

Aug.29 Cluster Practitioners' Talking Points

Panel Includes: Leslie Lehmann, Lynn Oetting, Eileen Drake

**Leslie Lehmann, Executive Director
Oregon Forest Resources Institute**

Why was the cluster initially organized?

- The Oregon Legislature created the Oregon Forest Resources Institute (OFRI) in the early 1990s to improve public understanding of Oregon's forests and to encourage sound forest management through landowner and operator training.
- For decades, forestry was the largest business sector in Oregon, and most Oregonians had some personal or family familiarity with forests and forestry operations. But the industry and Legislature woke up one day to realize that things had changed. Forestry had become number two behind high tech, and Oregon's population had become significantly more urban, including many newcomers with little understanding of Oregon's forest resources or forest practices. This contributed to a growing conflict about management of the state's forest resources that was hurting Oregon, and OFRI was created to address this division through education.
- OFRI was not formed explicitly as an economic cluster or workforce development organization, but we do play an integrative role for the forest cluster. OFRI's Board includes forest landowners and producers of all sizes as well as a representative of labor, the Dean of the OSU College of Forestry and a public representative. And our statute mandates collaboration with both OSU and the Oregon Department of Forestry in the development and implementation of our educational programs.
- Forest cluster collaboration did not begin with OFRI. The forest sector is a mature traded sector in Oregon. The industry has had a relationship with the College of Forestry and the Department of Forestry for decades regarding research in forestry and forest products, development of forestry environmental regulations and in developing programs that prepare graduates for work in the forest cluster.

Has the consortium met its stated purpose and/or deliverables? Why or why not?

- While OFRI's purpose is forestry education and not workforce training and recruitment, our work puts us in touch with the people who *are* meeting those needs. For the professional workforce – both in forestry and in product innovation – we work with the OSU College of Forestry as the primary training provider. We also collaborate with Mt. Hood, Central Oregon, Chemeketa and other community colleges that offer associate of science degree/forestry technician programs.
- OFRI has extensive K-12 and public education programs that help the forest sector effectively make external connections, and our research into the economic potential of Oregon's forest sector has helped draw people in the forest cluster together to examine

options for becoming more competitive in global markets. We also have an extensive forest landowner training program – in collaboration with the OSU Forestry Extension Service – and a website for forestry workers to keep them up to speed on forestry issues.

- Our K-12 program manager is working with the Oregon Department of Education and high schools to make teachers and students more aware of forest sector employment opportunities and to develop educational standards for forestry career curricula.
- Another example is a recent OFRI special report on the forestry profession in Oregon. This report (copies available) describes the wide range of undergraduate and graduate degree programs at the College of Forestry at OSU. These programs were designed and refined over the years with forest sector input. The report describes the myriad jobs held today by graduates from these programs.
- But this is only scratching the surface. OFRI recently worked with OSU's Wood Innovation Center to conduct focus group research into employer needs. Among the focus group findings:
 - The workforce of the future has emerged as a primary concern of employers.
 - Better workforce training is needed, particularly for manufacturing jobs. Mills are looking for advanced skills – math, computer, etc. – and compete with employers in other clusters for these same employees. Forestry and logging contractors also face challenges in recruiting people willing to “work in the woods.”
 - Historically, people wishing to enter the non-professional forest sector workforce – both in the woods and in the mills – could land and keep good jobs as long as they had a high school education. Today, many of these jobs require computer and other technical skills unheard of 30 years ago as well as grounding in math, measurement and design. The training needed to land and perform those jobs is provided mostly by community colleges.
 - Better communication skills need to be part of the training for forestry professionals.

Where is the cluster going next? Future plans? Key opportunities?

- Upcoming challenges:
 - The skilled professional and vocational workforce is about to take a big hit as baby boomers begin retiring. This will affect state and federal as well as private employers. In just one example, in 2003 the Oregon Department of Forestry estimated that more than 25% of its employees will have retired by 2008.
 - Many students no longer see forest sector jobs as attractive or as having a promising future, even though the OSU College of Forestry is placing *all* graduates in some of its programs – Forest Engineering or Wood Science, for example – in high-paying, professionally fulfilling jobs. So, clearly we have a communications gap.
 - Problems with drug use and language barriers (English/Spanish workforce) are creating growing challenges, especially in rural areas.

What can be done to improve relationships between industry and the workforce system?

- Forestry is an important and robust cluster, critical to middle-class jobs in rural communities. If it is to remain so, two key priorities emerge for the future:
 - More and better workforce training needs to be offered and properly funded. Community college programs are key to this.
 - Better communication is needed to convince young people that many opportunities exist for professional and vocational jobs in the forest cluster that will provide financial rewards as well as professional fulfillment and opportunities for growth.
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**Lynn Oetting, Microchip
Semiconductor Workforce Consortium**

Why was the cluster initially organized?

- In 1989, the SWC was created to ensure that OR and SW Washington had enough skilled/qualified workers for forecasted Semiconductor related jobs.

Has the consortium met the stated purpose and/or deliverables? Why/Why not?

- Overall yes.
- We focused on the needs of Maintenance Technician level jobs and improved the programs at local community colleges to provide industry qualified candidates
- We have set up K-12 programs in local schools to increase the interest in technology careers
- Community colleges have seen improvements to their programs including customized training and AA degree programs
- Industry partners provide internship opportunities

Where is the cluster going next? Future plans? Key opportunities?

- SWC should look at building stronger relationships with 4-year institutions to address Engineer positions
- SWC should look to broaden out our reach and blend with other existing high tech communities. Our needed skills sets are not unique to our industry
- SWC needs to look at marketing the programs and benefits of getting the needed education to enter high tech fields. We can do this by bettering our outreach in K-12 programs, focusing in middle schools or earlier. This has been identified as a major strategy for the Manufacturing Work Force Development Committee.

What could be done to improve the relationships between industry and the workforce system?

- Provide list of services so industry knows what is available.
- Ensure any training created is usable, current, accessible, and trackable.

- Grants are available to meet needs of incumbent training and new hire training with minimal restrictions to accommodate business needs.
- Modularized training events to support compressed work weeks, Just In Time Training.
- Training that allows transfer points of entry level positions to move to tech positions and from tech positions to engineer positions
- Focus on transferable skill sets that can allow someone to move across companies/industries
- Bring “Vendor training” to the masses to reduce the cost and allow more people access to the information.

What are the needs of traded sector clusters concerning workforce development?

Skill Sets:

- Basic Math for entry level positions to provide reasoning ability and ability to make decisions based on results.
- Advanced Math topics for techs/eng. level positions
- Basic English and writing skills
- Reading Comprehension and following directions
- Work Ethic – ready to work
- Readiness to learn
- Computer skills
- Team skills – working with others to achieve a goal
- Trouble shooting
- Problem solving
- Critical thinking

In General:

- Consistent funding for math/science/electronics programs/education K-12.
- Commitment to the process. It can't be solved with quick certification programs or short programs.

Eileen Drake, PCC Structurals METALS INDUSTRY CONSORTIUM

The Metals Industry Consortium is an active group of over 35 employers from the metals and transportation equipment industries working together with representatives from education, workforce development and economic development organizations to meet current and future workforce development needs.

Current focus of MIC work:

- Employee recruitment and workforce development – meeting current and future needs

- Connecting businesses and schools – initially starting with high schools working way down to middle schools (e.g., Portland Public Schools, Sabin Schellenberg Skills Center, David Douglas)
- Increasing public and governmental awareness about importance/value of metals industry to the Oregon economy

Current MIC Initiatives:

- Metals Industry Expo
- Connection with Manufacturing 21 Coalition and NW Center for Manufacturing and Infrastructure Engineering
- Portland Workforce Alliance
- Building a Drug-free Oregon Workforce Taskforce, Oregon Business Plan Initiative Request
- Portland Business Alliance, Regional Business Plan, Education Taskforce