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PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Richmond Workforce Investment Board (RWIB), in partnership with the Greater Richmond Chamber of Commerce through its Workforce One initiative, and Training & Development Corporation (TDC), which operates the Richmond Career Advancement Center (RCAC) for RWIB, were awarded a grant funded by the Department of Labor to conduct a community audit. The project's scope is to focus specifically on demand- and supply-side issues associated with improving the ability of our inner city, economically disadvantaged workers to meet the labor and skill requirements of employers who are currently facing supply shortages. This effort is taking place around the country in other cities to gain an understanding of where employers and the agencies assisting these individuals stand in this equation.

To accomplish these goals in the Richmond area the responsibilities for the project are divided between two analyses: a demand side analysis and a supply side analysis. The goal of the demand side is to interface with employers to identify their labor and skill requirements and the goal of the supply side is to provide a comprehensive audit of the training and support services of:

- Richmonders who remain unemployed
- Incumbent workers who remain at poverty level

The separation of the project's goals also extends to which grantee is overseeing efforts toward accomplishing the objectives. The demand side analysis is the responsibility of Workforce One. The supply side analysis is the responsibility of the Richmond Career Advancement Center, under the direction of the Training and Development Center. Though these two parties are those identified in the grant, the spirit of the grant's 'community' name has involved such other organizations as the Home Builders Institute, the Greater Richmond Employment Assistance Team (GREAT) and the Richmond Human Resources Management Association.

This report is the initial effort of Workforce One under the grant to work with employers and determine where employers are at a community level. The findings herein, on the supply side, and subsequent findings during the collaboration between the supply and demand sides will be shared with the Richmond Workforce Investment Board to use in their strategic planning efforts to better prepare Greater Richmond's workforce.

The survey questions you are about to answer will create valuable information for employing low-income workers in entry-level positions.

Some basic information about your company...

Company name: _____

Your name: _____

Your title: _____

Your mailing address: _____

What industry does your company represent? _____

How many total employees do you have? _____

Geographically where are you located? (Especially useful to provide the zip codes)

Within your company what do you consider as an entry-level position? _____

QUESTION 1:

What are your formal requirements for hiring entry-level workers?

Formal Requirements	Yes	No
<i>Application/resume</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Skills assessment</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Interview</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• <i>If so, typically how many?</i>	# _____	
<i>References</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Screening Tools</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• <i>Criminal check</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• <i>Credit check</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• <i>Drug Screen</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Other? If so please, specify...</i> _____ _____		

QUESTION 2:

a) **How important are overall employability skills in your decisions about hiring and retaining workers in your entry-level jobs? Please rate on a 1 to 5 scale with 1 being not very important and 5 being essential.**

Employability Skills	Not very important	Somewhat important	Important	Very Important	Essential
<i>Appropriate attire</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
<i>Good attitude</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
<i>Good communicator</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>				



<i>Follows instructions</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
<i>Team-player</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
<i>Other, please specify</i> _____	<input type="checkbox"/>				
<i>Other, please specify</i> _____	<input type="checkbox"/>				

b) Occupational Skills...

	Not very important	Somewhat important	Important	Very Important	Essential
<i>As an employer would you say, having Occupational Skills (e.g. bilingual, computer skilled, etc.) in advance of employment is...</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>				

c) Training

	All go through a standard training program	Trained on an as need basis	No training is offered
<i>To what extent do you provide training for employees in your entry-level positions after they are hired?</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

d) Which is more important for you as an employer in an entry-level candidate...

Employability Skills or **Occupational Skills?**

QUESTION 3:

What have been your challenges and successes with low-income individuals during the last two years?

Challenges: _____

Successes: _____

QUESTION 4:

For any of the following challenges that apply to your workers, please give one or more examples.

Challenge	Yes, a challenge	No, not a challenge	If yes, please, elaborate
<i>Childcare</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<i>Transportation</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<i>Literacy/qualifications</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<i>Work ethics/attitude</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<i>Drug abuse</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<i>Mental health issues</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<i>Flexible work schedules</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<i>Criminal records</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<i>Unidentified disabilities</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<i>Language</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<i>Credit record</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

QUESTION 5:

- What support programs do you have?

Support Program	Yes	No
<i>Employee Assistance Program (EAP)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Tuition Reimbursement</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>New Hire Orientation</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Training/Workshops</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Evaluation Process (Promotion/Hiring/Probation/Development)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Retention/Incentives</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Mentoring</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Cross-training</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Childcare Assistance</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Transportation Services</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Grievance Process</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- Are there any not listed above in Question #5? _____

Which support programs have been most successful in hiring?

Which support programs have been least successful in hiring?

QUESTION 6:

- What key changes would you make within your organization to reduce the cost AND risk of hiring/retaining low-income employees?



-
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- What key changes would you make within the public sector (such policy changes as public transportation) to reduce the cost AND risk of hiring/retaining low-income employees?
-

QUESTION 7:

Which, of the following services and resources, if any, are important in encouraging you to hire entry-level workers with relatively little prior work experience?

Service &/or Resource	Yes	No
<i>Tax credits</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Training – occupational and soft skills</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• <i>On-the-job training</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• <i>Internships</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• <i>Job shadowing</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• <i>Job Coaching</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• <i>Case Manager</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• <i>Training Assistance</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Job readiness</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• <i>Resume</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• <i>Interview skills/capable of filling out an application</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• <i>Certifications</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• <i>Workshops</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• <i>Assessment tools, such as WorkKeys</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Which is most important to you? _____

QUESTION 8:

Identify best practices in hiring/recruiting low-income individuals

QUESTION 9:

Identify the least effective practices in hiring/recruiting low-income individuals

DEMAND SIDE ANALYSIS OVERVIEW

The project work on the demand side of the Richmond Community Audit began December 3, 2001. A consultant was brought in by Workforce One to manage the project and implement the demand side analysis. Primary objectives in the first phase of the project plan were:

- Overseeing compilation of a list of employers who have employed low-income individuals
- Developing a survey in scope to be presented (via paper copy and/or phone) to the identified employers
- Pulling together a focus group to bullet proof the initial survey
- Conducting the survey
- Presenting a preliminary analysis of the demand side data to the Richmond Workforce Investment Board on January 8, 2002
- Creating a final analysis report of the demand side to distribute in February 2002

The body of the report you are now reading is the product of the above steps in the first phase of the demand side analysis.

The next steps on the demand side will be to collaborate with the supply side and implement findings with the existing Workforce One Industry Action Groups (IAGs). The IAGs are efforts currently existing and coordinated by Workforce One to advance workforce readiness across the Richmond region. Involving them will enable the employers in the City of Richmond to better serve the needs (identified through the demand side analysis and the supply side integration) of low-income individuals. This integration of supply and demand sides is targeted to start in March 2002.

SURVEY ANALYSIS

Types Of Companies Who Participated:

The numbers of employees at each employer among the participating companies in the survey ranged in size from 4 employees to 17,000+ employees. Most employers ranged in the 1-250 employees range, six were in the 251-1000 range and five were in the 1,000+ range.

Entry-Level Positions Identified By Employers:

Accounts Payable Associate
Administrative Assistant
Cashier
Cleaner
Check/Deposit Handler
Cook



Data Entry
Delivery Person
Dietary Aide
Housekeeping
Machine Operator
Mail Clerk
Maintenance Crew
Messenger
Manufacturing Associate
New Loan Tracking Assistant
Pre-School Aides
Receptionist
Stocker
Teller
Utility Worker

Formal Requirements:

To better understand the formal requirements in place for entry-level workers, a series of questions were asked about those requirements.

- 100% of employers surveyed require an application. Most said some form of a resume was ‘nice to have’, but not required.
- 64% have in place some form of skills assessment
- 100% of employers have a formalized interview process. The number of interviews ranges from 1-2, with as many as 3 interviews for certain positions requiring specialized skills.
- 86% contact the references supplied by the applicant.
- 50% pull a criminal record on applicants.
- 14% conduct a credit check
- 79% require an up-front drug screen

Employability Skills

These employability skills—appropriate attire, good attitude, good communicator, follows instructions & team-player – were directly addressed in the survey. Responders were asked to rate them on a 1 to five scale, respectively not very important, somewhat important, important, very important & essential. The following break out identifies where the two highest percentile responses for each fell on that scale. (For the complete percentile breakout see TABLE 1 in the APPENDIX on Page 15.)

- Appropriate attire - 50% feel ‘important’ & 36% feel ‘very important’
- Good attitude - 50% feel ‘essential’ & 29% feel ‘very important’
- Good communicator - 36% feel ‘important’ & 29% feel ‘very important’
- Follows instructions - 50% feel ‘essential’ & 29% feel ‘very important’
- Team-player - 43% feel ‘essential’ & 36% feel ‘very important’

Under the option of ‘Other’ – 29% felt attendance was a core employability skill.

Occupational Skills:

From survey responses occupational skills – such as bilingual capability and computer skills – were identified as ‘important’ by 36% of employers. There was almost an even spread of 14% each on the other options of ‘not very important’, ‘somewhat important’, very important’, and ‘essential’.

Employability Skills vs. Occupational Skills:

Though occupational skills are considered ‘important’ by a significant percentage of employers, employability skills play the greater role in filling entry-level positions--93% feel employability skills are more important than occupational skills.

Training:

When asked to what extent training is provided for entry-level employees out of the options proposed—all go through a standard program OR trained on an as needed basis OR no training is offered— 64% stated employees are trained on an ‘as needed basis’. Almost 30% of the remaining employers have a standard training program by which all entry-level employees are brought up to speed.

Challenges And Successes During The Last Two Years:

When asked about the challenges and successes faced with low income individuals coming into entry-level positions employers consistently echoed a similar list of challenges and successes. The majority of the responses were derived from the employers’ interactions with these individuals on the job, i.e. they were not identified pre-employment.

CHALLENGES:

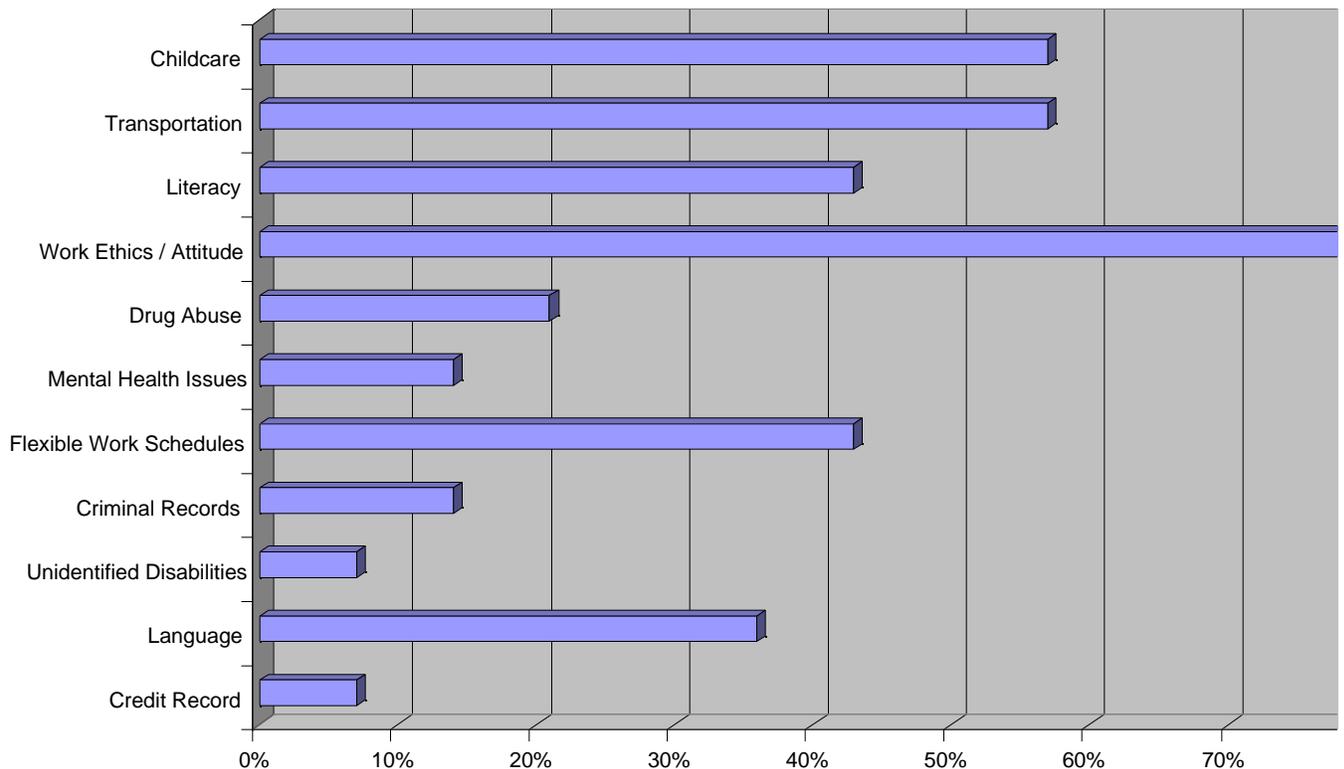
- **Commitment** – Employers stated the individuals were not committed to the position. They often exhibited an attitude in line with “I can get another job.” Other ways, in which employees expressed a lack of commitment, were among the other identified challenges listed below, e.g. poor attendance and attrition.
- **Attendance & Punctuality** – Attendance and punctuality were flagged as prevalent challenges, especially among their low-income, entry level employees. Reasons for not showing up to work when expected ranged from an inability to find transportation to a lack of childcare to not owning an alarm clock.
- **Attrition** – Several employers cited excessive turnover, in entry-level positions, as a challenge. Some of the reasons speculated for this high level of entry-level attrition were the employees were...
 - ill prepared to work 40 hour weeks (many having been out of the workforce for an extended period of time),
 - did not have skills to effectively deal with interpersonal issues when they arose in the workplace,
 - could not balance responsibilities at home with their required work schedule
- **Lying & ineptitude** – Instances where employees had misrepresented themselves (e.g. employability skills, occupational skills, interpersonal skills, etc.) in the hiring process became evident in the workplace. In most instances these misrepresentations led to dismissal or self-selected attrition.
- **Transportation** – Transportation posed an identifiable challenge for some employees. This challenge also filtered into other challenges such as attendance and punctuality. Most of the employers who saw instances of transportation challenges were those NOT on a bus line. However, even those located on bus routes recounted instances of employees not factoring in adequate time for transfers or not planning to arrive at work early, in the event of a delay because of a bus breakdown.

SUCSESSES:

- **Improved self-esteem** – Instances of heightened self-worth due to committing to a job and doing it well were cited. These examples ranged from employees who exemplified traits as top-notch employees to success stories of entry-level workers going on to assume supervisory roles.
- **Diversifying employee demographics** – Companies took what was perceived as a risk, based on high projected turn over rates for a particular demographic, and succeeded in employing low-income individuals.
- **Dependability and Attendance** – The appreciation for an opportunity from some candidates who were offered positions translated into them being very dependable workers. Apparently, where other employers had not extended them opportunities, when given the chance, they felt compelled to prove their value as a good employee. These exhibitions of proof translated into attending work regularly as well as punctually, following directions well and working overtime when business needs offered the opportunity.

MORE IN-DEPTH LOOK AT CHALLENGES:

**Employer Perceived Challenges
with low-income, entry-level candidates**



- **Childcare** - 57% of employers cited employee childcare as a challenge with low-income, entry-level workers. Ways this exhibited itself ranged from absenteeism to tardiness. When the reason for their absenteeism and/or tardiness was addressed many would identify as a single parent they did have a contingency plan if their primary child-care provider was unable to care for their child/children.
- **Transportation** - 57% of employers cited employee transportation as a challenge with low-income, entry-level workers. Ways this manifested itself ranged from absenteeism to tardiness. When the reason for their absenteeism and/or tardiness was addressed many would identify they did not have a reliable form of transportation. Most of these instances were individuals not easily accessible to a bus line and/or the place of employment was not easily accessible to a bus line, as an alternate transportation measure.
- **Literacy Qualifications** – 43% of employers cited employee literacy qualifications as a challenge with low-income, entry-level workers. In environments where written instructions were provided as part of the workflow process employees were often unable to accurately complete the requests as detailed in writing.
- **Work Ethics & Attitude** – 79% of employers cited employee work ethics and attitude as challenges with low-income, entry-level workers. Attitude issues were pervasive and ranged from poor interaction with customers to insubordinate interactions with management to situational conflicts with other employees. Employers routinely stated they felt there was a lack of example for many individuals of professional and baseline acceptable workplace behavior. Work ethics were questioned in such examples as generating a barely passable result for what was requested, sacrificing quality to meet production quotas, taking extended breaks and lunches, and ‘creating’ mechanical difficulties that prevented working.
- **Drug Abuse** – 21% of employers cited employee drug abuse as a challenge with low-income, entry-level workers. Of those employers who experienced issues with employees disciplinary action was usually required to address the issue of the employee being under the influence of some substance during work hours.
- **Mental Health Issues** – 14% of employers cited employee mental health issues as a challenge with low-income, entry-level workers.
- **Flexible Work Schedules** – 43% of employers cited employee need for flexible work schedules as a challenge with low-income, entry-level workers. In most of these instances the employer stated they needed the worker to be at work during a set schedule. The start or end time of the proposed schedules were earlier or later than some candidates’ schedules permitted. The reasons for the candidate needing to leave early ranged from childcare provider schedules to being able to arrange for transportation to other job commitments.
- **Criminal Records** – 14% of employers cited employee criminal records as a challenge with low-income, entry-level workers.
- **Unidentified disabilities (e.g. diabetes)** – 7% of employers cited employee unidentified disabilities as a challenge with low-income, entry-level workers.
- **Language (i.e. English speaking)** – 36% of employers cited employee fluency in English, either verbal or written, as a challenge for low-income, entry-level workers. These challenges ranged from the employee being able to fully comprehend the needs convey by the employer to misunderstanding or failing to understand written communications to difficulties completing paperwork for human resources.
- **Credit Record**– 7% of employers cited employee credit records as a challenge with low-income, entry-level workers.

Support Programs:

To gain an understanding of support programs that are in place with employers this survey asked for a yes or no identifier regarding eleven different types of support programs. The results follow:

<i>Employee Assistance Program (EAP)</i>	64 % have in place
<i>Tuition Reimbursement</i>	64 % have in place
<i>New Hire Orientation</i>	86 % have in place
<i>Training/Workshops</i>	79 % have in place
<i>Evaluation Process (Promotion/Hiring/Probation/Development)</i>	93 % have in place
<i>Retention/Incentives</i>	71 % have in place
<i>Mentoring</i>	36 % have in place
<i>Cross-training</i>	86 % have in place
<i>Childcare Assistance</i>	14 % have in place
<i>Transportation Services</i>	7 % have in place
<i>Grievance Process</i>	71 % have in place

Most Successful Support Programs:

There was not a single support program that across employers was perceived as the most successful support program in hiring. The responses for which support programs were identified as most successful among the survey participants follow-- in alphabetical order:

- Cross-training
- Employee Assistance Program
- Flexible Schedules
- Medical Benefits
- Mentoring
- New Hire Orientation
- Promotion opportunities
- Retention/incentives
- Sign-on bonuses
- Training
- Tuition reimbursement

Least Successful Support Programs:

Most employers felt none of their support programs would be considered least or even less effective in their hiring process.

As with the ‘most successful’ support programs, there was not a single support program that across employers was perceived as the least successful support program in hiring. The responses for which support programs were identified as least successful, by at least one company, among the survey participants follow--in alphabetical order:

- Employee Assistance Program
- Grievance Process
- Tuition reimbursement

Key Private Sector Changes To Facilitate Low-Income Individuals Into Entry-Level Positions:

The heart of the question in the survey addressed the changes that could be made within the company to reduce the associated risk and cost of hiring low-income individuals into entry level positions. The answers received in this section were as varied as were the employers. The following is a comprehensive list of changes heard from the participating employers.

- Incentives – Providing incentives to exhibit the employing company was aware of and appreciated the work performed by the employee.
- Improving the interview process – Some companies stated their hiring process was too drawn out and resulted in candidates finding employment elsewhere before an offer could be made. Some companies indicated their interviewing process did not adequately identify a ‘right fit’ for the different positions for which they were recruiting—seemed mostly to be a lack of behavioral interviewing being implemented.
- Skills evaluation – In companies where this is not already part of the process its absence was clearly identified by hiring personnel.
- Drug Screening – Up-front screening of job candidates before an incident in the workplace warrants a drug screen.
- Literacy training – To provide employees with the skills needed to accomplish their jobs. This was identified as a need with existing employees more than new candidates, as measures were already being set in place to test for literacy at the company who mentioned this change.
- Clearly identifying chain of command – Unclear identification of who can address an employee’s concerns/issues was an identified issue where some companies felt they could improve.
- Management Style – Providing employees more positive feedback to boost morale was an area for improvement that was identified. Providing recognition in group settings, such as staff meetings was also identified as an organizational level change considered prudent.
- Offering market competitive wages – Entry-level positions that offer less compensation than comparable positions in other companies increases attrition rates. Bringing up the wages to market competitive rates was identified as a change needed by one employer.

Key Public Sector Changes To Facilitate Low-Income Individuals Into Entry-Level Positions:

Funding for services and resources that instill employability skills & occupational skills, childcare assistance, English as a second language programs and better public transportation were the four public sector changes businesses identified. Several employers conveyed giving low-income individuals a means of getting to a place of employment was not enough. The challenges faced by these individuals need to be holistically addressed to foster their ability to express themselves as good employees. Employers proposed an equal need for candidates possessing the skills to carry out job expectations, confidence that their childcare issues were being addressed, and literally understanding what the employer expected.

Services And Resources Viewed As Incentives By Employers:

To better understand how employers perceive the impacting in their workplace, from existing services and resources in the community, they were asked to identify if the following services/resources were incentives for them when making hiring decisions. (Where the percentages do not total 100% of responders there were some employers who did not answer.)

See the chart on the following page.



Service and/or Resource	Yes, an incentive	No, not an incentive
Tax Credits	57%	36%
On-the-job training	50%	29%
Internships	36%	57%
Job shadowing	29%	57%
Job Coaching	43%	43%
Case Managers/Plan Managers	50%	43%
Training Assistance	57%	29%
Job Readiness: Resume prepared	50%	43%
Job Readiness: Interview skills and ability to complete an application	93%	7%
Job Readiness: Certifications	21%	64%
Job Readiness: Workshops	36%	43%
Job Readiness: Assessment Tools, such as WorkKeys	43%	43%

Existing Best Practices At Local Employers:

When asked to identify the best practices in place for addressing low-income, entry level worker challenges employers answered with the following:

- On-the-job Training – Giving the employee the opportunity to gain the skills needed for the position while actually doing the work.
- Setting Minimum Experience thresholds – Clearly identifying the minimum required to effectively perform a role and identifying that for the applicant up-front.
- Leveraging social agencies – Using organizations such as Spherion, GREAT and the Richmond Career Advancement Center to bring in low-income individuals into entry-level positions. These candidates have already gone through more screening and received more individual attention than can be provided by the employer in the typical recruiting process.
- Job Descriptions – Providing applicants with a clear understanding of the expectations for a role and the associated experience or aptitudes that will be required to effectively perform the job.
- Multiple Interviews – Having the candidate interview with more than one person at the company and then a collaborative decision is made based on the feedback of the interviewers.
- Short turn around on hiring process– Being able to determine if an offer will be made to the applicant as quickly as possible, before they have the opportunity to accept another job offer.
- Assessment tools – Ensuring the aptitudes the applicant stated he/she possessed was actually the case.
- Interview Techniques – Conducting behavioral interviews to see how the candidate responds to potential workplace scenarios.
- Incentives – Rewarding a job well done by monetary incentives and/or by recognition from management.

Existing Ineffective Practices At Local Employers:

When asked to identify the ineffective practices in place for addressing low-income, entry level worker challenges employers most said none. Those who felt there were some ineffective approaches being taken answered with the following:

- Referrals from current employees
- Requiring a resume

APPENDIX

TABLE I:

Employability Skills	Not very important	Somewhat important	Important	Very Important	Essential	No Respc
<i>Appropriate attire</i>		7%	50%	36%		7%
<i>Good attitude</i>			14%	29%	50%	7%
<i>Good communicator</i>		14%	36%	29%	14%	7%
<i>Follows instructions</i>			14%	29%	50%	7%
<i>Team-player</i>		7%	7%	36%	43%	7%
<i>Other, please specify</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Attendance</i>					29%	