ICTEF Eastern Idaho Industry Tour, October 8 & 9, 2026

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1. General. We participated in conversations at all sites, and tours at industry sites, except the Bannock County jail, and at all of the schools. Industry sites selected were members of local technical school Technical Advisory Committees (TAC). At each industry site we asked: "What issues do you see with recruiting and retaining quality workers"? At each school we asked: "What innovative strategies do you use to ensure your students are hirable by your local industries"? Our goal was to determine what industry finds "lacking" in new employees, and how career technical programs, both high school and technical college, try to address these weaknesses.

2. Partners. ICTEF visited the following organizations and individuals over the 2-days of this visit:

Curtiss-Wright, Idaho Falls. 10,500 total employees world-wide, with 250 employees in Idaho Falls. We met with 3 director/division managers for discussion, and met many other engineers/technicians as we toured their Idaho Falls manufacturing plant. The Idaho Falls site is mostly involved with manufacturing "control" components for the nuclear power industry, and they hire way more engineers than technicians. Quality Assurance and strict manufacturing controls are routine. As a consequence, their employees must be able to pass background investigations. They have an extensive internal training program. Specific Curtiss-Wright issues include:

a. They find it hard to find applicants who can pass a background investigation due to inappropriate behavior which the applicant films and places onto social media.

b. They find it hard to compete with INL on their pay rate.

c. Most new hires do not have familiarity with quality assurance – the concept and/or the software.

d. Work ethic (inappropriate phone use, attendance, initiative) are problems with younger and older workers – it is an individual issue, not a "type" of worker issue.

e. They struggle finding enough "experienced" workers. New employees need some work experience. Too many have no idea what a "work day" looks like.

f. They really like internships, and offer about 1000 per year (paid, almost all at the BS level of education) because they get a good look at the intern's work ethic.

g. Secondary certifications help a prospective employee get their resume to the top of the pile, including:

(1) Soldering – both through-hole and flow.
(2) SolidWorks Drafting Software.
(3) Programmable Logic Controllers (PLCs).
(4) LabView Software.

Foodera, Idaho Falls. 800 total employees, with 170 in Idaho Falls. We met with one engineer and toured their Idaho Falls manufacturing plant where we met many technicians. This site manufactures food processing equipment, mainly for potatoes, i.e. French fries, tater tots, and dehydrated "instant" mashed potatoes. Their larger customers include Simplot and Lamb-Weston. They have an extensive internal training and certification program for welding, safety, fork lift, etc. Specific Foodera issues include:

a. They have **open and unfilled** machining jobs but NO applicants.

b. Welding applicants cannot read welding blueprints with (or without) welding symbols.

c. As an active member of the CTEC Welding Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), they see CTE full of "single-teacher dependent programs". In other words, if the CTE instructor leaves, the school may not be able to offer the program of study for years as they struggle to find a replacement instructor. This results in gaps in their employee pipeline.

Bannock County Sheriff's Office and Bannock County Jail, Pocatello. We met with the Bannock County Sheriff and Deputy Sheriff. This site houses the county jail, DMV, and dispatch, so access control is strict. Several employees, in all areas, have come from the Portneuf Valley Technical Education Center (PV-TEC). Applicants must be able to pass background investigations and a rigorous physical fitness test. They have a continuous training program for all employees. They can employ 18 year-olds, although employees must be 21 years old to work patrol, investigations, etc. Specific Bannock County Sheriff issues include:

a. They find it hard to find applicants who can pass a background investigation due to inappropriate behavior which the applicant films and places onto social media.

b. 18 year-olds do not have a lot of "experience". New employees need some work experience. New employees have no idea of how to manage their "benefits" package (rule of 80, PERSI, medical).

c. Work within the Sheriff's office is very specialized, so they always hire for advanced positions "from within" after extensive training that never stops. Loss of an experienced employee to a higher paying law enforcement organization happens too often.

d. Often, new employees do not know/are not able to:

(1) Use a computer.
(2) Write well. Absolutely critical for reports that go before a judge.
(3) Pass the physical fitness test.
(4) Dress appropriately, even for their initial job interview.
(5) Communicate.
(6) Demonstrate "people skills" (empathy, firm-but-fair, de-escalation).

Morton Buildings, Pocatello. They have several hundred employees nationally; locally they have about 30. Pocatello is their Western Regional Plant, with responsibilities for most western states. We met the Regional Plant Manager and Safety Coordinator and toured the facility. They send out construction teams to build wood buildings, shops, and homes across the western United States. Most training and certification is handled "in house" including safety and fork lift. They offer a tuition assistance program for some specialized positions. Specific Morton Building issues include:

a. Their biggest issues with new employees are attendance and lack of communication if the employee is going to be late or absent.

b. Often, new employees do not know/are not able to:

(1) Interview.

(2) Dress appropriately, even for their initial job interview.

(3) Perform basic math.

(4) Show initiative.

College of Eastern Idaho (CEI), Idaho Falls. We toured the facility with three administrators and met with several professors during our tour. CEI recently received $1.5M in state appropriations specifically to increase expansion efforts. This is expanding and improving their certification and degree programs. As with all CTE programs, they struggle to find industry members who will leave their industry for education due to significant pay loss (up to 50% in some cases). The CEI surgical technician program uses an instructor provided by industry (Mountain View Hospital) to fill a gap in their teaching staff. Specific CEI solutions to industry concerns include:

a. The surgical technician instructor provided by Mountain View Hospital continues to receive pay and benefits from Mountain View under a Memorandum of Understanding between CEI and Mountain View. Both organization view this as a "win-win" solution for the lack of a second surgical technician instructor.

b. CEI uses general education classes to teach "durable skills" (work ethic) such as teamwork and communications.

Career Technical Education Center (CTEC), Idaho Falls. We toured the facility and met with one administrator and ten CTE teachers for a lengthy question and answer session. Not only does CTEC struggle to find teachers, but when one teacher leaves it may take considerable time to find a replacement instructor. Specific CTEC solutions to industry concerns include:

a. All of the CTE programs strive to introduce industry standards to the students. Some have time card machines and require the students to clock-in and out. The CNA program uses the local hospital's cell phone and attendance policy. Most mirror industry for uniforms and dress standards.

b. All of the CTE programs offer internship opportunities in their respective industries, when available.

c. Almost all of the CTE programs do not allow cell phone use in the classroom.

d. Almost all of the CTE programs offer industry certifications; some offer several certifications (such as welding).

Portneuf Valley Technical Education Center (PV-TEC). We toured the facility and met with one administrator and several instructors during our tour. The carpentry instructor accompanied us on our tour of Morton Buildings after our tour of PV-TEC. Some of PV-TEC CTE programs are actually held on the Idaho State University (ISU) College of Technology campus, although the low number of seats at ISU for most programs limits participation by high school students. Specific PV-TEC solutions to industry concerns include:

a. Speed interviewing. Once a year, Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) members volunteer to staff several tables in the common area. Each student spends 5 minutes at each table in a mock job interview. Interviewers give immediate feedback so the student has the opportunity to improve as they move to another group of interviewers.

b. CTE programs use several industry standards in their classrooms, including:

(1) Time cards for attendance and punctuality.

(2) Work-appropriate clothing; uniforms if appropriate.

(3) Loss of phones for inappropriate use.

c. Several primary and secondary certifications are offered in some programs. Examples:

(1) Veterinary Technician: Certified Vet Assistant, OSHA-10 Vet, Horse Judging, Meat judging, Animal Science.

(2) Culinary Arts: Serve Safe Food Handler, Serve Safe Manager, Serve Safe Allergens.

3. Industry commonalities.

All (4 of 4) of the industry sites visited use advanced automation and some AI to process their products and/or reports in large quantities and at rapid speeds.

All (4 of 4) of the industry sites visited have internal training, or tuition assistance, programs for employee advancement. All require employees to demonstrate a solid work ethic before affording them these “grow your own” training opportunities, which can lead to employee advancement.

All of the industry sites visited have similar issues with new employees that leads to the employee being let go; including:

(a) Lack of solid work ethic. Not just kids, older workers also have problems putting phones down (4 of 4).

(b) Employees have a hard time showing initiative and “stick-with-it-ness” (4 of 4).

(c) Lack of experience. New employees need SOME work experience; internships, apprenticeships, growing up on a farm – something to show they understand HOW to work (3 of 4).

(d) Inability to pass a background investigation due to inappropriate behavior which they post onto their social media accounts (2 of 4).

4. Technical Training Commonalities.

All CTE schools (3 of 3) reported difficulty in finding instructors. Industry professionals will not leave their industry for education due to significant pay loss (up to 50% in some cases).

All CTE schools (3 of 3) reported "single-teacher dependent programs" – which some referred to as "single point of failure programs". If the instructor leaves, it may take years to find a replacement.

One CTE school, and all of the CTE administrators who were on the team (4 of 4), reported an insufficient number of seats for dual-enrolled high school students who take their training at a post-secondary institution.

5. Take-aways. Here are some key take-aways and recommendations from discussions with representatives of the above organizations.

Take-away #1. Soft skills are more important than hard skills. Every industry site visited complained about lack of work ethic, and every school had methods of simulating industry to give students practice in proper attendance/punctuality, attitude, phone etiquette, dress, etc.

Recommendation #1:

(a) Develop "work ethic" and "soft skill" badges in SkillStack, including a badge for social media literacy, which discusses how students, through their inappropriate "postings", can make themselves ineligible to pass a background check.

(b) Award SkillStack badges when students demonstrate proficiency by placing in statewide SLSC contests, many of which include mock job interviews.

(c) Award school credit(s) for participation in leadership roles in CTSOs.

(d) Support restrictive school phone policies, especially in CTE labs, where the policy can be said to mirror industry standards.

(e) Encourage CTE programs to adopt industry-standard attendance, punctuality, dress, etc, standards and hold students accountable when they fail to meet these standards.

Take-away #2. A new employee needs to arrive with a mastery of fundamental skills for the industry, and SOME job experience.

Recommendation #2:

(a) CTE training programs should focus on mastery of fundamental skills; skills identified by their industry TAC committees.

(b) Create a SkillsStack badge for fundamental math skills related to each trade and/or industry.

(c) Encourage all CTE programs of study to incorporate internships and/or apprenticeship opportunities for their best students.

Take-away #3. Industry is desperate to hire trained employees, even to the point of allowing one of their own employees to work as an adjunct professor.

Recommendation #3:

(a) Examine methods to incentivize employers to place their own employee into a CTE training environment at a CTC or technical college. This incentive might be a tax break, assistance with a PERSI 401k, etc.

Take-away #4. Professional “career counselors” are needed in high schools and career technical schools. Industry reports that new employees do not know how to dress or act at interviews, have poor communication skills, and have no knowledge of industry benefit packages. Career technical programs attempt to provide exposure to these skills, but a career counselor can provide durable skill training to all students.

Recommendation #4:

(a) Offer a counselor "track" at the Division of CTE's summer conference.

(b) The Division should incentivize (i.e. help pay for) school counselors to attend summer conference and participate in the counselor track.

(c) Invite online school counselors to CONNECT and put them in contact with transition coordinators.

Take-away #5. Post-secondary CTE programs who accept dual-enrolled high school students must find a way to enroll many more students. All of the CTC admins, past and present, on the tour agreed that more seats for high school students need to be provided by post-secondary dual credit programs.

Recommendation #5:

(a) Allow Career Technical Center (CTC) administrators to speak with the Technical College Leadership Council (TCLC) to discuss ways to increase the number of post-secondary CTE program seats available for dual-enrolled high school attendees.

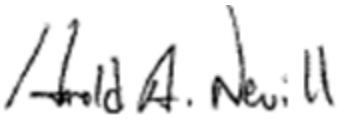
Take-away #6. Foodera has open and unfilled machining jobs, with no applicants. Machining is an exceptionally expensive program to equip and operate, and most CTCs and some technical colleges have dropped this course offering.

Recommendation #6:

(a) The Division of CTE should explore ways to increase the number of machining programs, and machining graduates, in Idaho; including a partnership with industry partners to “apprentice” interested students and train them in industry facilities.

See below for a one-page summary of take-aways that can be used by ICTEF members when they interface with legislators.

Respectfully submitted,



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Summary of take-aways to use as talking points with Legislators.

Take-away #1. Soft skills are more important than hard skills. Every industry site visited complained about lack of work ethic, and every school had methods of simulating industry to give students practice in proper attendance/punctuality, attitude, phone etiquette, dress, etc.

Take-away #2. A new employee needs to arrive with a mastery of fundamental skills for the industry, and SOME job experience.

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