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Businesses cite better training Hoosier workforce needs surveyed

About 80 percent of Indiana employers surveyed said they would like more information on workforce training programs, and 86 percent said they would like the private sector to get more involved in designing and delivering training programs.

Those are the findings of a study being released today in Fort Wayne and four other Indiana cities that will lead to a call for businesses to serve as intermediary between their employees and available workforce training and literacy services.

The study was conducted for the Indiana Chamber of Commerce Foundation by FutureWorks, an Arlington, Mass.-based economic development and strategic research organization.

The results of the study will be shared with Indiana businesses at a summit in Indianapolis planned for the third quarter. Business representatives attending the summit will be educated on workforce training and literacy programs and encouraged to help develop new programs.

The study, performed over nine months, included a survey of about 475 businesses statewide, said Mark Lawrance, vice president of corporate development at the Indiana Chamber of Commerce.

About 84 percent of Indiana businesses surveyed said that basic workforce skills, such as working in teams, are very important for their employees.

And almost three-fourths of the firms indicated that they had provided basic skills training for some of their workforce in the past two years.

Having a literate and skilled workforce is important for economic development. "When employers look to either expand a current business or to bring a new business to the state, one of the first questions they look at is what are skills and capabilities of the workforce," Lawrance said. "And decisions are made based on those skills."

If workers are not made aware of the skills that employers need, they are not going to find good jobs, said Steve Corona, president of JobWorks, a Fort Wayne-based skills training and placement services organization.

"We have a degree of difficulty in filling some of the highest skilled jobs in this community," he said. "We continue to see companies ... recruit on a national basis because they can't find qualified engineers here."

Current workforce training and adult literacy resources are serving only about 20,000 to 23,000 adult workers annually, partly because of a lack of awareness of these resources, Lawrance said.

He said he would like to see the numbers of working Hoosiers served doubled. The study recommends greater coordination between the state workforce development programs and the businesses themselves.

It recommends the use of tax credits and other financial assistance to encourage businesses to provide their employees with workforce training and to nudge people to develop jobs skills that would make them more employable, Lawrance said.

Vestil Manufacturing, in Angola partly because of Tri-State University, employs 18 engineers, said Ralph Trine, company chairman and chief executive officer. "We thought that that was very important, to be able to tap into that brain trust," Trine said.

Vestil, which makes material handling equipment such as aluminum ramps and hydraulic lifts and employs about 240, has not had trouble finding adequately trained workers.

"If you're paying \$14 an hour, you don't have any trouble finding literate people," Trine said. "And if you're paying \$8 an hour, you are going to have trouble finding (them)."