

INDUSTRY DEEP DIVES

TalentFirst's Industry Deep Dives convened more than 100 CEOs and senior HR leaders for data-driven conversations on the region's most in-demand jobs and skills. By pairing labor market intelligence with real-time employer insight, the Deep Dives detail workforce trends and talent gaps—delivering actionable guidance to strengthen talent pipelines for employers, educators, and partners.

Regional Workforce Trends



Demographic Headwinds Are Structural, Not Cyclical

- Working-age population growth remains minimal through 2045 as retirements accelerate.
- Birthrates remain below replacement; in-migration is positive but insufficient to offset retirements.



Credential Pathways Are Not Keeping Pace with Credential-Driven Demand

- Postsecondary enrollment and completions have declined across most program types since 2011.
- Capacity constraints are most evident in clinical fields, skilled trades, STEM, business operations, and legal/finance support roles.



Entry-Level Turnover Remains Elevated Across Sectors

- Frontline and early-career roles show turnover rates 2–5× higher than middle- and high-skill roles.
- Churn is driven by generational shifts, job quality, wage competition, and lack of clear advancement.



Durable Human Skills Are the Shared Currency of the Labor Market

- Communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and leadership continue to rise in employer demand across industries.
- These capabilities enable mobility and competitiveness across sectors, and are largely resilient to AI-driven shifts.



AI/Automation Pressures Are Advancing Faster Than System Adaptation

- AI and automation are reshaping job tasks and workflows across industries.
- In many cases, role design, training systems, and talent pipelines are still adapting to these changes.



Workforce Expectations Are Evolving

- Workers increasingly prioritize flexibility, career mobility, supportive management, and workplace culture.
- Career mobility and clearly defined advancement pathways are becoming central to retention, particularly among early-career talent.



Shift from Specialization to Generalization is Accelerating Across Roles

- Demand is rising for adaptable, cross-functional talent with strong problem-solving and digital fluency.
- Automation/AI is reducing routine task concentration, increasing the value of integrative skillsets.



Succession Risk is Surging in Managerial, Technical, and Skilled Roles

- Several industries have 20–30% of supervisors/managers nearing retirement.
- Leadership and institutional knowledge transfer is becoming a strategic priority.

Healthcare

Key Challenges: Clinical capacity constraints, high turnover, shrinking workforce pipeline, aging administrative talent.

- ✓ Expand training capacity
- ✓ Invest aggressively in upskilling and mobility
- ✓ Accelerate AI integration
- ✓ Strengthen retention strategies
- ✓ Target administrative and leadership succession

Manufacturing

Key Challenges: Skilled-trades talent gaps, aging workforce in critical roles, limited training capacity relative to demand, moderate AI adoption, high entry-level turnover.

- ✓ Scale “grow your own” models
- ✓ Integrate AI and automation
- ✓ Create formal knowledge-transfer pathways
- ✓ Modernize sector branding
- ✓ Partner deeply with CTE and community colleges

Retail, Hospitality, & Tourism

Key Challenges: Wage competitiveness pressures, high turnover, significant automation exposure, early-career and low-tenure workforce, limited awareness of long-term career pathways.

- ✓ Shift the narrative from “first job” to “first step”
- ✓ Leverage AI for scheduling, demand forecasting, and onboarding
- ✓ Redesign frontline roles to improve job quality
- ✓ Strengthen retention through manager development
- ✓ Compete on flexibility rather than wage alone

Professional Services

Key Challenges: Declining business-aligned completions, widening managerial and operations talent gaps, high AI exposure in administrative functions, aging leadership pipeline, durable-skill demand outpacing training capacity.

- ✓ Shift toward competency-based hiring
- ✓ Redesign administrative and back-office roles
- ✓ Strengthen management and leadership pipelines
- ✓ Invest in durable skill development
- ✓ Partner with education providers

Legal Support

Key Challenges: Shrinking paralegal and legal support training pipeline, high exposure of routine tasks to automation and AI, aging support workforce, rising demand for tech-enabled staff.

- ✓ Rebuild the legal support pipeline
- ✓ Upgrade legal support roles
- ✓ Prepare for automation of routine tasks
- ✓ Design pathways for internal mobility
- ✓ Reassess staffing models

Agribusiness

Key Challenges: Aging workforce, limited talent supply, low visibility among youth, thin credential pipelines, competition for transferable skills, uneven AI adoption.

- ✓ Build early-exposure pipelines
- ✓ Cross-train workers across operations & maintenance
- ✓ Adopt targeted automation and precision-ag tools
- ✓ Develop succession plans
- ✓ Strengthen partnerships with immigration and visa programs

Finance & Insurance

Key Challenges: Shrinking credential supply in key roles, automation pressure on routine processing, hybrid skillset gaps (technical + human + regulatory).

- ✓ Shift to competency-based hiring
- ✓ Develop hybrid-skills pathways
- ✓ Leverage AI to streamline back-office operations
- ✓ Build internship-to-hire pipelines
- ✓ Invest in continuous upskilling

IT

Key Challenges: Misaligned STEM and applied tech pipeline, automation exposure in entry-level roles, aging technical talent in mission-critical positions, remote-driven wage competition, persistent turnover in lower-skill tiers.

- ✓ Align credentials to high-demand STEM and applied tech roles
- ✓ Accelerate AI integration and digital upskilling
- ✓ Stabilize entry pathways
- ✓ Strengthen retention through career mobility and advanced skill progression
- ✓ Launch targeted succession planning

Energy & Construction

Key Challenges: Credential capacity gaps, aging supervisors and foremen, shrinking postsecondary pipeline, sustained high demand for trades, industry change outpacing training adaptation.

- ✓ Advocate for expansion of skilled-trades education
- ✓ Formalize fast-track leadership development
- ✓ Align training more closely with employer needs
- ✓ Strengthen cross-employer collaboration
- ✓ Prepare for large-scale infrastructure and energy investments

