

FEATURE

WHERE ARE THE WORKERS? A COMMUNITY REPORT

by Christine Marshall, Executive Director, Summit/Medina Workforce Area Council of Governments

Summary

One year ago, as ConxusNEO Board members discussed the disconnect between employers and workers, which became evident as the world reopened post the COVID-19 pandemic, we started asking “where are the workers?”.

Using several funding channels, we sought to uncover answers through a research project that asked working age adults how they were doing. The research spanned the Greater Akron Chamber footprint which consists of Medina, Portage, and Summit Counties.

The project commenced with a set of surveys to obtain insights from employers about their challenges in hiring talent and to determine the average working adult’s commitment to work. The next phase of the project invited response from workers. Spoiler alert: the research showed the direct impact from the COVID-19 pandemic changed everything about work as we know it.

We knew it would be important to understand where employers and workers were coming from to find solutions to fill job openings, retain workers, and address the skills gap. The impact of this research extends beyond our own organizations and into the region’s economic, education, and workforce development systems.

Methodology

The employer research began in the late Fall of 2021, funded by ConxusNEO and TeamNEO with a distribution of surveys to employers across the three counties and follow-up focus groups for a deeper dive into the survey responses. With 254 surveys received, TeamNEO expanded the research and recovered an additional 512 employer responses across an 11-county footprint.

The 766 surveys revealed 80% of employers were facing a talent shortage, 65% experiencing higher turnover, 95% did not have a sufficient pool of qualified candidates, 18-30 years old were the

hardest to recruit and retain, and finding workers interested in full-time positions were the hardest to locate.

Finally, employers reported that raising wages and providing bonuses aren’t enough of an incentive. Workers are looking for more emphasis on company culture and creation of flexible policies which include hybrid work. Employers continue to struggle to find motivated employees.

The second portion of the research began with a survey for the working age adults made possible by U.S. Department of Labor funds through a grant to the Summit/Medina Workforce Area Council of Governments from the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services.

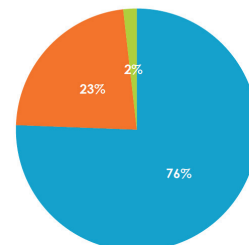
The survey’s content was collected from various community partners across the three counties. The research firm, Center for Marketing and Opinion Research, LLC (CMOR) was selected to develop the final tool, transmit the surveys, collect the data, conduct focus groups, and produce reports based upon the findings.

A total of 2,400 surveys (800 from each county) were collected between mid-February and the end of the first week in May of 2022. The Where Are the Workers (WATW) research project was expanded by the Fund for Our Economic Future (FFEF), who consulted with CMOR to replicate the tool to gather more information across eight additional northeast

Final Results— Importance of salary info in job posting



QUESTION: When looking for a new job, how important is it that the salary information is included in the job posting or description?



Very important
Somewhat important
Not at all important



Ohio counties: Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lake, Lorain, Mahoning, Stark, Trumbull and Wayne resulting in an additional 2,587 survey responses.

Results

Of those who are employed and/or looking for work, the findings showed:

- 98% say a wage is somewhat or very important;
- 92% say meaningful work is somewhat or very important;
- 91% say flexibility in the workplace is somewhat or very important;
- 55% are looking for part-time work; and
- 24% desire more training.

Additionally, we learned most respondents quitting their jobs did not have a new job lined up and many planned to quit in the next year. The number one reason expressed for quitting was a “toxic” work environment. Forty-three percent of the respondents declared work is less of a priority after the pandemic.

Eighteen to thirty year-olds were the number one age group involved in the “Gig” economy with 69% starting this type of work during the pandemic and 84% of respondents in that age group enjoyed the freedom of working for themselves. Both Gen Z and unemployed respondents expressed a desire for employers to provide access to mental health benefits.

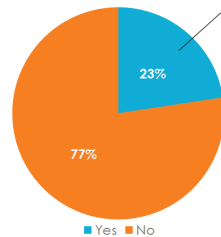
Themes emerged from the responses include:

- Wage matters
- “Flexibility” is desired

- Want “meaningful work” - feel a part of something/contributing
- Gig work is a large part of the current employment landscape
- Access to mental health services
- Half job seekers looking for part-time work
- High interest in job related training and education
- COVID has had a significant impact on defining what work means

Final Results- Why left job

QUESTION: Have you quit or left a job in the past 12 months?



QUESTION: What is the main reason you left your last job?

	#	%
Toxic work environment	43	12.3%
Schedule conflicts	40	11.4%
In transition	38	10.9%
Low pay	36	10.3%
Work overload	28	8.0%
Health	24	6.9%
Did not like job	19	5.4%
Impact of Covid	19	5.4%
Retirement	17	4.9%
Personal obligations	15	4.3%
Mental health	13	3.7%
Other	50	14.3%
Total	350	N=350



The responses were analyzed during May 2022. The findings determined what topics would drive the five focus groups. The data has been sliced into various demographic categories including but, not limited to gender, race, age, household income, educational attainment, generation, geographic (major cities and by county), and employment status.

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Call to action

It is our desire to share our research findings with employers and workers to foster equitable, community-based solutions to this massive shift in the way our workplaces and economy perform. The next phase of the research project has shifted to collecting and sharing solutions.

We invite you to visit www.conxusneo.jobs/watw for a slide presentation specific to the three-county research project. Finally, FFEF is leading our post-survey work for the region and will soon release a virtual tool kit for employers and an interactive website. For more information visit the FFEF website at www.thefundneo.org/watw.