

Background

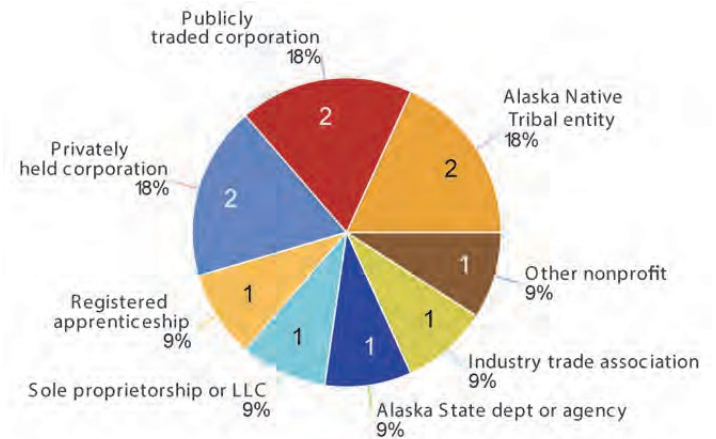
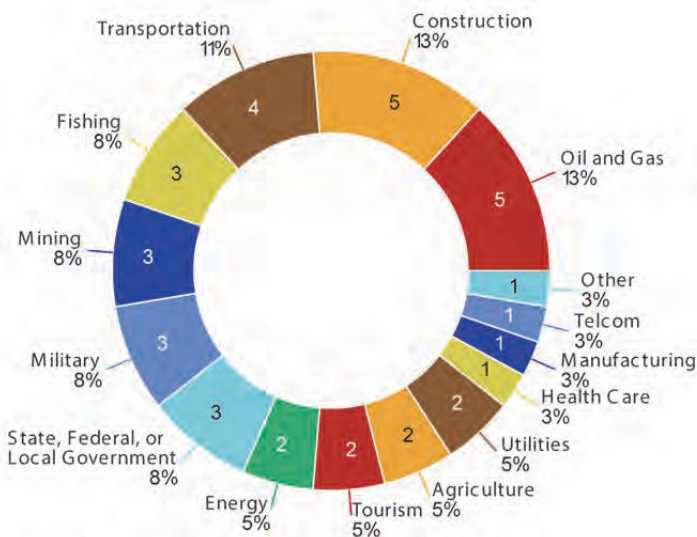
Formed in December 2023, the Industry Advisory Council (IAC) is charged with crafting evidence-based recommendations for a new integrated all-industries workforce plan to serve all Alaskans. Effective workforce development frustrates all the world’s developed economies. The symptoms of the problems include not enough trained workers to fill all the available jobs even as not all emerging or existing workers are able to receive the education and training they need to reach their own full employment potential. In Alaska, leaders have determined that a new integrated plan serving all industries would be beneficial because of perceived deficiencies and failures in the current system, the growing shortage of qualified workers, and workforce reductions caused by an aging workforce and out migration. The effort to develop recommendations for this plan is sponsored and funded jointly by the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development and the Denali Commission and led by the Alaska Safety Alliance.

Initial Survey of IAC Members

The IAC will conduct fact-finding surveys of private employers, associations, nonprofits, Native Alaskan entities, educational and training institutions and organizations, students and trainees, employed and emerging workers, and government entities to learn what stakeholders want to see in the Alaska’s Workforce Future Plan.

To focus the surveys, a straw poll of IAC members was conducted to identify key workforce goals and problems, important soft skills, important hard skills, and communication among industry, education and training, and government entities. The aim was to use the IAC survey as a first-cut pilot of key questions. Questions were drawn from US and Alaska workforce development literature from 2010 to the present, including 33 US documents and 14 Alaska documents. Twenty-one goals for successful workforce plans and nine ongoing problems were identified.

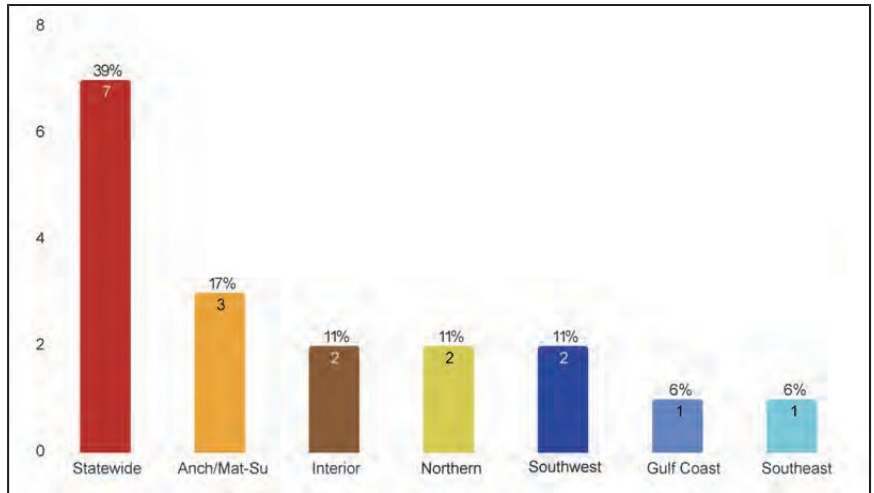
IAC Composition The IAC comprises a diverse and experienced cross-section of Alaskans with daily involvement in workforce issues in all aspects of Alaska’s economy, as shown in the pie chart at right.



IAC Industries The IAC members represent a broad swath of Alaska’s industries including state, federal, or local governments, agriculture, mining, military, tourism, fishing, and transportation as shown in the chart at left. In some instances an IAC member represents more than one industry, so the count exceeds the number of members.

IAC Regions The IAC members are involved across all of Alaska’s economic regions from Anchorage to the Northern Region, with many having statewide responsibilities, as shown in the bar graph at right.

Several IAC members are involved in more than one region.



IAC Survey Results

Ten of 14 IAC members returned surveys (71%). Since then, three new members were added, and responses for one are included. Five main issues are covered: 1) workforce problems; 2) workforce goals; 3) important soft skills; 4) important hard skills; and 5) communication between industry and education and training entities.

1) Workforce Problems The literature search identified nine universal workforce problems cited to varying degrees among all the reviewed programs in the US. The ratings of these problems by the IAC members for Alaska appear in the table below. Top rated among the IAC respondents is *not enough communication, discussion, and collaboration among employers, educators, and local, state, and federal agencies*, seen as the greatest problem by 90% of respondents. Also, 80% cited the *struggle in all industries to find and place workers with up to date skills*, and 70 percent cited *lack of clear pathways, guidance and support for workers who need training and for students, parents, and new job seekers*. Tied closely to the major problem concerning lack of communication was *outdated and siloed information in the private and public sectors*, which was selected by 70% of IAC members. And *unequal access to work-related training* was cited by 70%. The ranked order for all nine problems appears in the table below.

% Yes	IAC Members Rated 9 PROBLEMS
90%	Not enough communication, discussion, and collaboration among employers, educators, and local, state, and federal agencies.
80%	Employers in all industries struggling to find and place workers with current and up to date skills.
70%	A lack of a clear pathway, guidance and supports for workers who need retraining.
	A lack of a clear pathway, guidance and supports for students, parents, and new job seekers.
	Outdated and siloed information in the private and public sectors.
	Unequal access to work-related training.
60%	Lack of funds for workforce development programs.
50%	Too few pilot and demonstration projects to test methods before adoption.
40%	The slow evolution of educational institutions and training programs.

Each problem statement was associated with a 4-point Likert scale (Not a Problem/Mostly Not/Mostly Yes/Yes, a Problem). Outcomes were recoded as binary, combining Yes with Mostly Yes and No with Mostly Not.

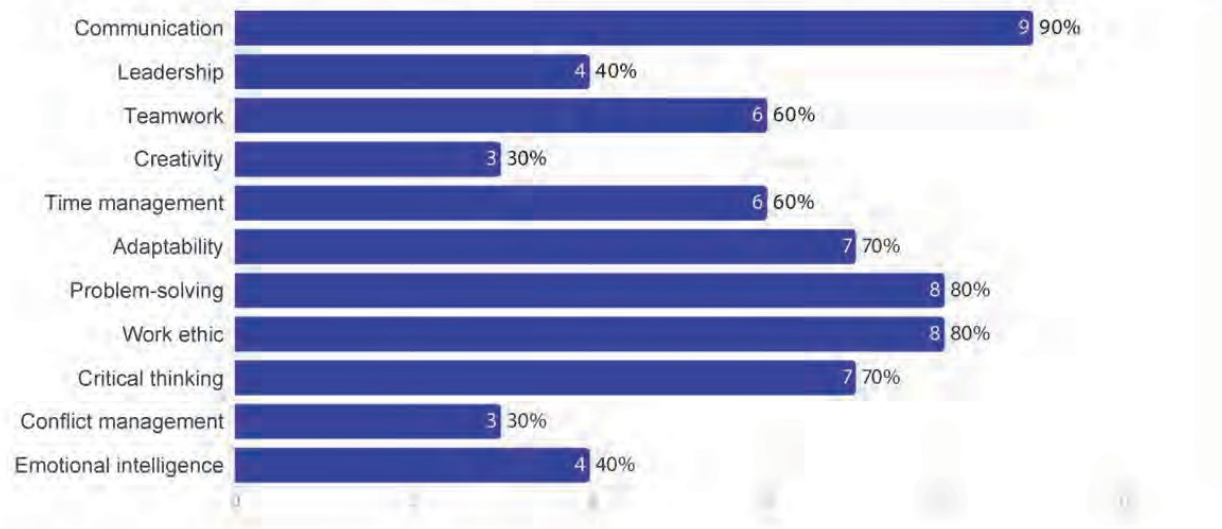
2) Workforce Goals The literature search identified 21 commonly discussed workforce goals. IAC members ranked these using two criteria: 1) value or importance to a workforce plan and 2) degree to which the goal is attained by current workforce planning. To simplify results, goals were arranged based on ratings for “not attained” and further arranged in descending order by value. Goals mostly not attained would be the highest priorities. The table reveals 12 of the 21 goals were seen by 50% or more as unattained and 11 of the 12 were rated as valued by 60% or more. Four goals that 40% or fewer felt had not been attained were valued by 100%.

% Valued	% <u>NOT</u> Attained	21 GOALS Rated by IAC Members
80%	100%	Options for child care and/or family care.
90%	80%	Incentives and supports to help update curricula and align education and training with labor market needs.
80%	80%	Private and public policy incentives to support workforce efficiency, including pilot and demonstration projects.
80%	80%	State-level cadre of personal navigators for students, new job seekers.
90%	70%	Readily accessible information about education/training costs and returns on investments.
70%	70%	Mechanisms to make benefits transferable across employers.
100%	60%	Elimination of information silos.
60%	60%	Options to enable/support cultural practices, such as seasonal subsistence work.
60%	60%	Mechanisms to reduce employer, worker, and student costs of matching applicants with job openings.
90%	50%	Awareness of forecasted needs and skills.
80%	50%	Use of improved data and evidence to monitor, test, share, and scale up proven remedies.
40%	50%	Options to defray the costs of job-based relocation.
100%	40%	Multiple on-ramps for displaced and transitioning workers.
80%	40%	Efficient and appropriate matching and rematching of skilled workers with jobs.
100%	30%	Multiple on-ramps for graduating students and new jobseekers.
100%	30%	Equitable access to opportunities for acquiring the skills in demand in the labor market.
80%	30%	Access to forecasting on industry and occupational trends in Alaska.
80%	30%	Use of standardized terminology to describe occupations and measure skills.
100%	20%	A broadly applicable skill and competency base for all Grade 6 - 12 students.
70%	20%	Options to enable/support cultural practices, such as seasonal subsistence work.
70%	20%	Options to defray education and training costs.

Soft Skills and Hard Skills The IAC survey also looked at the soft skills and hard skills likely needed by successful job applicants and employees. The lists were generated in the preliminary literature review. The aim was to determine whether and how Alaska requirements differ from the national trends and to inform the upcoming statewide surveys. Those surveys will probe the extent to which educators teach or train the soft and hard skills and to what extent trainees and students believe they need and receive such skills. Alignment among these stakeholders will be key to potential recommendations for workforce planning changes.

3) Soft Skills More than 70% of IAC members identified 5 soft skills as very important for students and workers. These are: communication (90%), problem solving (80%), work ethic (80%), adaptability (70%), and critical thinking (70%). Slightly smaller percentages are seen for teamwork (67%) and time management (60%). The next step will to be move these issues forward in the wider surveys to see how important they are thought to be by those stakeholders.

11. As an employer or company representative, how important do you believe the following soft skills are to your organization and to building a viable cross-industry workforce that is integrated horizontally (changing jobs) and vertically (promotions within an organization)?

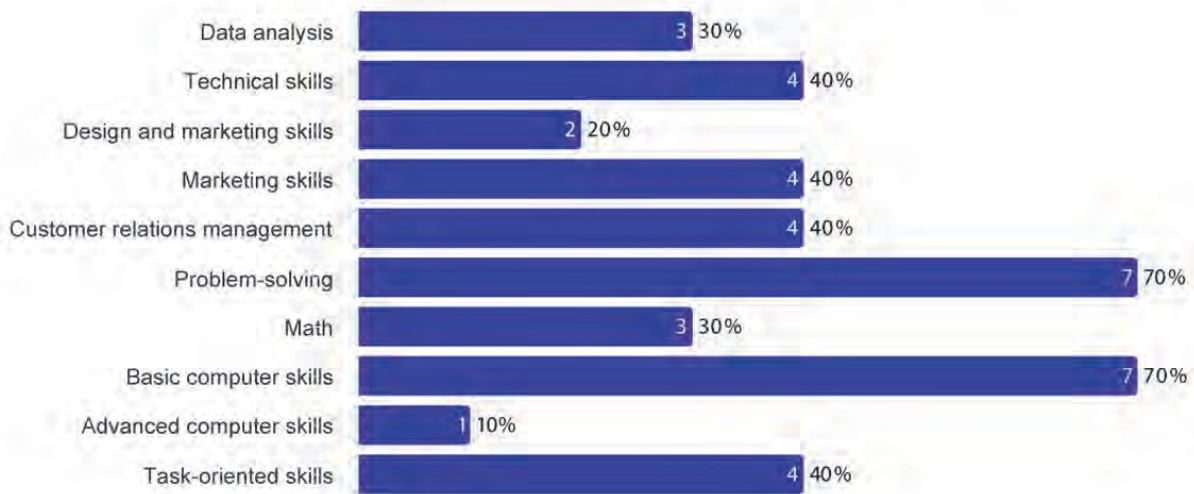


In general, these skills are deemed important by employers for workforce participants and it is believed by many educational experts that they can be taught. The question is, are they being taught and how successfully? The results will have bearing on workforce education design recommendations.

4) Hard Skills There are hard skills built around being able to do a task or carry out a process. For a workforce plan that is widely applicable to all industries, the hard skills cannot list specific skills related to specific industries because not all industries would need or value those skills. Instead, evaluation of hard skills must focus on generalizable and cross-industry skills which the literature shows are in demand by employers.

As shown in the bar chart on the next page, IAC members focused on two specific hard skills as *very important*: problem solving (70%) and basic computer skills (70%). An additional four skills were also ranked *important* by 40%: technical skills, managerial skills, customer relations skills, and task-orient skills.

12. As an employer or company representative, how important do you believe the following hard skills are to your organization and to building a viable cross-industry workforce integrated both horizontally (changing jobs) and vertically (promotions within an organization)?

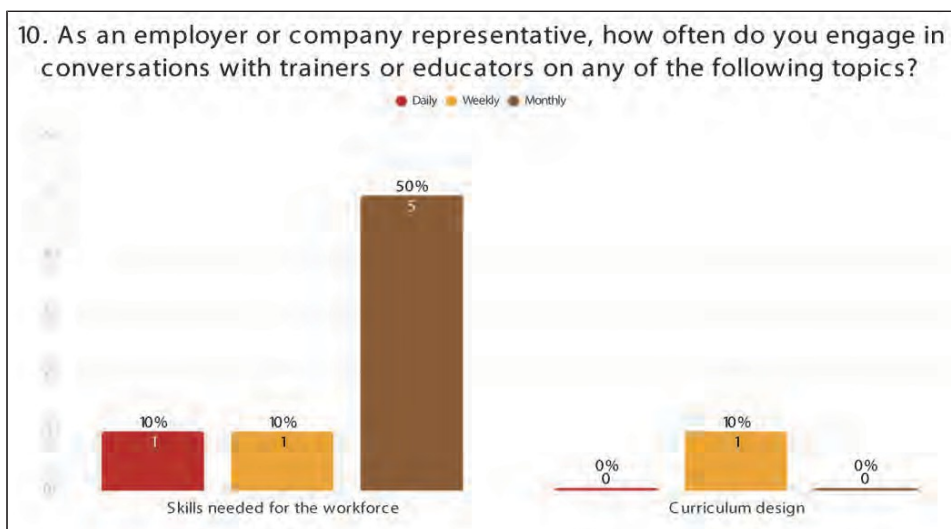


The next step is to bring these and other cross-industry skills forward in the wider surveys to see how important they are thought to be by stakeholders statewide.

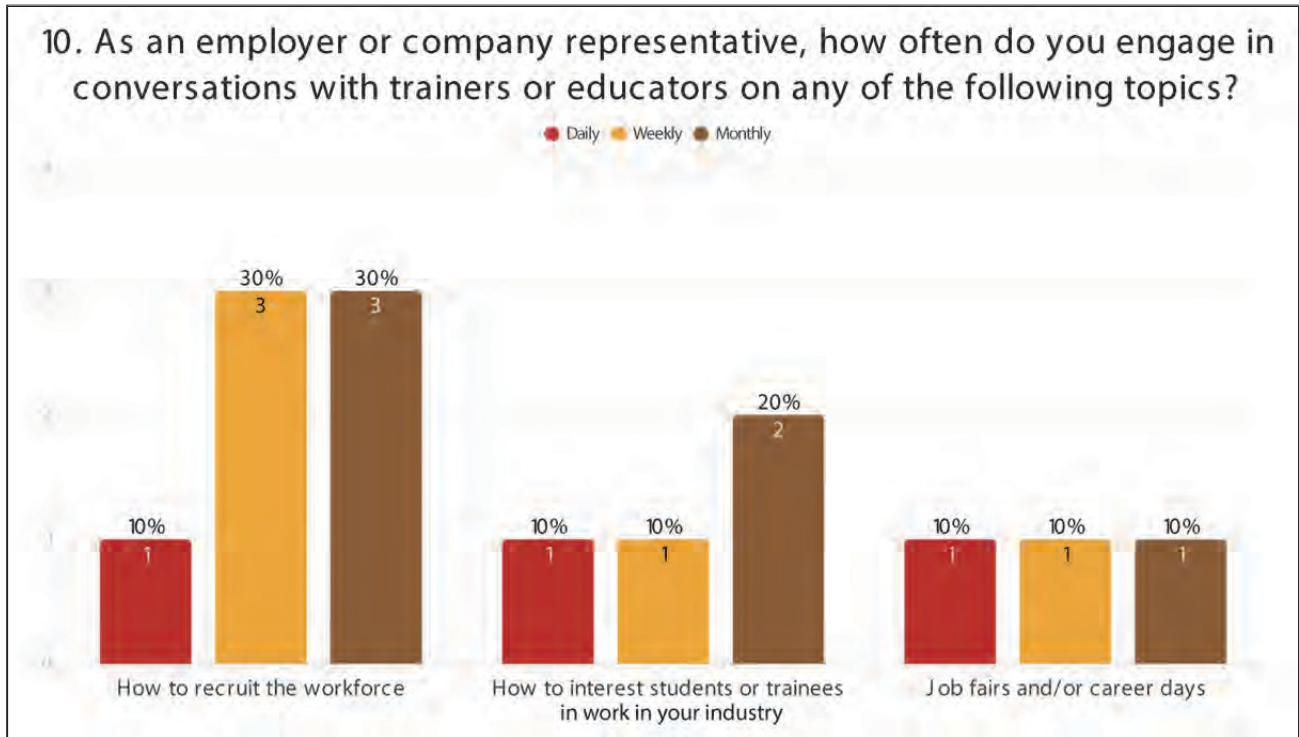
5) Communication among Industry and Education and Training Entities

A major concern revealed in the IAC survey is lack of communication among key entities. Associated with that is the *silo effect* among organizations and agencies. The survey examined the degree to which such failures of communication and silos are experienced by IAC committee members.

The bar chart displays IAC member engagement with trainers or educators. Results are shown for five topic areas with percentage of contacts monthly or more frequently. In large measure, even among this more dedicated set of leaders, contact with educators and trainers was limited. The greatest percentage of IAC members showed involvement with “skills needed for the workforce” with 70% reporting monthly or greater involvement. For curriculum design, only one participant had monthly or more involvement.



More IAC members were engaged in the question of workforce recruitment, with 70% reporting monthly or more frequent contact with trainers and educators. Forty percent reported monthly or more frequent conversations concerning how to interest students or trainees in their industry, and 30% reported monthly or more frequent efforts in job fairs.



Taken together, these results show IAC members as a group have some involvement with educators and trainers, but the results do not suggest what might be expected from the remainder of the employer population and/or the education and training population.

The literature shows that a failure of employers and educators to communicate regularly is one of the foremost causes of education or training not preparing workers for the workforce. Consequently, the statewide surveys of private employers, associations, nonprofits, Native Alaskan entities, educational and training institutions and organizations, students and trainees, employed and emerging workers, and government entities should focus sharply on this issue.

Conclusion

The Initial IAC Survey identified consensus problems, goals, soft skills, and hard skills, to explore in statewide fact-finding surveys, which will include standard workforce development questions. The IAC can move forward to conduct the surveys of private employers, associations, nonprofits, Native Alaskan entities, educational and training institutions and organizations, students and trainees, employed and emerging workers, and government entities to learn what stakeholders want to see in the Alaska’s Workforce Future Plan.