

Addressing the Ongoing Need for Skilled Employees

Q&A with Secretary of Labor Karryl Hubbard

Forward Delaware holds a lot of promise for underemployed Delawareans. Tell us about this initiative and how implementation is going?

Despite the pandemic, where so many Delaware workers were displaced, employers have ongoing workforce needs for skilled employees. When Governor Carney issued Executive Order 43, the Department of Labor, Division of Employment and Training, and the Delaware Workforce Development Board, created the Rapid Workforce Training and Redeployment Initiative, or Forward Delaware – a short-term training program designed to assist Delaware employers and workers impacted by the COVID-19 crisis.

Funded with CARES Act dollars, the program targeted skill training in key areas: health care, IT, construction/trades, hospitality/food service and logistics/transportation. Delaware allocated \$15.5 million to support this initiative, with a goal of reaching more than 3,000 participants using 26 existing training providers. These funds allowed our training providers to increase their capacity. Those interested in training and employers who have workforce needs in the targeted areas should visit Forward Delaware at www.forwarddelaware.com.

Employers of every industry and size value workers with soft skills. Soft skills, like emotional intelligence and teamwork, and leadership abilities are increasingly becoming the hard skills to attain. How do you approach this developmental challenge within the Department of Labor?

We have developed workshops focusing on soft skills and the importance of highlighting those skills when applying for jobs. Our occupational skills trainers incorporate soft skills when training on “hard” or occupational skills. Training partners also coach clients on these soft skills.

Automation is going to change the workplace and we have seen some of those changes during this pandemic. What do you think employers need to key in on for the next five years?



Employers should examine areas that could be impacted by technology. Employees remain a key resource to identify efficiencies, so address employee concerns with transparency if possible. They also need to provide continued training, upskilling and cross training opportunities, and diversify staff by hiring people with strong critical thinking skills and those that can adapt to change. I would also suggest that employers work together within industries to address common needs.

Building a more inclusive and diverse workforce is a priority for State Chamber members. What advice do you have for business members as they seek out diverse talent pools to hire from?

Leadership should survey workplace culture. Look at hiring and interview practices for unintended biases. For example, check whether a job really requires a bachelor's degree before advertising for one. Assess your top performers and consider what skills the person has that make them successful in the job. Employers can utilize Delaware JobLink to find a diverse range of people and talents. This free service is available to search for employees based on skills, abilities, talents, location, work, and much more.

What is on the horizon for workforce development? What do you think Delaware needs to do in order to prepare itself to meet new and changing demands in the labor market?

It is no secret that workforce development is a federal and state priority. It will be key to use data and business intelligence to adjust workforce investments accordingly. Conversations around inclusion and poverty elimination mean that we need to engage citizens differently, develop relationships and reach untapped populations, those with disabilities, and with histories of incarceration. We will provide ongoing support for predominate industries in Delaware, but we also must be prepared to pivot to new industries including information technology, green tech, and sustainability. ■