▲ SkillSmart

WHITE PAPER:

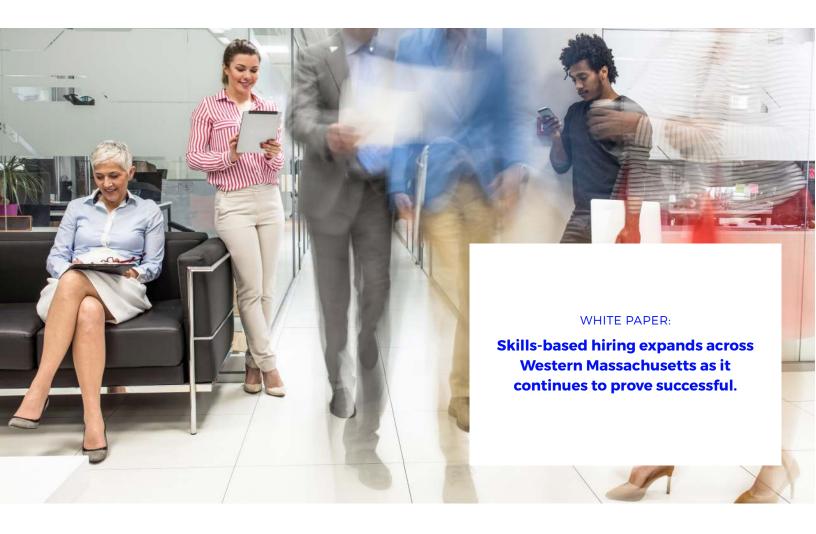**Skills-based hiring expands across Western Massachusetts as it continues to prove successful.**

Tailored platform designed to connect over 8,500 job seekers and dozens of employers in one community.

SkillSmart offers data engine to advance skills development.

Objective

What happens when a community transforms the traditional model of workforce and talent development by using a demand-driven, skills-based approach? The community thrives.

In Fall 2017, Springfield WORKS, a Collective Impact initiative of leaders from businesses, academia, local nonprofits, and workforce development, supported by the Economic Development Council of Western Massachusetts, launched a community-based workforce development model that utilizes SkillSmart's skills-based hiring technology to better connect stakeholders across the region. In less than one year, the community is experiencing widespread economic improvements and opportunities.

The way that today's employers and job seekers match—through resumes and job boards—is not working. The system is broken.

Job seekers—lacking transparency into the actual skills required for a job—apply for numerous opportunities for which they may or may not be qualified. Employers receive an average of 144 resumes for a single job posting and spend less than 6 seconds reviewing each of those resumes. All while workforce development agencies, educators, and trainers are tasked with developing workforce pipelines without a good sense of the actual needs of employers.

Springfield WORKS, with the help of SkillSmart, is transforming the way the region's employers, industries, and communities identify, develop, and hire talent. This new approach to connecting employers, job seekers, educators, and workforce development leaders generates real-time data about the needs of local employers and the skills held by the available workforce.

In September 2017 springfieldworks.skillsmart.us was launched. This online platform matches job seekers with available positions from more than 25 employers in the region by assessing their skills and abilities from previous work, education, or other life experiences.

Job seekers on the platform can explore job opportunities, understand exactly what skills those jobs require, numerically match to specific jobs based upon their skills qualifications, and be matched to regional training opportunities to learn the skills they might need to be more competitive for a job opportunity.

While employers across the nation are using SkillSmart's technology, Western Massachusetts is the first region to deploy the skills-matching program community-wide. The region is building a workforce and talent development ecosystem that enables employers to broadcast their skills' needs to job seekers and educators simultaneously and in real time; in turn job seekers gain a clearer understanding of where they fit (and why) and where (and how) they can build their skills.

Technology Spotlight

Springfield WORKS utilizes SkillSmart Seeker for job seekers to search opportunities, see how their skills match, and view training opportunities, and SkillSmart Prospect for employers to gain data insights about candidates and the regional workforce in whole.

Nine months after launch, Springfield WORKS is helping employers fill positions and putting people to work. Further, this technology collects rich data on the overarching needs of employers and job seekers, allowing for better alignment within the community regarding its workforce development goals and positive economic progress.

Implementation

Rather than relying on traditional proxies like degrees or work history—which often operate to foreclose entire populations from job consideration—this skills-based hiring approach to workforce development enables employers to define their positions based on tangible skills required to accomplish job tasks successfully.

Skills-based hiring levels the playing field by taking an asset-based approach and equally valuing the experiences that generate skills, regardless of what those skills are. Further, it increases the pool of candidates an employer can choose from, resulting in more qualified candidates in the workforce, lower recruiting costs, and reduced turnover.

Skills Recognition

Job seekers have important skill-building experiences that qualify them for work opportunities that don't appear on their resume. A skills-based hiring approach ensures employers evaluate the entire candidate and don't leave talent on the table.

Using a proprietary skills index, SkillSmart helps employers map, define, and prioritize the skills needed into job descriptions. Through this process, employers start to uncover how certain skills can be validated beyond traditional proxies.

For example, one large hospitality employer determined that customer service skills were a top priority for a specific job type. After using SkillSmart's matching algorithm, the company discovered that many of its top candidates had earned that skill outside of the traditional classroom or workplace – developing the skills instead through volunteerism, such as being ushers in their places of worship.

Results

With 133 job types in the system (not including the 200+ specific job classifications being filled by a major regional employer, MGM Springfield), Springfield WORKS was able to evaluate employers across the community to identify general skills trends and needs in the region. Despite crossing several industries, many of positions had common skills and prerequisites for hiring.

One-third of the region's job types require the same top seven skills. These include effective communications, teamwork, ability to comply with company policies, record keeping, customer service, work prioritization, and basic computer skills. (See Appendix A for top 10 skills required by local employers.)

There are more effective ways to screen for a job than requiring a college degree. The focus on skills allows employers to lessen their reliance on traditional proxies such as degrees. For example, 35% of the job types define a prerequisite of high school diploma or equivalent, while only 6% require a bachelors' degree. This shift in requirement opens opportunities to individuals with the right skills who would otherwise have been dismissed early in the traditional applicant process. (See Appendix B for top 10 prerequisites of local employers.)

Community Participation

**Multiple Industries:
Healthcare, Education,
Automotive, Hospitality,
Manufacturing, Banking/
Financial, Non-Profit
Community Services,
and News Media**

› **The following employers can be found using**
springfieldworks.skillsmart.us

Baystate Health, United Personnel, Springfield Public Schools, Freedom Credit Union, Health New England, MassMutual, UMass, Peerless Precision, Pride Stores, Balise Motor Sales, Pioneer Valley Cardiology Associates, EcoBuilding Bargains, Big Y, Stawco Hospitality, Roca, US Tsubaki Automotive, the YWCA, and others.

Understanding employer demand is key to informing regional training and skills development.

Using the data gathered from SkillSmart Prospect, Springfield WORKS and the Economic Development Council of Western Massachusetts are able to provide local educators and trainers a clear understanding of the region's skill demands.

Currently, 43 separate agencies and organizations provide workforce training in Springfield and the surrounding region, including certification, diplomas, or other credentials to help them gain a job or a better position.

Prior to having community-wide data provided by SkillSmart Prospect, those agencies would try to address skills gaps in more unsystematic ways—through community events or business roundtables. Often, the more vocal or engaged employers would have the most influence in shaping training programs to fill needs for workers.

However, with real-time insight into where actual skills gaps exist in Western Massachusetts, workforce development agencies and employers are better able to partner with training and educational institutions to develop curricula that develop the right skills.

The lasting result will be a long-term pipeline of local talent that gives the region's residents more pathways to career opportunities.

What's Next

With more than 8,500 profiles for job seekers across Western Massachusetts, SkillSmart and Springfield WORKS will continue to assess and match the skills demands of employers to the existing skills held by job seekers in the region to share which skills gaps exist with local education and training providers.

As the program continues to grow—with additional employers posting positions and job seekers building profiles—the region will receive richer real-time data on the skills needed by employers, the scope of skills in the workforce, and the capacity of the educational infrastructure.

This integrated process is enabling a skills-based labor market in Western Massachusetts, where skills are the currency for success and employers set the demand in the marketplace.

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Appendix A

Top 10 Skill Requirements Across 130+ Job Classifications in Western Massachusetts

Skill	Count of Jobs	Percent of Jobs
Effective Communication	67	51%
Teamwork	59	45%
Comply with Company Policies	54	41%
Record Keeping	53	40%
Customer Service	50	38%
Plan and Prioritize Work	47	36%
Basic Computer Skills	42	32%
Safety Orientation	30	23%
Clean Work Area	29	22%
Coordination	24	18%

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Appendix B

Top 10 Prerequisites Across 130+ Job Classifications in Western Massachusetts

Prerequisite	Count of Jobs	Percent of Jobs
High School Diploma, G.E.D. or HiSET	46	35%
Flexible Schedule	39	30%
Driver's License	23	17%
Physical Ability	14	11%
Professional Appearance	13	10%
Minimum Age 18	11	8%
Own Transportation	10	8%
Work Environment	10	8%
ServSafe	8	6%
Bachelor's Degree	8	6%

About SkillSmart

SkillSmart develops technology that helps people, communities, and employers improve their lives. We make it easier for anyone interested in filling, getting or keeping a job by re-inventing the way employers interact with potential job seekers.

We use data to power our web-based platform and empower employers and industries to develop, grow, and nurture their employees and workforce.

Learn more about us and our technology product suite at www.skillsmart.us.

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About Springfield WORKS

Springfield WORKS was created by city, community, education and employer leaders to develop and drive innovative strategies to transform the region's workforce ecosystem, with funding from the Boston Federal Reserve Bank's Working Cities Challenge grant. Approximately 42 out of 100 Springfield residents aged 16 to 64 are not working, poverty rates are rising, and employers do not have enough qualified candidates to support operations and growth. Innovative strategies being led by Springfield WORKS and its partners include:

- Implementing the community-wide SkillSmart portal to connect job seekers, employers, education/training, and supports.

- Driving policy and legislative changes to incentivize and reward work.

- Expanding access to quality training, coaching and mentoring.

- Advancing collective impact relationships to drive alignment through data sharing and analysis for continuous improvement.

About the Economic Development Council of Western Massachusetts

A private, not-for-profit corporation, the EDC provides resources and information to businesses operating in or entering the region by aiding in expansion, relocation and networking. Our mission is to deliver the services and business resources that will enable companies to thrive in Western Massachusetts while improving the region's economy and lifestyle through the creation of quality jobs and enhanced public and private investment.