

To: Warden and Members of County Council

From: Chief Administrative Officer

Workforce Readiness: Addressing the Workforce Crisis

RECOMMENDATION

1. That Council support community efforts to address the workforce crisis in Oxford with a financial contribution of \$10,000 as a partner in a campaign to attract and retain youth in Oxford County.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

The Workforce Readiness (WR) Plan: Addressing the Workforce Crisis 2020 was developed in partnership with Community Employment Services, Elgin Middlesex Oxford Planning and Development Board, and Future Oxford.

The Plan outlines four objectives:

1. Increased Collaboration
2. Workforce Alignment
3. Attraction and Retention
4. Reducing Barriers

More detail is provided in Attachment 1 Workforce Readiness Plan One Page Summary, October 2020.

This report outlines the following implementation activities of the WR Plan:

- Establishment of an Employer Advisory Committee (EAC)
- Youth-focused attraction and retention campaign
- WorkInOxford website

Implementation Points

Following Council's approval of the recommendation contained in Report No. CAO 2021-04, staff will continue to participate as a partner to implement this campaign, including but not limited to, cross-promoting campaign activities, showcasing Oxford County's own viable career opportunities at Woodingford Lodge and the Wastewater Treatment Plant, and making use of the WorkInOxford website.

Financial Impact

The Employer Advisory Committee (EAC) established to guide the implementation of the Workforce Readiness Plan does not have an operating budget. Project-specific monetary needs are raised by partners, employers, and other community sources of funding.

Approximately 70% of the project is being funded by private sector partners including Hutton Transportation Ltd. and the Elmhurst Inn & Spa. Local employers see the importance of investing in attracting and retaining talent to keep their businesses successful.

Community contributors include Community Employment Services, Elgin Middlesex Oxford Workforce Planning and Development Board, Tillsonburg Multi Service Centre, Thames Valley District School Board, and Oxford Connections.







The County's contribution to this initiative via this Report is recommended to be \$10,000, funded from the CAO's approved 2021 Strategic Initiatives budget.

Communications

The County is one of many partners involved in this initiative. The Project Director is provided by Community Employment Services, who hosts monthly meetings with all partners, along with initiative-specific meetings to keep partners engaged on a regular basis.

Staff will continue to support communications for the initiative when and where applicable. Ongoing and future efforts include posting opportunities on the WorkInOxford website (www.workinoxford.ca); cross-posting and promoting the youth-focused video series outlined in this Report; and participating at EAC meetings.

Strategic Plan (2020-2022)

					
WORKS WELL TOGETHER	WELL CONNECTED	SHAPES THE FUTURE	INFORMS & ENGAGES	PERFORMS & DELIVERS	POSITIVE IMPACT
1.i. 1.ii.		3.iii.			6.i.

DISCUSSION

Background

In January 2020, it was estimated that Oxford faced a shortage of more than 3,000 workers.

Oxford has a long-standing history of working together to build a stronger regional workforce and grow economic prosperity in Oxford. Local partners have worked tirelessly to collaborate and align their efforts to the needs of local employers and reduce barriers to employment.

Addressing the Workforce Crisis

Workforce readiness is a driver of our economic wellbeing, our community wellbeing, and our individual wellbeing. Much effort has gone into undertaking workforce studies, needs assessments, and initiatives to better understand and address workforce challenges faced by businesses and residents of Oxford County. Today, we are faced with evolving economies and industries, and persistent workforce needs throughout Oxford.

Addressing the workforce needs across businesses, service sectors, and industries in Oxford is an essential component to improving the quality of life and wellbeing for all current and future generations. Employment and income are key influencers to the living and working conditions that people experience every day.

The Workforce Readiness Plan: Addressing the Workforce Crisis identifies four objectives:

Increased Collaboration

- Employer-specific needs and initiatives: support employers through specific workforce needs with a holistic approach
- Employer Advisory Committee: create an employer advisory committee

Workforce Alignment

- Informed career decisions: facilitate informed career decisions
- Experiential learning: facilitate hands-on experiential opportunities
- Frontline influencer awareness: engage frontline influencers

Attraction and Retention

- Develop a co-ordinated Oxford workforce marketing strategy focused on attracting and retaining a sustainable workforce
- Employer-specific attraction and retention: support employers collaboratively, holistically

Reducing Barriers

- Provide support, guidance, and a feedback loop for employers

Comments

The Workforce Readiness Plan: Addressing the Workforce Crisis was developed in partnership with Community Employment Services, Elgin Middlesex Planning and Development Board, and Future Oxford.

The Plan is built upon a systems-oriented approach to addressing the crisis.

The creation of the Plan for Oxford forms a basis for sustaining economic vibrancy that is respectful of workforce wellbeing and environmental sustainability. The Plan suggests doing this by meeting the evolving needs of our workforce, our businesses, and our communities.

Employer Advisory Committee

An Employer Advisory Committee (EAC) was created to deliberately foster collaborations to effectively implement the four objectives of the Workforce Readiness Plan. A direct connection to local employers ensures that the Plan's implementation is based on real and local needs.

EAC members are volunteers with the support of their respective employers to participate in regular meetings and priority projects as they arise.

The Oxford Employer Advisory Committee (EAC) is comprised of four key founding partners, and (currently) 14 local employers. The primary purpose of the EAC is to facilitate Oxford employers, employment and training providers, and governments work collaboratively to ensure a thriving economy in Oxford. The EAC is designed to be fluid to allow for continued growth and adaptation to meet identified needs and opportunities that align with strategic priorities.

As industry leaders, members provide insight and guidance, acting as advocates and champions to ensure that programs, services and activities from service providers and governments can dovetail to meet the needs of our business community and allow them to thrive in the current economic climate and in the future.

The Committee does not have an operating budget. Project-specific monetary needs are raised by partners, employers, and other community sources of funding.

Community Partners

- Community Employment Services
- Tillsonburg Multi-Service Centre
- Future Oxford Partnership
- Elgin, Middlesex, Oxford Workforce Planning and Development Board

Private Sector Partners

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| • ArcelorMittal | • Millards Chartered Professional Accountants |
| • Boston Pizza | • People Management Group |
| • Bright Cheese and Butter | • SAF Holland |
| • Execulink Telecom | • Salford Group |
| • Great Northern Insulation | • Timberland Group |
| • GreenLea | • Woodstock General Hospital |
| • Innovata Foods | |
| • Marwood International | |

The initiative is being led by a Program Director on behalf of the Oxford Employer Advisory Committee partners and members. The Program Director is an employee of one of the partner

organizations and has extensive experience with workforce attraction and retention, including extensive knowledge of the local context and a far-reaching network of collaborators.

A Campaign for Youth, Designed by Youth

The development of the Oxford Workforce Readiness Plan and input from the EAC highlights the importance of focusing efforts on Attraction & Retention, Workforce Alignment, and Youth.

Beyond the community partners and EAC members, the Thames Valley District School Board and local schools (TBD) are engaged specifically for this project, including as financial contribution. The TVDSB has been a willing collaborator with the EAC and will continue to be an active participant throughout the development of the virtual tours and beyond. Students are not only our primary target audience; they are our sounding board in the development of the videos and marketing campaign.

The development, promotion, and use of virtual employer tours will help to enhance the potential retention of youth in Oxford, as well as provide increased opportunity for workforce alignment, addressing themes of supporting informed career decisions, training, experiential learning and engagement of front line influencers.

With recent restrictions and health concerns, as well as with the advancement of technology, experiential learning opportunities may take different forms including a virtual component.

This initiative highlights employment opportunities at local employers via on location video interview / tours. Each video will be approximately 3-5 minutes in length and will combine footage of an employee(s) being interviewed while engaging in their work, highlighting the diverse roles within each facility and skills / interests that would lead to a career there. The videos will be accessed through the existing workinxford.ca (WIO) website for schools to use to complement high school curriculum and provide the opportunity to engage youth and increase their awareness of local employment possibilities.

The target audience is Oxford County Youth ranging from grades 7-12. These engaging and informative videos will be shared digitally via partner websites and social media posts, through the School Board and classrooms.

Based on research findings from the Labour Market Information (LMI) studies including workforce demand and opportunities, sectors to highlight may include: skilled trades, self-employment, hospitality, science (i.e. technology, engineering, and math), agriculture, manufacturing, health, and transportation.

Two of the County's core services – Long-Term Care and Wastewater Treatment are being showcased as part of this initiative.

These videos will feature various employment pathways (high school to work, college, university, and / or specialized training). Teachers will be able to use the videos for experiential learning reflections such as: education and career / life planning and could be integrated in careers and co-op classes. It may also have relevance across the broader curriculum as education evolves to support the school-to-work continuum.

Partnerships and collaborative opportunities will be promoted with employers, the School Board, high schools, and other Workforce Readiness partners including the Small Business Center, Economic Development Officers, and Employment Ontario, etc.

WorkInOxford.ca

Addressing the workforce crisis requires a holistic strategy. One of the primary tools drawn upon to support many of the workforce readiness initiatives is the WorkInOxford (WIO) website and associated social media presence. The WorkInOxford (www.workinoxford.ca) website promotes employment opportunities in Oxford, links job seekers to employers and also connects people to the myriad of local programs and services that can support their aspirations. It is also the source of information drawn upon by the regional marketing tool Local Jobs Hub (www.workforcedevelopment.ca/map/) which is coordinated through the Workforce Planning and Development Board.

The original WIO website was developed with community stakeholders and championed by Community Employment Services (CES) in 2010. The use of this site has increased dramatically since that time to where there are now an average of 20,000 site visits per month with approximately 3,000 job opportunities posted by an average of 100 employers per month. Co-op is often the pathway to future labour market engagement. Youth represent the labour market of the future and this initiative will expose them to the myriad of opportunities in Oxford.

A fulsome revamp of the WIO website is occurring in stages, with the first phase focused on enhancing the co-op section of the existing platform to ensure the information available is as robust as possible to serve both the needs of employers, the needs of students, and awareness to stakeholders. The goal of this phase is to highlight all available co-op positions across Oxford with the various opportunities for student engagement identified. Data will also be used as a resource for employers, students, front line educational influencers, parents, and community leaders.

The larger WIO revamp scope and associated awareness and engagement plan will ensure Workforce Readiness actions are supported by this foundational digital platform. The goal is to offer responsive support meeting employer, workforce, and stakeholder needs by increasing awareness of labour market opportunities, providing ease of access to valued resources, programs and supports. This will provide an overarching backbone to support the many other Workforce Readiness initiatives including those addressing increased collaboration; workforce alignment and youth; attraction and retention; and reducing barriers.

Conclusions

COVID has resulted in wide-sweeping changes to employment. While the nature of our workforce has changed the crisis remains. If we want to attract and retain employees in Oxford, we must be creative with how we target our efforts.

All partners involved in this initiative see the benefits of virtual employment tours and the WorkInOxford website including local youth engaged in design, development and implementation. It is critical that we increase awareness and provide accurate, timely

information regarding Oxford employment opportunities and career pathways to enhance youth retention.

The expected outcomes of this initiative will show positive impact via engagement and participation with the video series, increased rates of co-op opportunities, high skills majors participation, increased summer employment rates, and youth retention. These outcomes support and connect local employers, youth, and educators.

Workforce readiness requires a shared responsibility with stakeholders reimagining their role in building a thriving, inclusive, and resilient economy by meeting the evolving needs of our workforce, our businesses, and our communities. This initiative directly addresses the workforce challenges we find ourselves working to overcome.

SIGNATURES

Report Author:

Original signed by

Dennis Guy
Manager of Strategic Initiatives

Approved for submission:

Original signed by

Michael Duben, B.A., LL.B.
Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENT

Attachment 1 – Workforce Readiness Plan One Page Summary, October 2020