

Why did your company decide to become an ACT Work Ready Communities champion?

NW Natural began using the ACT WorkKeys system in 2002. We needed a way to validate the skills necessary for employees to be successful, and we rely on the job profiles and assessments for that purpose. We know it works, so it was only natural to support the ACT Work Ready Communities initiative. NW Natural is committed to supporting the communities we serve and the states in which we operate. We subscribe to the idea that documenting the skill levels of our workforce improves our competitive advantage when attracting new businesses to our region.

How is your company using the ACT WorkKeys system: assessments, certificates, job profiles and training curricula?

We have profiled all of our non-bargaining positions. We require that applicants take the assessments and pass the minimum requirements for each job. In our hiring efforts, we advertise a preference for the ACT NCRC from applicants. Once hired, they are required to pass the assessments for any job for which they wish to submit a bid. The ACT training curricula is beneficial to those needing to upskill. In fact we use the assessments to diagnose any skills gaps, and the training materials to remedy those, as part of each employee's career development path.

What benefits has your company seen?

Prior to implementation, our "wash out" rate with new employees in technical job classes was 20 percent higher than it is now. That saves our company substantial time and money. Our hiring and posting process is more efficient, and our internal candidates are more confident because they have passed the required assessments for the new position. We have anecdotal confirmation that the quality of our new hires is better. And the assessments and training work great as key elements of career pathing which is important for employee retention. Overall, company productivity has improved.

What advice would you offer others?

Go for it. It's all upside. Be sure you gain full support from your organization's human resources and executive management teams. Declaring your support for the ACT NCRC and the ACT WorkKeys system will help solidify your company's commitment for the benefit of your employees, your firm, your community, and your state.