



# **The State of Our Workforce: Western NC** **2022 Analysis**



# INTRODUCTION

## State of Our Workforce: Western NC Talent Analysis

With more than 470,000 people living in the Asheville Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), more than ten million people living in North Carolina, and continued growth forecast for our region and our state, a strong, skilled, and diverse talent pipeline will continue to drive our economic success. Understanding gaps in our region's existing talent pipeline and identifying opportunities to fill them are essential steps toward ensuring prosperity across Western North Carolina.

### Purpose

Before and throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Western North Carolina employers in various industries have described challenges recruiting and retaining the talent they need. These challenges persist in a tight labor market in the Asheville MSA, which as of June 2022 holds the lowest unemployment rate in North Carolina. The State of Our Workforce: Western NC talent analysis was operated in spring of 2022 to help inform the efforts of area stakeholders, policymakers, and employers to strengthen and broaden our region's talent pipeline over the next several years.

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**68%** of companies surveyed expect to grow in the next three years

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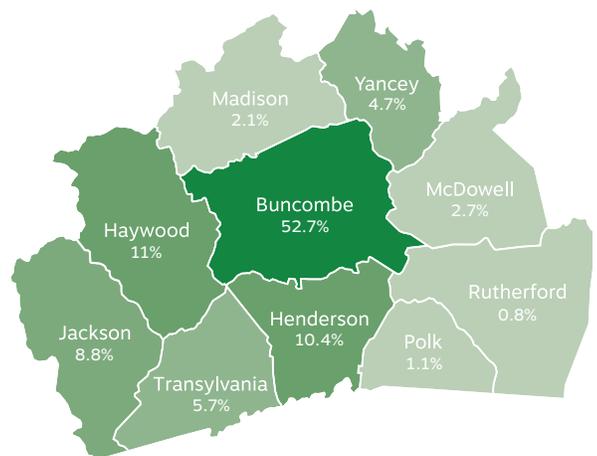
### Background

In early 2022, the Economic Development Coalition for Asheville-Buncombe County, the Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce, the Mountain Area Workforce Development Board, and the Land of Sky P-20 Council began working with independent nonprofit institute RTI International to survey businesses across a 10-county region in Western North Carolina, which included Buncombe, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Madison, McDowell, Polk, Rutherford, Transylvania, and Yancey Counties. This survey was also conducted in 2018 among businesses in the same Western North Carolina footprint.

The 2022 State of Our Workforce: Western NC survey ran from March 15 – May 31, 2022, collecting 795 completed responses and 548 additional partial responses. It asked business leaders – primarily those most informed about their organization's immediate and future hiring needs, like chief executives, directors of human resources, or small business owners – about their expectations for growth, the types of skills and training they most needed in workers, how they connected with talent, and where they intended to source their future workforces.

### Survey Objectives

- ✓ Understand the short- and long-term hiring needs of our region's employers
- ✓ Provide information on current and future workforce needs to training and education providers
- ✓ Connect policymakers in education, workforce, and economic development with current workforce information
- ✓ Inform regional stakeholders' individual and collaborative investments in workforce and economic development over the next three years



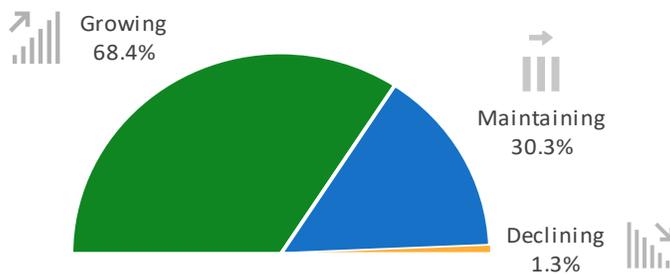
# KEY FINDINGS

The State of Our Workforce: Western NC findings suggest that just as in the 2018 survey, most Western North Carolina employers in each surveyed industry expect to grow over the next three years. Despite COVID-19-related challenges experienced by many businesses in recent months, the expectations that many Western North Carolina employers have for business growth remain similar to the growth expectations they held before the pandemic. Overall, respondents to the 2022 survey anticipate hiring between 22,150 and 44,140 total new employees in the next three years.

To help meet these growing workforce needs and to ensure economic opportunity is accessible to every member of our community, organizations in local government, education, and economic and workforce development across our region will need to work individually and collaboratively to connect prospective workers with skills, training, and opportunities.

Several key findings in the survey can help inform these efforts:

## Employers expect to grow their workforces over the next 3 years.



Respondents expect to add 22,150 to 44,140 new jobs.



Growth expected among businesses of all sizes.

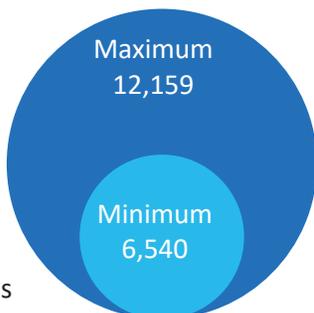


10-30% of new hires are expected to come from outside WNC.

## Healthcare and Manufacturing Industry employers anticipate the largest hiring needs.



Healthcare & Social Services



Manufacturing



## Industry Findings



Construction & Skilled Trades 7



Healthcare & Social Assistance 8



IT, Software, & Analytics 9



Manufacturing 10



Professional & Technical Services 11



Public Sector & Education 12

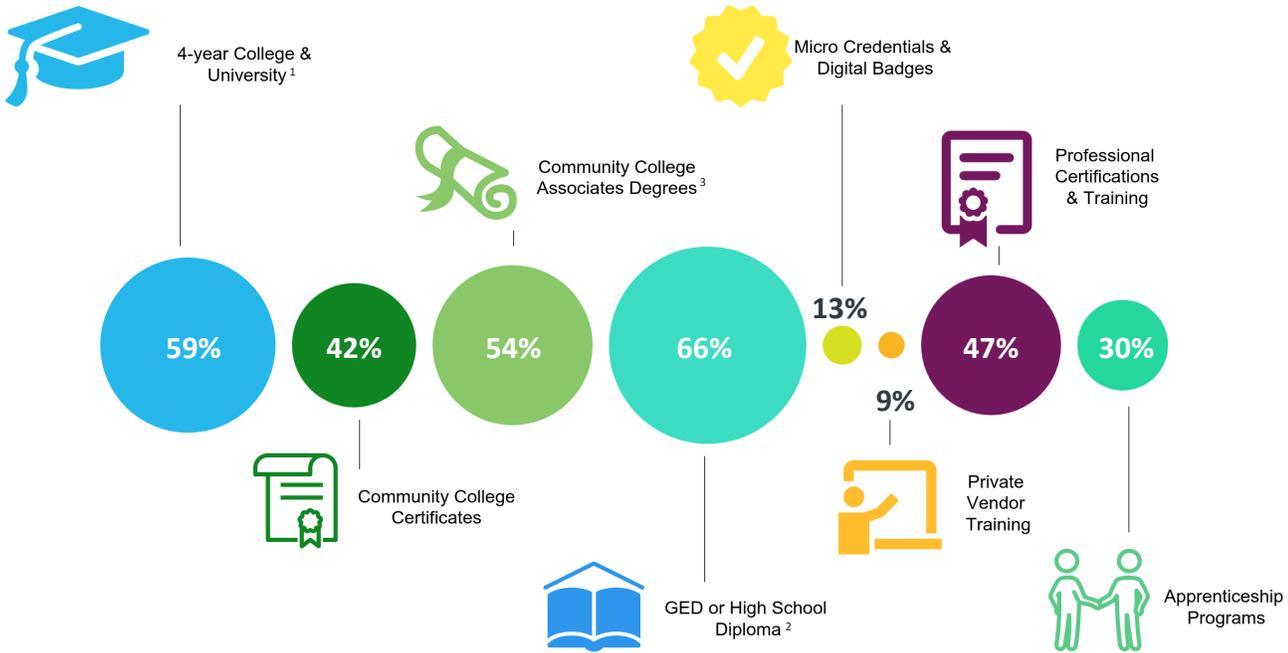


Retail 13



Restaurant, Lodging, & Hospitality Services 14

## Employers seek workers with degrees and credentials



1) **4-year College & University** is most sought after credential for employers in Healthcare & Social Assistance (which projects largest growth over the next three years); IT, Software & Analytics; Professional & Technical Services; and Public Sector.

2) **GED or High School Diploma** is most sought after credential for Manufacturing (#2 in expected job growth over the next three years); Construction; Energy, Utilities & Clean Tech; Restaurants & Retail.

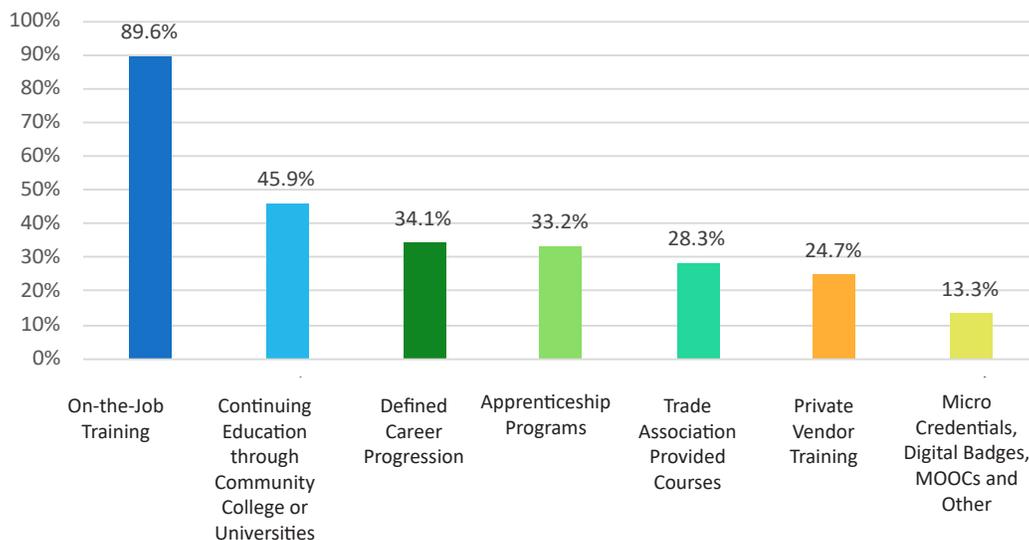
3) **Community College Associates Degrees** are the second most sought after credential for all industries except Construction which noted Apprenticeships as second most sought after credential.

## Employers are most interested in the following soft skills:



- #1 Responsibility and Self-Discipline
- #2 Taking Initiative
- #3 Critical Thinking
- #4 Communication
- #5 Time Management

## Employers will rely on on-the-job training to develop and strengthen existing workforces.



## Employers cite housing cost/availability, wages and child care as the most significant obstacles to talent recruitment and retention.



84%

Perceive cost & availability of housing as very challenging or extremely challenging



60%

Perceive wages as very challenging or extremely challenging



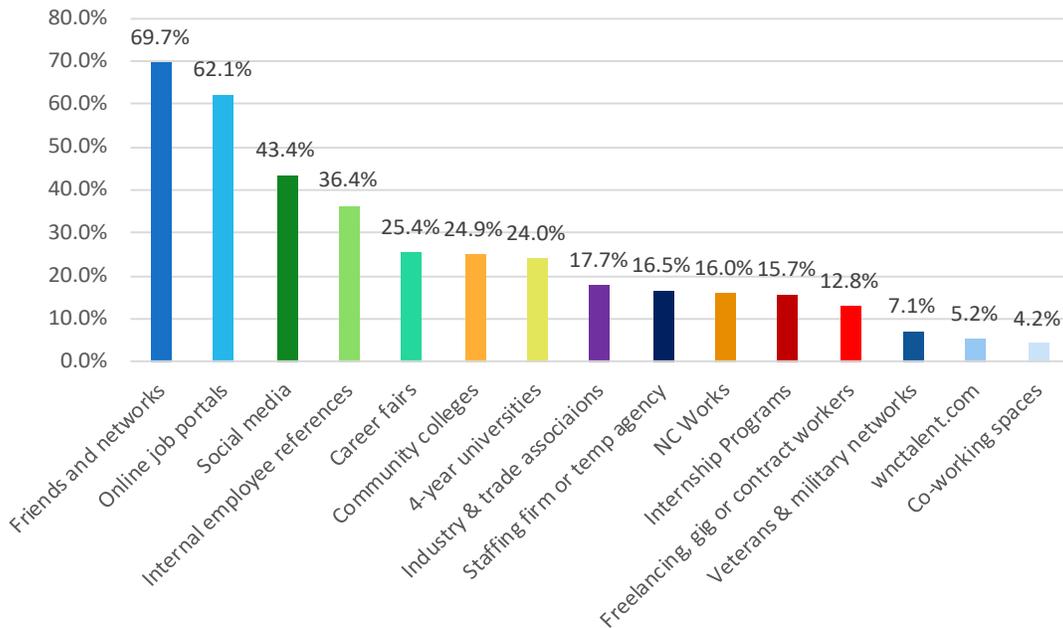
58%

Perceive employee access to childcare as very challenging or extremely challenging

## Employers continue to hire through friends and networks, but are also utilizing online job portals to source their talent.

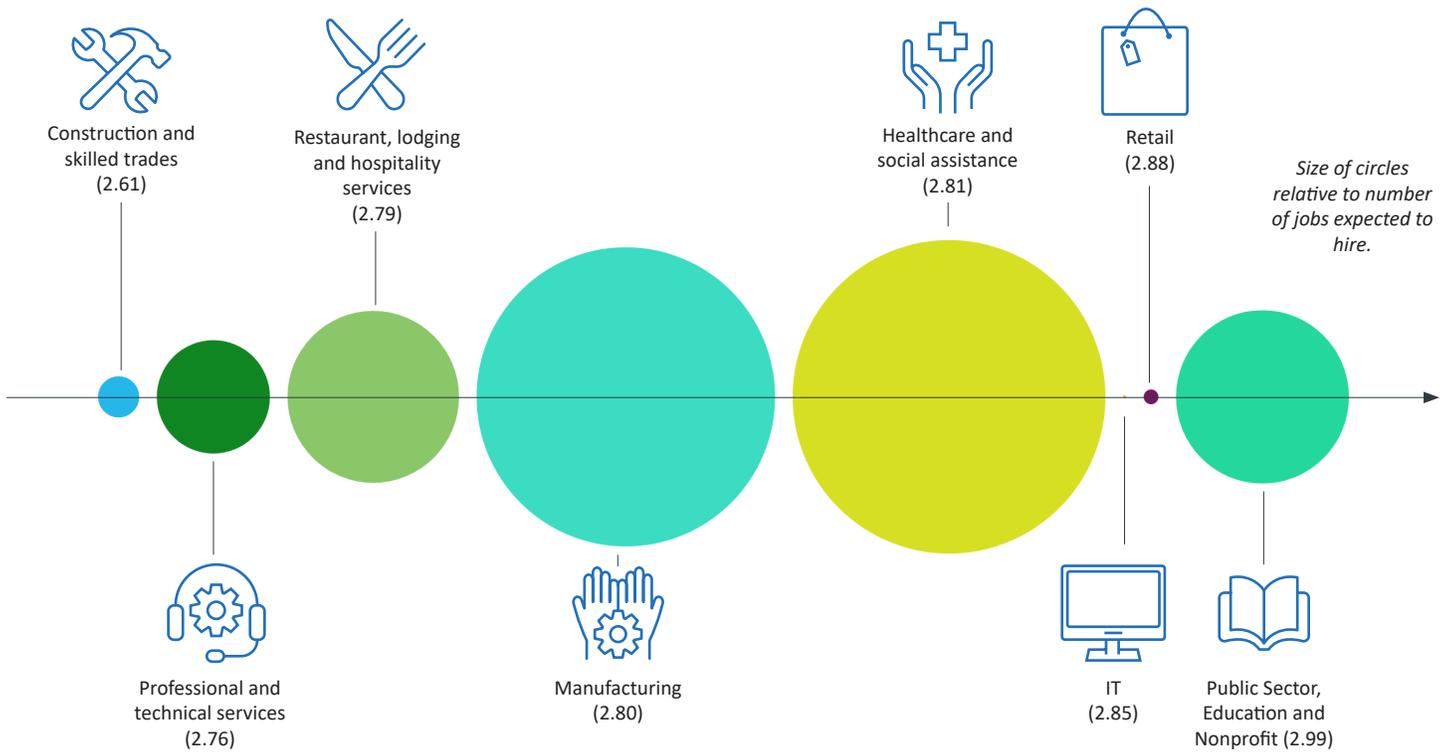


About 70% of employers rely on friends and networks to recruit talent.



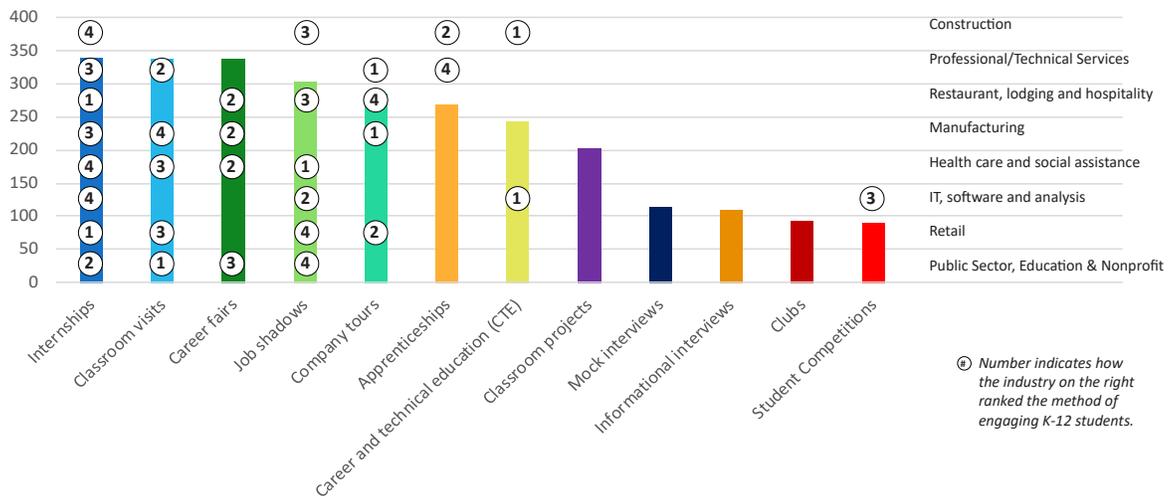
## Talent pipeline rated average.

The average talent pipeline rating was 2.83 out of 5.



## Internships are the most preferred method of K-12 student engagement but methods vary by industry.

All industries listed internships among the top four ways to engage K-12 students and are the number one method for retail and hospitality employers. Career and technical education (CTE) tops the list for employers in the IT and construction industries, while job shadows top the list for employers in the health care and professional/technical services industries. Career fairs remain a meaningful K-12 student engagement method for health care, manufacturing, and hospitality industry employers, while classroom visits are most meaningful to public sector and professional/technical services employers.

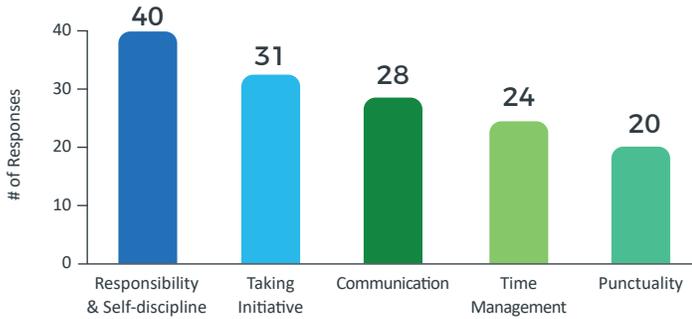


④ Number indicates how the industry on the right ranked the method of engaging K-12 students.

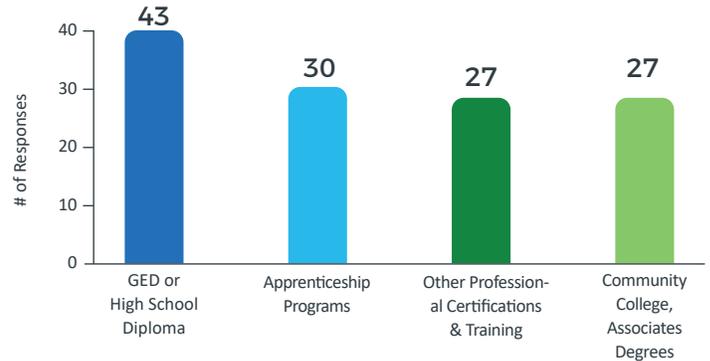
# CONSTRUCTION & SKILLED TRADES

--75 Responses--

What qualities or soft skills are most difficult to find in the workforce?



What credentials or education experience are you seeking in your future workforce?



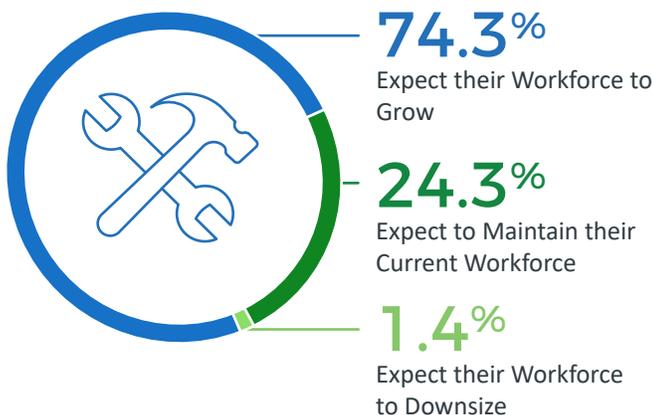
Which positions do you expect to have the most openings in the next 3 years?

- #1 Commercial Construction Field Supervisors
- #2 Electricians
- #3 Estimators
- #4 Commercial Construction Projects Managers
- #5 Supervisors and Managers

What skills are the most important for hiring?

- #1 Efficient Completion of Tasks
- #2 Selection & Effective Use of Appropriate Tools, Machinery, Equipment, & Resources
- #3 Participate & Contribute to a Safe Work Environment
- #4 Communication & Visualization of Proposed Work
- #5 Interpretation of drawings used in project planning

Do you expect your workforce to grow in the next 3 years?



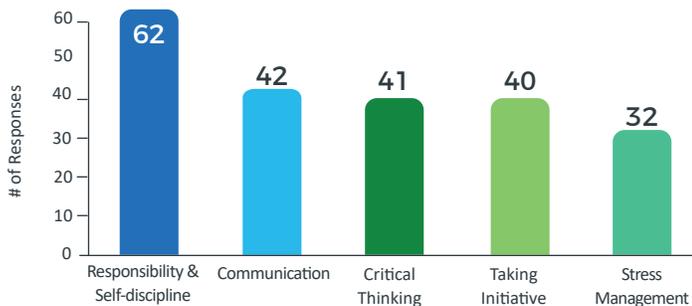
Industry-specific degrees and credentials sought:

- Commercial Driver's License
- North American Technician Excellence (NATE) Certification
- Journeyman qualifications
- OSHA 10 training
- National Wood Flooring Association (NWFA) training
- Training or experience in construction, HVAC, plumbing, landscaping

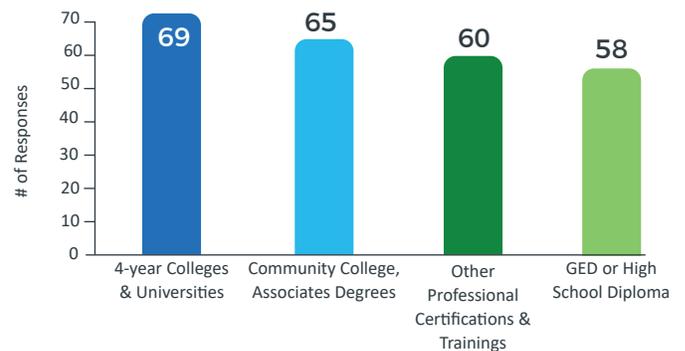
# HEALTH CARE & SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

--129 Responses--

## What qualities or soft skills are most difficult to find in the workforce?



## What credentials or education experience are you seeking in your future workforce?



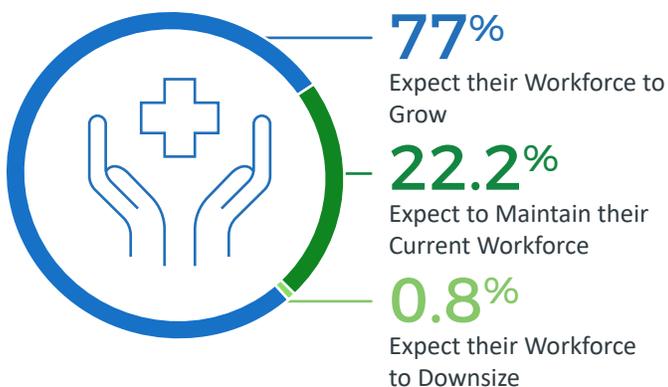
## Which positions do you expect to have the most openings in the next 3 years?

- #1 Health Aides & Assistants, Including Home & Health Aides
- #2 Nurses (RN & LPN)
- #3 Case & Care Managers
- #4 Health technologists and technicians, e.g. lab technicians
- #5 Therapists, including physical therapists, occupational therapists

## What skills are the most important for hiring?

- #1 Effective Communication & Appropriate Documentation
- #2 Efficient Response to Patient/Client Health Changes
- #3 Analysis of Information Gathered from Patient Evaluation
- #4 Treatment Plan Creation Using a Problem-solving Model
- #5 Confidential Patient/Client Information Collection in Compliance with Facility Guidelines

## Do you expect your workforce to grow in the next 3 years?



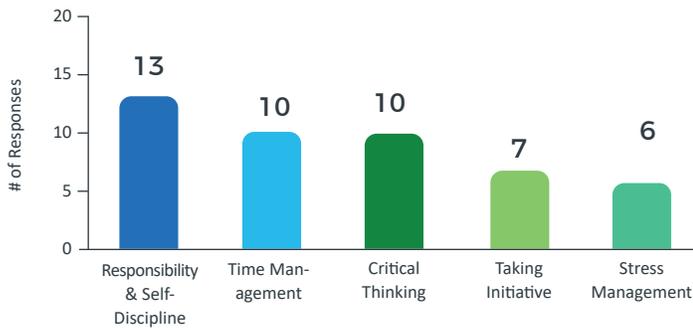
## Industry-specific degrees and credentials sought:

- Nursing credentials like CNA, RN, FNP, bachelor/master's degree in nursing
- Emergency medicine: EMPs, paramedics, EMT-B certification
- Dental professionals: doctoral degrees (DDS, DMD), assistants (CDA), hygienists (RDH)
- Mental health workers: Relevant master's degrees and certification (CADC, LCAS, LCSW)
- Physical therapists with doctoral degrees (DPT), personal trainers (CPT), massage therapists (LMT)
- Veterinary credentials: doctoral degrees (DVM), technicians (RVT)
- Radiologic technologists
- Medical laboratory technicians (MLT)
- National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP) Certification

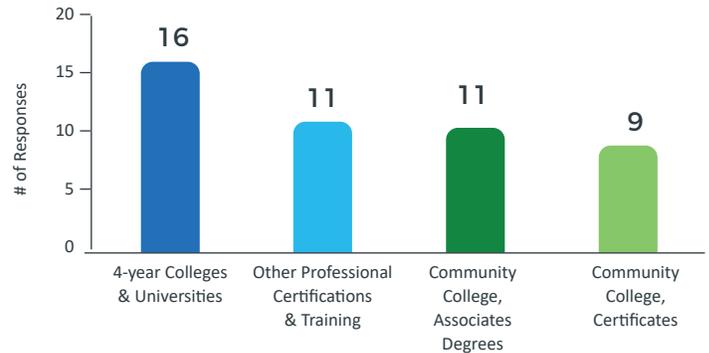
# IT, SOFTWARE, & ANALYTICS

--28 Responses--

## What qualities or soft skills are most difficult to find in the workforce?



## What credentials or education experience are you seeking in your future workforce?



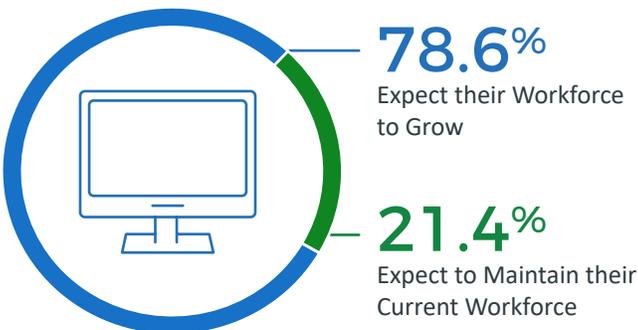
## Which positions do you expect to have the most openings in the next 3 years?

- #1 Software Developers, Programmers & Engineers
- #2 Computer, networking and IT support professionals
- #3 Business Development Professionals
- #4 Account Managers
- #5 Technical Sales Representatives

## What skills are the most important for hiring?

- #1 Remaining Current on Advancements in Technology
- #2 Knowledge of Relevant Computer Software
- #3 Creating & Maintaining Positive Client Relations
- #4 Analysis and recognition of potential security threats
- #5 Information gathering and analysis

## Do you expect your workforce to grow in the next 3 years?



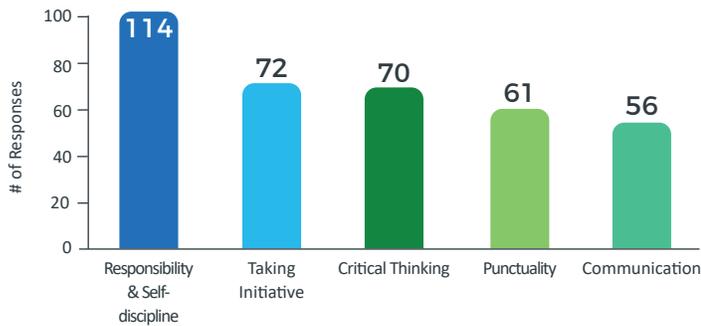
## Industry-specific degrees and credentials sought:

- Bachelor's degree in computer science or related
- CompTIA Certification
- EC-Council Certified Ethical Hacker
- SANS Institute trainings
- SOC Analyst Certification

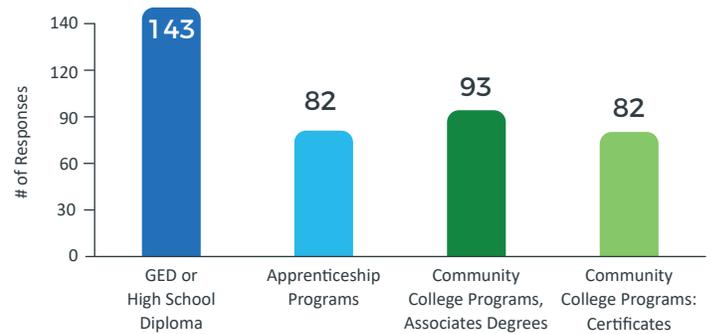
# MANUFACTURING

--186 Responses--

## What qualities or soft skills are most difficult to find in the workforce?



## What credentials or education experience are you seeking in your future workforce?



## Which positions do you expect to have the most openings in the next 3 years?

- #1 Front-line Production Workers
- #2 Machine Operators (Not Computerized)
- #3 Maintenance & Repair Personnel
- #4 Supervisors & Managers
- #5 Engineers

## What skills are the most important for hiring?

- #1 Effective Communication to Share the Status of Work & Problems
- #2 Effective Use of Resources, Limiting Waste, Continuous Improvement
- #3 Participates & Contributes to a Safe Work Environment
- #4 Selection & Effective Use of Tools, Machinery, Equipment & Other Resources in Production
- #5 Effective Implementation of Operational Manuals & Instructions

## Do you expect your workforce to grow in the next 3 years?



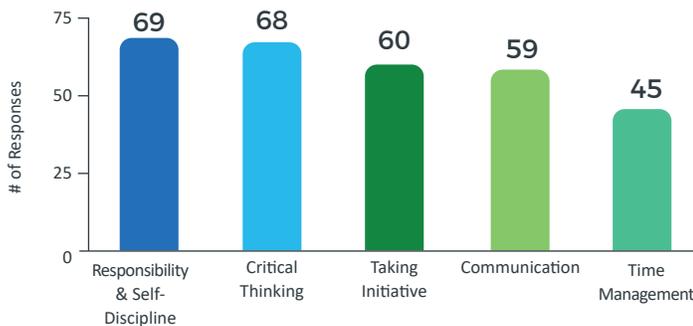
## Industry-specific degrees and credentials sought:

- Machinist degrees (associate's)
- Mechatronics degrees (Bachelor's or Master's)
- Plastics Technology and Engineering Certificate
- Lean Manufacturing/Six Sigma training
- OSHA 10 training
- Culinary Arts degree or certificate
- Acidified Food Manufacturing training
- Experience in manufacturing

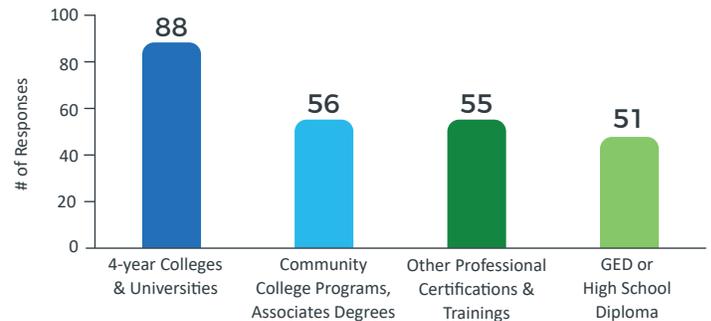
# PROFESSIONAL & TECHNICAL SERVICES

--163 Responses--

## What qualities or soft skills are most difficult to find in the workforce?



## What credentials or education experience are you seeking in your future workforce?



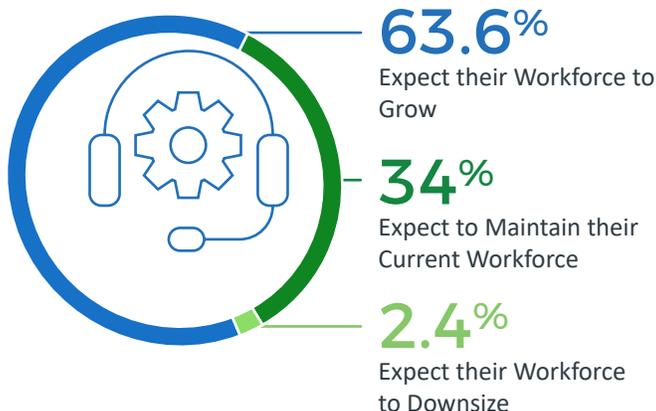
## Which positions do you expect to have the most openings in the next 3 years?

- #1 Administrative Assistants
- #2 Marketing Professionals
- #3 Accountants and book keepers
- #4 Supervisors & Managers
- #5 Computer & IT Support Professionals

## What skills are the most important for hiring?

- #1 Ability to Work Efficiently
- #2 Effective Communication Appropriate to Intended Audience
- #3 Creating & Maintaining Positive Client Relations
- #4 Information Gathering & Analysis
- #5 Knowledge of Relevant Computer Software

## Do you expect your workforce to grow in the next 3 years?



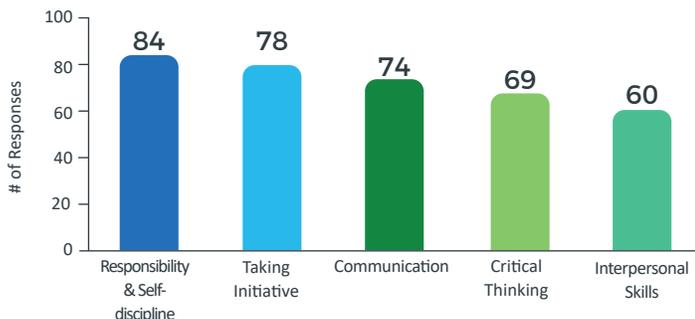
## Industry-specific degrees and credentials sought:

- Engineering, architecture and surveying
- Associate's or Bachelor's in geomatics, surveying or related
- Bachelor's in architecture, geology
- Master's or doctoral degree in engineering or physics
- Professional Engineering License
- LEED accreditation
- Bachelor's degree or experience in finance; real estate licensure
- Master of Public Health (MPH) or Master of Social Work (MSW) degree
- Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) Certification
- FAA Pilot Certification
- JD degree

# PUBLIC SECTOR, EDUCATION & NONPROFIT

--256 Responses--

## What qualities or soft skills are most difficult to find in the workforce?



## What credentials or education experience are you seeking in your future workforce?



## Which positions do you expect to have the most openings in the next 3 years?

- #1 Administrative, Technical & Support Staff
- #2 Teachers/Faculty
- #3 Counselors, Social Workers and Related
- #4 Facilities/Maintenance
- #5 Administrators

## What skills are the most important for hiring?

- 125 Ability to Organize, Plan & Set Goals
- 107 Effective Management & Leadership Skills
- 106 Ability to Implement Plans & Policies
- 58 Strong Writing Skills
- 53 Resource Management

## Do you expect your workforce to grow in the next 3 years?



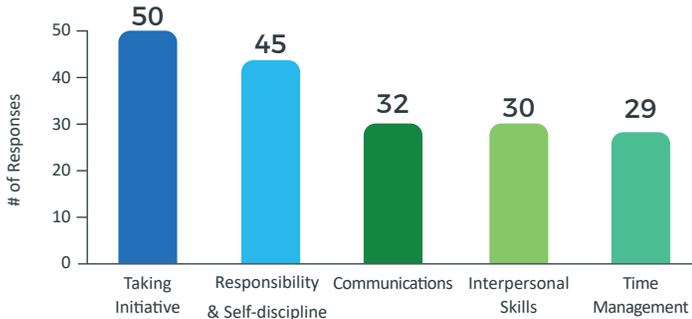
## Industry-specific degrees and credentials sought:

- Education: Bachelor's degree in education or early childhood education; BK Teaching License (Birth through Kindergarten)
- Bachelor's, master's or doctoral degree in human services, social sciences, and related fields
- Master of Public Health (MPH) or Master of Social Work (MSW) degree
- Bachelor's degree in parks, recreation or related fields
- Master's degree in Arts Administration
- Community Health Worker (CHW) Training
- HUD Housing Counseling Certification
- Wilderness First Responder training

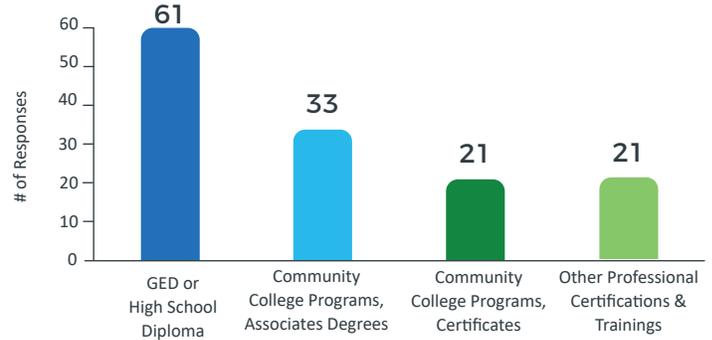
# RETAIL

--93 Responses--

## What qualities or soft skills are most difficult to find in the workforce?



## What credentials or education experience are you seeking in your future workforce?



## Which positions do you expect to have the most openings in the next 3 years?

- #1 Front-line retail staff (cashiers, floor staff)
- #2 Managers and Supervisors
- #3 Warehousing, stocking and logistics staff
- #4 Marketing Professionals
- #5 Financial Professionals

## What skills are the most important for hiring?

- #1 Commitment to Customer Service
- #2 Effective Communication
- #3 Organization
- #4 Knowledge of relevant computer software
- #5 Information gathering analysis

## Do you expect your workforce to grow in the next 3 years?



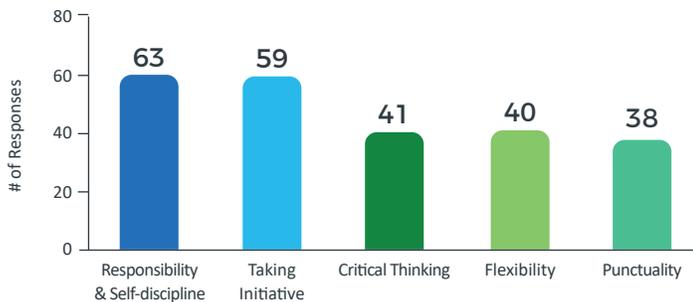
## Industry-specific degrees and credentials sought:

- Experience in retail, business and marketing
- Specific experience with: quilting or sewing, medicinal herbs, professional driving, arts and ceramics
- Six Sigma Certification
- Motorcycle mechanic training

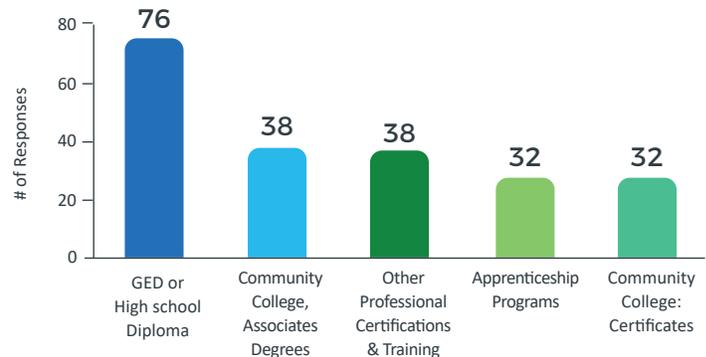
# RESTAURANT, LODGING, & HOSPITALITY SERVICES

--122 Responses--

## What qualities or soft skills are most difficult to find in the workforce?



## What credentials or education experience are you seeking in your future workforce?



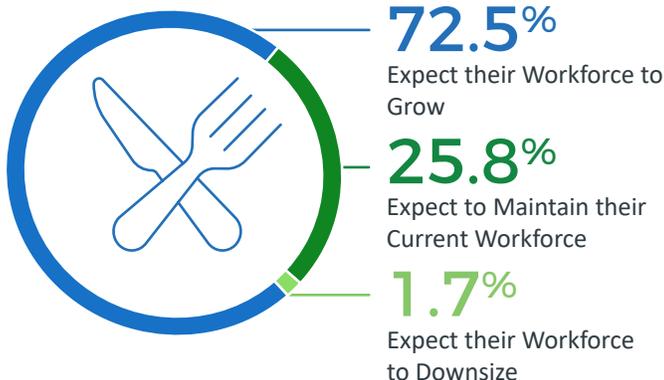
## Which positions do you expect to have the most openings in the next 3 years?

- #1 Food Preparation Staff
- #2 Wait/Banquet Staff
- #3 Guest Services Staff
- #4 Dishwasher/Bus Boy
- #5 Culinary Specialist/Chef

## What skills are the most important for hiring?

- #1 Commitment to Customer Service
- #2 Application of Appropriate Food, Health & Safety Practices
- #3 Effective Communication & Negotiation Techniques
- #4 Knowledge of Relevant Computer Software
- #5 Effective Allocation of Resources

## Do you expect your workforce to grow in the next 3 years?



## Industry-specific degrees and credentials sought:

- Associate's degree in Baking, Pastry Arts, Culinary Arts
- Cicerone Certification
- ServSafe Food, Alcohol Certificate
- Licensed Massage Therapists (LMT)
- Experience in administration, business, marketing
- Experience in restaurants and event planning
- Experience in snowmaking, ski lodges

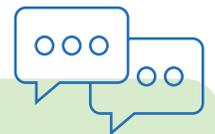


## SUMMARY

The following items were identified as the strongest takeaways from the survey:

- ✓ Western North Carolina employers' expectations for business growth remain as strong as they were in 2018, despite challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Over two-thirds of employers expect to grow their workforces in the next three years.
- ✓ There is a wide range of demand for workers who hold credentials ranging from GEDs or high school diplomas to two- and four-year college degrees, as well as certificates and apprenticeships.
- ✓ Employers continue to rely on friendships and networks for talent recruitment at a similar rate to our 2018 survey, but have increased utilization of other tools like online job portals, social media and career fairs to reach a broader and more diverse talent pool.
- ✓ Employers view cost and availability of housing, wages and employee access to child care as the most significant obstacles to talent recruitment and retention.
- ✓ Employers expressed a broad need for employees with industry-specific skills and credentials as well as key soft skills including responsibility and self-discipline, taking initiative, critical thinking, and communication skills.

High-quality education resources like area public school systems, community colleges, and universities, access to job training opportunities, and a strong network of partners who prioritize growing and diversifying our talent pipeline will bolster our region's efforts to address current and future workforce needs.



### Stay Connected & Keep the Conversation Going.

Visit [ashevillechamber.org/state-of-workforce](https://ashevillechamber.org/state-of-workforce) for updates on workforce needs as we take steps to strengthen and grow talent in the region.

# STATE OF OUR WORKFORCE: WESTERN NC 2022 SURVEY PARTNERS



The 2022 State of Our Workforce: Western NC talent analysis was led in partnership among the Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce, the Economic Development Coalition for Asheville-Buncombe County, the Mountain Area Workforce Development Board, and the Land of Sky P-20 Council and was operated by RTI International.

We are deeply grateful for the support of more than 90 leaders from Chambers of Commerce, economic development organizations, local governments, education partners, community leaders, and stakeholders, who encouraged employer participation in this survey.

To learn more about the survey, visit [ashevillechamber.org/state-of-workforce](https://ashevillechamber.org/state-of-workforce).