

BACK TO BUSINESS IOWA PODCAST

A partnership of Iowa State University Extension and Outreach and America's SBDC Iowa

SEASON 1 | EPISODE 35: Future Ready Iowa

(24:28; published Sept. 9, 2020)

Description: *Future Ready Iowa Policy Advisor Kathy Leggett speaks to Steve Adams about the program's objectives to achieve post-secondary educational equivalency for 70% of Iowa adults by 2025 through apprenticeship and other non-traditional education methods.*



[music]

Steve Adams, host 00:10

Hello, and welcome to the Back to Business Iowa podcast from Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. This podcast is a collaboration between Iowa State University Extension and Outreach and the programs including Community and Economic Development, Farm, Food and Enterprise Development, and the Iowa Small Business Development Centers. These podcasts cover relevant topics for businesses and individuals related to education, research and technical assistance during and post COVID-19.

Steve Adams, host 00:55

Hi, I'm Steve Adams, field specialist three at Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, part of the Community and Economic Development unit and your host for these podcasts. Today, our guest is Kathy Leggett, Future Ready Iowa policy advisor, which is part of Iowa Workforce Development. Thank you for being here today, Kathy.

Kathy Leggett 01:16

Thanks for having me, Steve.

Steve Adams, host 01:18

So can you tell us a little bit about Future Ready Iowa?

Kathy Leggett 01:22

Sure. Future ready Iowa is the state's initiative to have 70% of Iowans have education and training beyond high school by 2025. And that is, there are a couple reasons that I can quickly say that we need to do that. One is because by 2025, 68% of the jobs in Iowa will require education and training beyond high school. Another one is because we have a huge skills gap in Iowa. When it comes to individuals with education up to a two year degree, we have more than 50% of our jobs requiring that and only about 30% of our people having it. So those are two reasons among many that we have this initiative going on.

Steve Adams, host 02:06

70% seems kind of aggressive by 2025. Where did that number stand when the program started and where are you today, Kathy?

Kathy Leggett 02:14

Yes, that's a great question. Well, when the program started in 2017, that educational attainment was 58.4%. And then actually, we took a dip in 2018 to 57.6%. And our 2019 current number is 60.2%. So we've been kind of ... we had previously been hanging around that 58%. So it's good to see that we have made some progress up to 60%. It's a fluid number, because it also depends on people moving in and out of the state and people staying in the workforce and out. However, this is good that we're up at that 60%, but yes, you're right, we still have a lot of work to do.

Steve Adams, host 03:00

Well to get that extra 10% to hit that 70% mark you want to by 2025, what are you doing to get people more motivated into belonging or being a part of this program?

Kathy Leggett 03:11

Sure. There are actually many things happening. And one I will say it's kind of the opportunity that we have here today, is really to raise awareness about the need that will, if it isn't here already in many industries or jobs, it is going to be, that we need to have some type of training beyond high school, and to have that be the new norm. So raising awareness, talking to all kinds, you know, adults, parents, students, teachers to try and get everybody to understand the need for this first. Also then there are many efforts going on big and small across the state to provide technical resources and funding resources to do some strategies that the Future Ready Iowa Alliance came up with when this goal was set to help us move forward.

Kathy Leggett 04:01

Some of those include really increasing the number of registered apprenticeships across the state, because that is one that definitely is a value for people, they get a credential they get trained while they're working. So for adults, this is great because you have little depth that you get great training and you can transfer that training to any state should you leave. Of course we don't want you to. So increasing registered apprenticeships is one of the efforts. Increasing internships and work-based learning, increasing support for people to get that good education and training up to a two-year degree which can be a non-credit certificate, diploma, a two-year associate's degree, any number of things in there that lead to high demand jobs. That's another priority of Future Ready Iowa is making that training available that will connect Iowans with jobs that we know will continue to grow and provide good wages. So large efforts statewide to provide funding, small efforts and communities working together to do, to come up with innovative ideas and apply for innovation grants to do towards this goal. So there's a variety of things.

Steve Adams, host 05:16

Well, Kathy, I know that Governor Branstad was the one that initiated this apprenticeship program and then Governor Reynolds followed through with it so obviously, that's education outside of a normal four-year college or university. What locations in the state of Iowa are offering these apprenticeship programs and what are these apprenticeships? What can you get certified in or get an apprenticeship in, in the state of Iowa?

Kathy Leggett 05:41

Sure, such a great question. And actually there, it has a very big answer. Through the Future Ready Iowa website, which is really easy to Google and get to, there's a lot of information about registered apprenticeships. So for more details, I would encourage people to go there. But basically a registered apprenticeship is a employer, kind of an employer-run education and training program. And there are, it's very safety focused, it's very structured and you have related training that happens in a classroom. But the bulk of it is on-the-job training and so throughout a year—and they vary, it can be a year or an apprenticeship could be five years—and they actually exist in a lot of different areas across the state.

Kathy Leggett 06:31

And again through the website and connecting either with me or Future Ready Iowa, we can help you. Now there are large apprenticeships, there are small, most people think of a registered apprenticeship typically with the trades. So HVAC, electrician, plumbing, carpenter, and those definitely exist. We have great programs. But what's really interesting and what we're continuing to try and grow is that there are over 1000 occupations that can be apprenticed, or however you would say that, through the Department of Labor.

Kathy Leggett 07:03

And so we have in Iowa also registered apprenticeships in winemaking, in craft beer, beekeeping. We're working to try and get more apprenticeships in healthcare, like we have CNA and CMA registered apprenticeships, and technology apprenticeships in the IT field. And then a request I saw just coming forward from an employer was to try and start an apprenticeship in accounting for the needs that they have. So there are more than you would imagine. It's not like a simple click on a website to find out where and what's available. But I think that the Future Ready Iowa website and Iowa Earn and Learn are great places to start.

Steve Adams, host 07:47

Well, certainly the trades, I think everybody would assume that, but some of these other things have popped up there with winemaking, beekeeping, accounting, etc. I guess I never would have guessed that. It seems like in heating, ventilation and air conditioning, plumbers, and especially around here, welders just seem to be really difficult to find, especially one that's trained and certified, so.

Kathy Leggett 08:09

Yes, yes, those are definitely high-demand jobs in Iowa, because we have a lot of need for them. So, and your point earlier is that this is maybe what people think of as non-traditional way to get the education. But that is definitely one of the things that we talked about with Future Ready Iowa was we really want to change the conversation from, you know, the only option is a four-year degree. We love four-year degrees, they are great, but it's not the only option. And in Iowa we have lots of opportunities to get some really good education and training from like, for example, the registered apprenticeship, or for example, you know, IT training in five weeks by Delta V School in Cedar Rapids. So just really trying to elevate all of those opportunities.

Steve Adams, host 09:01

I think people forget too, in the trades those jobs pay really, really well and the benefit seem to be good. So why veer away from that is just beyond me.

Kathy Leggett 09:12

Yeah, you're absolutely right. And there's a lot of personal satisfaction in doing something and seeing it completed. And I think that we also have a really, a pretty large segment of our population that really prefers, would prefer to learn on the job or by doing something. It's just easier for them. And so I just definitely encourage people to think about this and encourage businesses to think about it. An employer may be looking for a way to feed their employee pipeline. A registered apprenticeship is a really great way to do that. And it's not as difficult as they think.

Kathy Leggett 09:51

And we can offer a lot of help and support and funding for those opportunities. So also really, a shout-out to employers to think about it as a pathway for them. You know, the other thing I wanted to mention about that is, and I'm not going to get this number exactly right, but now—and this is growing—is we probably have at least 23 of our high schools in Iowa that have registered

apprenticeship programs set up as another path, and the students start as early as 16. So we are really, really trying to grow that.

Steve Adams, host 10:25

Well, I may be dating myself, but at one time, I know there was an initiative called the 2+2+2 program. And I don't know if you're familiar with that or not, but it was, you know, in high school, you had two years of just high school type education and followed by two years of introduction to a trade followed by two years outside of high school getting that associate's degree or that apprenticeship. Is that still a popular program, or is that something that's just kind of gone by the wayside?

Kathy Leggett 10:56

I'm not sure there are similar things. So I think it may have evolved a little bit to different things. But one of the goals also with Future Ready Iowa is really to make things like that accessible to every student across the state. And that's where we still have work to do too. And so I think versions of that exist and I think that even more are being developed.

Steve Adams, host 11:23

I get a little concerned when I think about my days in high school, which were many, many years ago—our guidance counselor's were always pushing us towards a four-year degree and they seemed to put all their emphasis there. When you talk about outreach and education to people across the state of Iowa, are you having to kind of retrain, I guess, guidance counselors at the high school level to say, hey, students, here's another option or another opportunity for you, if you don't want to go to a four-year college?

Kathy Leggett 11:55

Yes, yes, that is, that's definitely been part of the conversation since this initiative started. And really trying to help, well, there are a couple things, is we need to spread this word among everyone, because our high school guidance counselors have so much on their plate, that they have so many things to deal with that even sometimes there isn't the time to do this as much as they would want to. Secondly is trying to help support those conversations, because a lot of our high school counselors don't, they're not familiar with registered apprenticeships or other types of innovative training and education. So there's that piece too.

Kathy Leggett 12:38

And then I think there is just that larger conversation, even with parents. And I feel like I can say this, because I am a parent who was in that mindset of, you go to high school and you go to college—that's the way I was raised, I didn't know there was any other option. And that's the way I was raising my kids. But because of the challenges, some challenges that my kids have, that isn't what happened. And that had to open my eyes to the fact that there are many other opportunities. And so parents are a big part of that, too, is realizing that things have changed. And technology moves everything so quickly, that different opportunities aren't and shouldn't take as long to train. And the other piece of that is the lifelong learning piece. Because things change so fast, sometimes even in a program, by the end of the program, the technology used to do that job has changed. So we all have to be continuous learners.

Steve Adams, host 13:34

Well let's not forget about cost. If you've got somebody to pay for an apprenticeship program for you, it's not taking money out of pocket. And certainly we know how expensive a four-year university or college can be, right?

Kathy Leggett 13:48

Yes, yes. And cost is absolutely another thing. Just over the many years seeing the student, the college student debt rise is definitely something that people really are taking more of a pause before committing to that, because it can end up to be so much. The other thing that I wanted to mention, when you said that is, Future Ready Iowa—the biggest population actually that we're trying to support and getting the education and training down in high school right, now the biggest population we have to link to is our adults who are already working, but did not get any education and training beyond high school. and in the next several years, maybe their skills aren't going to be what the employers need because of technology or other reasons. So how do we help support them getting that education and training they need and number one, shorter term is better. At least if you haven't been in school a long time to make to get a short term opportunity is probably very helpful. The other thing is that's another reason why registered apprenticeship is great, just as you mentioned because it's not like you're putting out a lot of money. The employer is supporting the majority You have your education and training. And so this is a great model for adults to be able to upskill as well.

Kathy Leggett 14:35

So how do we help support them getting that education and training they need—and number one, shorter term is better. At least if you haven't been in school a long time to make, to get a short term opportunity is probably very helpful. The other thing is that's another reason why registered apprenticeship is great, just as you mentioned, because it's not like you're putting out a lot of money. The employer is supporting the majority of your education and training. And so this is a great model for adults to be able to upskill as well.

Steve Adams, host 15:06

Yeah, my nephew, matter of fact, is in vocational training in auto mechanics, he just loves it. High school wasn't his favorite thing but he's really taken to this and just really enjoys it. He works three different jobs, and it seems to me like he's working too much. But that's just the route he chose, you know?

Kathy Leggett 15:26

Yeah. Yeah, and that's it. It's just really elevating all of these opportunities, because they are all great opportunities, and we want people to be connected to their passion, and to have a good job.

Steve Adams, host 15:37

Have you been doing anything different in response to COVID-19? It's going to change the way I think we're all trying to live and do our jobs. But anything specifically at Iowa Workforce Development?

Kathy Leggett 15:49

Well, I can speak to just Future Ready Iowa, certainly Iowa Workforce Development has been incredibly busy with unemployment, compensation and other issues, you know, just doing huge amounts of work to help support Iowans during this crisis. For Future Ready Iowa, we did have some innovation—innovation funding is another funding source through Future Ready Iowa. And we had about 46 projects that had just really gotten started when COVID hit or were kind of in the midst of it.

Kathy Leggett 16:22

So we worked with all of those to make adjustments to either, you know, change how they were doing it or give them extended deadlines or things to make sure that they could make it work and they've done phenomenal work. The other thing is the COVID Relief Innovation Fund opportunity that has just come out. And this is a very short term but great opportunity to address some needs for people who were affected by COVID. And it's \$5 million, so that's big.

Steve Adams, host 16:51

Is that referred to also as the Coronavirus Relief Employer Innovation Fund?

Kathy Leggett 16:57

Yeah, I say that it's a long name and a short timeframe. But yes, that's exactly what I'm talking about.

Steve Adams, host 17:04

So what's the intended purpose that of that fund, and does it differ from the mission of your organization or Iowa Workforce Development as a whole?

Kathy Leggett 17:12

Yeah, actually, no, it doesn't differ. It's right in line with our mission. And what it is, is the Federal CARES Act funds that came to states to help deal with Coronavirus, Governor Reynolds has set aside 5 million of that for us to work with Iowans all across the state, organizations and employers, to make opportunities available for Iowans who were affected by Coronavirus. Their jobs, less hours or their job went away or who knows what, to get short term training done in the next several months that will link them to a high-demand job. So this funding is right in line with what Future Ready Iowa is about, and Iowa Workforce Development, to really have the best-trained workforce. It's making an opportunity specifically available to those who've been affected and in a short term and in as many innovative and creative ways as we can.

Steve Adams, host 18:11

Is the application process difficult, Kathy or is it fairly simple for anybody to fill out that wanted to [unclear].

Kathy Leggett 18:19

That probably depends on who you ask [laughter]. But I believe it is fairly simple. And here's the thing, it's at lowagrants.gov. Or, again, you can go to the Future Ready Iowa website and click on Employer Innovation Fund. And it's an online application, we have all of the guidance out there. So you can you can print off everything that will be scored. And it gives you exactly, you know, just, you need to be meeting this, this and this and include that. So it's very spelled out. It's, we love brevity, we love brief applications, you don't need to tell us, you know, everything in the world, just answer the basic things and do a budget for it.

Kathy Leggett 19:01

And so the other thing is, we will be hosting a webinar early next week on it. And I am available to provide technical support to anybody who's thinking about doing an application. So they can, you know, answer questions, brainstorm, anything like that. So it's definitely worth doing, you can apply for up to \$100,000. And I would encourage anyone who even thinks they might have an idea of how to do this to take a look at the application.

Steve Adams, host 19:33

Okay, the application sounds pretty simple. lowagrants.gov is one site or they can go to the Future Ready Iowa site and find it as well. That's where they would find that application. I gotta assume here Kathy, and you know what they say about assumptions, but there's gotta be a deadline attached to this, right?

Kathy Leggett 19:51

Yes, yes, sir. There absolutely is. So it's open now. The deadline for applying is Wednesday, September 16, at 11:59pm. And then applicants will be notified no later than a week later, September 23. And the short timeline is important for people to understand—these funds have to be spent by December 31, and project programming for individuals has to be completed by the end of February. These are

timelines set by the federal government, and so we can't change that. But we are creative in Iowa. We are hard workers. And I really believe that we have numerous programs and employers who can utilize this to help Iowans.

Steve Adams, host 20:44

So 11:59 p.m. on September 16. At midnight, then, they turn back into mice and the carriage turns back into a pumpkin.

Kathy Leggett 20:55

That's right. That's right, it closes, so you've got to have it in by then.

Steve Adams, host 20:59

Okay, outstanding. I love the program. I like the intent behind it, too. So Kathy, I'd like to offer our guests a chance to provide any advice or guidance to their constituents on our program. Is anything you'd like to share with your community about how to best get through this bizarre and rather difficult time?

Kathy Leggett 21:19

Boy, isn't that the question? This is something like we've never seen before. I don't know that that my wisdom is any different from anyone else's. But I thought about that, and I think that we all just need to stay focused on the good and what we can do. And that's kind of the example that I'm setting with this Coronavirus Innovation Fund opportunity, is it could seem overwhelming, but you can take a look at it and say, Hey there, I'm an employer and there are five people I could help. And I need five, you know, so how could I do this? So that's what I would offer.

Steve Adams, host 21:56

Well, I appreciate that. And you did say that people could reach out to you. So Kathy, what is the best way for someone to get a hold of you?

Kathy Leggett 22:05

Sure ... my email is actually the best way, so that's kathy.leggett@iwd.iowa.gov. And the other thing that I will say is, if you go to the Future Ready Iowa website there is a way to say Contact us. Those emails come to me. So if that's easier, you can go to the Future Ready Iowa website under the Contact us and send an email.

Steve Adams, host 22:40

Well that's terrific. Two Gs, two Ts. And our guest today, folks, has been Kathy Leggett, Future Ready Iowa policy advisor and part of Iowa Workforce Development. Kathy, it's been a real pleasure—thanks for being here today.

Kathy Leggett 22:55

Thank you so much for having me, Steve.

Steve Adams, host 22:59

Hey, if you have any questions about this Back to Business Iowa podcast, please feel free to contact me at stadams@iastate.edu. And as always, we thank you for listening. And so if you've enjoyed listening to this podcast, please consider posting a review on Stitcher, Spotify, Castbox, the Podcast app, Apple, Google or whichever platform you find your podcasts. Reviews, ratings and comments will help us to build a better podcast. So whether it's a one star or five star review, we value your input and opinion, so please take advantage of that if you can.

Steve Adams, host 23:40

This podcast is a collaboration between Iowa State Extension and Outreach and the Small Business Development Centers of Iowa. We're always serving Iowans, hashtag strong Iowa. So let's get back to business, Iowa. Our justice statement is as follows: this institution is an equal opportunity provider. For the full non-discrimination statement or accommodation inquiries, please go to www.extension.state.edu/diversity/ext. See y'all next time.

[music]