

New River/Mount Rogers Workforce Development Region

2024 Q2 QUARTERLY
WORKFORCE REPORT

Introduction

Welcome to the Quarter 2 2024 Workforce Report.

The New River Mount Rogers Workforce Quarterly Report is a collaborative effort between the Virginia Tech Center for Economic and Community Engagement and the New River Mount Rogers Workforce Development Board (WDB). Its primary objective is to provide a comprehensive overview of the regional labor landscape, presenting in-depth analyses and data to offer valuable insights into the evolving workforce dynamics. The publication is dedicated to delivering timely and relevant information to its audience.

This latest edition focuses on the current landscape of work-based learning (WBL) in the region. Employers have slowly been increasing minimum employment thresholds especially for lower-level positions. WBL programs provide students and job-seekers with hands-on work experience and crucial industry exposure. Those who participate in WBL programs drastically increase their chances of being hired in their desired industry, and their salary over time.

Job seekers are not the only ones who benefit from WBL. Employers can see many benefits from supporting and hosting these programs. WBL programs increase exposure for underrepresented industries, prepare a highly-skilled workforce, and help strengthen ties between employers and their communities.

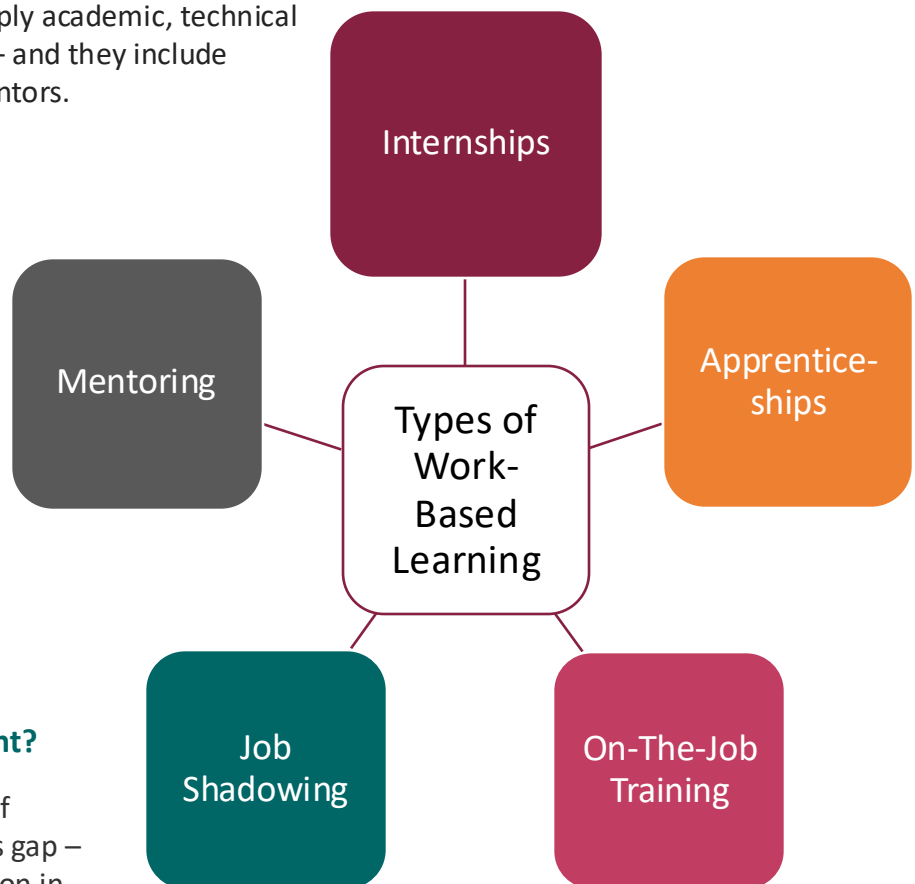


Introduction to Work-Based Learning

What is Work Based Learning?

Work-based learning (WBL) offers opportunities for students and adults to obtain skills and experiences needed to be successful in an increasingly competitive employment landscape. Employers can have a hand in creating a strong workforce in any industry. WBL can be customized to meet the needs of any industry and comes in many different forms. No matter what they are named, these programs are characterized by the combination of experiences in educational and workplace settings. They align classroom and workplace learning and apply academic, technical and employability skills in a work setting – and they include support from classroom or workplace mentors.

“73% of employers perceived that it was “very or somewhat difficult” to find qualified candidates for jobs...” – John Baker for FORBES Magazine



Why is Work Based Learning Important?

One factor driving the recent expansion of work-based learning programs is the skills gap – a widely acknowledged global phenomenon in which, for complex reasons, the skills taught in schools don’t always match the skills demanded by employers. For example, in a recent U.S. [study](#), 73% of employers perceived that it was “very or somewhat difficult” to find qualified candidates for jobs, and about 34% said schools have not properly prepared students for jobs. Work-Based learning programs help to combat the skills gap by supplementing education with real world experience. This experience reinforces the content taught in school, and helps people gain the practical knowledge needed to be successful in the working world. WBL programs are accessible for people of all ages, from in-classroom curriculum to years-long apprenticeships. Employment in the New River | Mount Rodgers region is dominated by careers in Healthcare, Manufacturing, and Skilled Trades. These industries are mostly comprised of jobs where previous hands-on experience is the minimum necessity. Highlighting and uplifting work-based learning, helps ensure the entire workforce is prepared for successful careers.

Types of Work-Based Learning

Internship

Internships are the most ubiquitous types of work-based learning programs. In general, internships provide participants with hands-on work experience for a set time. Internships can be paid or unpaid, and can range from a few months to over a year. It is very common for internships to align with school schedules, so that students are able to participate in the programs while not in school, and apply their education to the workplace.

Apprenticeship

Apprenticeships are hands-on learning experiences that usually focus on one or a few specialized skills. Apprenticeships typically last 1-3 years, and focus on careers in the skilled trades. These programs are usually more structured than other work-based learning programs, they are often organized around a curriculum and have a target end goal like a certificate. Apprenticeships are commonly paid experiences, and aim to transition completers directly into the workplace.

On-The-Job Training

On-the-job (OJT) is the most distinct of the work-based learning programs in this report. Unlike the other types, OJT is specifically tailored for new hires, not those who are seeking positions. OJT is a contractual agreement made between an employer and the Virginia Employment Commission [VEC]. The employer agrees to hire and provide substantive on-the-job training to a qualified individual. VEC reimburses the employer up to 50% of the training period wage. OJT helps to close the skills gap prevalent among the labor pool, allowing employers to offer positions to job seekers who may not have qualified. OJT only lasts for the initial training period for new employees, and is always accompanied by a paid position.

Job Shadowing

Job Shadowing requires the least commitment from employers and participants. Job Shadowing provides participants with the opportunity to observe workers as they perform their typical duties. This type of WBL typically only lasts for one work day, participants do not often shadow at the same workplace twice. Job Shadowing provides participants the ability to gain a deeper understanding of the qualifications, duties, and responsibilities of positions they are interested in. This is a very flexible option for a workplace who may not be able to dedicate much time to a participant, but want to make themselves available to job seekers.

Mentoring

Mentorships are another type of WBL that does not require much from employers or participants. Mentorships are more akin to professional relationships than workplace programs. Mentors are highly-skilled professionals who offer guidance, networking opportunities, and career insights to mentees. Mentoring is one of the most flexible types of WBL. The structure of a mentorship can range from regular formal meetings, to occasional informal conversations. Employers can get involved by hosting mentorship programs, linking prospective students and perspective employees with employees.

Benefits of Work-Based Learning

Increased Productivity:

- Employers that can train and bring new hires up to speed quickly have more productive workforces. In a study conducted by the Learning and Skills Council, 81% of employers that used apprenticeships reported increased work output.

Improved Employee Engagement:

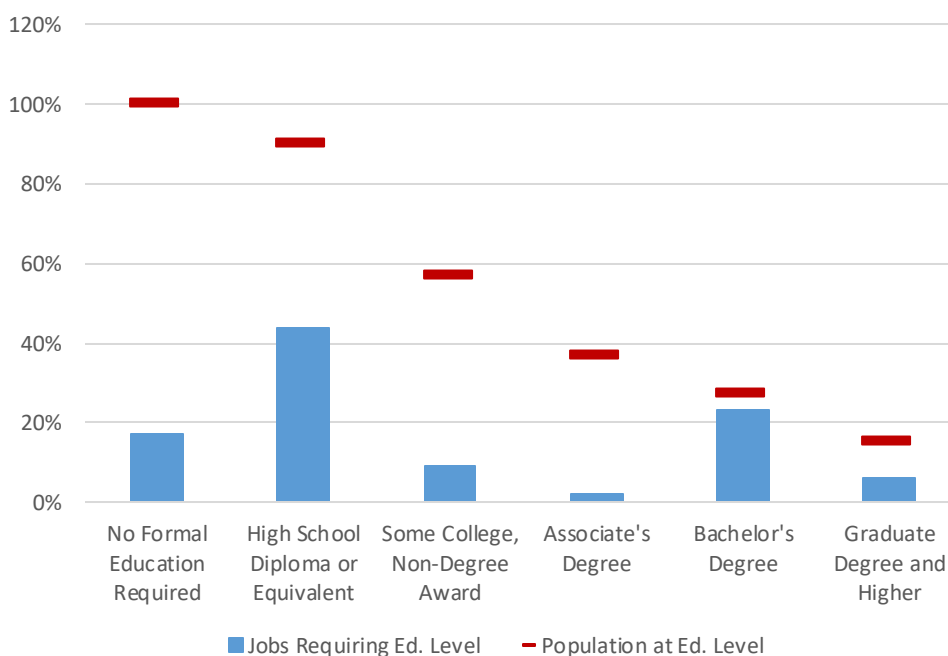
- With work-based learning programs, businesses can develop and retain the talent they need. According to a 2014 Gallup study, participants in work-based learning programs had almost twice the level of employee engagement as workers who haven't taken part in them. When employers cultivate a sense of belonging, retention rates improve, absenteeism declines, and discretionary effort increases.

Expanded Workplace Diversity and Inclusion:

- Work-based learning can advance diversity and equity in the workforce by providing the structure, support, and training needed for people of many different backgrounds and skill sets to succeed. Diversity in the workplace then cultivates innovation and creative problem-solving.

Workforce Needs in the Region

Educational Need vs Population at Educational Level



Most jobs in the NRMR region require either a high school diploma or bachelors degree as their minimum education. Regionally, the population over-exceeds the educational needs of employers. Through conversations with employers it is clear that the main barrier to employment is that job-seekers do not have the minimum required work experience. Many employers agreed they would lower the educational threshold for a job-seeker with more work experience. Work-based learning programs help mitigate this barrier by providing job seekers ample opportunity to gain on-the-job experience.

Work Based Learning in the Region

The New River/Mount Rogers Workforce Development Board

The New River /Mount Rogers Workforce Development Board has multiple grant programs that can provide funding to support work-based learning opportunities. These grants include:



Youthbuild Program – works with at risk youth ages 16-24

WORC – works with individuals from the substance abuse and justice involved communities

Pathway Home – works with returning citizens

Trades Gap – works with individuals who are looking for short term training that improve skills or lead to better employment opportunities in the skilled trades, healthcare and manufacturing industries.

Types of Work-Based Learning may include:

Job Shadowing: Short term experience where the individual follows a worker through a typical job day in their chosen occupation.

Work Experience/Internships: This is usually a six to eight week temporary work experience that the individual is paid through a stipend to provide services to a specific business (the stipend for this is being paid by the Workforce Board programs).

On The Job Training: The individual is hired by a specific business, wages are reimbursed at 50% for a designated time period while the worker is getting up to the required skill level (the 50% is being paid by Workforce Board programs).

To learn more about Work-Based Learning programs, see our Work-Based Learning Toolkit at

<https://vcwnewrivermtrogers.com/business-solutions/>

Virginia Department of Education Career and Technical Education (CTE) High-Quality Work-Based Learning (HQWBL)



CTE HQWBL is a program led by the Virginia Department of Education where students can apply their classroom education to real-world work experiences. Each CTE HQWBL experience includes three components: Classroom Instruction, Student Organization Participation, and High-Quality Work-Based Learning. These experiences help to reinforce Virginia's 5 C's, preparing students to be successful once they transition into the working world. CTE HQWBL experiences fall under three interconnected categories: Career Awareness, which help expose students to different career paths; Career Exploration, where students can learn more about specific career paths that interest them; and Career Preparation, where students develop the knowledge and skills to be successful in a chosen career path.

Work Based Learning in the Region

Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS): Employment Service & Special Programs (ESSP)

Virginia DARS ESSP helps individuals with disabilities prepare for, find, and keep a job that increases their ability to live independently. The Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) program encourages and supports students with disabilities' (SWD) initial career exploration, enhances, complements, and fills gaps in available transition services, and empowers SWDs to pursue their employment and independence potential. To be eligible, an individual must be between the ages of 14-21, in a secondary, post-secondary, or other recognized education program, and have a documented disability.



For questions regarding DARS ESSP:
Carrie Worrell
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Main office: 804-662-7129

The five elements of pre-ETS include Job Exploration Counseling, Work-Based Learning, Counseling on Postsecondary Education / Training Options, Workplace Readiness Training, and Instruction in Self-Advocacy. The Work Based Learning opportunities usually take place in the summer and involve a 3–8-week authentic work experience in a single place of business. In 2022, the Summer Work Experience program supported 54 students at their offices in Abington, Christiansburg, Roanoke, and Wytheville

Virginia Department of Social Services (DSS): Virginia Initiative for Education and Work (VIEW)

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Hotline: 804-726-7385



The VIEW program provides employment, education, and training opportunities to help individuals develop economic independence. Recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) must participate in the VIEW program as a condition of eligibility, unless otherwise exempt.

Under VIEW, the DSS operates the Full Employment Program (FEP), a subsidized employment program designed to help participants increase self-sufficiency by earning a living wage, increase career-related work skills, and improve their competitiveness in the labor market. Employers participating in FEP receive a subsidy to offset some or all the wages and costs of employing a FEP participant. FEP pays employers a monthly stipend for a maximum of 6 months for each FEP participant hired to work an average of 20 hours or more per week.

People Inc.: Youth Workforce Development

276-623-9000 | Info@peopleinc.net

The Youth Workforce Development program offered by People Inc. serves youth ages 14-24. The program helps participants answer the questions, "What's next?" by enhancing their workforce readiness skills, connecting them with paid internships and training opportunities, and aiding them in exploring future careers. In 2023, People Inc. served 402 young people and helped 49 clients obtain employment after the program. The program serves Bland, Carroll, Floyd, Giles, Grayson, Montgomery, Pulaski, Smyth, Washington, and Wythe Counties and the Cities of Bristol, Galax, and Radford.



Work Based Learning in the Region

The Virginia Talent + Opportunity Partnership

The Virginia Talent + Opportunity Partnership (Virginia TOP). Is a statewide program that works to increase access to internship opportunities for students and grow capacity for organizations and employers to host internships. The program offers free skills-building courses for students, resources for companies who are looking to start an internship program, and many networking and professional development events. Virginia TOP resources and activities are organized by region. The NRMWDB area spans across regions 1 & 2 in the program, each region has its own point of contact that helps to connect employers and students to internship resources in their local areas.



VIRGINIA
TALENT +
OPPORTUNITY
PARTNERSHIP

Region 1: Bland, Carroll, Smyth, Washington, Grayson, & Wythe

Chelsea Justice- caj5g@uvawise.edu

Tonya Nations- mnr3pm@uvawise.edu

Region 2: Montgomery, Pulaski, Floyd, & Giles

Brenna Valle- valleb@vt.edu

Jemma Sabokrouh- Jemma@vt.edu

Local Opportunity: Virginia Talent and Opportunity Partnership Region One Internship Summit

2024 SWVA Internship Summit

11 Nov
Monday
09 - 03
am pm

12 Nov
Tuesday
10 - 01
am pm

Join us for internship focused conversations and networking!

Day 1: Sessions on Mentorship, Student & Employer Experiences, Relationship Building with Educational Institutions, and More!

Day 2: Internship Networking Opportunity Between Employers and Students!

Meet us at:
One Heartwood Circle
Abingdon, VA 24210

****The event is FREE & registration is required.**
Open to employers, educational institutions and students.

REGISTER HERE!

need more information? email:
vtop@uvawise.edu

UVA WISE

SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA Cultural Center & MARKETPLACE

VIRGINIA TALENT + OPPORTUNITY PARTNERSHIP

Work Based Learning in Action:

Hunsuyador Yusif, a chemical engineering major at Virginia Tech, was struggling to find a summer internship before he connected with the Virginia Talent + Opportunity Partnership (VTOP). With a summer position at Inorganic Ventures, Hunsuyador applied learning from the classroom to real-life work and built skills for his future career.

“Getting to see why we learned the way we did, it brings everything together” –Hunsuyador Yusif on applying his education to his internship

When Hunsuyador’s boss at the Virginia Tech chemistry lab asked what he was doing for the summer, he mentioned he was looking for an internship. She connected him with VTOP, and Hunsuyador ended up interning with Inorganic Ventures. He explained that this internship helped him understand how his education applied to the real world - “Getting to see why we learned the way we did, it brings everything together. It’s nice to be able to apply what I’ve done in the classroom to something in real life.” When asked the best part about his internship, Hunsuyador answered, “the people. I can literally pull anyone and ask them a question and they’ll be glad to either help me or point me in the right direction.”

Hunsuyador advises students searching for internships to reach out to their network. “I would say definitely go online and look for stuff, but I would also say network. Just voice that you’re looking for an internship.” Now as a college senior, Hunsuyador is looking forward to entering the workforce with the skills acquired from his internship.

Best Practices and Strategies

Work-Based learning programs can come in many shapes and sizes. However, the end goal for every type of program is to expose a participant to a career field. The strategies to achieve this goal can look very different, but research shows there are a handful of practices that ensure successful programming.

The Best Work-Based Learning Programs...



Correlate with school curricula: Work-Based learning programs provide students with the opportunity to bolster classroom instruction through real world experiences. Practical application of education reinforces lessons learned at school, and helps students retain skills learned during the experience. This linkage has ripple effects on all school subjects, as students are better able to understand how to apply what they learn in school to the real world.

Provide participants with hands-on experiences: As time progresses, employers are requiring more hands on experience for entry-level positions. Having prior experience in a career field increases the chances that job seekers will become employed, and the rate that employees are promoted. A work-based learning program that does not have a hands-on component may be able to provide participants with a lot of good information, but they will ultimately leave without having done anything. Especially in the trades, manufacturing, and healthcare industry, a qualified job-seeker must have some type of previous hands-on experience. Early hands-on exposure also helps increase interest and engagement in understaffed occupations.



Offer Mentorship, Support, and Employer Connections: Many job seekers have issues becoming employed because they lack the soft-skills and industry connections needed to successfully start careers. If this gap in skills is not addressed by work-based learning programs, participants may not leave with everything they need to be successful. Any organization hosting a work-based learning program must carefully consider the level of effort they are able to provide program participants, being especially aware that the most disadvantaged participants often need more closely-monitored experiences in order to be successful.

Pay participants: There are many of people who do not have the ability to sacrifice income for experience. Many job seekers have financial responsibilities that cannot be set aside. Almost every person who goes through a work-based learning program will see a higher income in the long run. However, there is a large majority of job seekers who are not able to participate in unpaid programs, even though doing so would make them more likely to experience financial gain. Unpaid work-based learning programs only exacerbate economic disparities.



For information on recruitment opportunities and programs to support Employed Worker Training, On-the-Job Training and other work-based learning opportunities contact the New River/Mount Rogers Workforce Development Board [Contact - New River/Mount Rogers Workforce Development Board \(vcwnewrivermtrogers.com\)](https://vcwnewrivermtrogers.com)



For more information, please contact:

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