Workforce Excellence Program:
Comprehensive Workforce Planning Model for Transportation Agencies

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Strategic recruitment of vital positions, retention of highly skilled and motivated employees, and effective training and development rank foremost in the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities’ (DOT&PF) commitment to workforce planning. This paper describes the design, development, and initial implementation of the Workforce Excellence Program, which is currently a work in progress. Performance measures and results will be reported as the program matures.

Transportation challenges include:
- Alaska Marine Highway connects 33 coastal communities via 3,500 waterway miles
- Aviation operations include two international airports and 252 rural airports – approximately 82% of communities are not served by roads
- Diverse and extreme geologic and climate conditions

The Workforce Excellence Program incorporates workforce data with an annual environmental scan to forecast future transportation workforce needs. Program focus:
- 2011 – training and development
- 2012 – recruitment and retention
- 2013 – knowledge transfer and career awareness

Recent DOT&PF training and development successes include:
- Construction Management Graduate Certificate through University of Alaska and the Alaska University Transportation Center focusing on leadership and project management skills – credits can be applied to Master’s Degree
- American Association of Airport Executives Certified Member program (AAAE CM) – professional airport management credential
- Standards of Training Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW) training – international qualification standards for masters, officers and watch personnel
- Online Supervisor Toolkit

Over the next 12 months, DOT&PF will implement a Mentorship program and the Leadership Development Program. Additional online resources and tools will also be made available to department employees. Workforce Excellence strives to identify and implement workforce development best practices in the transportation industry.
Workforce Excellence Program Overview

Active workforce planning began in 2009 with comprehensive workforce data gathering and analysis. DOT&PF identified an initial need for education and raised awareness of workforce planning based on the preliminary findings of the 2009 data. The years 2009 and 2010 focused exclusively on establishing data gathering and analysis processes and preparing the department for implementation of a workforce planning program. Follow-up workforce surveys in 2010 and 2011 demonstrated a higher overall awareness and understanding of workforce planning and assisted the department’s leadership team in fine tuning the developmental needs of the department. In 2011, the Workforce Excellence Program launched department-wide. Tied directly to the department’s strategic plan and with complete executive sponsorship, the Workforce Excellence Program is a three-year initiative with a focus on leadership, strategic recruitment, professional and personal employee growth, employee retention, and effective workforce planning processes. The program has been designed to accommodate industry shifts and changing workforce demands in order to maximize its effectiveness; it is administered via website and is accessible throughout the department’s duty stations. DOT&PF began design and development after researching trends in workforce demographics and planning.

The World of Work: Today and Tomorrow

The demand to recruit and retain top talent in today’s competitive job market is inspiring leaders to re-examine their approach to managing their greatest asset – people. Studies, however, show state governments are struggling to keep up with the demands of a changing workforce. In a 2008 project by Governing magazine, state governments were graded in four categories: information; people; money; and infrastructure. The states’ lowest rating was in the people category, receiving a C+ overall. In an effort to improve employee relations, managers have begun looking to generational influences to gain insight on how to manage the workforce. This concept is based on the premise that events and experiences that influence people during their lifetime can affect the attributes they expect from an employer. With retirement and turnover rates on the rise, agencies with strategic plans to manage the impact of generations in the workplace will emerge as winners in the battle for talent. The Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOT&PF) has incorporated generational awareness training into its workforce development program to provide tools for managing potential multi-generational impacts.

Today’s workforce is unique in that, for the first time, four generations are in the workplace at the same time. While experts do not agree on exact demarcations for the generations, the dates and ages in the following table are within the accepted range:
### TABLE 1 WORKING GENERATIONS SNAPSHOT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>Millennial (Gen Y)</th>
<th>Generation X (Gen X)</th>
<th>Baby Boomer (Boomers)</th>
<th>Traditionalist (Veterans)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age Range</strong></td>
<td>16 – 28 years old</td>
<td>29 – 48 years old</td>
<td>49 – 65 years old</td>
<td>66 – 87 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Approximate Population</strong></td>
<td>73 million</td>
<td>58 million</td>
<td>80 million</td>
<td>52 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percentage of US Workforce</strong></td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
<td>26.6%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Views on the Workplace</strong></td>
<td>Insist on a work-life balance. More skeptical and unimpressed by authority, more self-reliant, and less willing to sacrifice for work.</td>
<td>“Work to live.” Expect work to be fun – and if it’s not fun, it better have significant, tangible rewards.</td>
<td>Value individuality, creativity, and personal fulfillment. Desire to “make a difference.”</td>
<td>Prefer conformity over individuality in the workplace. Used to strict, vertical lines of authority.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The chart below illustrates the department’s generational makeup as compared to various labor markets.

![Generation Group Comparisons](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>47.7</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AK DOT</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>47.3</td>
<td>41.1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Sources: DOT/Personnel 2010 Workforce Group as of PPE 2/15/10
USDOL/Household Data/Civilian Labor Force (non-institutional) 2009
11/24/2010

Of primary concern is the dearth of Millennials in the DOT&PF workforce. This indicates a potentially catastrophic loss of experience and institutional knowledge in the near future with a miniscule talent pipeline.

In addition to raising generational awareness, DOT&PF has identified workforce trends in preparation for the next 5-10 years. The top ten future trends listed below are a culmination of what the department believes it will face in the years to come. DOT&PF has taken action to address these trends through its annual strategic planning session and in conjunction with the workforce planning program. The top ten future trends are listed below, with a brief description of the trend and related DOT&PF activities.

1. Process Change. The workplace will see increased use of rapidly changing technology, more extensive networking, and more effective services with limited resources. Efficiency will become crucial to survival, let alone success.

   DOT&PF is currently reviewing the technology and related processes used to conduct business with an eye toward consolidation and automating routine actions. The State of Alaska
is undergoing an enterprise replacement project for its procurement, financial, and HR information systems with a staggered 2012 – 2016 implementation schedule. This will change DOT&PF’s business processes. Popular social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter are being incorporated into the department’s communication plan. The 511 site is mobile-friendly and the department is expanding its mobile footprint.

2. Leadership Development. An overall culture change to networking and leadership at all levels is anticipated.

In 2012 DOT&PF will begin offering training and other resources to supervisors across all career fields to develop employees’ leadership skills. The Leadership Development Program will concentrate on helping newly promoted employees make the transition from peer to supervisor and then will expand to address more advanced leadership skills.

3. Ongoing Individual Development. There will be increased focus on learning and training as a result of the increased use of IT and the scarcity of sufficient qualified numbers in the labor pool to meet workforce needs. Social networking will expand and become an integral part of getting the job done.

Development is an integral piece of DOT&PF’s culture; the core value “Excellence” stresses the importance of professional and personal growth. Department leadership and trainers have begun to collaboratively identify and prioritize the most critical development opportunities. The Workforce Excellence Program includes extensive and varied training and development projects such as Communication, Leadership, and a centralized learning management system.

4. Organizational Performance Management. Performance measures will become reality, linked with human, fiscal, and other resources. Outcome-based management and funding is anticipated.

Changing Workplace Attitudes:
- Shorter Career Lifecycles – shift toward free agency, temporary work, consulting
- Increasing Acceptance of Technology – remote access, work from home, computer security
- Increased Demand for Learning at Work – computer-delivered training, necessary to keep up on profession
- Increased Focus on Lifestyle – new ways to satisfy employee needs; better blending of work and personal time

What Government Agencies are doing to Manage Talent:
- Enhancing job experiences through job rotation and new staff assignments
- Creating “Top Gun” academies offering formal training and coaching for star performers
- Utilizing personal coaches for current and potential leaders
- Establishing co-managers in critical functions to ease transition between retiring experts and new leaders
- Outsourcing hard-to-fill functions and diverting existing staff to more strategic roles
  - Beware and Prepare – The Government Workforce of the Future by Tyler Galdamez

TRB 2013 Annual Meeting
Paper revised from original submittal.
DOT&PF is undergoing a comprehensive review of its existing performance measures. Future performance measures will have a strong focus on effectiveness and efficiency, providing a clear picture of the services being provided and their subsequent costs.

5. Individual Performance Management. Organizational and individual performance will be managed together. Individual performance will merge with strategic goals.

All positions in the department are under review to identify their role in the organization: vision; critical; core; or non-core. This exercise is part of DOT&PF’s hierarchical structure analysis. The position review includes a close look at how each position may be best utilized for optimal outcomes. Individual performance can then be tied to roles and mission. The four roles are defined below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROLE</th>
<th>DEFINITION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vision</td>
<td>Roles vital for achieving strategic goals (~10-15% of department). Future success is compromised if these roles are not filled with extremely competent people. Mission-critical positions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical</td>
<td>Roles related to operational excellence (~20% of department). Essential to executing the mission and strategy of the department. Current success is compromised if there are issues in critical roles. The majority of these positions require specialized education, training, knowledge, or experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core</td>
<td>Roles that keep the internal operation working smoothly (~60-70% of department). The majority of employees within the department who support and process work. Most of these positions require some specialized education, training, knowledge, or experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-core</td>
<td>Roles that may have become obsolete because skill sets no longer align with the mission and strategy. Changes in the industry or technology may have reduced or eliminated the need for these roles.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. Strategic Recruitment. Focus on finding new feeder pools, which could include more non-conventional positions/job classes. Workforce diversity will continue to expand.

Recruitment and selection times vary greatly in the department. Candidates may be offered positions within 15 days of a recruitment bulletin, or after an exhaustive nationwide search that can take 12-18 months. Some difficult-to-fill positions remain vacant in spite of aggressive recruitment efforts. Difficult-to-fill positions include but are not limited to specialized Engineers (hydrology, bridge design, etc.), Environmental Impact Analysts, Port Captains, Airport Managers, Accountants, Transportation Planners, and specialized IT professionals. The department is streamlining its recruitment and selection process and developing online resources and tools to help hiring managers fill critical and core positions.

7. Employee Retention. The decreased labor pool will lead to talent wars for well-qualified workers. The most successful employers will offer interesting work, employee authority,
innovative offices, work-life balance, and multiple opportunities for employee development and growth.

DOT&PF has begun tracking employee retention. In 2012, 85.09% of new hires are still working for DOT&PF after approximately three years. The department’s average length of state service is 9.2 years. Additional data analysis is being conducted to determine when and why department employees choose to leave DOT&PF. As the labor pool for highly specialized jobs decreases, the department faces extreme challenges in retaining employees long enough to “grow its own” experts and in finding expert replacements as employees retire or otherwise leave the department. The Workforce Excellence Program will be focusing on employee recruitment and retention in 2012 and 2013.

8. Employee Retirement. Retirement will continue to be redefined and could include:
   succession planning, long-term mentorships, job shadowing, co-managers, etc.

As depicted in the table below, retirement projections for State Fiscal Year (FY) 2007 showed 48.5% of department employees were eligible for retirement within five years. FY 2008 showed 29% of department employees were eligible for retirement within five years after a large number of employees retired from state service. Retirement projections through FY 2011 have hovered near 30%, with a slight annual decrease.

TABLE 3 DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION & PUBLIC FACILITIES
RETIREMENT PROJECTIONS FY 2006 – FY 2011
DEPARTMENT TO STATEWIDE COMPARISON

![Bar chart showing retirement projections for DOT&PF and statewide from FY 2006 to FY 2011. The chart indicates a slight decrease in retirement eligibility over the years, with DOT&PF consistently showing a lower percentage compared to statewide.]

TRB 2013 Annual Meeting   Paper revised from original submittal.
Since the FY 2007 exodus, the department has focused on retaining employees and regaining institutional knowledge. To that effect, retired employees have come back to work as temporary employees and transferred their knowledge and experience to permanent employees. In addition, the department has worked with employees to ensure smooth transitions as individuals retire.

9. Knowledge Management. Successful employers will organize industry knowledge to maximize use by all stakeholders; this will be a competitive advantage in talent wars.

DOT&PF is actively pursuing effective knowledge management through document imaging technology/practices and person-to-person knowledge transfer. Employees are encouraged to share information and resources; the department is also participating in identifying knowledge management best practices in transportation on the national level. The Mentorship Program launched January 2012 is an additional knowledge management tool.

10. Workforce Training and Development. The rate of new knowledge will increase exponentially, requiring employers to keep their workforce current with increased training and development opportunities and methods. Successful employers will research, analyze, and understand their most beneficial training topics and methods.

DOT&PF implemented an updated learning management system in 2011 which allows online training, registration, transcripts, and training plans. Department employees can attend webinars, view training videos and documents, listen to narrated PowerPoint presentations, and record their completed training through this web-based system. The department is also making more use of teleconference and videoconference. Monthly leadership team meetings are held via video conference; Maintenance & Operations training sessions are held monthly via teleconference. DOT&PF continues to identify ways to increase training and educational opportunities using available technology.

Workforce Planning: Today’s Tool for Tomorrow

The term “workforce planning” possesses a wide variety of meanings and parameters. DOT&PF defines workforce planning as a systematic process for identifying and addressing the gaps between the workforce of today and the human capital needs of tomorrow. It is often described as a process that ensures the right people are in the right jobs at the right time. Across the nation, government agencies are experiencing a high number of retirements and finding it difficult to fill vacant positions with qualified replacements.

The department has designed its workforce planning efforts to address the following considerations:

- Critical need for successful workforce planning the first time. Implementing a program typically involves transformational change; small steady achievements are more likely to ensure continued success.
Data gathering and analysis are keys to a successful program. Anecdotes and personal observations can miss underlying issues and derail a program’s effectiveness.

Flexible program that can change as business changes. Ideally, workforce planning programs are evaluated and revised every 9-12 months.

Workforce development is an organizational culture. Critically positioned nay-sayers can undermine a well-planned program.

Clear communication and managing expectations is vital for success. Workforce planning is most successful when sponsored by leadership and shared openly.

Change management training can greatly increase success. Workforce planning focuses on how to prepare for anticipated future change.

DOT&PF has also identified its top workforce planning challenges based on internal review, nationwide research, and communication with other state transportation agencies with active workforce planning programs:

- Stagnant spots in an agency can slow down or stop workforce planning efforts. Spots, for example, may come from limited employee buy-in, inadequate resources, or outdated technology.
- A department-wide communication plan is necessary for success. Sporadic or unreliable communications can affect success and create stagnant spots.
- An honest review of organizational culture, and adjustment if necessary, further increases the chance of success. Workforce planning orientation requires strong and consistent leadership from all levels within the agency.
- Funding and human capital resources for workforce development can be challenging to find and maintain. Performance measures that are directly related to workforce planning and department achievement are critical.
- DOT&PF is already feeling the effects of the aging workforce. This means speed is as important as quality. Best practice reviews and networking with other agencies can be extremely beneficial.

DOT&PF identified the following workforce planning benefits to help communicate the need for a quality program:

- Allows an agency to more accurately determine the workforce needed for future success;
- Provides a foundation to actively train, recruit or restructure resources;
- Bridges knowledge gaps due to attrition or changes in the industry;
- Increases an agency’s ability to achieve maximum organizational effectiveness; and
- Integrates separate initiatives scattered across an agency into an overall plan.

“More than ever, creativity, teamwork, and leadership will be critical skills for tomorrow’s transportation workforce.”

- Midwest Transportation Consortium, 2010
DOT&PF has developed an agency workforce plan that details initial findings, objectives, and project tasks and timelines. The department also established a web site that provides workforce planning data, resources, guides, and program forms/applications for current employees. An annual workforce planning survey allows DOT&PF greater responsiveness to new or shifting workforce issues.

**Department Snapshot**

DOT&PF is responsible for a large geographic area and has a most unusual combination of transportation challenges which include:

- **Alaska Marine Highway System (AMHS)** connects the Southeastern and Southwestern coastal regions of the state via waterway
  - Communities are generally accessible only by sea or air
  - Year-round service to 33 Alaskan communities plus Bellingham, Washington, and Prince Rupert, British Columbia, Canada, covering 3,500 route miles
  - Annual average of 312,000 passengers and 98,000 vehicles
- **Aviation operations, maintenance and support**
  - Two international airports – Anchorage and Fairbanks
  - 252 rural airports
  - Approximately 82% of Alaskan communities are not served by roads
- **Arterial road structure involving municipalities, boroughs, and tribal governments**
  - State of Alaska owns/maintains 92% of high functional class roads
  - Comprises 30% of all roads, where: 75% of total vehicle miles traveled occurs; and 86% of accident cost occurs
Diverse and extreme geologic and climate conditions ranging from permafrost to volcanic activity

DOT&PF’s 2010 environmental scan revealed five primary areas of interest:

1. Approximately 30% of the department’s workforce can retire in the next five years;
   a. 90 job classes where 50% or more of the total employees in the job class can retire within five years
   b. Retirement eligible employees span the career fields and hierarchy of the department; smaller “feeder” pools

2. Average length of service with the department is a little over 9 years;
   a. Workforce has an inverted bell curve where the majority of employees have either more than 20 or less than 5 years of service
   b. May experience significant institutional knowledge loss without well-established knowledge management and transfer processes

3. Recruitment challenges;
   a. Some critical positions have remained vacant due to unsuccessful recruitment efforts, widening the knowledge gap
   b. Universities in general are issuing a smaller number of graduates in transportation-related career fields
   c. Hiring managers are “settling” for less qualified candidates, resulting in longer learning curves and lower productivity

4. Need to maintain current infrastructure to industry standards while continuing to connect the state’s infrastructure;
   a. Potential discord in regard to prioritization of work and funding
   b. Tasked with more work than available resources and funding
   c. In today’s economy, it costs more to provide the same level of service even as demands for service are increasing

5. Employee engagement;
   a. Employees report feeling “stretched thin” and often cite the “curse of competence” – refers to the axiom that the more competent you are as an employee, the more work you are simultaneously tasked to complete.
   b. National trend of retaining an aging workforce to avoid losing institutional knowledge and skills inhibits promotional and developmental opportunities of the younger workforce, encouraging job hopping.
   c. Employees report staying more interested in the work when the organizational culture supports personal growth and work-life balance.

The department’s 3,500 positions are located in 96 duty stations across the state, including the 11 AMHS vessels.
DOT&PF Strategic Plan

Purpose

Get Alaska Moving through service and infrastructure.

To do this we:

- Provide for the safe and efficient movement of people and goods
- Provide access to state services
- Open opportunities for exploration and development of Alaska's resources

Core Values

From our history to date and from the commitments we all share now about the future, we have defined the values that should guide our activities and staff in the years to come.

These are our core values:

- **Integrity:** Ensure honesty, dependability, loyalty, and a high ethical standard
- **Excellence:** Personal and department commitment to continually improve individual, team, and organizational knowledge, performance, and methods to provide superior service and products
- **Respect:** Positive regard for colleagues and customers

Workforce Excellence Progress To Date

Workforce Excellence strives to identify and implement workforce development best practices in the transportation industry. Accomplishments and upcoming projects are listed below with implementation dates.
Accomplishments

- Construction Management Graduate Certificate (2009)
  - Available through the University of Alaska and the Alaska University Transportation Center – remote learning option
  - Focuses on leadership and project management skills
  - Can be applied to a Master’s degree
- Standards of Training Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers training (2009)
  - International qualification standards for masters, officers and watch personnel
- Generations in the Workplace Training (2009)
  - Raise awareness of generations and potential impact in the workplace
  - Preparation for the Workforce Excellence Program
- “Serving Future Transportation Needs: Succession Planning for a State Department of Transportation Organization, Its People & Mission” (2011) -- report conducted by the University of Alaska, Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, prepared for the Alaska University Transportation Center and DOT&PF
  - Interviewed engineers and supporting disciplines, both current DOT&PF employees and those who separated from DOT&PF in the last three years
  - Reported on reasons engineers left DOT&PF, stayed with DOT&PF
  - Offered recommendations to improve knowledge transfer and maintain expertise
- Change Management Training (2010)
  - Department-specific change process – delivered to leadership
  - Preparation for implementation of the Workforce Excellence Program
- DOT&PF Workforce Excellence Web Site (2010)
  - Key source of communication on workforce planning – provides resources, workforce planning activities, and the program’s overall objectives and timeline
- Workforce Planning Communication Plan (2010)
  - Centered around the Workforce Excellence web site
  - Commissioner includes program updates in his quarterly strategic planning meetings – open to all DOT&PF employees
  - All staff emails announce activity launches
  - Information is also disseminated by the department’s leadership team through regularly scheduled staff meetings
- American Association of Airport Executives Certified Member Program (2011)
  - Professional airport management credential

Skill Gap Analysis:

Engineering workforce is aging. Science as a subject in school has steadily been on the decline. Shortfall of engineers and road-based technical skills anticipated in the next 10 years.

Consequences:

Road work that simply can’t get done, even if funding is there.

Market Research:

Image problem – “Not well paid. Finite career path. The organization and work is boring. Interesting work is contracted out.”

- World Road Association Findings, 2010
• DOT&PF custom new employee orientation (2011)
  o Developed to supplement State employee orientation process – provides
department-specific information designed for on boarding new employees
  o Includes an employee entrance survey for data gathering and reporting
• DOT&PF Supervisor Toolkit (2011)
  o Department-specific resource for supervisors; provides information and contacts
  o Introduction to DOT&PF supervisors’ role and responsibility – part of the
leadership development program
• Mentorship Program (2012)
  o Voluntary program open to all DOT&PF employees – mentors and learners are
carefully matched for maximum success
  o Six month one-on-one mentorship agreement with focus on a specific job or
career-related knowledge and/or skill set
  o Administered online through the department’s intranet
  o Four hour mentor training mandatory before mentorship begins
• Core Value Online Resource Toolkit (2012)
  o Provides supervisor resources related to the department’s three core values
  o Variety of interview questions for recruitment and selection
  o Sample performance appraisal phrases and rating guide

Upcoming 2012 Projects
• Strategic Recruitment Process
  o Expanding Intern program at both high school and college levels
  o Targeted Outreach (marketing, advertising/social media, networking, attending
career fairs)
  o Provide DOT&PF adjunct professors and guest speakers to local universities for
students in specific career fields
  o Campus presentations to high school students on specific career opportunities in
the department
• Entrance/Exit Survey
• Knowledge Transfer needs and methods
• Employee Recognition Program
• Leadership Development Program
  o Tiered program primarily designed to develop leaders as they move into
increasingly responsible management and executive roles
  o Program also addresses change management, strategic leadership, day-to-day
effectiveness, and motivating others
  o Co-worker to supervisor course – adapted from Ohio Department of
Transportation
  o Alaska Maintenance Leadership Academy

CONCLUSION
DOT&PF has embarked on a comprehensive workforce planning program in response to the
rapidly changing transportation landscape. With a potentially large number of employees
choosing to retire now or soon, DOT&PF must become and remain an employer of choice. The
Amanda Holland

department must successfully fill vacancies with an effective workforce and keep new and seasoned employees satisfied as well as highly qualified. DOT&PF’s workforce development plan is designed to assist in the recruitment, retention, and professional growth of the department’s workforce. Preliminary performance measure data is being collected and will be reported annually after the entire program is implemented in 2014.

To date, DOT&PF has experienced steady, measured progress which has allowed the department to integrate separate initiatives into an overall department plan and to manage the change inherent in successful workforce planning efforts. The program’s tenets for achievement remain:

- Flexibility to change with industry’s needs
- Workforce development is an organizational culture
- Skilled change management, communication, and leadership are vital for success

The department is looking forward to the continued implementation of the workforce plan and to providing future reports of success, lessons learned, and best practices.
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