



OUTDOOR INDUSTRY WORKFORCE ASSESSMENT SURVEY: OVERVIEW, KEY TAKEAWAYS, AND OPPORTUNITIES

There has been a collective desire across the outdoor recreation economy to gain a better understanding of two critically important and interconnected pieces of the industry: **talent attraction and retention initiatives** and **diversity, equity, and inclusion outcomes**.

Oregon State University's Center for the Outdoor Recreation Economy, in collaboration with college and industry partners, has conducted a study, the "Outdoor Industry Workforce Assessment Survey" to:

- ▶ Highlight workforce hiring and retention trends
- ▶ Help inform educational and up-skilling initiatives that aim to make job opportunities in the outdoor industry more accessible and equitable
- ▶ Provide a snapshot of where the industry stands in their efforts to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion outcomes
- ▶ Surface best practices for inspiration and adoption by other companies

Survey results represent a complex cross-section of the outdoor industry. Responses were collected from 107 outdoor organizations including product and manufacturing companies, retailers, nonprofit and trade organizations, tour operators, and others. 52% of the respondents are located in urban areas and 46% are located in rural areas. 87% of organizations are small with budgets and/or revenue less than \$20M.

Read on below for key findings, takeaways and opportunities. Download the full report to see all results.

Outdoor Hiring and Retention

The study includes detailed results on a wide variety of possible priorities for hiring entry-level, skilled professionals, and executives across the outdoor industry. Results include what different types of companies are looking for in job candidates including both hard skills and soft skills. Additionally, companies can compare their hiring practices and priorities with similar organizations to determine their approximate position in the industry. Key findings include the following:

- ▶ Outdoor companies looking for entry-level and skilled professionals prioritize communications skills over financial and/or business acumen, emotional intelligence, creativity and resilience, and team management. Candidates looking for these positions are more likely to be hired.
- ▶ Hiring has not been easy for outdoor companies, in fact 66% report having difficulty finding qualified applicants. Other

issues that reportedly hinder hiring in outdoor include lack of affordable housing options proximal to job locations, competition from other companies and other industries and cost of living where jobs are located.

- ▶ Outdoor companies are prioritizing flexible work hours and work-life balance as attraction and retention strategies. In fact, flexible work arrangements are prioritized ahead of employee benefits and financial rewards to attract and retain employees. It's likely safe to conclude that remote work and hybrid work arrangements will become the norm in outdoor even after the COVID-19 pandemic has passed.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Organizations may use the results of this study to measure their progress on DEI efforts by comparing their efforts with the results of this study. Additionally, these results can be used to build a diversity plan with a comprehensive array of DEI priorities and practices. Key findings include the following:

- ▶ Respondents reported varying degrees of progress on building diversity, inclusion, and equity into their overall plans. 60% of surveyed organizations revealed they have or are in the process of building a diversity plan, a plan for hiring and retaining employees of diverse backgrounds and identities.
- ▶ Respondents with diversity plans report that they are integrating diversity and inclusion into their hiring practices, injecting diversity and inclusion core values in their strategic and operating plans, and expect leadership to report on DEI metrics.

Conclusion

Survey findings provide a snapshot of the workforce and DEI trends for a small swath of the outdoor recreation economy. Across numerous outdoor sectors and subcategories, organizations are hiring in 2022 and are anticipating several barriers to fill open positions, particularly with entry-level and skilled professional openings. Organizations are considering an array of strategies, including professional development, as a way to attract and retain employees. Over half of the responding organizations are making strides to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion outcomes. Based on the survey results, several of these efforts with defined goals are described and compared. In the future, it will be critical to monitor outcomes of varied DEI efforts to determine the most effective ways to build diversity, equity, and inclusion into the Outdoor workforce.

[DOWNLOAD THE FULL REPORT](#)

Key Takeaways & Opportunities:

KEY TAKEAWAY 1:

New Hires



The industry expects to hire for a high volume of entry and skilled professional positions over the next year.

Organization Opportunity:

- ▶ Add and elevate talent from unique backgrounds, perspectives, or nontraditional career paths to reflect the changing face and interests of the outdoor participant.
- ▶ Train, upskill, and elevate current talent into higher-level roles.

Industry Opportunity:

- ▶ Coordinate messaging with job boards, trade events, and workforce organizations about exactly what these jobs are, associated pay and benefits, and potential career paths.

KEY TAKEAWAY 3:

Work/Life Balance



Outdoor companies are prioritizing flexible work arrangements and work-life balance as attraction and retention strategies ahead of employee benefits and financial rewards.

Organization Opportunity:

- ▶ Recognize that remote work and hybrid work arrangements will become the norm in outdoor even after the COVID-19 pandemic has passed.
- ▶ Understand that flexible work arrangements and work-life balance as perks have limits and should not be used as wholesale substitutes for competitive wages and benefits packages.

Industry Opportunity:

- ▶ Share best practices supported by metrics for employee attraction and retention.

KEY TAKEAWAY 2:

Qualified Applicants



The largest barriers to recruiting hard-to-fill jobs are finding qualified applicants, and lack of affordable housing options proximal to the job location.

Organization Opportunity:

- ▶ Consider collaborating with educational institutions to develop tailored programming to close these qualification gaps and create direct onramps from classroom to career.
- ▶ Get clear on which skills are absolutely necessary versus those that are nice to have or can be trained.

Industry Opportunity:

- ▶ Take a creative, multi-pronged approach to address affordable housing and cost-of-living issues in outdoor recreation hubs, including:
 - ▷ Company-owned or subsidized employee housing
 - ▷ Support of affordable housing policy initiatives, and/or
 - ▷ Shifting to a remote or hybrid workforce, among others.

KEY TAKEAWAY 4:

Increasing DEI



Companies who have a diversity plan in place are utilizing a wide variety of methods and tactics to achieve their goals. However, companies that do not currently have a diversity, equity, and inclusion plan in place largely do not plan to implement one or do not know where to start.

Organization Opportunity:

- ▶ Utilize and learn from key sources (e.g. [In Solidarity Project](#), [Outdoor CEO Diversity Pledge](#), [Camber Outdoors](#)) where DEI best practices and lessons learned are shared at the organization level.

Industry Opportunity:

- ▶ Understand the rationale behind organizations that are reluctant or resistant to advance DEI and provide clear education resources (particularly utilizing existing guides, thought leaders, and toolkits) to help companies who are unsure of how to start, find their first step.