



# WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SURVEY REPORT

WORKFORCE REPORT

2023



SONOMA COUNTY  
 **WORKFORCE  
INVESTMENT BOARD**

*Report developed by the Sonoma  
County Economic Development Board  
in partnership with the Sonoma County  
Workforce Investment Board*

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2023 Workforce Development Survey Report is intended as a **tool to align local workforce development efforts with employer needs**. The 2023 report summarizes findings obtained from the collective input of over 150 Sonoma County organizations. Between natural disasters and COVID-19, businesses in Sonoma County have been presented with a number of unique and unprecedented challenges that still have long term effects to Sonoma County's workforce in 2023. This year, there were additional questions surrounding the possibility of a recession, in which the results demonstrated an optimistic mindset within local employers. Taken together, **these findings are used to evaluate current workforce realities and develop programs relevant to employers' needs and opportunities**. The findings below are particularly important in developing a strong, resilient workforce.

## 2023 KEY FINDINGS & OPPORTUNITIES

**63%**  
of respondents  
experienced hiring  
difficulties

**50%**  
of respondents said they  
received an insufficient  
number of applicants

**93%**  
of employers do not  
expect a need to lay off  
employees in 2023

### Finding #1

Hiring difficulties often act as an impediment to potential economic growth. According to the survey, 63% of businesses reported experiencing hiring difficulties. The top reasons for difficulties stayed consistent to previous years, with the top hiring difficulties being a lack of relevant work experience, insufficient number of applicants, lack of hard/soft skills, and reluctance among potential new hires to accept the offered wages.

**Opportunity:** To address such ongoing issues in Sonoma County's local economy, the EDB developed a 3.0 Action Plan with the assistance of a diverse steering committee to enhance communication and stimulate economic well-being with various community stakeholders. The work plan utilizes a system-scale approach that will address the different barriers that are faced in 3 target areas, one of them being Education and Workforce Development.

**Action:** One of the 3.0 Action Plan goals is to bridge the education and skills gap by creating cradle-to-career pipelines, enabling individuals to earn a living wage or higher, while also helping local employers meet their workforce requirements. To achieve this objective, the EDB intends to enhance partnerships between the community, industry, and education sectors while fostering collaboration that connects students with employers.

### Finding #2

Due to hiring challenges presented in the past year, half of employers surveyed were not able to fill the position needed. About a third of the employers stated that they responded to hiring difficulties by increasing recruiting and/or compensation.

**Opportunity:** Sonoma County boasts a wide variety of employers across several industries and the EDB can help connect the local community, students and job seekers to educational resources, training, and certificate programs.

**Action:** The EDB's talent attraction and retention efforts are exemplified by Sonoma County Connections, a website designed to showcase the unique factors that make Sonoma County an ideal location for personal and professional growth. To make this resource an even more valuable tool for employers, the EDB is exploring various ideas, such as providing job postings and employer and industry profiles, to help companies attract and retain talent.

### Finding #3

When faced with uncertainty in times like a recession, many employers may feel their only option to combat costs is to lay off employees. With the possibility of a pending recession, employers remain optimistic that they will not need to resort to layoffs to reduce costs and maintain profitability.

**Opportunity:** Leverage relevant goals and objectives listed in the most recent regional Sonoma Mendocino Economic Development District (SMEDD) to provide local assistance to programmatically support the workforce and employers of Sonoma County.

**Action:** Secure funds, design training programs, and foster public-private partnerships between Community Colleges and private agencies to support the economic clusters of the Blue, Green and Creative Economies, as outlined in the CEDS.



# OPPORTUNITIES

## KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND RESOURCES

### Resources are available to help employers find qualified applicants.

- The **EDB** partners with the **WIB** to offer valuable, free support services for local employers, including talent attraction and retention, customized employee trainings, and specialized hiring events through Job Link, Sonoma County's One-Stop career center, and more.
- **Job Link** hosts monolingual and bilingual job fairs to help keep employers attuned to demographic shifts in Sonoma County and the rapid growth of the Latinx and homeless population. To meet employers' specialized needs, Job Link also provides **industry-specific job** fairs to spotlight critical industries and match employers with enthusiastic candidates that have the right skill sets.
- **Job Link's Team Workforce**, a multi-agency business-serving group, takes a coordinated approach to raise the visibility of employers' recruitment opportunities and to match job seekers with compatible employers.
- With **Sonoma County Connections**, an online talent attraction and retention website, the EDB is working to address concerns over the lack of qualified candidates in specialized fields.
- The EDB provides **industry-specific business intelligence reports** around HR and labor market trends, including the number of job postings for a position and the top skills employers are looking for.

### Training resources are closing the skills gap between the skills workers bring to the labor force and the skills most sought-after by employers.

- Programs that emphasize filling specialized skills gaps are now available. For example, the **Work Experience Department at Santa Rosa Junior College (SRJC)** helps develop desirable work habits, attitudes, and soft skills through internships, apprenticeships, community involvement and other opportunities.
- The **Employment Training Panel Lists** the SRJC and Sonoma State University (SSU) as an eligible training provider, with WIOA funding to cover the costs of over two dozen certificate programs.
- Work-based learning opportunities are offered through several sources; see the resource matrix on page 7 of this report for a list of programs.

### Employer expectations are rising, reflected by the growing demand for top candidates with a Bachelor's or Advanced degree. Education is a top priority for Sonoma County and resources for continuing education programs are vital to success.

- Sonoma County offers a number of top-rated K-12 schools and a variety of innovative charter schools as well as higher education institutions such as SRJC and SSU.
- **Apprenticeship programs, service opportunities, and internships are offered at SRJC and SSU** to supplement students' education and allow students to gain valuable technical experience in their chosen field.
- The **Career Technical Education Foundation (CTE Foundation)** integrates educational opportunities with technical and STEM-related skill development. CTE Foundation courses provide curriculum and paid work experiences that engage high school students in exploring their interests and preparing for college and careers. They also offer a "Gap year" work-readiness program that provides students with an opportunity to build their skills before entering the workforce.

# RECOMMENDATIONS & RESOURCES

- The **Workforce Investment Board** and **Economic Development Board** are leading coordinated and sustained initiatives that support industry partnerships in Healthcare, Manufacturing, and Construction. These initiatives are aimed to focus on industry-involved curriculum development, talent recruitment and development, apprenticeship and career pathways.
- The EDB strives to equip employers with comprehensive data and well-informed resources to aid their decision-making process. The resources comprise a vast array of data, such as labor market information, industry specific information, job analysis information encompassing median salaries, career pathways, and job availability.
- The EDB **3.0 Action Plan** aims to improve communications and promote economic prosperity among diverse community stakeholders. To achieve this, the EDB is implementing a comprehensive system-wide strategy that targets three key areas: Education and Workforce, Jobs and Business Development, and Housing and Community Development, with the intention to collaboratively address the specific obstacles faced in each of these areas.
- Workforce support and development agencies play a central role in supporting small business talent attraction and retention efforts. By coordinating the efforts of individual businesses, agencies can help programs achieve the scale needed for success. The WIB and EDB are working diligently to enhance the design and broaden the participant pool for future surveys. In addition, the WIB is consistently adapting its workshops and job fairs to reflect current workforce needs.
- The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), spearheaded and developed by the Sonoma-Mendocino Economic Development District (SMEDD), outlines its mission to promote business growth and success by offering personalized and tailored training, resources, and development opportunities. With this community driven economic development planning already in place for our region, employers and institutions alike can reference it for their own planning and federal funding acquisition efforts through innovative partnerships. For more information and regionally focused economic development efforts, visit SMEDD.org.

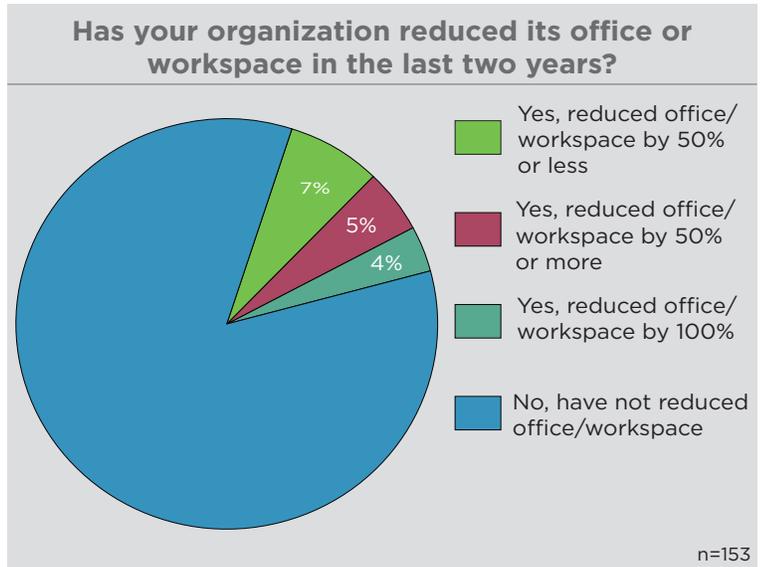
RESOURCES	SERVICES
<a href="#"><u>Sonoma County Job Link (WIB)</u></a>	Hosts job fairs to connect employers to a pool of qualified job seekers, screens candidates, offers support, and financial assistance for workforce development and training in hard and soft skills and staff development. Job Link also provides layoff support and prevention and labor market information.
<a href="#"><u>Career Technical Education Foundation</u></a>	Offers grants to enhance or expand in-school programs for career technical education and training in Sonoma County that align with the economic development and workforce needs of local employers such as Advanced Technology and Manufacturing, STEM, and Construction.
<a href="#"><u>Sonoma County Office of Education</u></a>	Established Maker Certificate Program, oversees Maker Design Lab in Santa Rosa, hosts conferences on maker education movement to train educators, offers a California Career Pathways Trust Grant to support strong, integrated career pathways from high school through Community College.
<a href="#"><u>Santa Rosa Junior College</u></a>	Offers approximately 150 skills certificates and certificates of achievement to prepare students for an entry level job or for career advancement in a chosen field and prepares students for employment in current or emerging jobs. The SRJC and the EDB awarded \$7.2 million in grand funding to construct the North Bay Regional Construction and Building Trades Employment Training Center, which will offer short-term career skill training classes and is aimed to be completed by Spring 2024 on the SRJC Petaluma campus.
<a href="#"><u>Sonoma State University</u></a>	Partners with Sonoma County Office of Education to implement the Maker Certificate Program and hold the Summer High School Internship Program, a science research program for students. The School of Extended Education offers certificate programs for students to explore and gain specialized skills in particular fields, while simultaneously gaining credits.
<a href="#"><u>Empire College (Monterey College of Law)</u></a>	Offers career training for in demand careers in the Law industry.



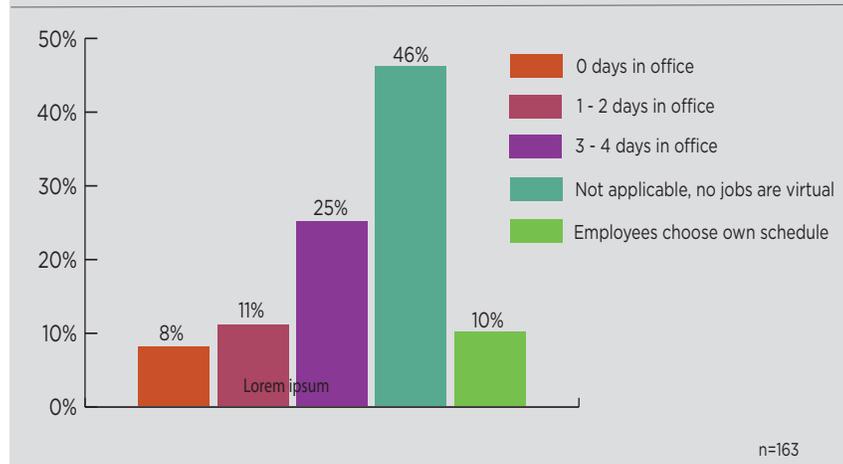
# ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES

## CHANGES IN OFFICE SPACE

The onset of COVID-19 brought forth a range of obstacles that businesses had to adjust to. In recent years, a number of organizations have modified the work environment for staff. This year, businesses were asked about the continued impact and its relation to workspace. According to the survey, **16% of respondents reduced their office or workspace** over the last two years.



**How many days a week are employees expected to be in office (as opposed to teleworking)?**



## THE SWITCH TO TELEWORK

Teleworking has become a new standard of work for employee retention and work-life balance, and continues to impact how organizations operate on a daily basis. In 2023, 54% of employees still telework in some sort of capacity, while 46% of employees are expected to be in the office full time.

## NEW TOOLS AND TECHNOLOGY

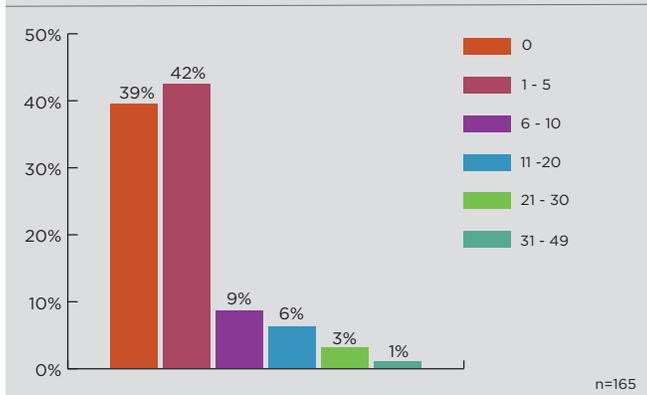
To maintain organizational effectiveness and employee productivity, businesses are continuing to utilize and implement new technologies, revealing the on-going success of the modernization in the workplace.

**39% of respondents** have adopted some form of new technology/tools, such as project management, virtual meeting, or food-service related software.

Of 64 that responded to adopting new technology, **37 respondents** specifically noted they have adopted some type of virtual meeting software like Zoom or Microsoft Teams.

# HIRING & RECRUITMENT

**How many new full time employees did your organization hire in 2022?**



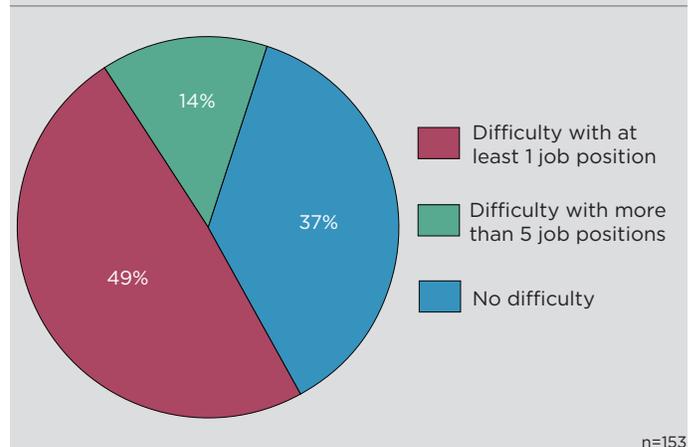
## NEW EMPLOYEES

According to this year’s survey, 59% of employers recruited new staff in 2022, which is a 26% decrease from responses obtained in 2017. Just over half of the employers reported having 10 or fewer hires. These results suggest that there has been an increasingly tight labor market.

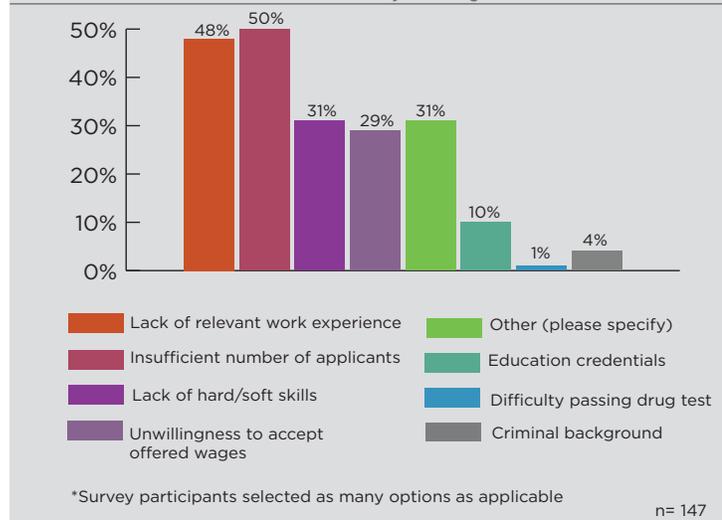
## HIRING DIFFICULTIES

In 2022, 63% of survey participants experienced some difficulty in hiring new employees. Sonoma County is experiencing a competitive labor market with a high demand for workers and a limited supply of available talent. Some employers state that the hiring difficulties may stem from specific industry or skill shortages specific to Sonoma County.

**Did your organization experience any hiring difficulties in 2022?**



**Why did your organization experience hiring difficulties, if any?**



*“Lack of available housing locally.”*

*“Prospective employees wanting 100% remote.”*

*“Cost of living in the Bay Area is our #1 issue with hiring.”*

# HIRING & RECRUITMENT (PT. 2)

## PRIORITIZING SKILLS

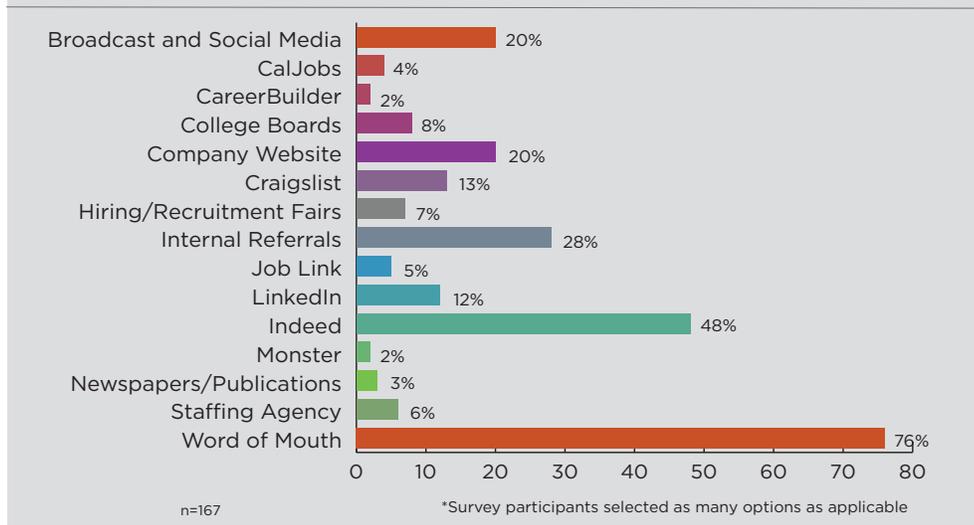
Employers are prioritizing interpersonal skills as they are critical in today's fast-paced and ever-changing work environments. Remote work and virtual communication require employees to possess strong communication, collaboration, and relationship building skills.

### Skills employers will be looking for in 2023

	Skill	% of Organizations Selecting Skill
1	Interpersonal skills	64%
2	Knowledge skills	63%
3	Organizational skills	61%
4	Motivation skills	59%
5	Analytical skills	47%
6	Basic Computer skills	45%
7	Physical skills	36%
8	Language skills	28%
9	Other/Misc. skills	15%
10	Customer Service skills	13%

\*Survey participants selected as many skills as applicable

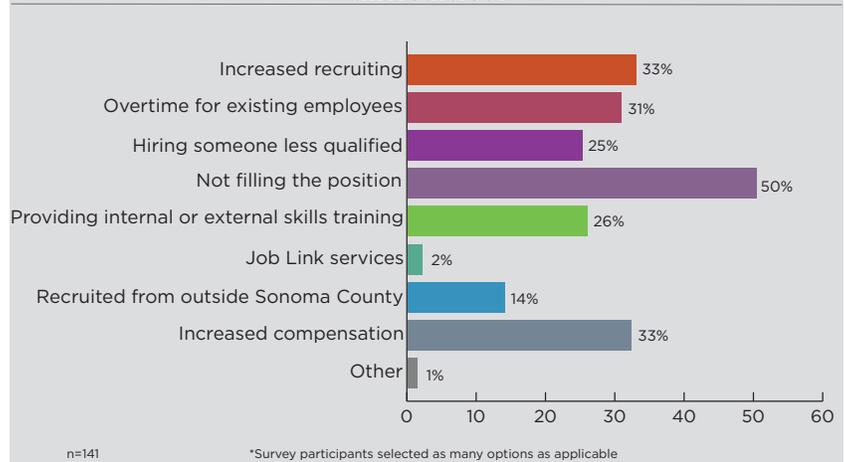
### What are the most effective resources for hiring new employees?



## HIRING DIFFICULTIES

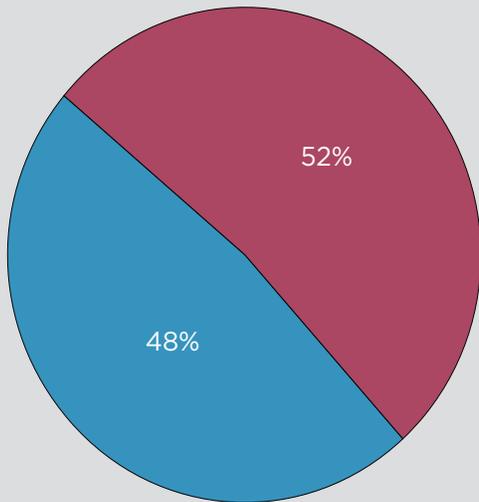
Half of the employers opted to not fill a position as a response to hiring difficulties while a comparable portion of employers addressed the issue by increasing recruiting and compensation. This strategy is most likely aimed at mitigating the challenges of hiring in Sonoma County, where the cost of living is high.

### How does your organization respond to hiring difficulties?



# ECONOMIC RECESSION CONCERNS

Would an economic recession motivate your organization's decision to eliminate employee positions?



Yes  
No

n=161

## RECESSION AND JOB STABILITY

Despite 48% of employers stating that an economic recession would motivate their decisions to lay-off employees due to economic instability and expenses, only 7% of employers anticipate a need to reduce employee positions in the upcoming year. The employment outlook remains positive as 65% of organizations expect to hire employees in 2023, showing a consistent level of confidence in the labor market.

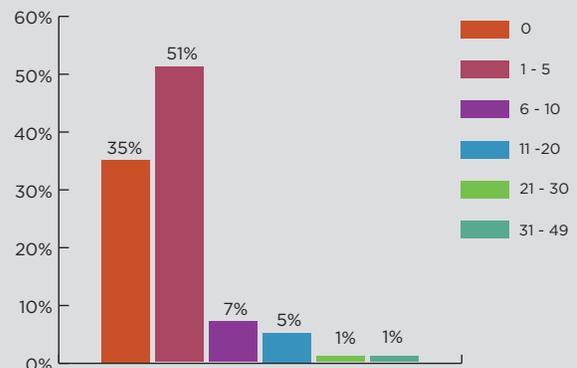
40% of employers responded that if their organization were to lay off a large portion of employee positions, they would utilize lay off aversion programs.

## ARE EMPLOYERS EXPECTING A NEED TO REDUCE EMPLOYEE POSITIONS:

93% employers do not expect to lay off employees in 2023

7% employers expect to lay off 1-5 positions over the next year

## How many new full time employees does your organization hire in 2023?

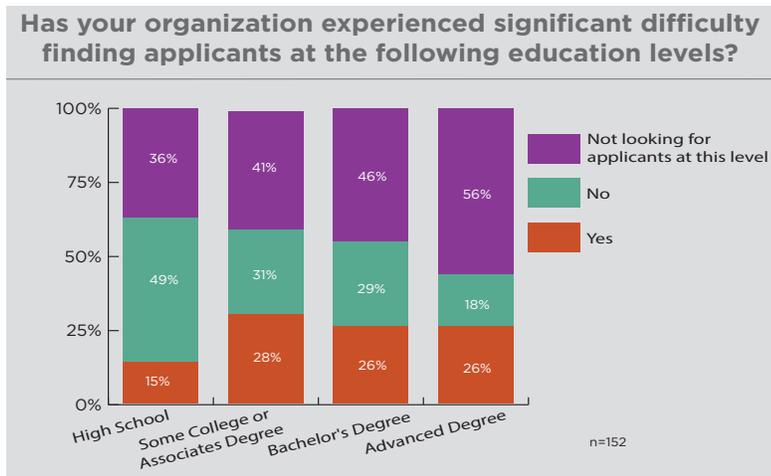


n=159

# EDUCATION, SKILLS, & TRAINING

## HIRING BY EDUCATION

According to the survey, employers reported that hiring individuals with “Some College or Associates’ Degree” was the most difficult, with more than a quarter of employers experiencing hiring challenges in this category. The data suggests that this difficulty may be due to a shortage of qualified applicants in the applicant pool. Some employers may perceive these candidates as overqualified for certain positions or may struggle to meet their salary expectations.



**65%**

Respondents said they would be more willing to hire an individual that didn't meet the required level of education, if they received training funds.

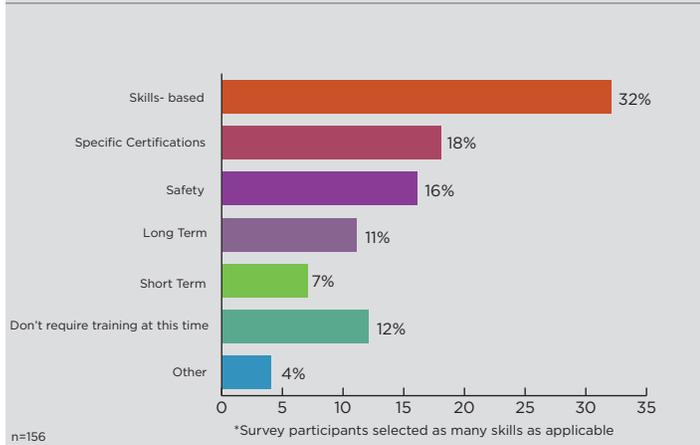
## SKILLS & TRAINING

Internal training is the most popular option for organizations providing for their employees. This could be because internal training allows organizations to tailor the training to their specific needs and culture.

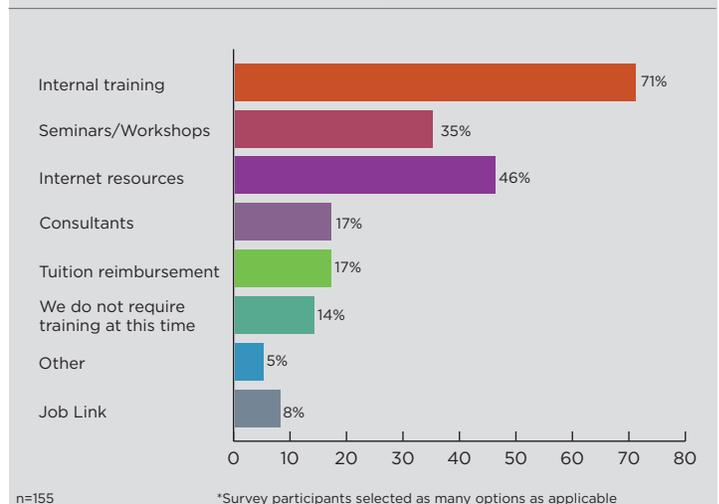
*“Classes in surveying and CAD at the Santa Rosa Junior College.”*

*“DEA certificates, professional licenses, registered behavior technician.”*

### What type of training is most needed for your organization's employees?



### What resources does your organization use to meet training needs?



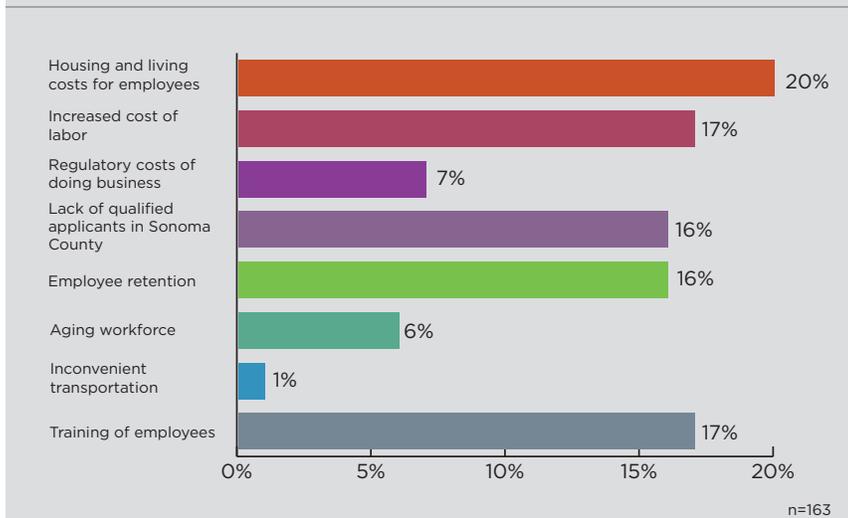
## INTERNSHIPS & WORK EXPERIENCE

**28%** Organizations responded to having an internship Program

**59%** organizations responded to having a Work Experience Program

# CONCERNS & ASSISTANCE

When given the option to choose one, which of the following workforce issues is your organization concerned with?

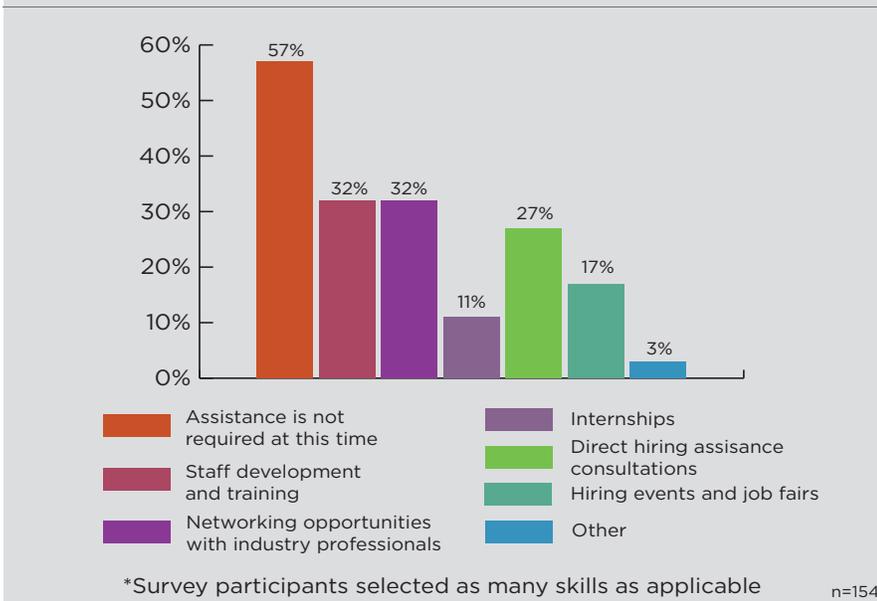


## WORKFORCE CONCERNS

20% of organizations continue to cite housing and living costs as their top concern. An increase in the cost of labor, and training employees tied as the second most common concern businesses face. These findings suggest that businesses continue to anticipate high costs of attraction while recognizing the importance that training employees is critical to stay on track with growing trends in technology.

*“Sonoma County is an expensive county to do business in and new employees take years to build a clientele that can make it financially sensible to stay here.”*

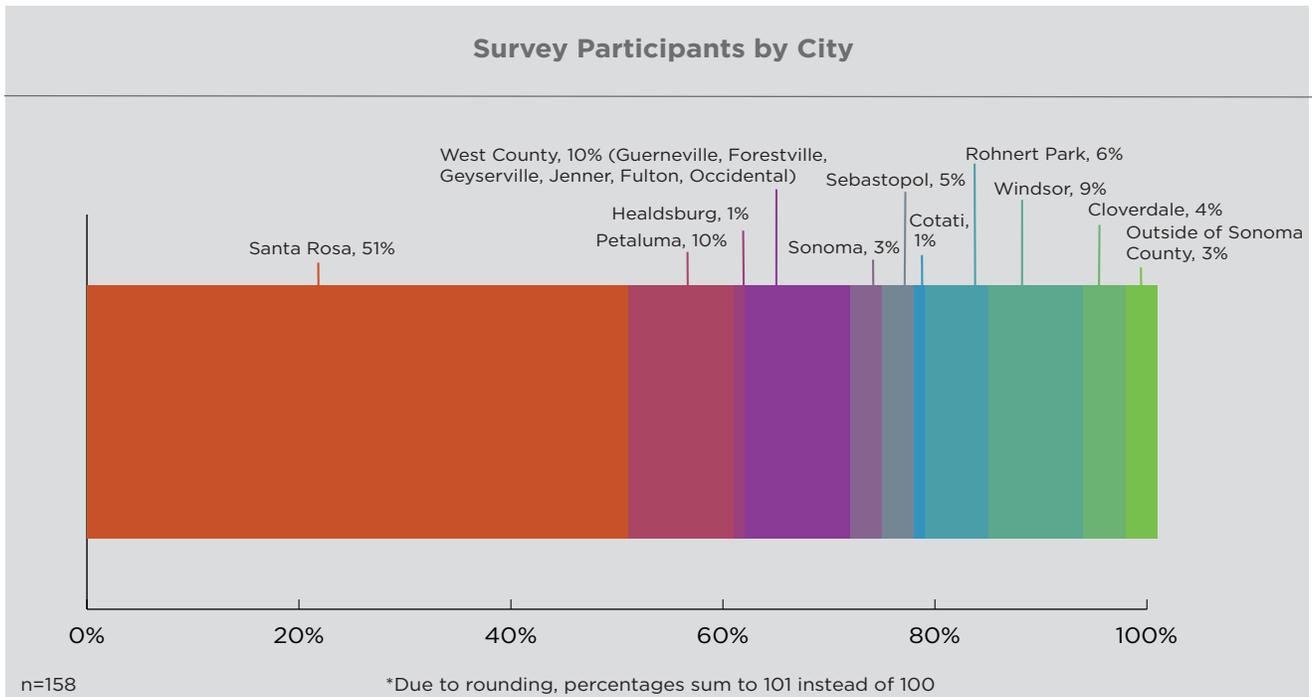
What area does your organization need assistance in?



## WORKFORCE ASSISTANCE

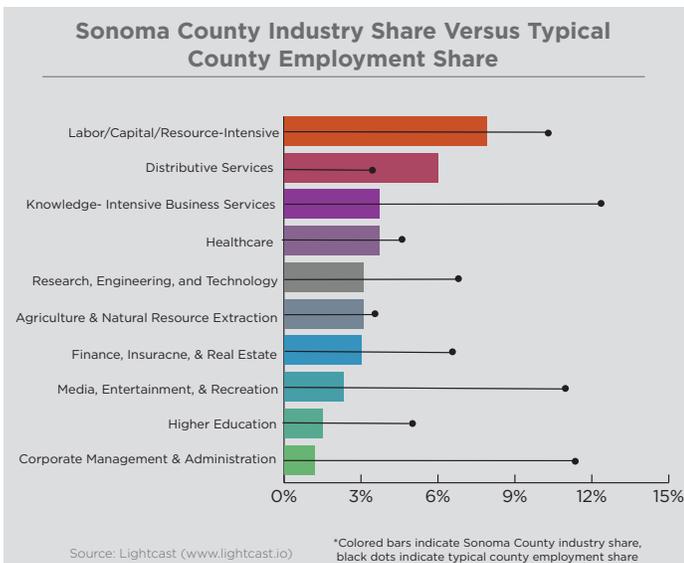
While business face a range of concerns, 57% of survey participants responded that assistance is not required at this time. This supports the trend that organizations are choosing to address both training and hiring needs internally. For those who did express a need for external support, staff development and training were the most commonly cited areas of interest. This underscores the importance businesses place on up-skilling their workforce.

# PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS



## INDUSTRY DIVERSITY

Sonoma County scores high in industry diversity, ranking 76th out of 3,142 US counties with an industry diversity rating of 97.6%. This means that employment is distributed more evenly amongst the 11 industry clusters when compared to the typical county. High diversity regions can signal greater economic stability and better withstand economic pressures than regions with low industry diversity (Lightcast).



### Sonoma County Industry Cluster Employment Chart

Industry	2022 Jobs	% of Total Employment	% of Typical County Employment	% Job Growth 2023 - 2028
1 Non- Export/Local Serving	141,258	64.4%	18.7%	7%
2 Labor/Capital/Resource- Intensive	17,303	7.9%	11.8%	1%
3 Distributive Services	13,119	6.0%	3.8%	5%
4 Knowledge-Intensive Business Services	8,176	3.7%	13.3%	1%
5 Healthcare	8,018	3.7%	5.7%	-5%
6 Research, Engineering, & Technology	6,878	3.1%	7.3%	5%
7 Agriculture & Natural Resource Extraction	6,870	3.1%	3.5%	1%
8 Finance, Insurance & Real Estate	6,661	3.0%	7.1%	-2%
9 Media, Entertainment, & Recreation	5,106	2.3%	11.1%	10%
10 Higher Education	3,212	1.5%	5.9%	7%
11 Corporate Management & Administration	2,727	1.2%	11.6%	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>219,328</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	

\*Non-Export/ Local Serving refers to industries that primarily serve local markets and are non-export based industries such as retail, dentist offices, and construction  
Source: Lightcast (www.lightcast.io)



# SURVEY NOTES & METHODOLOGY

## SURVEY NOTES

The 2023 Workforce Development Survey Report provides a detailed overview of the workforce needs of Sonoma County employers. Data utilized in the report was obtained through the creation and distribution of an online survey to a diverse sample of Sonoma County businesses, non-profits, and public agencies.

The 2023 Workforce Development Survey Report is not intended to provide a complete analysis of the needs of Sonoma County employers. The Economic Development Board (EDB) and Workforce Investment Board (WIB) believe that the information contained within this report is accurate and reflective of the most current data available, but this does not guarantee accuracy or completeness. Use of data from an outside source does not represent an endorsement of any product or service by the EDB, WIB, or any of their members or affiliates.

Interested readers are encouraged to contact data resource agencies for further research or to visit the EDB website, [www.sonomaedb.org](http://www.sonomaedb.org) for more information. Readers are also encouraged to direct all inquiries or suggestions for future reports to the EDB by calling (707) 565-7170 or emailing [edb@sonoma-county.org](mailto:edb@sonoma-county.org).

## SOURCES

2023 Workforce Development Survey

Lightcast ([www.lightcast.io](http://www.lightcast.io))

(All quotes are from 2023 Workforce Development Survey respondents)

## SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Invitations to complete the 2023 Workforce Development Survey were emailed to businesses identified by the EDB and WIB and posted on the EDB's Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Both an English and Spanish version of the survey were distributed. The survey was administered using Survey Monkey, and 168 responses were received. Survey answers are equally represented and are not weighted. Some graphs and percentages may not add up to 100%, as survey respondents were able to select multiple answers on some questions to accurately reflect their employer needs.

*The **EDB** offers business tools that include assistance in talent attraction, navigating the permit process; market research tools to identify growth potential; site selection assistance to help locate a site to meet business needs; customized demographic and psychographic information to help identify customers; and connections to additional resources to help local business grow and expand. [Sonoma County Job Link](#), the one-stop career center administered by the WIB, offers job counseling, training, financial assistance for employers, scholarships, hiring events and job fairs, and business referral services. Employers and job seekers are encouraged to take advantage of these resources.*

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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**Nina Cheek** is the Workforce and Public Policy Project Coordinator (2022- 2023), and was responsible for the management of this report including the preparation, development, data collection, data cleaning, statistical analysis, and finalization of the 2023 Workforce Development Survey Report.

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