Excerpts from Interviews with Employers

Formal classroom instruction is complicated by the fact that these workers don't want to be in a classroom. Entry-level workers need a baseline of theory, but the focus should be on hands-on learning and practical and soft skills. Training must be customized to Maine and to the workers we are trying to reach.

Fiber optics is THE communications platform. It is ubiquitous. Anybody being trained in Science, Engineering, or Communications needs to understand fiber. Fiber optics should be a basic skill used and understood by a broad swathe of the workforce.

The existing workforce system is very difficult to navigate. There is a need for someone to organize all of the programs in a central source so that employers can easily access assistance.

The only thing limiting our growth is the workforce shortage. We need to expand our view of workforce to include women, minorities, and reentry workers.

Inclusivity is a major problem across the trades. There should be no reason women or minorities don't enter these jobs, but the culture can be exclusionary.

There are very few training opportunities, so most workers receive on-the-job training. It's a major investment in terms of time and money, just to have that employee quit a few months later.

Career awareness is crucial. The general population does not know or understand broadband, including tangential industries (power, solar, electric).

Workforce retention is a major pain point. Feeder programs from K-12 schools, adult education, and community colleges are needed.

Workforce shortages across the board, from entry-level workers in customer service and flagging to engineers and managers. Broadband jobs offer good opportunities in terms of pay and advancement, but experienced workers are aging out and there's a lot of competition for labor.

Barriers to employment include lack of soft skills, childcare, transportation, healthcare, and affordable housing.