendance Navigators.”

(The Urban League, 2017)

### Urban League Nebraska (ULN) Young Professionals

“The ULN Young Professionals is a volunteer auxiliary group of the Urban League of Nebraska. We provide our members opportunities (1) for leadership and professional development, (2) to engage the community and (3) to support the overall mission of the Urban League of Nebraska.” (The Urban League, 2017)

### **Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce**

The Greater Omaha chamber offers a variety of workforce programming aimed at retaining and attracting talent helping to pair industries with quality workers that desire quality jobs.

A brief description of some of the Greater Omaha Chamber Workforce and Talent Programs follows from the Greater Omaha Chamber website:

#### DIG (Diversity & Inclusion Groups)

- “A partnership with Inclusive Communities, aimed at supporting and enhancing the growth of employee resource groups, diverse leadership and inclusive cultures.” (The Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce, 2017)

#### Heartland Workforce Solutions

- “A nonprofit organization made up of agencies from private and public sectors dedicated to expanding employment opportunities for job seekers and employers.” (The Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce, 2017)

#### Greater Omaha Chamber Young Professionals

- “A catalyst organization to recruit and retain young professionals to the Greater Omaha area through engagement, opportunity and advocacy.” (The Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce, 2017)

#### Council of Companies

- “A support group that facilitates coordination between company employee resources groups in an effort to strengthen retention efforts.” (The Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce, 2017)

## Careerokit

- “Careerokit is an initiative of the Greater Omaha Chamber in partnership with countless community partners to connect students and young adults with opportunities to move along the learning pipeline, gain applicable knowledge and build excitement for growing career options.” (The Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce, 2017)

## **Lincoln Partnership for Economic Development Lincoln**

### Young Professionals

“Connecting a diverse network of young professional peers and providing talent development and leadership skills opportunities along with networking opportunities.” (The Lincoln Partnership for Economic Development, 2017)

### The IGD Explorers

“IGD Career Education Summer programs offer students grades 6-12 hands-on career education where they can learn about fun and exciting careers in a variety of fields, such as public service, engineering, healthcare, media, and more. Programs run June-July.” (The Lincoln Partnership For Economic Development, 2017)

## **Grand Island Chamber of Commerce**

“The Grand Island Area Chamber of Commerce is a working partnership of business people who know the wisdom of coordinating their efforts under effective leadership for the advancement and development of the Grand Island area. The Chamber seeks to unite all the business, agricultural, professional, industrial and civic interests for the purpose of developing and promoting the Grand Island area as a center for a broad range of activities.” (Grand Island Chamber of Commerce, 2017) Key industries that the Grand Island Chamber supports include transportation and distribution, health care, and financial transaction services.

The Grand Island Chamber supports a local manufacturing group, as well as the following programs:

### Young Professionals

“The Chamber’s Young Professionals organization is dedicated to cultivating a young, vibrant, professional community in the Grand Island area by providing networking, volunteer, and educational opportunities for personal and professional development. By helping young

professionals connect with their peers, the potential for inclusion, service, and leadership is enhanced, leading to greater personal and professional satisfaction.” (Grand Island Chamber of Commerce, 2017)

#### Top 35 Under 35

“Top 35 Under 35 is a select group of young adults who are recognized for their leadership and contributions to their employer and the community. Individuals are nominated for this distinction, and honorees are selected by a panel of judges based on criteria including professionalism, volunteerism, and commitment to the community. The Top 35 Under 35 program demonstrates the community’s appreciation for these young leaders.” (Grand Island Chamber of Commerce, 2017)

#### Dream It! Do It!

“The Chamber’s Dream It! Do It! program is designed to give high school students a firsthand look at the career opportunities that are available in Grand Island. Exposing students to available careers and educational pathways allows students to strategically plan their future and eliminate the ‘blur’ between high school graduation and the real work world. Students tour business facilities and discuss hiring procedures and protocol with Human Resource professionals.” (Grand Island Chamber of Commerce, 2017)

### **Norfolk Area Economic Development Council and Norfolk Chamber of Commerce**

#### Norfolk Now

“Norfolk Now represents a public-private partnership between the Norfolk Area Economic Development Council and Norfolk Chamber of Commerce to recruit, retain, and bring back talent to the Norfolk, Nebraska area.” (Norfolk Now, 2017)

### **North Platte Chamber of Commerce**

#### The School to Business Partnership Program

“The School-Business Partnership Program is a collaborative effort where businesses are paired with schools or educational programs to assist in preparing students for success. The program includes opportunities for internships and job shadowing, as well as resources for educators to enhance course content reflective of real-world, local career opportunities.

In addition to K-12 education partners, we work closely with Mid-Plains Community College/North Platte Community College. MPCC offers a variety of degree and certificate programs and collaborates with businesses on customized training programs to ensure employees gain the skills needed for specific job tasks.” (North Platte Chamber of Commerce, 2017)

## **Dawson Area Economic Development**

### ABLE Program

“The Advocating Business Labor and Education (ABLE) program is a collaborative effort between Dawson County area businesses and school districts to minimize the number of young people who choose to leave the county following high school. The program exposes young people to area businesses and quality of life so that they have a better understanding of the career and lifestyle opportunities that exist in and around their hometown.

Four school districts are involved in the ABLE program and support the hands-on student experiences and apprenticeships that the program provides. Activities include the student-business and industry tours, Dawson County Career Fair, in-school speakers, job shadows, job assistance, and more.” (Dawson Area Economic Development, 2017)

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## EDUCATION PROGRAMS

### **Avenue Scholars**

The mission of Avenue Scholars Foundation (ASF) is to ensure careers for committed students of hope and need through education/training and supportive relationships. The Avenue Scholars program provides comprehensive, individualized support services to help students from low-income backgrounds identify, persist toward, and ultimately enter financially sustaining careers.

The core attributes of the program are the long-term, comprehensive support provided to each Avenue Scholar and an intensive focus on career attainment. Each Avenue Scholar is assigned to a dedicated ASF staff member called a Career Coach, who guides students’ personal and career-related development during their junior and senior years of high school (High School Career Coach) or during their postsecondary education/training and into a career (Postsecondary Career Coach). Program participants also receive support from ASF’s Business

Outreach Team, which engages area businesses in order to provide career exploration, preparation, and placement opportunities, as well as our Student Support Team, which provides training and resources to help students meet individual social and emotional needs.

Students are selected for the program based on financial need (eligibility for free or reduced-price school lunches or a federal Pell Grant) and interest in a high-demand vocational/technical career field.

ASF currently serves students in eight metro-area high schools (Omaha Benson, Omaha Bryan, Omaha North, Omaha Northwest, Omaha South, Millard South, Ralston, and Papillion-LaVista), on three Metropolitan Community College campuses (Fort Omaha, South Omaha, and Elkhorn Valley), and in businesses throughout the community. (Avenue Scholars Foundation, 2017)

### **EducationQuest Foundation**

EducationQuest Foundation has a goal of improving access to higher education. They provide direct student support to high school juniors and seniors as well as college students in Nebraska. From the EducationQuest website: “We fulfill our mission through free college planning services, outreach services, need-based scholarship programs, and college access grants.” (EducationQuest Foundation, 2017)

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## COMMUNITY COLLEGES

The Nebraska community colleges serve individuals and industry throughout the state as a partner in career and technical education and training. Nebraska community colleges offer a broad variety of educational training programs. Only a small portion of these programs are listed in this description.

### **Metropolitan Community College**

“The Applied Technology area offers a wide range of career options within the skilled trades. Training options range from a single course to a two-year associate degree, as well as apprenticeship training programs. Their programs cover the areas of Automotive/Diesel/CDL Faculty, Building Trades Faculty, Manufacturing Trades, and Process Operations Technology Faculty. The Welding Technology program provides training in the basic and advanced skill levels of different welding processes, which includes lecture and hands-on lab training under the close supervision of qualified instructors. Precision Machine Technology prepares students for a career in an important high-tech area of today's manufacturing industry. Students learn

to program, operate, and set up machines used to manufacture machine components and parts. Using computer numerical control mills, lathes, grinders, and drill presses, students learn to manufacture everything from motorcycle parts to aviation gears.” (Metropolitan Community College, 2017)

### **Southeast Community College**

The “Manufacturing Engineering Technology program includes extensive practice in traditional and computer-aided drafting, layout and design of fabricated products, the study of materials used in manufacturing, plant layout, materials handling, manufacturing processes, and the use of machines. Further study takes students into quality control, time and motion efficiency, tool and product design, and mold design.

The Diversified Manufacturing Technology program offers courses, taught online and face to face, that align with the nationally-recognized Manufacturing Skill Standards Council Certified Production Technician credential. The unique blended learning approach includes 3D/4D graphic simulations, traditional classroom experiences, and online seminars. The program affords the opportunity to earn the OSHA 10-hour certification, a nationally-recognized credential.

The Welding Program at SCC is an Accredited Test Facility through the American Welding Society. Students who achieve an AAS degree will be qualified/certified to a national code through this facility upon graduation.” (Southeast Community College, 2017)

### **Central Community College**

The “Advanced Manufacturing Design Technology program provides the skills and technical knowledge needed for a career in the machining industry as a mold maker, a tool and die maker, CAD/CAM designer programmer, machinist, or CNC machinist.

The Welding Technology program provides instruction in a wide range of welding techniques (oxyacetylene, gas metal arc, shield metal arc and gas tungsten arc welding), welding codes and standards, robotics and welder qualification-certification, as well brazing, cutting, and blueprint reading” (Central Community College, 2017)

### **Mid-Plains Community College**

The “Welding and Machine Shop Technology program leads to a diploma or Associate of Applied Science Degree for employment opportunities in the welding/machine shop field. The

program provides the skills and knowledge necessary for entry-level job production welding or job shop employment upon graduation. Students may enter at different stages of readiness and progress according to his/her abilities and efforts. Students will be assessed and evaluated as they complete each measurable performance objective.” (Mid-Plains Community College, 2017)

### **Western Community College**

Welding Technology:

Shielded Metal Arc Welding

- Mild steel with single and multi-pass welds, pipe welding teaching both the uphill and downhill methods

Gas Metal Arc Welding:

- Mild steel, with single and multi-pass welds using short circuiting transfer, and spray transfer

Flux Cored Arc Welding:

- Carbon steels, with and without shielding gas, using small diameter dual shield electrodes

Gas Tungsten Arc Welding:

- Mild steel, stainless steel, and aluminum. GTAW on pipe and tubing for welding on mild steel in 2G, 5G, and 6G positions

Oxyacetylene Welding, Cutting, and Brazing:

- Flame cut plate, weld, and braze weld steel in all positions

(Western Community College, 2017)

### **Northeast Community College**

Manufacturing Boot Camp: This class provides individuals basic workforce readiness skills, tools and techniques related to the application and management of quality production, customer service, and safety. Participants will obtain the skills needed for success in a variety of manufacturing positions in the area. Successful program participants will be prepared to earn a

set of stackable certificates, nationally recognized credentials, and the foundation for more advanced technical skill training.

**Diversified Manufacturing Technology:** Through classroom instruction and hands-on lab experiences, you will learn the basic safety, electrical/mechanical and computer skills intended to prepare you for machine operation and simple repair in a wide variety of manufacturing environments.

**Welding Program:** Through classroom and shop application, you'll learn gas and arc welding, inert-gas arc welding, and continuous wire production welding and a background in metallurgy, blueprint interpretation, and mathematics. (Northeast Community College, 2017)

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## LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS

### **Local Industrial Councils**

#### Hastings Area Manufacturing Association (HAMA)

“Formed in the 1970's, the Hastings Area Manufacturers Association (HAMA) has been an advocate for the manufacturers in the Hastings area since its inception. The charter for the organization is the support and advancement of manufacturing in the Hastings area. HAMA has been involved in many initiatives over the years for the benefit of local business and has most recently partnered with local educational institutions on a Career Pathways project for education junior- and senior-level high school students. HAMA also has working subcommittees that address training and continued education, workplace safety and OSHA compliance, and supply chain and local purchasing awareness.” (Hastings Area Manufacturing Association, 2017)

#### Grand Island Area Manufacturing

The Grand Island Chamber of Commerce brings together key leaders from local industry. The group participates in workforce development planning and program design. (Grand Island Chamber of Commerce, 2017)

### **High School Career Academies**

Career academies have been developed in multiple communities in Nebraska in recent years. They represent local commitment, funding, and significant partnerships with industry, the Nebraska Department of Education, and community colleges in ongoing efforts to illuminate

pathways and provide educational preparation that aligns with opportunities for skilled employment.

#### Career Pathways Institute – Grand Island

The Career Pathways Institute is an innovative 21st century learning experience that benefits area students and businesses. The program gives motivated students the opportunity to enter the world of work or gain a head start on college upon completion of high school. It also helps provide area businesses with a well-trained workforce. Students will gain knowledge of manual mills and lathes, surface grinders, machine tools, computer numerical controlled machining, computer numerical controlled plasma cutting, welding, and casting. Manufacturing related careers as well as safety procedures and proper use of hand and power tools will be covered. (Career Pathways Institute, 2017)

#### The Career Academy - Lincoln

Curriculum includes practice in traditional and computer-aided drafting, layout and design of fabricated products, the study of materials used in manufacturing, plant layout, materials handling, manufacturing processes, and the use of machines.

Learn basic metal fabrication and entry-level techniques to build and repair structures or products using OXY/FUEL and PLASMA cutting, ARC, MIG, and TIG welding. Students work on projects in a detailed, hands-on environment to prepare for a career in the welding industry. (Lincoln Public Schools, 2017)

#### Hastings High School Career Pathways Program - Hastings

In 2013, Hastings Public Schools partnered with Central Community College and the Hastings Area Manufacturers Association to develop a Career Pathways program for manufacturing. Area business and industry helped the schools acquire advanced mills, lathes, plasma cutters, and more in order to start advanced manufacturing training at the high school level. Hastings High School's Advanced Manufacturing course replicates the first semester of Central Community College's Advanced Manufacturing program at the Hastings Campus (Hastings Public Schools)

#### Omaha Bryan High School Industrial Technology and Manufacturing Programming - Omaha

Areas of focus include CAD Design and 3D modeling, Car Care, Industrial Material & Processes, and Technology Exploration. Program covers the areas of architecture & construction,

manufacturing, science, technology, engineering & mathematics, and transportation, distribution, and logistics (Omaha Public Schools, 2017)

#### Papillion-LaVista South High School Skilled and Technical Sciences Programming - Papillion

Students use manufacturing processes, laser cutting, welding, electrical systems to manage, understand and assess technology. Students will also explore different welding applications with an opportunity to complete many welding labs. Complicated open-ended, problem-based design activities will be used to increase the student's technological literacy. Students focus on manufacturing and technology-related careers that are available after high school.

#### Millard Public Schools (MPS) Academies - Millard

MPS academies provide a unique opportunity to explore a career field and prepare for college or a career in high school. Focuses include: Culinary Arts, Transportation and Logistics, Entrepreneurship, and Health Sciences (Millard Public Schools, 2017).

#### Scottsbluff High School Career Academies – Scottsbluff

The goal of the Scottsbluff High School career academies is “to provide highly skilled students that can transition seamlessly from high school to college, tech school, or the workforce with certification needed to meet community and industry demands.” Available pathways, by career sector, are listed below:

Ag, Food, and Natural Resources – Agribusiness; Animal Science and Vet Science; Plant Science and Environmental Science; Ag Machinery

Business, Marketing, and Management – Business Administration;  
Marketing/Entrepreneurship; Hospitality and Tourism; Business Technology

Communication, Arts, and Technology – Journalism; Visual and Performing Arts; Digital and Graphic Design

Health Sciences – Medical Specialties and Technologies; Pre-Medicine; Nursing; Health Information Technology

Human Sciences and Education – Criminal Justice; Early Childhood Education; Human Services; K-12 Education

Skilled and Technical Sciences – Welding; Auto Body; Automotive Technology; Manufacturing and Construction; Engineering (Scottsbluff Public Schools, 2017)

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## WORKFORCE HOUSING PROGRAMS

Workforce housing is an issue that impacts workforce recruitment and development in Nebraska. In many Nebraska communities outside of the Lincoln and Omaha areas, workforce housing stock is limited. In addition, the cost of building new homes in some communities is often greater than the value of the home at the time of completion. Workforce housing issues are a constraint on other workforce issues outside metro areas in Nebraska. Program efforts to help mitigate workforce housing issues have been developed at the state and local levels.

### **Nebraska Department of Economic Development (NDED) - Rural Workforce Housing Fund (RWHF)**

“The RWHF provides matching grants to nonprofit development organizations to reduce the cost of workforce housing in Nebraska’s rural communities. Workforce housing is housing that meets the needs of working families and is attractive to new residents locating in a rural community. Housing projects eligible for RWHF Grants include:

- New owner-occupied housing costing no more than \$275,000 to construct;
- New rental housing units costing no more than \$200,000 per unit to construct;
- Owner-occupied or rental housing units for which the cost to substantially rehabilitate exceeds 50% of a unit’s assessed value; and
- Upper-story housing.”

(Nebraska Department of Economic Development, 2017)

In conjunction with this program, the City of Auburn has offered up to ten thousand dollars to individuals participating in the program to build a qualified residential dwelling.

The City of North Platte and the North Platte Chamber of Commerce were the first communities to develop a local workforce housing incentive program.

## STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS

In total, forty-seven participants were interviewed as a part of the qualitative assessment. ZA observed throughout the interview process that Nebraska is fortunate to have engaged professionals whom are committed to leading and supporting workforce development in the state. The goal of the engagement interviews was to gain better visibility into key stakeholder perceptions of workforce trends, issues, and mitigations, and in turn, capture and aggregate

similar thoughts among multiple stakeholders into themes. In addition to functional details, these themes consist of comments that indicate stakeholder perceptions of important factors in workforce efforts. Future efforts may wish to further explore stakeholder opinions via the use of tools such as focused Likert scale surveys and/or representative focus groups to further develop representations of perspective and examine issues. Several themes emerged from the interview process. A listing and analysis of these themes is provided below.

## **Theme One: Workforce Scarcity**

### **Qualified Worker Shortages**

Thirty of forty-seven participants highlighted workforce shortages as primary concerns. Seventeen referred directly to unemployment rate in describing workforce issues. Five participants referred to examples of worker shortages. Four participants referred to shortages and described a need to reach students with career pathway information earlier. Two referred to shortages as impacting rural areas more than urban areas. One industry participant described labor competition from other states driving wage offers to community college students to levels where Nebraska companies could not compete. One described a company acting on its own to create a program because requirements dictated that it could not wait for multiple other entities to catch up. One participant observed that Nebraska may lose companies in the next five years, due to workforce pressures.

Comments related to this theme included:

“There simply are not enough qualified people...”

“Even after we get them well trained from a community college, it takes six months to get them to a productive level...”

“If we start from scratch to train them internally, we lose another year and the productivity of trainer employees...”

“A company from (another state) is (recruiting at a Nebraska community college) offering \$25 per hour...”

“We accepted that this has to be an industry pull model. No one else is going to fix this for us...”

“This issue is a much bigger problem in rural areas because it is difficult to recruit...”

General Comments: Several participants indicated a perception that Nebraska is behind on workforce issues in terms of addressing qualified worker scarcity. Participants also indicated a perception that Nebraska is catching up.

### Analysis

Though this theme is unlikely to come as a surprise to those familiar with Nebraska's economy, the number of times that this issue was mentioned made it worthy of recording it as the first theme. Many participants and their organizations are under great pressure to help find or train workers so that industry stays productive and competitive. Solving workforce scarcity problems and ultimately retaining industry in Nebraska, particularly in rural areas, will depend upon how effectively this issue is addressed. In the near term, Nebraska must continue to work on concerted efforts to help local entities provide pathways to higher skill jobs for students. This will require an extraordinary level of cooperation between industry, government, and educational institutions. It will also require more systematic solutions and strategic planning to align resources and measure effectiveness of efforts.

### **Theme Two: Program Resources**

Of the forty-seven interviews, fifteen participants highlighted access to resources as primary challenges. Five of those referred to budget constraints at various levels of education. Three referred positively to new state education and/or economic development programs. Three participants described issues obtaining resources needed to affect changes. Two noted directly that issues of scarcity impacted rural areas disproportionately. Two noted that though they had required resources, they could not accomplish nearly as much locally without fulltime employees in facilitator roles.

Comments related to this theme included:

"We are trying to make changes without the funds to act..."

"If (local company) had not stepped in to cover the costs, we could not have accomplished this..."

"There is no way we can expect to create effective programs on our own..."

"We used the (program resource) to accomplish in a few months what would have otherwise taken us more than a year..."

"Resources are a constant issue in trying to help people with barriers to employment."

## Analysis

Resource distribution is an issue in developing effective programs. Efforts to develop broad-based programming are complicated by the fact that the most effective solutions are crafted at the local level and communities have varying levels of resources. Recent programming has begun to partially mitigate this problem. The Nebraska Department of Education's reVISION program provides planning and execution grants to help school systems, businesses, and communities implement new educational workforce training initiatives. Southeast Community College's SENCAP program offers career academy dual-credit opportunities to southeast Nebraska school districts that do not have the critical mass of students to assemble large programs. The Nebraska Department of Economic Development's Developing Youth Talent Initiative has provided local companies with resources to develop I.T. and Manufacturing programs with local schools and the Nebraska Department of Education. The Nebraska Department of Labor's Registered Apprenticeship program provides opportunities for companies to set up and register new programs anywhere in the state. Private programs such as Avenue Scholars in Omaha are also working to align students with opportunities in high-demand careers in an effort to mitigate service gaps.

### **Theme Three: Strategic Partnerships**

#### **Addressing Workforce Issues is a Team Sport**

Thirteen participants expressed that this is a problem that is too broad in scope for any single organization to effectively address. Six indicated that partnering and/or collective strategy was important. Four referred to specific local partnerships as models that other communities should replicate. Two indicated that industry must describe the need and help other partners develop programming. One participant pointed out that needs are too broad and can't be solved by creating hundreds of specialized education programs.

Comments related to this theme included:

"Workforce is a team sport..."

"The cooperation between our businesses, community, and schools is exceptional..."

"This is not just an education system or private sector problem, it is a community problem..."

"There is no way we can expect to create effective programs on our own..."

"We have got to be at the table to solve this..."

“This (problem) is bigger than just us...”

“The whole country has workforce problems...”

### Analysis

Participants acknowledge that collective action is necessary. Collectively there is a great deal of willingness to partner among industry, government, and educational organizations on program efforts. Nearly all participants described existing or emerging local partnership efforts in some level of detail. Most of the described efforts were crafted to address local needs. Model public-private collaborations were noted in Grand Island, Hastings, and in other cities in Nebraska.

## **Theme Four: Connect People to Careers**

### **Illuminate the Path**

In forty-seven interviews, seventeen participants referred to communication and/or connection with students and parents as significant issues. Four noted that effectively connecting people to careers pathways was not a simple process. Many comments focused on the need to reach students earlier in the education process. Three participants referred to connection issues with parents as the most difficult part of changing pathways. This commentary was consistent from participants from disciplines ranging from education to industry.

Comments related to this theme included:

“We can’t just communicate, we have to connect with them...”

“This has to be hands-on...”

“We have to find ways to reach parents...”

“Reaching parents is the most difficult part of the problem...”

“Parents were taught that vocational training was a path of last resort....”

“We are trying new ways (to reach students) but we are not sure if they are working...”

### Analysis

The work to connect students and parents is underway in Nebraska. The efforts of community colleges, high school career academies, and others have begun to make a difference. Concerted private efforts such as NAMAC’s Dream It. Do It. and its Career Ambassador program

continue to make positive impacts in reaching families and changing perceptions about skilled technical career pathways. However, changing dinner table conversations will continue to require a long-term concerted effort among multiple parties.

### **Theme Five: Broad Partnerships, Local Control**

Ten of the participants made comments that indicated that local determination of programming is important. Most participants discussed local efforts in the interviews. In almost all circumstances, programs were planned locally, though sometimes with state and/or community college assistance.

Comments related to this theme included:

“We’ve been successful because of the work of our industrial council and economic development organization...”

“We needed to work thorough the needs and curriculum ourselves...”

“Nobody else can solve this problem for us....”

“There is no one size fits all solution...”

### Analysis

Local control will always be a key element for successful planning. This is due to variation of circumstances and resources at the local level.

For example, North Platte is addressing workforce and workforce housing challenges. In evaluating the needs of the three main employers in North Platte, Union Pacific, Walmart Distribution Center, and Great Plains Health, only one (Great Plains Health) of the three employers had a primary need for highly trained workers. In addition to helping Great Plains Health with its individual needs, the North Platte Chamber of Commerce successfully focused its efforts on promoting large career fairs, and in developing unique assistance programs for residential homebuilding.

Those solutions would not be appropriate for Ariens Company in Auburn. Ariens Company worked with city officials, and on its own, to establish a registered apprenticeship with the Department of Labor. Ariens Company created its own talent pipeline to mitigate a lack of available skilled labor.

There is no way that a one-size-fits-all approach could adapt to solve both (North Platte and Auburn) issues. Instead, the most effective government and educational programs provide the toolkits, mechanisms, and resources for local businesses, school districts, and communities to develop and apply relevant local solutions.

## **Theme Six: Soft Skills**

### **Blending School and Job Norms**

Six participants noted soft skill development as an important part of any program. Two of those recommended that soft skills should be required for students in middle school. Several participants discussed student behavior in one form or another as a part of programming.

Comments related to this theme included:

“What good is it to teach them how to program and operate equipment if they are not going to be dependable?”

“Expectations need to be set for students at a younger age...”

“Program participation needs to be tied to soft skills...”

“Employers can’t afford to invest in poor performing skilled employees...”

“Hands-on training and having to show up (on time) helps make the program real...”

### Analysis

Training soft skills is task that has been transferred to the school systems by default. Many have implemented soft skill development programs into middle school curriculum. Creating environments that more closely emulate the rules of a workplace in career academies also helps. In most career academy programs, this is a standard practice. Students are required to report on time, manage equipment, arrive in uniform, etc.... These experiences help students identify and practice professional behavior. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce offers guidance for such programming in it “Bridging the Soft Skills Gap” report.

## **Theme Seven: Talent Recruiting and Retention**

### **Playing to Keep Talent**

Several participants noted that recruiting and retaining talent is a critical process that is sometimes distinct from other workforce efforts. Three participants indicated that they have

begun local open houses with free pizza in order to help K-12 students learn about what happens in those facilities and the job opportunities available. Two other participants discussed young professional (YP) programs, along with organized outreach to alumni and Nebraskans living outside Nebraska, as strategies to promote community amenities, quality of life, and job opportunities.

Comments related to this theme included:

“Our best bet is to work to retain people with Nebraska roots...”

“Young professional events are important to building networks...”

“If we didn’t do this, there might be no one else telling them to stay...”

### Analysis

Talent retention programs are cost-effective ways to address what should be low-hanging fruit. Networking events and outreach provide trackable success metrics. Currently, talent attraction programs are primarily local efforts. However, opportunities exist to bring these efforts to a larger scale by partnering with universities and colleges to utilize alumni data.

## **Theme Eight: Managing Change**

### **Workforce Needs, Today and Tomorrow**

Several participants noted that current workforce efforts need to be strategic and flexible to address future needs. Two participants noted that future workforce needs will change, and as such, systems need to be more adaptable. One participant commented that the jobs of the 2030 will likely look much different than today, yet the youngest K-12 program participants will begin to arrive in the workforce in about that timeframe. Several participants mentioned the difficulty of planning the education and training effort for the future.

Comments related to this theme included:

“Kindergarten kids won’t hit the job market until 2030...”

“We don’t know if skills that we set up programs for today will be important in ten years...”

“We have to train for the jobs we have now...”

## Analysis

Ambivalence about changing training needs is good. Stakeholders seek to commit time and resources to efforts that will make lasting impacts in the state. The only thing that we can be sure of is that skill requirements will change. The best programs are designed to accommodate for change and allow for adaptability at the local level. The Brookings Institute estimates that somewhere between one and thirty percent of skilled positions will be lost to automation by the year 2030 (Soliz, 2016). Strategy is more important than ever. Though the future will be great change, we must train for the skills of today. The State of Nebraska and Nebraska educational systems should continue to build flexible, adaptive training systems that scale to industry and individual need. Further work to align state strategies and collaborations will help position Nebraska for inevitable change.

## **OBSERVATIONS**

### **Collaboration**

Nebraska must continue to work to coordinate efforts and empower collaboration in workforce programs across disciplines and boundaries. This recommendation was directly or indirectly reflected in all eight feedback themes. Partnerships inherently help organizations align program goals, maximize resources, and achieve objectives. In order to tackle the macro-level issues facing Nebraska, successful partnership models need to be illuminated and emulated. Opportunities also exist to establish further collaborative, state-level program guidance and benchmarking.

Examples of individual successful workforce program collaborations abound. The Nebraska Department of Economic Development (NDED), the Nebraska Department of Labor (NDOL) and the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) worked together with the Nebraska Manufacturing Advisory Council (NeMAC) on a multi-year project that cleared many misconceptions and barriers and helped affirm the eligibility of young workers (as young as sixteen years of age) to participate in registered apprenticeship programs. NDED and NDOL labor availability reports have also provided many communities with labor threshold data that is useful in local workforce efforts.

Another example of productive collaboration is the partnership among Hastings Public Schools, Central Community College, the Hastings Economic Development Corporation, and the Hastings Area Manufacturing Association. These organizations have worked together successfully for

years in youth outreach and developing talent pipelines in the local area. They continually review needs and opportunities.

The Grand Island Chamber of Commerce and the Grand Island Manufacturing Group offer another example of exemplary local collaboration, with their focus on workforce, education, training, and marketing central Nebraska. They work closely with the Grand Island Public Schools and the Career Pathways Institute and have developed successful career pathways and registered apprenticeship programs.

However, there are several challenges related to developing and implementing collaboration at the local level, including lack of resources, varying levels of resources in communities, siloed organizational responses in efforts, lack of data, lack of visibility, and fragmented efforts.

Examples of collaborative efforts that could prove helpful in addressing Nebraska's workforce needs include:

- Dual credit expansion (local workforce groups, industry, state agencies, community college)
- Expanded articulation agreements (local workforce groups community college, state colleges, universities)
- Expanded earn-and-learn registered apprenticeship opportunities (federal agencies state agencies, local workforce groups, industry, community colleges)
- Expanded talent attraction and retention programs (university foundations, universities, state colleges state agencies local workforce groups,)
- Ongoing efforts of changes/alignment in skill requirements (federal agencies state agencies, local workforce groups, industry, community colleges)

Nebraska's many examples of collaboration represent relevant efforts with real mechanisms to match industry needs and help close the skills gap. In consideration of future efforts, however, opportunities exist to improve communication of successes and highlight best practices, develop a collective organizational strategy, improve alignment activities and resources, and enhance data gathering methodology and program evaluation.

### **Improve Communication**

Nebraska must continue to find new and better ways to connect students to workforce efforts, and in turn, measure the effectiveness of those efforts. This includes helping some communities, education, and workforce organizations better engage with industry, and helping all of those entities better engage with students and parents. Efforts to connect industry

partnerships to students and parents are underway in several communities in Nebraska. Local industrial councils, community colleges, high school career academies, and others are working to make a difference. The Grand Island Manufacturing Group and the Hastings Industrial Association are great examples of organizations using new communication methods to forge power connections between, education, government, and industry, as well as innovative methods to connect workforce efforts to students and parents. Concerted private efforts such as NAMAC's Dream It. Do It. and Career Ambassador program continue to make positive impacts in reaching families and changing perceptions about skilled technical career pathways. However, changing dinner table conversations will continue to require a long-term concerted effort of multiple parties.

An example of an exemplary local connecting point program is the York Public Schools system. York Public Schools participates in Southeast Community College's SENCAP career academy. In addition, York Public Schools has an innovative partnership with Dupont Pioneer to offer agribusiness career path experiences for its students. The school system also participates in other state programs.

Another example is the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce's Careerokit program. Careerokit connects students and young adults with opportunities to move along the learning pipeline, gain applicable knowledge and build excitement for growing career options, throughout the Greater Omaha area. Other examples of local efforts include the Empowerment Network's (in partnership with the Urban League and the City of Omaha) Summer Training Pathway and Urban Pipeline or STEP-UP program also provides jobs and paid internship opportunities to youth and young adults during the summer.

At the state level, the Department of Economic Development's InternNE program provides a successful bridge between qualified students and Nebraska employers. Additionally, the innovative work of Nebraska Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) offers best practice strategies to guide government's efforts in this area. Nebraska VR has won national awards for its use to social media to stay connected to clients that may lose access to other forms of communication. Though the context might be different, it is VR's paradigm of taking clients "as they are, where they are..." that could be emulated and seeing power of social media tools as more than just another medium for traditional government messaging.

There are many examples of Nebraska workforce program communication successes that are not yet fully visible outside those communities. Communication efforts are as varied and localized as program needs, but, as is the case with collaboration, opportunities exist to

establish communication partnerships, state-level program guidance, and benchmarking. Simply creating methods to disseminate best practices would help extend effective programming to others who could benefit.

### **Strategic Planning**

Nebraska should expand strategic planning and improve the coordination of programming efforts in order to remain competitive. Opportunity exists to identify successful models, illuminate best practices, collect data, set benchmarks, and align efforts. Strategic planning is critical for sustainable workforce efforts. For this reason, successful workforce approaches must involve macro-level access to planning resources and data that are compatible with critical elements of flexibility and local control.

### WIOA

The state of Nebraska submitted a Combined State Plan for Nebraska's Workforce System under the Workforce Opportunity and Invest Act on July 1, 2016. The plan articulated a strategic approach to coordinate efforts for job seekers and employers (WIOA, 2016). It also provided an opportunity for the state to further utilize state workforce boards. In Nebraska, State Boards accomplishments are significant. They have advanced sector strategies, facilitated updates for registered apprenticeships, and administrated multiple federal labor programs. WIOA created an umbrella that foresaw the use of workforce boards to facilitate collaboration at the state level. In Nebraska, the Workforce Development Board is established by the Governor in accordance with Section 101 of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA, 2016). Many very valuable programs are covered by the WIOA statewide strategic plan. However, many other efforts are not included.

In light of this, it was interesting to note that local workforce program study participants did not reference sector partnerships or the workforce boards in discussion workforce issues. This suggests two possibilities: first, that stakeholders at the local level are still largely not thinking about workforce boards as they look for solutions, or second, that the local level is the transactional level of programming. For those who have pressing needs and are seeking solutions, thoughts tend to gravitate to entities and programs that directly provide service solutions, with limited focus on the planning mechanisms attached to the efforts. In the interviews, stakeholders most often referred to industry, local school systems, community colleges, and state agencies such as the Nebraska Department of Education and the Nebraska Department of Economic Development when discussing processes related to articulating or planning.

State agencies, community colleges, community development organizations, and industry have worked together in a very effective manner in recent years to help address workforce issues, and the timing and atmosphere has never been better for cooperation.

In terms of strategic planning, best-practice approaches to solving workforce challenges provide resources, guidance, and support that are locally determined and adaptive, yet allow for standardization with respect to collecting data and evaluating success. Three programs that fit this definition and offer significant potential in terms of future collaborative strategic planning efforts are the Nebraska Department of Economic Development's Developing Youth Talent Initiative, the Nebraska Department of Labor's Registered Apprenticeship program, and the Nebraska Department of Education's reVISION process.

These three program examples each provide scalable and effective mechanisms to address Nebraska workforce issues in a manner that allows for adaptive local control. They are each beneficial and complimentary of the other. These programs also represent potential mechanisms to further build strategic planning collaborations between industry, NDE, NDED, NDOL, community colleges, chambers of commerce, and community organizations in addressing issues such as:

- Identification and adaptation of curriculum to current skills needs.
- Dual credit expansion (local workforce groups, industry, state agencies, community college)
- Expanded articulation agreements (local workforce groups community college, state colleges, universities)
- Expanded earn-and-learn registered apprenticeship opportunities (federal agencies state agencies, local workforce groups, industry, community colleges)
- Expanded talent attraction and retention programs (university foundations, universities, state colleges state agencies local workforce groups,)
- Ongoing efforts of changes/alignment in skill requirements (federal agencies state agencies, local workforce groups, industry, community colleges)

These organizations have a history of successful collaboration with industry. Expansion of strategic planning and coordination of programming efforts would benefit Nebraska. Opportunities also exist to better illuminate best practice examples, collect data, set benchmarks, and align existing and future efforts.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

The breadth of quality workforce programming in Nebraska is very substantial. Yet Nebraska still struggles with underemployment and skills gaps. Key industries are often not able to find workers who possess the necessary skills to fill job openings, and without mitigation efforts, this skills gap will likely grow larger.

Higher level skills and education are required by employers, and Nebraska must significantly increase the number of individuals receiving meaningful “middle-skill” training and credentials, and position well for future changes. It is apparent that a more strategic approach to planning is required.

At the beginning of the Nebraska Workforce Landscape Assessment study, Zeece and Associates, LLC recognized two facts about the term workforce: (i) the concept is broad-based and complex, and (ii) based on the principle of subsidiarity, the inherent complexity and variation of circumstances are best addressed at the local level. Workforce, as a concept, is far more than just a term to describe the activity of matching labor to training and work resources. Rather, it is indicative of a series of interrelated economic decisions and dependencies. It inevitably describes the cross-connected needs and purposes of individuals, industry, education, government, and community in a variety of ways. The nuances of these interdependencies and their relationships to external conditions express variation at the local level but require solutions, resources, strategic focus, and benchmarking that are best accomplished as a part of a statewide effort. Currently, many individualized efforts exist in Nebraska. But, Nebraska still lacks a plan, beyond the scope of existing resources in the WIOA plan, to develop a cohesive workforce development strategy.

Zeece and Associates, LLC therefore recommends that the State of Nebraska form a workforce development task force with the goal of creating a strategic workforce plan for the state. The task force should include, but not be limited to, participation from key stakeholders, such as industry and education leaders, state agencies (including the Departments of Economic Development, Labor, and Education), postsecondary institutions (community colleges and universities), career pathways and career academy efforts, etc. Key state agencies are in a good position to facilitate and further drive plan participation and logistics.

ZA recommends that the task force examine similar strategic planning efforts such as the California community college system’s “Doing What Matters” workforce plan (Doing What

Matters, 2018) or Virginia’s “Elevate Virginia” plan (Elevate Virginia, 2015). The taskforce should review key Nebraska data elements essential to the plan, including, but not limited to, the following:

- Nebraska economic, demographic, and labor data;
- Previous studies;
- Graduation rates and disposition of graduates by diploma, degree, or discipline;
- Local adaptation and regional coordination priorities;
- Dual-credit expansion and training-credentialing linkages;
- Best Practices and existing efforts (including other state plans and the Nebraska WIOA plan);
- Most predominate skills gap(s) - regionally and statewide;
- Recommended programmatic outcomes;
- Definitions of success; and
- Funding

ZA further recommends that the task force identify clear strategic goals and areas of focus that illuminate the pathway for the coordinated programmatic efforts necessary to maintain Nebraska’s competitiveness. For example, areas of focus from the Elevate Virginia plan include:

- Business engagement;
- Measurable skills development;
- Credentials that matter to business;
- Measuring and improving the number of trained students accepting high-skill occupations; and
- Workforce public Investments that generate measurable ROI

(Elevate Virginia, 2015)

Strategic goals from the Elevate Virginia plan are to:

- Further refine and enhance state-level business services;
- Elevate system performance by endorsing and securing funding for a cross-agency professional development program; and
- Identify and support a technical solution, policy and resource strategy to align technology and data platforms

(Elevate Virginia, 2015)

The task force efforts should bring together a cross-functional team in an effort to further align existing and future industry opportunities and needs. The task force should develop a comprehensive strategy to focus workforce development resources, set strategic goals, and lay the foundation to measure progress, and achieve results. The task force is critical to providing a strategic approach to aligning skills, retaining critical industry and talent, and maintaining the good life in Nebraska.

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