

Talent
Solutions

Playbook

Third Edition | September 2023

Strategies for CEOs, HR leaders, and DEI practitioners to support recruitment, development and retention of talent.

Special thanks to our partners:



The information contained within this playbook should not be construed as legal advice in any manner and specifically within employment and labor law. The authors of this document are not lawyers. Practitioners should seek the advice of legal counsel whenever appropriate to ensure that activities undertaken as part of this guidebook are consistent with local, state, and federal law.

Contents

Introduction	1
Know Your Team and Recruits	2-3
The Game Plan	4-5
The Five Strategies	
1. Build Your Employer Brand	6-7
KPIs	8-9
Tactics	10-16
Resources	17-19
2. Hire For Attitude, Train for Skills	20-21
KPIs	22-23
Tactics	24-28
Resources	29-31
3. Invest in Upskilling Your Workforce	32-33
KPIs	34-35
Tactics	36-42
Resources	43-45
4. Establish Talent Pipelines	46-47
KPIs	48-49
Tactics	50-54
Resources	55-57
5. Embrace Automation and Artificial Intelligence	58-59
KPIs	60-61
Tactics	62-68
Resources	69-70
HR Council	71-72

First up.

Employers are the driving force of a thriving West Michigan where everyone can prosper. No other group is more capable of providing stability, lifting families out of poverty, and advancing innovation and progress.

For our region to thrive, employers must thrive. And for employers to thrive, they must have the talent that allows them to compete in an increasingly dynamic, information-driven, global marketplace.

These are big responsibilities. And employers of West Michigan have embraced them.

In the year since publication of the first edition of the Talent Solutions Playbook, [TalentFirst](#) has distributed 1,000 copies across our 13-county region. Hundreds more digital versions have been downloaded from our website.

We also continue to leverage the insights of the Playbook as a framework for our ongoing [Talent Solutions Series](#). Already hundreds of West Michigan employers and HR professionals have gathered to hear insights from peers and local and national thought leaders.

The reason for this is simple: The historic disruption of the workforce demands a robust and strategic response. And employers must lead the way.

The economic shock of the pandemic helped shine a light on long-building trends that continue to accelerate, trends we cannot afford to ignore. Employers need new tools and new tactics to address shifting worker attitudes, demographic challenges, declining labor force participation, and the rise of remote work, automation and artificial intelligence.

This generational upheaval also has raised awareness that many in our community continue to struggle with untenable gaps in employment, income, and economic mobility. The risk that they will fall further behind is greater than ever. We cannot accept that risk if we hope to achieve our goals.

The good news: Employers are uniquely positioned to address our region's challenges by addressing their own needs for talent.

This win-win concept is at the core of TalentFirst. As a premiere alliance of CEOs, presidents, and market leaders joined by HR and diversity leaders, educators, workforce leaders, and policymakers, our members collaborate on an unmatched scale for the benefit of all who live and work in the region.

The proven strategies in this guidebook are designed to give employers the tools they need to continue leading the way to a better future for West Michigan, where prosperity is within reach for all.

Know your team and recruits.

The workforce consists of individuals who defy one-size-fits-all definitions. However, by understanding what workers value and what motivates them at their stage of life and career, employers can refine recruiting methods and messages. They can design benefits and practices that reflect the needs of workers of every generation.



Baby Boomers (1946-1964) value job security, visibility, and recognition and rewards for a job well-done. As part of the largest generational cohort, they faced competition throughout their careers, so they take pride in working hard to stand out. They appreciate opportunities for continuous learning and development, while also mentoring others. Work can be a defining characteristic of their identity, and many plan to work past age 65 — though some may favor a shift to part-time work.

Expectations:

- Competitive salary
- Retirement benefits
- Medical, dental, and vision insurance
- Voluntary coverage (i.e., life insurance, long-term care, critical illness)
- Accommodation to work past standard retirement

To attract and retain Baby Boomers, employers should show respect for their hard work. Inclusive benefit design could include upskilling opportunities or sabbaticals to reinforce their value to the company, or phased retirement and flexible schedules to retain their loyalty. Employers should understand workplace environment needs (e.g., ergonomics).

Generation X (1965-1980) values flexibility, as these workers usually have responsibilities for aging parents as well as their own children. However, they tend to emphasize financial stability over purpose, equity, or advancement. Generation X tends to be drawn toward traditional benefits, such as employer-sponsored healthcare and retirement options and competitive salaries, as well as greater autonomy at work. They are comfortable adapting to new technologies and respond favorably to digital and face-to-face communications.

Expectations:

- Flexible schedules, remote work
- 401K plan with matching benefits and retirement bonuses
- Tax-advantaged accounts (Flexible Spending, Health Savings, Health Reimbursement Arrangements)
- Student Loan Assistance programs (more for their children than themselves)
- Mortgage services

To attract and retain Generation X talent, employers should provide greater flexibility to promote work-life balance. Customizable benefits can empower workers to choose options that meet their life circumstances. Workers in this generation are highly independent and experienced. They prefer direct and honest feedback. Avoid micromanaging, provide opportunities for growth and networking, and respect their experiences.

To effectively apply the strategies in this playbook, employers should begin with a solid understanding of attitudes and expectations of workers of all ages.

Millennials (1981-1996) value flexibility, purpose, opportunities for career progression, and customizable benefits. Like Gen Z, they tend to seek out transparent, inclusive organizations. They place a greater emphasis on equity and advancement than older generations but are likely dealing with financial burdens that come with homeownership and parenthood. Pets play a heightened role in Millennial households; benefits should reflect this untraditional family structure.

Expectations:

- Flexible schedules, remote work
- Customizable benefits, especially pet insurance and options for mental health
- Skill-structured career development programs
- Paid volunteer time off (VTO)
- On-site daycare or pet care
- Mortgage services

To attract and retain Millennial talent, employers should launch initiatives centered around equity and inclusion, provide flexibility and childcare options to promote work-life balance, and offer robust opportunities for professional development. Establishing clear career pathways, self-directed learning opportunities, and consistent feedback with managers can cultivate trust and loyalty while appealing to their desire for career progression.

Gen Z (1997-2012) values workplace flexibility above all else. These workers are often drawn to transparent, inclusive, socially responsible organizations. They tend to seek out mentorships with senior staff and prefer to invest their energy into work they find meaningful. They're highly responsive to digital recruiting and hiring.

Expectations:

- Flexible schedules, remote work, and project-based learning
- Assistance with student debt
- Paid volunteer time off (VTO)
- Tuition reimbursement
- Mentorship training models
- Diverse representation in the workforce
- Programs and policies that contribute to inclusion and belonging
- Benefits that accommodate non-traditional family structures
- Employee assistance programs that support mental health

To attract and retain Gen Z talent, employers should launch initiatives that reinforce the company's mission and employee roles in achieving goals. Allow opportunities for workers to have their voices heard. Use digital interactions or cutting-edge technology to provide easy access to information, resources, and a platform for two-way dialogue with leadership.



The game plan.

The most successful organizations understand that the workforce is undergoing a **generational transformation** that requires calculated, robust strategies.

That is the purpose of this playbook: to provide practical, proven resources and tactics for employers to support the recruitment, development and retention of talent needed for our new era. These responsibilities have never been more crucial to the success of employers and employees alike.

The playbook was informed by West Michigan employers, HR leaders, and workforce professionals who are recognized for their expertise, credibility, and accomplishments. They contributed their insights to support the continued success of West Michigan, but these strategies are applicable beyond the region amid universal and accelerating workforce trends.

Labor force participation rates have been declining since the turn of the century; geographic mobility in the U.S. is historically low; the population is aging, and birth rates aren't keeping up with retirements; and workers are flocking to jobs that offer flexibility, purpose, and a sense of belonging. The prevalence of remote work means many attractive jobs are with companies located outside of Michigan. Meanwhile, as the adoption of automation and artificial intelligence gains momentum, more low-skill Michigan residents are finding their skillsets obsolete. To combat the challenges of the evolving workforce requires leadership, long-term vision, and human-centered solutions.

This guide documents the strategies, metrics, tactics, and resources organizations need to thrive in the new talent landscape. The strategies are organized in five key areas:

1. Build Your Employer Brand

It is essential to manage and influence your reputation among job seekers and employees. This is not about advertising. It is about the public perception of your company culture, values, and work environment. Companies with strong employer brands recruit top-tier talent faster and retain these workers longer.

2. Hire for Attitude, Train for Skills

Skills tell what a person is able to do, while attitude (i.e., soft skills) determines what a person is willing and able to do. Soft skills are inherent, but technical skills can be taught. Relaxing job requirements – not standards – can help find overlooked talent. Eliminating artificial barriers to entry, like traditional requirements for degrees or experience, will expand and diversify your talent pool.

3. Invest in Upskilling Your Workforce

Employers who invest in upskilling their workers have a steady supply of internal candidates for even the most hard-to-fill positions. This leads to a larger candidate pool and increased loyalty and engagement among current employees, which guards against turnover. It also reduces the time required for new hires to become productive.

4. Establish Talent Pipelines

It's never too early to introduce the next generation of talent to careers at your organization. Partner with K-12, higher education, and community organizations to develop work-based learning opportunities (internships, apprenticeships, job shadows) that empower students to solve real-world problems and learn on-the-job. It's also smart to develop internal pipelines through robust upskilling and retraining efforts.

5. Embrace Automation and Artificial Intelligence

Advanced automation and artificial intelligence are becoming more affordable and more capable, making it more feasible for smaller companies to remain competitive when labor costs are high. Technology can be used to accelerate productivity at every skill level and create well-paying opportunities for workers.

An Essential Component: DEI

Prioritizing diversity, inclusion, equity, and belonging are essential to attracting and retaining top talent. Intentional efforts must be made to strategically embed these principles into a company's workforce, processes, policies, and culture. Advancing DEI involves engaging every department and employee. The work should not take place in a vacuum. For that reason, it is not called out as a separate strategy in this playbook. A DEI lens has been applied to the five strategies outlined above. Additional information, leading practices, and resources can be found in the guidebook, [Five Essential Competencies of Effective Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Leaders](#).

Strategy

1

Build Your Employer Brand

Employer branding is not about advertising, but instead involves managing and influencing your reputation among job seekers and employees. Perceptions of your company culture, values, and work environment are increasingly important to recruiting top-tier talent – and retaining them.

Surveys of job seeker attitudes reveal the growing significance of employer brand:

95%

of candidates identify a company's **reputation** as a key consideration when exploring new career opportunities

40%

of passive candidates would accept a new position without an increase in pay if the company had a good employer **brand**



As much as **23%** of the workforce between ages 18 and 34 would accept a **pay cut**

for an opportunity to join a company with a good employer **brand**

69%

of candidates would **reject** an offer from a company with a bad employer brand, even if they were unemployed

PAY INCREASE

Companies with a poor employer brand must offer a *minimum* of a **10% pay increase** to lure top talent



KPIs to Build Your Employer Brand

Your employer brand is reflected in multiple ways: how many people accept job offers, the reasons employees give for leaving, and overall employee engagement.

Tracking these basic metrics can help you assess the strength of your brand as an employer.

These suggested Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are not exhaustive – employers should choose the metrics that focus on areas they want to improve. These examples offer a broad pulse check on the health of your employer brand.

▶ Offer Acceptance Rate (OAR)

What percentage of candidates accept a job offer?

Administer follow-up surveys to new hires, or have recruiters ask *why* or *why not* after extending an offer.

- What are the primary reasons candidates give for accepting or rejecting a job offer?
- Are you effectively communicating job responsibilities and benefits in job postings?
- Are your organization's values and culture reinforced effectively throughout the hiring process?

▶ Turnover Rate

What percentage of employees leave, whether voluntarily or involuntarily?

Conduct exit interviews and read online reviews.

- What are the primary reasons employees are leaving?
- Is there any correlation between separations and employee attitudes toward company efforts related to diversity, inclusion, belonging, and/or equity?
- How does your turnover rate compare to the industry standard?

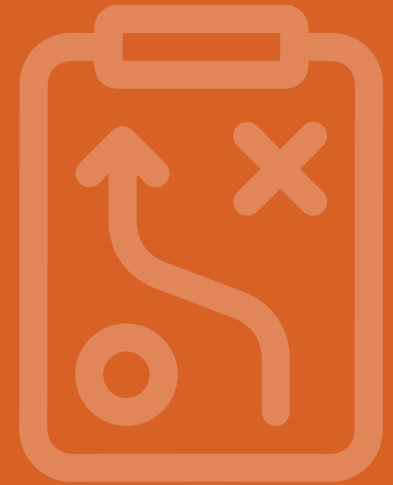
▶ Employee Engagement

The extent to which employees feel passionate about their jobs, are committed to the organization, and put discretionary effort into their work.

Create a climate survey to address key issues important to your organization. Communicate the reasons for the survey, make the results available, and act to address these concerns.

- Have you assessed your culture by administering a climate survey?
- Does your organization have an inclusive culture that develops, empowers, challenges, and respects all employees?
- Are managers clearly defining expectations, holding employees accountable and focused on delivering results?
- Do managers effectively communicate and motivate their employees to give their best?
Are managers building strong relationships to foster a cohesive team?
- Do employees understand the current state of the organization, where it's headed, and how they contribute to its success?





Tactics to Build Your Employer Brand

- 1a. Be responsive.
- 1b. Grow your online presence.
- 1c. Be inclusive.
- 1d. Be flexible.
- 1e. Be transparent.
- 1f. Customize benefits.
- 1g. Retool and refocus manager training.



1a. Be responsive.

Collect and analyze employee feedback and use it to create solutions.

- Administer an [annual climate survey](#) to all employees. Analyze the insights to determine next steps and realistic timelines, communicate the findings to all employees, and take action to resolve common issues.
- [Read and respond](#) to negative online reviews with grace and empathy. This shows candidates and employees your organization is receptive to feedback and continuously improving.





1b. Grow your online presence.

Use various platforms to recognize employees through spotlights or testimonials. Provide a glimpse of work life through photos, videos, or virtual site tours. Engage job seekers through live Q&As with hiring managers to share interview preparation advice.

- Integrate employee recognition into your marketing and communications efforts by showcasing employees and sharing how they've advanced in your organization.
- Develop a **brand ambassador program** to allow employees to 1) share approved content on personal accounts, 2) develop personal testimonials to feature on company accounts/webpages, 3) speak on behalf of the company at recruiting events.

1c. Be inclusive.

Language, representation, and accessibility are essential for attracting top talent.

- People who represent various dimensions of diversity should be reflected within all levels of your workforce, especially on leadership teams, your website, and marketing materials.
- Offer job applications and talent acquisition assessments in multiple languages.
- Ensure your online presence and physical facilities are welcoming and accommodating to all, especially persons with disabilities. Consider lighting, signage, entryways, conference rooms, and restrooms.





1d. Be flexible.

Offer flexible schedules and opportunities for remote work; consider how to engage the part-time workforce by redesigning jobs to allow for greater flexibility in scheduling and locations.

- Identify tasks that require little to no training and could be done remotely; consider allowing employees in non-remote occupations the chance to do these tasks from home one day per week.
- Leverage **mobile scheduling apps** to allow hourly workers to easily find available shifts across numerous locations and sign up for hours that fit their schedule.

1e. Be transparent.

Provide regular communications about company performance. Elevate the review process to incorporate frequent project-based performance appraisals. Provide more transparency surrounding pay.



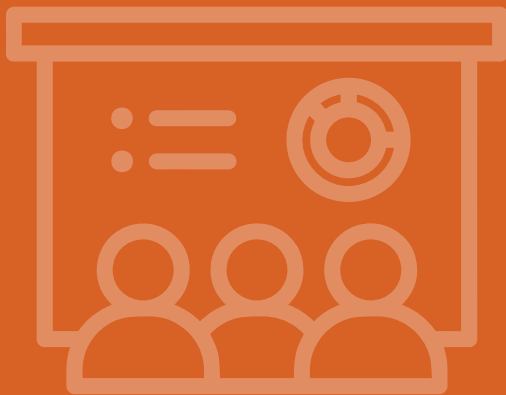
- Make company-wide metrics available to employees to strengthen the connection between their work and the bigger picture, creating a stronger sense of purpose to drive employee engagement.
- Supplement the annual/quarterly review process with project-based appraisals. This quickly establishes relationships and provides consistent feedback between managers and employees.
- Share how market data is used to calculate pay. Provide salary ranges for open positions. Outline clear policies and expectations for raises.



1f. Customize benefits.

Leverage employee feedback to expand the range and customization of benefits, offer more value-added programs, and improve communications, internally and externally, about benefits.

- Equip managers and key staff to ensure all benefits and perks are communicated effectively to prospective employees in job postings and throughout the interview process. Recruiters should not be the only staff to talk to candidates about your company's benefits.
- Frequently poll employees to explore their benefit needs and preferences. Use the information to broaden the range of benefits provided. Empower employees to choose options within a given allotment and offer a cash equivalent to employees who forgo benefits – this is popular among younger workers.
- Consider in-demand options like maternity/paternity leave, home office stipends, WIFI/ phone reimbursement, pet/auto/home insurance, financial education, or caregiver benefits.
- Create a **benefits communication plan** to convey information across audiences at multiple touch points to eliminate mistakes and increase use. Make information digitally accessible.



1g. Retool and refocus manager training.

Ensure all leaders are equipped to support employees' inclusion, training/upskilling, work-life balance, and overall health and well-being.

- Train managers to speak about benefits and perks during the interview process. Managers must be able to maintain the momentum established by recruiters when talking with potential employees.
- Develop robust, formalized training programs for new hires. Ensure managers are prepared to conduct frequent check-ins to review progress and provide feedback.
- Provide ongoing educational opportunities to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) on a personal and organizational level. **Equip managers to handle DE&I challenges** and provide financial and personnel resources to build, implement and promote a work environment that exhibits respect, welcoming, inclusion, and belonging.



Resources to Build Your Employer Brand

Employers looking to elevate their employee value proposition may find the following resources beneficial ►

TalentFirst Members and Initiatives

Axios HR (axioshr.com)

The AXIOS HR team provides customized HR solutions to help small and mid-sized companies maximize productivity, strengthen their cultures, find their next hire, or keep up with the latest industry practices and navigate emerging employment issues.

BDO USA (bdo.com)

BDO provides knowledge, experience, strategic vision and boots on the ground to help hone leadership skills, improve productivity, acquire and retain talent, reduce administrative burden and minimize risk. They help businesses optimize their workforces and embrace cutting-edge technology to solve industry challenges.

Crowe (crowe.com)

Crowe human capital services (HCS) specialists can help employers recruit and engage qualified, passionate people, train them quickly, compensate them fairly, and embrace cutting-edge technology throughout their operations by sharing expertise to implementing employer-of-choice practices.

DEI Guidebook (Second Edition) (talentfirst.net)

This guidebook documents the knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics DE&I leaders need to drive organizational change.

DISHER (disher.com)

DISHER's Talent Solutions team has become a trusted partner for all things people. From building a healthy culture and recruiting to employee retention and succession planning, DISHER provides a variety of services and training to take your organization to the next level.

Employers Association (EA) of West Michigan (eawm.net)

EA offers comprehensive HR, safety, talent development resources to support your organization's success throughout the entire talent life cycle. Our resources include timely, regional data, networking, and expert guidance to help you develop and implement effective organizational strategies and navigate complex employer issues.

EY (ey.com)

EY People Advisory Services professionals can help employers effectively harness their people agenda as part of an integrated business strategy. This can translate into competitive

advantage by helping you get the right people, with the right capabilities, in the right place, for the right cost, doing the right things.

Frontline Training Solutions (frontlineon.com)

Frontline, an Express Employment Professionals company, provides the solutions you need to train, develop, and retain your workforce. Their practical training and consulting solutions help clients become employers of choice and be sustainable for the future.

HR Solutions Group (thehrsolutionsgroup.com)

HR Solutions Group specializes in reducing the complexity and stress of HR for small to mid-sized businesses. Their experienced team can handle your every HR need from complex compliance requirements, hiring, pay and employee relations to long-term HR strategy for culture and human capital performance.

Mixed Staffing & Recruiting (mixedmi.com)

Mixed Staffing & Recruiting offers customized services to help employers recruit diverse, skilled talent through three divisions: Professional, Diversity, and Inclusive Staffing and Recruiting. They also offer diversity, equity, and inclusion training, assessments, and resources to help employers establish and maintain a diverse workforce.

PIVOT (talentfirst.net)

A digital toolkit designed to support West Michigan HR leaders and DEI practitioners by providing leading practices and resources for small, medium, and large employers across a range of industry sectors.

Rehmann (rehmann.com)

Rehmann provides a range of services and resources to help employers mitigate HR risk and implement best practices and policies to recruit, retain, and develop talent while embracing cutting-edge technology to streamline processes.

Seyferth PR (seyferthpr.com)

SeyferthPR offers a range of services and expertise to help your organization shape and influence its brand across various platforms to create, maintain, and build trust within multiple communities of interest.

Other Resources

The Association for Human Resource Management (AHRM) (ahrm.net)

AHRM is a professional organization focused on fulfilling needs of human resources professionals in the Greater Grand Rapids area and is an affiliate of the national Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM).

Chamber Partners (uschamber.com/co/chambers/michigan)

Visit this site to connect with your local chamber of commerce or to explore the resources, services, and supports offered in your location.

The Employers Association (teagr.org/teaimis)

The Employers Association provides a host of services to support talent management and operational excellence, including consulting, benchmarking, networking, organization development, and training services.

Greater Muskegon Economic Development (developmuskegon.org)

Greater Muskegon Economic Development is the countywide economic development authority providing programs and resources to support employers in Muskegon County.

Lakeshore Advantage (lakeshoreadvantage.com) Lakeshore Advantage provides a variety of programs and re-sources to support employers in Ottawa and Allegan counties.

The Right Place (rightplace.org)

The Right Place provides a variety of resources and programs to support employers in Ionia, Kent, Lake, Mecosta, Montcalm, Newaygo, Oceana and Mason counties.

Strategy

2

Hire for Attitude, Train for Skills

Skills tell what a person is able to do, while attitude (i.e., soft skills) determines what a person is willing and able to do. Soft skills are inherent and take time to develop, while technical skills can be learned relatively quickly. Hiring for attitude and training for skills is about relaxing job requirements – not standards – to find overlooked talent. Eliminating artificial barriers to entry, like traditional requirements for degrees or experience, will expand and diversify your talent pool. This is most impactful for entry and mid-career roles where degrees are often used as a proxy for soft skills.

The data shows the advantage of looking beyond credentials:

86%

of new hire failures are due to attitudinal deficits, compared to 11% for a lack of skills

54%

of jobs in Michigan require skills training, but not a 4-year degree

2020

saw a 20% rise in the share of managers hired without a traditional 4-year degree

Employees without a 4-year degree stay at companies

34%

longer than those with a degree



Over 1 in 5

(238,204) West Michigan residents have some college education, but no degree

► Employees who see opportunities to learn and grow are 2.9x more likely to be engaged



KPIs to Hire for Attitude, Train for Skills

Evaluating your selection process can help identify barriers that prevent potential talent from getting hired – or even applying. Some basic metrics can help employers to assess the company’s effectiveness of hiring for potential and training to address skills gaps. These are examples that can help employers to develop metrics to track and improve their company’s capacity to hire for attitude and train for skills.

▶ Selection Ratio

The number of job applicants relative to the number of open positions.

A low selection ratio (number of open positions divided by the number of applicants) means hiring managers have a large pool of candidates to choose from and can afford to be more selective. Combined with accurate skills-based prescreening assessments, a low selection ratio can almost guarantee a high success rate for new employees.

- Are you effectively reducing barriers to entry in job postings to widen your candidate pool?
- Are prescreening assessments working effectively to reduce the burden on recruiters?

▶ First-Year Attrition Rate

What percentage of new hires leaves after their first year?

Conduct exit interviews and read online reviews to determine why employees leave your organization.

- Do job descriptions properly convey responsibilities, expectations, and realities to new hires?
- Are screening methods working appropriately to select candidates with the right skills?
- Do candidates understand their skills and what they need to develop to progress in the organization?

▶ Ramp-Up Time

How long does it take for a new hire to become productive?

Define productivity, identify training needs, and develop individual performance plans with SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, time-bound) goals.

- How is productivity measured for each role?
What's the ideal benchmark for ramp-up time?
- Are new hires equipped with a customized training plan designed around their skills and deficits?
- Do you have an "early warning" system to know if someone is off track before it's too late to fix it?

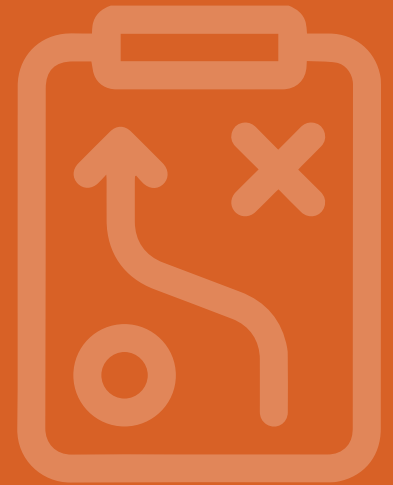
▶ Workforce Diversity & Inclusion

How are you measuring the diversity and inclusion of your workforce?

Define your organization's DEI "why" and create meaningful metrics with quantitative and qualitative measures that lead to impact.

- Do you track race, ethnicity, and gender demographics for your workforce, levels of leadership, new hires, promotions, and turnover?
- Do you administer an engagement survey that measures employee attitudes and the human experience of what it's like to work for your company?
- Do you offer programs that support the development needs of underrepresented talent (i.e., internships, sponsorships, mentorship, affinity groups?)





Tactics to Hire for Attitude, Train for Skills

- 2a. Rethink job descriptions.
- 2b. Revisit job postings.
- 2c. Leverage skills-based assessments.
- 2d. Redesign the hiring process.



2a. Rethink job descriptions.

Define the competencies (knowledge, skills, and abilities) a candidate should possess to succeed and identify which can be acquired through short-term training.

- Consult with hiring managers and current employees to determine job responsibilities, and then identify which competencies are required to perform effectively.
- Separate the must-have from the nice-to-haves by identifying which competencies are needed immediately and which can be developed on-the-job or through short-term training.

Soft skills like critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving are nearly impossible to acquire through rapid training, while most technical skills can be taught in days or weeks.

2b. Revisit job postings.

Ensure **job postings focus on skills and responsibilities**, rather than qualifications and requirements, to remove unnecessary barriers to entry and to help job seekers better understand the role.

- Highlight “responsibilities” instead of “requirements” on job postings by detailing the tasks candidates will encounter on the job or the results they’re expected to achieve.
- Emphasize training and development opportunities to attract candidates with transferrable skills, or those who lack experience but have potential.

Job postings that list **responsibilities** instead of requirements get

14%

more applicants per view than those that only list formal requirements



2c. Leverage skills-based assessments.

Determine how skills will be assessed at each stage of the interview process and decide on a baseline that candidates must meet to progress.

- Prescreen and rank candidates based on desired competencies by creating an application infused with skill-related questions. Responses can be automatically evaluated by an applicant tracking system or used by recruiters during initial screening.
- Once candidates have progressed through the initial screening, conduct a more thorough review of skills and qualifications early in the process by using hard skill evaluations (like computer skill assessments or cognitive tests) and soft skill assessments to gauge personality and cultural add.
- In lieu of a final interview, consider conducting a **job audition** to observe candidates' hard and soft skills while performing tasks they would be hired for. This is a great way to showcase company culture while assessing a potential new hire's aptitude and personality on-the-job.

Tips

DO:

Ensure ability tests are professionally developed, job related, and serve as a reasonable measure of job performance.

DON'T:

Use tests that disproportionately affect a protected group, regardless of discriminatory intent.

DO:

Compensate candidates for their time in job auditions – or develop scenarios to mimic job activities without actually requiring candidates to complete work that will be useful for the organization.

DON'T:

Allow candidates to perform work in an audition that will be useful for the organization without paying at least minimum wage.

Tips

The STAR (situation, task, action, results) framework is preferred for behavior-based interviews, as it provides a standard outline for candidates to organize their responses and can be indicative of soft skills.

With a standardized rating scale and clear examples (anchors), answers can be scored 1-5. Each question should include an example of the most desired representation of the target behavior for that question – a response that would earn a score of 5.

Hiring managers should be prepared to explain why candidates were given a certain score on each response.

2d. Redesign the hiring process.

Reduce bias by developing and utilizing a structured interview guide with behavior-based questions and a standardized rating scale (with examples) to evaluate competencies related to the job.

- Before conducting interviews, ensure the entire hiring team understands the responsibilities of the position and the must-have competencies that are being sought.
- Develop behavior-based questions centered around a position's must-have competencies to probe about ways candidates have handled specific situations in the past. Review potential questions with current employees.
- Develop a standardized rating scale with clear examples (anchors) to provide interviewers with a frame of reference to score responses based on the key job-related behaviors being assessed.
- Ensure all factors are considered when making selection decisions so candidates are evaluated holistically, as opposed to being screened out due to a low interview or assessment score.



Resources to Hire for Attitude, Train for Skills

Employers seeking to implement skills-based hiring practices may find these resources helpful. ►

TalentFirst Members and Initiatives

Axios HR (axioshr.com)

The AXIOS HR team provides customized HR solutions to help small and mid-sized companies maximize productivity, strengthen their cultures, find their next hire, or keep up with the latest industry practices and navigate emerging employment issues.

BDO USA (bdo.com)

BDO provides knowledge, experience, strategic vision and boots on the ground to help hone leadership skills, improve productivity, acquire and retain talent, reduce administrative burden and minimize risk. They help businesses optimize their workforces and embrace cutting-edge technology to solve industry challenges.

Crowe (crowe.com)

Crowe human capital services (HCS) specialists can help employers recruit and engage qualified, passionate people, train them quickly, compensate them fairly, and embrace cutting-edge technology throughout their operations by sharing expertise to implementing employer-of-choice practices.

DISHER (disher.com)

DISHER's Talent Solutions team has become a trusted partner for all things people. From building a healthy culture and recruiting to employee retention and succession planning, DISHER provides a variety of services and training to take your organization to the next level.

EG Workforce Solutions (egnow.com)

Through temporary staffing, managed services, recruitment process outsourcing (RPO), and other workforce services, EG Workforce Solutions is constantly thinking outside the box to find innovative ways to help employers succeed.

Employers Association (EA) of West Michigan (eawm.net)

EA offers comprehensive HR, safety, talent development resources to support your organization's success throughout the entire talent life cycle. Our resources include timely, regional data, networking, and expert guidance to help you develop and implement effective organizational strategies and navigate complex employer issues.

Express Employment Professionals (expresspros.com)

Connect with this organization to not only find new talent, but to explore the variety of employment services and workforce solutions offered to employers – including trainings and resources to support leadership.

EY (ey.com)

EY People Advisory Services professionals can help employers effectively harness their people agenda as part of an integrated business strategy. This can translate into competitive advantage by helping you get the right people, with the right capabilities, in the right place, for the right cost, doing the right things.

HR Solutions Group (thehrsolutionsgroup.com)

HR Solutions Group specializes in reducing the complexity and stress of HR for small to mid-sized businesses. Their experienced team can handle your every HR need from complex compliance requirements, hiring, pay and employee relations to long-term HR strategy for culture and human capital performance.

Mixed Staffing & Recruiting (mixedmi.com)

Mixed Staffing & Recruiting offers customized services to help employers recruit diverse, skilled talent through three divisions: Professional, Diversity, and Inclusive Staffing and Recruiting. They also offer diversity, equity, and inclusion training, assessments, and resources to help employers establish and maintain a diverse workforce.

PIVOT (talentfirst.net)

A digital toolkit designed to support West Michigan HR leaders and DEI practitioners by providing leading practices and resources for small, medium, and large employers across a range of industry sectors.

Rehmann (rehmann.com)

Rehmann provides a range of services and resources to help employers mitigate HR risk and implement best practices and policies to recruit, retain, and develop talent while embracing cutting-edge technology to streamline processes.

Other Resources

Chamber Partners (uschamber.com/co/chambers/michigan)

Visit this site to connect with your local chamber of commerce or to explore the resources, services, and supports offered in your location.

Emsi Skills (skills.emsidata.com)

Features a free Job Posting Optimizer to help organizations develop skills-based job postings for any job title using in-demand competencies that are commonly listed in other postings for the same role.

Greater Muskegon Economic Development (developmuskegon.org)

Greater Muskegon Economic Development is the county-wide economic development authority providing programs and resources to support employers in Muskegon County.

HireReach (hirereach.org)

Provides organizations with a framework, tools, and support to implement skills-based hiring in less than six months.

JobSync (talnet.org/jobsync)

Supports analyzing, documenting, and communicating the essential characteristics and competencies of West Michigan jobs.

Job Interview Questions (jobinterviewquestions.com)

Search any occupation to find skill-based interview questions curated specifically for that role. These questions, and related competencies, can also be used to develop skill-based job descriptions.

JOFI (jobfitscore.com)

JOFI provides measurement tools for sourcing, selection, onboarding, development, and career navigation. The JOFI Five-Star score maximizes predictive validity by combining measures of job-related attributes and career interests.

Lakeshore Advantage (lakeshoreadvantage.com) Lakeshore Advantage provides a variety of programs and resources to support employers in Ottawa and Allegan counties.

O*NET (onetonline.org)

The O*NET is the nation's primary source of occupational information on almost 1,000 occupations across the U.S. economy. It's a free resource maintained by the USDOL that can be used to update job descriptions based on the activities, competencies, skills, and credentials that are recognized or required for any role.

The Right Place (rightplace.org)

The Right Place provides a variety of resources and programs to support employers in Ionia, Kent, Lake, Mecosta, Montcalm, Newaygo, Oceana and Mason counties.

Skillful (skillful.com)

Features free planning, hiring, onboarding and development tools for employers, who can also sign up for updates on skills-based hiring.

Skills Path (linkedin.com)

A pilot being launched by LinkedIn, Skills Path brings together LinkedIn Learning courses with Skill Assessments to help recruiters evaluate candidates in a more equitable way – based on their proven skills.



Strategy

3

Invest in Upskilling Your Workforce

Upskilling is the process in which workers continually develop new skills to progress along a career pathway. Reskilling occurs when employees replace outdated, irrelevant skillsets with in-demand skills in order to make a career transition. Empowering workers to upskill and reskill allows organizations to develop internal pipelines for even the most skilled positions, while ensuring the capabilities of the workforce continually evolve to meet new demands. Employers should be aware of how both methods provide employees with coveted opportunities for growth.

How upskilling and reskilling can boost attraction, retention, and engagement:

50%

of workers will require some level of **reskilling** to remain effective within the next 5 years



\$\$\$

Hiring new workers can be **>2 times** as expensive as **upskilling and reskilling existing employees**

94%

of employees say they would stay at a company longer if their employers **invested** in their career development

81%

of CEOs expected their companies to adopt new training methods in 2021. **73% were looking to create new custom skilling content**

Employees who move into new jobs internally are

3.5x

more likely to be **engaged employees** than those who remain in their current jobs

▶ Employees at companies with high **internal mobility** remain **2x** longer



KPIs for Upskilling Your Workforce

The objectives of learning and development (L&D) programs vary widely across companies, and chosen metrics should reflect those priorities. Are you looking to fill future talent gaps, refresh skillsets, improve retention, boost employee engagement, or all of the above? Employers should identify what's important to their organization, then design upskilling and retraining programs around those priorities. Here are a few metrics to consider.

▶ Internal Mobility

What percentage of total hires are internal candidates?

Employees at companies with high internal mobility stay almost twice as long as those with low internal mobility. They also tend to be more engaged and productive. Add metrics around promotions to scorecards – and reward and recognize leaders who do this extremely well.

- Does each role in the organization have a clear path for advancement defined by skill qualifications?
- Do new hires understand opportunities for advancement and available resources early on?
- Is it easier for employees to find internal opportunities than external ones?

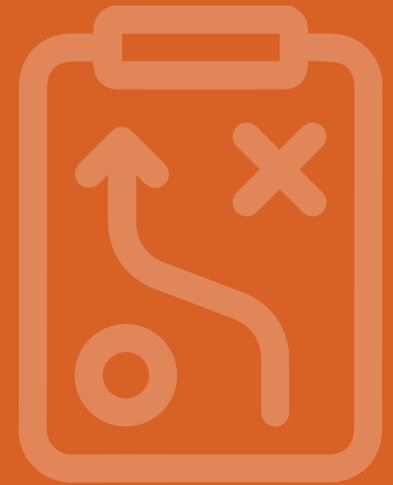
▶ Engagement and Completion Rates

How many employees participate in internal L&D programs or leverage tuition assistance programs? How many earn a credential or demonstrate a measurable skills gain?

Companies typically invest in tuition assistance or reimbursement programs, but often don't know how many people graduated, what schools they attended, or if they actually enhanced their skillsets. These are critical factors to consider when communicating the business value of these programs.

- What percentage of employees are aware of these resources? Do they understand the benefits and potential career outcomes of continued learning?
- Are programs accessible? Do employees pay up front? Are there too many administrative burdens?
- Are managers equipped to discuss career advancement and support individual learning journeys?
- Does your organization offer flexibility to allow employees to attend training?
- Are skills and proficiencies documented? Can you currently measure skills gains?





Tactics for Upskilling Your Workforce

3a. Start with skills.

3b. Be transparent.

3c. Improve accessibility.

3d. Systematically capture skills.

3e. Partner with education
and training providers.

Tips

Workforce planning is a crucial component of learning and development strategy. It's important to consider which skills are emerging and hard-to-find in the industry. These might not yet be in-demand by the organization but could soon become necessary.

It's also important to consider skill adjacencies, which are skills that are transferrable across roles and departments. For example, customer service skills are a must-have for sales roles, but they're also extremely beneficial for employees working in human resources.

On-the-job training, internal L&D programs or "universities," third-party providers (Coursera, LinkedIn, Udemy, etc.), workshops, self-directed training, and college courses are all popular training formats.

3a. Start with skills.

Take a skills-based approach to identify current and projected gaps — either social-emotional, technical, digital, or advanced cognitive skills that are lacking or expected to be in-demand — and then design and implement initiatives and pathways around these competencies.

- Compare the organization's current supply of core skills (those that are hard-to-find and critical to organizational success) against current and forecasted demand, while considering the organization's strategic ambition, the effects of digital transformation, and the overall business model.
- Identify which core skills can be developed internally and which can be more efficiently and effectively acquired through external sources like hiring, contracting, or partnerships with education and training providers. **Develop a strategy to close anticipated gaps** for critical, internal skills by determining which training formats to use, as well as how to design, deliver and track programs – for example, by using learning management systems.
- Execute skill-building efforts at scale. Ensure your workforce is building new skills, with dedicated organizational structures in place for learning (e.g., **skilling hubs**), and a rigorous and dynamic system to track the impact of learning.



3b. Be transparent.

Identify and promote career maps and establish a culture of lifelong learning by empowering employees to benchmark their current skills, easily identify their next opportunity, and leverage available resources to continually grow personally and professionally.

- Use job descriptions, internal data, feedback from employees, and technology to identify **career maps** defined by tangible criteria required for advancement.
- Elevate awareness during onboarding and use multiple channels (email, webinars, social media, posters, etc.) to effectively market workforce education programs to employees and job seekers.
- Offer assessments to employees to help them better understand their skills, career interests, and prospective career paths. Encourage managers to use this information to co-create **development plans**, aligning interests with **skills gaps** identified by the organization.
- Develop and maintain an easy-to-use **internal talent marketplace** that provides workers with recommended future roles and learning journeys based on current skills. Empower them to find their next opportunity.

51%

of employees want assessments to better understand their **skills** and potential opportunities, and 43% want help from their employer to select courses/programs

Tips

Be explicit about which skills are needed for each position and include recommendations on which courses, workshops, or programs can teach these skills. Lateral transitions are just as important to document as vertical transitions and can be identified by looking at skill adjacencies.

A tech-enabled internal job market could be used by managers to search for employee-uploaded job profiles defined by skills, enhancing equity in talent decisions and encouraging internal mobility.

Consider hosting an **internal career fair** so employees can learn more about the responsibilities, impact, and opportunities of various departments they normally wouldn't interact with.

3c. Improve accessibility.

Improve access at all stages and provide development opportunities for all workers, regardless of position or seniority. Make it easier to enroll in programs or courses that satisfy unique desires for personal and professional growth without unintended financial or administrative barriers.

- Provide a variety of formats to suit every learning style (instructor-led, blended, virtual, etc.) along with resources to help employees identify suitable providers and programs. Help them understand and apply for financial aid.
- Avoid tuition reimbursement programs that require upfront payments from employees, which create financial burdens and discourage participation. Instead, opt for programs with direct-billing models that allow the employer to cover tuition expenses upfront.
- Consider the unique needs of marginalized groups when identifying resources and in the creation, marketing, and communication of opportunities.
- Ensure universal access to online learning formats, if offered, by providing public computers or a dedicated space employees can use. Or consider loaning out laptops and mobile hotspots for employees who do not have internet access at home.



Incentivize employees to perform well by offering rewards or perks to top performers, or include payback provisions if performance benchmarks aren't met

Tips

3d. Systematically capture skills.

Formally log employees' skills to help guide learning and development initiatives, measure effectiveness, and easily identify which workers are ready for advancement.

- Maintain **skills inventories** to track employee skillsets, proficiency levels, and dates these skills were attained or refreshed.
- Review skill inventories on an ongoing basis and incorporate skill-building into the review process. This ensures managers regularly document skill gains and behavior changes, identify barriers to engagement, and empower employees to learn new skills. This supports coaching on which skills need further refinement and which courses to take to advance along their chosen pathway.



Skill inventories are commonly created by administering surveys asking workers to self-report their skills — which are validated by 360-degree feedback from managers, peers, and/or direct reports — through robust learning management systems, or by leveraging artificial intelligence to infer skills based on resumes or previous internal projects.

Reviewing skill inventories provides an opportunity to get feedback from employees on their level of engagement and satisfaction with upskilling and retraining initiatives, which can be used to further refine the organization's learning and development strategy.

Tips

Training partnerships are not limited to certificates or credentials. Education providers are eager to offer short-term professional development courses to help employers rapidly reskill and upskill their workforces — but they need employers to communicate which skills and courses are in-demand.

Consider hosting a college fair so employees can learn more about programs, and financial aid, and better understand their options and how they relate to career pathways at the organization.



3e. Partner with education and training providers.

Collaborate with local providers to determine which courses and programs align with the skills the organization needs, to communicate the value of upskilling to employees, and to help workers navigate enrollment and funding.

- Work with local education and training providers to align internal pathways to existing courses and programs, which can be listed as recommendations in the organization’s career maps. This can ensure the content being taught in these courses aligns with real-world expectations.
- Local education providers likely have staff who are solely responsible for recruitment, meaning they can help employers effectively communicate the value of a program to their employees. They also can provide one-on-one support to employees struggling with enrollment or financial aid.



Resources for Upskilling Your Workforce

Employers seeking to enhance their approach to learning and development may find these resources helpful. ►

TalentFirst Members and Initiatives

Axios HR (axioshr.com)

The AXIOS HR team provides customized HR solutions to help small and mid-sized companies maximize productivity, strengthen their cultures, find their next hire, or keep up with the latest industry practices and navigate emerging employment issues.

BDO USA (bdo.com)

BDO provides knowledge, experience, strategic vision and boots on the ground to help hone leadership skills, improve productivity, acquire and retain talent, reduce administrative burden and minimize risk. They help businesses optimize their workforces and embrace cutting-edge technology to solve industry challenges.

Crowe (crowe.com)

Crowe human capital services (HCS) specialists can help employers recruit and engage qualified, passionate people, train them quickly, compensate them fairly, and embrace cutting-edge technology throughout their operations by sharing expertise to implementing employer-of-choice practices.

DISHER (disher.com)

DISHER's Talent Solutions team has become a trusted partner for all things people. From building a healthy culture and recruiting to employee retention and succession planning, DISHER provides a variety of services and training to take your organization to the next level.

Education-to-Employment Partnership (talentfirst.net)

The West Michigan Education-to-Employment Partnership (E²P) is a collaboration between employers, education and training providers, and community organizations to help recent high school graduates, jobseekers, and current employees discover, access, and complete skills-based pathways into high-demand jobs requiring postsecondary training.

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EY People Advisory Services professionals can help employers effectively harness their people agenda as part of an integrated business strategy. This can translate into competitive advantage by helping you get the right people, with the right capabilities, in the right place, for the right cost, doing the right things.

Frontline Training Solutions (frontlineon.com)

Frontline, an Express Employment Professionals company, provides the solutions you need to train, develop, and retain your workforce. Their practical training and consulting solutions help clients become employers of choice and be sustainable for the future.

HR Solutions Group (thehrsolutionsgroup.com)

HR Solutions Group specializes in reducing the complexity and stress of HR for small to mid-sized businesses. Their experienced team can handle your every HR need from complex compliance requirements, hiring, pay and employee relations to long-term HR strategy for culture and human capital performance.

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Rehmann (rehmann.com)

Rehmann provides a range of services and resources to help employers mitigate HR risk and implement best practices and policies to recruit, retain, and develop talent while embracing cutting-edge technology to streamline processes.

Higher Education Partners

Aquinas College (aquinas.edu)

Baker College (baker.edu)

Calvin University (calvin.edu)

Cornerstone University (cornerstone.edu)

Davenport University (davenport.edu)

Ferris State University (ferris.edu)

Grace Christian University (gracechristian.edu)

Grand Rapids Community College (grcc.edu)

Grand Valley State University (gvsu.edu)

Hope College (hope.edu)

Kuyper College (kuyper.edu)

Montcalm Community College (montcalm.edu)

Muskegon Community College (muskegoncc.edu)

West Shore Community College (westshore.edu)

Western Michigan University (wmich.edu)

Other Resources

Apprenticeship (apprenticeship.gov)

Create your future workforce, improve productivity, and reduce turn-over by creating your own, or joining an existing, high-quality apprenticeship program.

Chamber Partners (uschamber.com/co/chambers/michigan)

Visit this site to connect with your local chamber of commerce or to explore the resources, services, and supports offered in your location.

Greater Muskegon Economic Development

(developmuskegon.org)

Greater Muskegon Economic Development is the countywide economic development authority providing programs and resources to support employers in Muskegon County.

JobSync (talnet.org/jobsync)

JobSync works with employers to analyze and document what it takes to succeed at West Michigan jobs, and to map career pathways. Look at reports from a range of jobs to better understand the critical skills you may need, or connect with West Michigan Works! to map your own jobs..

JOFI (jobfitscore.com)

JOFI provides measurement tools for sourcing, selection, onboarding, development, and career navigation. The JOFI Five-Star score maximizes predictive validity by combining measures of job-related attributes and career interests.

Lakeshore Advantage (lakeshoreadvantage.com)

Lakeshore Advantage provides a variety of programs and resources to support employers in Ottawa and Allegan counties.

LinkedIn Learning (learning.linkedin.com)

An online learning platform tailored for employee training and professional development. It offers thousands of courses to build skills at scale that can be curated to suit the needs of any organization.

Michigan Training Connect (jobs.mitalent.org)

Search for a specific occupation or group of occupations to see all eligible training providers in Michigan, or in your designated geography.

Michigan Works! (michiganworks.org)

Michigan Works! agencies help employers find skilled workers and access training opportunities to upgrade workers' skills through state-funded, competitive training grants.

O*NET (onetonline.org)

The O*NET is the nation's primary source of occupational information on almost 1,000 occupations across the U.S. economy. It's a free resource maintained by the USDOL that can be used to update job descriptions based on the activities, competencies, skills, and credentials that are recognized or required for any role.

The Right Place (rightplace.org)

The Right Place provides a variety of resources and programs to support employers in Ionia, Kent, Lake, Mecosta, Montcalm, Newaygo, Oceana and Mason counties.

SkillsFirst (skillsfirst.com)

An automated, online career navigation system that can be used by employers to help workers understand their skillsets and make evidence-based career decisions.

The SOURCE (grsource.org)

The SOURCE leverages the collective resources of the public/private partners to offer services such as job specific training personal growth classes, and support services to help overcome barriers employees face in retaining and advancing in the workforce.

Talent Development Liaisons (michigan.gov/leo)

Talent Development Liaisons (TDLs) are responsible for engaging employers and educators to comprehensively address talent needs focused on mid- and long-term development skill gaps in key industries in each region statewide.

Talent Pipeline Management (uschamberfoundation.org)

The TPM Upskill Academy presents a customizable framework to support employers in improving the skills of incumbent employees and preparing them for success in new and changing roles.

Strategy

4

Establish Talent Pipelines

A talent pipeline is a ready pool of potential candidates who are qualified and prepared to fill critical vacancies within an organization. Talent pipelines provide employers with consistent access to qualified streams of candidates, which can be used to fill current and emerging gaps. They also can be developed well in advance to fill anticipated needs — the best companies have pipelines already in place for vacancies they forecast 5 to 10 years into the future.

Why talent pipelines are important to find qualified candidates for hard-to-fill positions, manage attrition, and meet diversity goals:

1 in 4

HR LEADERS



identified an inability to fill emerging skill gaps as the leading talent management issue facing their organization

80%

of employers have trouble recruiting high-potential talent. 67% are building talent pipelines

Best-in-class companies are 3x more likely to populate more than 50% of their talent pools from the passive workforce

62%

of organizations say talent acquisition efforts focus solely on active, job-seeking candidates



KPIs to Establish Talent Pipelines

To assess the effectiveness of talent pipelines, employers should consider other factors beyond the number of candidates available. It's important to consider the quality of candidates and time to productivity, in addition to identifying which sources provide the most qualified candidates. This information can help refine recruiting and hiring tactics. To improve talent pipelines, employers can reflect on these examples to develop their own metrics about sources and qualities of candidates their organization needs to reduce the time to fill key positions.

► Qualified Candidates per Hire

How many candidates make it past the first hiring stage per job opening?

As organizations begin to invest in building and widening talent pipelines, the number of qualified candidates applying for each open position should increase. Measuring the total volume of candidates is useful, but assessing their quality provides a quick gauge on the condition of the organization's sourcing and advertising strategies, employer brand, and learning and development programs.

- Which roles have lower rates of qualified candidates applying? Can you partner with preferred education and training providers to improve candidate quality?
- Does the organization offer learning and development (L&D) programs? If so, do these programs provide employees with the right skills to advance?

► Source of Hire

Which sources provide the largest share of candidates and the highest quality candidates?

Track candidate volume and quality across sources to determine how time and resources should be allocated. Sources that provide a steady stream of qualified candidates are still valuable, even if they don't lead to hires. If an education and training provider is among your top sources, consider partnering to co-design curricula to ensure graduates emerge with the skills and qualifications you need.

- Does your organization have a sourcing strategy? If so, do you track which source provides the highest quality candidates?
- Are resources allocated based on the proportion of candidates or hires each source provides?
- Do candidates share a common primary or secondary source — like a certain high school, college, staffing agency, or community organization — that could be engaged to strengthen the pipeline?

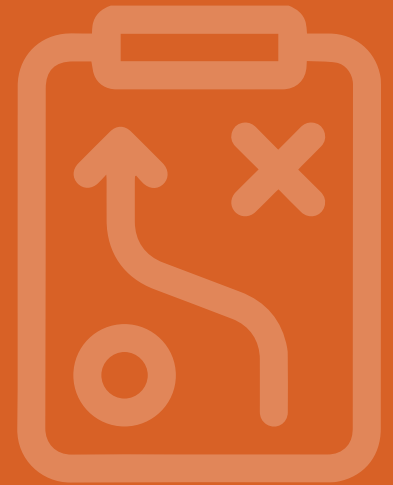
► Time to Fill

How many days, on average, does it take to fill an open position?

By definition, candidates in your talent pipeline should already be engaged with your organization and on their way to becoming qualified, if they're not already. If you find that your talent pipeline doesn't significantly reduce your average time to fill, you may need to reassess the efficiency of your hiring process or rethink how you qualify candidates.

- Are candidates' goals aligned with the goals of the organization? Are you sourcing candidates from places and providers that reflect these shared goals and values?
- Is it easy for candidates in your pipeline to apply for openings? Are there ways to streamline the process for passive candidates?





Tactics to Establish Talent Pipelines

4a. Be proactive.

4b. Leverage employees.

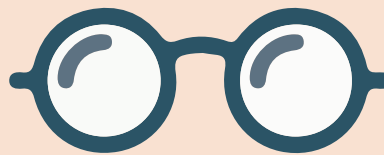
4c. Partner with local providers.

Tips

You can develop internal training programs and career pathways to grow your own pipeline for hard-to-fill roles, or you can partner with education and training providers to improve existing programs or develop new ones.

An [effective career page](#) should be mobile-friendly, reflect the values of the organization, clearly portray your work environment with photos, videos, or employee testimonials, and feature a clear call to action prompting visitors to upload their resumes and contact information for future openings.

Even if you don't have an opening for their dream job, you can recommend alternative roles and remain in contact through newsletters, event invitations, and engaging content (like videos) to reinforce your employer brand, which increases the likelihood they'll apply or accept an offer in the future.



4a. Be proactive.

Anticipate future gaps through workforce planning to determine which occupations and skills you will need in the future. Establish internal and external pipelines to meet these needs and focus on establishing relationships with passive candidates who have these skills but aren't looking for a new job yet.

- Identify which skills are emerging and hard-to-find in the industry that might not be in-demand by the organization yet but will become critical soon. Then determine the most efficient method to acquire these competencies.
- Build a [talent community](#) of engaged and skilled prospects by maintaining a career page on your website where candidates can share their resumes, contact information, and career interests. It's a great way to capture the enthusiasm a candidate has for your company, document their skills and interests, and widen your pipeline of passive candidates who can be called upon when a future opportunity emerges.

Employers who adopted this [candidate-centric model](#) were

30%

more likely to have hired more than 50% of their new hires on time per expectation



4b. Leverage employees.

Referrals are typically the highest quality hires, with greater retention and engagement rates than their peers. You can also leverage top-performing employees to identify potential sources of high-quality talent by looking back at their education and work history.

- Establish a robust **employee referral program** by hosting “invite-a-friend” happy hours to expose others to the company’s culture. Throw sourcing parties with colleagues from the department you’re hiring for to encourage them to comb through their networks. Offer incentives for employees who refer candidates who remain with the organization for a set duration.
- Evaluate the education and work history of top-performing employees to identify providers that have supplied your organization with the highest share of high-caliber talent. These preferred providers could be high schools, colleges, other training providers, or even community-based organizations that have contributed to individuals’ success within your organization.

Tips

With referral incentives, avoid creating the perception that certain jobs are more important than others by offering the same monetary incentive regardless of department, seniority, or position.

Treat employee referral programs like ongoing marketing campaigns, and consider how you can recognize referred employees. For example, Groupon provides coveted green Adidas track-style jackets to referred candidates who remain with the company for one year.

Channel resources toward your preferred providers to widen your talent pipeline or codesign curricula, so you can further reduce the time it takes these new hires to become productive. If you’re the primary organization hiring graduates from a specific program, they’ll likely be willing to partner to ensure graduates develop the skills you’re looking for and remain engaged with your organization.

Tips

Developing campus-specific, creative approaches to drive on-site engagement is what differentiates top companies.

Consider facilitating virtual case competitions (where willing participants strive to develop the best solution to a business or education-related case study within an allocated time frame) or hold virtual “office hours” with your leadership team to chat with students.

Employers who hire returning citizens from the Vocational Village can earn tax credits of \$1,200 to \$9,600 per hire.



4c. Partner with local providers.

Leverage internships, apprenticeships, ambassador programs, and other opportunities to increase company and job exposure among K-12 and postsecondary students and adult learners.

- Establish an **early careers program** to build genuine connections with college students through targeted messaging and engagement on social media, partnerships with student organizations, and ambassador programs featuring recent graduates who are now employed by the organization.
- Build authentic relationships with community organizations, non-profits, workforce development agencies, and churches that serve underrepresented talent. Provide them with exposure to your employer brand, industry, various job functions, and the competencies needed to perform these jobs while building awareness of in-demand occupations with large hiring volumes.
- Consider recruiting talent from a state Vocational Village, which provides inmates with intensive hands-on job training and state-issued certifications in 11 different trades – auto mechanics, carpentry, CNC machining, electrical, forklift, masonry, plumbing, robotics, truck driving, welding, and tree trimming. Returning citizens are **shown** to be more loyal and productive than the average worker and represent 1 in 3 adults nationwide, reflecting a huge potential pipeline of skilled candidates.



Resources to Establish Talent Pipelines

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Goodwill Industries (goodwillwm.org)

Goodwill provides a diverse pool of job-ready workers through its numerous work training and job skills programs to meet the needs of area manufacturers, food service providers, retailers, and other businesses – with a 90-day retention support service to ensure successful placement.

Hope Network (hopenetwork.org)

Access a diverse pool of work-ready candidates and remove barriers for your workforce with help from Hope Network's deep, broad, and connected services.

HR Solutions Group (thehrsolutionsgroup.com)

HR Solutions Group specializes in reducing the complexity and stress of HR for small to mid-sized businesses. Their experienced team can handle your every HR need from complex compliance requirements, hiring, pay and employee relations to long-term HR strategy for culture and human capital performance.

Mixed Staffing & Recruiting (mixedmi.com)

Mixed Staffing & Recruiting offers customized services to help employers recruit diverse, skilled talent through three divisions: Professional, Diversity, and Inclusive Staffing a Recruiting. They also offer diversity, equity, and inclusion training, assessments, and resources to help employers establish and maintain a diverse workforce.

PIVOT (talentfirst.net)

A digital toolkit designed to support West Michigan HR leaders and DEI practitioners by providing leading practices and resources for small, medium, and large employers across a range of industry sectors.

Rehmann (rehmann.com)

Rehmann provides a range of services and resources to help employers mitigate HR risk and implement best practices and policies to recruit, retain, and develop talent while embracing cutting-edge technology to streamline processes.

Other Resources

Chamber Partners (uschamber.com/co/chambers/michigan)

Visit this site to connect with your local chamber of commerce or to explore the resources, services, and supports offered in your location.

Getting Talent Back to Work (gettingtalentbacktowork.org)

This free resource from SHRM is a multi-faceted program with the actionable knowledge and tools HR professionals, hiring managers, and front-line supervisors need to attract, hire, and retain people with criminal records.

Greater Muskegon Economic Development (developmuskegon.org)

Greater Muskegon Economic Development is the countywide economic development authority providing programs and resources to support employers in Muskegon County.

Hello West Michigan (hellowestmichigan.com)

Hello West Michigan provides access to a pipeline of skilled talent new to the region and resources to keep them employed. The West Michigan Internship Initiative also provides free resources for employers to develop and enhance their internship programs.

Lakeshore Advantage (lakeshoreadvantage.com) Lakeshore Advantage provides a variety of programs and resources to support employers in Ottawa and Allegan counties.

Michigan Training Connect (jobs.mitalent.org)

Search for a specific occupation or group of occupations to see all eligible training providers in Michigan, or in your designated geography.

The Right Place (rightplace.org)

The Right Place provides a variety of resources and programs to support employers in Ionia, Kent, Lake, Mecosta, Montcalm, Newaygo, Oceana and Mason counties.

Talent Pipeline Management (uschamberfoundation.org)

The TPM Upskill Academy presents a customizable framework to support employers in improving the skills of incumbent employees and preparing them for success in new and changing roles.

Vocational Village (michigan.gov)

The Vocational Village aims to give prisoners intensive, hands-on job training to prepare them for high-demand careers in 11 vocational trades. Graduates receive a state-issued certification in their chosen field, ACT WorkKeys assessments, and an employment readiness course to prepare them for the workforce.



Strategy

5

Embrace Automation & Artificial Intelligence

Advanced automation and artificial intelligence (AI) are becoming more affordable and more capable, making it more feasible for smaller companies to remain competitive when labor costs are high.

Technology can be used to reduce labor costs, increase revenues, and boost employee productivity for workers at every skill level and companies of all sizes. Machines and AI can be used to carry out more tasks currently done by humans, complement the work that humans do, and even perform some tasks that go beyond human capabilities — ultimately improving economic growth, agility, customer satisfaction, and employee engagement and retention.

Some advantages of automation:

81%

of employees believe AI-based technology improves their overall job **performance**

73%

of companies increased **technology** investments for talent acquisition last year



7 in 10

of those adopting AI technology believe it will **enhance** job performance and satisfaction



83%

of HR leaders cite a lack of the right technology as a **challenge** heading in to 2024

While **43%** of businesses are set to reduce their workforce in favor of new technology,

34%

plan to **expand** their workforce due to **technology** integration



KPIs to Embrace Automation and AI

It's critical for employers to continually assess how AI and automation impact vacancies, job design, employee satisfaction, productivity, and engagement — as well as the overall experience for candidates and new hires. These examples offer a starting point. Employers should develop organization-specific metrics to guide decisions about where to focus AI initiatives — and how to engage human talent in the development — based on the real-world practices, needs and opportunities of the workplace.

► Vacancy Rate

What percentage of positions in the organization are vacant?

Integrating automation and AI technology within an organization should lead to fewer vacancies on average, as fewer workers are needed to perform routine, repetitive tasks and employees are more engaged and satisfied with their work.

- Are vacancies concentrated among jobs that could be automated or replaced with AI? Are there certain skills common across all vacancies that seem to be lacking in the labor market?
- Can jobs be redesigned with automation and AI in mind to generate new opportunities targeted at largely untapped skillsets?

► Employee Productivity

Has the volume and quality of outputs increased after integrating automation/AI?

Productivity measurements are only meaningful if you know what you're looking for. Before embracing automation, benchmark productivity levels to assess when you're excelling or falling behind. The benchmark you choose will depend on your industry and the type of work employees are performing, but it should measure both the time it takes to get something done and the quality of the output.

- Are employees properly trained on how to maximize the benefits of new technologies?
- After integrating AI, are employees more productive in the long run, or has the burden shifted to different areas of the organization?

► Employee Engagement

Do you measure employee attitudes about their work and the organization?

This is the extent to which employees feel a sense of purpose, passion, inclusion, and belonging in their role, are committed to the organization, and put discretionary effort into their work. Create an assessment, communicate the reasons for doing the engagement survey, communicate the results, and take action.

- Do managers have more time to focus on relationship-building after administrative and managerial tasks are automated away?
- Has the integration of technology challenged and motivated employees? Are they eager to develop new skills and learn how to leverage new technologies?
- Are you inviting input and feedback from your employees on the benefits, challenges, and opportunities to maximize the use of technology?





Tactics to Embrace Automation and AI

5a. Start small.

5b. Optimize current solutions.

5c. Enhance the employee experience.

5d. Value employee input.

Tips

Bigger automation processes are usually high-risk and high-reward, but they can be broken down into smaller component parts – meaning you can always start with the quick wins and build from there.

If you start small with automation and AI, employees should be more open to the trial-and-error method. They've already experienced the big benefits that can accompany even the smallest changes and are more familiar with how the process works and how it will impact the nature of their work.



5a. Start small.

Focus on automating easy processes in the beginning to secure quick wins and to demonstrate to employees that automation and AI are being used to help them, not replace them.

- Always keep the big picture in mind, but focus first on identifying a few pain points in your overall process that are easy, quick wins – the low-hanging fruit. Then find technology-driven solutions that can be implemented to improve efficiency and effectiveness. Once employees are comfortable and the organization has a better grasp on what its unique approach to automation looks like, ease into bigger and more complex processes.
- Embracing automation and AI is a continuous process, and technology is constantly evolving, which means it's critical to move quickly and use technology to augment small, easy processes that are critical to your business model. The perfect solution doesn't exist without trial and error. Automation and AI are highly customized to suit an organization's processes and needs, so don't be afraid to test things out and continually adjust and evolve them.

5b. Optimize current solutions.

Before bringing in new solutions for automation and AI, optimize what already exists within the organization.

- Start with a **technology audit** through the lens of the employee experience and business needs. Highlight opportunities to leverage or upgrade the existing solution architecture, automate processes, or integrate systems. What value does each solution add to the business and the employee experience? Which capabilities are you using and which ones remain? What redundancies or inefficiencies exist between systems?
- Ensure **alignment** exists between departments utilizing technology solutions and the IT department. Consider establishing a cross functional IT advisory team. This is critical to ensure an effective and efficient technology ecosystem across the enterprise.
- Improve the employee adoption of technology solutions through phased rollouts, continuous improvement, and regular training. This empowers and equips employees with confidence in using new technology, resulting in **greater ROI** for them and the organization.

On average,
enterprises have

7.6

duplicate apps and

7.1

orphaned
subscriptions

5c. Enhance the employee experience.

Integrate automation and AI in recruitment, hiring, onboarding, offboarding, and training. Use this to improve accuracy, efficiency, engagement and productivity, and to elevate the overall experience for current and prospective employees. Relying on technology to fulfill administrative tasks leaves more time for HR departments to focus on the human-centered, creative, equitable, and strategic functions of talent management that are critical to establishing and maintaining an attractive company culture.

- Automate repetitive, routine tasks in the talent acquisition process to prescreen and rank candidates, administer assessments, conduct background checks, simplify outreach and scheduling, and minimize unconscious bias. This gives HR managers more time to focus on relationship-building and more data to track and monitor, so the process can be continually refined.

Automation does not replace human interaction or decision making. It merely provides high-quality enhancements to accuracy and productivity, while minimizing the time spent on low-value manual tasks. Along with streamlining workflows, organizations that automate experience costs savings and faster hiring. Candidates report greater satisfaction due to quicker turnaround times and consistent communications throughout the process, which means they're more likely to accept an offer.

Acknowledge that AI may inherit human biases. Actively work to eliminate them by routinely evaluating the impact of AI at the selection phase. Monitor the entire funnel to detect points where bias might emerge. Assess the diversity of your workforce before and after implementation to determine if AI has resulted in more equitable hiring decisions for your organization. Identify at which points in the selection process diverse candidates are being filtered out.

Automation can also be used during offboarding to administer exit surveys and to ensure access is turned off and materials are returned when employment ends. This can help improve the authenticity of feedback by removing the human element that often deters employees from sharing honest critiques.



- Develop AI-powered chatbots to engage and assist new hires as they continue to adapt to their new roles and navigate benefits and company policies. Personalized support and access to information are critical to onboarding new employees, but chatbots can also be designed to support current employees as organizations embrace new technologies, policies, and procedures.
- Leverage AI-based coaching systems to complement traditional in-person performance management. **These systems** deliver timely and effective coaching through customized training tailored to an individual's strengths, weaknesses, and preferred learning methods. They can provide detailed insights for managers – telling them when specific employees deserve praise, and when and where others need additional support to help them address specific areas of their performance.

Tips

AI chatbots interact with employees like humans and provide AI-powered knowledge-based answers to common queries in real-time, which saves time for employees, support staff, and managers by delegating the first level of support. Questions can be escalated to support agents to provide additional insight or troubleshooting, which takes the pressure off employees to ask for help.

Chatbots also provide useful insights that organizations can use to further refine their onboarding or communications strategies, as the array of commonly asked questions curated by AI-enabled technologies reveal key gaps in employee awareness that should be addressed companywide.

Tips

When evaluating automation opportunities, focus on both frequency and intensity to identify which tasks are most common across departments, and which might not be as common but consume a great deal of time. For example, fielding phone calls or taking orders from customers might not be common activities across every department, but they're time-consuming and can easily be automated.

It often takes time for employees to learn how to fully leverage new technology, and the learning curve can vary significantly. Be patient and recognize that everyone has their own timeline. Some employees will require more intensive support.

Pilots are a great opportunity to identify effective ways to train employees to navigate new technology, and to determine how much time it might take to fully scale these innovations across the organization.

5d. Value employee input.

When embracing automation or AI in different departments, ensure employees are included in planning and implementation to boost their satisfaction and engagement, and to help troubleshoot any issues that arise.

- Survey employees to compile a list of repetitive, time consuming, non-value-added tasks that can be automated. This list will help determine which activities should be prioritized for automation and how to redistribute job responsibilities. Employees will feel more comfortable embracing automation and AI, and in taking on new responsibilities, because they were involved in the process from the beginning.
- Pilot new technology with small teams and ensure employees have sufficient time set aside every day for testing. Collect feedback and use it for continuous process improvement. The more testing done during setup, the more successful the transition will be when it's scaled companywide – and the more employees will feel like they're part of the solution.



Resources to Embrace Automation & AI

Employers seeking to embrace automation and artificial intelligence may find these resources helpful. ►

TalentFirst Members and Initiatives

Axios HR (axioshr.com)

The AXIOS HR team provides customized HR solutions to help small and mid-sized companies maximize productivity, strengthen their cultures, find their next hire, or keep up with the latest industry practices and navigate emerging employment issues.

BDO USA (bdo.com)

BDO provides knowledge, experience, strategic vision and boots on the ground to help hone leadership skills, improve productivity, acquire and retain talent, reduce administrative burden and minimize risk. They help businesses optimize their workforces and embrace cutting-edge technology to solve industry challenges.

Crowe (crowe.com)

Crowe human capital services (HCS) specialists can help employers recruit and engage qualified, passionate people, train them quickly, compensate them fairly, and embrace cutting-edge technology throughout their operations by sharing expertise to implementing employer-of-choice practices.

DISHER (disher.com)

DISHER's Talent Solutions team has become a trusted partner for all things people. From building a healthy culture and recruiting to employee retention and succession planning, DISHER provides a variety of services and training to take your organization to the next level.

Employers Association (EA) of West Michigan (eawm.net)

EA offers comprehensive HR, safety, talent development resources to support your organization's success throughout the entire talent life cycle. Our resources include timely, regional data, networking, and expert guidance to help you develop and implement effective organizational strategies and navigate complex employer issues.

EY (ey.com)

EY People Advisory Services professionals can help employers effectively harness their people agenda as part of an integrated business strategy. This can translate into competitive advantage by helping you get the right people, with the right capabilities, in the right place, for the right cost, doing the right things.

Rehmann (rehmann.com)

Rehmann provides a range of services and resources to help employers mitigate HR risk and implement best practices and policies to recruit, retain, and develop talent while embracing cutting-edge technology to streamline processes.

Other Resources

Automation Alley (automationalley.com)

Automation Alley is a nonprofit focused on supporting manufacturing and technology businesses in Michigan with educational materials and opportunities. Subscribe to their digital knowledge center, attend technology events, and grow your business with customized solutions that propel your business forward.

Chamber Partners (uschamber.com/co/chambers/michigan)

Visit this site to connect with your local chamber of commerce or to explore the resources, services, and supports offered in your location.

Greater Muskegon Economic Development (developmuskegon.org)

Greater Muskegon Economic Development is the countywide economic development authority providing programs and resources to support employers in Muskegon County.

The Institute for Robotic Process Automation and AI (irpaai.com)

This independent professional organization offers a range of industry research, market intelligence, sourcing assistance, events, and a certification for employers to better leverage and scale intelligent automation.

Lakeshore Advantage (lakeshoreadvantage.com) Lakeshore Advantage provides a variety of programs and resources to support employers in Ottawa and Allegan counties.

LIFT (lift.technology)

LIFT is driving American manufacturing into the future by helping organizations move emerging materials and processing technologies from advanced concepts to commercialization, and the LIFT Talent Programs develops new tools and teaching techniques to prepare the manufacturing workforce for a smart future.

Michigan Manufacturing Technology Center-West (thecenterwest.org)

The Center-West offers personalized consulting services to West Michigan manufacturers to develop more effective business leaders, drive product and process innovation, promote company-wide operational excellence and foster creative strategies for business growth and greater profitability.

The Right Place (rightplace.org)

The Right Place provides a variety of resources and programs to support employers in Ionia, Kent, Lake, Mecosta, Montcalm, Newaygo, Oceana and Mason counties.



Be part of a West Michigan community of practice committed to enhancing talent attraction, retention, development, and nurturing inclusive workplace culture.

Join TalentFirst's HR Council today!

Learn more, page 72.





TalentFirst's HR Council

The HR Council is an exclusive professional membership and networking group that works alongside TalentFirst's CEO Council and working groups. Members provide leadership, insight, and strategic thinking to improve talent attraction, retention, and development in their organizations and throughout the region.

Membership is open to top-level HR and DEI leaders from organizations in the 13-county region of West Michigan.



Partner / Create / Improve

Collaborate with peers to create and refine solutions to common challenges.



Influence

Humanize TalentFirst data and research to influence policymakers through storytelling.



Learn and Inform

Grow professionally by sharing observations, opportunities and experiences.

Membership Benefits

- Participate in **member-exclusive events** twice per year with the option to engage in TalentFirst's working groups and initiatives.
- Be part of member-exclusive **roundtable discussions** focused on current talent challenges.
- Receive **specialized reports** on talent trends, needs, and insights.
- Join other HR and DEI leaders to **advocate** for public policy that addresses shared challenges.
- Highlight your **innovative talent practices** on TalentFirst's platforms.
- Contribute to and gain insights on regional talent issues through **pulse surveys**.
- Access TalentFirst's annual **D&I Benchmark Survey**.

Interested to learn more about the HR Council?

Visit: talentfirst.net/hr-council

TalentFirst is an approved SHRM Certification Credit Provider. Select HR Council events qualify for professional development credits.



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Vision. Insights. Solutions.



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