

# Criminal Justice Employer Engagement Brief



**CENTER OF EXCELLENCE  
HOMELAND SECURITY-EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT**  
[www.COE-HSEM.com](http://www.COE-HSEM.com)

---

**December 14, 2016**

## **Background**

Employer engagement is critical to building successful pathways. Engaging employers produces benefits at every stage of the educational process and requires close cooperation with industry as well as public workforce agencies to ensure that pathways and supporting curriculum and instruction align with the labor market. Successful employer engagement and activities supporting it are part of a continuum and each step is important in deepening the relationship with an employer.

This is the second brief in a series of employer engagement briefs designed to capture key information that will inform community and technical colleges about industry requirements and trends, skills and competency gaps, and needed curriculum updates.

There is a recognized value in matching employer needs and worker skills in today's economic climate as organizations that design and deliver education and training have few dollars to waste. Regular employer engagement is a key building block in establishing strategic, long term partnerships with employers. If you recognize employers as key customers of the Community and Technical College (CTC) system, it is important to regularly engage directly with hiring organizations in order to fully identify and then retool academic programs to meet the job markets changing demands.

## **Phase One: Program Design**

The methodology used for this Criminal Justice (CJ) employer engagement project began with development of a set of questions designed to guide discussions during one-on-one employer engagement interviews. HSEM Collaborating colleges program managers and Administrators were asked to review the draft set of questions (see Appendix A: Discussion Guide) and provide their input. Three out of nineteen colleges (Pierce, Highline, and Skagit Valley) that offer criminal justice related programs in our state provided input to the Discussion Guide.

## **Phase Two: Employer Outreach**

One on one discussion meetings were held with industry professionals that were for the most part hiring managers. The "Employer Discussion Guide" was the main reference used during the meetings but due to time constraints set by participants not every question in the Discussion Guide was covered with every participant. The sample size for this project was 15 organizations with a mix of both private and public sector organizations. The majority of the participants in the pilot were provided with a copy of the discussion guide prior to the meeting. Many chose to

prepare answers prior to our one on one meeting and in several cases the primary point of contact had others in their organization also fill out answers. Overall 21 individuals in 15 organizations contributed to the data summarized in this report. The list of organizations that participated in the project included:

- 1) Washington State Patrol
- 2) U.S. Bank
- 3) Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center
- 4) Pacific Coast Security
- 5) Everett Police Youth Services
- 6) City of DuPont Police
- 7) Pierce County Sheriff's Dept.
- 8) Renton Technical College Safety and Security
- 9) APM Terminals Emergency Management & Security
- 10) Shoreline College
- 11) Oatridge Security Group
- 12) Universal Protection Services
- 13) STAR Security
- 14) Mason County Sheriff
- 15) Muckleshoot Casino

### **Phase Three: Share Employer Engagement Findings**

The findings of this project and a summary of the data collected is provided in the "Key Findings" section of this report. A copy of this report will be provided to all Criminal Justice programs statewide so that they might gain insight on how their existing course content and skill set training could be updated to meet workplace needs. The HSEM Center of Excellence Center will facilitate a DACUM process on March 22, 2017, hosted at Pierce College in Lakewood. On December 2, the Center distributed the [CJ Curriculum Survey](#) which was designed to help identify current KSAs to guide CTC CJ programs in developing an agreed upon core curriculum and common core numbering. The DACUM process will include identification of student competency outcomes, course content and prioritization.

### **Key Findings:**

This project validated the fact that the CJ field today is extremely diversified and industry specialization is becoming more common. Regulations to increase people's safety and security in a variety of settings are growing so there is a need for knowledge specialization in different subsets of the profession. For instance, for those working in the gaming institutions area the high rate of physical encounters requires a higher skill set and knowledge around restraint training. Many of the hiring managers (both public and private) in this project recommended that colleges in our state consider providing specialized training tracks with a core set of courses with credits transferable between colleges. Once a student completes their general core and basic criminal justice system courses, colleges around the state could offer concentrations in the following areas:

- 1) Academic Institutions Safety & Security

- 2) Retail Security
- 3) Gaming Institution Security
- 4) Corrections
- 5) Global Corporate Security
- 6) Public Safety

Employers liked the idea of being able to count on various colleges to produce graduates with CJ concentrations ensuring these graduates would be well versed on the laws, regulations and specialized requirements in that area of the profession. Colleges in turn would find it easy to target specific high volume employers to take their graduates.

Another critical finding in this project relates to the need for colleges to ensure those declaring Criminal Justice as their major can pass a standard background check. There were no positions offered at any of the organizations interviewed for this study that **did not** require a background check. Students planning to pursue a CJ degree need to be made aware early on in their academic career of the need to pass a background check. For those students determined to work in the public safety area as a state patrol officer, police officer or deputy sheriff, they will in addition need to be able to pass oral boards and a polygraph. Interviewing skill sets is a common area mentioned by hiring managers as an area that colleges need to strengthen. Colleges statewide need to ensure they are preparing their students to successfully compete for open positions by making students aware of these common screening steps in the hiring process. One common disconnect that was mentioned was the differences between state and federal laws in relation to cannabis possession and use. Public law enforcement positions are often partially federally funded so it is important to keep in mind that federal laws still will need to be followed regardless of changes in current state laws around cannabis use and possession.

The need for colleges to strengthen written and oral communication skills in general was a common area cited by project participants--in particular hiring managers felt there was a need for greater emphasis on report writing. Pierce College was cited as a best practice example of a program that does a good job of strengthening report writing skills in their CJ students. Many also emphasized a need to strengthen handwriting skills.

Most hiring managers felt that strengthening course work in psychology and social work would produce CJ employees that could perform better in today's multi-cultural society. The International Association of Chiefs of Police at their October conference in San Diego this year noted that "All of society's ills are dumped at the doorstep of law enforcement." Yet the consensus among those interviewed for this project indicate that community trust in law enforcement seems to be at an all-time low. Several hiring managers stated that their biggest hurdle to hiring was the negative perception of the field due to the high number of excessive force issues highlighted by the media around the country in the last couple of years. Increased training that includes rigorous psychological stress testing using scenario simulations in the classroom were cited as key approaches to ensuring today's CJ graduates are ready to face an increasingly complex and diverse work environment. Hiring managers also felt strongly that CJ

courses needed to be taught by current or former practitioners or at a minimum make better use of CJ practitioners as guest speakers.

Employers were asked (see Appendix A: Employer Discussion Guide) to cite two skills that they consider lacking in most recent college graduates seeking positions in their organizations. Written and oral communications which was discussed earlier in this report was most often #1 requested area for improvement but the second most desired skills were tied between ***“demonstrating accountability and work ethics in their job and critical thinking.”***

One surprising finding was that in terms of paying for a criminal justice degree, 70% of organizations indicated that they offer some kind of tuition reimbursement program. Public sector organizations most commonly cited state and local budget cuts as contributors to uncertainty around how much funding was currently available.

Finally, there were some individual comments made outside the “Employer Engagement Guide” standard questions that indicated future areas of possible investments for CJ curriculum. Those included:

- CJ graduates could benefit from understanding predictive policing and use of big data in making informed decisions around where to place limited resources.
- A need exists to identify alternative ways to reduce turnaround time for commissioning law enforcement officers in our state. The statewide waiting list for hired officers to complete their commissioning process is contributing to a shortage of sheriff deputies and police officers statewide.
- Does a benchmarking study exist that compares the training offered at the Criminal Justice Training Center versus the Washington State Patrol Academy? While the duties and focus of those graduating from these two institutions are slightly different, there should be common training offered that could pinpoint what training/knowledge and skill sets produces high performance officers.

### **Conclusion:**

Washington has 19 Criminal Justice and allied programs which are listed on the Center’s website at <http://wp.pierce.ctc.edu/blog/hsemcoe/project/criminal-justice-pathway/> Community and Technical Colleges (CTC) must be prepared to provide their students with both a base curriculum and then offer concentrations in a variety of industry areas. The data collected directly from one on one interviews with CJ field hiring managers is designed to stimulate discussion and debate among colleges offering criminal justice degrees in our state. Many colleges have Advisory Boards composed of both private and public employers that also provide a wealth of knowledge on current workforce needs. We hope that colleges across the state will be

able to attend the March 22 DACUM at Pierce College to map out the core knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) every student should possess upon completion of a CJ program in our state.

The employment outlook in this field continues on an upward trajectory with the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) indicating an increase in the number of jobs that ranges between 5% to 12% from 2012 to 2022 depending on position.

The Center of Excellence remains committed to building and sustaining ongoing relationships with employers through our Career Pathways Engagement program. If interested in more information gathered through this project, please contact: Wendy Freitag, Communications and Outreach Specialist [wfreitag@pierce.ctc.edu](mailto:wfreitag@pierce.ctc.edu) or 206-818-9673.

## APPENDIX A

### EMPLOYER DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. Which best describes your role in hiring employees at your organization. (Circle one)
  - A. I am a recruiting or HR professional who works to identify talent for the organization.
  - B. I manage people and take an active part in hiring at my organization.
  - C. I am a department manager who makes final hiring decisions in my organization.
  
2. Does your organization hire recent college graduates who have earned AA degrees?
  - A. Yes
  - B. No
  
3. Does your organization mostly hire recent graduates who have earned
  - A. Bachelor's degree
  - B. Graduate level degree
  
4. How many years of work experience do you have across all jobs you have held?
  - A. 10 or fewer years
  - B. 11 -20 years
  - C. 21 – 30 years
  - D. 31 or more years
  
5. What industry does your organization primarily serve?
  - A. Health Care
  - B. Services/Retail
  - C. Manufacturing
  - D. Science/Technology
  - E. Education
  - F. Government/Non-profit
  - G. Transportation/Travel
  - H. Private Sector Consulting
  - I. Other \_\_\_\_\_
  
6. Approximately how many people does your organization employ?
  - A. Fewer than 50
  - B. 50 to 99
  - C. 100 to 499
  - D. 500 or more
  - E.
  
7. In what state is your organization headquartered? \_\_\_\_\_

8. Is it likely that your organization ever hires a candidate with strong work experience but no degree for a job that was advertised as requiring a bachelor's degree?
- Yes, we look for candidates with the right fit regardless of degree.
  - Yes, for a particularly outstanding candidate only.
  - No, a degree is always required.
9. Does your organization offer a pay preference for those with BAS versus AA degrees? What is the differential/scale used?
10. How important is a recent college graduate's major to your organization when you hire?
- We look for specific majors only and do not consider candidates without them.
  - We value some majors over others but are open to good candidates regardless of major.
  - A candidate's major is only part of the picture; we balance it out with other factors.
  - College major is not at all important in our hiring process.
11. List the three top majors you prefer for your hires.
- \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
12. We often hear feedback from graduating students that finding what they consider entry level positions in their field of choice is challenging as most jobs require 3-5 years of on the job experience. Would you count internship or volunteer work experience toward meeting work experience requirements?
- Yes
  - No
  - Other Explanation \_\_\_\_\_
13. How much weight do you give each of the following types of experience when you evaluate a recent college graduates' resume? (Please assign a percentage from 0 to 100. Your responses must add up to 100%; if an item is not important at all, assign it a value of 0.)
- Experience gained through internships \_\_\_\_\_%
  - Experience gained through any employment during college \_\_\_\_\_%
  - Experience gained through volunteer experiences \_\_\_\_\_%
  - Experience gained from extracurricular activities (e.g., professional clubs, athletics, service) \_\_\_\_\_%
14. What are the five most important skills that recent college graduates seeking positions in your organization should have to be successful? (Please circle the five most important)
- Knowledge of a content area associated with the job.
  - Technical skills associated with the job.

- C. Creative
- D. Strategic thinker
- E. Written and oral communication skills
- F. Team Leadership
- G. Collaborative
- H. Diversity and cultural sensitivity
- I. Analytical/research skills
- J. Planning/organizational skills
- K. Decision making/problem solving
- L. Active Listening
- M. Customer service oriented
- N. Flexible and adaptable
- O. Facilitation skills
- P. Ability to multi-task
- Q. Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

15. Using the skills list in the previous question or others that you consider important, which 2 skills do you consider **lacking** in most recent college graduates that seek positions in your organization?

- 1. \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. \_\_\_\_\_

16. There seems to be a high number of vacancies occurring in local EM jurisdictions in our state at present. Do you believe these vacancies are part of the graying tsunami or are the demands of the job somehow contributing to turnover? Are there skills sets/competencies that colleges need to instill more than ever in future emergency management leaders that will set them up to be successful and have longevity in their career paths?

17. Please rate how well colleges and universities are doing in producing employees who are successful in your workplace? (Please circle your answer.)

- A. Excellent
- B. Good
- C. Fair
- D. Poor

18. Does your organization offer Tuition Reimbursement programs for current employees? If so, describe your program.

19. What homeland security emergency management related training needs are most in demand for your workforce? \_\_\_\_\_