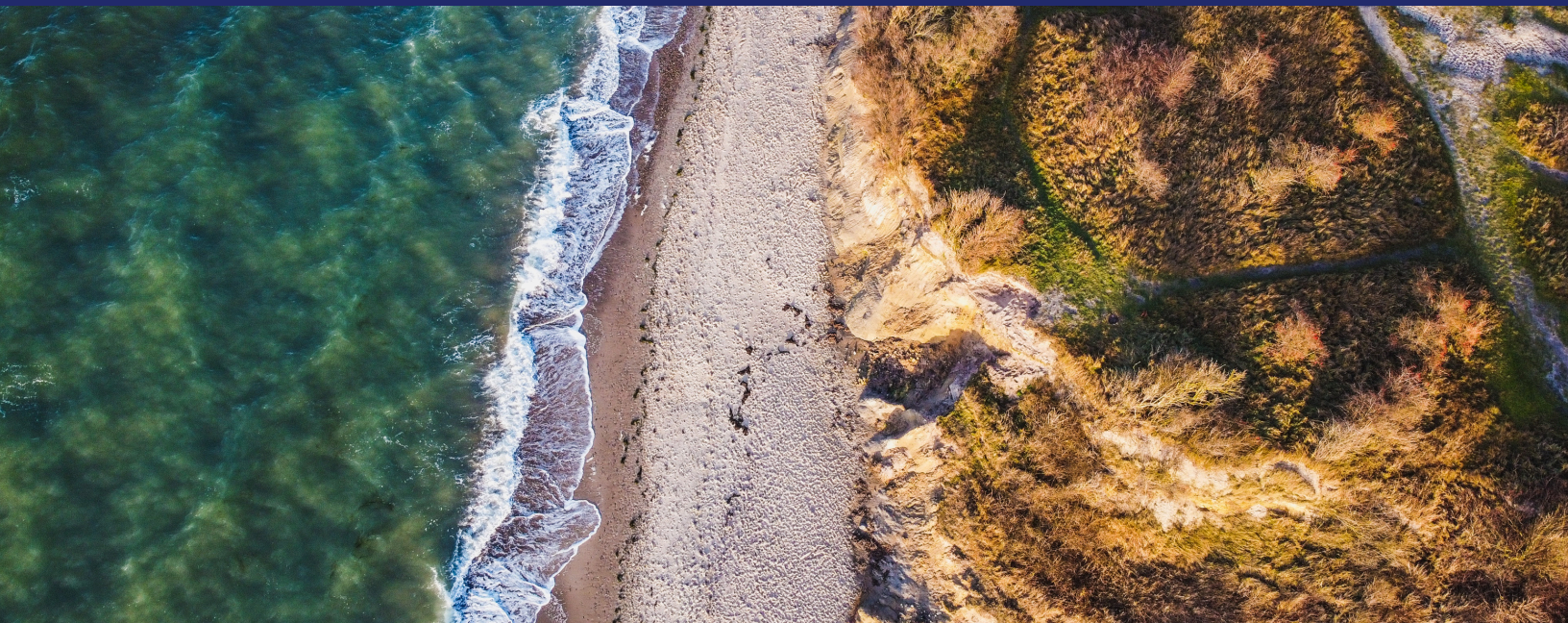# Building a Stronger Coastal Hospitality Workforce

Findings and Recommendations from the Oregon Coast Hospitality Industry Sector Partnership, 2024 – 2025

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OREGON COAST HOSPITALITY
INDUSTRY SECTOR PARTNERSHIP

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- Oregon Coast Visitors Association
- Collaborative Economic Development

And the many dedicated staff who made this research project happen.

Executive Summary

The Oregon Coast hospitality industry is both economically vital and deeply personal. It is made up of small businesses, frontline teams, and community-rooted employers who welcome millions of visitors each year. In 2023 alone, coastal counties generated over $2.4 billion in travel spending, more than many urban regions of the state. Yet the sector's strength relies on a workforce that is often invisible in policy conversations and underserved by traditional systems of support.

This report reflects a 16-month effort to understand the underlying issues that this sector faces and identify tools and pathways to change that landscape. Led by the Oregon Coast Hospitality Sector Partnership and supported by the U.S. Department of Labor's Critical Jobs Quality Grant, this initiative engaged over 200 stakeholders, including employers, employees, educators, and workforce leaders, to examine the current state of coastal hospitality work and chart a course toward a stronger, more sustainable future.

The findings are clear: coastal hospitality jobs are accessible, essential, and valued, but they are limited by systemic constraints that limit long-term retention and advancement. Seasonal volatility, housing shortages, inconsistent schedules, and limited training infrastructure all contribute to churn. Yet these are not failures of the businesses themselves...they are symptoms of broader structural challenges, particularly in rural and tourism-dependent regions.

Despite these challenges, there is real momentum to turn things around. Many employers are already taking steps to improve job quality by offering flexible scheduling, mentoring new staff, investing in team culture, and exploring ways to support housing, transportation, and mental health. Workers, for their part, report a deep commitment to their roles when they feel respected, included, and able to grow.

This report organizes findings of the research and highlights recommendations around these four pillars:

Hire Well	Support Workers	Grow Talent	Compete with quality

Together, these pillars form the backbone of a regional framework for action, rooted in employer voice, employee experience, and cross-sector partnership. The tools developed through this process, including a Good Jobs Playbook, Career Pathways Guide, and Metrics Dashboard, are designed specifically for the coastal context and tailored to the realities of small, seasonal, tourism dependent, and rural operations.

Most importantly, this work does not end with research. All three coastal workforce boards have now invested in sustaining the Sector Partnership beyond the life of the initial grant, allowing implementation efforts to continue into 2025 and beyond. With this infrastructure in place, the region is well-positioned to pilot shared solutions, align public and private investment, and elevate hospitality as a sector worthy of long-term support.

This report is not a summary of challenges; it is a driver for progress. It affirms what many in the industry already know: the people who power hospitality are ready for investment. Employers are engaged. Workers are asking for more. And with the right tools, partnerships, and sustained coordination, the Oregon Coast can lead...not just in tourism, but in job quality and workforce innovation.

Understanding the Oregon Coast Tourism Industry

The Oregon Coast is one of the most visited regions in the Pacific Northwest. In 2023, coastal counties received a combined $2.48 billion in direct travel spending, according to Travel Oregon estimates[1]. Yet the industry's stability rests on a workforce that is increasingly overextended.

Despite its size, hospitality remains one of the under-resourced industries on the Coast, particularly when it comes to systemic infrastructure and workforce support. In several counties (Lincoln, Clatsop, and Curry) the leisure and hospitality sector represent the single largest source of employment by job count, often surpassing retail, healthcare, and education[2]. Across the full coastal region, this sector makes up roughly 16% of total employment[3], significantly above the state average of 4.8%[4].

The leisure and hospitality sector is not only a significant employer, but also one of the only industries that touches every community across the coast. It fuels both public and private investment and provides accessible entry-level positions[5].

Coastal Demographics and Economic Dependence

Regional Demographics and Economic Context

The Oregon Coast exhibits distinct demographic characteristics compared to the state overall. The region has a higher median age of 50 (compared to statewide median of 38.9), a more rural population distribution, and a greater economic reliance on tourism and retirement income[6]. Coastal communities are comprised of an older, less educated population with greater economic dependence on tourism and retirement[7]. This demographic profile influences the labor market, particularly in the hospitality sector.
The 2021–2022 Oregon Visitor Profile Report indicates that visitors to the Oregon Coast averaged 54 years of age, with 63% identifying as female[8].

Employment Patterns in Hospitality

Hospitality is a significant employment sector along the Oregon Coast. Data from the Oregon Employment Department indicates that, as of 2024, the leisure and hospitality sector employs over 21,000 individuals in coastal counties, accounting for approximately 15.7% to 17.2% of total employment, depending on the county. This is notably higher than the 4.8% statewide average for this sector.

Business Composition

The hospitality industry on the Oregon Coast is predominantly composed of small, locally owned businesses. For instance, 93% of short-term rentals are owned by individuals who manage just one property[9]. The broader hospitality sector encompasses various business types, including lodging, restaurant services, entertainment, and recreation.

The distribution of tourism employment across these sectors is as follows. Statewide data are used due to a lack of specific coastal data, but trends can be assumed to be relatively similar if not slightly higher.[10]

Lodging and Restaurant Services: This sector accounts for 34% of tourism employment in Oregon. It includes hotels, motels, bed and breakfasts, and a wide range of food establishments such as restaurants, cafes, and bars.

Entertainment, and Recreation: Comprising 37% of tourism employment, this sector includes businesses like tour operators, recreational services, and cultural attractions.

Other: 29% of this sector includes retail trade, local transportation services, travel planning, and other support roles that directly serve visitors.

These figures highlight the diverse nature of the hospitality industry on the Oregon Coast, with a significant portion of employment spread across various service-oriented businesses.
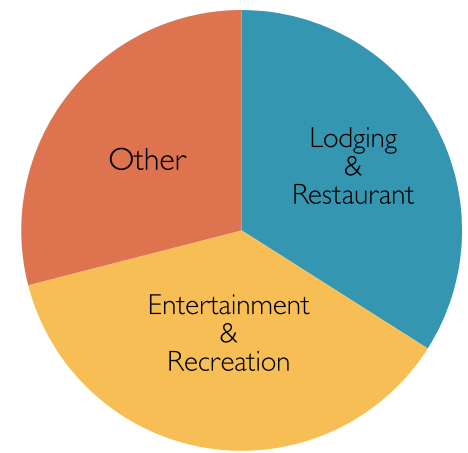
Demographic Profile of Hospitality Workers

The hospitality workforce on the Oregon Coast is characterized by a younger demographic, significant racial and ethnic diversity, and a reliance on seasonal labor. According to the Oregon Tourism Workforce Assessment, 16% of employee respondents were under 30, and 25% were between 30 and 39 years old. This indicates a substantial presence of younger workers in the industry[11].

The workforce also exhibits notable racial and ethnic diversity. While 90% of employee respondents identified as White, 10% identified as Latino or Multiracial. This diversity is particularly evident in roles such as housekeeping, dishwashing, and kitchen preparation, where Spanish-speaking workers are prominently represented[12].

Seasonal employment is a defining feature of the coastal hospitality sector. The same assessment reports that 73% of employee respondents were full-time, year-round workers, while 15% were part-time, year-round, and 11% were seasonal workers[13]. This seasonal nature of employment underscores the industry's dependence on fluctuating tourist activity.

These demographic trends highlight both challenges and opportunities within the coastal hospitality industry. The prevalence of younger, entry-level workers suggests a need for targeted training and retention strategies. Simultaneously, the industry's diversity presents an opportunity to foster inclusive workplace practices that support a broad range of employees.

Survey Methodology

Purpose of Data Collection

The Oregon Coast Hospitality Industry Sector Partnership initiated this research project to better understand the perspectives and challenges of both employees and employers in the region's hospitality sector. While abundant data exists at the state and national levels, coastal-specific insights are often limited or outdated. This gap prompted the need for a regionally grounded, mixed-methods approach that centers the voices of local stakeholders.

Workers identified opportunities to improve compensation, scheduling stability, and advancement pathways...areas where strategic investment could significantly enhance retention and job satisfaction. Employers noted ongoing challenges in recruitment and retention, citing factors common across rural and tourism-driven economies, including seasonal unpredictability, rising operational costs, and limited access to housing. These pressures, shaped by broader regional forces, point to the need for coordinated, cross-sector solutions.

These issues do not exist in isolation. Hospitality intersects with transportation, housing, childcare, education, and mental health. To stabilize and grow a strong coastal economy, we must treat hospitality as a cornerstone of regional strategy, not an afterthought.

This work is grounded in the US Department of Labor's Good Jobs Principles, which outline key elements of quality employment, such as recruitment and hiring, pay, benefits, advancement, and worker voice. These principles guided both the research questions and the resulting recommendations.

Our Approach

Research + Engagement + Data + Recommendations = Sustainable Workforce Solutions

Over the last 16 months, the Oregon Coast Hospitality Industry Sector Partnership, convened through the Oregon Hospitality Foundation and supported by the Department of Labor's Critical Sectors Job Quality Grant, has led a region-wide effort to better understand and address workforce challenges across the coastal visitor economy. This white paper presents these findings and offers actionable recommendations to improve employment outcomes, business resilience, and long-term sector stability.

This report presents a comprehensive analysis of the hospitality workforce and business climate across the entire Oregon Coast, identifying the conditions that drive turnover, limit advancement, or prevent workforce participation, and proposing strategies to build a stronger, more sustainable hospitality workforce ecosystem.

These insights are not the end of the conversation; they are the foundation for sustained industry collaboration. The Oregon Coast Hospitality Sector Partnership will continue to convene stakeholders to act on these findings and refine strategies over time.

Methodological Overview

Data were collected from July 2023 through November 2024 and included Employee Voices surveys, Owner/Operator surveys, Employee Focus Groups (including 2 conducted in Spanish), stakeholder interviews, and field observations with supplemental information gathered through engagement activities across the coast.

The surveys were designed to capture real-time input from a broad spectrum of coastal hospitality workers. The research team focused on three coastal workforce regions: Northwest, Southwest, and Lane County. Survey distribution was conducted through employer partners, community-based organizations, and direct outreach at hospitality worksites.

Research and Engagement Approach

Over the course of 16 months, the Oregon Coast Hospitality Sector Partnership led a region-wide, mixed-methods effort to understand the challenges facing both workers and employers in the hospitality industry. This work was supported by the Oregon Coast Hospitality Industry Sector Partnership and carried out through the leadership of the regional Sector Strategist. The methodology combined survey research, qualitative interviews, field engagement, and labor market analysis to ensure that findings were grounded in both data and lived experience.

Data Collection Overview
Surveys were distributed to hospitality workers and employers across the Northwest, Southwest, and Lane County coastal workforce regions, with a total of 157 employee surveys and 72 employer surveys submitted. After data cleaning to keep responses unduplicated and regional, the final dataset included:

[1] (Dean Runyan Associates, 2024, p. 33)
[2] (Oregon Employment Department, 2024)
[3] (Ghahramani, 2020)
[4] (Oregon Employment Department, 2024)
[5] (Hospitality Sector Partnership Expands on the Coast, (2024))
[6] (Haley Epperly, 2020)
[7] (Haley Epperly, 2020)
[8] (Destination Analysts, 2021-2022)
[9] (Tauer, 2022)
[10] (Gahramani, 2020)
[11] (Gahramani, 2020)
[12] (Gahramani, 2020)
[13] (Gahramani, 2020)

- 91 valid English-language employee surveys
- 10 valid Spanish-language employee surveys
- 60 valid employer responses

Surveys were administered in both English and Spanish and distributed through employer partners, community-based organizations, and direct outreach at hospitality worksites.

Survey questions captured both quantitative data (e.g., Likert-scale ratings) and qualitative input (open-ended responses and personal reflections).

Additional qualitative data was collected through:
- 6 regional focus groups, hosted in partnership with local nonprofits and education providers.
- Dozens of semi-structured interviews with hospitality business owners, frontline workers, educators, and workforce board representatives
- Field visits, event participation, and listening sessions held across the coast.

Stakeholder Engagement
This project prioritized broad and inclusive outreach. Engagement efforts included:
- Workforce boards in all three coastal regions
- Local Chambers of Commerce and economic development organizations
- Civil rights organizations and culturally specific CBOs
- Tribal representatives and Native-owned hospitality businesses
- High school educators, Career and Technical Education (CTE) program leaders, and youth employers

Data Integrity and Interpretation
To protect confidentiality and ensure high data quality, surveys were screened to exclude respondents from outside the region or those who miscategorized their role. Demographic questions were intentionally limited to age, racial/cultural identity, and job title in order to protect respondent privacy in small, close-knit communities. Quotes and stories throughout this report are drawn directly from respondent feedback and were selected to illustrate major thematic findings.

Alignment with Broader Trends
Primary data was supplemented with relevant state and national sources, including:
- Oregon Employment Department's Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW)
- Oregon Tourism Workforce Assessment (2022)
- Travel Oregon's 2023 visitor spending and destination profile data
- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and Census indicators

This combination of coastal-specific insight and broader labor market data supports a more accurate picture of what is working, what is missing, and what is possible.

Confidentiality and Limitations
To protect respondent anonymity and encourage participation, demographic questions were intentionally limited. Participants were asked to provide their age group, racial or cultural identity, and job title. Questions regarding gender, sexual orientation, and immigration status were excluded to preserve confidentiality, particularly given the small size and tight-knit nature of many coastal communities.

This approach balanced ethical obligations with practical concerns, aiming to capture a partial demographic profile without compromising the privacy of potentially vulnerable individuals.
The qualitative data was synthesized and coded for themes using an inductive approach. Quotes were selected to illustrate key findings across topics such as wages, working conditions, benefits, and retention.

Interpreting Survey References

Throughout this report, statements like "surveys showed" or "respondents indicated" refer to data collected through this primary research process. No external survey sources were used unless explicitly cited via footnote. When outside data from sources like the Oregon Employment Department or Travel Oregon (among others) are used, citations are provided in footnotes and listed in the appendix.

Reimagining Good Jobs Within a Coastal Framework

All data in this chapter are drawn from the Oregon Coast Hospitality Industry Sector Partnership's 2024 Employee and Employer Surveys or supported by cited data. This section serves as a foundation for interpreting the report's findings as reflective of real experiences across Oregon's hospitality workforce, especially those voices often missing from traditional data sets.

To better align federal Good Jobs Principles with industry realities on the Oregon Coast, we synthesized the original eight principles into four industry-facing pillars. Each pillar draws from regional employee and employer data and will serve as the organizing structure for recommendations in Chapter 3.

Pillar 1: Hire Well

Build inclusive hiring pipelines, expand equity in opportunity, and improve outreach.

Entry Points & Employer Demand

Oregon labor data confirms that entry into the hospitality industry on the Oregon Coast is more accessible than in some other sectors, especially for those seeking immediate employment.[1] Coastal hospitality roles—particularly in food service and lodging—tend to require lower formal education levels, minimal prior experience, and are frequently open to part-time or seasonal applicants. However, entry into the sector is not without barriers, many of which are intensified by the region's rural character and limited infrastructure[2].

Most workers in Oregon's coastal hospitality industry begin in frontline, high-turnover roles such as housekeeping, dishwashing, food service, and front desk positions[3][4]. Employee survey data reveals a strong clustering around these roles across both lodging and food & beverage subsectors. For example, 26.8% of employees reported beginning as servers, 22.0% as housekeepers, 18.3% in kitchen or prep.

According to the survey, 73% of employers reported difficulty filling entry-level roles, often due to applicants lacking essential employability skills or required certifications. Additionally, 46.7% cited a lack of basic soft employability or professionalism among applicants, and 53.3% reported that candidates often lacked required certifications such as SERV Safe or OLCC.

Infrastructure & Housing Gaps

Among surveyed employees, 34.7% reported difficulty reaching job sites due to limited public transit options, fuel costs, or the geographic isolation of coastal, rural communities. This concern was echoed by employers, 36.7% of whom identified reliable transportation as a core hiring challenge, often noting that applicants were unable to commute consistently or affordably to coastal job sites.

Both groups identified the lack of affordable, stable housing as a major impediment to workforce participation. Among surveyed employees, 48.6% indicated that difficulty securing long-term or proximate housing had directly impacted their ability to accept or sustain employment. Employer data further confirmed this pattern: 78.5% identified housing as a top barrier to recruitment.

Certification Costs & Bureaucratic Requirements

According to the research conducted, 60% of surveyed employers reported requiring at least one certification, such as a Food Handler's Permit, OLCC Server Permit, or CPR/First Aid, for some or all roles. While the individual cost of these credentials typically ranges from $10 to $75, that amount can still present a significant barrier for workers at the start of their employment journey. This is especially true for those entering their first job, transitioning between roles, or covering multiple onboarding expenses at once. On top of being cost prohibitive, these certifications also often require internet access and English proficiency, which may limit accessibility in rural communities.

According to survey responses, 58.3% of employees indicated their role required at least one certification. Of those, 28.3% reported that the cost made it difficult to begin or maintain employment without support. This challenge was most common among younger workers, part-time staff, and those without employer-sponsored boarding. These groups represent a vital part of the hospitality industry.

Language Access & Discrimination

16.7% of Spanish-language survey respondents indicated that limited English fluency made it harder to fully participate in training and advancement opportunities. They cited exclusion from full-time roles, lack of training, and racist behavior from managers. In contrast, only one employer mentioned difficulties onboarding Spanish-speaking employees due to the absence of bilingual trainers.

Pillar 2: Support Workers

Improve scheduling practices, cultivate respectful workplace culture, and prioritize worker voice to improve retention

Job Security & Scheduling

Job stability was reported at relatively high levels across the surveyed employee population. 82% of employee respondents indicated they felt secure in their current job. However, seasonal instability remains a factor. In open-ended comments and supplemental data, employees frequently referenced reduced hours during the off-season as a stressor. This concern was especially pronounced among Spanish-speaking respondents, 50% of whom described shortened shifts or sudden drops in scheduled hours during low-demand months.

Inconsistent scheduling also emerged as a broader theme affecting job satisfaction and financial stability. 27% of employees reported that unpredictable hours, regardless of season, created challenges in planning transportation, childcare, or second jobs. For part-time and entry-level workers, irregular schedules sometimes limited access to benefits or made it difficult to meet household needs.

Employers are aware of this dynamic. In survey responses and interviews, 28.6% acknowledged that fluctuating demand and limited year-round roles make consistent scheduling a challenge, especially in coastal markets with strong seasonal swings. Several expressed interest in exploring new staffing models, technology tools, or regional partnerships that could help increase schedule predictability.
These findings suggest an important opportunity. While job security is relatively strong overall, improvements in scheduling consistency could play a key role in improving both retention and quality of life for hospitality workers, especially those navigating caregiving responsibilities, school schedules, or multiple jobs.

Workload & Burnout

Burnout was identified as a meaningful challenge to long-term retention and advancement within the coastal hospitality sector. Among employee respondents, 37.5% reported symptoms consistent with burnout, including emotional exhaustion, lack of recovery time, and chronic overwork. Several indicated that such conditions had led them to consider leaving their jobs or the industry altogether, citing unsustainable workloads and limited mental health support.

From the employer perspective, 24.1% acknowledged burnout as a challenge in their workforce, most often attributing it to seasonal demand spikes, staffing shortages, or the cumulative pressure placed on a limited number of core employees. The prevalence of burnout presents a structural risk: not only does it accelerate turnover, but it also inhibits advancement by depleting the energy, confidence, and stability required for professional growth.

In addition to burnout symptoms, 12.5% of employee respondents described broader mental health challenges, such as chronic stress, anxiety, and emotional fatigue. These challenges may reduce workers' ability to build lasting careers unless addressed through supportive workplace practices.

Structural Supports & Holistic Needs

Broader support that influence retention, including childcare, housing assistance, and mental health resources, were identified by 40.8% of employee respondents as needs that would improve job satisfaction and long-term stability. While these types of benefits are uncommon across most industries, the interest expressed here points to a growing demand for more holistic forms of workplace support.
At the same time, 20.6% of surveyed employees reported offering at least one of these non-traditional supports. This demonstrates that, even amid operational and seasonal constraints, some coastal businesses are already finding creative ways to respond to workforce needs. Their efforts offer a foundation for shared learning and sector-wide progress.

The fact that most workers want these supports, and a portion of employers are already providing them, highlights a clear opportunity for collaborative investment in wraparound benefits that can improve retention, especially for part-time and seasonal workers.

Worker Voice & Inclusive Communication

Do you have an ability to provide input in the operations or management of your workplace?

| Yes | No | 73.2% |

73.2% of employee respondents reported being given the opportunity to provide input on workplace decisions. This points to a promising foundation of trust and participation. However, open-ended responses, particularly from Spanish-speaking workers, indicated uncertainty about whether their input led to meaningful action. This feedback highlights the need for more proactive and linguistically inclusive engagement practices, especially in workplaces with bilingual or multilingual teams.

Culture, Inclusion, and Manager Accountability

Culture plays a significant role in shaping job satisfaction across the coastal hospitality workforce. Many employees reported feeling safe, respected, and connected to their organization's values. Among English-speaking respondents, 83.3% said they felt respected at work, and 70.8% believed their employer's values were reflected in daily operations. Spanish-speaking employees also reported generally positive experiences, with 62.5% indicating they felt safe and respected.

At the same time, responses revealed that not all employees experience workplace culture in the same way. While 100% of surveyed employers said their organization had defined values and that managers were essential in reinforcing them, only 37.5% of Spanish-speaking respondents said they understood those values, and just 25.0% of those respondents saw them reflected in day-to-day practices. This suggests that even when values are well-defined at the leadership level, they may not always be communicated or demonstrated in ways that reach all employees equally.

These findings point to a key opportunity: employers have laid important groundwork in shaping positive culture, and many employees feel that effort. The next step is to ensure consistency across teams by investing in culturally competent communication and inclusive leadership practices.

Employees who share the dominant workplace language and cultural norms were more likely to report feeling included. Among English-speaking employees, 85.4% understood their organization's values. For Spanish-speaking respondents, that number was 37.5%. These findings suggest that even well-intentioned practices may not reach all employees equally, and that cultural competency and inclusive communication remain critical areas for continued focus.

Employers overwhelmingly identified frontline managers as the primary conduit for workplace culture. Many emphasized the importance of emotional intelligence, consistency, and trust-building at the supervisory level. However, the variation in employee experiences suggests an opportunity to strengthen leadership development and ensure values are consistently demonstrated across teams.

Pillar 3: Grow Talent

Build a stronger workforce through training investment, clear advancement pathways, and credentialed skill-building.

Training Access & Systemic Gaps

Survey data revealed a substantial disconnect between employees' desire for skill development and employers' perceptions of the training they provide. Among employee respondents, 43.8% identified lack of training as a barrier to advancement or job performance, and 39.6% expressed a desire for more structured or accessible training opportunities. In contrast, 53.2% of employers stated they offer training to their staff, primarily in the form of onboarding, safety protocols, or informal mentorship. However, only 27.8% of employers acknowledged any challenges in delivering consistent or adequate training, suggesting that many perceive their current efforts as sufficient, even when employee feedback indicates otherwise. This misalignment may point to deeper issues in communication, structure, and expectation-setting. More transparent and equitable workforce development systems may be necessary to meet the evolving needs of both employees and employers in the sector.

Advancement Opportunities & Perceptions

While 41.8% of employers reported offering some form of career advancement opportunity, such as internal promotions or skill development, employee perceptions diverged. Less than one-third of employee respondents believed they had realistic opportunities for advancement in their current workplace, and 45.8% expressed feeling stuck, overlooked, or unclear about how to progress. This perception gap can be demoralizing for staff and poses a risk to long-term retention.

One major contributor to this gap is the absence of formal advancement systems. Only 26.6% of employers reported having a structured process for promotion. In many small or seasonal businesses, advancement is handled informally or on a case-by-case basis, making upward mobility difficult to anticipate and navigate. As a result, even when internal promotions do occur, the process may appear opaque or inequitable to employees, particularly those who are not in close communication with decision-makers.

Among Spanish-speaking respondents, access to advancement was evenly split half reported opportunities to train or move up, while the other half did not. This reflects not only inconsistent promotion systems but also uneven communication and visibility into existing opportunities. While 58.7% of employers said they are consistently able to train and promote staff, their efforts may not reach all workers equitably, especially in the absence of formal pathways.

Although entry-level base wages (before tips) tend to be modest, compensation improves significantly in mid- and upper-level hospitality roles. Among respondents working in positions such as General Manager, Accounting Manager, Business Advisor, and Education Director, 87.0% reported wages between $25 and $40 per hour, and 42.4% reported annual salaries above $80,000. These roles were also strongly associated with benefit access: 74.2% of respondents in these positions received medical insurance, and over 60% reported access to both paid time off and retirement plans.

Additionally, 78.3% of respondents in these leadership roles said they felt their wages were sufficient to support themselves or their families, compared to just 24.2% of all other employees. These individuals were more likely to report job security and confidence in their compensation compared to other local employers.

Demographically, 63.7% of workers in these mid- and upper-level roles identified as white, and 58% were aged 35–54 or older, pointing to potential disparities in who accesses and retains leadership positions across the coastal hospitality sector. Despite this, the data suggests that when advancement opportunities are available and accessible, the industry can offer not only stability but also meaningful, long-term career potential.

Pillar 4: Compete with Quality

Offer competitive wages and benefits to reduce churn, attract talent, and strengthen employer reputation.

Wage Realities

According to statewide occupational data, the median hourly wage for waitstaff across all industries is $15.42, while restaurant cooks earn a median of $18.18 per hour[1]. On the Oregon Coast, many key hospitality roles offer wages that align with or exceed the local minimum wage, underscoring the industry's importance as an accessible entry point for jobseekers in rural regions. For example, survey respondents reported earning the following hourly wages: waitstaff between $14.31 and $14.64, hotel front desk clerks between $15.31 and $15.69, and line cooks between $16.05 and $16.71. As of July 1, 2024, Oregon's standard minimum wage is $14.70 per hour—applicable to much of the North Coast—while a lower nonurban rate of $13.70 applies to most of the Central and South Coast. These figures suggest that coastal hospitality jobs are frequently paying above the minimum wage in nonurban areas, providing a solid foundation for regional workforce development.

Reported Coastal Wages vs. Regional Minimum Wages
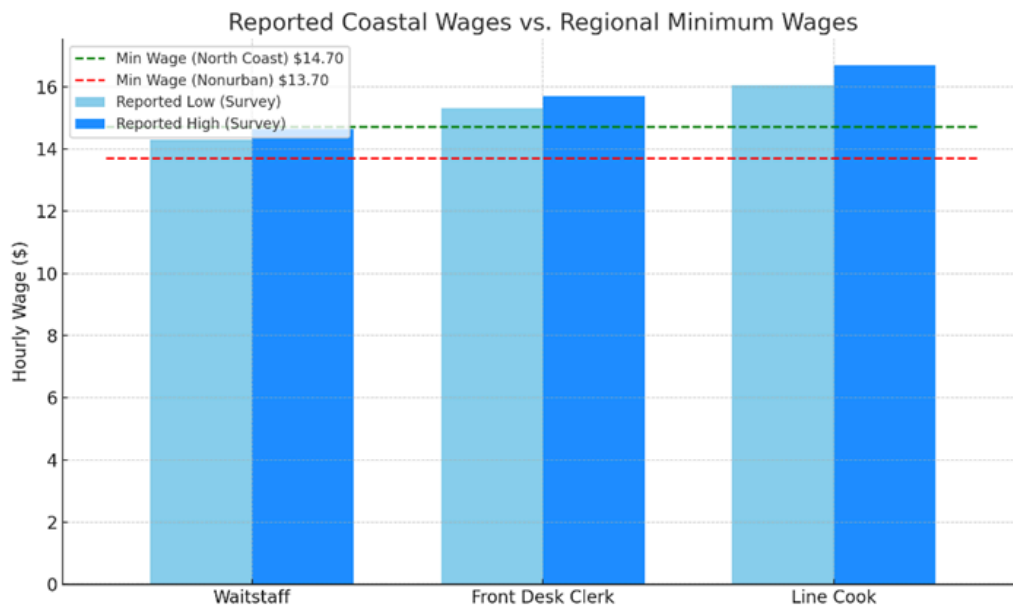
Among more than 100 employee respondents, 13% reported earning over $25 per hour. At the same time, seasonal fluctuations and inconsistent access to tips were noted as factors that influence take-home pay. These variables were more commonly reported among younger workers and workers of color. For instance, 52% of Latino/a, 58% of Native American, and 49% of Black respondents reported earning under $15 per hour, compared to just 34% of white respondents. Similarly, 61% of workers under age 25 reported wages below $15 per hour, compared to 27% of those aged 35–54 and 19% of those aged 55 and older.

Employers across the region generally estimated average hourly wages for entry-level positions to fall between $18 and $22 before tips. They also reported that upper-level roles, such as general managers, often earn between $30 and $40 per hour or more. A few employers noted that some team members can exceed $50 per hour when tips or bonuses are included.

This contrast reveals a clear gap between employer perceptions and employee experiences. While posted rates may appear competitive, actual compensation can be significantly affected by factors like limited hours, inconsistent tip distribution, and unclear job classifications. In unstructured interviews, frontline workers emphasized that these conditions shape how wages are ultimately experienced, particularly in roles that rely on variable or seasonal income.

[1](Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries, 2025)

Subsector Variability

Compensation levels in the coastal hospitality sector vary significantly by subsector and job function. In lodging, housekeepers and front desk staff tend to earn more modest wages, with over half of employee respondents in these roles reporting earnings under $15 per hour. Respondents from these positions report that they rarely receive tip income, which can limit overall take-home pay.

In food and beverage settings, servers and bartenders often report higher total compensation due to tips, though base wages remain low and tip income can fluctuate depending on the season, shift, or location. Kitchen staff such as line cooks and dishwashers typically earn steady but moderate wages, with limited access to tip pools in most establishments.

Those working in tourism and cultural institutions, such as museum staff, tour operators, or experience guides, reported hourly wages in the $15 to $18 range. These roles generally do not include tipping, but may offer greater schedule consistency or community engagement value.

These patterns highlight the importance of looking beyond hourly base rates to understand the full picture of hospitality compensation. Tip access, job structure, and seasonality all shape the real-world value of a given role.

Structural Supports & Holistic Needs

Broader supports that influence retention, including childcare, housing assistance, and mental health resources, were identified by 40.8% of employee respondents as needs that would improve job satisfaction and long-term stability. While these types of benefits are uncommon across most industries, the interest expressed here points to a growing demand for more holistic forms of workplace support.

At the same time, 20.6% of surveyed employers reported offering at least one of these non-traditional supports. This demonstrates that, even amid operational and seasonal constraints, some coastal businesses are already finding creative ways to respond to workforce needs. Their efforts offer a foundation for shared learning and sector-wide progress.

The fact that most workers surveyed want these supports, and a portion of employers are already providing them, highlights a clear opportunity for collaborative investment in wraparound benefits that can improve retention, especially for part-time and seasonal workers. We return to this theme in later sections of the report when discussing implementation strategies and opportunities for shared solutions.

Access to Benefits

 Survey responses indicate that access to benefits in the coastal hospitality industry is inconsistent, with notable variation across employers, regions, and demographic groups. Many employers reported offering a suite of benefits that includes medical insurance, paid time off, and retirement plans. However, employee responses suggest that these benefits are not always reaching frontline workers in practice.

Among survey respondents, 53% reported receiving some form of medical insurance, while access to dental (39%), vision (28%), and retirement savings plans (26%) was less common. Young workers were among the least likely to report access to benefits. 19% of respondents under age 25 said they had health insurance, and only 12% had paid time off. Among young workers with full-time schedules, fewer than one in four reported receiving employer-sponsored benefits. These findings suggest that age may be a factor in how benefits are communicated, distributed, or applied.

Spanish-speaking respondents experienced even greater disparities. Just 16% reported having health insurance and only 10% reported access to paid time off, despite 41% indicating that they worked full-time. In comparison, 61% of English-speaking respondents reported full-time hours, with 36% receiving health insurance and 29% receiving paid leave. When comparing only full-time workers, English-speaking respondents were more than twice as likely to report access to both paid time off and employer-sponsored health insurance.

Employers appear to overestimate the scope and consistency of their benefit offerings. While 76% reported offering health insurance, paid time off, or flexible scheduling, only 33% of employees reported receiving any of these benefits. Among those who did not receive benefits, 47% cited unaffordable insurance premiums, 39% said that part-time or inconsistent schedules made them ineligible, and 22% indicated they were unaware of any benefits being available. An additional 14% reported losing eligibility during the off-season due to reduced hours or contract changes.

This disconnect points to an important opportunity. Improving communication, eligibility clarity, and affordability of benefits could help employers better align their intentions with employee experiences, particularly for younger workers, seasonal staff, and multilingual teams.

Turnover & Workforce Stability

Turnover continues to challenge long-term workforce development in the coastal hospitality sector. Among employee respondents, 31.3% reported they had either recently left a job or were actively considering leaving. Their reasons included unsustainable working conditions, inadequate compensation, and limited advancement opportunities. In follow-up interviews, workers most often cited burnout, housing instability, and a sense of stagnation as central factors contributing to these decisions.

Employers echoed these concerns. Nearly 75% identified turnover as one of their top workforce challenges, citing the costs of recruitment, onboarding, and productivity loss. When asked about contributing factors, 39.2% of employers pointed to external influences such as shifting worker expectations, perceived declines in commitment, or broader economic trends.

However, employee feedback suggests that internal factors, including workplace conditions, compensation, and clear growth pathways, are stronger predictors of turnover than attitudes alone. These findings point to a shared opportunity: by investing in retention strategies that reflect the lived experiences of frontline staff, employers can reduce churn, strengthen team cohesion, and improve service outcomes.

Addressing turnover is not only about preventing early exits, it is also about creating environments where hospitality careers can grow. As businesses across the Coast continue to adapt, those that prioritize stability, development, and wellbeing will be better positioned to compete for talent in a rapidly changing labor market.

Strategic Recommendations
Rooted in Industry Insight

Overview of Core Challenges

Across all survey instruments and stakeholder conversations, several recurring challenges emerged that continue to shape workforce outcomes across the Oregon Coast hospitality sector. While these issues are familiar to many industry leaders, they remain highly relevant and present clear opportunities for strategic investment and cross-sector problem-solving.

Ongoing Instability in a Seasonal Economy
Businesses across the region continue to navigate instability tied to seasonal demand, rising costs, and housing shortages. These external factors make it difficult to maintain consistent staffing levels year-round and can contribute to worker turnover, particularly among part-time, entry-level, or newly hired employees.

Gaps in Voice, Language Access, and Advancement
Although most employees report feeling respected and safe, gaps in communication remain, especially for workers navigating language barriers or unclear job growth pathways. Spanish-speaking employees were particularly likely to describe limited access to advancement, training, or participation in workplace decision-making.

Differing Perspectives Between Employers and Employees
Employers and workers often describe the same workplace conditions in very different terms. This disconnect, sometimes rooted in culture, expectations, or communication style, can limit problem-solving, reinforce misunderstandings, and make it harder to retain staff, even when intentions are aligned.

Limited Internal Infrastructure for Growth
Many hospitality businesses, especially small or seasonal ones, want to support their workers' long-term growth. But without HR staff, formal systems, or time to develop internal training plans, it can be challenging to turn good intentions into clear pathways for advancement.

Synthesis of Key Themes

Job Quality Is Central to Retention
Turnover is not driven by worker disinterest, but by workplace conditions. Burnout, unstable housing, and limited mental health supports were consistently cited as barriers to longevity.

Language Access and Equity Gaps Undermine Workforce Inclusion
Fewer than 20% of Spanish-speaking workers reported seeing a path to promotion. This cohort also reported lower access to training, advancement, and input into decision-making.

Employers Often Lack Support for Implementation
While many employers express interest in improving scheduling, training, and retention strategies, they cite limited time and staffing capacity as obstacles to follow-through.

Employees Are Asking for More, And Employers Are Open
A significant portion of workers requested access to structured training, clearer pathways, and wraparound supports like housing and transportation. Many employers indicated they would adopt such supports if given technical assistance or financial incentives.

Reflections from the Field

As part of our broader effort to understand the experiences of frontline workers in Oregon's coastal hospitality industry, the Oregon Coast Hospitality Sector Partnership (OCHISP) partnered with Marin Arreola of Advanced Economic Solutions to conduct a series of focus groups across the region. Over the course of several months, we facilitated six total sessions (four in English and two in Spanish) with hospitality employees from a wide range of job roles, career stages, and communities.

There was no PowerPoint. No agenda. Just a table, a notepad, and a sincere invitation: tell us what it's like to do your job. And people did.

Marin served as the lead facilitator for all six groups, bringing years of experience conducting qualitative research with diverse and multilingual participants. His ability to create a safe, open environment was essential to the process, particularly for Spanish-speakers. I was present for the four English-language groups and on-site for the two Spanish-language sessions, though I remained outside the room, as I do not speak Spanish. I point that out intentionally, because while we convened these groups to listen, I also recognize the limits of my own perspective. That's why we worked closely with bilingual professionals like Marin and offered the same $50 Visa gift card to every participant to help ensure each session was inclusive, equitable, and welcoming.

The settings varied…hotel boardrooms, restaurant meeting spaces, and even, once, the production floor of a working brewery. But the intent was always the same: to hear directly from the people doing the work. These conversations offered a grounded, candid window into the values, frustrations, and hopes that shape life on the frontlines of coastal hospitality.

While each session reflected its own regional nuances, the themes that emerged were strikingly consistent. Workers talked about pay: what feels fair, what doesn't, and how compensation practices affect morale. They spoke about the squeeze of seasonal income, the challenge of juggling multiple jobs, and the rising cost of housing that often makes year-round residency unsustainable. But they also spoke, often with pride, about their teams, their guests, and the sense of purpose they find in their work, especially when supported by strong managers and clear expectations.

One person told us they were proud of their job and their team but had to live in a converted garage an hour away because it was the only place they could afford. Another described translating for both guests and coworkers every shift serving as the unofficial bridge between management and the back of house without any formal recognition or added pay.

In many cases, participants were quick to note what's working well: flexible schedules, supportive supervisors, and inclusive environments where diversity is seen as a strength. In others, they pointed to gaps, especially around training, communication, and consistency. Across the board, workers were pragmatic. They didn't expect perfection. But they did hope for fairness, respect, and the opportunity to grow.

There were contradictions. Some people said they loved their jobs but hated their pay. Others didn't mind their pay but felt invisible. But a few core themes rose to the top: the burden of housing costs, the instability of seasonal employment, the value of workplace diversity, and the need for management practices built on communication and respect. For Spanish-speaking workers, the stakes were even higher…stories of discrimination and fear, yes, but also of resilience and the desire for simple fairness: igualdad para todos.

I've worked in hospitality most of my life. I've run hotels, managed teams, served guests in high heels and broken AC. I thought I understood this industry. But sitting across from these workers, notebook in hand, I was reminded again and again: we don't know unless we ask. And more importantly, unless we listen.

The goal of these focus groups wasn't to produce sweeping conclusions. It was to add context and dimension to the data we've already gathered. Surveys can tell us what's happening. Conversations like these help us understand why it matters.

Marin's full focus group report, including methodology and detailed thematic findings, can be found in the Appendix. What follows here are the practical recommendations that grew from both the quantitative data and the lived experiences shared in these sessions.

For me, these sessions were a reminder that the people who power our industry are observant, thoughtful, and deeply invested in their work, especially when they believe that investment is mutual. The insights they shared should not be treated as merely anecdotal, but rather as guideposts. If we want to improve retention, strengthen workplace culture, and make year-round hospitality careers more viable along the coast, we need to keep listening and we need to act on what we hear.

Industry-Driven Recommendations (Organized by Pillar)

Hire Well

Improve recruitment experience and expand equitable access to opportunity
Employers across the region consistently report difficulty finding candidates who meet job requirements, while workers describe being willing and able, but blocked by logistical or structural barriers. These include high onboarding costs, inaccessible applications, and limited regional transit options. Strengthening the recruitment process means reducing these friction points so that employers can access a broader and more prepared talent pool.

Remove cost barriers to entry-level employment
Many new hires, especially youth, first-time workers, or those re-entering the workforce, struggle to cover the upfront costs of certifications like Food Handler's Cards or OLCC permits. These are modest expenses by industry standards, but they can be significant for workers starting with limited resources. Public stipends, employer reimbursements, or regional scholarship programs could help bridge this gap and improve equity in hiring.

Build deeper partnerships with community-based organizations and schools
Expanding the hospitality workforce will require a wider and more intentional talent pipeline. Employers can strengthen relationships with culturally specific organizations, Tribes, and trusted community partners to reach multilingual and underserved populations. Similarly, high school Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs already operating in coastal communities (like ProStart, the High School Seafood Butchery Program, and local hospitality tracks in Tillamook and Seaside) offer structured training and ready-made pipelines. With mentorship, summer jobs, or paid internships, these programs can become on-ramps to long-term careers.

Support consistent, regionally aligned hiring systems
Seasonality affects when and how hiring takes place, making it harder to share strategies across communities. Developing region-specific hiring calendars, pooled applicant systems, or shared workforce campaigns can help identify common staffing needs. In tandem, offering training for hiring managers focused on soft skills, cultural responsiveness, and inclusive evaluation practices can improve outcomes across the board, especially for applicants with nontraditional education or work histories.

Support Workers

The daily realities of hospitality work can drive turnover...even in positive workplaces.
Most coastal employees report feeling safe and respected at work. However, the physical demands, emotional strain, and logistical unpredictability of hospitality jobs contribute to burnout, especially in peak season. Even small breakdowns in scheduling, support, or communication can push workers toward exit. Addressing these issues head-on can boost retention and strengthen team cohesion.

Invest in communication systems that build trust.
Many frontline workers, especially those who are multilingual or part-time, struggle to access timely and clear information about expectations, safety, and workplace changes. Employers can bridge this gap by translating onboarding and training materials into commonly spoken languages, offering regular feedback opportunities such as anonymous surveys or suggestion tools, and creating more predictable scheduling practices. While seasonal variability is unavoidable, communicating schedule changes at least two weeks in advance, where feasible, can improve both planning and morale.

Create inclusive environments that reflect staff needs and strengths.
In many small or family-run businesses, team dynamics are strong but informal. This works well until issues of fairness, favoritism, or miscommunication arise. Frontline supervisors often have limited training in culturally responsive leadership or emotional intelligence, both of which are essential in today's workforce. Targeted development for managers can help foster more inclusive, empathetic teams. Similarly, peer-led onboarding and mentorship programs, particularly those led by bilingual or long-tenured staff, can increase belonging and reduce early-stage attrition.

Expand access to wraparound supports through collaboration.
While traditional benefits like medical and dental insurance remain unevenly distributed, employees are increasingly vocal about broader needs: mental health support, affordable housing, transportation, and childcare. Many employers expressed a desire to provide more, but cited limited resources and seasonal constraints. Regional collaboratives or pooled benefit programs could help close the gap, particularly for small businesses and seasonal operators, while advancing shared goals around workforce stability.

Grow Talent

Most hospitality careers start on the front line, but few have a clear path forward.
Across the Oregon Coast, workers consistently said they wanted to grow in their roles but didn't know how. Many employers also expressed interest in promoting from within but lacked the time, tools, or structured training systems to do so equitably. These disconnects are especially visible in smaller operations, where formal career ladders may not exist. Supporting talent development requires low-barrier, high-impact strategies that work in busy, resource-constrained environments.

Work-based learning and community alignment can create real pathways.
High school CTE programs, youth employment pilots, and paid internships are already laying the foundation for workforce pipelines. ProStart, OCVA's seafood butchery program, and local high school hospitality programs all provide opportunities for young people to build skills and explore careers. Strengthening the links between these programs and local employers through summer jobs, job shadowing, and mentorship can turn short-term experiences into long-term commitments. Coordinating with community colleges and workforce boards to align training content with real-time employer needs can further close skill gaps, particularly in supervisory, culinary, and operations roles.

Internal advancement becomes possible when expectations are clear.
Many workers report that it's hard to know what success looks like, especially in roles where feedback is limited or training is inconsistent. Formal mentorship and cross-training can help clarify what's possible and prepare workers for advancement. In small businesses without HR staff, simple toolkits or train-the-trainer resources can support employers in setting clear promotion benchmarks and tracking staff development over time. Offering bilingual leadership development alongside language-bridging resources can help ensure more equitable access to advancement opportunities for Spanish-speaking workers.

Celebrating internal growth helps raise the bar across the region.
When businesses promote from within and share their success stories, it inspires others to do the same. Regional recognition efforts, peer learning cohorts, or employer showcases can help elevate strong practices and demonstrate that investing in staff is both feasible and beneficial. By highlighting what's already working, the sector can foster a culture of growth that strengthens the workforce and deepens community ties.

Compete with Quality

Wages and benefits shape more than take-home pay…they shape long-term loyalty.
Across the Oregon Coast, employers consistently cite retention as a top concern. Turnover impacts not just daily operations but workplace culture, brand reputation, and community continuity. While many employers are increasing wages, survey data suggests that compensation remains uneven, especially for younger workers, part-time employees, and workers of color. Aligning pay with cost of living and offering even basic benefits can help reduce churn and build a more reliable workforce.

Understanding the gap between intention and experience is the first step.
In employer surveys, over three-quarters of businesses reported offering benefits such as health insurance, paid time off, or flexible scheduling. Yet only one-third of employees reported receiving any of these offerings. Interviews with workers pointed to several reasons for this mismatch, including unclear eligibility criteria, unaffordable premiums, and seasonal ineligibility due to reduced hours. These patterns suggest that the challenge is not just what's offered, but how, when, and to whom.

Wraparound supports offer new ways to compete for talent.
Traditional benefits are important, but they're not the only ones workers are asking for. Many employees described how supports like childcare, housing assistance, and mental health resources would improve their ability to stay in the industry. While these are not commonly offered in any sector, nearly 20% of surveyed hospitality employers on the Coast have found ways to provide at least one of these supports. This shows that even in constrained environments, targeted investment and creative partnerships can make a difference.

Raising the bar doesn't mean going it alone.
From peer-to-peer learning to regional collaboratives, employers don't have to make these changes in isolation. Technical assistance, public-private partnerships, and cost-sharing models can all help expand access to essential benefits. Recognizing and amplifying the efforts of "high-road" employers can shift local norms and attract talent to the region. When wages and benefits are seen as business strategies rather than just expenses, hospitality becomes a sector where quality jobs and quality service go hand in hand.

Tools for Employers

This report is not just a diagnosis, it is a toolkit. As conversations unfolded across the coast, employers consistently expressed a desire to improve hiring, training, and retention practices. What they lacked were clear, targeted resources tailored to the unique challenges of small, seasonal, and rural hospitality businesses.

In response, the Oregon Coast Hospitality Sector Partnership developed a set of employer-focused tools grounded in the Good Jobs framework introduced in Chapter 2. These tools are modular, scalable, and rooted in coastal experiences, designed to meet businesses where they are and support progress across all four pillars. As the partnership evolves, these supports will be refined based on business feedback and workforce needs.

The Coastal Hospitality Career Pathways Guide and Good Jobs Playbook for Employers are included within the body of this report. You will find the OCHISP Partner Resource Folder URL in the appendixes.

Coastal Hospitality Career Pathway Guide

What it is:
A visual roadmap of common career paths across lodging, food and beverage, and tourism sub-sectors. Includes entry-level, mid-level, and leadership roles along with associated skills and certifications.

Who it is for:
Employers, jobseekers, educators, workforce programs, and support partners.

Why it matters:
Many workers reported interest in advancement but lacked a clear sense of how to get there. This guide supports transparent hiring, promotion, and training aligned with the Grow Talent and Compete with Quality pillars.

Good Jobs Playbook for Coastal Employers

What it is:
A practical guide to improving job quality through better recruitment, scheduling, communication, and workplace culture. Includes best practices, sample templates, and real coastal business examples.

Who it is for:
Small Business owners, general managers, and HR leads

Why it matters:
Employers want to retain talent, but many do not know where to begin. This playbook connects everyday decisions, such as posting schedules or gathering feedback, to long-term outcomes in retention, equity, and morale. It supports the Support Workers, Hire Well, and Grow Talent pillars.

OCHISP Partner Resource Folder

What it is:
A living shared folder with key tools, reports, visuals, and templates created through the Oregon Coast Hospitality Industry Sector Partnership.

Who it is for:
Employers, workforce boards, and support partners engaged in regional hospitality strategy.

Why it matters:
This central hub makes it easy to access current materials, stay aligned, and build on shared work. It reflects our commitment to collaboration and practical solutions.

Hotel/Lodging Operations

Hotel operations refers to the day-to-day work that keeps a property running smoothly for guests. It includes departments like housekeeping, maintenance, laundry, and the front desk—the teams that clean rooms, fix what's broken, check people in and out, and respond to guest needs in real time. It's all about making sure the hotel functions well every day and delivers a consistent guest experience.

I'm most comfortable focusing on the systems and details that support great service.

I'm energized by guest interaction. I love meeting strangers and being the face of their experiences.

Maintenance Tech

Housekeeper

Front Desk Agent

I love organizing supplies

I love ensuring everything is perfect

Bookkeeping or Accounting

I love the numbers and systems

Maintenance Coordinator

Laundry Attendant or Stockroom Lead

Room Inspector

Night Auditor

I love troubleshooting issues

I love helping my team solve problems

Maintenance Supervisor

I want to help direct all aspects of facilities

Housekeeping Supervisor

I want to help shape the entire guest experience

Front Desk Supervisor

I want to run the whole department

I want to support culture, hiring, onboarding, or retention

Maintenance Manager

Housekeeping Manager

Front Desk Manager

Human Resources

Upper Levels Management

WHERE CAN THIS JOB TAKE YOU?

Lodging   Food Service   Support
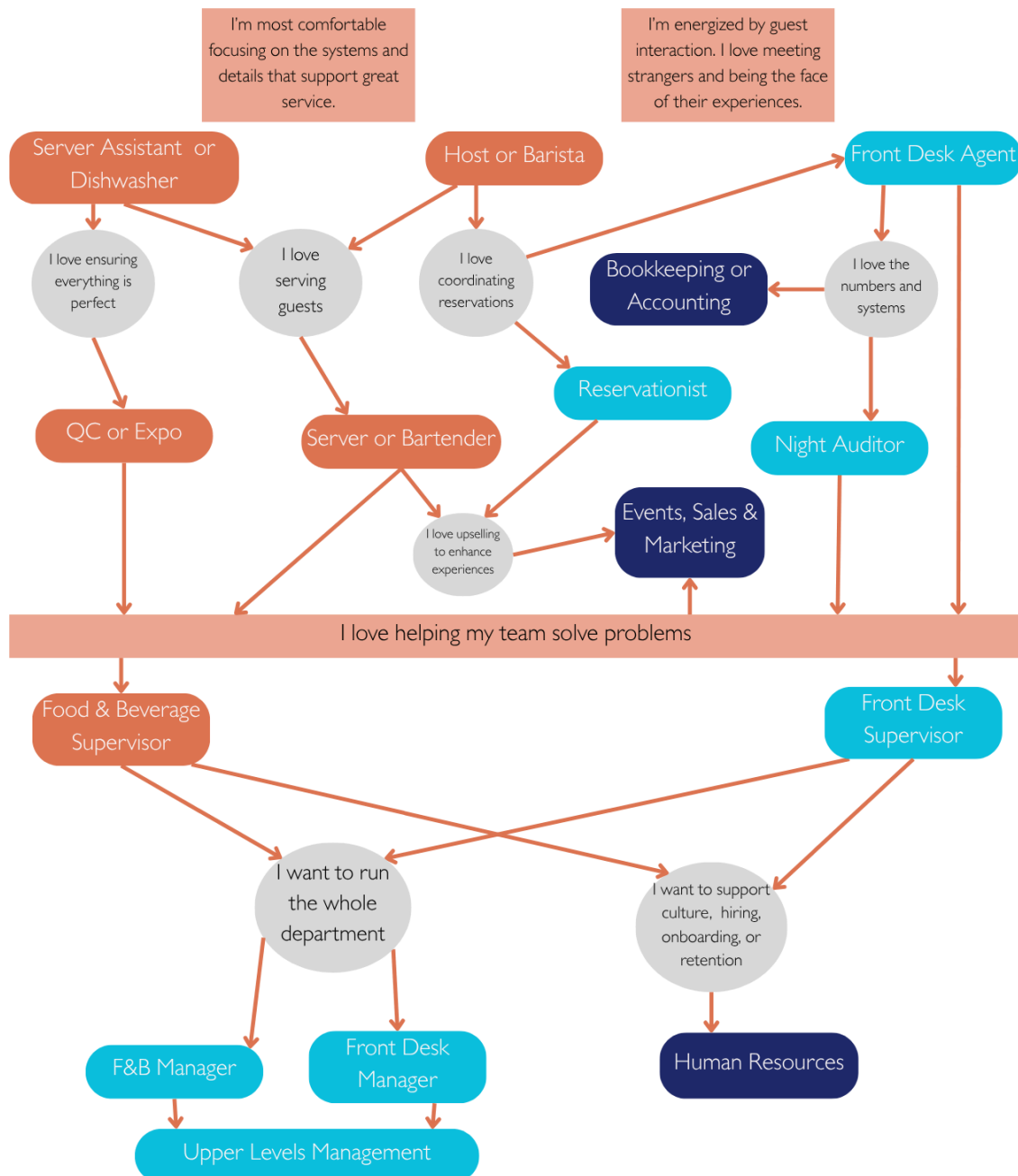
A Choose-Your-Own-Career Map for Coastal Hospitality

Hotel/Lodging Business & Support

The behind-the-scenes engine that keeps the hotel running smart. These roles handle sales, HR, finance, marketing, and events—the systems that support staff, fill rooms, and grow the business. Less guest-facing, but just as essential.

I'm most comfortable focusing on the systems and details that support great service.

I'm energized by guest interaction. I love meeting strangers and being the face of their experiences.

Server Assistant or Dishwasher

Host or Barista

Front Desk Agent

I love ensuring everything is perfect

I love serving guests

I love coordinating reservations

Bookkeeping or Accounting

I love the numbers and systems

QC or Expo

Server or Bartender

Reservationist

Night Auditor

I love upselling to enhance experiences

Events, Sales & Marketing

I love helping my team solve problems

Food & Beverage Supervisor

Front Desk Supervisor

I want to run the whole department

I want to support culture, hiring, onboarding, or retention

F&B Manager

Front Desk Manager

Human Resources

Upper Levels Management

Hotel/Lodging Business & Support

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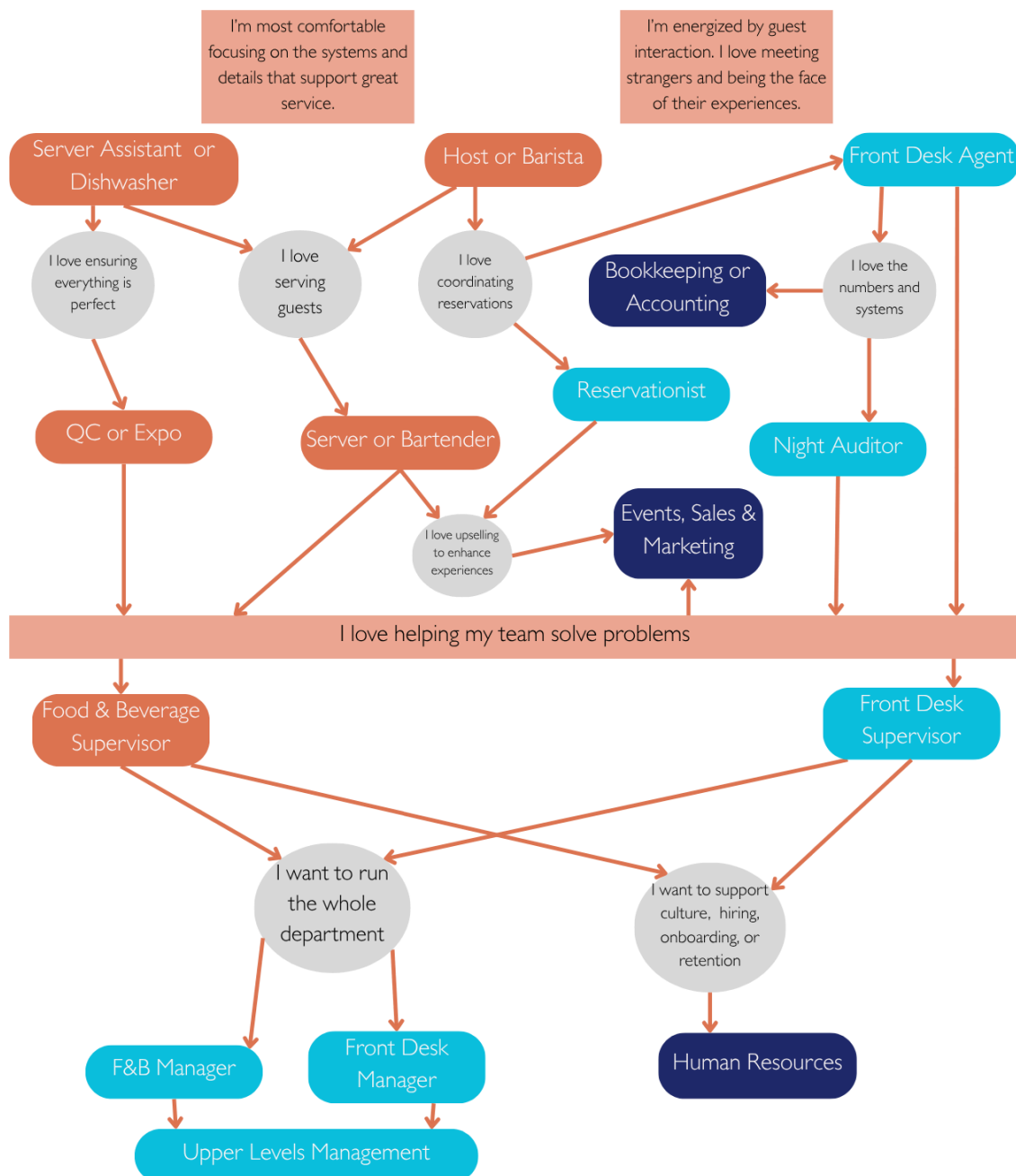
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Night Auditor

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Events, Sales & Marketing

I love helping my team solve problems

Food & Beverage Supervisor

Front Desk Supervisor

I want to run the whole department

I want to support culture, hiring, onboarding, or retention

F&B Manager

Front Desk Manager

Human Resources

Upper Levels Management

GOOD JOBS PLAYBOOK FOR COASTAL EMPLOYERS

A Choose-Your-Own-Career Map for Coastal Hospitality

Lodging Support Food Service

WHAT IS A "GOOD JOB"?

A "good job" in hospitality doesn't have to mean five-star benefits or corporate infrastructure. On the Oregon Coast, it often means something simpler: fairness, consistency, and respect. Good jobs are built through small, intentional decisions that help workers feel supported and valued, and help businesses thrive as a result.

WHY GOOD JOBS MATTER

Hospitality is essential to the coastal economy, but turnover, staffing shortages, and burnout are real challenges. Many employers want to make jobs better but aren't sure where to begin. This playbook breaks it down: one page, one topic at a time. Every tip and tool here is designed to be practical, flexible, and rooted in real examples from coastal businesses.

WHO THIS IS FOR

This guide is for anyone who makes hiring, scheduling, or workplace decisions in small or midsized hospitality operations: owners, general managers, supervisors, and HR leads. You don't need a corporate team to build a great place to work. You just need the right tools.

HOW TO USE THIS PLAYBOOK

Each section includes:

- A simple overview of the topic
- Realistic tips for small teams
- Sample tools and templates
- Examples from local businesses when available

Use the pages that matter most to your business. Share them with your managers. Print them for your staff room. These aren't one-size-fits-all mandates — they're building blocks. Take what works and make it your own.

Hiring well isn't about finding "perfect" people. It's about creating a fair, clear process that sets everyone up for success. Especially in small and seasonal teams, the way you hire shapes the tone of your workplace—and your ability to retain staff down the line.

PRACTICAL TIPS

- Be honest in job descriptions. Don't oversell the role. Highlight both the exciting parts and the hard parts.

- Keep applications simple. Consider paper or mobile-friendly forms and skip long online portals.

- Use a short, structured interview. Ask consistent questions that focus on behavior, not personality.

- Include team input. When possible, involve a peer or supervisor in hiring decisions.

- Follow up, even if it's a no. A quick message builds goodwill and protects your reputation.

TRY THIS: TEMPLATE FOR JOB POSTING

We're hiring a [Job Title]! This is a [part-time/full-time], [seasonal/year-round] role in our [restaurant/hotel/shop] in [City]. You'll be part of a team that [insert something honest and appealing, e.g., 'works hard, supports each other, and loves serving travelers'].

Key Details:
- Pay starts at $[XX]/hour
- Typical schedule: [Days/times]
- Must be comfortable [e.g., being on your feet, working with guests]
- Experience is great, but not required—we'll train you

Apply in person, or email [contact info].

"I started being more upfront in the job postings about what hours we have, shift expectations...what the pace is really like. It's helped me find people who are a better fit, and we don't lose as many folks early on. That alone has saved us time and money—we were spending way too much energy onboarding people who didn't end up working out."

Good jobs don't just start at hiring—they're sustained through how people are treated day-to-day. The most effective hospitality leaders create structure, communicate clearly, and treat workers like people, not just positions. These small things build trust, reduce turnover, and improve service.

PRACTICAL TIPS

- Post schedules early. Aim for at least 7 days in advance—14 if you can. It shows respect and helps staff plan their lives.
- Stick to promised hours. If you offer someone 30 hours a week, don't routinely cut them to 15 without warning.
- Have a clear point of contact. Whether it's you or a shift lead, make sure every employee knows who to go to with questions.
- Check in regularly. Even a 5-minute weekly conversation can surface issues early and show staff you care.
- Make changes visible. If someone gives feedback and you act on it, say so. It builds a culture of trust.

TRY THIS: CHECK-IN PROMPT

"What's going well this week? What's been frustrating or confusing? Is there anything I can do to support you better right now?"

You can use this as a quick one-on-one script or turn it into a written check-in form. You can also send out a short, anonymous survey once a month or each quarter with similar questions—this helps you track team morale over time and spot patterns early.

Be prepared: sometimes the feedback will be frustrating or unexpected. Employees may point to surface issues—like a specific task or policy—that actually reflect deeper challenges, such as unclear communication, favoritism, or burnout. The key is to listen with curiosity, not defensiveness. Feedback isn't a personal attack; it's a chance to understand what's really going on and make smarter decisions for your team.

"We started posting schedules two weeks out, and it's made a big difference. I wasn't sure it would work, planning that far out. But we created a basic template and adjusted it as we went. Now staff can plan childcare, second jobs...everything. We've had fewer call-outs and way better morale."

A good job gets people in the door. A great job gives them a reason to stay. For small teams, growing talent doesn't require a big budget—it just takes consistency, mentorship, and the belief that people can develop with the right support.

PRACTICAL TIPS

- Train on the floor. Shadowing, buddy systems, and clear expectations can go a long way. Build learning into the shift.
- Show the path. Even if promotions are rare, help workers understand what leads to more hours, raises, or new responsibilities.
- Give regular feedback. Praise effort and correct gently. Tell people when they're doing well—not just when they mess up.
- Invite input. Ask what skills people want to learn and build small opportunities to practice them.
- Celebrate growth. Mark milestones like 30-day anniversaries or mastering a new task. Small acknowledgments build loyalty.

TRY THIS: SKILLS CHECK LIST

Create a simple skills checklist for each role. Break the job into smaller, teachable tasks—like "Can prep salad station," "Can run register during a lunch rush," or "Can close dining room independently." Make each item clear and specific so that progress is easy to see and celebrate.

Be thoughtful about what goes on the list. For example, tasks like handling upset or confrontational guests should be reserved for supervisors or managers...people trained and authorized to de-escalate tough situations. If a role doesn't come with that kind of training or pay, it shouldn't come with that kind of responsibility either. Instead, focus on giving your team clear steps for when and how to involve a manager.

As employees build skills, check them off together. Revisit the checklist during regular check-ins and use it as a reference point when considering raises or promotions. This gives team members a clear sense of their progress and helps managers make decisions based on growth, not just gut feelings.

Hiring well, supporting workers, and growing talent are all part of a bigger picture: building a business that stands out—not just in what you sell, but in how you operate. On the Oregon Coast, competing with quality means offering a workplace that earns loyalty from employees and trust from guests.

PRACTICAL TIPS

- Be consistent. Clear policies, stable hours, and respectful communication create reliability—for your team and your customers.
- Focus on your culture. A workplace that feels safe, supportive, and inclusive is one that employees talk about—and stay with.
- Highlight your values. Share your commitments to community, sustainability, or employee growth in your marketing and hiring materials.
- Invest in experience. Every positive guest interaction is made possible by a staff member who feels prepared, supported, and valued.

TRY THIS: INTERNAL BRAND STATEMENT

What you believe about your people is part of your brand—whether you say it out loud or not. Writing it down helps you stay aligned and consistent.

Try this exercise: write a sentence or two that describes how your business values its people. This isn't a mission statement—it's an internal guidepost.

Ask yourself:

- What do I want this workplace to feel like?
- What kind of team experience supports the guest experience I'm aiming for?
- What values or practices set us apart?

Example:

"At Ocean View Café, we believe hospitality starts behind the counter—with fair treatment, teamwork, and respect for every role. We lead with empathy and listen first."

Post it where you'll see it. Share it with new hires. Use it to shape policies, guide decisions, and refocus during tough seasons.

"We're not the cheapest option in town, but we don't have to be. Our employees stay longer, and guests love seeing the same faces year after year. People come back for the experience—and that starts with how we treat our team."

GOOD JOBS PLAYBOOK FOR COASTAL EMPLOYERS

Quick Wins & Low-Cost Changes

You don't need a full HR department to make a meaningful difference. Small, low-cost changes can dramatically improve morale, reduce turnover, and build a stronger team culture. Here are ten ideas you can implement quickly—most take less than an hour.

TEN QUICK WINS

1. Post the schedule earlier. Try moving your schedule release from Thursday to Tuesday, or give a two-week view instead of one. Small changes add up.
2. Use a welcome checklist. Make sure every new hire knows where to find things, who to ask for help, and what's expected their first week.
3. Add one question to your next team meeting. Try: "What's one thing that would make your day easier?"
4. Write a thank-you note. Handwritten or texted, just let someone know their effort was seen.
5. Clean up the staff area. Show that you care about the spaces your team uses.
6. Post a feedback box. Use a locked box or simple QR code linked to a short Google Form. And actually USE the dang thing!
7. Create a recognition board. Let staff shout each other out for going above and beyond.
8. Make a simple policy one-pager. Many employees don't know or forget about what you offer them as an employer.
9. Share your own story. In a huddle or meeting, tell your team why you do this work and what you're proud of.
10. Celebrate a small win. Bring donuts. Play a favorite song. Announce that the team got through a tough weekend. Little moments matter.

These quick wins won't fix every challenge—but they show your team that you're paying attention, that you care, and that you're willing to improve things step by step. That's what leadership looks like.

A New Foundation for Coastal Hospitality

Sixteen months ago, we set out to answer a question that had long gone unasked:

What does the coastal hospitality workforce actually need...and what would it look like for the workforce system to meaningfully support it?

At the time, there was no shared map. Employers operated in silos, often disconnected from workforce and education systems. Public partners recognized the sector's size but had few formal mechanisms for engagement. Workers, especially those in part-time, seasonal, or multilingual roles, were largely invisible in regional planning efforts. The gaps were clear, but the path forward was not.

This project changed that.

From Research to Partnership

What began as a time-limited research initiative has grown into something far more enduring. The Oregon Coast Hospitality Sector Partnership, convened through the Oregon Hospitality Foundation, has evolved into a living framework for industry-led coordination, one that spans the region and includes employers, educators, workforce boards, and civic organizations working in concert.

The first step was hiring a full-time Sector Strategist to serve as a regional connector, convener, and advocate for hospitality employers and workers. Over the course of the project, that role helped to align cross-sector partners around a common set of priorities, drawing participation from:

- Small business owners and large employers across lodging, food service, and tourism
- Workforce boards and education providers in Northwest, Southwest, and Lane County
- Tribal partners, civil rights groups, and culturally specific community-based organizations
- Destination management organizations (DMOs), chambers, and local governments

Together, these stakeholders co-designed a research and engagement strategy that prioritized direct employer and employee voice. The resulting process blended surveys, focus groups, and in-depth interviews to capture a wide range of perspectives, establishing a more intentional, inclusive model for hospitality workforce engagement across the region.

The resulting framework not only aligns with the U.S. Department of Labor's Good Jobs Principles, but it also reflects the distinct realities of the coastal visitor economy. By design, it invites local ownership, cross-regional consistency, and long-term sustainability.

The Partnership also hosted six formal employer convenings across Clatsop, Lincoln, Lane, Coos, and Curry counties, alongside dozens of one-on-one interviews. These engagements surfaced candid insights, built trust, and created new pathways for collaboration. Many employers connected with regional workforce and economic development leaders for the first time, unlocking new potential for problem-solving across the sector.

From Insight to Action
With foundational data in hand, the partnership shifted into an action-planning phase. Between fall 2024 and spring 2025, regional convenings were held to:

- Identify shared pain points across counties and business sizes.
- Review preliminary data and test findings against lived experience.
- Align around a shared vision of job quality and business support.
- Brainstorm solutions that could scale across the region

Out of the discussions, four central priorities emerged, as shown in this report:
- Hiring and access
- Worker support and retention
- Talent development
- Compensation and competitiveness

To operationalize this work, the partnership launched four cross-regional Action Teams:
1. Talent & Workforce Development
2. Operations & Business Support
3. Branding, Marketing, and Experience Bundling
4. Creative Infrastructure Solutions

Each team includes a mix of employers, support partners, and industry stakeholders. These teams are the implementation engine for what comes next, ensuring that conversations translate into practical strategies tested by real businesses.

Sustaining the Work: A Regional Commitment

Perhaps the most important outcome of this project is not this report itself but the relationships it helped build. For the first time, the public workforce system, hospitality employers, and community partners are working from a shared foundation of insight and purpose. That alignment matters. It makes future collaboration possible and meaningful.

The launch of the Partnership and the research behind the report were made possible by an initial investment from the US Department of Labor's Critical Jobs Quality Grant. That funding enabled the creation of the Sector Strategist role to lead data collection, coordinate engagement efforts, and convene stakeholders across the region.

But the project did not end when the surveys closed. Thanks to strong buy-in from regional partners, that same role has been sustained and expanded to serve as the backbone of the ongoing Partnership. The position is housed within the Oregon Hospitality Foundation and is now supported through a braided funding model that includes follow-on investment from all three coastal workforce boards: Northwest Oregon Works, Southwestern Oregon Workforce Investment Board, and Lane Workforce Partnership. Additional support comes from industry partners like the Oregon Coast Visitor's Association and regional economic development entities.

This blended structure reflects a shared commitment to long-term workforce resilience. It now functions as a central forum for coordination. It provides the infrastructure needed to share data, pilot employer-facing tools, deploying action teams, and aligning public investments with on-the-ground business needs. The Partnership also offers a new model for how rural regions can engage with and uplift service-sector work without defaulting to deficit narratives.

What Comes Next

As the Partnership moves into its next phase, the focus will shift from research to implementation:

- Employers will pilot strategies and provide feedback on tools and training.
- Action teams will lead regional efforts focused on hiring, retention, and business support.
- Public partners and funders will have clearer, data-driven ways to engage with industry needs.
- Resources will be refined and shared across the region to build consistency and scale.

This is no longer a grant-funded project with an end date. It is an industry-led, community-supported commitment to strengthening the coastal economy by investing in the people who power hospitality. We now have a clearer picture of the challenges and a stronger foundation for working together to solve them. With continued investment and shared leadership, the Oregon Coast can reimagine what hospitality means not just for visitors, but for those who call this place home.

Final Takeaways

This project revealed strong alignment between what workers need and what employers are willing and often eager to provide, particularly when support and guidance are available. Through a year of cross-regional listening, engagement, and analysis, several key takeaways emerged:

Turnover is solvable.

Workers identified specific and actionable needs, including stable hours and clear promotion pathways, which fall within employers' power to address, especially when supported with the right tools and peer learning.

Employers want help, not judgment.

Small business owners consistently cited limited time, staffing, and HR capacity as barriers rather than a lack of willingness. When offered culturally appropriate resources and tools, many responded with interest and optimism.

The workforce is changing.

From youth seeking their first jobs to older adults re-entering the labor force, coastal hospitality workers are diverse in age, background, and motivation. Employers need support adapting to this evolving talent pool.

Workforce systems are ready to engage.

This project laid the foundation for stronger collaboration between the hospitality sector and workforce development boards, tribal partners, CBOs, and economic development entities. The regional commitment to sustaining it together signal a long-term investment in shared solutions.

This is just the beginning. The research and recommendations in this report are not a final verdict; they are a foundation. The Coastal Hospitality Sector Partnership will continue to bring businesses, educators, and support organizations together to implement, test, and refine strategies that improve job quality and economic resilience along the Coast.

By combining local insight with national frameworks, and pairing community voice with coordinated action, the Oregon Coast now has both a blueprint and a structure to grow a stronger hospitality workforce for years to come.

Appendices

Appendix A: Research Process and Engagement Summary

Project Timeline
Start Date: January 2024
End Date: June 2025
Project Duration: 18 Months
Lead Organization: Oregon Coast Hospitality Industry Sector Partnership
Funding Source: Department of Labor Critical Jobs Sector Strategy Grant
Regional Partners: Northwest Oregon Works, Lane Workforce Partnership, Southwestern Oregon Workforce Investment Board, Collaborative Economic Development of Oregon, Oregon Coast Visitor's Association, Oregon Restaurant & Lodging Association, Oregon Hospitality Foundation

Engagement Activities
Activity Type Description Count
Employee Surveys Anonymous survey distributed to hospitality workers coastwide 100
Employer Surveys Distributed to owners, managers, and HR staff 68
Focus Groups Facilitated in partnership with regional orgs 6
Stakeholder Interviews One-on-one or small-group interviews with industry leaders 25+
Monthly Convenings Sector partnership meetings with employers & workforce partners 24+
Site Visits On-location visits to hospitality businesses 30+

Appendix B: Survey Questions
Employee Voices Survey (English Language)

| Views	Starts	Submissions	Valid Submissions	Average Time to Complete
413	184	94	91	14:35

Tell us who you are. First Name, phone number, email, company (specific answers to this question are purposely redacted from this report)

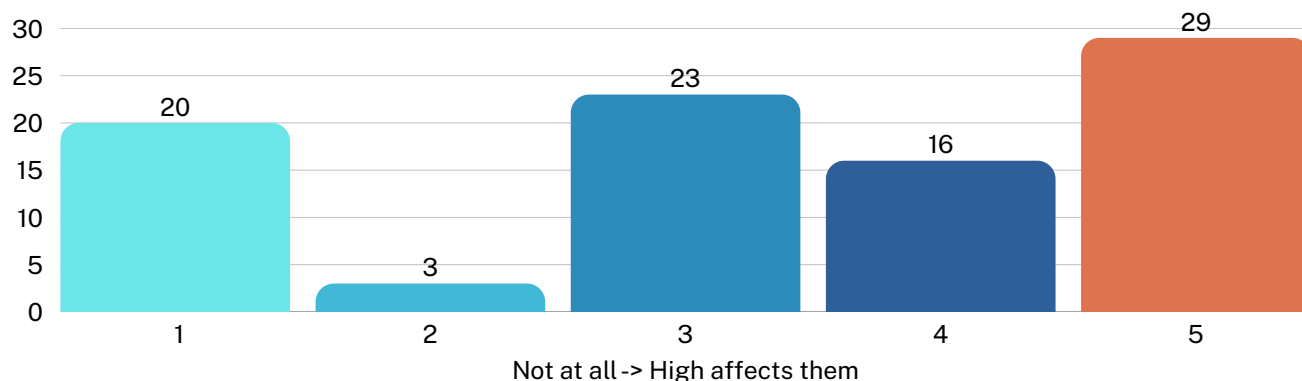| F&B	Lodging	Tourism	Other
32	42	11	6

What is your role within the company? (specific answers to this questions are purposely redacted from this report)

| First Job	Entry	Leadership	Unknown/Other
25	24	18	24

Rate the difficulty of finding jobs that fit your lifestyle

Rating	Count
1	9
2	13
3	24
4	29
5	16

Least Challenging -> Most Challenging
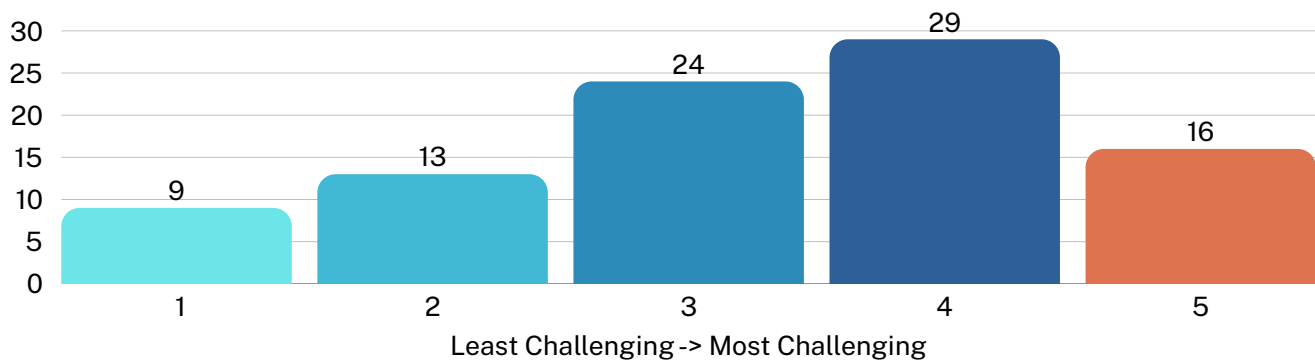
Does seasonal change affect your employment/hours?

Bar chart:
- 1: 20
- 2: 3
- 3: 23
- 4: 16
- 5: 29

Not at all -> High affects them

Which of the following do you believe most affect your experience finding employment on the Oregon Coast?

- Wage Rates: 36
- Lack of Housing: 32
- Competing Opportunities: 15
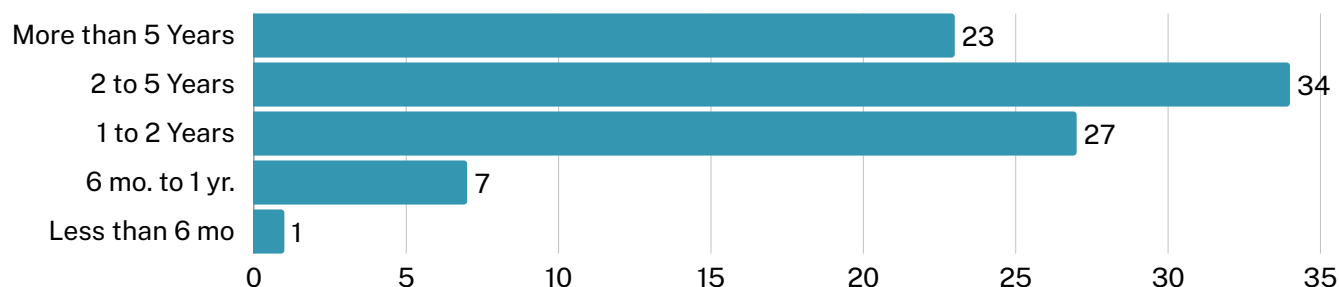- Lack of Training: 7
- Other: 2
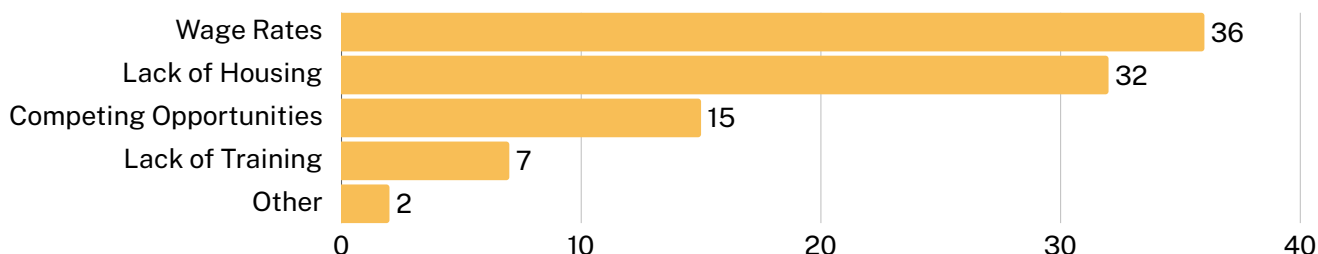
Other: Work is seasonal | Lack of quality applicants

In your experience, what have been positive or negative aspects of working in the hospitality industry?
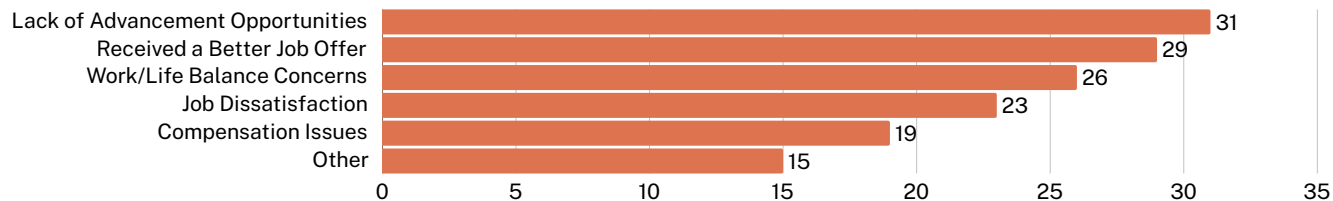
Respondents shared a wide range of experiences in the hospitality industry, highlighting both deeply rewarding and persistently challenging aspects. On the positive side, many appreciated the opportunity to meet diverse people, create memorable guest experiences, and work in dynamic, team-oriented environments. Flexibility in scheduling, creativity, personal growth, and the intrinsic satisfaction of service were also noted as benefits. However, common negative themes included low wages, lack of benefits, high stress—especially during peak seasons—seasonal employment instability, and dealing with rude or demanding customers. Several also pointed to physical demands, emotional labor, and limited advancement opportunities. Overall, the industry was seen as meaningful but often undervalued and unsustainable without structural improvements.

## On average, how long do you typically stay in a position before moving on to a new opportunity?

- More than 5 Years: 23
- 2 to 5 Years: 34
- 1 to 2 Years: 27
- 6 mo. to 1 yr.: 7
- Less than 6 mo: 1

What was the primary reason(s) you left a previous company?
Select all that apply

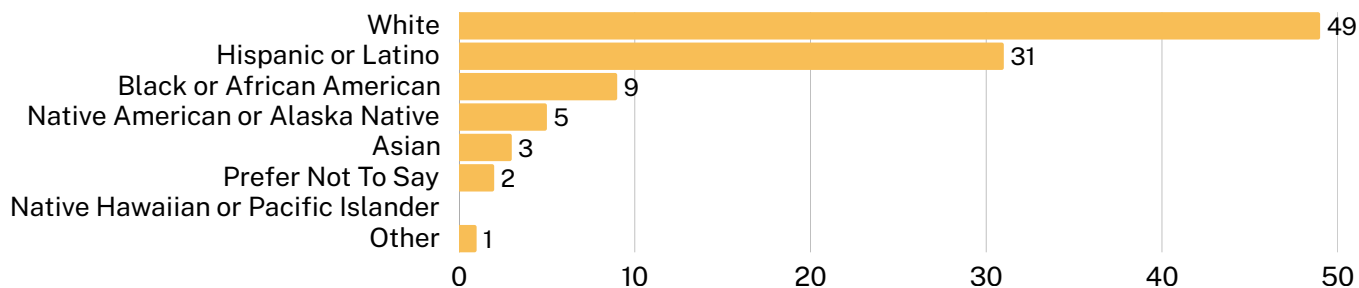| Reason	Value
Lack of Advancement Opportunities	31
Received a Better Job Offer	29
Work/Life Balance Concerns	26
Job Dissatisfaction	23
Compensation Issues	19
Other	15

Other: Moved closer to my family | Favoritism towards other employees | Relocation | Didn't like working for a big corporation | Maternity leave & didn't get called back | Moved | Moved | Moved away | Husband got job offer (moved) | This is my first job & I still work here | Career progression desires | Not enough work | Moved | Fired despite experience | My previous company was in Portland, before, during, and after the pandemic. It became unsafe and higher management had unrealistic expectations of what one person should be able to do.

What general age group applies to you?

Age Group	Value
65+	
55-64	5
45-54	10
35-44	21
25-34	34
18-24	20
Under 18	1
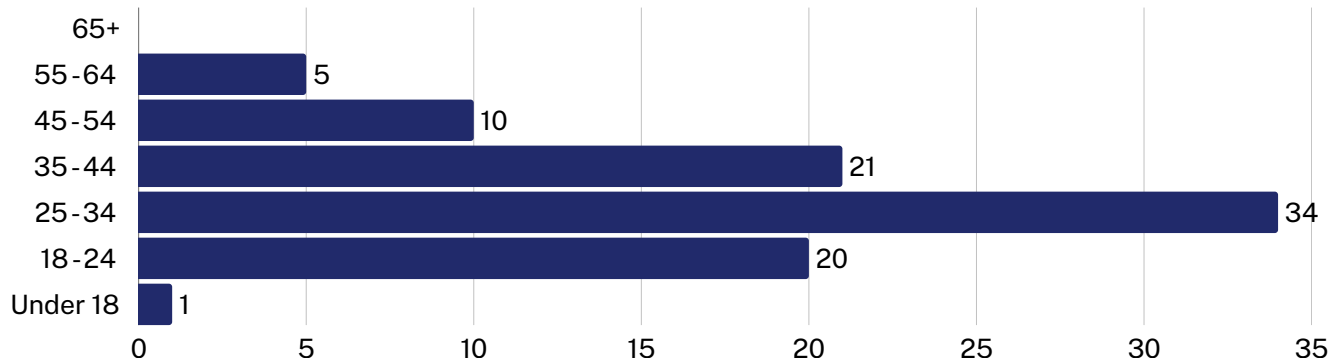
Please select the option that you feel best represents your race or cultural background
Select all that apply

Category	Value
White	49
Hispanic or Latino	31
Black or African American	9
Native American or Alaska Native	5
Asian	3
Prefer Not To Say	2
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	
Other	1

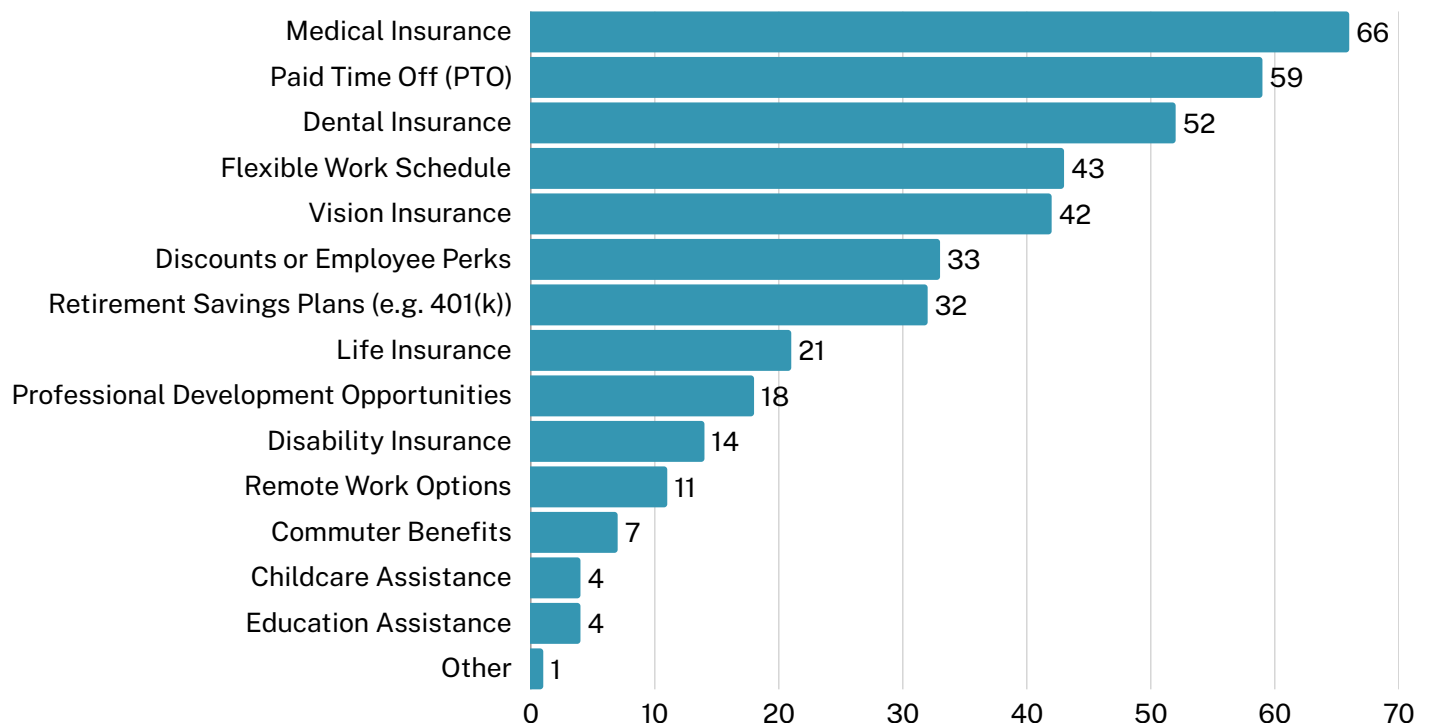## Do you feel that your workplace reflects the diversity of your community?

Yes - 76.1%   No - 23.9%

Please indicate the benefits your employer offers, regardless of whether you personally use them.

Select all that apply

Benefit	Value
Medical Insurance	66
Paid Time Off (PTO)	59
Dental Insurance	52
Flexible Work Schedule	43
Vision Insurance	42
Discounts or Employee Perks	33
Retirement Savings Plans (e.g. 401(k))	32
Life Insurance	21
Professional Development Opportunities	18
Disability Insurance	14
Remote Work Options	11
Commuter Benefits	7
Childcare Assistance	4
Education Assistance	4
Other	1

What benefits are you looking for in an employer?

Respondents most commonly cited health-related benefits — including medical, dental, vision, and mental health coverage — as top priorities, followed closely by competitive wages, flexible scheduling, paid time off, and retirement plans such as 401(k)s. Many also expressed interest in job security, career advancement, training opportunities, and a positive work environment. A few noted the importance of employee appreciation, accommodation or housing support, and stability over perks. While some downplayed traditional benefits in favor of meaningful work or work-life balance, the majority emphasized a need for compensation and benefits packages that support both financial and personal well-being.
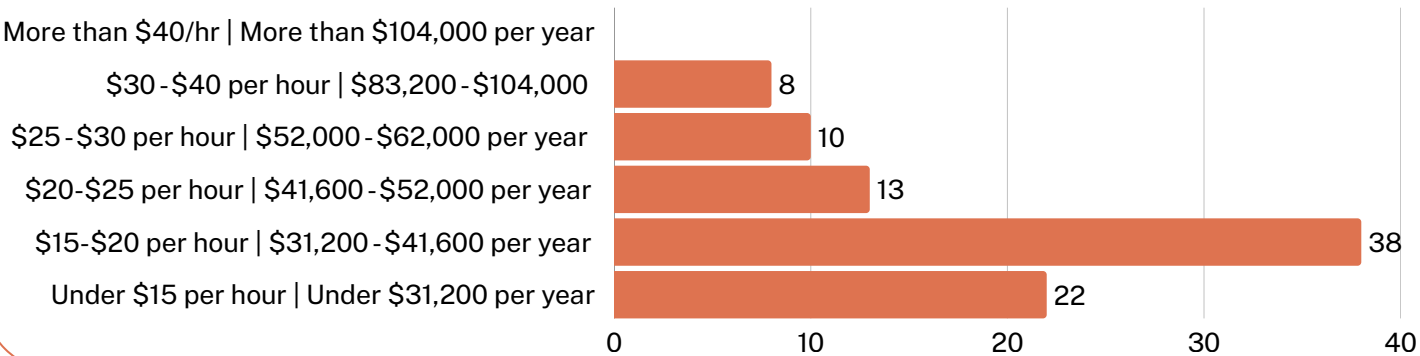
What benefits do other industries have that are not currently offered to you that would support you or your family?

Respondents highlighted a range of benefits offered in other industries that they feel are lacking in their current roles. The most frequently mentioned include comprehensive health coverage (medical, dental, vision), retirement plans such as 401(k)s, and paid time off, including vacation and holidays. Many also pointed to needs like childcare support, educational assistance for employees and their families, higher or more stable wages, and housing or accommodation support. Some emphasized structural benefits — such as more reliable scheduling, sick leave, and opportunities to work remotely or advance within the company. While a few respondents indicated satisfaction with their current benefits, others expressed uncertainty or lack of awareness about what might be available elsewhere.
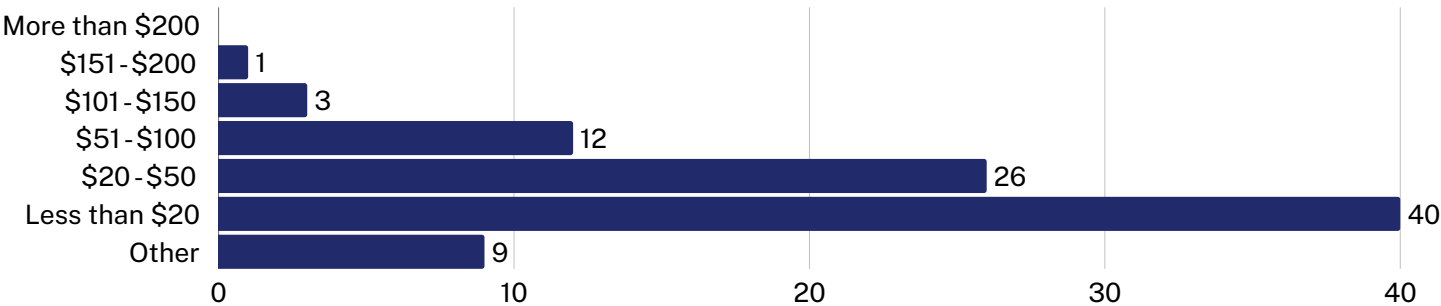
Do you feel that your current benefits support your and your family's needs?

Yes = 64.3%   No = 35.7%

What is your average wage?
Do not include income from tips

Wage	Count
More than $40/hr | More than $104,000 per year	
$30 - $40 per hour | $83,200 - $104,000	8
$25 - $30 per hour | $52,000 - $62,000 per year	10
$20-$25 per hour | $41,600 - $52,000 per year	13
$15-$20 per hour | $31,200 - $41,600 per year	38
Under $15 per hour | Under $31,200 per year	22

What is your estimated average income from tips alone PER SHIFT?

| Tips per shift	Count
More than $200	
$151 - $200	1
$101 - $150	3
$51 - $100	12
$20 - $50	26
Less than $20	40
Other	9

Other: I am not a tip-based employee | I don't receive tips, my income is $80,000 | NA | None | No tips | No tips | 0 | $0 | 0

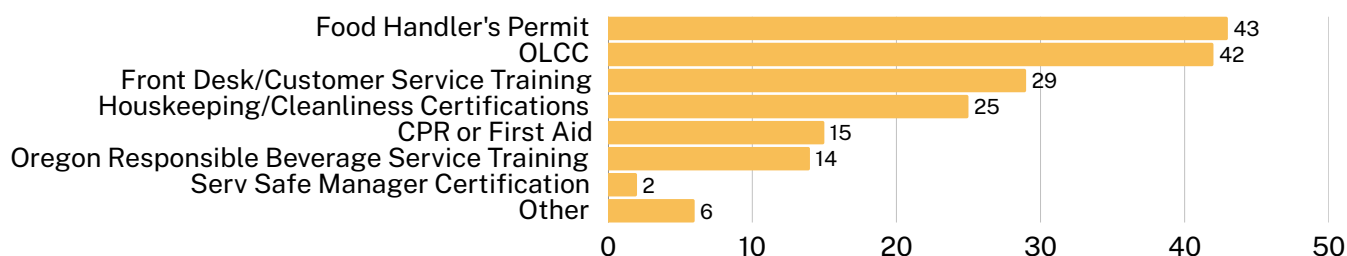## Do you feel that your current wages support your family's needs?

Yes - 43.7%   No - 56.3%

How competitive do you perceive your current wage compared to other local employers?

15 | 14 | 27 | 22 | 13

1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5

Not competitive -> Extremely competitive
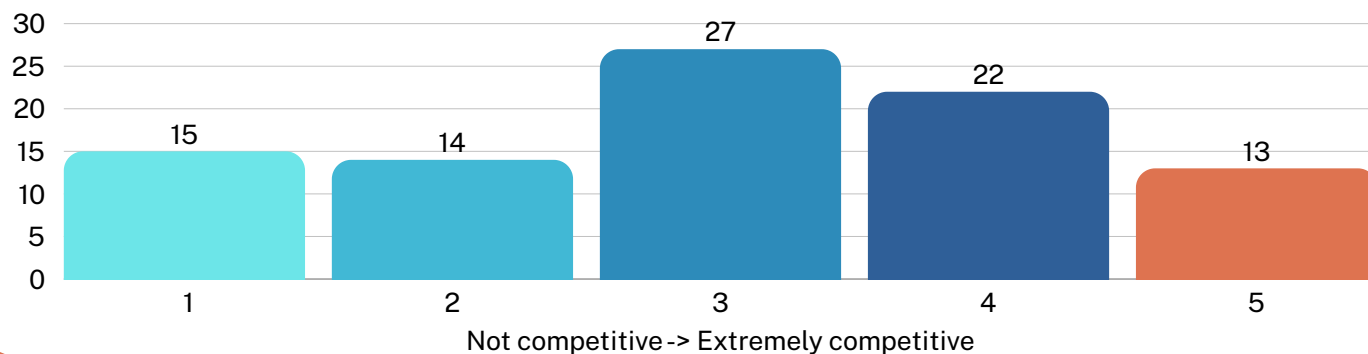
Other: Not in Operations anymore, but have done many of these when I was | Accounting | Nothing | None | None | None

## Which certifications or training programs are you required to complete?

Select all the apply

Food Handler's Permit — 43
OLCC — 42
Front Desk/Customer Service Training — 29
Houskeeping/Cleanliness Certifications — 25
CPR or First Aid — 15
Oregon Responsible Beverage Service Training — 14
Serv Safe Manager Certification — 2
Other — 6

0 10 20 30 40 50

Would access to additional training resources significantly contribute to your career growth?

6 | 7 | 33 | 17 | 24

1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5

Not at all -> Yes, significantly
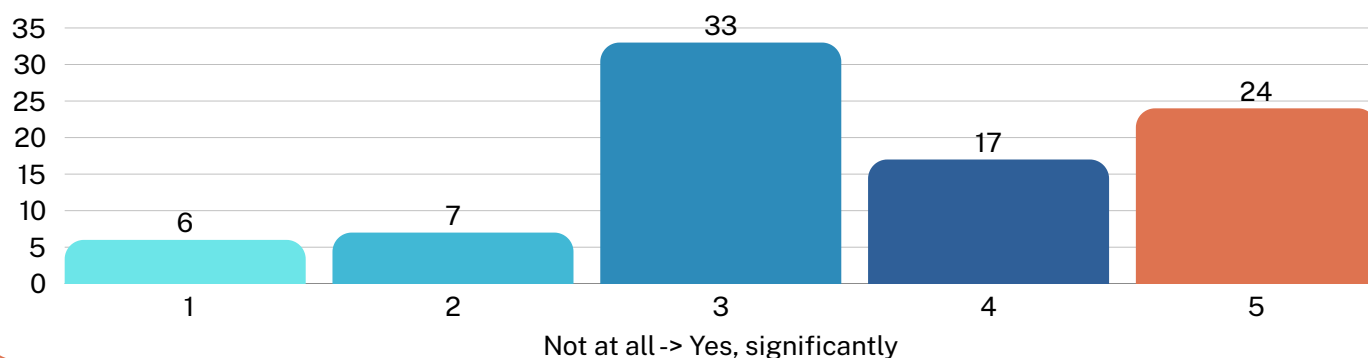
If you wanted to have skill building or credential training, would you be able to pay for it out of pocket?

No — 44
Yes — 21
Unsure — 21

0 10 20 30 40 50
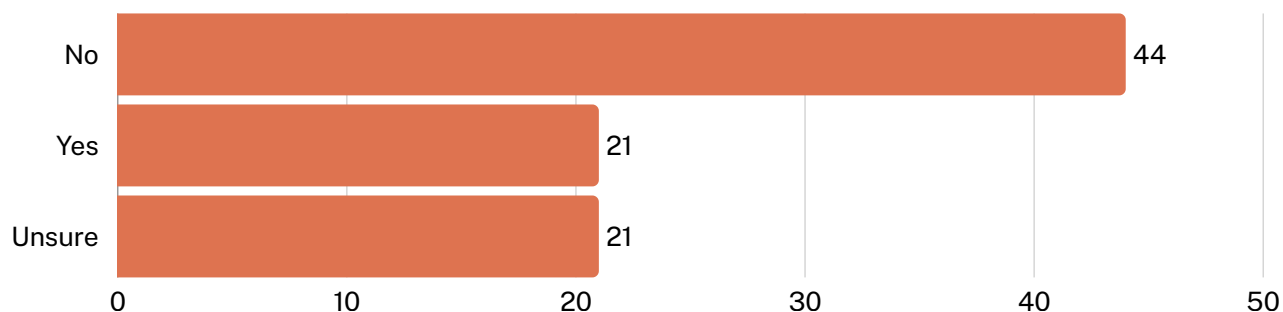
Does your employer provide opportunities for training and promotion for current employees?

No	47
Yes	44

(Bar chart: No = 47, Yes = 44; x-axis 0 to 50)
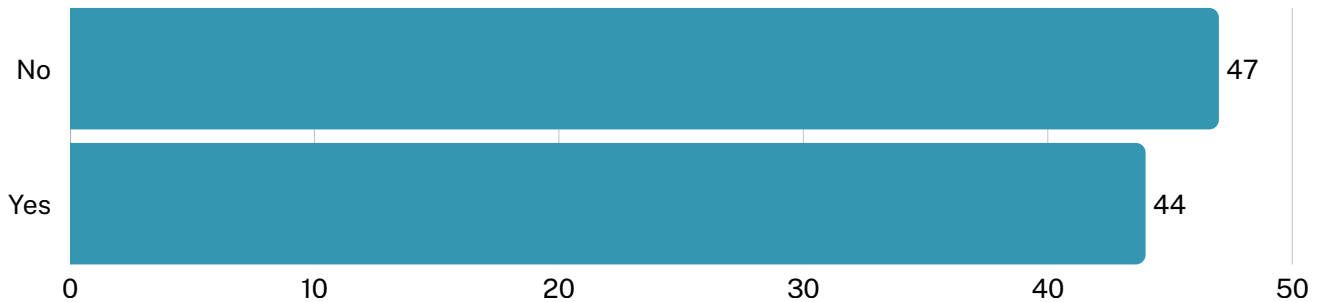
What factors, in your opinion, impede the promotion of current employees?

Respondents identified several key barriers to promoting current employees, with the most frequently cited being a lack of training resources and employee interest. Wage disparity also emerged as a significant issue, suggesting that pay gaps may demotivate employees from seeking advancement or disincentivize employers from investing in internal promotions. Many noted a shortage of available positions or advancement pathways, especially in roles with limited vertical mobility. Other impediments included competition from qualified external candidates, lack of professional certification support, language barriers, and perceived favoritism or inadequate succession planning. Overall, the responses point to both structural and cultural challenges in developing and advancing internal talent.

What are some ways your company supports career growth/promotion of current employees?

Respondents described a range of ways employers support employee promotion, with the most common being access to training and professional development opportunities. These include workshops, online courses, certifications, conferences, and cross-training between departments. Several mentioned internal job postings, job shadowing, and structured programs like mentorship or succession planning as pathways to advancement. Recognition and rewards — such as employee of the month or performance-based incentives — were also noted, along with the importance of fair pay, benefits, and work-life balance. While many acknowledged supportive efforts, others expressed uncertainty or reported minimal support, suggesting uneven access to promotion pathways across workplaces.

Do you know your company's core values and/or guiding principles? What are they?

Responses to the question about company guiding principles were mixed. Many employees demonstrated clear awareness of their organization's values, frequently citing principles such as integrity, customer satisfaction, respect, teamwork, sustainability, and community involvement. Some referred to formal value sets — like Vesta's or Local Ocean's — or specific cultural commitments such as inclusiveness, innovation, and service excellence. Others referenced informal but strongly held norms like "treat everyone like gold" or "no gossiping, positive attitude." However, a significant portion of respondents either did not know, were unsure, or stated their company had no guiding principles, suggesting that while some workplaces clearly communicate their values, others may struggle with visibility or consistency in messaging.

How much do you feel the core values and guiding principles shape the culture of your organization?

Bar chart (scale: No influence -> Highly influential):
- 1: 7
- 2: 5
- 3: 19
- 4: 29
- 5: 29
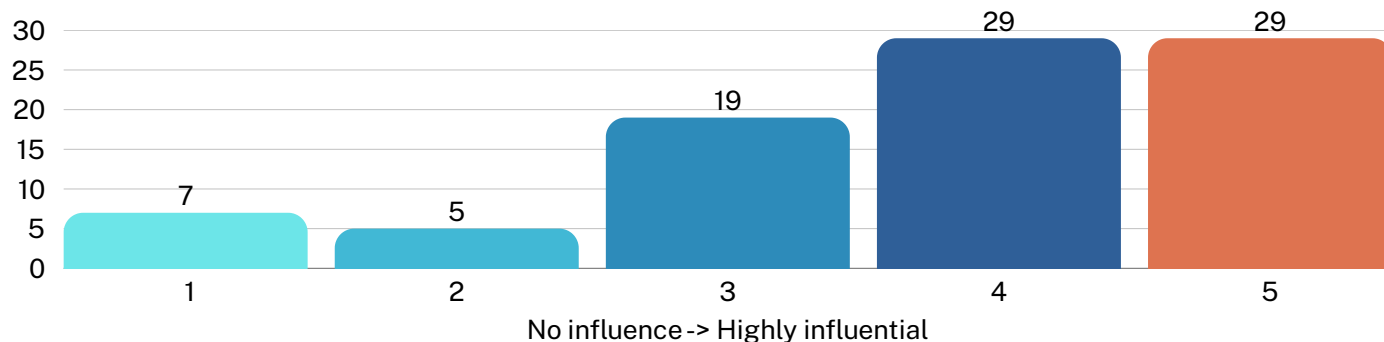
Do you feel your job is secure?

Yes = 70.4%   No = 29.6%

Do you feel safe and supported in the workplace

Yes = 84.5%   No = 15.5%

Do you have an ability to provide input in the operations or management of your workplace?

Yes = 73.2%   No = 26.8%

How do you think your manager(s) influence company culture and the overall employee experience?

Respondents overwhelmingly agreed that managers have a significant influence on company culture and the employee experience — either positively or negatively. Many cited leadership by example, open communication, approachability, and support as key behaviors that shape a healthy, motivating environment. Effective managers were described as enthusiastic, respectful, and willing to collaborate or step in when needed, helping employees feel valued and engaged. On the other hand, some noted that poor communication, unilateral decision-making, and lack of responsiveness to concerns can create confusion, frustration, or feelings of exclusion. Overall, the responses affirm that managers play a pivotal role in setting the tone, reinforcing values, and either fostering or undermining a culture of respect, trust, and growth.

Employee Voices Survey (Spanish Language)

| Views	Starts	Submissions	Valid Submissions	Average Time to Complete
66	19	10	10	21:41

Por favor, díganos quién es usted. (specific answers to this question are purposely redacted from this report)

| F&B	Lodging	Tourism	Other
4	4	2	0

¿Cuál es su rol dentro de la empresa? (specific answers to this questions are purposely redacted from this report)
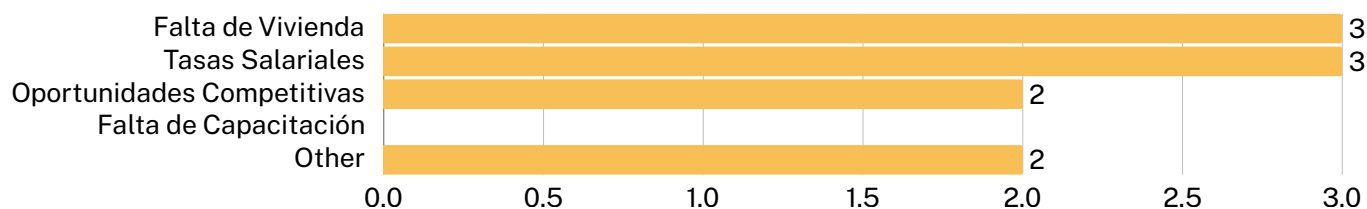
First Job	Entry	Leadership	Unknown/Other
1	8	1	0

Califique la dificultad de encontrar trabajos que se ajusten a su estilo de vida.

Least Challenging -> Most Challenging
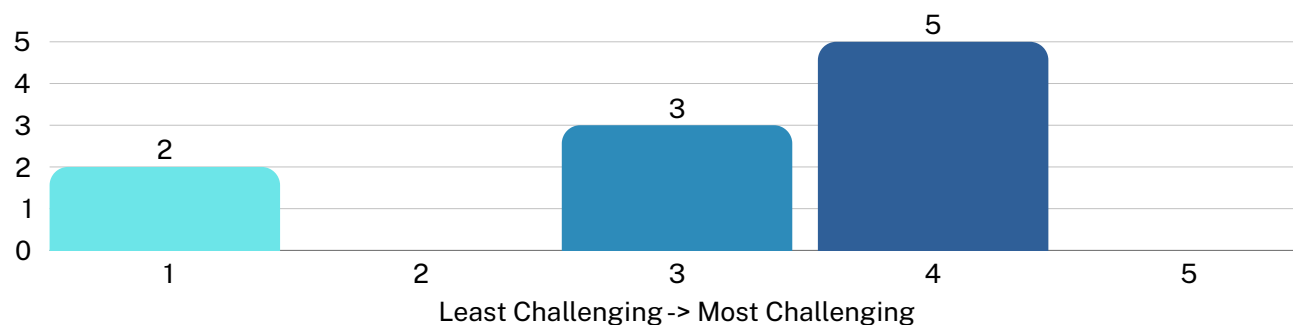
¿Afecta el cambio de temporada su empleo/horas de trabajo?

Not at all -> High affects them
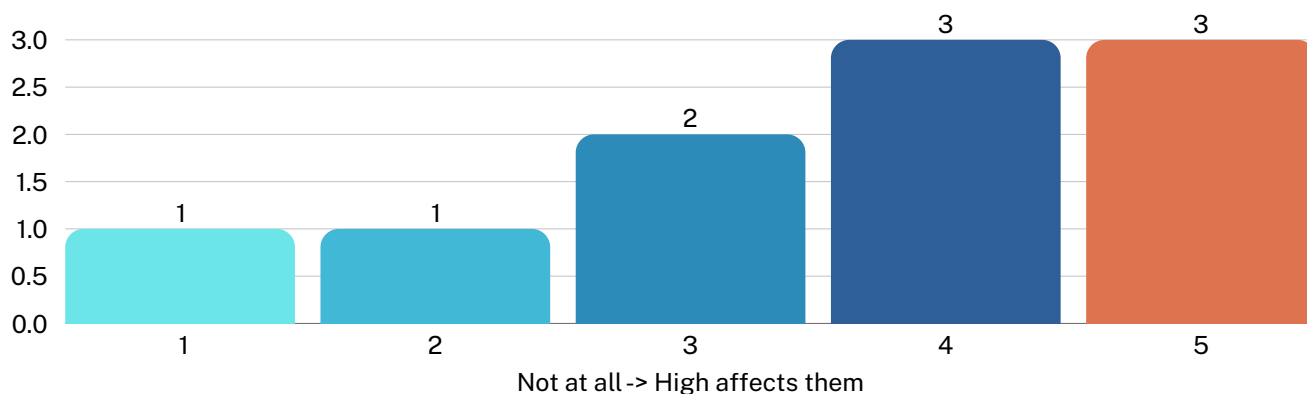
¿Cuál de los siguientes factores cree que más afecta su experiencia para encontrar empleo en la costa de Oregón?
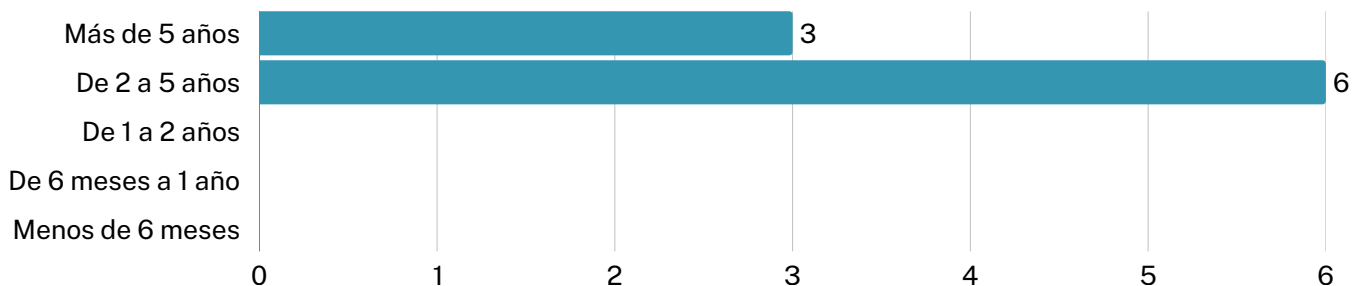

Other: School Schedule | Ingles

En su experiencia, ¿cuáles han sido los aspectos positivos o negativos de trabajar en la industria hotelera?
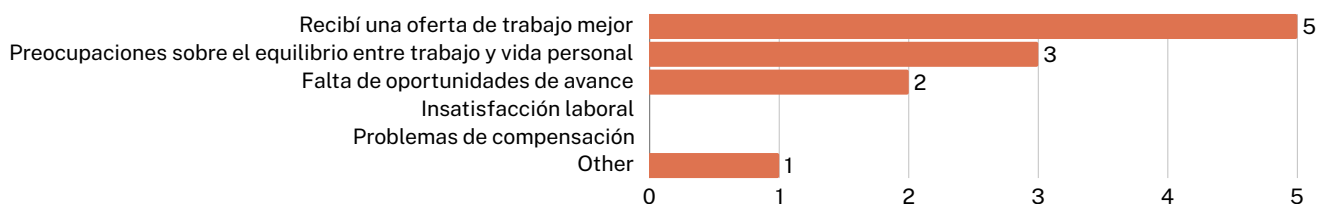
Respondents described both positive and negative aspects of working on the coast. On the positive side, they appreciated flexible schedules, steady employment during the busy season, good wages, bonus programs, and a positive work environment. Negatively, many emphasized the reduction in hours during the winter season, which creates financial stress as bills continue regardless of work availability. Additional challenges included lack of public transportation, inconsistent weekly hours, and feeling undervalued in roles like housekeeping.

En promedio, ¿cuánto tiempo suele permanecer en un puesto antes de pasar a una nueva oportunidad?
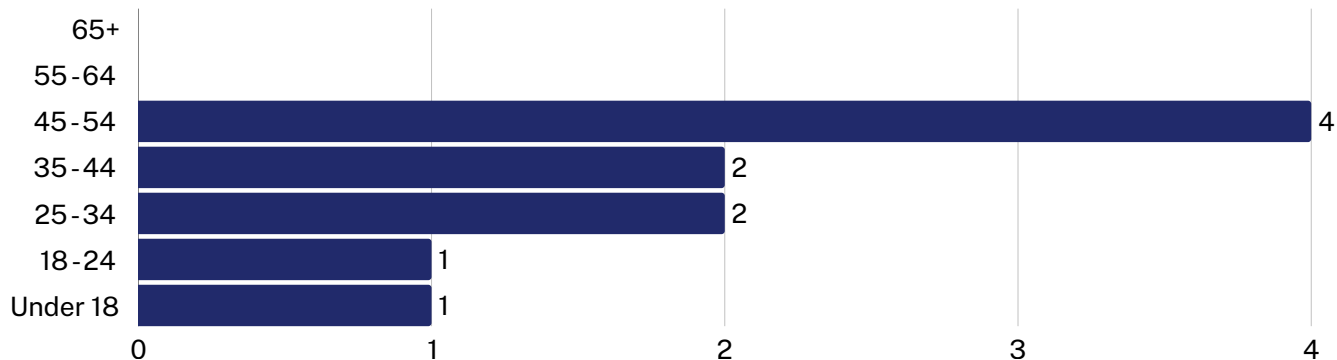
Categoría	Valor
Más de 5 años	3
De 2 a 5 años	6
De 1 a 2 años	
De 6 meses a 1 año	
Menos de 6 meses	

¿Cuál fue la razón principal por la(s) que dejó una empresa anterior?
Select all that apply

Categoría	Valor
Recibí una oferta de trabajo mejor	5
Preocupaciones sobre el equilibrio entre trabajo y vida personal	3
Falta de oportunidades de avance	2
Insatisfacción laboral	
Problemas de compensación	
Other	1

Other: Me inscribí en el colegio.

¿A qué grupo de edad pertenece usted?

Grupo de edad	Valor
65+	
55-64	
45-54	4
35-44	2
25-34	2
18-24	1
Under 18	1

Por favor, seleccione la opción que mejor representa su raza o origen cultural.
Select all that apply

Categoría	Valor
Blanco	1
Hispano o latino	8
Negro o afroamericano	
Nativo americano o nativo de Alaska	
Asiático	
Prefiero no decir	1
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	
Other	
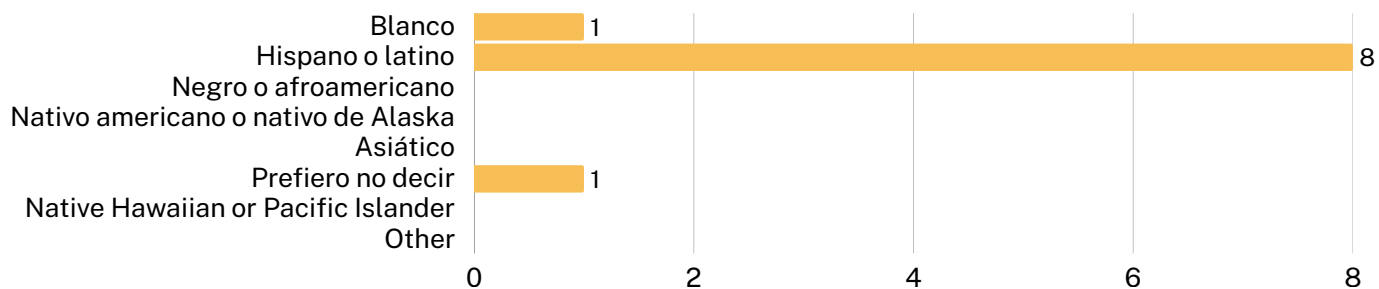
¿Siente que su lugar de trabajo refleja la diversidad de su comunidad?
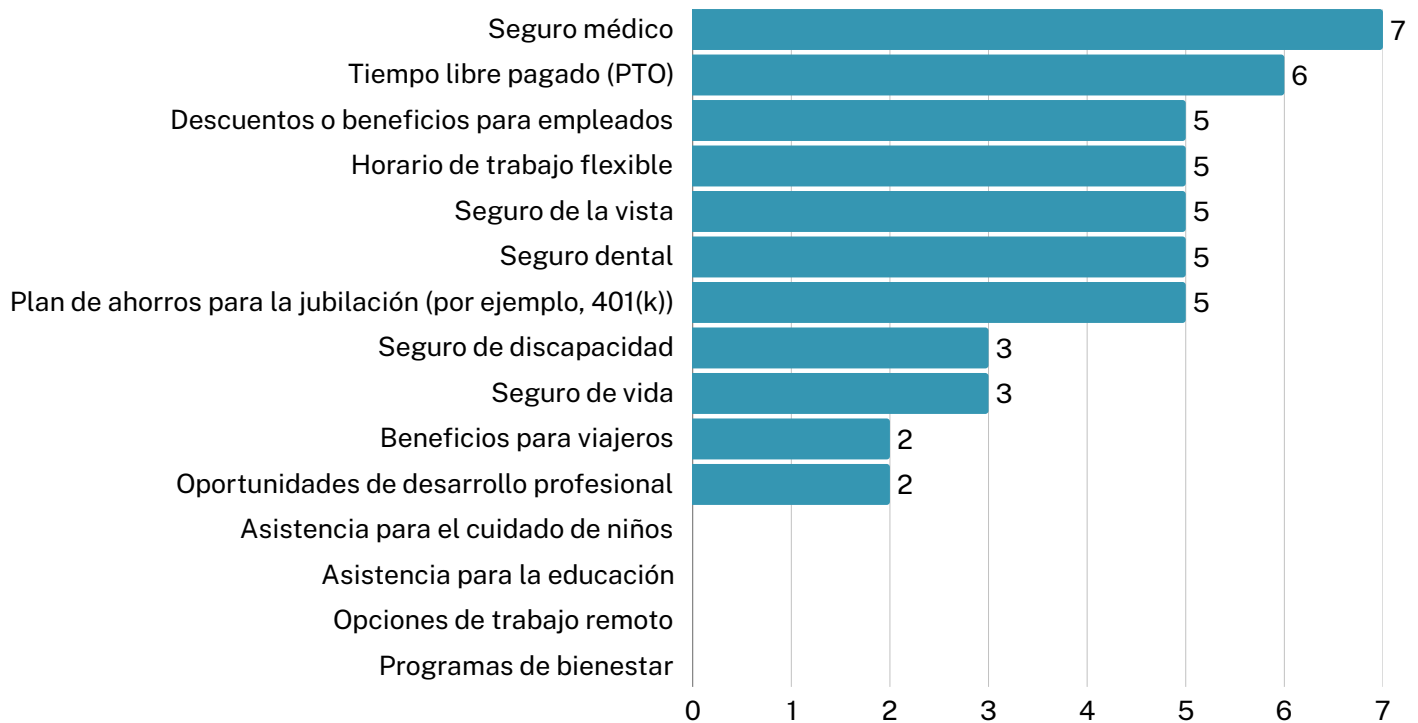
Si - 87.5%   No - 12.5%

Indique los beneficios que ofrece su empleador, independientemente de si los utiliza personalmente:
Select all that apply

Beneficio	Valor
Seguro médico	7
Tiempo libre pagado (PTO)	6
Descuentos o beneficios para empleados	5
Horario de trabajo flexible	5
Seguro de la vista	5
Seguro dental	5
Plan de ahorros para la jubilación (por ejemplo, 401(k))	5
Seguro de discapacidad	3
Seguro de vida	3
Beneficios para viajeros	2
Oportunidades de desarrollo profesional	2
Asistencia para el cuidado de niños	
Asistencia para la educación	
Opciones de trabajo remoto	
Programas de bienestar	

¿Qué beneficios buscas en un empleador?

When asked what benefits they look for in an employer, respondents emphasized the importance of good wages, respectful and non-discriminatory treatment, flexible schedules, health insurance, retirement plans, bonuses, educational assistance, and fair workplace practices. Several also highlighted the value of being heard and treated without favoritism.

¿Qué beneficios tienen otras industrias que no se le ofrecen actualmente y que lo apoyarían a usted o a su familia?

When asked what benefits other industries have that they wish they had, respondents mentioned paid vacation and sick leave, childcare support, financial assistance for education, better health insurance, and the ability to earn tips. One respondent said they were unsure.

¿Cree que sus beneficios actuales satisfacen sus necesidades y las de su familia?
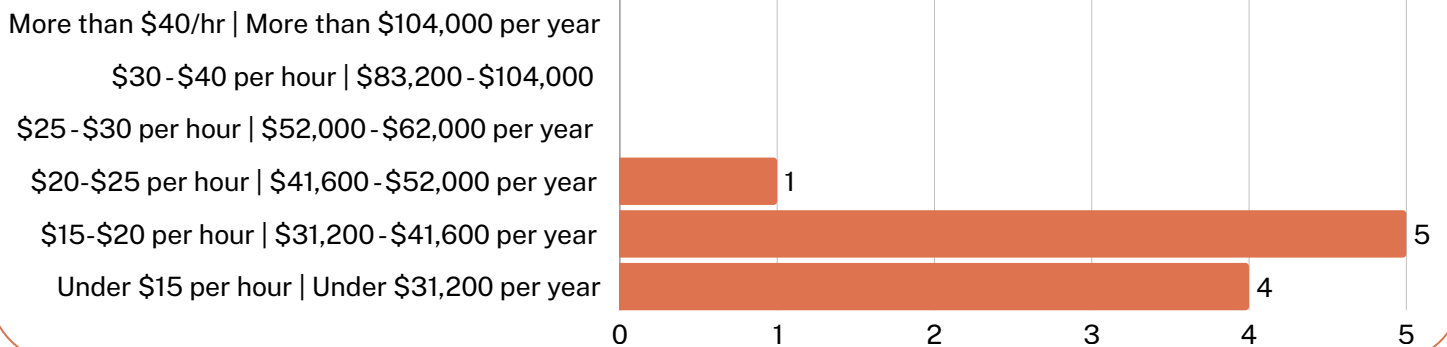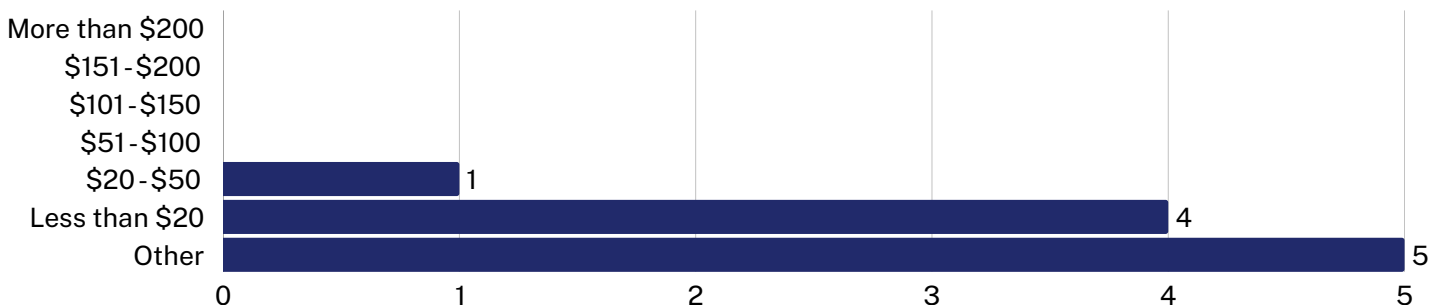
Si= 75%   No = 25%

¿Cuál es su salario promedio?
Do not include income from tips

More than $40/hr | More than $104,000 per year	
$30 - $40 per hour | $83,200 - $104,000	
$25 - $30 per hour | $52,000 - $62,000 per year	
$20-$25 per hour | $41,600 - $52,000 per year	1
$15-$20 per hour | $31,200 - $41,600 per year	5
Under $15 per hour | Under $31,200 per year	4

0 1 2 3 4 5

¿Cuál es su ingreso promedio estimado de PROPINAS SOLO POR TURNO?

|	
More than $200	
$151 - $200	
$101 - $150	
$51 - $100	
$20 - $50	1
Less than $20	4
Other	5

0 1 2 3 4 5

Other: Hay días que no dejan nada. | Trabajo en recepción, no recibo propinas | Varea

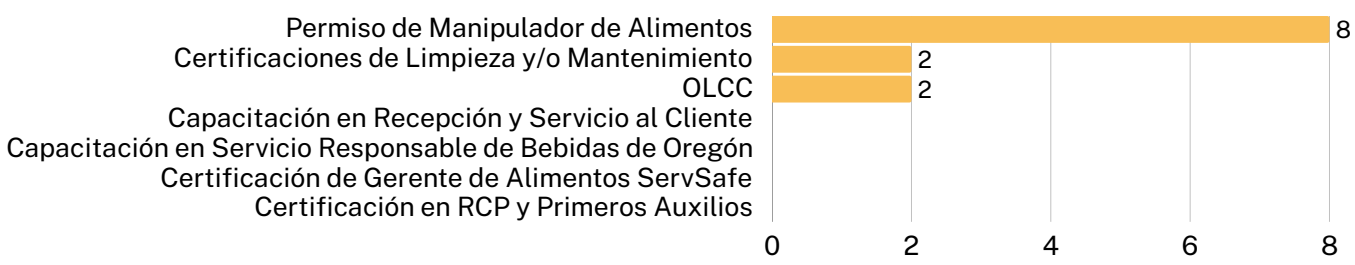## ¿Siente que su salario actual satisface sus necesidades y las de su familia?

Yes - 25%   No - 75%

## ¿Cómo percibe la competitividad de su salario actual en comparación con otros empleadores locales?

Not competitive -> Extremely competitive
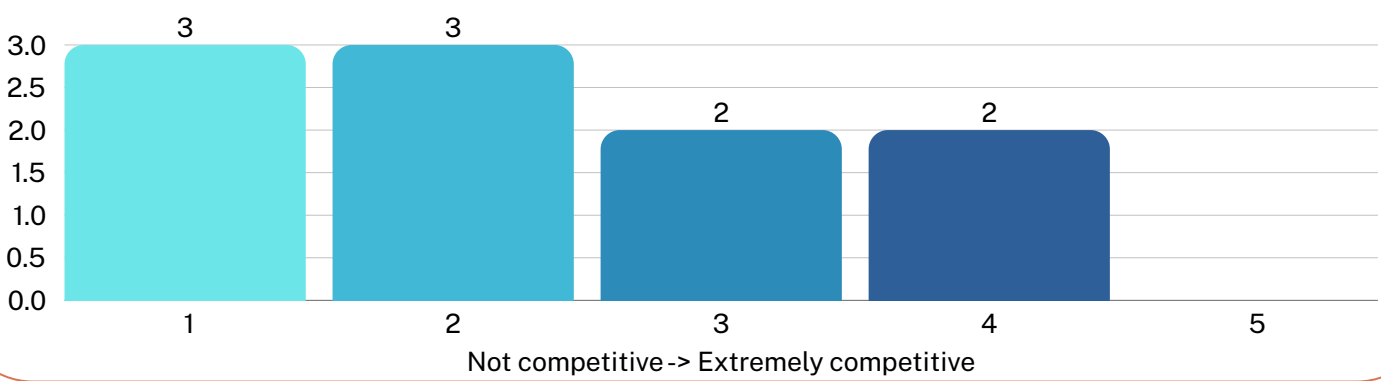
¿Qué certificaciones o programas de formación está obligado a completar?

Select all the apply

Permiso de Manipulador de Alimentos — 8
Certificaciones de Limpieza y/o Mantenimiento — 2
OLCC — 2
Capacitación en Recepción y Servicio al Cliente
Capacitación en Servicio Responsable de Bebidas de Oregón
Certificación de Gerente de Alimentos ServSafe
Certificación en RCP y Primeros Auxilios
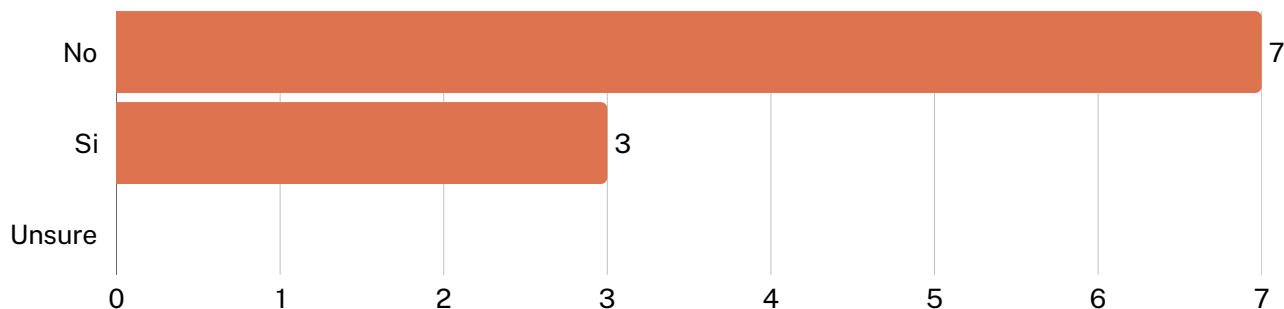
## ¿El acceso a recursos de formación adicionales contribuiría significativamente a su crecimiento profesional?

Not at all -> Yes, significantly
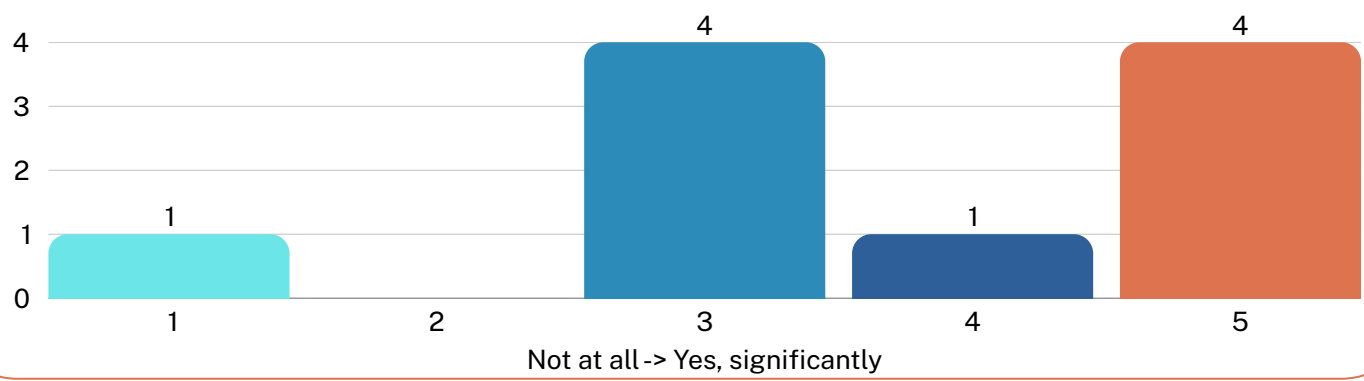
Si quisiera recibir formación para desarrollar habilidades o obtener credenciales, ¿podría pagarlo de su propio bolsillo?

No	7
Si	3
Unsure	

(escala 0 a 7)

¿Su empleador ofrece oportunidades de capacitación y ascenso para los empleados actuales?

No	5
Yes	5

(escala 0 a 5)
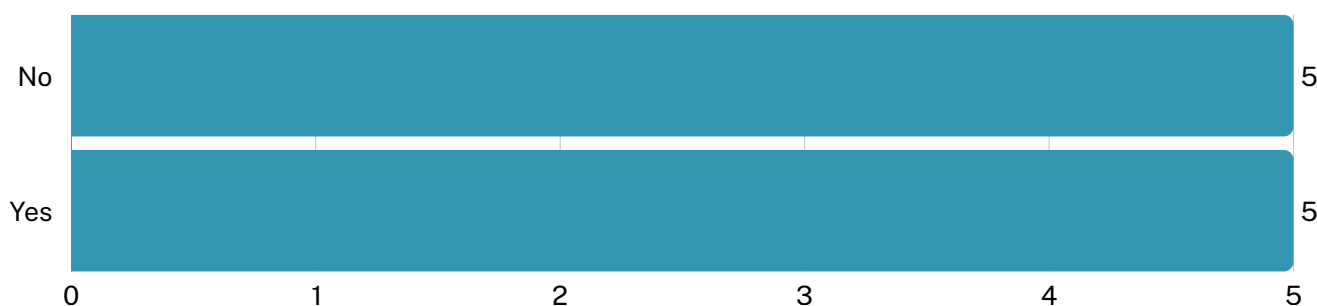
En su opinión, ¿qué factores obstaculizan la promoción de los empleados actuales?

When asked what factors impede the promotion of current employees, respondents cited several barriers including racism from some managers, being employed only part-time, lack of English fluency, and a general lack of interest or long-term commitment from employees—many of whom are seen as seeking only temporary work. Low wages were also mentioned as a limiting factor.

¿De qué maneras apoya su empresa el crecimiento profesional y la promoción de los empleados actuales?

When asked how their company supports professional growth and promotion, respondents shared mixed experiences. Some said their company provides opportunities for advancement, encourages employees to pursue their goals, and offers training to improve customer service—including reimbursing courses paid by the employer. Others noted support through general encouragement or by teaching coworkers. However, several respondents stated clearly that there is no support at all for professional growth or promotion in their workplace.

¿Conoce los valores fundamentales y/o principios rectores de su empresa? ¿Cuáles son?

When asked if they know their employer's values, responses were mixed. Several respondents said they do not know or are not aware of any stated values. Others identified general principles such as honesty, kindness, respect, non-discrimination, anti-harassment, teamwork, and cleanliness. A few mentioned policies like open-door communication and a focus on workplace safety, suggesting that while some values may be communicated informally, they are not consistently understood or emphasized across all workplaces.

¿En qué medida siente que los valores fundamentales y los principios rectores moldean la cultura de su organización?

No influence -> Highly influential
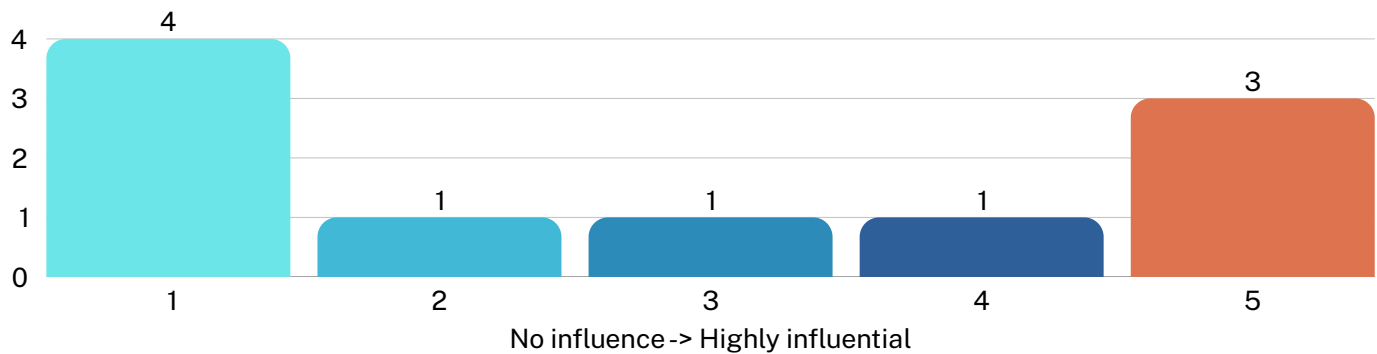
¿Siente que su trabajo está seguro?

Yes = 75%   No = 25%

¿Se siente seguro/a y respaldado/a en el lugar de trabajo?

Yes = 75%   No = 25%

¿Tiene la capacidad de brindar aportes en las operaciones o la gestión de su lugar de trabajo?

Yes = 75% | No = 25%

¿Cómo cree que sus gerentes influyen en la cultura de la empresa y en la experiencia general de los empleados?

When asked how managers influence company culture and the overall employee experience, respondents generally highlighted the importance of support, clear communication, and listening. Some shared that their managers make the workplace more comfortable and offer guidance to help improve performance. One respondent noted that there is no real company culture, while others described the influence as "regular" or simply "fine," suggesting a range of experiences from engaged leadership to more neutral or limited impact.

Owner/Operator Survey

Views	Starts	Submissions	Valid Submissions	Average Time to Complete
579	220	68	60	18:56

Tell us who you are. First Name, phone number, email, company (specific answers to this question are purposely redacted from this report, and because some respondents own or operate businesses spanning multiple sub-sectors, they are represented in more than one column. As a result, the total number of businesses reflected in the table exceeds the total number of unique survey responses)

F&B	Lodging	Tourism	Other
12	31	20	5

What is your role within the company? (specific answers to this questions are purposely redacted from this report)

Owner/Executive roles include titles such as "Owner," "CEO," "Managing Partner," and "President" — individuals who hold equity or top-level decision-making authority within their organizations. Operations Manager roles include mid- to senior-level operational leaders such as "General Manager" or "Senior Director of Operations." Support/Admin roles represent administrative or back-office functions, including titles like "HR Director." Other includes less common or ambiguous titles such as "Sales" or "Student Coordinator".

| Owner/Executive	Operations Manager	Support/Admin	Other
31	17	3	5

Rate the challenge of filling entry level positions in your organization

Least Challenging -> Most Challenging
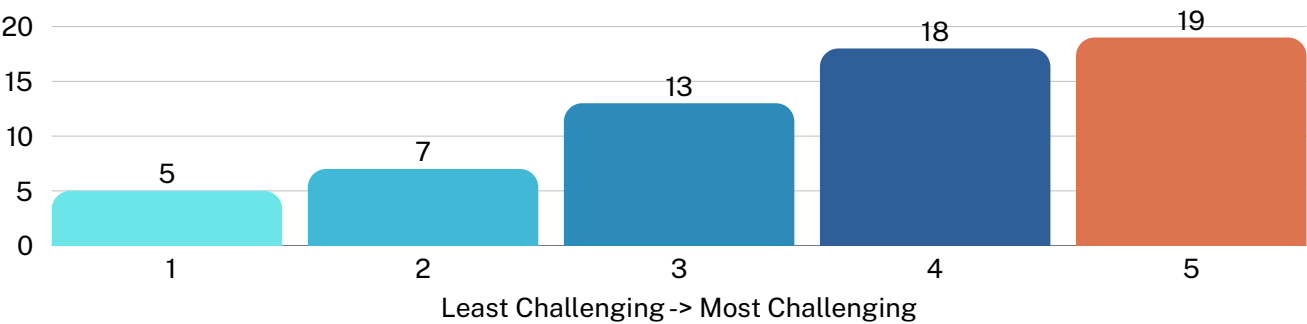
Rate the challenge of filling mid level/management positions in your organization

Least Challenging -> Most Challenging
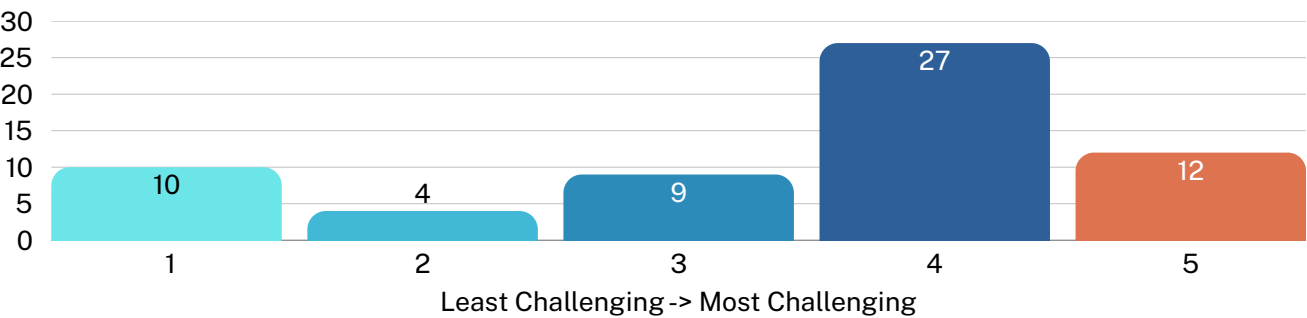
Rate the challenge of filling high level/executive positions in your organization

Least Challenging -> Most Challenging
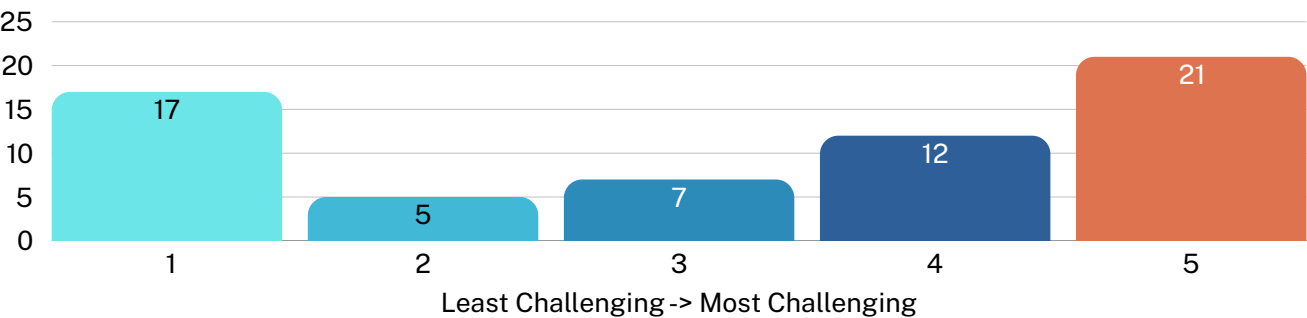
Does seasonal change affect your overall hiring and employment needs?

Not at all -> High affects them

Bar chart values:
- 1: 6
- 2: 6
- 3: 5
- 4: 16
- 5: 29
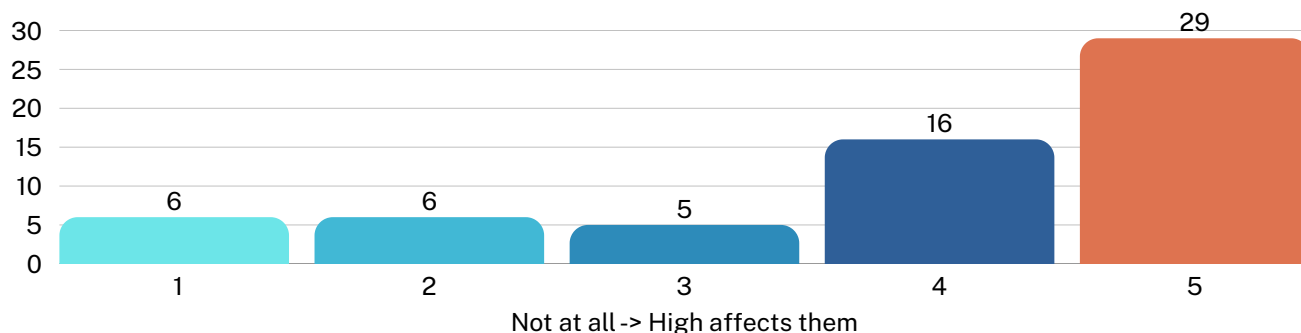
Which of the following do you believe most affect the available workforce during your peak season?

- Wage Rates: 21
- Lack of Housing: 41
- Competing Opportunities: 20
- Lack of Training: 9
- Other: 4
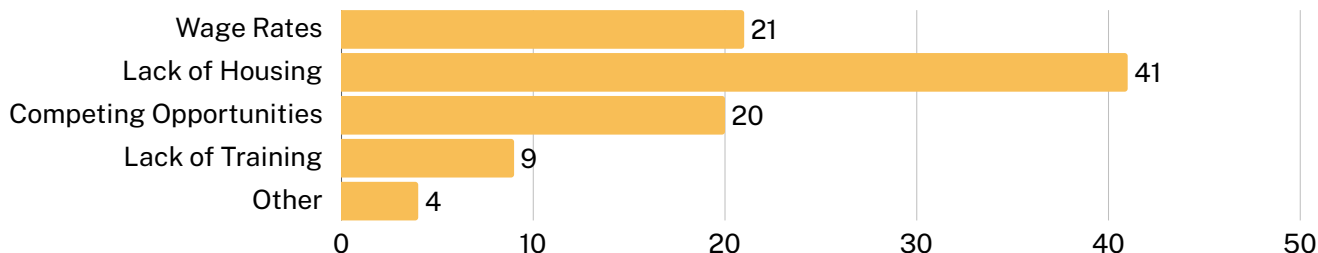
Other: A little out of the way | Seasonal Hours | People not interested in working| Lack of qualified applicants & housing

In your experience, what have been positive or negative impacts on the coastal workforce?
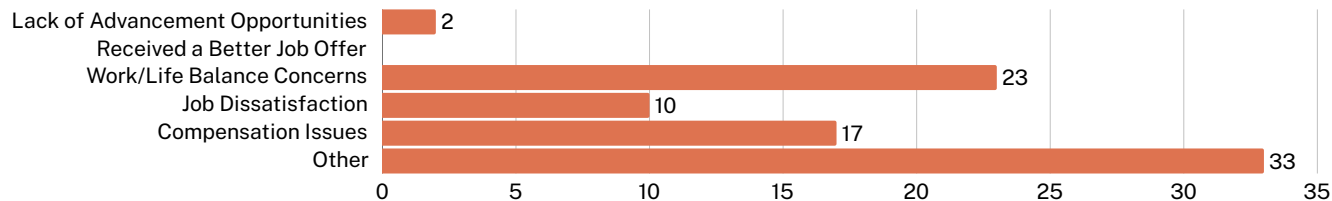
Respondents overwhelmingly identified the lack of affordable housing as the most critical barrier facing the coastal workforce, noting that it prevents recruitment, leads to high turnover, and forces some employees into unstable living conditions such as vehicles or overcrowded arrangements. Seasonality was also cited as a major challenge, with many employers unable to offer consistent year-round hours, especially in tourism-dependent sectors. Additional concerns included substance use, mental health issues, a limited applicant pool, and gaps in basic workplace readiness. Despite these challenges, some respondents pointed to positive impacts, including strong employee retention when housing is stable, successful local recruitment through word of mouth, and the economic benefits of tourism and cultural preservation in coastal communities.

On average, how long do employees typically stay with your company before moving on to a new opportunity?

- More than 5 Years: 13
- 2 to 5 Years: 23
- 1 to 2 Years: 21
- 6 mo. to 1 yr.: 10
- Less than 6 mo: 8
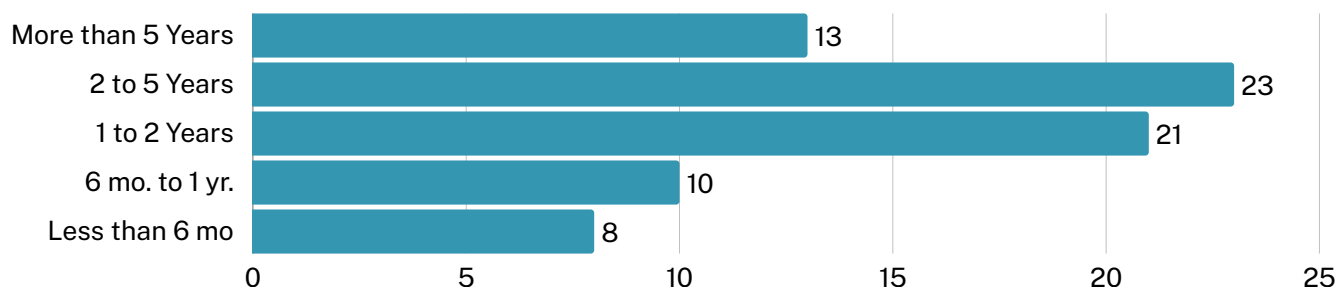
For those who have left your company in the past, could you briefly describe the primary reasons for their departure?

Select all that apply

Reason	Value
Lack of Advancement Opportunities	2
Received a Better Job Offer	
Work/Life Balance Concerns	23
Job Dissatisfaction	10
Compensation Issues	17
Other	33

*Other: Most emp. who leave are moving out of the area or starting a family | Moving out of area or hospitality was a job while they prepared for another profession | returned to school or heading to college | NA | Lack of housing | Let go | Didn't want to work or needed more hours during the off season | Moved to another area | Burnout | Moved to due to cost of housing, substance abuse issues, unwilling to work | They can make more money in other industries and work less | Need year-round work | One was a family business that required his time, two was going to the Army, three was his video business increased so he had no time | start their own business | Housing | Seasonal positions are difficult for people to manage relationships | lack of business levels | Housing | Lack of responsibility | Housing | Unable to perform job duties | Lack of housing | Competitive job market | Housing | Not qualified or the employee is doing substandard work | They usually quit for no reason or because they don't want to work | Lack of performance or family & health issues, moving | Not a good fit, didn't want to do what we required, staff communication issues \ Career opportunities | Not enough hours | NA | moved or job too hard (can't keep up) | Starting their own business or wanting a career change.*
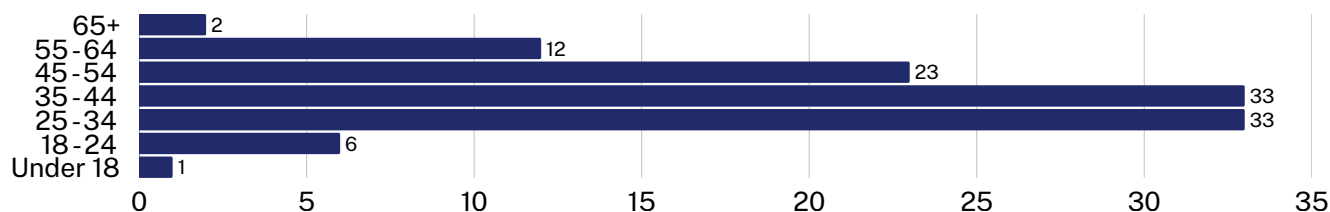
What general age group do you employ in your ENTRY LEVEL positions?
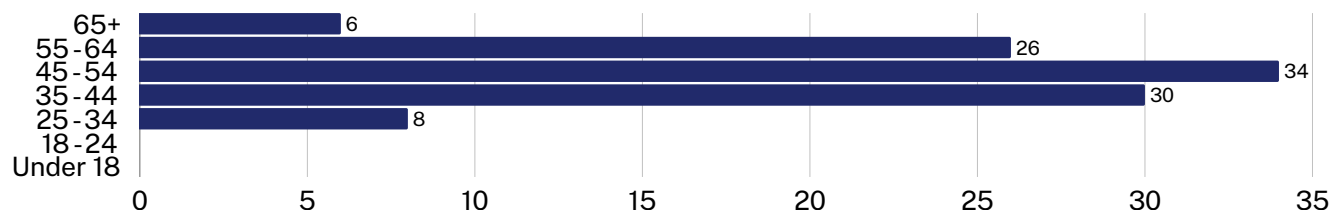
Select all that apply

Age Group	Value
65+	6
55-64	12
45-54	16
35-44	19
25-34	34
18-24	38
Under 18	8
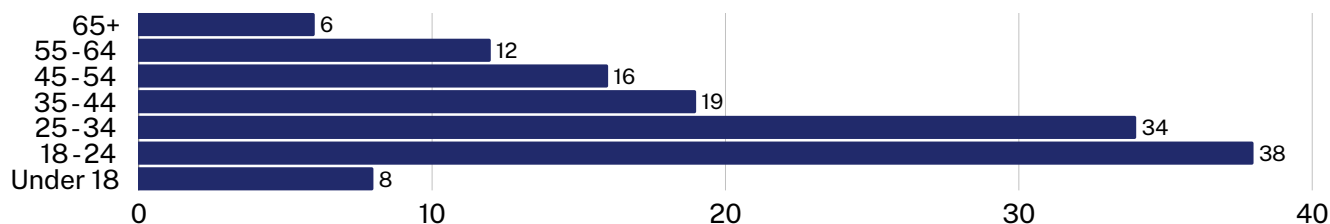
What general age group do you employ in your MANAGEMENT or MID LEVEL positions?

Select all that apply

Age Group	Value
65+	2
55-64	12
45-54	23
35-44	33
25-34	33
18-24	6
Under 18	1

What general age group do you employ in your EXECUTIVE LEVEL or UPPER MANAGEMENT positions?

Select all that apply

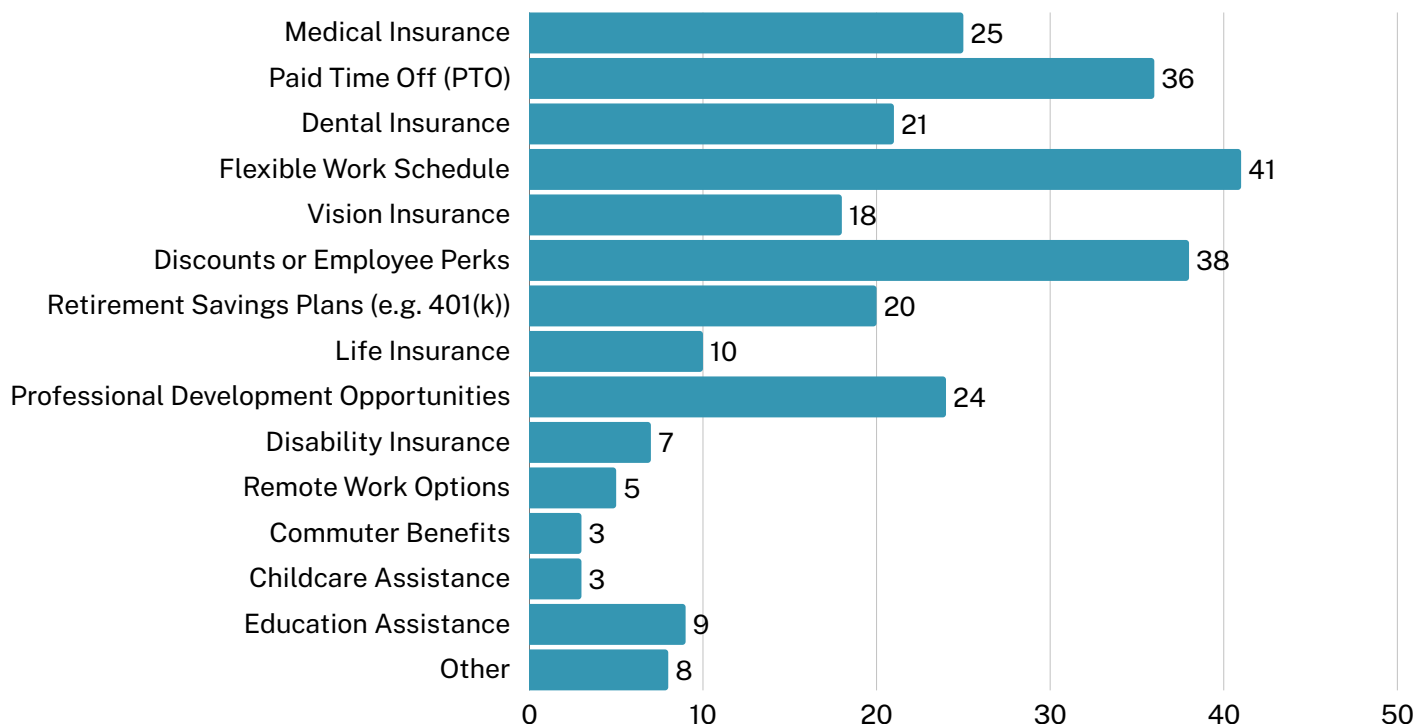| Age Group	Value
65+	6
55-64	26
45-54	34
35-44	30
25-34	8
18-24	
Under 18	

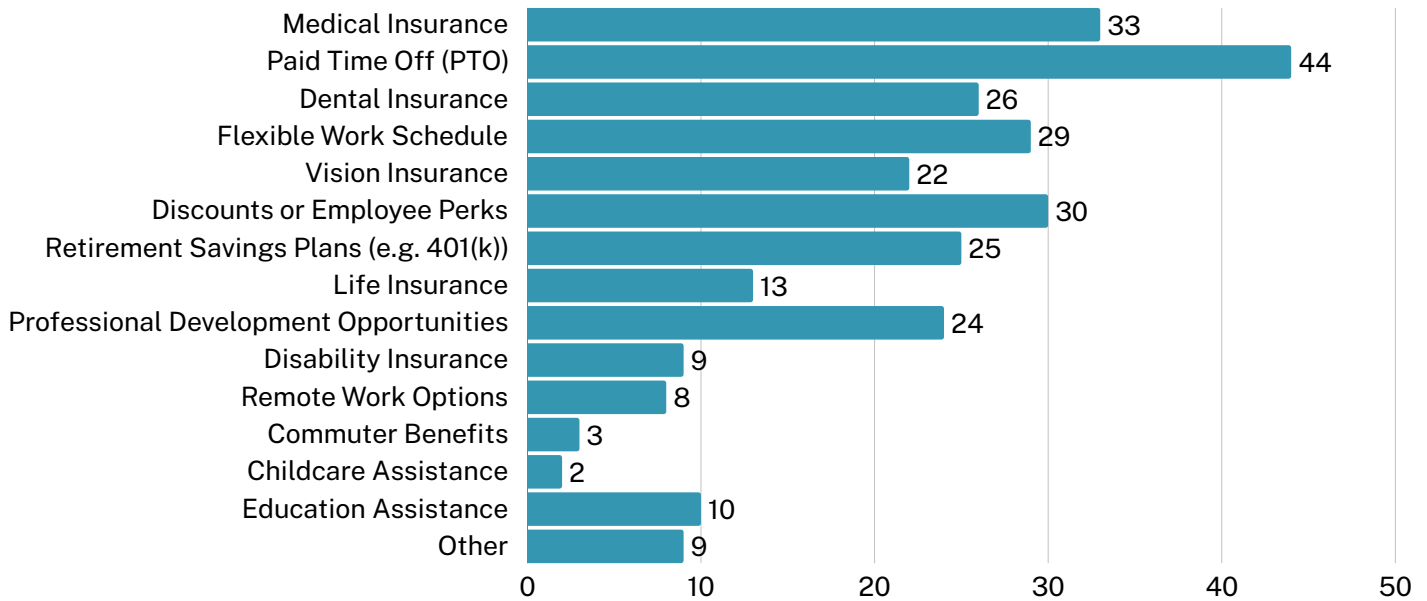Do you feel that your workforce reflects the diversity of your community?

Yes = 82.3   No = 17.7%

Please indicate the benefits offered to your ENTRY LEVEL employees by checking the applicable boxes:
Select all that apply

Benefit	Value
Medical Insurance	25
Paid Time Off (PTO)	36
Dental Insurance	21
Flexible Work Schedule	41
Vision Insurance	18
Discounts or Employee Perks	38
Retirement Savings Plans (e.g. 401(k))	20
Life Insurance	10
Professional Development Opportunities	24
Disability Insurance	7
Remote Work Options	5
Commuter Benefits	3
Childcare Assistance	3
Education Assistance	9
Other	8

Other: Not applicable | NA | Sick pay | Free lunch | Bonuses | Independent Contractor | Nothing | Financial assistance to long term employees and bonuses

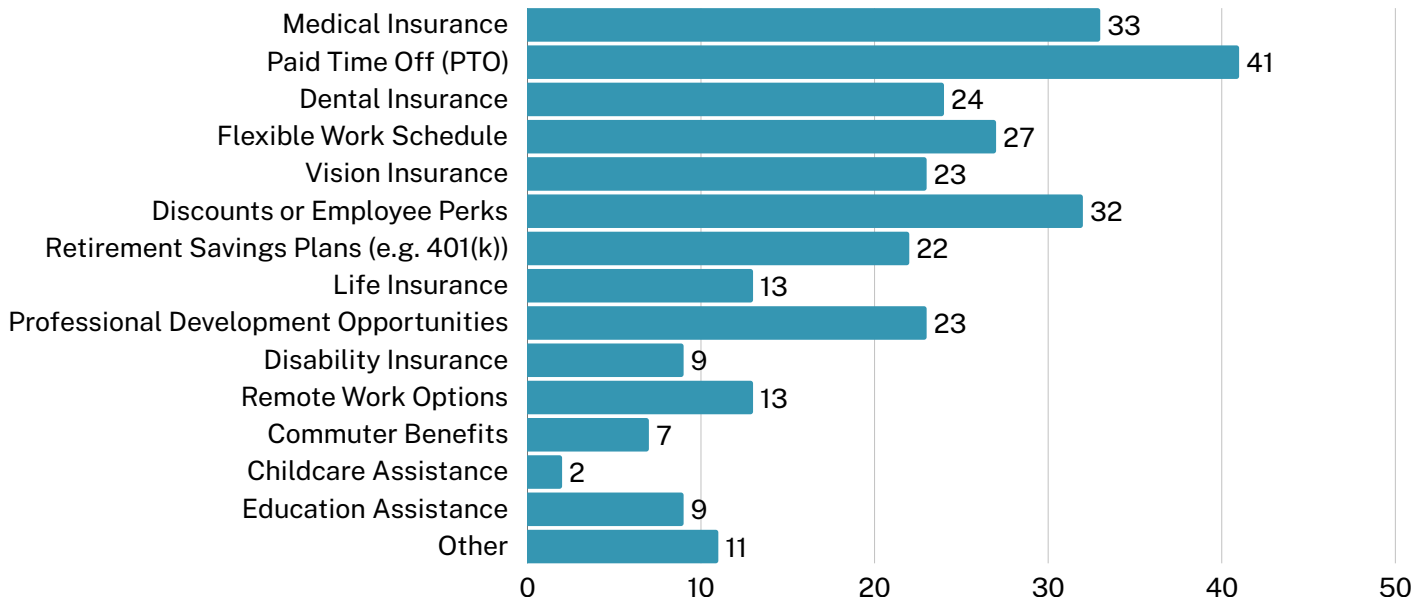## Please indicate the benefits offered to your MANAGERS/MID LEVEL employees by checking the applicable boxes:
Select all that apply

Benefit	Value
Medical Insurance	33
Paid Time Off (PTO)	44
Dental Insurance	26
Flexible Work Schedule	29
Vision Insurance	22
Discounts or Employee Perks	30
Retirement Savings Plans (e.g. 401(k))	25
Life Insurance	13
Professional Development Opportunities	24
Disability Insurance	9
Remote Work Options	8
Commuter Benefits	3
Childcare Assistance	2
Education Assistance	10
Other	9

Other: We don't have any | self-employed | NA | Free lunch | Bonuses | Hybrid Work | WE | Independent Contractor | Housing & Financial assistance and bonuses

Please indicate the benefits offered to your EXECUTIVES/HIGH LEVEL employees by checking the applicable boxes:
Select all that apply

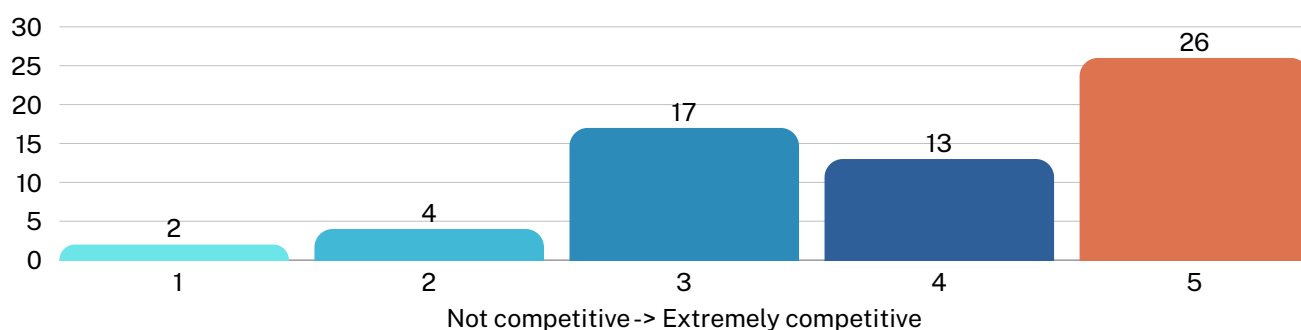| Benefit	Value
Medical Insurance	33
Paid Time Off (PTO)	41
Dental Insurance	24
Flexible Work Schedule	27
Vision Insurance	23
Discounts or Employee Perks	32
Retirement Savings Plans (e.g. 401(k))	22
Life Insurance	13
Professional Development Opportunities	23
Disability Insurance	9
Remote Work Options	13
Commuter Benefits	7
Childcare Assistance	2
Education Assistance	9
Other	11

Other: We don't have any | NA | NA | Bonuses | Bonus | Not all benefits are known at this level | We are very small, I am the only high-level person here | NA | Independent contractor | Nothing | Housing & Financial Assistance, and Bonuses

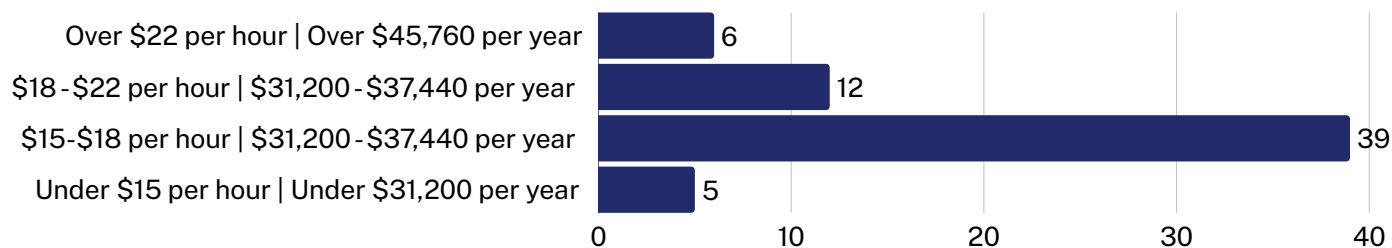**Which benefits do you believe are crucial for maintaining competitiveness in attracting local talent?**

respondents overwhelmingly emphasized wages and consistent, year-round hours as top priorities. Health insurance — including medical, dental, and vision coverage with low deductibles — was the most frequently cited specific benefit, followed closely by paid time off (PTO) and flexible scheduling. A smaller number of employers also highlighted the value of retirement plans, professional development opportunities, and employee perks like meals or bonuses. Notably, housing support emerged as a critical factor for some, particularly on the coast where affordability remains a barrier to recruitment and retention. While a few respondents reported minimal competition or reliance on seasonal, entry-level labor, the majority indicated that compensation and a strong benefits package are essential to remaining competitive in today's labor market.

How competitive do you perceive your current wage offerings compared to other local employers?
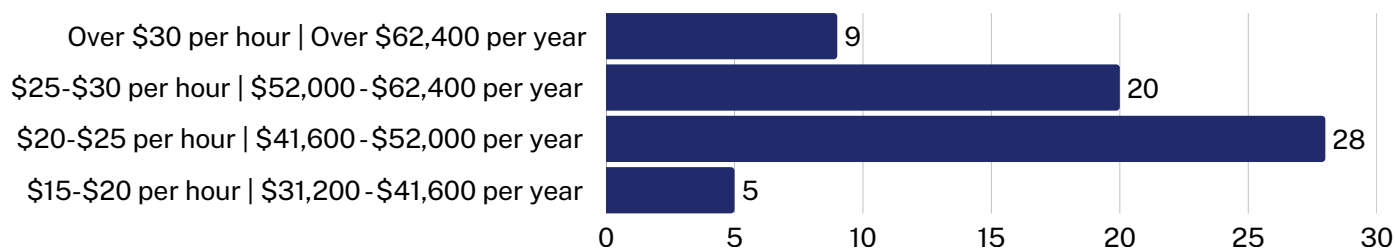
Rating	Count
1	2
2	4
3	17
4	13
5	26

Not competitive -> Extremely competitive

What is the average wage range for your ENTRY LEVEL staff:
Do not account for tips

Range	Count
Over $22 per hour	Over $45,760 per year	6
$18 - $22 per hour	$31,200 - $37,440 per year	12
$15-$18 per hour	$31,200 - $37,440 per year	39
Under $15 per hour	Under $31,200 per year	5

What is the average wage range for your MID LEVEL / MANAGEMENT staff:
Do not account for tips

Range	Count
Over $30 per hour	Over $62,400 per year	9
$25-$30 per hour	$52,000 - $62,400 per year	20
$20-$25 per hour	$41,600 - $52,000 per year	28
$15-$20 per hour	$31,200 - $41,600 per year	5

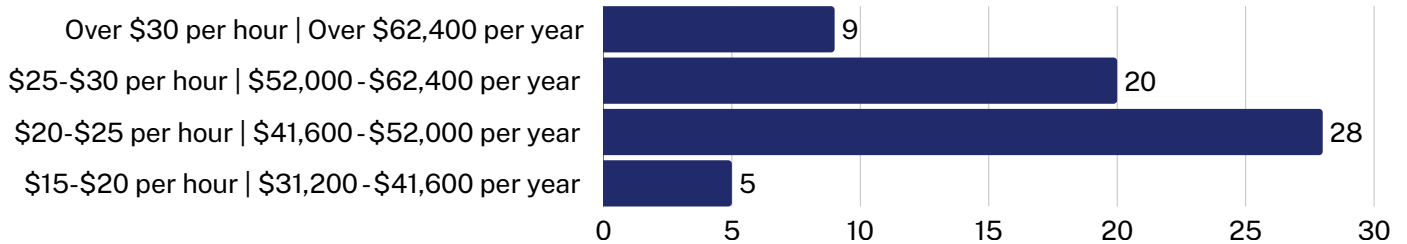## What is the average wage range for your EXECUTIVE LEVEL / UPPER MANAGEMENT staff:
Do not account for tips
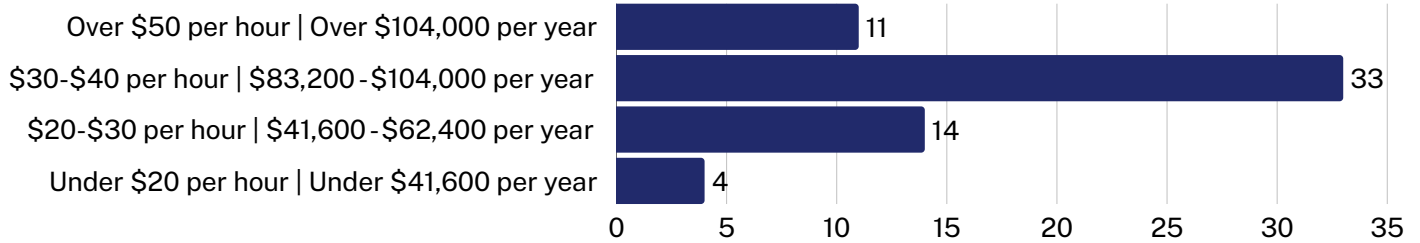
Wage range	Count
Over $50 per hour	Over $104,000 per year	11
$30-$40 per hour	$83,200-$104,000 per year	33
$20-$30 per hour	$41,600-$62,400 per year	14
Under $20 per hour	Under $41,600 per year	4

(x-axis: 0, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35)

What is the average wage range for your MID LEVEL / MANAGEMENT staff:
Do not account for tips

Wage range	Count
Over $30 per hour	Over $62,400 per year	9
$25-$30 per hour	$52,000-$62,400 per year	20
$20-$25 per hour	$41,600-$52,000 per year	28
$15-$20 per hour	$31,200-$41,600 per year	5

(x-axis: 0, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30)

What is the estimated average income from tips alone PER SHIFT for employees in tipped positions at your establishment?

Range	Count
More than $200	1
$151-$200	6
$101-$150	10
$51-$100	15
$20-$50	13
Less than $20	21

(x-axis: 0, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25)
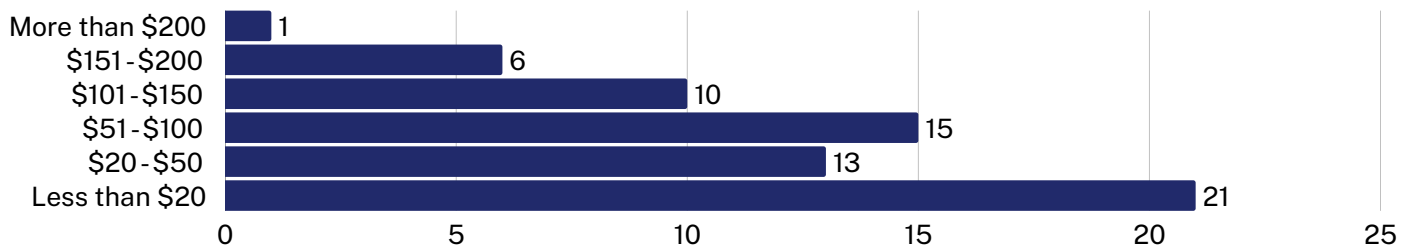
Other: Sales training | Na | LNT training; WFA or WFR level first aid; DOT physical; in-house 4-day guide training; clean driving record | Boat handling and charter guide training | Fishing skills costumer service and oars man ship. | Guide License | Captains license, OUPV 6 pack | None | In house training | None | We train | none | Home Safety | none

Which certifications or training programs do you currently require or prefer for your employees?
Select all the apply

Certification	Count
Food Handler's Permit	37
OLCC	31
Front Desk/Customer Service Training	20
Housekeeping/Cleanliness Certifications	15
CPR or First Aid	19
Oregon Responsible Beverage Service Training	7
Serv Safe Manager Certification	7
Other	14

(x-axis: 0, 10, 20, 30, 40)
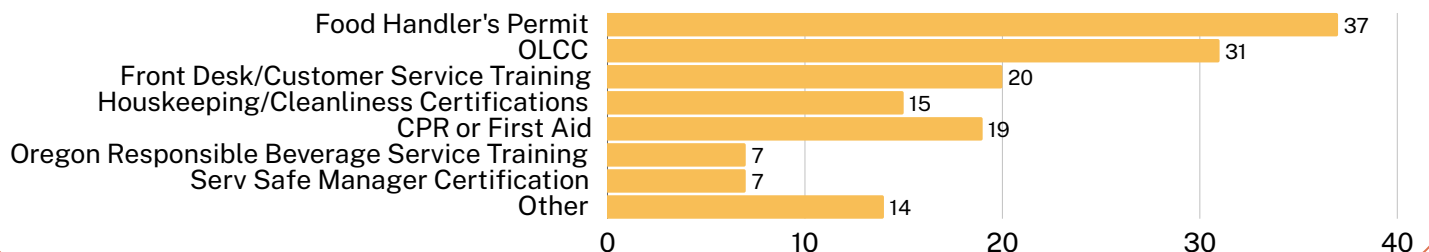
Do you believe applicants and employees with additional certifications or external training are more qualified or competitive than the average worker?

Yes = 66.7%　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　No = 33.3%

What types of training or certifications make an applicant more attractive to you as an employer? Please provide examples for both hiring a new employee and promoting an existing worker.

Respondents emphasized both technical and interpersonal competencies. For new hires, prior experience, especially in guest service, was considered highly valuable, alongside customer service training and familiarity with team dynamics, such as experience in sports or other collaborative settings. For promotions, respondents highlighted the importance of alignment with the organization's core values, as well as emotional intelligence, strong communication skills, and leadership potential. One employer specifically noted that training in a company's mission and purpose is essential when considering internal advancement. While some respondents referenced "all previously checked" certifications or marked "N/A," the overall emphasis was on a mix of practical experience and soft skills that align with service-oriented, team-based work environments.

Would having access to additional training resources would contribute significantly to your business growth?

Bar chart values: 1 = 7, 2 = 14, 3 = 19, 4 = 11, 5 = 11

Not at all -> Yes, significantly
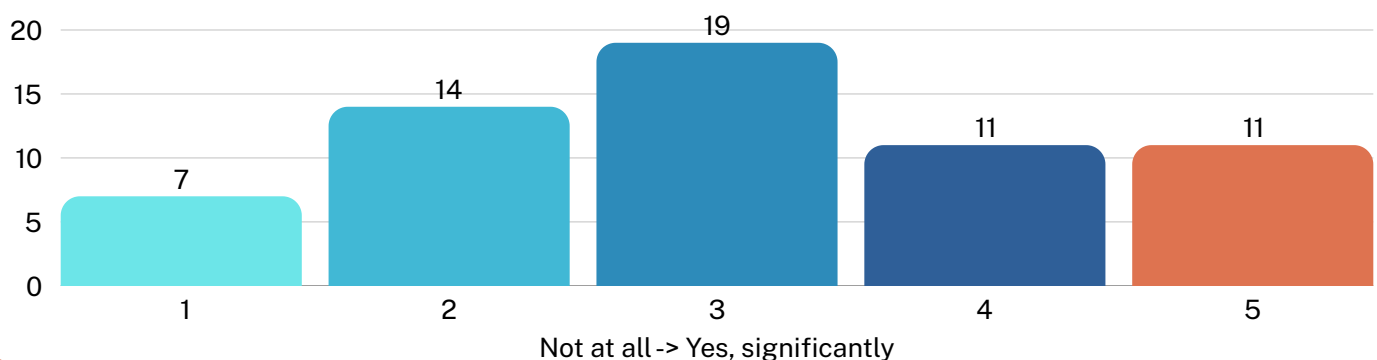
Are you consistently able to train and promote your staff to higher level positions?

No = 25
Yes = 37
Unsure
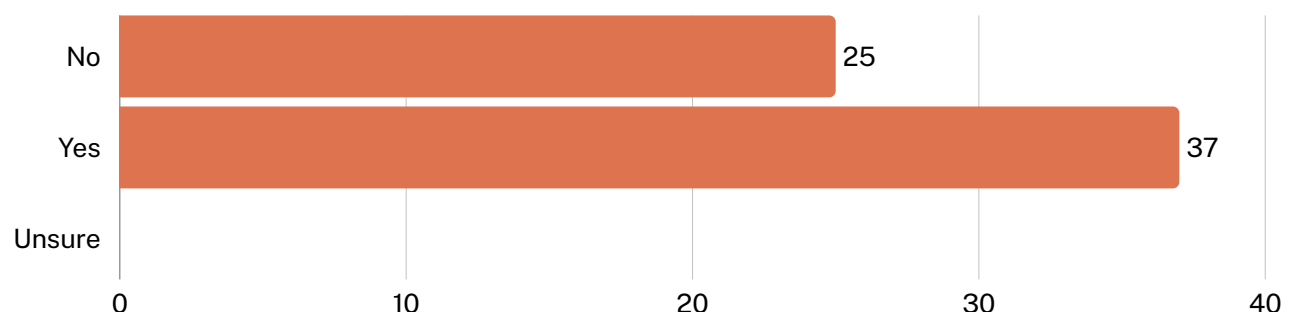
What hinders the promotion of current employees?

Respondents cited a range of structural, behavioral, and organizational barriers. The most common limitation was the lack of available positions, particularly in small businesses or operations with long-tenured leadership, where upward mobility is inherently restricted. Several employers noted that low turnover, while beneficial for stability, creates a bottleneck for advancement. Others pointed to employee disinterest in leadership roles, with some workers expressing satisfaction in their current positions or declining training opportunities even when offered. A few respondents flagged behavioral challenges, such as poor work ethic or a "helper vs. leader" mindset, and cultural obstacles, like productivity declining after promotion. Additional constraints included unstable living situations, wage disparities, and limited training resources, all of which complicate efforts to develop and retain internal talen

What are some of your best practices to support career growth/promotion of your current employees?

Responses described a range of intentional strategies focused on training, mentorship, and individualized development. On-the-job training and cross-training were the most frequently mentioned methods, often paired with flexible scheduling to accommodate additional learning or outside commitments. Many respondents emphasized the value of mentorship, regular performance conversations, and professional development plans—including formal evaluations, goal setting, and identifying personalized growth pathways. Others noted providing access to online certifications, AHLEI courses, or opportunities to gain experience at other properties, especially in organizations with multiple locations. A few highlighted the importance of deep relationships, open communication, and aligning promotions with employee aspirations. While some respondents declined to answer or noted limited practices, the overall trend reflects a growing recognition that structured, employee-centered development supports retention and long-term success.
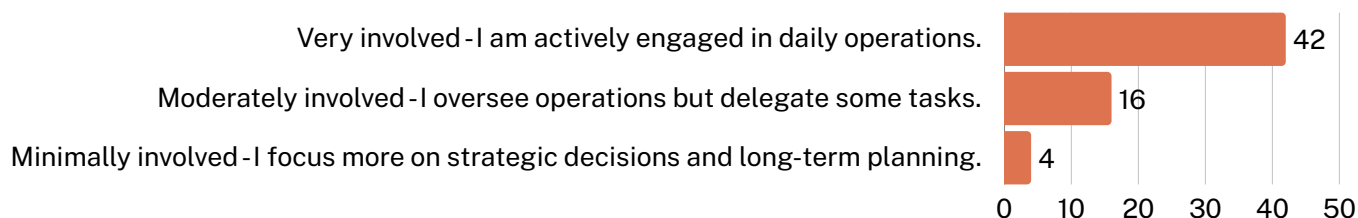
What are your company's core values and/or guiding principles?

Respondents highlighted a wide range of priorities that reflect both individual business cultures and broader industry trends. Respect, honesty, and integrity were among the most frequently cited values, often accompanied by commitments to teamwork, accountability, and customer service excellence. Many businesses emphasized employee empowerment and internal growth, referencing practices like open-door policies, mentorship, and treating staff as family. Several respondents named sustainability, community engagement, and environmental stewardship as core to their mission, particularly those with ties to local fisheries or tourism. Others stressed hospitality-driven values such as exceeding guest expectations, creating positive experiences, and promoting kindness and empathy in daily operations. While a few businesses declined to share or noted they do not formally publish their values, the overall responses suggest a strong coastal hospitality ethos grounded in care for people, pride in service, and a sense of place-based responsibility.

How much do you feel the core values and guiding principles shape the culture of your organization?

Chart (bar):
- 1: 1
- 2: 4
- 3: 7
- 4: 11
- 5: 19

No influence -> Highly influential
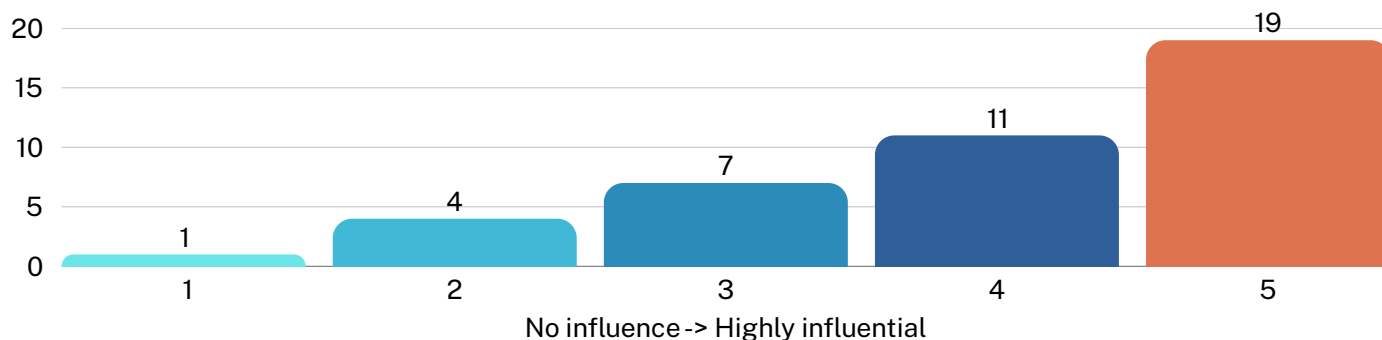
Indicate the extent to which you are personally engaged in the day-to-day activities of your business. Select the option that best describes your involvement.

Chart (horizontal bar):
- Very involved - I am actively engaged in daily operations. : 42
- Moderately involved - I oversee operations but delegate some tasks. : 16
- Minimally involved - I focus more on strategic decisions and long-term planning. : 4

(axis: 0, 10, 20, 30, 40, 50)

What is your perspective on how your managers contribute to shaping the company culture. How do you believe their actions influence the overall work environment and employee experience?

respondents overwhelmingly agreed that managers are central to the employee experience and the workplace environment. Many described managers as the face of the organization to frontline staff, setting the tone through their actions, communication, and example. Several emphasized that employees work for people, not companies, and that a manager's ability to lead with empathy, build trust, and stay aligned with core values directly influences morale, engagement, and retention. Others acknowledged that this responsibility is complex, especially in seasonal or high-turnover environments, where maintaining consistent culture is more challenging. Still, even in these contexts, respondents saw managers as the primary drivers of culture, with some using tools like annual values assessments or structured coaching to reinforce accountability. A few also highlighted the importance of self-awareness and growth among managers, describing culture-building as a continuous, evolving effort requiring openness, humility, and adaptability.

Appendix C: Oregon Coast Regions and Counties

Workforce Regions on the Oregon Coast

The Oregon Coast spans three workforce development regions, each supported by a regional Workforce Investment Board (WIB):

- Northwest Oregon Works (NOW)
    - Counties: Clatsop, Tillamook, Lincoln
- Lane Workforce Partnership (LWP)
    - Counties: Lane (coastal portion only)
- Southwestern Oregon Workforce Investment Board (SOWIB)
   - Counties: Coos, Curry, western Douglas

These regions reflect how federal and state workforce funding is administered and coordinated across local industries. The map on the following page outlines these regions and their corresponding counties.

Oregon's Local Workforce Boards

Locational Regions on the Coast

The Oregon Coast spans three informal locational regions.
- North Coast
    - Counties: Clatsop, Tillamook
- Central Coast
    - Counties: Lincoln, Lane
- South Coast
    - Counties: Coos, Curry, western Douglas

Minimum Wage Map

Oregon's Minimum Wage Increases on July 1, 2024
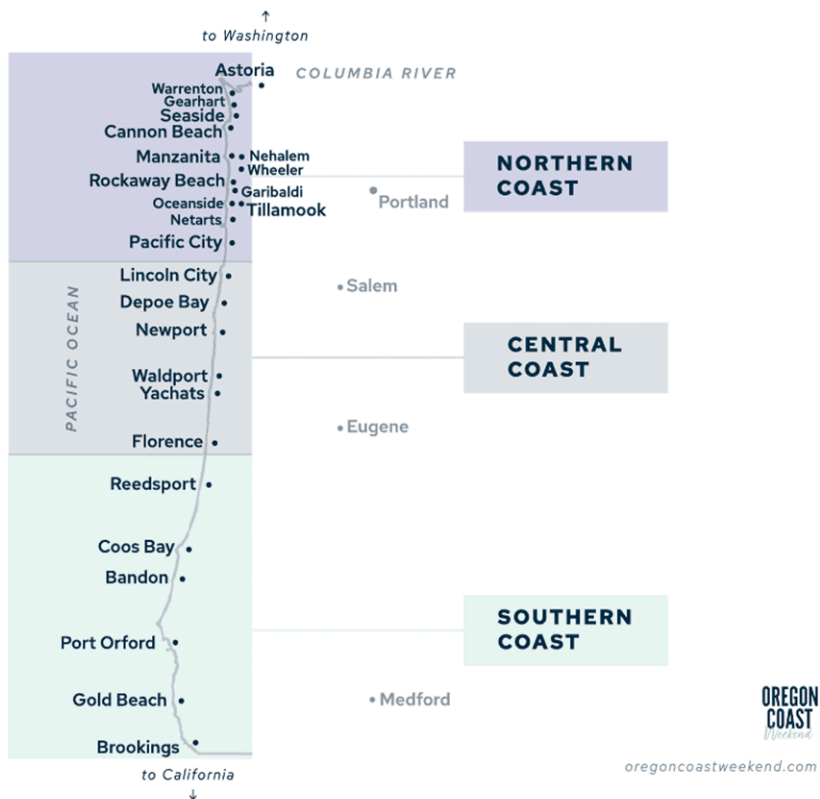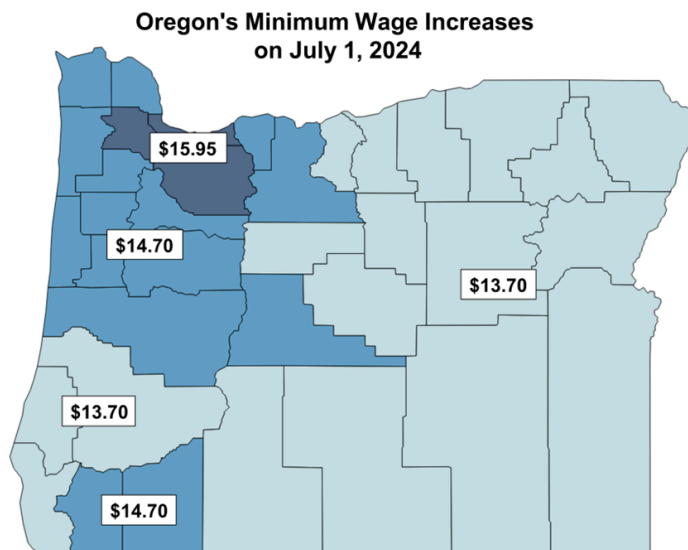
Source: Oregon Employment Department

Appendix C: Oregon's Coast Hospitality Industry Focus Group Report

The Focus Group Report (Appendix D) is provided as a separate attachment

Appendix D: Works Cited

AreaVibes. (2025). Cannon Beach, OR Cost of Living. Retrieved from AreaVibes: http://www.areavibes.com/cannon+beach-or/cost-of-living/

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Oregon's Coast Hospitality Industry

Focus Group Report

Commissioned by: Oregon Restaurant & Lodging Association (ORLA)

Conducted by: Advanced Economic Solutions (AES)

Principal: Marin Arreola

Date: June 18, 2025

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Executive Summary

The Oregon Restaurant & Lodging Association (ORLA) conducted focus groups with hospitality workers (including Spanish-speaking employees) to understand workforce challenges on the Oregon coast. Participants highlighted concerns about wage fairness, seasonal job instability, workplace diversity and inclusion, management practices, and economic hardships like housing affordability. Many workers enjoy the hospitality industry's diverse, family-like environment and find personal fulfillment in their roles, but they also reported significant frustrations that impact morale and retention. Fair pay emerged as a central issue – while some feel adequately paid, others see wage disparities and lack of rewards for extra effort. Seasonal fluctuations in tourism create cycles of job insecurity, forcing employees to juggle multiple jobs or rely on unemployment benefits in winter. Workplace culture and management support vary widely: in the best cases, supportive managers and inclusive policies foster loyalty and growth, but in other cases poor communication, inconsistent training, and even exploitation leave workers feeling undervalued. The high cost of living on the coast, especially housing, puts additional strain on hospitality workers, making it difficult to sustain a long-term career in the area. Additionally, Spanish speaking employees face discrimination and harassment at work that English speakers might not face. Most of the Latino employees feel not respected and valued by their employers. These findings align with broader state trends identified in a 2024 McMinnville Economic Development Partnership (MEDP) report on Latino workforce challenges, which noted persistent low wages, job instability, and systemic inequalities. However, the ORLA study also reveals unique coastal factors – extreme seasonality, tip-dependent income, and acute housing shortages – that compound the challenges. **Practical recommendations for ORLA and industry stakeholders include implementing transparent and fair pay practices, developing strategies to provide year-round employment stability, investing in diversity and inclusion training, developing better communication systems between employees and management, developing better seasonal staffing models, strengthening management and training programs, and collaborating on solutions for affordable housing and cost-of-living relief. By addressing these issues, Oregon's hospitality industry can improve worker satisfaction and retention, which in turn supports better customer service and business success.**

FOCUS GROUP PROCESS

Focus groups serve multiple purposes, including gathering customer feedback on products and service quality. They also help explore workplace environments, highlight organizational challenges and opportunities, and gauge perceptions of specific demographic groups. Depending on project requirements, focus groups may operate as:

- **A primary data source**, acting as the principal method of data collection on a particular topic.

- **A supplementary source**, enriching findings obtained through other data collection techniques such as interviews or surveys.

- **Part of a multi-method study**, complementing various research methods (e.g., one-on-one interviews, surveys, and participant observations).

A key advantage of focus groups over individual interviews or surveys is their capacity to capture group dynamics. The collective setting often sparks richer conversations, as participants compare viewpoints, challenge opinions, and share experiences that might not arise in a one-on-one context. Such interactions can yield more nuanced insights into participants' perceptions, values, and direct experiences. For example, when a single question is posed, the ensuing discussion may reveal a broad spectrum of perspectives, influenced by participants' distinct backgrounds, experiences, and cultural contexts.

At the request of ORLA, AES, Inc. conducted six focus groups between May 2024 and January 2025 in Lincoln City, Florence, Brookings, Coos Bay, and Seaside. The primary objective was to evaluate workforce challenges impacting hospitality employees along the Oregon coast. One of these focus groups, held in Seaside, was conducted in Spanish to specifically engage Latino hospitality workers.

FOCUS GROUP DEMOGRAPHICS

Participation in these focus groups was strictly voluntary. Attendees included both men and women, representing various age groups and ethnic backgrounds, all employed in the hospitality sector across a spectrum of hotel and restaurant establishments along the Oregon coast. Ethnicities included Latino, White, Asian, and African American.

Participants ranged in age from their mid-20s to their 70s, with most in their 30s and 40s. They held numerous roles within the hospitality industry, including housekeeping, security, sales, front-desk operations, food service, and cooking. Data collected through these focus groups—incorporating recorded conversations, participant notes, and survey responses—underpins the findings detailed in this report.

Key Findings and Observations

- **Wage Fairness Gaps:** Many workers feel their pay does not reflect their responsibilities or effort, especially when they perform additional duties (e.g. training others or translating for customers) without extra compensation. New hires sometimes earn as much as seasoned staff due to rising market wages, causing resentment among experienced employees who haven't seen raises. Tip distribution systems also influence perceptions of fairness – some employees benefit from pooled tips and service charges that stabilize income, while others feel tip-sharing rules can be inequitable.

- **Impact of Seasonal Employment:** The seasonal nature of coastal tourism leads to significant fluctuations in hours and income. Workers often enjoy plenty of hours (and

tips) in summer, then face sharply reduced schedules in winter. Many take on second or third jobs during the off-season to make ends meet. Employers use different strategies to maintain stability – for example, one restaurant cross-trains and shares hours so everyone "equally" loses time in winter, and some encourage employees to claim unemployment benefits for winter months. Despite these efforts, seasonal insecurity remains a major stressor and can drive workers to leave the area for more stable opportunities.

- **Diverse and Inclusive Workplaces:** Employees overwhelmingly value workplace diversity. They described teams with a wide range of ages, genders, cultures, and personalities that "feel like a family" and enrich the work experience. Bilingual staff are seen as an asset for serving customers who don't speak English, and having coworkers from different backgrounds fosters learning and open-mindedness. However, language barriers and segregation persist: Spanish-speaking and undocumented workers are often concentrated in back-of-house roles, which can limit communication and advancement. Some immigrant employees reported discrimination and even harassment, such as being mocked for their accent or threatened with immigration enforcement by abusive managers. Gender disparities were generally not seen as a major issue in these focus groups – participants felt men and women are treated equally in their workplaces, with promotions based on merit in most cases.

- **Management Support & Training Gaps:** Participants had varying views of management, ranging from extremely supportive to disappointingly disengaged. In positive cases, managers were praised for being approachable, listening to staff input, promoting from within, and even helping on the floor/kitchen during busy times – behaviors that boosted trust and morale. Some companies include employees in decision-making and maintain an open-door policy for communication. On the other hand, many workers experienced poor management practices: *lack of recognition* (no regular raises or feedback unless asked for), *poor communication*, and *inconsistent training*. New hires sometimes learn on the fly with little formal training, leading to confusion and mistakes – one group described a "fiasco" with a new reservation system because staff weren't properly trained beforehand. Several employees voiced the need for standardized training and clear procedures so that everyone performs tasks consistently. Where such support was lacking, employees felt their professional growth was stunted (no mentorship or clear advancement path) and that management "doesn't understand or care" about front-line challenges.

- **Economic Pressures on Workers:** High living costs on the Oregon coast undermine workers' financial security and job satisfaction. Housing was repeatedly cited as a critical issue – rents are outpacing wages, forcing employees to live with roommates or family or to commute long distances. Participants reported one-bedroom apartments often costing $1,600–$2,800 per month (and studios around $1,250), which is difficult to afford on hourly hospitality wages. The proliferation of vacation rentals in coastal communities has further squeezed the rental market, making affordable housing "really slim pickings" for workers. Other costs like utilities and gas are "so high" that many cannot save money. As a result, some workers only stay seasonally or short-term – they love the coastal community but do not see a viable long-term future there due to the cost of living. This

economic strain is compounded in winter when paychecks shrink; some struggle with basic expenses (several mentioned food insecurity and reliance on assistance during off-season). Notably, Spanish-speaking participants emphasized the importance of year-round benefits and hours – when work slows or stops, they lose income and things like health insurance, creating year-round instability.

- **Common Threads with Statewide Latino Workforce Trends:** The challenges identified in the ORLA focus groups echo many findings from the MEDP report on Latino workers. Both studies point to wage inequality and "dead-end" jobs that many minority workers find themselves in. Occupational segregation is a theme – Latino/immigrant workers often get stuck in the lowest-paying positions due to language barriers or discrimination, a pattern observed on the coast where Spanish-speaking staff have limited upward mobility. Workplace vulnerability is another shared theme: the MEDP study noted that even pre-pandemic, Latino workers were highly vulnerable to instability and exploitation, which the pandemic exacerbated. In ORLA's study, immigrant hospitality workers described exploitation ranging from overwork and underpay (one person doing the job of two) to threats of firing or deportation if they speak up, indicating ongoing power imbalances. Both studies highlight housing and food insecurity as critical issues; what is a statewide statistic in the MEDP report becomes an immediate reality in the focus group testimonies of struggling to pay rent or buy food in the off-season.

Thematic Analysis

Fair Pay & Compensation

Pay fairness in Oregon's hospitality sector is a nuanced issue, with perceptions varying based on individual circumstances and comparisons. Some focus group participants felt their wages were fair and competitive – often referencing local market rates. For example, one hotel front-desk worker noted that their pay was "pretty close" to what other employers advertised for similar roles, and given the small coastal town context, they felt paid well for the workload. Another participant working at an employee-owned restaurant described a model of a higher base wage plus a guaranteed 20% tip on every bill, which made overall pay "consistent all year" despite seasonal hour fluctuations. These cases illustrate that when employers proactively set higher wages or standardize tips, employees perceive compensation as fair or at least acceptable.

However, a significant number of workers expressed that their wages are not keeping up with their effort or responsibilities. A recurring sentiment was *"I deserve more for what I do."* In the Spanish-language group, participants unequivocally stated that the pay they receive is "muy por debajo" (way below) the value of the work they perform. Several described doing the work of multiple people for a single person's pay, suggesting chronic under-staffing and overloading of duties without corresponding pay adjustments. This feeling of unfair compensation was often tied to comparisons – either with what others in similar positions earn, or with co-workers and managers within the same organization. One restaurant worker observed that *"other kitchens*

require less work and offer more pay," making them feel their own wage should be higher. Another noted frustration that they had to share a significant portion of their tips (30%) with staff who already earn a higher base wage, viewing it as a hard-to-swallow policy that diminishes the fairness of their earnings.

A major factor influencing pay perceptions is whether raises and promotions keep pace with experience. In some focus groups, long-tenured employees felt short-changed when new hires were brought in at wages equal to or higher than their own. An employee recounted watching a 16-year-old new hire paid $19/hour to wash dishes (the current market starting wage), while they themselves – with years of experience – were asked to finish the teen's work for the same pay. Because the employer had to raise starting wages to attract new workers, it inadvertently created internal inequity: veteran staff did not receive raises to match the new baseline. This led to palpable resentment: *"that's not fair… those who have been there longer don't get compensated for their experience"*. In one case, a worker was even promoted to a role with more responsibility but never received the promised pay increase, prompting them to quit that job out of principle. Pay compression (when newer or lower-level employees earn close to what longer-term or higher-level employees make) is clearly demoralizing in these settings.

Transparency and processes around pay also affect fairness perceptions. Some participants mentioned that their companies keep pay rates secret and discourage discussing wages, which fosters suspicion. An older hotel employee criticized this opacity, saying management doesn't want staff "to talk about our wages" to avoid chaos. This secrecy, combined with a policy requiring employees to *justify why they deserve a raise*, was seen as an unfair burden. From a sociological perspective, having to "beg" or argue for a raise disturbed veteran workers who expected loyalty and hard work to be automatically recognized. *"I'm old school – you work hard, and a raise should come annually without asking,"* one 71-year-old worker explained, expressing discomfort with a system that put the onus on employees to initiate pay discussions. This generational viewpoint highlights how workplace norms have shifted – many companies now require proactive requests or have merit-based raise systems, which can clash with employee expectations and lead to feelings of being undervalued if not managed transparently.

Ethnographic factors also play a role in compensation fairness. Immigrant workers might compare their pay not only to others in the local industry but also to what they need to support family here or abroad. One bilingual participant frequently acted as an interpreter for Spanish-speaking guests and colleagues, essentially doing two jobs (guest services and translation), and planned to ask management for additional compensation for these extra duties. She felt her language skills were an asset to the company that wasn't formally recognized in her pay. In her case, cultural and linguistic abilities added invisible labor to her role – an experience common in diverse workplaces where certain employees become de facto translators or cultural liaisons. When such contributions are not compensated or at least acknowledged, it breeds a sense of unfairness and fatigue. Indeed, she mentioned being called in constantly (only 3 days off in a month because she'd cover others' shifts) and feeling exhausted, yet when she asked for a rare day off, her supervisor questioned it – as if her dedication was taken for granted. This example shows how over-reliance on a hardworking employee without proper reward can lead to burnout and perceptions of inequity.

From an economic perspective, many participants evaluated fairness in terms of a "livable wage." One focus group member bluntly said they would gauge if they were underpaid by whether the wage allows them to live independently – *"I do think it is at the bare minimum of being a livable wage"*, he said, noting that without savings or a second household income, it would be hard to get by.

Multiple people echoed that their pay "works for now," but any unexpected expense could tip the balance, which suggests wages are just on the cusp of adequacy. Workers who felt underpaid often connected that to the cost of living (rent, etc.) rather than the job itself: *"the company pays what they can, and I feel it's fair for this role, but if I were at a for-profit business, I'd expect more,"* said one non-profit employee, acknowledging her satisfaction with pay was relative to the organization's means. In contrast, another person left a large retail employer because even a promotion didn't come with the promised pay bump, highlighting that in for-profit settings, there's an expectation that profits be shared in employee pay – when that doesn't happen, workers feel exploited.

Importantly, Spanish-speaking workers articulated a desire for equity and reward in simple terms: they want "igualdad para todos" (equality for everyone) and raises when a worker proves themselves. One participant hoped for "aumento de salario cuando… un trabajador cumple con su trabajo", meaning raises or bonuses when an employee is doing their job well. The lack of such reward was discouraging, especially when combined with observations that some colleagues or managers do very little but are paid more. This contributes to a disillusionment that hard work is not being fairly paid or recognized – a point that directly affects job satisfaction, as discussed in the next section.

In summary, fair pay remains an unresolved issue in Oregon's hospitality industry. While a subset of workers feel content (largely when employers communicate about pay and attempt to be fair within constraints), many others see clear evidence of unfairness. Factors like unacknowledged extra work, lack of raises, wage secrecy, and internal inequities erode the sense of fairness. Economically, when wages don't keep up with living costs, even a "fair-for-the-job" pay rate can feel inadequate in real life. These nuanced perceptions mean employers must work harder to not only pay fair wages but also demonstrate fairness – through transparency, acknowledging contributions, and keeping compensation policies equitable.

Job Satisfaction & Job Security

Compensation and Morale: The focus groups provided insight into how compensation levels intersect with job satisfaction and performance. A number of hospitality workers take pride in their work and maintain that they "give 100%" regardless of pay. This work ethic, often tied to personal or professional standards, was noted especially among those in tipped positions: for instance, servers mentioned they strive to provide excellent service to every table, even though they cannot guarantee a good tip. *"You have to keep a positive attitude and greet each table as if they are going to tip well,"* said one restaurant worker, highlighting a common mindset in customer-service roles. In these cases, intrinsic motivation and customer-focus buffer the impact of low pay on daily performance. Some participants also felt a sense of obligation: *"we signed up for the job at that wage, so we have an obligation to do our best,"* as one person put it. This perspective, shared by a few, suggests that workers compartmentalize the wage issue – they may

not be happy with their pay, but they don't let it affect how they carry out their duties, at least in the short term. However, this stiff-upper-lip attitude has limits. Several employees admitted that chronic low pay or unfair pay does eventually erode their morale and effort.

One candidly shared that when they find themselves "working circles around people who are in higher positions… who maybe have double what I make" and those higher-paid individuals are slacking off, it *"does affect my job performance."* They described consciously slowing their pace and doing less in such moments, telling themselves *"you're being too hard on yourself – others are chilling, so you can chill too"*. This illustrates a natural human response to perceived inequity: people calibrate their effort to what they feel is fair. If they constantly overachieve without reward while seeing others underperform with impunity, their willingness to go "above and beyond" diminishes. Another participant echoed this, saying early on they would go the extra mile, but *"then you finally realize… they don't pay me enough to do all that"*. Over time, workers in an inequitable environment may stop bringing their full enthusiasm – not necessarily dropping below an acceptable performance, but certainly withholding the extra initiative that can improve customer service or efficiency.

It's important to note that some workers separate job satisfaction from pay satisfaction. They might enjoy the work itself or the team they work with, even if the pay is low. For example, an employee said *"my current level of pay does not affect performance. I don't go in thinking about how much I make vs. effort"*, emphasizing pride in doing a good job regardless. In contrast, another said *"if I'm not getting paid enough, why would I [push harder]… so I do sometimes hold back"*. These differing attitudes can often be traced to workplace culture: in environments where management shows appreciation in non-monetary ways (praise, flexibility, community), workers might accept lower pay without resentment. Where the culture is transactional or unsupportive, low pay feels like a personal slight, directly hitting satisfaction.

Seasonal Swings and Job Security: Job satisfaction on the Oregon coast is tightly interwoven with job security, which is heavily impacted by seasonal tourism cycles. During the summer high season, workers are busy, earning more (especially if tips are flowing) and often feeling a sense of excitement and teamwork as businesses thrive. But as tourism dwindles in the winter, many hospitality workers face reduced hours, temporary layoffs, or reassignment to other duties. This seasonality can create anxiety and financial stress that dampen overall job satisfaction, regardless of how much they enjoy the work in summer. Focus group participants shared various strategies employers use to handle seasonal downturns, each with implications for worker satisfaction:

- **Hour Reduction & Sharing:** Some businesses keep their core staff year-round but cut back hours for everyone during winter. One restaurant was cited as *"shifts everyone's hours and shifts so that everyone is equally losing time"* in the off-season. From a fairness perspective, this approach was appreciated – it spreads the pain evenly rather than laying off a few while others stay full-time. Employees remain on payroll (maintaining benefits and a sense of job security), and when business picks up again, the team is intact. While paychecks are smaller in winter, workers at least know their job is not in jeopardy, which provides some peace of mind and loyalty to the employer. A participant from "Mo's" (a well-known Oregon coast restaurant group) mentioned their management explicitly allows or even encourages staff to file for unemployment benefits

to supplement income during slow months. This suggests a compassionate approach – acknowledging that reduced hours hurt and helping employees navigate the system to get support. Notably, eligibility for such partial unemployment is often based on a year's work, and Mo's seemed willing to coordinate schedules to facilitate it. This practice likely improves job satisfaction, as employees feel their employer cares about their well-being beyond just the workplace.

- **Seasonal Staffing Models:** Other businesses hire seasonal workers for the summer and then release them, keeping only a smaller permanent staff year-round. One focus group example was Local Ocean (another coastal employer) which one year tried to retain all staff through winter – meaning year-round employees had to sacrifice hours to give seasonal hires work, causing discontent. The following year, they planned to drop seasonal workers as usual to restore hours for the year-round team. This situation shows that there's a trade-off between employee loyalty and financial practicality. If a company tries to be loyal to everyone, even short-term hires, it may inadvertently hurt its core team's income (and satisfaction). The lesson is that clear policies on who is retained and how hours are allocated are needed to manage expectations. The Local Ocean staff member, despite the prior year's mistake, expressed *"faith that the company will mend the errors"*, indicating that transparent communication from management about the plan helped restore some trust. In contrast, if seasonal layoffs or hour cuts come unexpectedly or unfairly, they can severely damage morale.

- **Multiple Job Juggling:** Many workers don't rely on just one employer to get through the winter. Focus group members mentioned holding 2 or 3 jobs in the off-season. For instance, a housekeeper might clean vacation rentals on the side, or a server might pick up shifts at another restaurant or work retail over the holidays. While this patchwork can provide income security to an individual, it introduces complexity in scheduling and loyalty. Workers noted it's "really hard" to coordinate schedules between employers, and not every boss is understanding of needing flexibility for a second job. Those who had supportive primary employers – ones willing to adjust schedules or give enough notice – expressed higher satisfaction, as it allowed them to balance multiple commitments. In contrast, if an employer is inflexible (demanding open availability even in slow times), employees may actually quit to find a more accommodating situation. Sociologically, this highlights how community and network ties might influence job security: workers with strong local networks can piece together enough work, while newcomers or those with fewer connections might struggle more in winter.

- **Job Security Beyond Seasonality:** Some aspects of job security are unrelated to seasons and more about general stability and advancement. On this front, many Latino and immigrant workers feel insecure not just about hours, but about their treatment and rights on the job. The Spanish focus group was particularly illuminating: workers spoke about wanting enforcement of labor rights and an end to workplace abuse. One participant recounted colleagues being threatened with calls to ICE (immigration authorities) or police if they didn't comply with excessive demands. This is an extreme form of job insecurity – *the fear of being deported or arrested can loom larger than the fear of being laid off*. In such environments, satisfaction is very low; people feel trapped in unjust

conditions. As one said, staying silent means "nothing will change… we want the abuse to stop". The focus group setting (confidential and anonymous) was perhaps one of the few places these workers could voice their concerns. This highlights an ethnographic reality: for undocumented or vulnerable workers, "job security" isn't just about keeping a position through winter, it's about being secure from exploitation and retaliation year-round. If one's basic rights and dignity aren't secure, job satisfaction is almost irrelevant – survival becomes the focus.

Despite these struggles, it's worth noting that hospitality work has intrinsic rewards that keep people satisfied enough to stay (even when pay or security are lacking). Participants lit up when talking about the positive aspects of their jobs – this inevitably feeds into satisfaction. They enjoy meeting travelers from all over, sharing local knowledge or a piece of Oregon's culture, and the camaraderie with co-workers that develops during busy times. One person said *"every day is new, but we also get to build relationships with each other and regulars"*, emphasizing the dynamic and social nature of hospitality work. Another felt *"lucky to live here on the ocean"* and work in a place people come to visit. These sentiments can offset some dissatisfaction – people might accept lower pay or some instability in exchange for a lifestyle or work environment they enjoy. This is a classic ethnographic trade-off, where the cultural and personal value of a job compensates for economic drawbacks, up to a point.

In conclusion, job satisfaction in this industry is a balancing act between passion for hospitality and practical concerns about pay and security. Many workers demonstrate resilience and dedication, but prolonged feelings of underappreciation or instability will eventually push them away. Employers who find ways to stabilize employment (through cross-training, fair hour reductions, or supplemental support) and who treat employees with respect and appreciation tend to sustain higher satisfaction, even when external factors (like a slow winter or high cost of living) create challenges. Conversely, if workers feel like "just a body" to be used in peak season and discarded in the off-season, or if they fear mistreatment, their loyalty and satisfaction plummet. Addressing these issues by making employment more stable and respectful is key to improving morale across the board.

Diversity & Workplace Culture

Richness of a Diverse Team: One of the standout positives from the focus groups is how much employees value diversity in the workplace. Oregon's coastal hospitality industry attracts a mix of people – long-time locals, transplants from other states, students, immigrants, young and old – which creates a vibrant social environment. Participants frequently used "family" as a metaphor for their teams. They talked about enjoying exposure to different cultures and viewpoints: *"We work with so many different people… we get to meet people from everywhere, and they bring a little bit of home with them,"* said one casino worker, referring to both coworkers and guests. This speaks to an ethnographic element: the workplace becomes a micro-community where cultural exchange happens daily. Another participant noted, *"Most people are NOT born/raised here, so they bring a diverse perspective to the workforce,"* highlighting that the coast's hospitality workers often come from elsewhere. This diversity can make work more interesting and educational – people learn recipes, languages, and customs from each other, which can enhance solidarity and understanding.

For customers, a diverse staff means a better experience too. Focus group members proudly pointed out that having bilingual staff in every department (front-of-house, back-of-house, management) makes it easier to serve non-English-speaking tourists. On the Oregon coast, visitors come from all over the world; being able to greet someone in Spanish or Vietnamese, or having an employee who can translate, is a business asset. Employees recognize this and feel pride in their collective ability to accommodate different customers – it's a way their diversity makes the business stronger. In one group, they listed languages represented on their team (English, Spanish, Vietnamese) and how that creates a welcoming environment for guests. This aligns with research that shows diverse teams can improve customer service in hospitality by making a broader range of guests feel comfortable.

Moreover, participants mentioned that working alongside people of different ages and backgrounds builds a unique team chemistry. Young workers bring energy, older workers bring experience; people with varied personalities (the introvert, the comedian, the organizer, etc.) complement each other to get the job done. *"All ages, genders, and personalities are all over the place – unique personalities, feels like a family,"* as one person described. In well-managed settings, these differences are cherished and everyone's quirks are accommodated, leading to strong bonds. Some even noted that outside of work, they participate in team events or community volunteering together (one company's team would volunteer in the community as a group), reinforcing that sense of a workplace family.

Inclusion and Equity in Practice: Despite generally positive views on diversity, the focus groups did identify areas where inclusion falls short. A key issue is the language barrier between English-speaking and Spanish-speaking staff. In many Oregon hospitality businesses, Spanish-speaking immigrants occupy kitchen, housekeeping, or maintenance roles (back-of-house), while front-of-house positions (like front desk, server, reception) tend to be filled by English speakers. This often isn't a formal policy but an outcome of who applies and language proficiency requirements of guest-facing jobs. One participant observed, *"most Spanish speakers/undocumented people are BOH [back-of-house] staff… it's not always an issue, but it can be tough to communicate with folks who don't speak the same language at all."*. This highlights a sociolinguistic segmentation in the workplace: the two groups may get along, but they aren't fully integrated due to language. Miscommunications or a lack of communication can cause operational difficulties or social isolation. For example, a Spanish-speaking dishwasher might have ideas or issues to share but feels unable to express them to an English-speaking manager, or an English-speaking server might not know how to ask kitchen staff for a special request in Spanish. When such gaps exist, it subtly creates an "us and them" divide even without any ill intent.

From the perspective of the Spanish-speaking workers, this divide can also mean limited opportunity. If higher-paying supervisory roles require fluent English, immigrant workers might find their advancement blocked, regardless of their technical skills or work ethic. In the Spanish-language focus group, participants talked about *"promociones" (promotions)* as a significant topic, indicating concern about advancement opportunities. While details in the transcript are sparse, one can infer they feel promotions are hard to come by for them – perhaps promotions go to those with better English or those in front-of-house roles. This is a classic structural equity issue: even without overt discrimination, certain groups (in this case, Spanish speakers) might be

stuck in lower roles. To them, that feels like inequity in opportunity, which can breed frustration or disengagement.

Discrimination and Harassment: The focus groups sought to uncover any experiences of bias or unfair treatment related to identity (ethnicity, gender, etc.). Most participants, notably in the English-language groups, reported that within their workplaces, overt discrimination was not prevalent. For example, when asked about gender disparities, people generally said men and women are treated the same in their organizations. A couple of women commented that even though kitchens are male-dominated in general, when women are present they are respected and treated well. Promotion decisions were largely viewed as merit-based in their current jobs, rather than biased by gender or race. This is encouraging and suggests that at least in these focus groups (which likely involved some of the better employers, since employees willing to speak may come from more positive environments), blatant discrimination is not tolerated.

However, subtler forms of bias and some explicit incidents did come up, especially from the Latino workers. One Latina worker described an incident outside of work that nonetheless illustrates the prejudice she faces in the community: a store clerk heard her Hispanic last name and mocked it, then baselessly accused her of shoplifting, even though she had a receipt in hand. This humiliating experience of being judged and targeted due to ethnicity/appearance left a strong impression on her. While this happened at a store and not her workplace, such experiences affect how welcome workers feel in the broader community and can carry over to workplace interactions (for instance, dealing with prejudiced customers). It also highlights why some Latino workers may feel on guard or underappreciated – they deal with bias regularly in society.

In the workplace context, some Spanish-speaking workers reported abuse by employers that borders on discriminatory harassment. A particularly alarming account from the Spanish focus group detailed how certain employers "pressured and threatened" immigrant workers with calls to police or immigration if they didn't comply. This indicates exploitation specifically targeting their vulnerable status (likely undocumented status or uncertain documentation). It's illegal and unethical, and it's a form of discrimination – those employers assume these workers won't seek legal help due to fear. Such abuse creates a culture of terror rather than inclusion. A worker was described as "crying" and wanting to gather others to speak out about these injustices. They explicitly said this treatment is "not fair nor legal… they are violating many rights". This is the starkest contrast in the study: while some workplaces are celebrating diversity, others are exploiting it by mistreating minority workers. It underscores that workplace culture can vary dramatically – which employees know all too well. Those in supportive environments count themselves lucky (as evidenced by their positive comments), whereas those in toxic, abusive environments feel trapped and desperate for change.

Inclusion Efforts and Gaps: Many participants hadn't experienced formal diversity or inclusion programs at work. When asked about training related to diversity/equity, most either skipped the question or recalled a single session years ago. This suggests that while diversity exists, intentional inclusion training or dialogue is rare. Most inclusion seems to happen informally (colleagues getting to know each other, individual managers treating people fairly by their own values). Formal structures like employee resource groups, bias training, or multilingual communications were not prominently mentioned (aside from one recall of a training from

Portland experts years prior). One focus group did note that their company has a "cultural coordinator" and team-building events celebrating staff, which is a great example of proactive inclusion – but this was an exception rather than the rule.

Some workplaces apparently have specific programs to include marginalized groups: one participant mentioned "disability friendly spaces – specific opportunities for disabled folks at Mo's" and that the company is "Youth Org Friendly". This indicates an awareness of diversity beyond ethnicity/gender, extending to disability and youth (perhaps partnering with youth employment programs or similar). Such efforts likely improve overall culture, making employees proud of their company's values.

Equity in advancement was explicitly discussed. A reassuring theme from multiple groups was that *"anyone who shows potential and willingness can move up"*. Workers in these situations felt that their companies recognize hard work and talent regardless of background – essentially meritocratic advancement. Indeed, one restaurant chain was praised for promoting from within and giving people chances to climb the ladder. This is a strong inclusion practice because it ensures diversity at higher levels over time (since the entry-level workforce is diverse). However, for companies where we heard less about promotions, we might infer that advancement is limited or biased. The Spanish speakers' emphasis on wanting fair promotions hints that not all organizations practice equitable advancement, especially for those with language barriers.

To sum up, workplace culture in Oregon's hospitality industry spans a spectrum. At its best, it's diverse, welcoming, and empowering, leveraging the mix of people to create a fun, familial atmosphere that employees cherish. These positive cultures tend to have open communication, respect for differences, and fair opportunities. But at its worst, there are pockets of exclusion and exploitation – often hidden from view – where immigrant workers in particular endure threats, discrimination, or are simply left out of the conversation. Most workplaces likely fall somewhere in between: generally accepting of diversity but not fully utilizing it (e.g., not addressing language barriers or offering inclusion training).

The focus groups show that employees themselves appreciate diversity and largely desire an inclusive, fair environment. Even the fact that Spanish-speaking workers participated (with translation assistance) indicates they want to be heard and included. The findings suggest that ORLA stakeholders should amplify the positives – the family feel, the multicultural service strength – while actively tackling the negatives like language segregation and any abusive practices. Creating a uniformly inclusive culture will improve morale, reduce turnover (especially of immigrant staff), and enhance the industry's reputation as a great place to work for people of all backgrounds.

Management Support & Training

The degree of management support that employees experience can make or break their job satisfaction, according to our focus group participants. We heard about both exemplary and poor management practices, offering a clear picture of what workers need from their leaders and where gaps exist.

Positive Management Practices: At one end of the spectrum, some hospitality workers praised their management in glowing terms. A standout example came from employees of a family-owned restaurant group, who felt truly valued by their bosses. They described management as "very supportive, welcoming and willing to listen", with an "open door" approach to any issues. One person noted there isn't even a physical door on the manager's office – a symbolic and literal gesture of accessibility. In these workplaces, employees trust that if a problem arises (whether a customer issue or a scheduling conflict), management will address it promptly and fairly, without retaliation or defensiveness. This trust has been earned by managers consistently showing up for their team: *"I trust my managers to fix issues,"* said one participant.

Supportive managers also invest in their employees' professional growth. For instance, a front-desk employee shared how a manager took a chance on her when she was shy and new to customer service: he told skeptics to *"just wait, she'll learn it,"* and indeed with his encouragement she became much more confident and capable. Another person added that their boss is *"very encouraging, even when you're kind of nervous… he creates a very welcoming environment"*. These anecdotes show management acting as mentors and coaches, not just bosses. By identifying potential in employees and nurturing it (rather than writing people off quickly), these managers build loyalty. Several workers mentioned internal promotions – companies that "promote from within" give staff a reason to stay and excel. One restaurant's employees observed that colleagues who left thinking they'd find something better often ended up coming back, which they attributed to the particularly positive culture and support at that restaurant. This is a testament to management practices that make employees feel like partners in the business rather than cogs in a machine.

Recognition and rewards are another aspect of support. The focus groups didn't dwell heavily on formal reward systems, but there were hints (e.g., "They offer bonuses"). What's more evident is informal recognition – managers stepping in to help and saying "we're all in this together." One kitchen worker appreciated that *"managers will cook/help when it's busy"*, showing that no one is above any task. This level of humility and teamwork from management earns respect from staff. It also ties into training: a manager who can do frontline tasks well is in a great position to train and support employees in doing them.

Poor Management Practices: Unfortunately, not all workers enjoy such supportive relationships. Some described feeling unsupported or even undermined by management. The issues ranged from managers being unresponsive or absent, to being unsympathetic about workload and life balance, to failing to reward or acknowledge hard work.
A common complaint was the lack of proactive communication about raises or career development. Employees like the 71-year-old focus group member felt that management either "doesn't know what we do, or they don't care," evidenced by the fact that they have to petition for raises and justify their worth. This suggests a disconnect: some managers aren't closely engaged with employees' daily work, so they don't see their accomplishments or struggles first-hand. As a result, they may not realize an employee is overdue for a raise or a promotion, leaving it to the employee to speak up. But as noted earlier, many employees are uncomfortable asking for raises, interpreting the need to ask as a lack of appreciation. This dynamic can foster resentment and a feeling of being invisible to management.

Another area of concern was communication and involvement in decision-making. In the positive examples, employees were kept in the loop and even consulted on changes (e.g., a company that wouldn't implement changes unless staff agreed it was a good idea). In less supportive environments, changes might be handed down without explanation, or policies enforced without employee input, leaving frontline workers feeling voiceless. One participant mentioned that their workplace's upper management is "pretty secretive about what each person makes" and discourages discussing it. While pay confidentiality is common, the way it's enforced can either build trust or breed suspicion. Here it sounded like the secrecy was part of a broader lack of transparency.

Training and Professional Development: A major theme that emerged is the need for better training. Inconsistent or insufficient training not only makes employees' jobs harder, it makes them feel unsupported by management. Several incidents were cited:

- **Inconsistent Training:** One focus group discussed how different shifts had different ways of performing tasks because each person was trained by a different individual with their own style. *"You get five front desk clerks, and two of them do it one way, two do it another way… they should have the same training to get to the same result,"* complained one worker. This lack of standardization is a management issue – it indicates no one has documented the best practices or ensured a uniform onboarding. It can lead to confusion, mistakes, and even conflict among staff ("No, you're doing it wrong!" situations). The worker's call for "consistency" suggests that employees actually *want* guidance and clear expectations, which is something management should provide.

- **New System Rollouts:** A specific example was given of a "fiasco" when a new operating system was introduced at a hotel with almost no training. Staff had "maybe three weeks to do some online training" on their own, which many didn't fully complete, and then the system went live – resulting in employees scrambling, publicly, to learn basic functions like checking out guests. This is a case where management (or corporate) severely under-supported their team. The stress and embarrassment of that scenario clearly stayed with the participants. It also likely impacted guests, thus hurting the business. A worker reflected that with proper, consistent training by the same trainer, the transition could have been much smoother.

- **Frequency of Training:** There was an implication in the discussions that training is seen as a one-time event (e.g., at hire or when something changes) rather than an ongoing process. One worker noted that they don't get regular refreshers: *"Every year you don't get training on certain areas…"*, meaning if you learned something years ago and the world changed (new software, updated procedures), you might never get formally retrained – you just adapt on the fly. Others said training nowadays is often just "through practice" – essentially trial and error on the job. While on-the-job learning is valuable, the absence of structured training leaves employees feeling that management hasn't invested the time to properly equip them. It can also be risky or inefficient.

- **Diversity and Safety Training:** When asked about specific training on topics like diversity, equity, or even safety, responses indicated it was minimal or outdated. One

person recalled a diversity-related training "seven or eight years ago", suggesting nothing recent. Safety training wasn't explicitly discussed in the snippets we saw, but given hospitality involves things like food safety, alcohol service, etc., one might expect more mention if robust programs were in place. The lack of discussion on these likely means they weren't strongly present.

Barriers to Growth: Management support is closely tied to whether employees feel they can advance professionally. Some barriers mentioned were external (like housing, which we'll discuss later), but internal barriers include nepotism, favoritism, or simply lack of opportunity. In generally positive workplaces, workers felt advancement was attainable (as long as one works hard, anyone can move up). However, one participant in a less positive setting implied a dead-end situation: *"there's not really anyone to go to… no conversation you can have… I dread coming to work, not because of the work but because of being met with disrespect and dismissive attitudes"*. This person actually left a higher-paying job because the environment was toxic and growth was impossible due to a single coworker (or small team) dynamic. They moved to a much smaller operation with lower pay but a healthier environment. This trade-off highlights how a supportive management and culture can matter more than money for some employees' career choices.

Another point from that story: in the toxic job, there was "not really anyone to go to" – implying no effective HR or higher manager to resolve conflicts. This is a typical barrier in small businesses; if your direct manager or coworker is the problem and there's no higher authority or peer network, you have no support. Thus, people leave. In the new job, although it's also very small (they are the only employee, working directly with owners), it seems those owners are receptive and they "have conversations regularly" about things like business levels and wages. That open communication makes a world of difference.

Management-Employee Communication: Communication was specifically probed in the focus groups. The consensus in good workplaces was that communication is open, frequent, and two-way. Employees felt heard and kept informed. In less ideal situations, communication was either top-down only or lacking altogether. One participant described a scenario in a corporate hotel where none of the front desk staff felt informed: *"none of us know … they're pretty secretive… they don't want us to talk [about wages]"*. Another chimed in explaining management likely fears "chaos" if people knew each other's pay, which is a *lack of trust* in the team's maturity. This environment of hush-hush communication can breed paranoia and false rumors.

Conversely, in the best-case example, even "upper/regional management and the owner" were described as willing to listen to hourly employees. That's a strong culture of respect and approachability across hierarchy. Employees in such places felt "included in financial and directional discussions" of the company, something quite rare in hospitality but powerful in practice. It means, for example, a restaurant server might know the monthly revenue target or the reasoning behind a new menu, and management might solicit their feedback on how a change is working. That inclusion makes employees feel invested in the business's success – a hallmark of supportive management.

Summary of Needs

The focus group insights point to several needs related to management and training:

- **Recognition and Fair Reward:** Employees want management to notice their hard work and reward it (not only in pay, but in promotions or even verbal appreciation). When management is oblivious or ignores issues like understaffing or uneven workload, employees lose faith.

- **Mentorship and Personal Growth:** Especially younger or less experienced workers value managers who coach them and build their confidence. The shy front-desk clerk who blossomed under a patient manager's guidance is a prime example. People don't just want a boss; many want a mentor figure who cares about their development.

- **Consistency and Structure:** Paradoxically, while hospitality tends to attract free spirits and has informal cultures, employees are asking for more structure in training and procedures. Consistency in how things are done, clear protocols, and proper training not only make operations smoother but show that management has their act together. It's hard for employees to respect or trust management that seems disorganized or reactive.

- **Communication and Inclusion:** Workers at all levels want to be kept informed about changes that affect them and to have a voice. Even if not every idea is adopted, the act of listening and explaining decisions is critical. Inclusion in decision-making (when feasible) makes employees feel like valued stakeholders rather than expendable labor.

- **Accountability for Bad Actors:** In cases where a manager or supervisor is the source of problems (bullying, discrimination, etc.), employees need a higher authority or external avenue to seek help. Otherwise, one person's behavior can poison the workplace culture if unchecked. This speaks to the importance of HR policies and also industry associations or regulators to protect worker rights, because in small businesses HR might be non-existent.

In conclusion, management support and training are areas with both shining examples and notable deficiencies in Oregon's hospitality industry. The focus groups show that when management "gets it right" – through supportive, inclusive, and organized leadership – employees recognize and appreciate it immensely, resulting in loyalty and high morale. On the flip side, poor management leads to quick burnout, high turnover, and even people exiting higher-paying jobs to find a better environment. For ORLA stakeholders, this means investing in management training and creating industry standards for good workplace practices could have

big payoffs in stabilizing the workforce. Many of the worker complaints (lack of raises, poor training, no communication) are fixable management issues, not intractable economic ones. That's an important insight: improving management is one of the most attainable ways to improve job quality in this sector.

Economic Impacts & Worker Struggles

Perhaps the most sobering insights from the focus groups revolve around the economic realities hospitality workers face, especially on Oregon's coast. Even when people love their jobs, economic pressure can force them to make tough choices about whether they can afford to stay in those jobs or in the region at all.

Housing Affordability Crisis: By far, the most frequently mentioned struggle was the cost and availability of housing. Oregon's coastal communities, known for tourism and vacation homes, have experienced rising rents and home prices that local wages haven't kept up with. Focus group participants painted a stark picture of this mismatch:

- **High Rents:** Workers cited typical rents in their area ranging from ~$1,250 for a studio to $1,600–$2,800 for a one-bedroom apartment. These figures are extremely high relative to the average hospitality wage (often around $15–$18 per hour for many positions, which annualized is roughly $30k–$37k before taxes if full-time). Paying $1,500 a month in rent on a $2,500 monthly pre-tax income leaves very little for other expenses. It effectively prices single earners out of living alone. That's why one key theme was *"you have to have roommates or live with family."* Several participants said they either share housing with multiple roommates, live with their parents, or even rent non-traditional spaces (one mentioned renting a garage in someone's home). These are compromises people make to reduce housing cost, but they come with issues like lack of privacy, long commutes if living further out, or suboptimal living conditions.

- **Vacation Rentals and Housing Supply:** A specific challenge on the coast is that many homes are used as short-term rentals (Airbnb, VRBO) for tourists, rather than long-term rentals for locals. Participants noted "really slim pickings for rentals because so many have become vacation rentals", which are "unaffordable" for workers even if they weren't intended for full-time occupancy. This dynamic reduces the housing stock available to employees and drives up competition (and prices) for the few units that remain on the long-term market. It's an example of how the tourism economy, while providing jobs, can also inadvertently displace the workforce via housing. Some coastal towns have started grappling with this by considering limits on vacation rentals, but the focus group comments show it's already a serious problem.

- **Living Situations and Transience:** Because of the housing challenges, many workers view their situation as temporary. Young or newer residents especially treat their coastal job as a stopover; *"they are here for the experience but then they have to move somewhere more affordable,"* one person explained. The data point that *"this is especially true of folks who have immigrated here from other states where cost of living is cheaper"* suggests that people who come from, say, the Midwest or South (with lower costs) might be shocked by Oregon coast prices and leave after a season or two. This

constant churn can be destabilizing for employers as well, leading to perpetual hiring/training cycles. Workers themselves feel a sense of impermanence: even if they like the job, they might not invest in it as a long-term career because they anticipate needing to relocate.

The MEDP report identified safe and affordable housing disparities as a major issue for Latino workers statewide. The ORLA focus groups confirm that on the coast, this is not an abstract policy issue – it's a daily worry. When people are paying large portions of their income on rent or moving frequently to find cheaper housing, it's harder for them to focus on career advancement or be fully present and productive at work. Maslow's hierarchy of needs comes to mind: if shelter (a basic need) is insecure, higher-level needs like esteem at work can take a backseat.

Cost of Living and Transportation: Beyond rent, participants called out other expenses. Utilities (electricity, heating), gasoline, and car maintenance were all mentioned as burdens. Coastal areas often have higher utility costs (for example, heating in damp, windy winters, or just higher rates in rural areas). Gasoline is a significant cost especially if workers have to commute from less expensive inland towns or outlying areas to get to jobs in tourist centers. Public transportation is limited on the coast, so most people need a car. One participant's exasperated list of "gas, electric, car, etc. SO HIGH" summed it up. These cost pressures mean that even a decent hourly wage might not stretch far enough.

Income Volatility: The seasonal nature of work compounds cost-of-living issues by introducing income volatility. It's not just that one's annual income is modest; it's also unevenly distributed across the year. Workers essentially have to budget like squirrels storing nuts: save as much as possible during summer and hope it lasts through winter's lean times. One group explicitly noted *"there is a huge gap in money flow in the winter"*. Even with unemployment benefits or second jobs, winter can deplete any savings. Unexpected costs (medical bills, car repairs) during the off-season can be disastrous. Some mentioned relying on family (e.g., living with parents) to buffer these swings. The stress of this financial rollercoaster can weigh on workers' mental health and overall outlook on their job.

Food Insecurity and Other Struggles: The Spanish transcript's summary keywords included "seguridad alimentaria" (food security), indicating that some workers face difficulty consistently affording enough food. While this didn't come up as explicitly in the English sessions, it's likely a reality for those on the tightest budgets or supporting families. The MEDP report also listed food insecurity among disparities heightened by the pandemic for Latino workers. Workers in the focus groups didn't directly talk about going hungry, but we can infer that if someone is struggling to pay rent and utilities in winter, food expenses are the next to cut. Some hospitality jobs provide a meal per shift, which helps, but on days off or for family members at home, making ends meet can be challenging.

Another struggle is healthcare and benefits. Many hospitality jobs, especially if they drop below full-time in winter, do not provide health insurance or only provide it part of the year. Spanish-speaking participants explicitly wished for "beneficios todo el año" (benefits all year), suggesting that maybe benefits are offered in summer when business is booming but then lost

when hours are cut. Losing health insurance outside of open enrollment periods can leave workers in a precarious spot. Even if insurance is continuous, co-pays and medical costs can be high on a low income, leading people to defer care. None of the English transcripts explicitly mentioned healthcare, but "employee benefits" was a listed theme in one group, so it likely was discussed. At least one person framed it as *"my evaluation is coming up and I want to ask for some benefit"* – implying they might negotiate for a benefit (perhaps health coverage or PTO) as part of a raise or review. For many low-wage workers, benefits can actually be as important as wages in determining financial stability.

Transportation and Geography: The Oregon coast's geography means affordable housing might be far from job centers (which tend to be in small, concentrated tourist towns). If someone finds cheaper rent 30 miles inland, they face a commute that costs time and gas money. In winter, roads can be hazardous or slow, adding to stress. There's also the factor that many coastal towns are rural; outside of work, access to affordable shopping (for groceries, clothes, etc.) might be limited, causing people to drive further or pay higher local prices – a phenomenon known as the "rural penalty" on cost of living. While not deeply discussed in focus groups, these contextual factors lurk behind some of their comments.

Immigrant Workers' Economic Challenges: Immigrant and undocumented workers have some additional burdens. They often send money to family in their home country, meaning a portion of their low earnings leaves the local economy and increases their own local financial strain. They also may avoid public assistance or government aid (like food stamps, housing programs) for fear of jeopardizing immigration status or due to eligibility issues, so they rely solely on their earnings. The focus group mentions of wanting more hours and year-round work could be extra-urgent for someone who cannot legally claim unemployment benefits or doesn't want to interact with government systems. Additionally, undocumented workers are frequently paid in cash or off the books in some establishments, which might mean no access to unemployment at all, no overtime pay, and vulnerability to wage theft (not being paid for all hours). We heard about labor abuse like threats and overwork, which often goes hand in hand with not being properly compensated for overtime or extra duties. Such practices exacerbate economic insecurity – imagine working 60 hours a week but being paid for 40, because you fear rocking the boat. That kind of exploitation drastically affects one's economic situation.

Comparison to Broader Trends: The MEDP report noted that Latinos often work jobs with "little or no benefits and rank high in labor law violations", leading to a wage gap. The ORLA focus groups provided real-life color to that statement: people describing how they don't get overtime pay or rest, essentially confirming labor law issues, and lacking benefits year-round. MEDP also highlighted "safe and affordable housing disparities" – the coastal workers' housing woes are a perfect case study of that. The pandemic was mentioned as magnifying these issues; while the focus groups took place in late 2024 (post-pandemic), some references to COVID's impact did arise. One person noted that since COVID, tips have declined (perhaps more people paying by card and tipping less in cash) and that fast-food chains raised wages to attract workers, creating more competition for local businesses to keep talent. This indicates the economic landscape is still adjusting in the wake of the pandemic, with workers being more choosy (many left hospitality during COVID) and wages rising in some sectors, but not uniformly.

Consequences for Workers and Employers

The economic struggles of workers have several consequences:

- For workers, these struggles can lead to stress, health problems (working multiple jobs, not resting, poor nutrition, etc.), and difficult choices like leaving the area or switching industries. The focus groups showed that many love hospitality but might not stick with it forever under current conditions. Several mentioned plans or instances of moving on for better pay or stability.

- For employers and the industry, high turnover and difficulty recruiting are likely outcomes. If workers can't afford to live where the jobs are, positions go unfilled or service quality suffers due to inexperienced staff. Some savvy employers recognize this; one person said *"they pay me what they can… if it was for-profit I'd expect more"* – implying the employer would pay more if they had the budget. It's a tough spot: small businesses may genuinely struggle to pay more, yet if wages don't rise, they lose employees to bigger companies or other regions. It becomes a vicious cycle.

- **Community impact:** If hospitality workers relocate away, the community loses residents who contribute to year-round vitality – school enrollment drops if families can't afford to stay, fewer young people settle, etc. Some coastal towns already see this effect with largely older populations and difficulty retaining young workers.

Worker Resilience: It's worth noting the resilience and ingenuity workers show in coping. They find roommates, work multiple jobs, tap into benefits like unemployment, and even leverage community resources when needed. One might say they exhibit a form of "economic agility" to survive. But resilience has a limit; these individuals should not have to struggle so hard to make a living while working full-time in a booming industry.

The focus group voices call attention to the need for systemic solutions: higher baseline wages, more affordable housing, off-season job programs, and enforcement of labor standards. They also implicitly suggest that the status quo is not sustainable – as one person put it, people come for the experience but eventually *"have to move somewhere more affordable"*. If nothing changes, the hospitality industry on the coast might face a shrinking labor pool and deteriorating service. On the other hand, if stakeholders address these economic issues, it could stabilize and even grow the workforce, as employees would see a viable long-term career path in the region.

Comparison with MEDP Report Findings

The experiences captured in the ORLA focus groups reflect many of the broader trends identified in the McMinnville Economic Development Partnership (MEDP) report on Latino workforce challenges, while also highlighting the unique context of Oregon's coastal hospitality industry. Below is a comparison of key themes:

- **Wages and "Bad Jobs":** The MEDP report pointed out that Latino workers are often in jobs considered the "jobs no one else wants" – characterized by low wages, few benefits, and frequent labor law violations. The ORLA focus groups confirmed that many hospitality roles fit this description. Workers spoke of low base pay (often minimum wage or just above) that doesn't match their workload and instances of labor law violations, such as not receiving promised raises or being threatened for speaking up about conditions. The wage gap mentioned in MEDP (Latino workers earning less on average) was evidenced by stories of Latino employees doing extra work (like translation) without extra pay, and feeling stuck in lower-paid back-of-house jobs. Both sources highlight that just raising the minimum wage isn't enough if employers find ways to exploit or not reward extra effort – a persistent issue in these "bad jobs."

- **Occupational Segregation and Discrimination:** MEDP noted that Latino workers are often segregated into low-paying jobs due to discrimination, social norms, and gaps in legal protections. In the ORLA study, we see this in the pattern of Spanish-speaking workers predominantly in back-of-house positions and not moving up to management as frequently. Focus group participants didn't explicitly say their bosses discriminated, but the structure speaks for itself, and some did feel held back or undervalued due to who they are (one talked about others doubting her until a manager defended her potential). Also, the extreme case of an employer threatening to call ICE on workers is an example of "anti-immigrant sentiment" and exploitation that MEDP mentioned as part of the inequities exacerbated during the pandemic. On a positive note, some ORLA participants felt their companies were fair and that "anyone can move up if they show potential", which suggests that not every business practices or allows segregation – likely those with more progressive management break this pattern (aligning with MEDP's call to foster inclusive employers).

- **Vulnerability and Instability:** Both the MEDP report and ORLA findings emphasize that these workers were vulnerable even before the pandemic, and instability is a constant concern. MEDP detailed how limited access to education and biased employment policies left Latinos very vulnerable to workplace instability and underemployment. In ORLA's context, underemployment shows up in seasonal underwork and needing multiple jobs. The pandemic exposed these vulnerabilities statewide; on the coast, while not discussed

in depth, it likely hit hospitality very hard (e.g., shutdowns, layoffs in 2020). ORLA participants didn't focus on COVID itself, but the aftermath is implicitly there – for example, when someone mentioned fast food chains raising pay post-pandemic to attract workers, it indicates the labor market turmoil. Job security is tenuous in both narratives: MEDP noted Latinos are more exposed to disruption because they work in essential, easily impacted industries. Hospitality/tourism is definitely one such industry, pandemic or not. Seasonal fluctuations on the coast are another form of disruption. Thus, ORLA workers' heavy reliance on unemployment benefits in winter or willingness to leave for stability mirror the MEDP findings on instability.

- **Housing and Cost of Living:** The MEDP report touched on affordable housing disparities and food insecurity for Latino workers, attributing it to the long-standing inequities worsened by COVID. The ORLA study brings a specific example: coastal areas where housing is scarce and expensive for the workforce. This is a concrete instance of the broader issue – while MEDP looked at the statewide picture, ORLA zeroes in on a hotspot where the housing crisis is acute. Both sets of findings would agree that addressing housing is critical to improving workforce stability. The ORLA focus groups also connect high housing costs to eventual out-migration of workers, a trend that MEDP's macro data might predict (areas with high cost of living lose low-wage workers over time).

- **Health and Safety:** MEDP emphasized that during COVID, Latino workers faced more health risks and had less access to healthcare, and that wellness support is needed. In ORLA's groups, direct talk of health was limited, but one can infer that lack of year-round benefits (health insurance) and the stress of economic insecurity can lead to health issues. Also, the mention of needing wellness programs in MEDP resonates with ORLA participants describing anxiety and emotional stress from their jobs (e.g., the crying worker under abusive management, or the person dreading work due to a hostile coworker). There's a human toll in both contexts that often goes unseen. ORLA participants didn't explicitly request health or wellness programs, likely because many are just focused on basic needs. This could mean such needs go unspoken but are very real – something MEDP flagged and ORLA stakeholders should consider (like mental health support for employees dealing with high stress).

- **Management and Cultural Competency:** The MEDP report concluded with recommendations around cultural competency, service equity, and diversity training for employers. It stressed raising awareness in management about valuing diverse experiences and establishing diversity standards for recruitment, retention, and promotion. The ORLA focus groups illustrate exactly why those recommendations are needed. We saw that where management was culturally competent and inclusive, employees thrived (e.g., managers listening and supporting a shy bilingual worker, resulting in her growth). But we also saw cases where management lacked this competency – such as not providing Spanish-language training materials or not encouraging English classes for non-English staff, leading to communication breakdowns. The ORLA participants who faced bias or a lack of opportunity because of who they are would benefit if their employers implemented the kind of diversity and

inclusion initiatives the MEDP report calls for (like unconscious bias training for managers or mentoring programs for Latino employees).

- **Representation in Management:** MEDP suggested increasing the representation of Latinos in management and upper levels. ORLA's findings support this need – none of the focus group stories featured a Latino or Spanish-speaking person in higher management. In fact, several stories implied the opposite (Spanish speakers not in leadership, or one reference to tribal members being prioritized in a casino's management hierarchy, which is a different diversity aspect). If more managers or owners on the coast were from the communities of those frontline workers (Latino, bilingual, etc.), perhaps communication and trust would improve. ORLA stakeholders can see this as a potential area to work on, aligning with MEDP's recommendation.

- **Success Stories:** One difference in emphasis is that the ORLA focus groups, by covering multiple employers, included some success stories of good management and culture (e.g., Mo's). The MEDP report, focusing on challenges, may not have highlighted individual businesses doing well by their employees. ORLA findings suggest that there are models within the industry that can be learned from and scaled. This is less of a contrast and more of an addition: ORLA can supplement MEDP's more general findings by saying, "Yes, these problems exist broadly, but look – when a business invests in its people (fair pay, internal promotions, a respectful culture), it can buck the trend and succeed, so it's possible."

In essence, the ORLA study provides a microcosm of the issues the MEDP report outlined on a macro level. Low wages, insecure jobs, discrimination, and high living costs are the through-lines in both. ORLA's unique contribution is detailing how these issues play out in a seasonal coastal economy and within the hospitality sector, including the role of tips, tourism, and small-town dynamics. It also emphasizes language barriers and seasonality more than MEDP did, because those are particularly salient in this context.

Overall, there is strong alignment between the two: both call attention to the need for improved job quality and equity for frontline workers, especially those from diverse backgrounds. The ORLA findings validate the MEDP report's claims and lend urgency from a different angle – if these challenges are present in coastal hospitality now, it means the concerns MEDP raised are not limited to the immediate pandemic aftermath or one locale; they are pervasive and ongoing in Oregon.

For ORLA stakeholders, this comparison underscores that many of the issues their employees face are part of statewide and nationwide trends. Solutions will require industry collaboration and possibly policy support, not just individual workplaces tweaking their practices (although that's important too). The advantage is that we have insight into what workers value and what hurts them most, which can guide targeted interventions.

Practical Recommendations for ORLA Stakeholders

Based on the focus group insights, the following recommendations are offered to Oregon's hospitality industry leaders and ORLA stakeholders. These suggestions aim to address the identified challenges in fair pay, job stability, diversity and inclusion, management practices, and economic security for workers. Adopting these measures can improve employee well-being and retention, which ultimately enhances service quality and business performance.

1. Establish Transparent and Fair Compensation Practices

Ensuring employees feel fairly compensated is critical. ORLA should encourage member businesses to audit and adjust their wage structures:

- **Implement Wage Transparency:** Promote openness about pay ranges for different roles. Transparency can reduce rumors and perceptions of unfairness. When workers know how pay is determined (based on experience, position, etc.), they are more likely to view it as equitable. ORLA could develop guidelines or tools for businesses to communicate pay scales without violating individual privacy.

- **Regular Raises and Reviews:** Advocate for regular pay reviews (e.g., annually) for all staff. Even small annual raises or cost-of-living adjustments show recognition. This addresses the grievance of those who feel they are stuck at the same wage for years unless they beg for a raise. ORLA might provide a model policy for annual evaluations tied to raise considerations, helping "old school" workers see their loyalty rewarded.

- **Merit and Skill-Based Pay:** Encourage employers to reward additional skills or responsibilities with additional pay. For example, bilingual staff or employees who frequently serve as interpreters should receive a pay differential or stipend for that skill, rather than it being an invisible contribution. Likewise, if an employee takes on training new hires or regularly steps into a higher role, their wage should reflect those extra duties. Formalizing this avoids scenarios where quiet, hardworking individuals are taken advantage of.

- **Fair Tip Practices:** Standardize tip pooling/sharing policies that workers perceive as fair. ORLA can facilitate an exchange of best practices on tip distribution (for instance, tip pools that include back-of-house could be coupled with a higher base wage for servers to balance things out). The goal is to prevent resentment like the case of tipping out higher-paid staff. Perhaps ORLA can even explore industry-wide norms or agreements on

a service charge model that ensures a consistent gratuity, which some focus group members praised for providing stability.

2. Create Pathways for Year-Round Employment & Income Stability

Seasonality is a fact of life on the Oregon coast, but its effects on workers can be mitigated:

- **Work-Sharing Agreements:** Businesses in the same community could coordinate to share employees in the off-season. For example, a resort that slows down in winter can loan staff to a local restaurant that sees a holiday bump, and vice versa. ORLA can help broker such partnerships or a pool system. This keeps workers employed and earning instead of needing to find unrelated jobs or relocate.

- **Cross-Training Programs:** Encourage cross-training employees in multiple functions. A worker trained in both housekeeping and front desk, or both serving and basic cooking, could have more hours year-round (covering different departments as needed). Cross-training also increases workers' skills (making them more valuable) and provides backup staffing for employers. Several focus group participants expressed willingness to do more if it means stable hours.

- **Utilize Slow Season Productively:** Instead of layoffs or hour cuts only, employers can use winter to invest in staff training, deep cleaning, renovations, or planning, employing their team to do this work. This keeps people busy and on payroll. ORLA could advocate for an "off-season project" approach. Some businesses might qualify for work-share programs (where the state unemployment insurance supplements wages for reduced hours while employers keep workers part-time). The example of a restaurant reducing everyone's hours equally is humane; building on that, ORLA could educate employers on work-share (a program in Oregon's unemployment system) which can top-up those reduced hours.

- **Facilitate Unemployment Benefits:** For seasonal reductions that are unavoidable, ensure employees know their rights and how to access unemployment insurance (UI). ORLA can work with the Oregon Employment Department to create guidance tailored for hospitality workers. They could even host workshops or distribute bilingual info so that no worker feels ashamed or unsure about using UI as a bridge, much like the supportive approach at Mo's. When businesses openly normalize this (as Mo's did), employees feel secure that taking UI in winter won't cost them their job in summer.

3. Enhance Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in the Workplace

A diverse workforce is an asset, but it needs active inclusion efforts:

- **Language Access and Integration:** Overcome language barriers by providing key materials in Spanish (and other prevalent languages) – e.g., employee handbooks, safety instructions, schedules – so Spanish-speaking staff are fully informed. Also, encourage some basic language learning in both directions: offer English classes at work for staff

(perhaps a weekly ESL class after shift, with incentives for attendance) and offer basic Spanish phrases training for managers and English-speaking staff (to foster empathy and basic communication). Even a little effort here can make Spanish-speaking workers feel seen and included. One could follow the lead of workplaces that employ bilingual staff in all areas – if hiring new managers, consider Spanish fluency a plus, for example.

- **Promotion of Underrepresented Staff:** ORLA should promote mentorship programs pairing experienced managers with frontline workers from underrepresented groups (women, BIPOC, immigrants). The goal: prepare them for leadership roles. This addresses the "occupational segregation" issue by intentionally pulling talent upward. If an employee shows potential, as participants said, give them a road map: training modules or leadership shadowing opportunities to gain the skills needed for promotion. Recognize and announce promotions internally to show that growth is possible for everyone.

- **Zero Tolerance for Harassment/Abuse:** Establish clear anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies. ORLA can provide a template policy that even small businesses without HR can adopt, covering issues from racial slurs to sexual harassment to retaliation threats. Crucially, create safe reporting channels: workers must have a way to report issues (perhaps a designated ORLA hotline or a community liaison, if they fear reporting internally). For instance, the accounts of managers threatening immigrant workers indicate those employees had no safe avenue to complain. ORLA, in partnership with worker advocacy groups, could serve as an intermediary to field serious complaints and work with businesses to resolve them before legal action is needed. Regularly communicate to workers (in multiple languages) that their workplace should be free of abuse, and there are people who will help if they are mistreated.

- **Cultural Competency Training:** Host annual or biannual DEI workshops for managers and employees. These could be regional trainings that smaller businesses can send a couple of reps to, or even short online modules. Topics should include: understanding cultural differences, handling implicit bias, benefits of diversity for business, and communication skills for a diverse team. Given one focus group's recollection of a positive diversity training years ago, refreshing such training could reignite awareness. ORLA can invite experts (perhaps from organizations like the Latino Community Association or local tribal representatives for areas with tribal employment) to lead these sessions. Making it fun and directly relevant (e.g., role-playing common customer service scenarios across language barriers) will engage hospitality staff.

4. Invest in Management Training and Support

Improving management practices could address many issues raised by workers:

- **Hospitality Management Bootcamps:** ORLA should develop (or partner to offer) training for new supervisors and managers. Many great line employees get promoted to manager without formal training on how to lead a team. A "bootcamp" could cover effective communication, scheduling fairly, conflict resolution, how to conduct

performance evaluations, and legal basics (like wage and hour laws, non-discrimination). Emphasize the importance of regular feedback and coaching – managers should know that supporting their team's growth is part of their job, not just pushing for performance.

- **Standardize Onboarding and Training Materials:** Create an industry toolkit of training resources. For example, a standardized front-desk manual or a kitchen safety checklist that any hotel or restaurant can adapt. This could drastically help small operators who currently "wing it" and produce the inconsistent training experiences workers complained about. ORLA can collaborate with experienced trainers to produce bilingual training manuals, step-by-step procedure guides, and even short training videos. By distributing these to members, every business can at least have a foundation to train staff properly, leading to more confidence and consistency among employees.

- **Ongoing Training and Cross-Training:** Encourage a culture of continuous learning. Managers should schedule periodic refreshers or cross-training sessions (for example, an annual fire safety drill, a quarterly customer service refresher, a cross-department shadow day). Some focus group participants actually *want* more training (e.g., learning a new reservation system in advance), which contradicts a stereotype that workers resist training. In fact, they resist poorly executed training. Giving managers the tools to do it right will be welcomed. ORLA might consider a certification program where a business that commits to X hours of employee training per year earns a "Training Excellence" badge – creating positive pressure to prioritize learning.

- **Management Accountability and Feedback:** It's not just employees who should be evaluated; 360-degree feedback for managers can be valuable. ORLA could recommend that businesses gather anonymous feedback from staff about management performance. Simple surveys asking "Do you feel supported by your supervisor? What could they do better?" can uncover issues. Owners or upper managers should review these and coach their management team accordingly. This would address situations where a rogue manager is causing turnover or discontent unbeknownst to the owner. For instance, if such feedback channels had existed, the abusive behaviors reported by Spanish-speaking workers might have been caught and corrected earlier.

- **Recognize Good Employers:** ORLA can create positive incentives by highlighting businesses with excellent management and culture (awards, spotlights in newsletters). This not only spreads best practices but also shows others that "doing right by employees" is valued in the industry. The MEDP report recommended celebrating employers who champion equity; ORLA can do similarly, perhaps sharing case studies like the supportive practices at Mo's or other businesses praised in the groups. Knowing that being a great boss gets public recognition might motivate some managers to put in the effort.

5. Collaborate on Solutions for Housing and Transportation

While individual businesses can only do so much about housing, collectively ORLA and its members have a stronger voice:

- **Workforce Housing Initiatives:** ORLA should partner with local governments on addressing housing. This could include supporting zoning changes or incentives for developing affordable housing targeted at service workers. If there are underused properties (old motels, etc.), ORLA could facilitate conversations about converting them to dorm-style housing for seasonal staff or affordable apartments. Large employers might consider investing together in an employee housing project, sharing costs. The key is to treat housing as infrastructure for the tourism economy – just like roads or utilities. Present data (like the focus group testimonies) to city councils and county officials showing that lack of housing is driving away the very workers that make tourism possible. Public-private partnerships could be a win-win: businesses get more stable labor, and communities retain year-round residents.

- **Housing Stipends or Assistance:** Encourage employers, especially those with extreme seasonal profits, to offer housing stipends or creative assistance. For example, some resorts could master-lease a block of apartments year-round and sublet to employees at below-market rates (absorbing some cost as an employee benefit). Smaller businesses might partner to do this. Even helping with relocation costs or deposit assistance can make a difference for a new hire. Considering the focus group reports that some live in garages or overcrowded units, giving a bit of help here improves quality of life immensely.

- **Transportation Solutions:** To alleviate transport costs, ORLA could coordinate a ride-share or shuttle program for clusters of employees. If many workers live in town A and commute to town B for work, perhaps a vanpool funded by participating businesses could run during shift changes. This would cut gas costs (mentioned as a burden) and also ease parking issues in tourist areas. Additionally, pushing for improved public transit along the coast (more frequent buses that align with shift times) could be an advocacy point for ORLA with local transit authorities.

- **Cost of Living Adjustments:** As part of wage strategies, consider location-based pay differentials. If one coastal town has significantly higher rent than another, employers in the pricier town might aim to pay a bit more to offset that. ORLA can compile cost-of-living data for various coastal areas and share it with members to inform their wage setting. This ties back to fair compensation but is specifically about recognizing that $15/hour in one town is not the same as $15 in another. Some focus group members noticed differences even within the coast – leveraging that knowledge to push for equitable wages regionally could help.

- **Connect Workers to Resources:** ORLA and employers should also ensure workers know about any available assistance. Many non-profits offer help with rent or utilities, and Oregon has programs like energy assistance. Employers could invite resource fair events or have a pamphlet for new hires about local services (food banks, housing assistance, etc.). While this doesn't solve the root issue, it can alleviate short-term crises. A culture where it's okay to seek help (rather than a stigma) can be fostered by employers showing they care – e.g., "If you're having trouble in the winter, come talk to us, we can

connect you with someone who can help." This happened informally in some supportive workplaces, but formalizing it ensures no one falls through the cracks.

6. Advocate for Policy Changes Beneficial to Workers and Industry

Finally, ORLA as an organization can use its influence in policy arenas:

- **State Support for Seasonal Industries:** Lobby for state programs that support employers and workers in seasonal industries. For instance, improved work-share unemployment programs, seasonal worker healthcare coverage (maybe a state fund or exchange options that accommodate fluctuations), or tax incentives for businesses that provide year-round employment to a certain percentage of their workforce. The focus group stories show it's challenging for businesses to do it all alone; some public policy help could encourage the right behaviors.

- **Strengthen Enforcement of Labor Standards:** ORLA should actually support strong enforcement of labor laws to level the playing field. Reputable businesses often suffer when bad actors underpay or exploit workers – it undercuts fair competition. By collaborating with BOLI (Bureau of Labor and Industries) or encouraging anonymous reporting, ORLA can help ensure businesses that violate laws (like those threatening employees or not paying overtime) are held accountable. This removes the advantage bad employers have and protects workers. The MEDP report and ORLA findings both highlight labor law violations, so tackling that benefits everyone.

- **Healthcare Solutions:** Advocate for affordable healthcare options for hospitality workers. Perhaps ORLA could partner in creating a group health insurance plan that smaller employers can buy into for their employees, taking advantage of association health plan models. This could lower costs and expand coverage, addressing the "benefits all year" concern. Healthy workers are more productive and stay longer at jobs.

Each of these recommendations requires effort and collaboration, but they are grounded in the real voices and needs expressed by the focus group participants. Implementing them can transform the hospitality workforce experience on the Oregon coast. Workers who feel fairly paid, secure in their jobs, included and respected at work, well-trained, and able to afford living in the community will undoubtedly deliver better service and contribute to a more robust, positive industry reputation.

Moreover, addressing these issues proactively can help Oregon's hospitality businesses attract and retain talent in a competitive labor market. By comparing notes with the MEDP findings, it's clear that many challenges are not unique to one area – so ORLA's leadership in solving them could have ripple effects statewide, setting an example for how to support the backbone of the tourism economy: *its workers*.

Conclusion

The focus group analysis of Oregon's hospitality workforce reveals a complex interplay of economic, social, and cultural factors that affect employees' lives and job performance. While many participants expressed passion for their work and appreciation for diversity in their workplaces, they also highlighted significant areas in need of improvement – from basic pay and housing to deeper issues of respect and inclusion. In many ways, the Oregon coast's hospitality sector serves as a microcosm of broader labor issues: workers enjoy their jobs and take pride in them, but they yearn for fair treatment, stability, and the ability to build a decent life from their work. The similarities with the MEDP Latino workforce study underscore that these are not isolated concerns; they reflect statewide and national trends in service industries, especially those heavily reliant on immigrant and minority labor. For ORLA and its stakeholders, these findings carry important implications. Businesses that have already adopted supportive practices (like internal promotion, consistent scheduling, and open communication) can be champions and mentors within the association, helping others to follow suit. Those that have struggled in these areas now have candid feedback that can drive change. Addressing wages, seasonality, and management issues is not just altruism – it's increasingly a business necessity as competition for labor grows and as consumers pay more attention to how companies treat their employees. The practical recommendations provided offer a roadmap to start tackling these challenges. They range from immediate actions (like reviewing tip policies or translating the employee handbook into Spanish) to long-term initiatives (like housing partnerships and leadership training programs). It will require collective effort and creative thinking, but the return on investment is high: a stable, motivated workforce that provides excellent hospitality, stays with employers longer, and contributes to the community. In moving forward, it will be important for ORLA to maintain an ongoing dialogue with workers. Focus groups and surveys should not be one-off events. Continuous feedback loops – perhaps an annual workforce survey or regular roundtables – can help track progress and detect new issues as they arise. In particular, ensuring that Spanish-speaking and other marginalized voices are heard is crucial, as this study did. We saw how their experiences added dimensions that might be overlooked if only English-speaking or management-favored employees were consulted. Finally, the convergence of ORLA's study with the MEDP report's themes suggests that collaboration beyond the hospitality industry could be beneficial. Many solutions (housing, healthcare, training) could be pursued in partnership with other sectors or government agencies. ORLA has an opportunity to be a leader, showing how an industry can respond to workforce challenges proactively and compassionately. By implementing changes based on these findings, Oregon's hospitality industry can work toward a future where a job in a restaurant or hotel on the coast is not synonymous with financial struggle or dead-end prospects, but rather is a respected, sustainable career choice. That change will help not only the workers, but also the employers and communities that rely on a thriving, service-oriented economy. The focus group participants – through their honesty and insights – have illuminated the path. Now it is up

to the industry and its partners to act on it, ensuring that the people who welcome visitors to Oregon's beautiful coast are themselves supported and valued.