**GOAL:** To collect qualitative feedback from employers regarding the workforce development system in meeting their workforce needs with an emphasis on apprenticeship.

**KEY OBJECTIVES:**

* Complement and expand on the information gathered in the May 2024 apprenticeship survey;
* Dig into the perceived and real challenges and barriers businesses face in starting apprenticeship programs; and
* Understand businesses’ perceived and real challenges and barriers to utilizing and accessing business services and the workforce development system.

**EVENT DETAILS / LOGISTICS:**

* *Event Structure:* Three virtual 90-minute sessions
  + 60 Minutes: general questions for all employer participants
  + 30 Minutes: break out rooms for more specific questions per industry
* *Presenters:* TBD
* *Targeted Participants:* Business Leaders
* *Event Support:* ISU (logistics), TBD (content)

**OUTSTANDING QUESTIONS:**

* Timeline – September 9, 2024
* Profile of attendees?
* Who will facilitate?
* Who will support – break out rooms?
* How do we communicate with our partners / recruit participants?

**BACKGROUND**: Business engagement spans all aspects of the workforce board’s work and crosses all committees, workgroups, and task forces. The charge of the Business Engagement Committee (BEC) is to provide guidance and direction to help bridge the gap between Illinois’ important business sectors and employers, and the Illinois workforce development system. The BEC is reviewing the work and coordinating efforts of other IWIB committees [e.g., Apprenticeship Illinois Committee (AIC)] to combine, focus, and eliminate duplication. Part of the AIC’s marketing strategy relies on understanding businesses’ perceptions and understanding of apprenticeship as well as barriers to starting programs. These same principles relate to all workforce development services, including incumbent worker training (IWT), on-the-job training (OJT), paid work experience (PWE), recruitment, and more. Therefore, the BEC is collaborating with the AIC to uncover these questions around apprenticeship, business services, and the workforce development system.

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**FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS: DRAFT**

To understand the workforce development needs of industry and create an effective state plan, IWIB focus group questions should aim to gather insights on current workforce challenges, skills gaps, training needs, and future workforce trends. These questions are designed to provide comprehensive insights into the workforce development needs of various industries, helping to inform a state plan that effectively addresses these needs.

1. Poll: Select the category that best describes your business industry. (list of industries)
2. Poll: How many employees does your business currently have (list of range of employees)
3. INTROS:
   1. Can you briefly describe your Company, Your Role and
   2. Can you briefly describe your company's main workforce needs?
   3. Can you briefly describe your company’s main challenges?
4. Finding talent as a “Supply Chain” issue
   1. From where do you source your best talent for your critical positions?
   2. Is this talent supply chain adequate?
   3. Have you considered your talent needs as another “supply chain” issue?
   4. Do you have a process that allows you to manage that supply chain?
   5. Would you be interested in learning about a proven approach that applies supply chain management principles to talent?
5. Training Programs
   * How are you currently preparing your workforce for the next five years?
   * What do you anticipate as future workforce needs?
   * What opportunities do you see with growing pipeline of talent and / or upskilling your workforce?
   * How do you plan to fill your talent/workforce needs?
   * What do you currently do to help prepare or train your current or future workforce. (probing examples from survey): *(should this be a poll?)*
6. *University Partnerships*
7. *Community College Partnerships*
8. *Private Training Provider / On-line resources (e.g. Linked In)*
9. *Department of Labor Registered Apprenticeship Program*
10. *Apprenticeship programs not registered with the Department of Labor*
11. *Internship Programs*
12. *Mentorship, job rotation or coaching programs*
13. *Internal training department/ personnel*
14. *Other*

* Have you worked with your local workforce board? *(should this be a poll?)*
* Have you ever utilized the services of an American Job Center to find employees? *(should this be a poll?)*
* Have you participated in any public workforce development solutions such as Incumbent Worker Training (IWT), On-the-Job-Training (OJT), Paid Work Experience (PWE), Adult Basic Education (ABE), or other? *(should this be a poll?)*
* How do you measure the effectiveness of your training programs?
* How do you currently gather feedback on workforce development needs from your employees?

1. Apprenticeship Programs
   * How familiar are you with apprenticeship programs?
   * What comes to mind when you hear the term “Apprenticeship” (probing examples from survey)
     + 1. *Skill development*
       2. *Career advancement*
       3. *Hands-on training*
       4. *Professional mentorship*
       5. *Union or Trade affiliation*
       6. *Vocational training*
       7. *Entry into a specific trade or industry*
       8. *Pathway to employment*
   * What do you perceive as the benefits of apprenticeship programs?
   * What do you perceive as the barriers of apprenticeship programs? (probing examples from survey):
2. Limited funding/resources
3. Difficulty finding qualified mentors/trainers
4. Compliance with regulations and standards
5. Limited time to dedicate to training and supervision
6. Lack of awareness or understanding of apprenticeship programs
7. Difficulty attracting suitable candidates
8. Limited flexibility in program structure
9. Lack of curriculum development knowledge

Collaboration and Support

1. Partnerships
   * Are you currently partnering with other companies in your industry to address common challenges and create common opportunities?
     1. If so, please describe.
     2. If not, would you consider such a partnership if it would help your company?
   * Are you currently partnering with educational institutions or training providers to meet your workforce needs? *Elaborate.*
   * Do you collaborate with your local workforce board/ department?
     1. If so do you have comments on the services that they have provided.
     2. Would you work with them again?
     3. Would you recommend other employers to work with them?
   * What additional support or collaboration would you like to see from state agencies or educational institutions?
2. Government Support
   * What type of incentives or funding would be beneficial to support workforce development programs and / or apprenticeship programs?
   * How can state government better support your industry's workforce development efforts?
   * Are there specific policies or programs that would help address your workforce needs?
   * Would your company go ahead with training plans without incentives/ funding?
3. Technological Impact
   * How is technology changing the skill requirements in your industry?
4. Recruitment Strategies
   * Do you use recruitment services or a 3rd party training center? Elaborate
   * What strategies do you use to attract new talent to your industry?
   * What barriers do you encounter in recruiting skilled workers?
   * Have you ever worked with an American Job Center to recruit individuals for employment?
     1. If yes, how satisfied were you with the individual(s) who was/were selected?
     2. Would you recommend other employers to work with them?
5. Retention Initiatives
   * What initiatives have been successful in retaining employees within your industry?
   * What additional support could help improve employee retention?
6. Open Suggestions
   * Is there anything else you would like to share regarding workforce development needs or challenges?

BREAK OUT BY SECTOR ????

1. Skill Gaps
   * Where / what positions do you see as your current job gaps?
   * What emerging skills do you anticipate will be critical for your industry in the next 5-10 years?
   * How are you preparing your workforce for these emerging trends?
   * What specific skills are currently lacking in your workforce?
   * How does the skills gap affect growth, productivity and competitiveness in your industry?
   * Are there any unique workforce development needs specific to your industry that haven't been addressed?
   * What custom solutions would you propose to meet these specific needs?
2. Open Suggestions
   * What other suggestions do you have for improving workforce development in your industry?

Closing Questions

* + What is the most important takeaway you hope the state will address from this discussion?
  + How can we continue this conversation to ensure ongoing collaboration?