Colorado Springs Workforce Asset Map

by Tatiana Bailey

"By the Numbers" last month addressed the low civilian participation rate, and the decline in the percentage of U.S. residents participating in the workforce. Although the decline has stabilized, the rate remains stubbornly low at 63% in early 2017. Many speculate that this is all due to the aging population; however, it is the younger cohorts where the rate has fallen most precipitously. This points to a structural issue inherent in our workforce: the mismatch between industry's highest demand occupations and today's training and educational programs. This misalignment has been in the media much more of late and certainly highlighted in the results of the last election. The solution seems elusive given the time-intensive process of refining or even completely overhauling the U.S. educational pipeline.

In order to address such structural, longer-term issues, it is important first to understand the landscape. Smart communities are becoming highly responsive and nimble in helping industry fill the high demand occupations, and these communities first "audit," their workforce landscape. That entails fully understanding two fundamental pieces: a) what, exactly, does industry need, and b) what, exactly, does the local community provide in terms of qualified workers? It sounds so simple, but such an audit of workforce demand and supply is seldom pursued in any systematic and meaningful way. Colorado Springs, however, has recognized that thriving communities with robust job creation have a constant informational feedback loop between industry and training/educational organizations. To that end, various local workforce-related organizations partnered about a year ago, and they include the Chamber and EDC, the Pikes Peak Workforce Center (PPWFC), K-12 (specifically, the Career Track programs), Pikes Peak Community College, the City of Colorado Springs, UCCS, the SBDC, Catalyst Campus, Junior Achievement, and several other institutions. Each training and educational organization is providing a comprehensive list of what training programs, certificates, or degrees they provide, and how many people attain these certificates or degrees on an annual basis. This represents the "supply" of workers.

CHART A. Lewis-Palmer Vocational Programs & Concurrent Enrollment via Pikes Peak Community College, 2016/17
Auto Collision Technology
Health Career Exploration
Automotive Service Technology
Health Science Technology
Computer Aided Drafting
Interior Design
Computer Information Systems
Machining/Welding
Criminal Justice
Multimedia Graphic Design
Culinary Arts
Music
Diesel Power Technology
Radio and Television
Early Childhood Education
Welding Careers
Fire Science Technology
Zoo Keeping
Cosmetology

Chart A shows one example of this, the career track programs at School District 38 in partnership with Pikes Peak Community College. These lists are then compared to the monthly, real-time data provided by Wanted Analytics through the PPWFC, which gives the exact occupations that are being posted by employers via numerous mechanisms (mostly online). Data includes the number of postings by occupation. This represents the "demand" for workers. Chart B shows a subset of the 148 demanded occupations in January of 2017. All components will be part of the web-based platform that is under construction and slated for completion later this year. Various participating organizations are funding the work, and a student intern at UCCS is collecting the data to keep costs down while also providing her with meaningful work experience.

The benefits of this simple tool are numerous. Training and educational institutions can review and refine their programs on an ongoing basis with real data reflecting immediate, business needs. K-12 can be responsive to business needs via their career track programs, which target high-demand, middle-skill occupations. High school students benefit because they can make informed decisions about their chosen occupation or field of study. They are also more likely to have a job at the conclusion of their training. Businesses can benefit by knowing what programs exist, how many trained workers are being produced, and what organization they can contact to access these skilled workers. Our community can benefit by keeping some of our young talent in the region, with good jobs and meaningful career pathways. We are also likely to keep our unemployment rate lower than the national average, even during a downturn, because a qualified workforce acts as a magnet to industry. Government services are easier to sustain because the tax base is always higher with more people employed at livable wages. Kudos to Colorado Springs for proactively, and collaboratively using key data today to not only enhance the current economic momentum, but also to cement the future, economic prospects for our next generation.

CHART B. Sample of Job Postings by Occupational Category Colorado Springs MSA, January 2017	Volume
Computer and Mathematical Occupations	**2295**
Network and Computer Systems Administrators	481
Software Developers, Applications	324
Computer User Support Specialists	282
Computer Systems Engineers/Architects	275
Information Security Analysts	261
Operations Research Analysts	31
Actuaries	7
Statisticians	1
Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations	1038
Registered Nurses	432
Physical Therapists	48
Occupational Therapists	45
Family and General Practitioners	33
Speech-Language Pathologists	28
Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses	81
Radiologic Technologists	28
Medical Records and Health Information Technicians	22
Surgical Technologists	16
Medical and Clinical Laboratory Technologists	15
Occupational Health and Safety Specialists	5
Genetic Counselors	2
Athletic Trainers	1
Construction and Extraction Occupations	**370**
Construction Carpenters	61
Construction Laborers	53
Electricians	49
Plumbers	21
Painters, Construction and Maintenance	15
First-Line Supervisors Construction Trades & Extraction Workers	65
Highway Maintenance Workers	20
Construction and Building Inspectors	10
Source: Compiled by UCCS Economic Forum from TalentNeuron™, PPWFC	

Published by the Colorado Springs Business Journal on March 10, 2017; www.csbj.com.