

The EKCEP Phenomenon:

How Culture and Commitment Transform Hardship into Workforce Performance

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5 KEY FINDINGS:

EKCEP Punches Above Its Weight.

When you account for rural challenges – long travel, fewer employers, repeated disasters – EKCEP serves more people per capita and gets more credentials and placements than you would expect for a region its size.

Culture Is the Engine.

A shared, service-first way of working – from central staff to local direct service partners – keeps people engaged in services. That engagement produces more credentials, placements, and trusted employer relationships.

More Partners = More Reach and More Work.

Having nine local partners let EKCEP be everywhere they're needed, but it also means more coordination and overhead. That extra challenge and effort deserve recognition.

The “Alchemist” Archetype Powers the System.

EKCEP's culture – the report's “Alchemist” profile – turns hardships into possibility: central staff and CAP partners translate mission-driven problem-solving into tangible support, trust building, and local practices that amplify outcomes across 23 counties.

Supports Drive Success.

Participant supports – transportation, childcare, connectivity, and emergency aid – feed/promote higher completion and placement rates.

Researched and written by:



Executive Summary

A workforce system succeeds when employers, training providers, and public supports connect effectively. So, when one system outperforms other systems, the question becomes: what blend of structure, practice, and culture powers that success?

*One such board, Eastern Kentucky Concentrated Employment Program, Inc. (EKCEP) outperforms in several ways. Serving 23 counties through nine partner agencies, the board reached **12,820 unduplicated clients**, recorded **3,332 placements**, and supported **959 credentials**¹ in program year 2024 – outcomes that look especially strong once normalized across its 425,934² population. Research conducted for this analysis points to this explanation: EKCEP pairs a solid operational backbone (well-defined roles among service delivery partners, harmonized case management, strong employer relationships) with everyday practices that keep people engaged in this deeply distressed part of the country – frequent outreach, consistent supports, dedicated staff, and an intense drive as many community members as quickly as possible. These systems and service dynamics help participants stay connected to training and employers – even when transit, broadband, childcare, and employer scarcity make placement harder. Together, these*

metrics and on-the-ground evidence explain how a relatively small, high-need region can produce outsized service volumes when delivery is networked, intentional, and people-centered. Additionally, with the help of EKCEP's expansive Community Action Partnership (CAP) network, they can expand their local presence and ability to scale emergency recovery work after floods and other shocks that further drive demand, which is why place-adjusted comparisons, not raw benchmarks, best capture the board's true impact. EKCEP's culture shapes everything staff does: central staff prioritize relationships, continuous problem-solving, and data-informed follow-through, while CAP partners mirror those norms at the local level through consistent practice, trusted referral behavior, and willingness to accept risk on behalf of their participants. That shared culture turns policies and processes into action, including higher participant engagement, steadier employer partnerships, more consistent case outcomes across 23 counties, and the agility to scale recovery work after floods or other shocks. In short, this culture doesn't just accompany performance — it magnifies it. As work becomes the engine that rebuilds lives, families, and local economies, EKCEP converts hardship and coordinated effort into real opportunity, turns resilience into shared prosperity.

EKCEP Performance in Context – Comparative Strengths, Structural Barriers, and Place Metrics

EKCEP delivers measurable public value at a scale and depth that is uncommon in a largely rural service area. In Program Year 2024 (PY24), the Board reported 2,915 new Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) enrollments (2,045 Adults; 760 Youth; 110 Dislocated Workers) and a consolidated snapshot of 2,325 concurrent participants³. Across program streams, EKCEP's PY24 materials record 12,820 unduplicated clients served, 3,332 total job placements, and

959 credentials earned (959 is 152% of the PY24 credential goal of 630)¹. Those headline volumes, when normalized across EKCEP's 23-county service area, amount to roughly 580 participants per 100,000 residents, a per-capita penetration that significantly exceeds many single-county metropolitan boards that report similar absolute caseloads but draw from populations measured in the millions. When combined with an independent Lightcast ROI summary and state recognition for sector strategy and disaster-response work, these figures show how EKCEP converts reach into documented outcomes in a place of persistent adversity.

To understand why that per-capita penetration matters, consider a few concrete place indicators: the Census Bureau's American Community Survey Indicators workbook for EKCEP's 23 counties shows a weighted poverty rate of ~27.0%, a weighted median household income of roughly \$40,673, and a population-weighted mean commute of ~28.2 minutes. Only about 0.2% of commuters in the region use public transportation, while ~79% drive alone and ~12% carpool⁴. Those numbers document a low-income, high-need region where travel costs and the absence of transit multiply the practical barriers to attending training and accepting new work.

An operating dimension that further differentiates EKCEP from many peers is its distributed delivery model. The board works with nine Community Action Partnerships as direct service providers to reach its 23 counties. Most workforce areas — especially single-county metros — operate with one or two primary providers. Running a network of nine partner providers multiplies the complexity of coordination, quality assurance, data reconciliation, and consistent service design. This networked model requires EKCEP to harmonize schedules across geographies, standardize training curricula and credentialing practices, align case management protocols, and maintain tighter compliance and reporting processes so outcomes can be aggregated reliably. At the same time, the CAP network expands coverage and local presence, allowing EKCEP to reach deeply into remote communities and to mount rapid, localized responses after disasters; it also raises the per-participant administrative and coordination burden in ways that metropolitan boards rarely confront. EKCEP achieves high credential and placement volumes while managing nine distinct providers, evidence of its institutional capacity and systems leadership.

The research team also compared EKCEP to three single-county metropolitan boards because each reports caseloads broadly similar to EKCEP's PY24 totals while operating in fundamentally different

local markets; Dallas-WorkSource with 2,252 WIOA participants served (Dallas County, TX), CareerSource South Florida with 2,259 served (Miami-Dade County, FL), and the Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King County with 2,443 served (King County, WA)³. The population differences are substantial. Each compared county contains roughly 2.2–2.7 million residents versus EKCEP's ~425,934 across 23 counties, so an equivalent absolute caseload yields a per-capita penetration roughly five to six times larger in EKCEP. (EKCEP's PY24 unduplicated reach implies ~3,010 participants per 100,000 versus roughly 478–564 per 100,000 in the comparator counties for the same caseload.) Transportation and spatial structure also amplify this disparity. EKCEP's service area is overwhelmingly personal vehicle-dependent, with near-zero public-transit share and routine multi-hour travel burdens for participants. By contrast, the metropolitan counties possess greater transit availability and denser employer networks, which reduce travel distances and lower the time and scheduling friction involved in cohort attendance, employer engagement, and timely job starts. Consequently, serving an equivalent absolute caseload is administratively and operationally less costly in the metropolitan comparators than in EKCEP's dispersed, low-density region, and therefore per-capita penetration and place-adjusted measures provide a more appropriate basis for comparative performance than raw caseload counts alone.

A comprehensive reading of the data requires attention to the structural and episodic barriers that raise the real cost of achieving those outcomes. Over the last decade, Eastern Kentucky's labor market has been reshaped by the reduction of coal and its supply chain, leaving fewer stable, year-round employers and thinner hiring pipelines than exist in denser metropolitan economies. That employer scarcity reduces the number of robust apprenticeship slots and durable job offers that typically lift conversion and long-term retention metrics. Geography compounds the problem. Many participants face

long drives or multi-hour commutes to reach training sites or interviews, and public transit options are sparse (EKCEP public-transit share \approx 0.2%). For low-income households, the time and fuel costs of travel are substantial and recurrent, and they materially increase the likelihood of missed sessions or delayed starts. Broadband gaps and inconsistent connectivity further complicate delivery by limiting the effectiveness of virtual training options and requiring more intensive, in-person case management. Finally, childcare shortages and limited availability of informal care in rural communities mean cohort attendance frequently imposes direct household costs that are proportionally higher than in urban settings.

Overlaying these structural frictions is a sequence of high-impact shocks that have repeatedly interrupted EKCEP's work and the region's hiring capacity. Eastern Kentucky experienced major flood events in late February–early March 2021, catastrophic floods July 25–30, 2022, and again in mid-February 2025. Each event caused infrastructure damage, housing displacement, and business interruptions that fractured cohorts, closed hiring windows, and redirected household priorities toward immediate recovery. The COVID-19 pandemic similarly disrupted delivery, shifting childcare, employer demand, and cohort continuity for extended periods. Those episodic shocks do more than produce short-term dips in metrics; they change the risk calculus for households considering training, disrupt employer pipelines that would otherwise absorb graduates, and temporarily erase the local job opportunities that make credentialing immediately valuable.

These systemic and shock-related constraints help explain why some standardized metrics in the consolidated WIOA snapshot run below statewide averages — for example, training-conversion at \sim 39.8% (versus a Kentucky mean of 57.4%) and Q4 retention around 63.8% (versus a state mean near 82.8%)³. However, these statistics do not capture the whole story. EKCEP's credential and placement volumes, its rapid

upscale of EKY FLOOD recovery programming — which enrolled over 1,050 people — and ROI estimates from Lightcast of participant earnings gains and taxpayer returns, together, show the board achieves substantial, measurable impact despite constrained, local demand, and repeated interruptions. Where metropolitan comparators such as Dallas-WorkSource (Dallas County), CareerSource South Florida (Miami-Dade), and the Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King County may operate with abundant employers, short travel times, and stronger supportive infrastructures, EKCEP sustains similar throughput while absorbing far greater logistical cost, higher per-participant case intensity, and more operational complexity — a comparative insight that reframes apparent shortfalls as evidence of outsized regional impact.

The most defensible interpretation of the evidence is therefore comparative and contextual: EKCEP reaches deeply into its communities and operates intensively for each participant, achieving credentialing, placements, and measurable service gains in a setting that continually tests both households and providers. The organization's scale, documented outcomes, disaster-response capacity, and ROI together support the central conclusion of this white paper: EKCEP's performance is best assessed by the combination of scale, throughput, resilience, and the place-adjusted impact it sustains within a high-barrier operating environment, rather than any single statewide benchmark taken in isolation.

EKCEP Culture in Context

This section summarizes the approach and principal findings of the SummitWorX Solutions' study of organizational culture and employee engagement at EKCEP, explicitly including the nine CAPs that serve as EKCEP's direct service providers. The study characterizes culture as the set of behaviors, practices, and norms that

support EKCEP's effectiveness as a workforce development board and identifies levers for strengthening staff engagement and operational capacity. Key methodological and instrument details are incorporated below to substantiate validity and replicability.

Model & Instrument

SummitWorX used an archetypal culture profile framework based on the Organizational and Team Culture Indicator (OTCI)⁵, an instrument designed to identify dominant archetypal patterns in organizational cultures. The OTCI was originally published in 2003 by Dr. Carol S. Pearson and Dr. Allen L. Hammer as part of a broader program of archetypal instruments that also includes the Pearson Marr Archetype Indicator (PMAI)⁶. The OTCI maps organizational narratives and collective patterns onto a 12-archetype system (e.g., Hero, Magician, Sage) to make implicit cultural dynamics explicit and actionable. The OTCI and related Pearson instruments are widely referenced in applied organizational work and have been translated for wider commercial use (after the tool was acquired by Kenexa/IBM).

A recognized developer of the 12-archetype system, Dr. Carol S. Pearson has authored foundational texts on archetypal theory and its application in personal and organizational development (for example, *The Hero Within* and *Awakening the Heroes Within*). Her work underpins the theoretical rationale for using archetypal profiles to interpret organizational culture and to link culture with engagement and performance outcomes.

SummitWorX Solutions has adapted the research process to further define the Cultural Values of an organization by analyzing the Rational Facts, Emotional Truths, and Personality of an organization. These dynamics can also be analogous to a person, which allows us to define an organization via an exemplar. For example, an organization that values knowledge, adventure, and risk embodies the character of Indiana Jones, which can be better understood by the common layperson without the need for advanced Industrial Psychology training. This model has been honed over the past 20 years with more than

100 global organizations and more than 1 million employees.

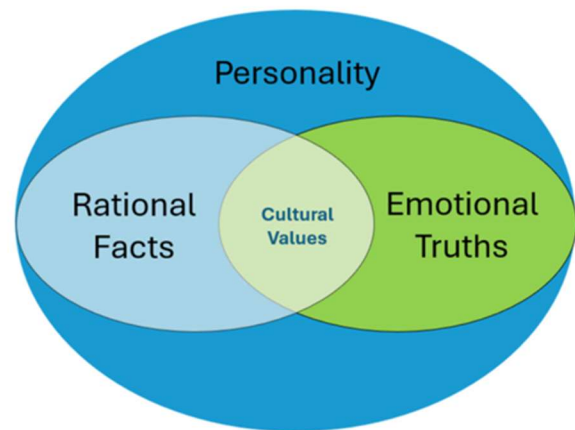


Figure 1: The SummitWorX Solutions Culture Model

Sample, Administration, and Psychometrics

The assessment and qualitative inquiry covered the EKCEP regional system, which comprises 103 employees in total: 27 direct EKCEP central staff and 76 staff employed by the nine contracted CAPs that deliver direct services across the 23-county region. Survey participation included 27 of 27 (100%) of EKCEP central staff and 45 of 76 (59.2%) of CAP staff⁷, yielding an overall participation rate of 69.9%, which is slightly below the expected response rate of 72 – 78%. These counts and participation rates are reported here to provide transparency about the sample frame and response distribution.

The Archetypal Culture Profile instrument operationalizes culture through aggregated responses to items tied twelve archetypes; instrument developers report evidence of construct coherence across archetypal scales and practical validity for organizational diagnosis. Where possible, SummitWorX compared EKCEP results to established engagement benchmarks for the survey tool; those benchmark ranges are reported alongside EKCEP scores for context and comparison.

The statistical comparison of EKCEP staff and partner survey responses shows a clear, but only modest, alignment in how each group perceives organizational culture. Across 55 matched survey

items, the scatter of question-level means produces a positive relationship (Pearson $r \approx 0.35$, $R^2 \approx 0.12$), indicating that when EKCEP staff rate an item higher, partners tend to do so as well, yet the association is not tight. Visually and numerically, many points fall below the 1:1 line. Partner scores are frequently lower than internal scores, and the fitted regression (Partners $\approx 0.45 \times$ EKCEP + 1.34) implies partner ratings increase more slowly as EKCEP internal ratings rise.

Equally notable is the systematic offset between the two perspectives. On average, EKCEP employees score items ~ 0.75 points higher on the 1–5 scale than partners do, a non-trivial gap that is visible across archetypes and many individual items. The pattern suggests broad shared recognition of which cultural traits matter, but a meaningful difference in perceived intensity: EKCEP staff report stronger process, care, and learning signals than partners observe in partner-facing interactions. In plain terms, the two groups largely point in the same direction, but partners consistently perceive those strengths as less pronounced — an important nuance for interpreting the organization’s influence on their partner’s culture or performance.

Qualitative Methods and Analysis

SummitWorX Solutions conducted a process of qualitative inquiry to complement the archetypal survey and provide contextual interpretation. Data collection included site visits, one-on-one leadership interviews, and focus groups with front-line staff and community partners. Seven focus groups were conducted with cohort sizes of 3-8 participants, for a total of 39 EKCEP or partner employees; 25 leaders, managers, and strategic frontline EKCEP employees were interviewed individually to surface strategic perspectives and implementation constraints. SummitWorX applied thematic analysis (inductive coding) to transcripts and facilitator notes to identify recurrent patterns, representative quotes, and points of divergence between central office and CAP experiences. Results are anonymized and randomized for reporting purposes. Findings from the qualitative analysis were triangulated with the archetypal culture profile survey results

to produce a coherent narrative of culture and engagement across the regional network.

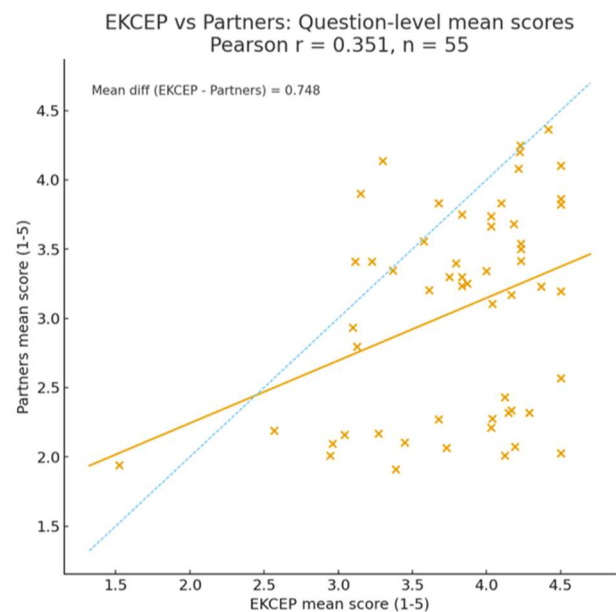


Figure 2: EKCEP vs partners question-level; analysis

Key Findings

Across methods, EKCEP and its CAP partners present a broadly positive cultural sentiment characterized by strong interpersonal bonds, a service orientation, and programmatic pride (for example, in apprenticeships, reentry services, and CDL programs). The archetypal profile is dominated by the Ruler, Caregiver, and Sage archetypes, indicating a predisposition toward learning, competence, stewardship, and reflective practice in both central and frontline teams. Engagement scores were high relative to Archetypal Culture Profile benchmarks (89.9% versus a benchmark of 76%)⁷; engagement was strongest for mission driven and client facing work and lower for administrative and compliance tasks. Several CAP respondents emphasized that time-sensitive requests originating at the central level can have downstream impacts on frontline service delivery.

The archetypal pattern and qualitative themes suggest EKCEP’s cultural strengths, pride, stability, mission focus, and mutual support

create favorable conditions for high quality service delivery across the regional network.

Conclusion

EKCEP demonstrates a level of operational reach and measurable public value that is unusual for a largely rural, multi-county workforce area. Program metrics and ROI work document thousands of enrollments, hundreds of placements, and credentials, and multi-million-dollar earnings and fiscal gains, outcomes delivered and sustained through repeated regional shocks. EKCEP's throughput and monetized returns show a board that not only achieves scale but converts scale into economic benefit for individuals and for the Commonwealth.

The research team sees EKCEP through the lens of "the Alchemist," an exemplar that provides the most convincing explanation for that

high levels of purpose, pride, care, and process orientation; partners generally agree on the shape of the organization's strengths but consistently report those qualities with less intensity. That pattern suggests a powerful internal culture that translates into operational discipline and rapid, localized action. In plain terms, EKCEP's internal culture is so strong that it sets a standard sometimes unseen at the partner level. It both enables exceptional system performance in hard places and, in practice, exists within a halo over partner perceptions, making partners feel the organization's intensity, but somewhat less directly than internal staff does.

Taken together, the programmatic results, monetized ROI, and cultural profile argue for interpreting EKCEP's performance through a place-adjusted lens. The board's combination of scale, resilience, and distributed delivery capacity constitutes an unusually effective public system response in an area with thin employer markets,

long travel distances, constrained supports, and repeated disasters. For state and national audiences evaluating comparative performance, the most informative frame is therefore contextual: EKCEP should be recognized as an exemplar of high-impact delivery under high barriers, and its cultural strengths

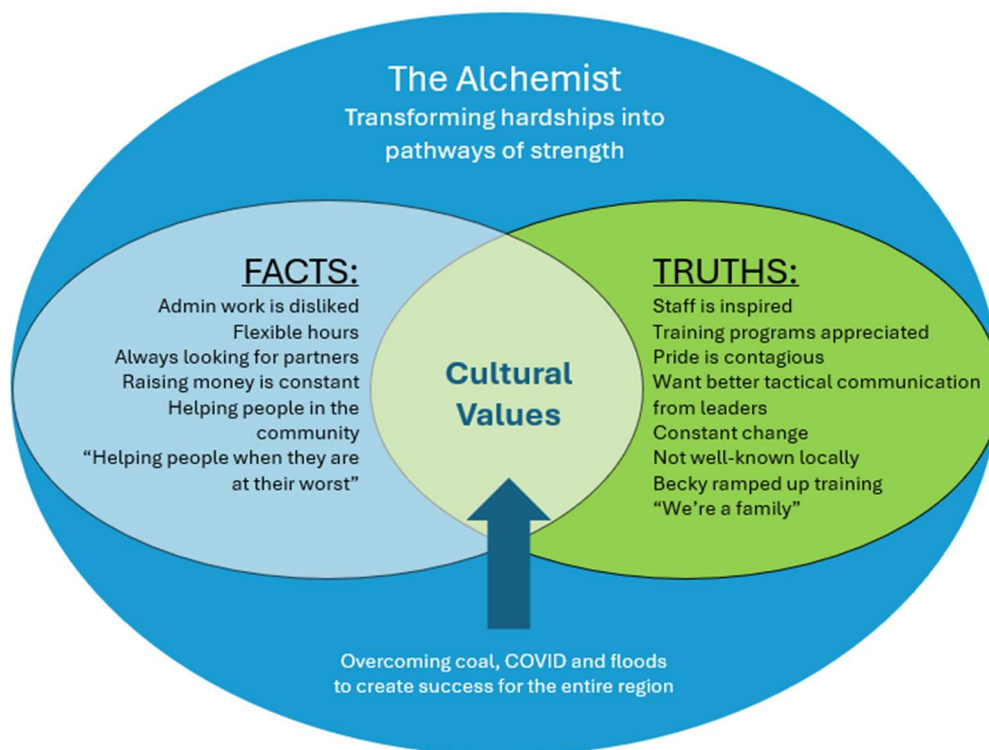


Figure 3: The EKCEP Culture Model

performance. The leadership of EKCEP has set high standards for the organization and its partners and has created a culture that inherently leads to positive outcomes. Internally, staff report

— the “Alchemist” capacity to transform hardship into pathways of strength — are central to that achievement.

Study References

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