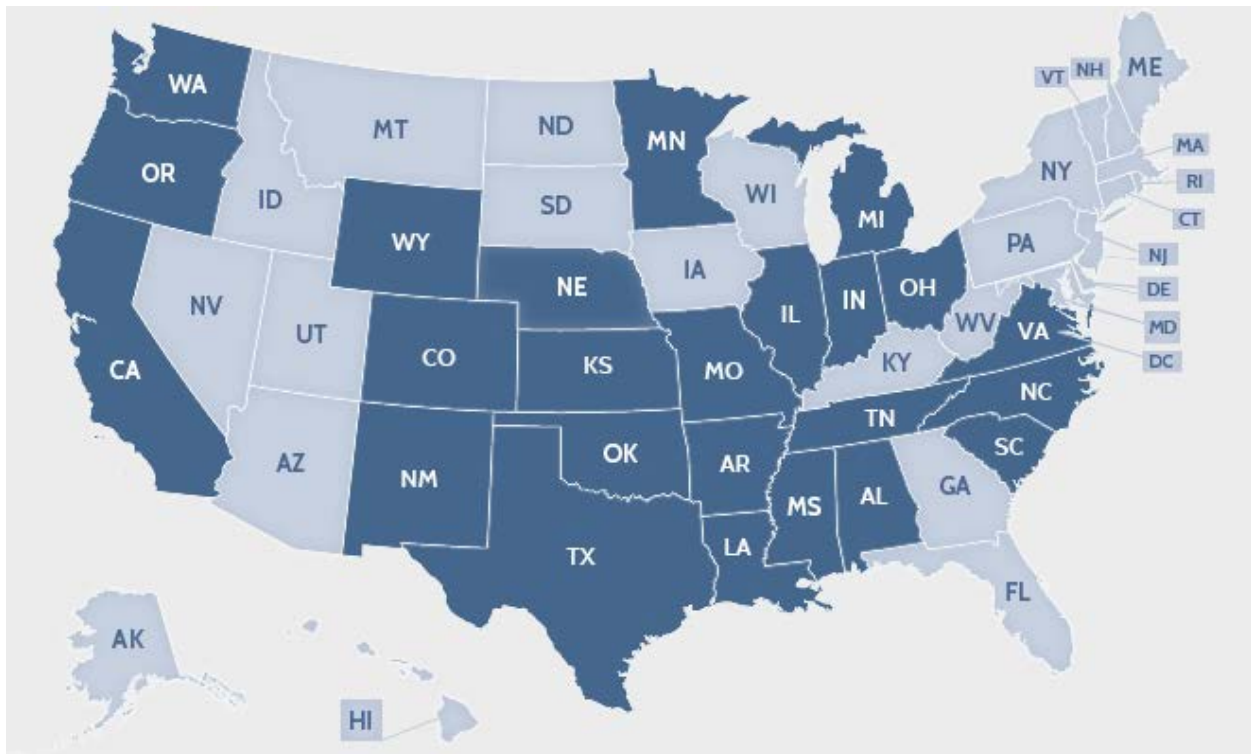


A Summary of the 2017 Survey Results

The mission of ACT is to help people achieve education and workplace success. At a time when the nation's economy is quickly changing and the skill needs of employers are constantly shifting, it is critical that we build successful collaborative efforts among businesses, workers, policymakers, educators, and economic developers. These efforts must be based on meaningful data that link education and workforce development, align to economic development and the needs of employers, and match individuals' skill sets with jobs to sustain and grow the workforce.

ACT is committed to helping people succeed in the current and future workforce. To that end, the ACT Work Ready Communities (WRC) initiative aims to provide a stronger bond between states or counties and their respective workforce development partners. The ACT WRC initiative enables communities to leverage a proven framework to build a sustainable community approach that unites county leaders around common and meaningful goals that result in positive change for all stakeholders.

The ACT WRC initiative began in 2012, and 184 communities had achieved certified ACT Work Ready Community status in 25 states as of July 2017 (see map below).



States (in dark blue) with state- or county-led ACT Work Ready Communities

Achieving WRC status means that the community has a robust, connected workforce development program in place. Certification of a participating WRC is based on:

1. the numbers of individuals in its emerging, transitioning, and current workforces who have earned an ACT® National Career Readiness Certificate® (ACT® NCRC®), a portable credential that uses performance on selected ACT® WorkKeys® assessments to demonstrate achievement and a certain level of workplace employability skills; and
2. the numbers of its employers recognizing or recommending the ACT® WorkKeys® NCRC® in support of the county becoming a certified Work Ready Community.

These numbers are established by goals developed from the [ACT WRC common criteria](#).

Users comment on the value of the ACT WorkKeys NCRC and ACT WorkKeys:

“The NCRC gave me a lot of confidence because it went back and showed me that a lot of the skill set that I had, I didn’t know I had. It came out through the NCRC. It gave me confidence because it reinforced some of the things that I knew and it helped point out areas I was weak in that I needed to grow in for future job opportunities.”

Skip Palma, Veterans Employment Specialist, Community Solutions of Clackamas County, Oregon City, OR

Jay Dunwell, chair of Michigan Work Ready Communities Initiative and president of Wolverine Coil Spring of Grand Rapids, said using ACT WorkKeys has helped his company identify high-potential employees like Diego Arvico.

Arvico was packing boxes at Wolverine when company officials noticed his high test scores put him in the “gold category.” Company officials have since trained him to operate a coiling machine and as a CNC setup technician.

Jim Harger, Grand Rapids *Press* (MI)

“One of the chief challenges is to bring on the right talent, because you don’t have a lot of budget for making mistakes. And the WorkKeys NCRC program allows you to assess people ahead of time, before they come in the door.”

Wayne Skipper, President, Concentric Sky, Eugene, OR

Once certified, a community may continue to maintain its certification and add new objectives, such as: closing skills gaps by helping individuals improve their work readiness skills; conducting job analyses to help companies better leverage the WorkKeys NCRC in hiring and promotion; and integrating the WorkKeys NCRC as the foundational level in the model of stackable credentials established by the U.S. Department of Labor, to help ensure that local targets are aligned with the skills needed in high demand careers.¹

¹ As an example of the last of these objectives, two WRC-certified counties in East Central Indiana use a Silver-level WorkKeys NCRC as a stackable credential toward the Manufacturing Skill Standards Council’s Certified Production Technician certificate.

The Need for Work Ready Communities

Communities that are motivated to ensure that education and training match the needs of employers, lead to jobs, and help individuals advance in their careers are enabled through the WRC framework. As highlighted in the latest edition of [ACT's Policy Platform: Workforce Development](#), education and workforce development must be linked and aligned with the needs of employers in communities so that candidates can find and succeed in jobs.

While this might sound easy, creating a sustainable, collaborative workforce development approach is hard work, especially because workforce development efforts are typically fragmented across multiple agencies, each with its own funding stream often tied to unique and disconnected performance outcomes. In contrast, the WRC initiative connects key workforce development leadership with the private sector to build a robust, sustainable, collaborative workforce development approach.

A user comments on the value of the WRC initiative:

Ed Cowgill, personnel director at Indiana Ticket/Muncie Novelty, which employs 170 people in the manufacturing of wristbands, tickets for sporting events, pull tabs and other products, calls [ACT] Work Ready [Communities] a "tremendous resource" that has made his job easier.

Seth Slabaugh, Muncie *Star Press* (IN)

How to Become an ACT Work Ready Community

In order to become a WRC, state or county leadership teams first apply to become involved in the initiative. Once an application is submitted and approved, ACT supports the leadership team via the WRC Academy. The Academy helps teams develop a holistic approach to leveraging WRC into a broader strategy tailored to meet their needs while also assembling a tactical plan to achieve their overall WRC goals based on the ACT WRC common criteria.

In a state initiative, ACT works with state leadership to help it build a plan for certifying and sustaining counties in an approach aligned with state economic development. Often, states create additional goals beyond those developed by ACT. (For example, a state may also wish to establish a minimum target percentage for high school graduation.) While the state is responsible for working with counties, including providing technical and communication support, ACT will provide additional support to counties as requested by the state.

In a county initiative, ACT works directly with the county leadership to build a local plan for certifying and sustaining the county, ensuring alignment to its economic development needs and providing technical and communication support. Here, only the ACT-developed goals are used to certify.

The Governor of Missouri comments on a WRC county initiative in his state:

"In speaking with local leaders, it is clear that [Pettis County] takes a team approach to making sure workers here have the skills they need to compete and win in a global economy," [Gov. Jay] Nixon said. "This community is an outstanding example of what is possible when educators, community leaders and business leaders work together."

Annabeth Miller, Sedalia *Democrat* (MO)

Key Findings

The following pages summarize key findings from the 2017 ACT Work Ready Communities Survey, to which county leaders, businesses, and WorkKeys NCRC holders participating in both state-led and county-led WRC initiatives responded. (See the table below for the list of states represented among the survey respondents.)

States Represented in Survey	
Alabama	Nebraska
Arkansas	New Mexico
California	North Carolina
Colorado	Ohio
Illinois	Oklahoma
Indiana	Oregon
Kansas	South Carolina
Kentucky	Tennessee
Louisiana	Texas
Michigan	Utah
Mississippi	Virginia
Missouri	Wyoming

The goal of the survey was to identify areas of strength and potential areas of improvement regarding the overall WRC initiative and some of its specific components. Within each group of survey respondents, ACT aggregated the results from state-led and county-led initiatives.

County leaders were asked for their opinions about the WRC initiative, while WorkKeys NCRC holders were asked for their opinions about the certificate. Businesses were asked for their opinions about both the WRC and the WorkKeys NCRC. Response counts and rates for each group appear in the table below.

Group	n	Rate (%)
County leaders	51	1.86%
Businesses	609	4.35%
Certificate holders	1,226	2.76%

Over all, WRC initiatives received strong support both from the county leaders and the businesses; the WorkKeys NCRC received fairly strong support both from the certificate holders and from the businesses.

Selected responses are highlighted below.

Responses about the Work Ready Community initiative

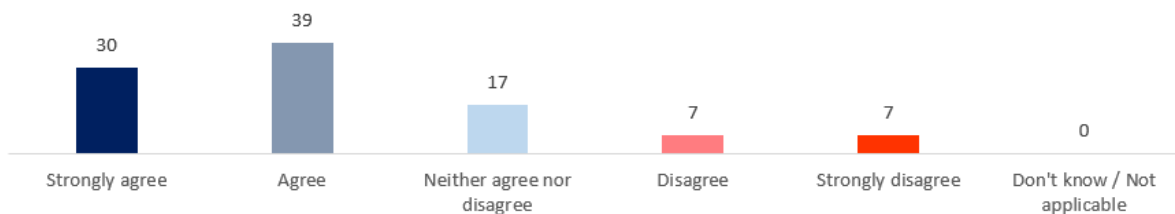
County leaders

For the three statements below, county leaders were asked to choose one of the following responses indicating how strongly they agree or disagree with each statement:

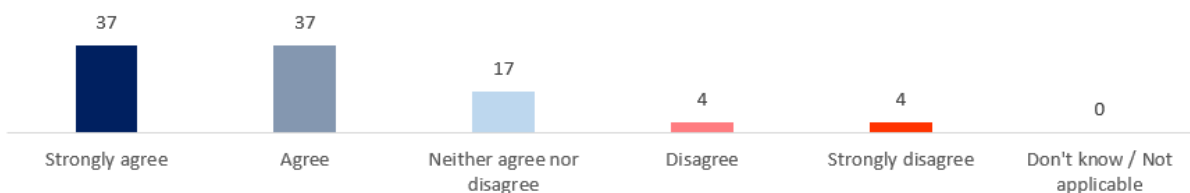
- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know / Not applicable

Nearly seven in ten (69%) of the county-leader respondents agreed that participating in the WRC initiative helps their county have a cohesive workforce development strategy; seven in ten (74%) agreed that participation is improving workforce development partnerships in their community; and nearly eight in ten (76%) would recommend the initiative to other counties.

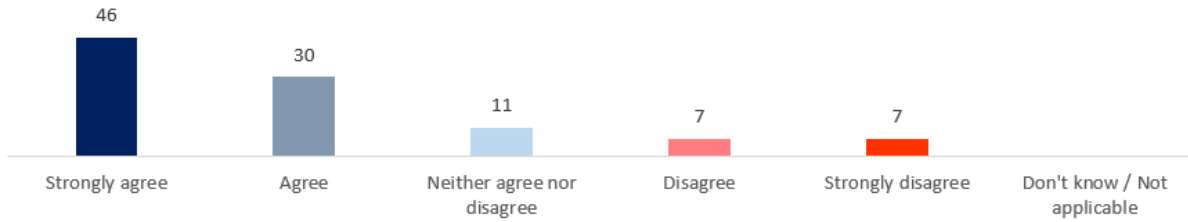
Participating in the Certified ACT Work Ready Community initiative helps my county to have a cohesive workforce development strategy.



My county's participation in the Certified ACT Work Ready Community initiative is improving workforce development partnerships in my community.



I would recommend the Certified ACT Work Ready Community initiative to other counties.



County leaders were also asked the following questions about whether they use the WRC initiative, or the data generated from it, to:

- Improve local workforce efforts
- Promote the county to new businesses
- Support current businesses

In each case, a clear majority of respondents reported using the data in these ways.

Are you using the ACT Work Ready Community data to improve your local workforce development efforts?



Are you using the ACT Work Ready Community data to promote your county to new businesses?



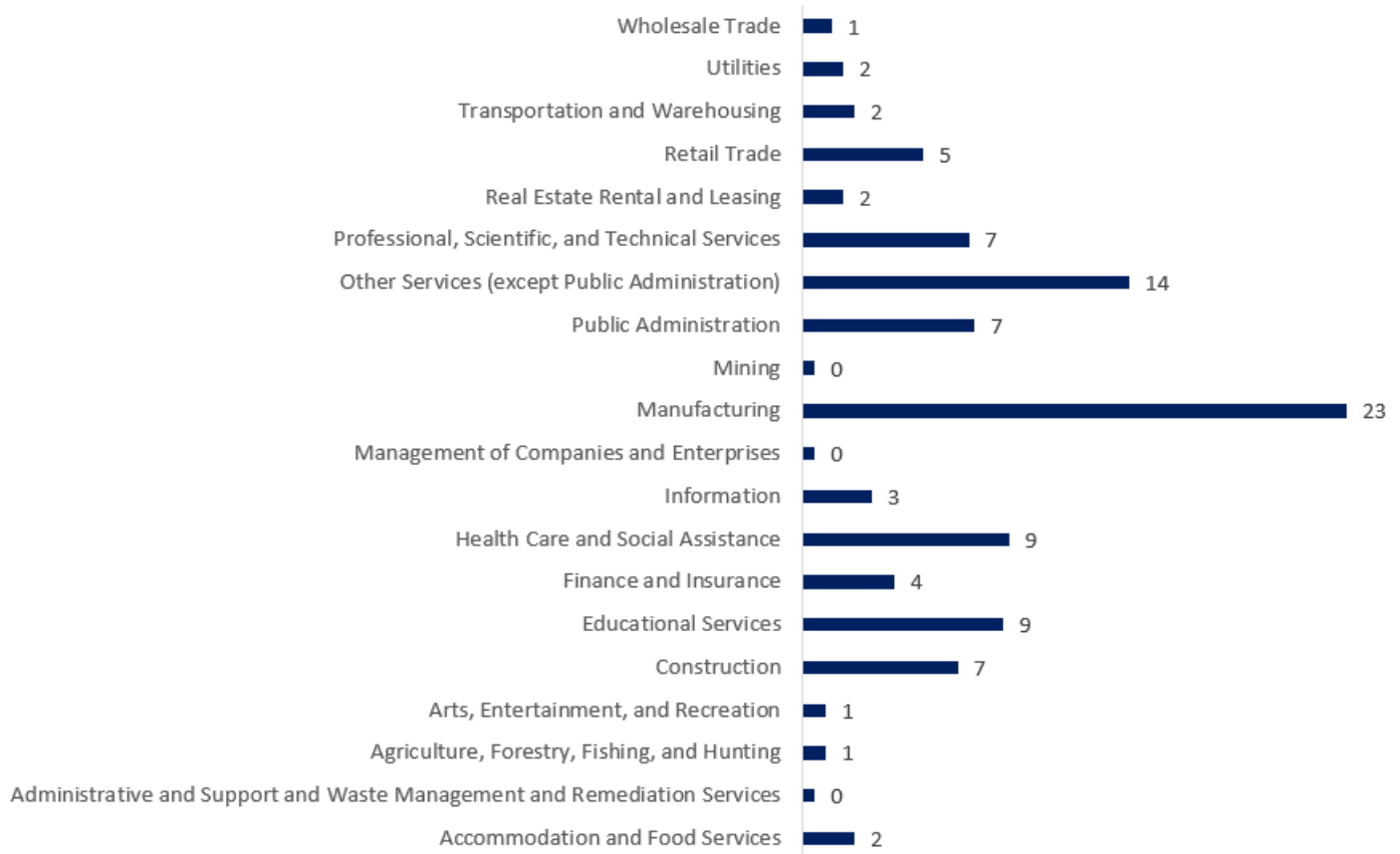
Are you using your Certified ACT Work Ready Community initiative to support your current businesses?



Businesses

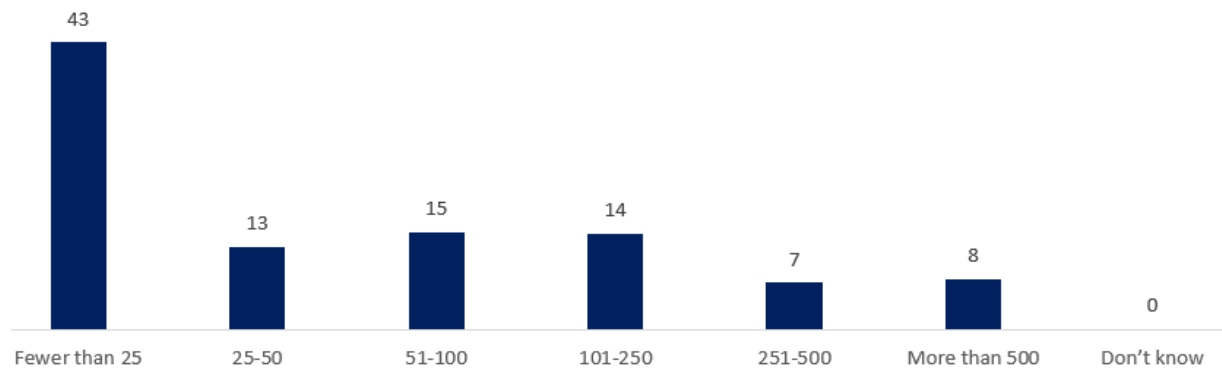
Over half of the businesses (55%) indicated that they are in the manufacturing, health care and social assistance, educational services, or “other services” industries (the four most common responses), with manufacturing the most commonly reported of these. Manufacturing is also the most common industry represented among all businesses involved in WRC initiatives nationwide. This is not surprising, as manufacturing is one of several industries that makes consistent use of evidence-based employee selection strategies such as the WorkKeys NCRC, and because manufacturing is typically the primary industry that economic developers want to attract to their communities, and is therefore often a focus of states or counties in WRC initiatives.

Which of the following best describes your company's industry?



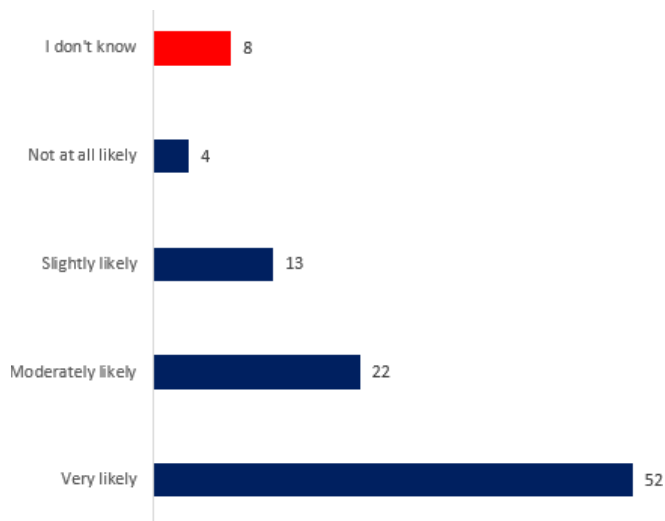
Over half of the businesses (56%) indicated that they employ 50 or fewer people at their local site, with close to three-fourths of this group (43% of the total, and by far the most common response) employing fewer than 25. At the other end of the range, 15% of the businesses indicated that they employ more than 250 people, with just under half of these (8% of the total, and the least common response overall) employing more than 500.

How many people are employed by your company at your local site?



The majority of the business respondents (87%) reported that their companies are likely, to one degree or another, to support the WRC initiative in their state or county, with 52% of the total indicating “Very likely.”

How likely is your company to support the ACT Work Ready Communities initiative?

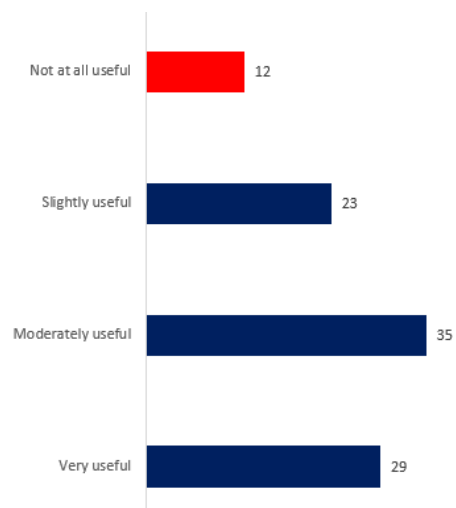


Responses about the WorkKeys NCRC

Businesses

Businesses were asked about the usefulness of the WorkKeys NCRC when they are looking for skilled employees. A large majority (87%) reported that the WorkKeys NCRC was useful to one extent or another, with the most common response (50% of this majority, 35% of the total) being “Moderately useful.”

How useful is the ACT National Career Readiness Certificate when you are looking for skilled employees?

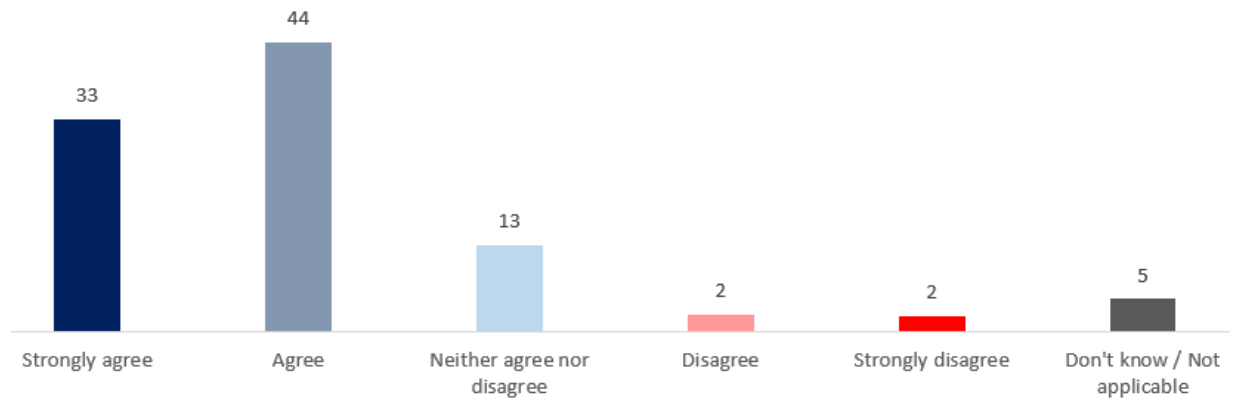


For the three statements below, businesses were asked to choose one of the following responses indicating how strongly they agree or disagree with each statement:

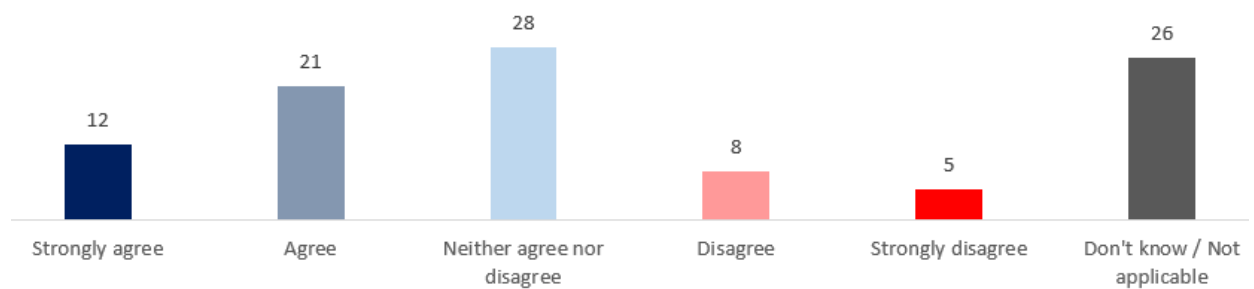
- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know / Not applicable

Over three-fourths (77%) of the businesses reported that they would recommend the WorkKeys NCRC to other businesses. However, only about three in ten (33%) agreed that the WorkKeys NCRC has helped them find better-qualified employees, and only about two in ten (24%) agreed that the WorkKeys NCRC helps them reduce employee turnover.

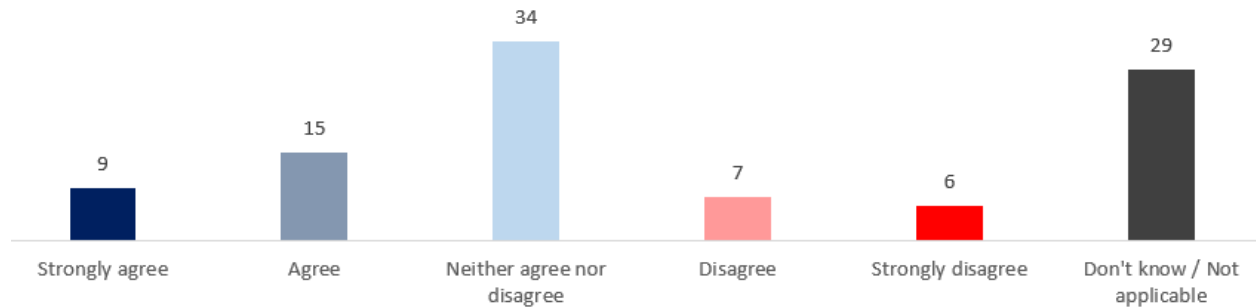
I would recommend the WorkKeys NCRC to other businesses.



Using the WorkKeys NCRC has helped my company to find better qualified employees.

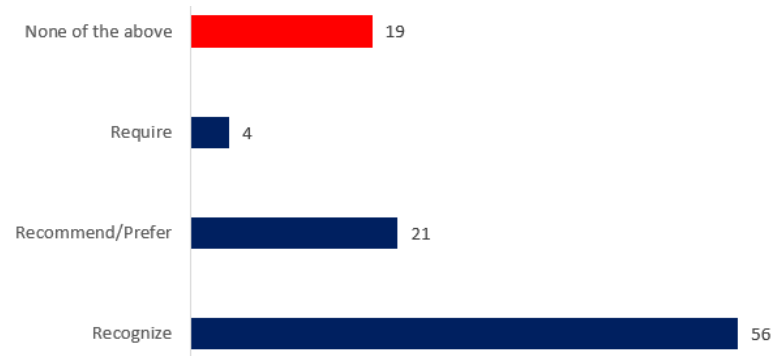


Using the WorkKeys NCRC helps my company to reduce employee turnover.



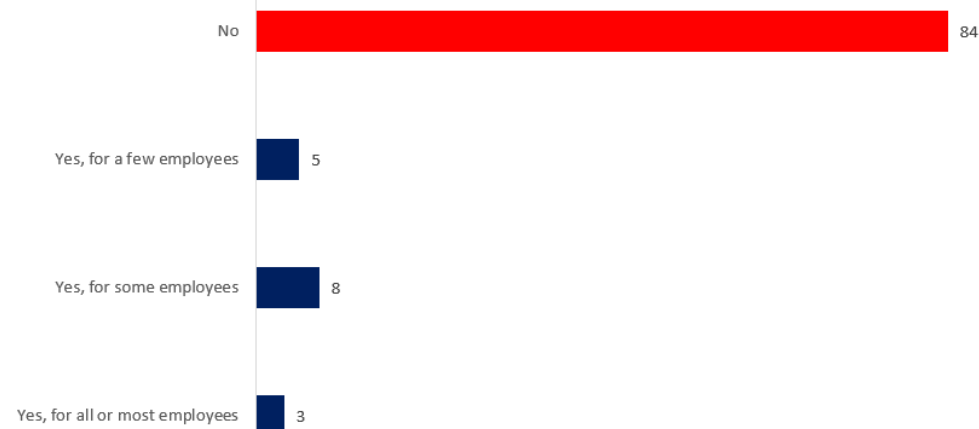
Businesses were also asked about the strength of the role the WorkKeys NCRC plays in their hiring process. The majority (56%) reported that they “recognize” the certificate, while close to one-fourth (21%) reported that they “prefer” it, and close to one in twenty (4%) reported that they “require” it.

Do you recognize, prefer, or require an ACT National Career Readiness Certificate in your hiring process?



When asked whether they use the WorkKeys NCRC with current employees for promotion or training, only 16% reported that they did so to one extent or another.

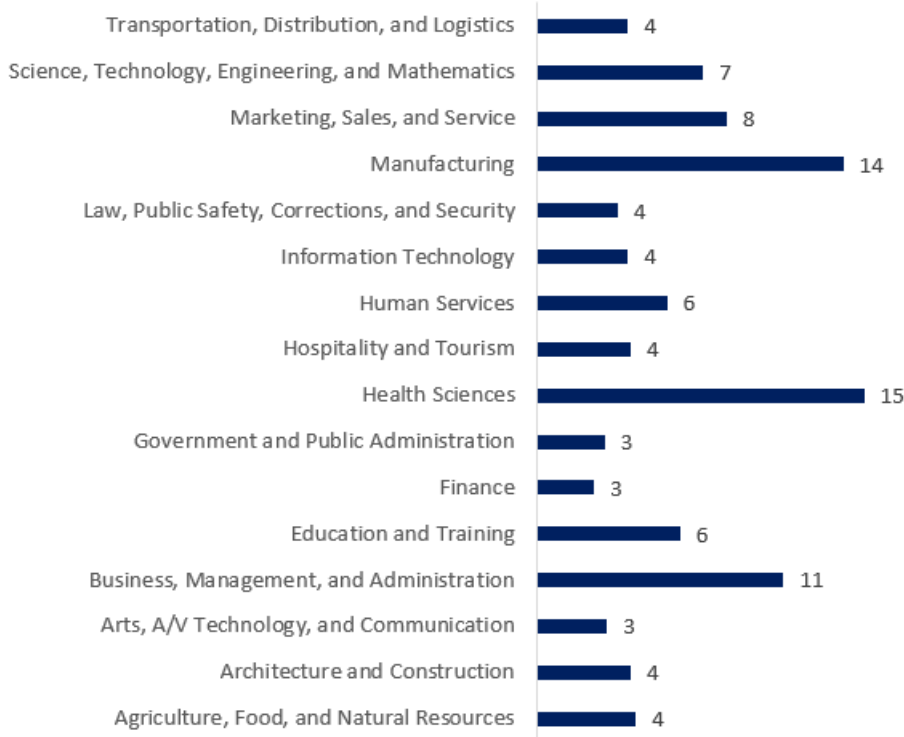
Do you use the ACT National Career Readiness Certificate with current employees for promotion and/or training purposes?



Certificate holders

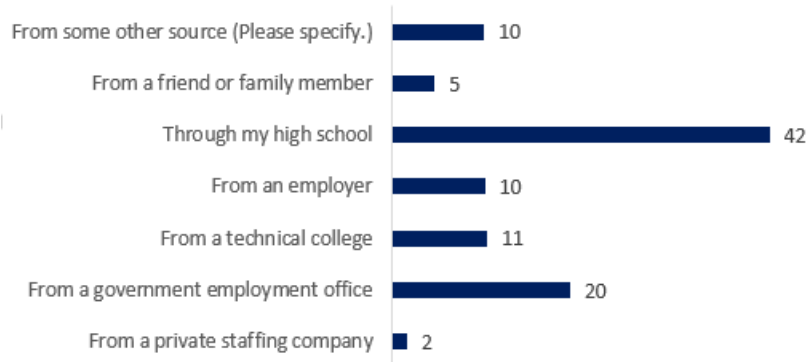
Four in ten WorkKeys NCRC holders (40%) indicated that they are in the manufacturing, business/management/administration, or health sciences field (the three most common responses). As was the case with the business respondents (see above), manufacturing was the most commonly reported field among certificate-holder respondents.

Which of the following best describes your field?



Forty-two percent of WorkKeys NCRC holders reported first hearing about the certificate through their high school, followed by the second most commonly reported source (20%), from a government employment office.

How did you first hear about the ACT National Career Readiness Certificate?

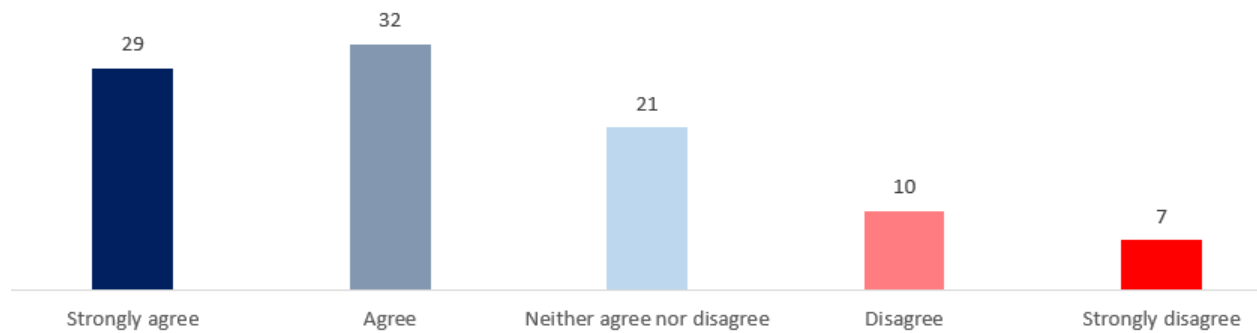


For the three statements below, certificate holders were asked to choose one of the following responses indicating how strongly they agree or disagree with each statement:

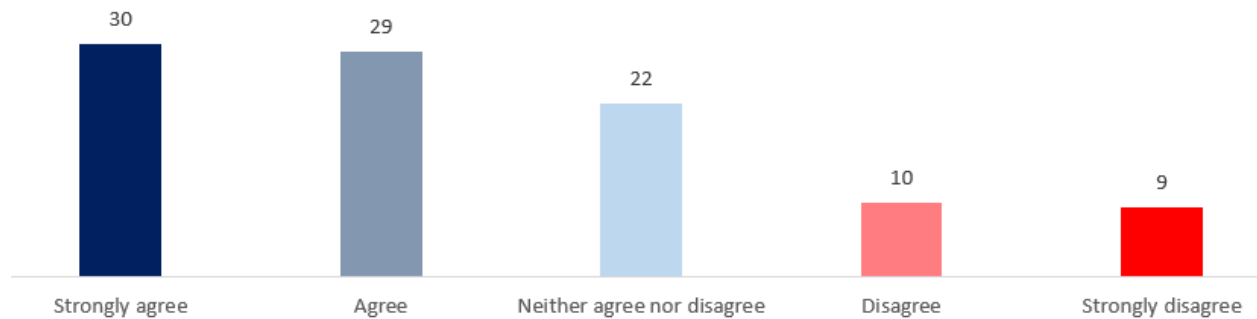
- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know / Not applicable

About six in ten (61%) of the certificate-holder respondents agreed that the WorkKeys NCRC was worth the time and effort it required, close to six in ten (59%) would recommend it to others seeking employment, while over four in ten (45%) agreed that the WorkKeys NCRC gives them an advantage over other job applicants.

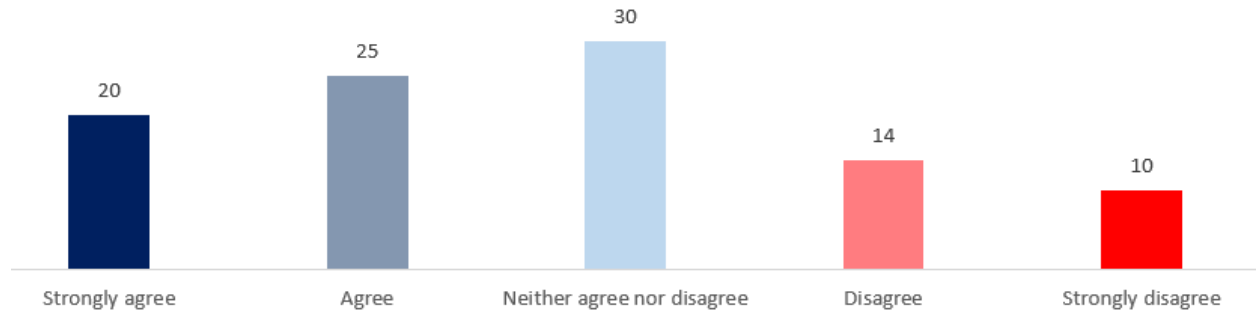
The WorkKeys NCRC was worth the investment of time and effort it required.



I would recommend the WorkKeys NCRC to others seeking employment.

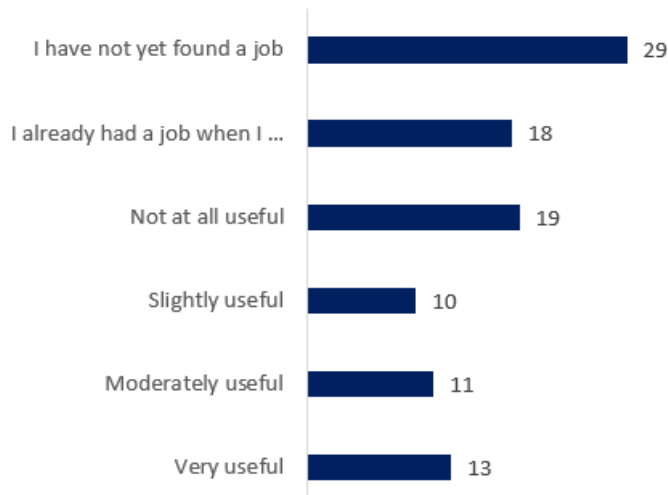


My WorkKeys NCRC gives me an advantage over other job applicants.



Certificate holders were also asked about the usefulness of the WorkKeys NCRC in helping them find a job. About one-third (34%) reported that the WorkKeys NCRC was useful to one extent or another.

How useful was the ACT National Career Readiness Certificate in helping you find a job?



A large majority (84%) certificate holders reported that they would include their WorkKeys NCRC level (Bronze, Silver, Gold, or Platinum) and/or their ACT WorkKeys assessment scores on their résumé.

Takeaways and Next Steps

Support for the WRC initiative and/or the WorkKeys NCRC was evident among all three groups of survey respondents. For example:

- Large majorities of the county leaders find value in the opportunities afforded them by the WRC initiative to develop a cohesive workforce development strategy and to strengthen workforce development partnerships in their community, and use the initiative or the data generated from it to improve workforce efforts and support their current businesses; a majority use the initiative or the data generated from it to promote the county to new businesses.

- A large majority of the businesses would recommend the WorkKeys NCRC to other businesses; a majority are very likely to support the WRC initiative in their state or county; and a majority finds the WorkKeys NCRC very useful or moderately useful when looking for skilled employees. 81% of businesses either recognize, prefer or require the WorkKeys NCRC during their hiring process.
- Majorities of the certificate holders believe that the WorkKeys NCRC is a worthwhile investment of time and effort and would recommend it to others seeking employment.

These takeaways have prompted us to consider the following steps with regard to furthering the WRC initiative:

1. **Facilitate knowledge sharing and collaboration between current and potential new participants in the WRC initiative.** Given that large majorities of county-leader respondents still find value in the WRC initiative, targeting additional county leaders elsewhere with information about the benefits of the initiative by participating counties and states could lead to increased participation nationwide. In order to better meet the needs of future WRC counties, ACT is in the process of adding more WRC Academy options. The new Academy options, including Regional WRC Academies, looks to make the WRC Academy and information shared more accessible to all regions of the country and allows us to deliver the Academy curriculum in a more expedient manner.
2. **Expand on the current Maintaining goals options.** It is clear that the WRC initiative is achieving its intended results of helping communities build robust, collaborative workforce development efforts. To further that end, as counties continue to maintain their certification status, the opportunity of building in goals that help strengthen holistic workforce development approaches built upon the WorkKeys NCRC can be helpful for long-term sustainability. ACT will expand the maintaining goal options to give WRCs more opportunities to achieve their goals and better customize those goals to their current workforce and economic development needs.
3. **Continue to increase employer education in areas where WRCs are developed to help them better leverage and use the WorkKeys NCRC in hiring and promoting practices.** The Survey results show that employers support WRC initiatives and find the WorkKeys NCRC valuable. Since the last survey counties have added more than 8,000 employers nationwide recognizing or recommending the WorkKeys NCRC in support of their counties' achieving WRC certification, bringing total list to more than 18,000. However, while survey results show an increase in employer awareness since 2014 more employer education is needed so that employers may leverage this value for improved hiring and cost savings. Such education should be broadened to help ensure that all industry segments and sizes are able to better understand and make use of the WorkKeys NCRC. ACT has begun to compile Employer, WRC and User Testimonials to give examples of return on investment, implementation strategies and personal user success stories using ACT Workforce Solutions.
4. **Increase economic developer education in areas where WRCs are developed to help them better leverage and use the WRC initiative in employer recruitment, retention, and expansion.** Evidence suggests that the best employer recruitment and expansion strategy is a robust employer retention strategy. Increased education among economic developers about the value of the WRC initiative in employer outreach will help communities to better thrive. Since the last survey, we have seen an increase in employer knowledge of WorkKeys and WRC.

To maintain and grow momentum ACT will hold regional workshops to discuss leveraging the WRC designation to further their economic development goals.

5. **Help WRCs develop better communication with certificate holders regarding the benefits of ACT WorkKeys and recent updates.** WorkKeys NCRC holders are an integral part of each WRC. Improved communications with certificate holders in WRCs is a good next step. ACT has recently made an unprecedented investment in its Workforce products to enhance the user experience. The last survey helped to shape the current WorkKeys 2.0 improvements including:
 - Ability to print certificates at home
 - New and updated skills and item content to better reflect today's jobs
 - New and improved assessment delivery platform to be more stable, faster
 - New Locating Information scale scores and improved item presentation
 - Fully aligned curriculum to better support skill development and test prep
6. **Improve communication with WRC Academy Alumni.** The drop in County Leader responses can be attributed to the number of years since launch for many of the counties and the expected attrition of team members. In an effort to increase engagement with WRC Alumni, ACT has created an ACT WRC Council to help advise ACT on WRC decisions. ACT will also add to the content of their WRC alumni quarterly call and schedule WRC alumni workshops at ACT WF Summits and events.

This report has provided some insights on the state of the WRC initiative as viewed through the lens of survey data acquired from county leaders, employers, and certificate holders. Since the last survey in 2014, the number of employers supporting their county, regional and state WRC initiatives has nearly doubled. Over time, employer awareness and best practices are becoming more evident as they continue implementing it into their hiring practice. Counties are becoming certified and the goals of the initiative are being achieved. The ability to help counties, regions and states link education and workforce development, align to economic development, and ultimately aid employers in matching people to jobs is moving in a positive direction.

For more information about the ACT Work Ready Communities initiative, please visit www.workreadycommunities.org.