

2021 Cobb Workforce Partnership Study

Overview

The availability of skilled labor continues to be a top site selection criterion for economic development projects. In addition, recruiting and retaining a qualified, trained, and reliable workforce is one of the greatest challenges for employers across the nation. Since its inception in 2015, the Cobb Workforce Partnership (CWP) has worked to address the current and future workforce needs and concerns by bringing together leaders from the business community, K-12 educational systems, postsecondary education institutions, and other stakeholders for focused dialogue.

In 2015, the Cobb Chamber of Commerce, in conjunction with representatives from local educational institutions, job training programs, and a wide range of businesses and industries in Cobb, partnered to develop a comprehensive workforce study for Cobb County. The county has experienced many changes and growth in the span of five years. The labor force grew, while unemployment shrank. Existing businesses expanded and outside businesses relocated to Cobb. New industries and new technologies have arisen, changing the landscape of where and how Cobb's citizens participate in the labor market.

In 2020, CWP recognized that new strategies and approaches would be needed to sustain the community's continued growth. As part of its five-year strategic plan, the CWP commissioned a workforce study from the A.L. Burruss Institute of Public Service and Research at Kennesaw State University. Here are the key findings of the study.

Cobb Demographics & Labor Pool Findings

- Cobb County's population has **grown 2.5%** since 2015.
- Cobb County's labor pool has **grown 3%** since 2015.
- Cobb County's unemployment rate has **decreased 1.6%** since 2015.
- Educational achievement of adults earning a bachelor's degree or higher **increased by 3%** since 2015.

Industry Employment & Occupation Data

Construction and skilled trades is one of the top two industry sectors in Cobb by employment numbers. High demand occupations for the construction and skilled trades are carpenters, pipefitters, ironworkers, welders, electricians, heavy equipment operators, and masons.

Within the **advanced manufacturing** industry sector, food production has become a top employer for Cobb County. High demand occupations for advanced manufacturing include laborers and freight stock, material movers, and production workers.

Within the **technology and communications** industry sector, telecommunications resellers have a strong presence. Financial technology is an emerging field in the county. Software developers, information specialists, systems engineers and administrators, and service desk managers are all high demand occupations with the technology and communications industry sector.

The **healthcare and bioscience** industry sector is one of the top employers for the county. Offices of physicians prove to be a key employer. Within bioscience, medical equipment and supplies manufacturing is a standout industry. High demand occupations in this industry sector are registered nurses, nursing assistants, paramedics, and bilingual mental health providers.

Within the **logistics and supply chain** industry sector, the wholesale trade of electronic and electrical goods and general freight trucking rank as the highest employers. High demand occupations within this industry sector include warehouse supervisors, frontline operations, commercial truck drivers, forklift drivers, and diesel repair.

Workforce Survey Results

To better understand the workforce status, challenges, and opportunities of Cobb County, the **A.L. Burruss Institute of Public Service and Research at Kennesaw State University** conducted an online survey of local business, industry, and education partners. Additionally, Cobb Workforce Partnership recognized that the COVID-19 pandemic unquestionably altered the workforce landscape in 2020. In previous years, one of the greatest challenges reported by CWP participants was a tight labor market with historically low unemployment rates. This survey sought to understand the impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on local workforce.

- **67.4%** of respondents agreed that employees hired in Cobb County have the technical skills and knowledge needed to be successful in their jobs.
- **63.2%** of respondents agreed that employees hired in Cobb County have the soft skills needed to be successful in their jobs.
- **60.7%** of respondents indicated that someone in their organization knows where to access training for new or existing employees.
- **56.2%** of respondents indicated that someone in their organization is familiar with organizations that can help meet their workforce development needs.
- **54.6%** of respondents agreed that their business has the opportunity to partner with the local schools on workforce development and initiatives.

Major Successes Since the Original Study

Through direct action and support, Cobb Workforce Partnership and its partners achieved significant victories in placing Cobb County as a top-tier location for businesses seeking a skilled labor pool. The following are some of those key accomplishments.

COBB WORKFORCE PARTNERSHIP

Founded in response to the 2015 study, CWP has grown to include educators, industry professionals, economic developers, investors, and community stakeholders.

TARGETED INDUSTRY COUNCILS

Founded in response to the 2015 study, each council meets to engage in focused dialogue that impacts the short and long term workforce needs in each industry.

COLLEGE AND CAREER ACADEMIES

A high-priority goal from the 2015 study, these institutions equip students with the skills and experience that local businesses need most. Through community partnerships and investments, both of Cobb's public school systems have opened their own state-of-the-art educational facilities.

VETERAN'S EDUCATION CAREER TRANSITION RESOURCE (VECTR)

The current VECTR location is in Warner Robbins. The 2020 Georgia Legislative Session allocated \$2.25 million to bring an additional VECTR to the Marietta Campus of Chattahoochee Technical College.

WORKSOURCE COBB CARES ACT FUNDING

Cobb County Government issued \$1 million in CARES Act funding to CobbWorks, Inc., the private not-for-profit organization operating as WorkSource Cobb, to provide a robust economic recovery and humanitarian assistance project to more than 230 Cobb residents and employers.

Moving Forward: Action Items

The 2021 Workforce Study helped to identify a number of specific action items that the Cobb Workforce Partnership, the Cobb Chamber of Commerce and SelectCobb can strive to achieve independently of broader community efforts. These items are measurable deliverables CWP seeks to deliver starting in 2021:

- **Facilitate relationship building** between workforce development consumers and stakeholders via Cobb Workforce Partnership meetings (two times per year) and Targeted Industry Council Meetings (one meeting per industry per year, total of five).
- **Increase effectiveness of industry councils** by creating one advisory group for each industry sector in Q1 of 2022.
- **Enhance local workforce development efforts** by connecting industry partners and allied organizations to regional workforce development initiatives starting Q4 2020.
- **Utilize the SelectCobb brand and communication channels** (e.g. website, newsletter, social media group, etc.) for communicating workforce development resources and updates to interested consumers at least once monthly.
- **Increase reach and impact of Cobb Workforce Partnership** through engagement and targeted recruitment of 20 or more first-time attendee organizations by end of 2022.
- **Support development of work-based learning and fulfilling employment needs** via Cobb Hires, with a rolling average of 15 job postings and five internship postings per month.
- **Facilitate access to workforce development resources** on a per-request basis.
- **Promote equity in the workforce** by delivering annual content on diversity, inclusion, and equity.