

Strong Workforce Program
Information, Communications, and Technology
Regional Advisory Meeting Proceedings
The Rise of Remote Work
September 10, 2021
Virtual - Zoom

Introduction

The Los Rios Community College District, in partnership with Valley Vision, and in collaboration with Sierra College and Yuba Community College District, invests Strong Workforce funding to organize and convene Regional Advisories. The objectives of the Regional Advisories are to build strong relationships between employers, educators, and workforce that:

- Provide timely information on skills gaps and workforce needs, informing partners on major industry trend information;
- Improve the efficiency of the advisory process for educators and employers;
- Reflect a regional view of workforce needs and assets;
- Provide opportunities for more systemic, ongoing engagement that includes workforce partners in key industry sectors.

Regional Advisory meetings help inform decisions on needed investments and enhancements for Career Education (CE) programs to help fill the growing demand for middle-skill positions. This meeting proceedings report includes key findings, best practices, and minutes from the Fall 2021 Information, Communications, and Technology (ICT) Regional Advisory Meeting, which focused specifically on the effects of the nationwide shift to working from home on occupations across multiple sectors.

Valley Vision supports a robust talent pipeline through our multiple 21st Century Workforce initiatives. We prepare our regional workforce for the future by addressing skills gaps, advancing research, aligning efforts and strengthening systems. Valley Vision's workforce efforts are supported by the Sacramento Employment and Training Agency (SETA), Golden Sierra Workforce Development Board (WDB), North Central Counties Consortium, Yolo WDB, City of Sacramento, local community college districts and others.

The Strong Workforce program provides Career Education opportunities to increase social mobility and fuel regional economies with skilled workers.

Key Findings

- Hybrid and remote work environments are predicted to continue into the next one to two years, and perhaps indefinitely. According to the Remote Work Survey conducted by Valley Vision, respondents estimated that 64% of their organization's employees are currently utilizing a hybrid work structure as a result of the pandemic's demand for alternative work structures. These respondents then indicated that they expect 46% of their employees to continue to operate on a hybrid/fully-remote schedule twelve to twenty-four months from now, which shows that remote workers foresee no drastic change in what has become the norm.
- Virtual meetings will continue to be the main method of communication between large groups of people. Employers highly value virtual communication skills, such as adeptly navigating Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Google Meet. 39% of the Remote Work Survey's respondents said that their business or organization adopted virtual meeting software during the pandemic. 38% of respondents anticipated continuing to use these programs on a consistent basis. Additional curriculum and considerations for hybrid meeting integrations will continue to be relevant and essential to operations even after the pandemic.
- Employees' mental health is a high concern. Second to ever-changing COVID-19 regulations, mental health was identified as a significant factor to consider when making the transition from remote to in-person. Valley Vision's [COVID-19 Resilience Poll](#) found that 78-84% of respondents experienced feelings of stress or anxiety at least once a week, and 58-65% experienced feelings of hopelessness or depression at least once a week. Studies have shown that giving employees the flexibility to work in a remote or hybrid environment improves their ability to maintain a work-life balance that is suitable for their needs.
- Internet connectivity is integral to business and employee success. Businesses and organizations should have access to the infrastructure they need to properly connect their employees to reliable internet. 15% of respondents from the Remote Work Survey indicated that productivity issues were one of the main concerns when considering a transition in work structure. Employees without proper internet access will not be able to execute responsibilities efficiently, as bandwidth strength can fluctuate in response to outside factors, including geographic location, quality of service plan, presence of other remote workers or students, and more. Broadband accessibility and equity will affect whether or not remote work will be viable in the long run.

- The COVID-19 pandemic only accelerated a remote work trend that had already begun. Findings from the Centers of Excellence via Burning Glass data discovered that the prominence of remote work job postings have been increasing since 2016. This suggests that remote work opportunities will not disappear if COVID-19 cases begin to decline, as remote work professions were increasing prior to the pandemic. Further, the pandemic strengthened the demand for work flexibility. With 59% of Remote Work Survey respondents indicating that they anticipate continuing to utilize a hybrid work structure for the next twelve to twenty-four months, employers should consider how this trend may affect and shape their organization after the pandemic.

Meeting Proceedings

Welcome & Overview

This regional advisory delved into the impact of remote work since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Renee John, Project Leader over 21st Century Workforce at Valley Vision began the meeting, stating the goal of bringing together employers and professionals from the ICT sector to discuss the current level of technology adoption in their industries and what they are predicting for the future. John also introduced Cornelius Brown, Regional Director of Employer Engagement for Information, Communications, Technology, and Digital Media, who helped to produce this advisory. Brown thanked the attendants for taking the time to participate in this conversation, and he expressed hopes for the audience to leave with a desire to foster the opportunities presented by the surge in demand for remote positions. The regional directors work with industry partners to develop pathways to employment for students coming out of college programs.

Framing and Trends

This section was led by Jamie Orr, CEO of Orr Consulting, and Aaron Wilcher, Research Director at the North Far North Centers of Excellence.

Orr first introduced the Remote Work Project Scope, which detailed how Orr Consulting works closely with Cornelius Brown to support workforce development goals specific to the shift to a remote workforce. The motivations behind this project included the challenges & opportunities presented by the mass shift to remote work, as well as the future of the region's students who are entering a remote or hybrid workforce. Orr also explained how remote work encapsulates more than "working from home"; this categorization includes roles that are fully remote, geographically-distributed teams, hybrid work, and telecommuting or telework. Some of the opportunities for this space that Orr emphasized included providing jobs for workers in secondary or rural economic regions, workers that require flexibility due to caretaking or family responsibilities, and workers with disabilities.

Orr then introduced Aaron Wilcher from the North Far North Centers of Excellence, who presented a high-level overview of remote work’s labor market trends not only within the state of California, but also nationally. The Centers of Excellence is a part of the California Community Colleges’ Economic and Workforce Development Division, providing research and technical assistance to the community colleges and other partners. The data presented in this segment was collected via a tool called Burning Glass, which utilizes algorithms to identify keywords in job postings across several online job boards. Although Burning Glass is a single resource, Wilcher explained that it is utilized for real-time labor market data analysis.

Figure 1. Job Postings “work from home” California, April 1 - March 31, 2020 vs. 2021

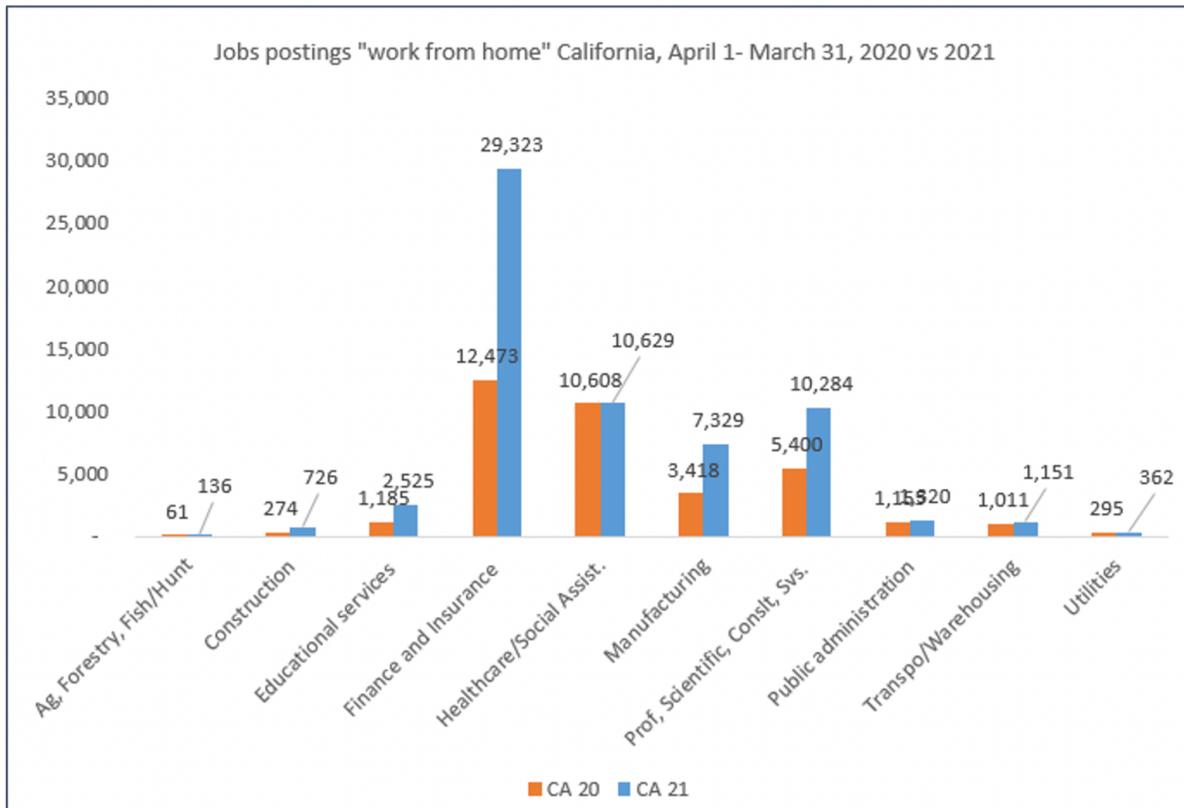


Figure 1 represents the volume of job postings that included the term “remote work” across industry sectors in California from 2020 to 2021. All industries in this chart, however, are a minority share. For instance, the sharp spike of 29,323 Finance and Insurance remote work postings only constitute around 11% of the total job postings for that field. While “work from home” style job postings may have drastically increased in 2021, these roles are still far outnumbered by in-person job postings, which suggests that the number of remote-style positions offered may not be enough to keep up with demand.

Figure 2. Greater Sacramento Region Job Postings Volume “work from home”, 2010-2020

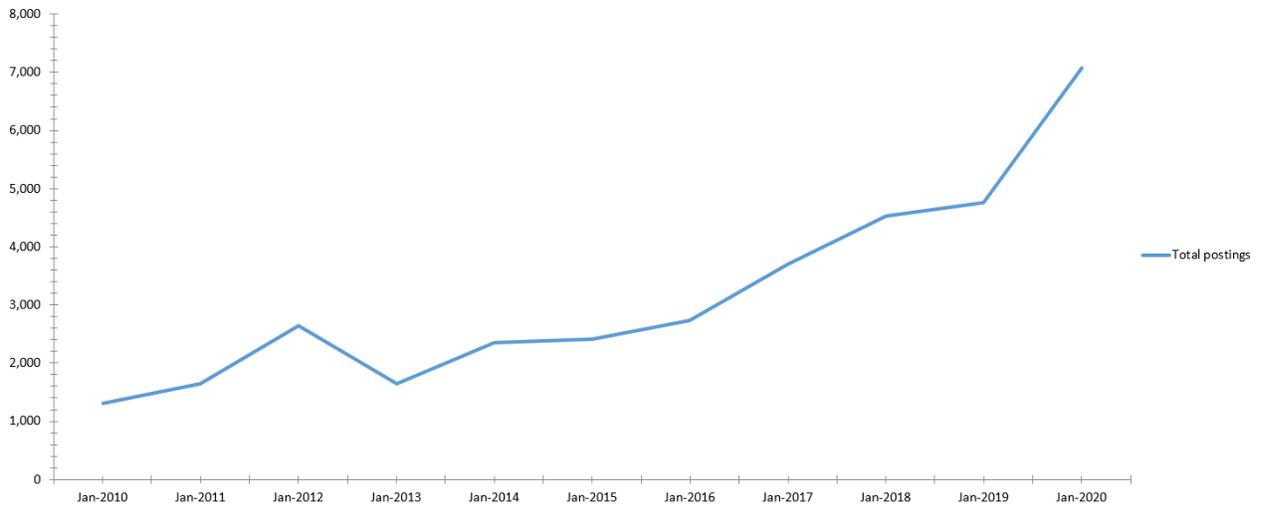


Figure 3. California Job Postings Volume “work from home”, 2010-2020

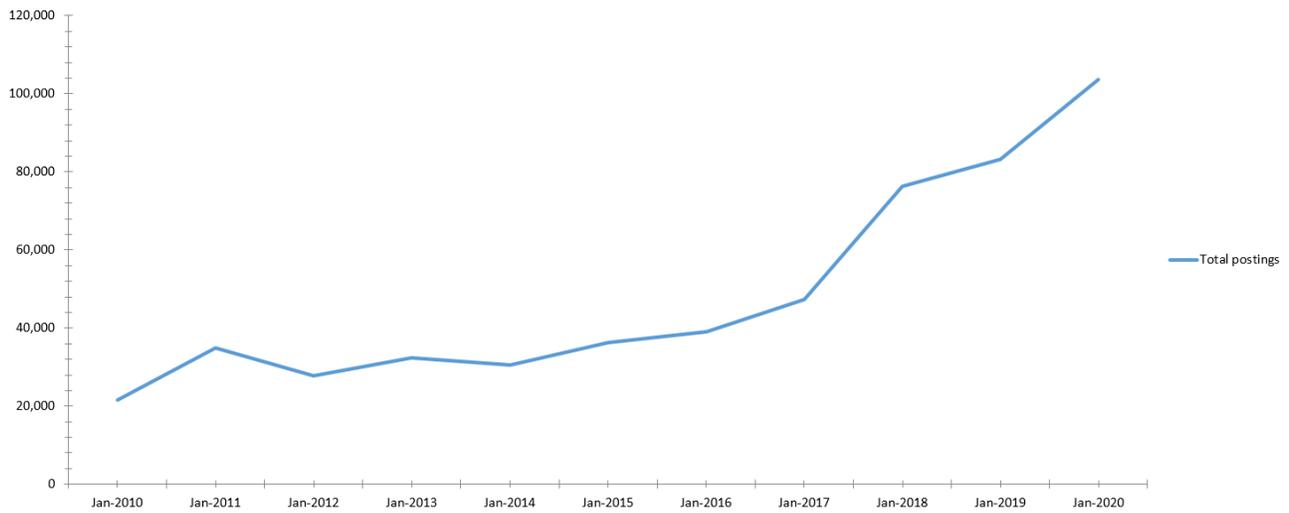
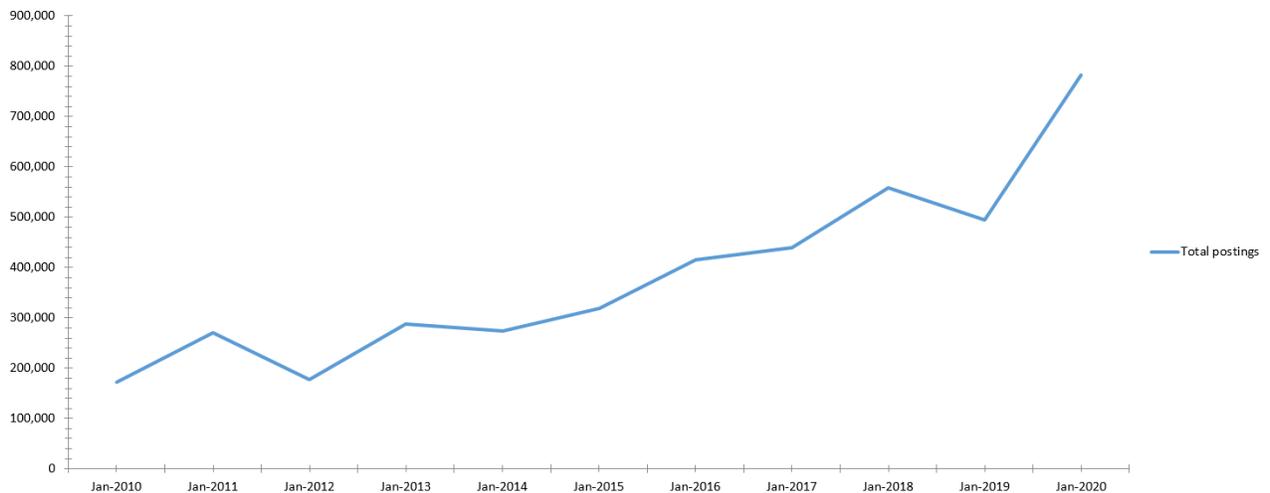


Figure 4 - United States Job Postings Volume “work from home”, 2010-2020



Figures 2, 3, and 4 show the upward trend of remote work job postings from January 2010 to January 2020 across the Greater Sacramento region, California, and the United States. Wilcher noted that the frequency of the term “remote work” on online job boards began to increase around 2016, meaning the COVID-19 pandemic was more of an accelerant rather than a cause for a trend that had begun years before it became prominent.

At the end of the segment, Wilcher posed the question, “How do in-demand work skills remain the same or become something different in a remote environment?” With the data pointing towards insurance and customer service as the leading providers of remote work opportunities, he asked the audience to consider if traditional skill sets are enough to prepare a remote workforce, or if specific training is needed to properly equip existing and incoming employees with the knowledge necessary to thrive in a non-traditional environment.

Panel Discussion

- **Nicole Grady** - *Breathe California Sacramento Region, Executive Assistant & Office Manager*
- **Sandra Paschal** - *County of Sacramento, Human Resources Manager*
- **Michelle L. Zhu** - *New York Life Insurance Company, Agent*
- **Daniela Devitt** - *California Employers Association, Vice President of Workforce Development*



New Environment, New Skills

Employers are looking for candidates who possess a high degree of self-management and time management skills. Utilizing a hybrid system allows for greater flexibility in terms of individuals who need occasional interaction with others versus those who might not require as much. Additionally, changing communication methods call for greater digital literacy skills and technological savviness. People who are searching for remote/hybrid jobs should possess or be willing to be trained in virtual meeting software and etiquette.

The Value of Remote Positions

Businesses and organizations in the small to medium size range may consider specific geographical needs. If an employee’s quality of life can be sustained without a raise in income (ex. a remote employee in San Francisco would require a higher wage for rent and other essential needs versus a remote employee who resides in Fresno), then there is no inherent need to grant raises or bonuses to newly-hired remote workers. Some employers are also considering labeling remote work as a benefit.

Addressing Infrastructure and Office Needs

Businesses and organizations have been implementing “check-out systems”, allowing associates to temporarily rent computers, desks, chairs, and other types of equipment for employees who may not have the technology necessary to carry out their typical duties. Utilities such as internet, cell phone, and electricity bills are also being covered by some companies to accommodate their increased use. In terms of office space, downsizing has occurred for some due to the lack of utilization, but coworking spaces and “hot desks” (desk space utilized through a rotating schedule as opposed to static ownership) are seen as potential alternatives.

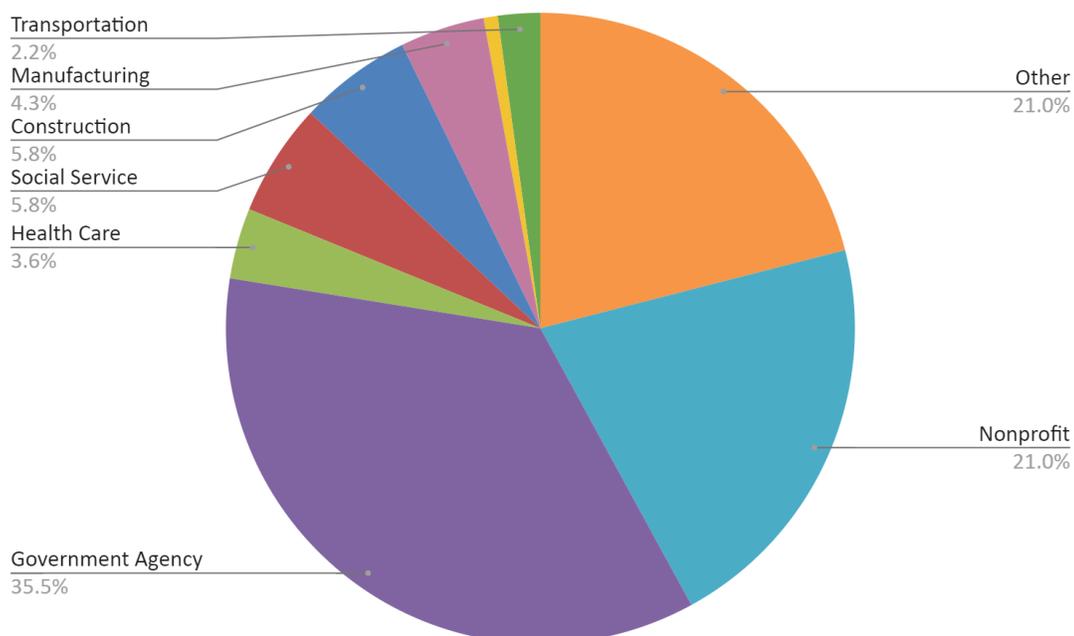
Remote Work Survey Methodology

Valley Vision, through Strong Workforce program funds, collaborated with Los Rios Community College District, Centers of Excellence, and Orr Consulting to survey the Capital Region’s employers on the types of skills needed to ensure that current and future employees are keeping pace with the occupational demands of the remote workspace. This study sought to pinpoint where additional training and curriculum could be dedicated to support the region’s remote workforce, as well as to lay a basis for the estimated trajectory of the prevalence of remote work both during and after the pandemic.

This research was conducted through an online survey, which consisted of 18 questions and remained live for six weeks after its initial release. After its completion, the survey was distributed via email to industry partners and workforce boards, who were also encouraged to continue outreach through their respective channels.

138 total responses were recorded within the six-week timeframe, and that data became the basis of our analysis. The geographic regions surveyed included 15 counties: **Amador, Alpine, Calaveras, Colusa, El Dorado, Glenn, Nevada, Placer, Sacramento, San Joaquin, Solano, Stanislaus, Sutter, Yolo, and Yuba.**

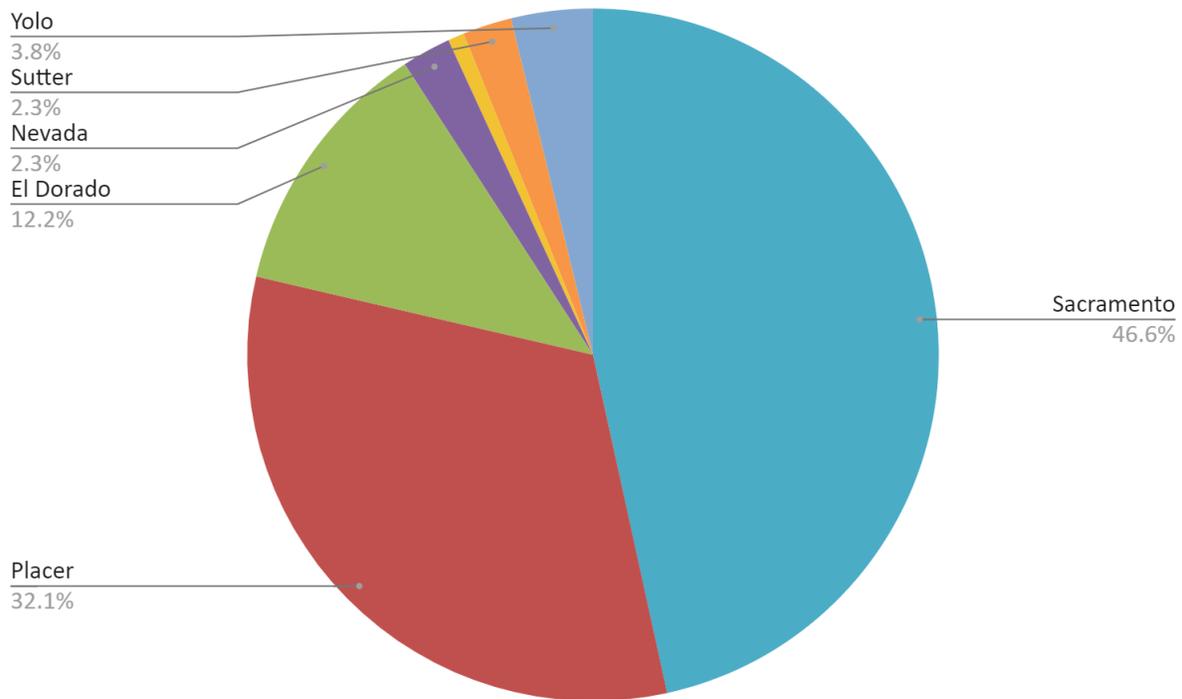
Figure 5. Industry Breakdown of Survey Respondents



The pie chart in Figure 5 shows the distribution of industries amongst the Remote Work Survey’s 138 respondents. A majority of respondents were affiliated with either a Government Agency (35%), or a Nonprofit (21%). As for the 21% of respondents who indicated “Other”, 47% of these individuals affiliated themselves with the Education sector.

Geographically, when analyzing the 15 counties surveyed, survey respondents were located primarily in six counties: Sutter (2%), Nevada (2%), Yolo (3%), El Dorado (12%), Placer (32%), and Sacramento (46%).

Figure 6. Geographic Breakdown of Survey Respondents



The Remote Work Survey analyzed the present practices and future projections of the Capital Region’s employers to establish a starting point for specific upskilling initiatives. The results of this analysis related the greatest opportunities for in-staff development and talent acquisition to two main objectives: **providing sufficient training on virtual communication platforms** and **creating a uniform classification for remote work opportunities** to guarantee that job postings are easily accessible for potential applicants. However, there are additional factors that need to be considered when approaching remote work demands, such as **regional broadband access, how remote work could benefit those with accessibility needs, and the breadth of remote opportunities available to those who do not have a bachelor’s degree.**

Conclusion

At the end of the advisory, attendees were encouraged to reach out to their fellow attendants, Regional Directors for Employer Engagement in the North/Far North region, and Valley Vision for opportunities to connect in the future.

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- Cornelius Brown - Information & Communication Technologies | BrownC@crc.losrios.edu