

Workforce Board Strategic Plan Tied to Talent and Prosperity for All

Washington's new strategic plan for workforce development is moving the state toward a seamless, more efficient workforce system capable of delivering a tailored set of services to each Washington worker and business, propelling them to greater prosperity.

Talent and Prosperity for All brings together the state's core workforce programs and their partners to provide a better, more streamlined customer experience—whether it's an unemployed worker who receives needed skill training and follow-up services after landing a job, or a business that depends on a steady stream of work-ready hires and help recruiting and retaining a stable workforce.

This plan forms the basis for the Workforce Board's strategic plan and informs the work we do every day as part of agency's mission to sustain Washington's economic vitality through a highly skilled workforce.

The *Talent and Prosperity for All* plan is the work of many people from a wide range of state agencies, non-profits, education and workforce organizations, and businesses and labor organizations, who represent a diversity of viewpoints and customers. What they have in common is a commitment to improving Washington's workforce system through a shared vision, and the accountability to see that vision through. Co-led by active members of the business and labor communities, this cross-agency collaboration will continue as the plan is implemented under the oversight of the state's Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (Workforce Board).

Deeper partnerships and an inspired sense of collaboration set this new plan apart from its predecessors. New federal legislation also takes this plan in new directions. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), the first federal reform of the workforce system in 15 years, is woven throughout *Talent and Prosperity for All* and influences much of the changes that encourage an aligned and integrated workforce system.

Four key priorities sit at the heart of the state's *Talent and Prosperity for All* (TAP) plan:

1. Improve the customer experience for both workers and businesses through aligning and coordinating services.
2. Build full partnerships with businesses through effective engagement strategies.
3. Use technology and other methods to ensure every Washingtonian has access to the workforce system.
4. Enhance performance accountability by measuring how well the system serves the individual customer, in addition to how well programs deliver results.

There is a lot of work to be done. By necessity, the work has been distributed among TAP Implementation Committees that will focus on specific short-term objectives that move the system closer to achieving the above priorities.

There will be a period of adjustment as program managers redirect resources, learn from their experiences, and make adaptations based on results and customer needs. However, TAP's many partners believe a more coordinated, better aligned workforce system ultimately will produce results far greater than the sum of the system's individual programs.

Each priority's goals, and the near-term steps to reach them, are explained below.

Improved Customer Experience

Washingtonians access the workforce system in many ways. Through improved customer experience, each jobseeker, worker or business—regardless of how they enter the system—will receive the full benefit of our state's workforce programs and services, tailored in a way that directly meets their needs. WIOA is helping make this happen by eliminating previous federal requirements that insisted clients follow a “sequence of services.” Under that model, customers had to move from a “low touch” level of service, to more one-on-one assistance, all the way to enrollment in skill building, career-focused education programs. Now, under WIOA, workforce system partners are able to enroll clients in a wider range of services, either consecutively or concurrently. To facilitate this more open environment, workforce system partners are identifying how to create a corps of navigators to assist businesses and workers in accessing the right mix of services right from the start.

WIOA also emphasizes the end result over program completion, allowing the system to focus on sustaining relationships with customers after they've become employed. Work-based learning and career pathways foster this type of relationship by actively engaging customers, both businesses and workers, in customizing workforce solutions that go beyond immediate employment and toward long-term economic success. In practical terms, this means customers will continue to receive support from the workforce system after the hire, whether it's an employee facing childcare or transportation issues, or an employer who needs training assistance.

What follows are specific goals and near-term actions within this priority.

Develop an intake process that eliminates redundant assessments and streamlines customer experience.

A key component to Washington's workforce system is its network of WorkSource Centers where core programs are taking steps to co-locate, share costs, and participate in cross training. While it will take time to complete and perfect, the melding of staff and resources should streamline the intake process for customers and increase the likelihood that the right set of services are delivered when needed.

Washington's Employment Security Department has begun a project of co-enrolling all WorkSource customers in both Title I and Title III programs. What this means is that customers entering WorkSource will also receive services through one of the three key WIOA programs (Dislocated Worker, Adults, and Youth).

The Common Intake Process/Data Sharing Implementation Committee for TAP seeks to broaden this project to include all WIOA services. The goal is to eventually fold in Title II

(Adult Education & Literacy) and Title IV (Vocational Rehabilitation). Agency members from these two service areas are helping to lead this expansion effort. In addition, this committee will identify the specific data gathered by most programs. Their objective is to create a process that allows all partners to access at least a basic level of shared client information.

Increase the number of designated navigators available within the One-Stop (WorkSource) system.

The goal is “no wrong door.” Whether entering the system because of a disability or a lay off or some other reason, each customer should have someone who knows how to successfully chart a course to the right mix of support, training, and education. The same applies to a business customer, searching for new hires. To be successful, this requires a core and partner agency commitment of staff and resources for cross-training so that navigators are readily available and understand the full range of Washington’s workforce system programs and services. An implementation committee focused on defining integrated service delivery will take the lead in identifying resources and the training necessary to make this happen.

Increase the number of participants, including those with barriers, who have defined career pathways and have gained portable skills, received industry recognized credentials, and/or earned college credits.

WIOA has generated excitement within Washington’s workforce development community by creating the opportunity to weave resources of multiple programs toward a common goal. Simply by stating this goal in terms of talent acquisition and career objectives, rather than specific program objectives, sets the stage for greater collaboration. For example, this plan identifies additional ways for clients to connect to postsecondary career pathways. Clients of TANF/WorkFirst and Basic Education for Adults—including those without a high school diploma—can connect to state financial aid to pay for college-level credits that, in turn, qualifies them for federal financial aid. This type of “braiding” of resources leverages state and federal programs in a way that maximizes financial and other support for students who face substantial barriers.

But to reach these goals, core state agencies and partners must reach a common understanding on how to equitably fund infrastructure costs at local one-stop, WorkSource Centers. The Workforce Board has directed these key programs to negotiate a “model memorandum of understanding” governing cost sharing. The Workforce Board’s executive director and staff will spearhead this initiative as part of the Defining Integrated Service Delivery implementation committee.

Business Partnership and Engagement

Talent and Prosperity for All relies on proven innovations such as sector partnerships, work-based learning and incumbent worker training to achieve the greater business engagement called for by WIOA. Sector partnerships, for example, are collaborations among businesses within a targeted industry sector along with workforce development organizations, educators, training providers, labor unions, community organizations and other key stakeholders that work to identify common industry training needs to ensure workers have the skills businesses seek.

Below are goals for business partnership and engagement over the next two years.

Identify meaningful metrics to establish a baseline and increase the number of businesses reporting satisfaction with the services they receive via the workforce system by 5 percent each year.

Consistent with WIOA, this plan places local Workforce Development Councils in the center of organizing business engagement efforts with other local workforce system partners. A single point of contact for business is essential. Currently, core programs and partners are identifying their ability to provide business navigators and working out how this corps of professionals will coordinate their efforts and share information.

Another key element to improving business satisfaction is the state's new WorkSource website (WorkSourceWa.com) which offers new services for workers and businesses, including free job postings and applicant matching, as well as providing ranking and side-by-side comparisons of applicants.

To measure progress and make continuous improvements, one of the primary tasks of the Business Engagement implementation committee is to develop a consensus baseline on how well the workforce system is currently connected to the business community, and whether the needs of business are being met. This committee will coordinate their efforts with the Performance Accountability committee, where performance metrics can be refined.

Train at least 30 percent of the workforce system's staff on the implementation of sector partnerships and have at least one new sector partnership in development in each of the state's 12 workforce regions.

Sector strategies are regional partnerships of employers within one industry that bring together government, education, training, economic development, labor and community organizations to focus on the workforce and other needs of that industry. While Washington was an early pioneer in sector strategy, the challenge has been to transition those start-up initiatives into more sustainable longer-term partnerships capable of addressing ongoing and emerging industry-wide needs. To facilitate this transition, this plan presents a Sector Partnership Framework that identifies a common set of principles, definitions, processes and criteria for establishing and maintaining these partnerships.

The Business Engagement committee will promote sector strategy approaches, working closely with local areas, and agency partners. A key committee responsibility is to ensure that sector strategy training is included in state professional development.

Increase the amount of work-based learning, including on-the-job training, apprenticeship, internships, work experience and especially, incumbent worker training in the next two years.

WIOA places a strong emphasis on work-based learning by setting funding mandates to increase work experiences for youth. WIOA also ensures that apprenticeship programs are engaged at the local workforce board level in developing customized solutions for businesses. But key to increasing these opportunities is building trust and support from the business community. The

many different options of work-based learning and the labels that apply can be confusing, creating the impression that the system is fragmented.

This plan calls for creating a common brand and a clear, plain-language menu of service options. The Business Engagement committee will take the lead in this area, developing standardized terms, identifying and promoting best practices and engaging industry in the development of career pathways.

Technology and Universal Access

This plan, reinforced by WIOA, is building new energy and enthusiasm across Washington's workforce system to remove system barriers that have unfortunately prevented too many Washingtonians from connecting with a career pathway and a living-wage job. The plan takes an expansive look at the many barriers people face in training and employment, and identifies ways everyone can benefit from engaging this vast pool of underused talent and creativity.

WIOA mandates that Washington's system provides accessible facilities and programs for all customers, and impresses on the system a duty to improve outcomes and service to many communities traditionally facing these system barriers to success.

In addition, there is a need to bridge the divide between urban and rural communities, ensuring that location is not a barrier to consistent, quality workforce services. This plan identifies the means to broaden the application of proven best practices so that all parts of Washington benefit from consistently high quality service.

Below are the plan's specific goals for Accessibility and Technology.

Establish a state-level advisory committee on accessibility and barrier solutions and ensure the designation of local advisory committees during the first two years of the plan. By the fourth year of the plan, ensure the state-level advisory committee has received annual progress reports on One-Stop (WorkSource) centers' accessibility at the local level.

This plan formalizes state and local advisory committees on Accessibility and Barrier Solutions. Local committees of workforce professionals are already elevating the conversation on how to identify and tap the strengths of these populations in Washington's workforce. These local efforts are reinforced and given additional heft by a recently established, permanent state-level committee. This committee will meet with the state's 12 regional Workforce Development Councils and examine local plans with the objective of identifying common barriers and developing strategies to remove them. Accessibility is a serious, pressing issue for workforce customers across the state and ensuring universal access is a high priority. Each WDC has been tasked with facilitating a local barriers-removal advisory group to broaden equity of access and will create an annual report that details accessibility issues, barriers, and solutions.

Implement secure, wireless internet access in public areas of all comprehensive One-Stop (WorkSource) centers in Washington by 2020.

This year, Washington launched a new online, job-matching service (WorkSourceWa.com) that offers employers a more efficient and effective way to recruit qualified candidates, and jobseekers the ability to connect with the most relevant job opportunities. But the new website must be universally accessible across all populations and regions of the state. To that end, the Accessibility and Barrier Solutions committee will work with the Employment Security Department to help troubleshoot the site and fix any accessibility problems.

This new website is available to anyone with internet access. This makes it even more pressing that the state's comprehensive WorkSource centers provide full public internet access. In addition, this plan identifies a growing partnership with public libraries whose internet portals can extend the reach of the WorkSource system.

Identify and encourage local pilot programs that use technology to facilitate and improve integrated service delivery for customers, including programs designed to improve access to this system.

While not the only answer to universal access, technology offers a great many opportunities to extend the system's reach. A key one is expanding access to the internet and improving the WorkSource website as described above. But even seemingly simple things such as expanding the ability of One-Stop offices to be paperless can improve access for blind/low-vision and limited English proficient populations while also reducing waste.

Performance Accountability

Even as a national leader in tracking workforce system performance, Washington has a difficult mission ahead as the state updates its performance accountability system to meet the requirements of WIOA—and the higher expectations of Washington's workforce system stakeholders.

Develop a system to accurately measure the collective success of all WIOA partners in serving workforce populations.

New measures will be developed to provide a system-level, cross-agency assessment of overall progress of system customers (rather than individual program results). During the initial planning period, the Workforce Board and participating agencies will evaluate how the final federal measures and exit policies compare to existing State Core measures and policies. The next task will be to consider modifying, or combining, these two systems so that collective "system success" can be measured for all WIOA partners serving a particular population, rather than previous report cards centered on individual programs. Because customers will be receiving services from multiple programs, it will take some work to determine how each contributed to overall success. Assessments will also take into account a wide variety of so-called "non-core programs"; those programs that fall outside the essential WIOA Titles I-IV.

To support the increased use of cross-agency data to report both participation and outcomes, existing data sharing agreements among agencies will have to be reviewed, revised and expanded, and new data agreements and transfers developed. This work will begin with the core

programs and expand outward to include Combined Plan partners and other partners. A second wave of modifications to data agreements will be necessary in the second year when the Skills Gain and Employer Service measures are developed.

This work will be in addition to implementing the federal WIOA measures in quarterly reporting for core programs, and developing reports that combine participant records and outcomes across at least the core programs. The existing employer and workforce program participant satisfaction surveys developed under WIA will continue until the new WIOA Employer Service measures are finalized.

The existing Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) system for determining eligibility of occupational skill training programs will be modified to incorporate the new features and/or measures identified in WIOA. Modifications needed to update CareerBridge.wa.gov to reflect changes in performance evaluation under WIOA and implement other additional features identified in the Act will be planned in detail, and a cost estimate developed. A plan for phased expansion of the ETPL to additional types of training providers will be developed in the first year, and the highest priority expansion group(s) added to the system in the second year.

The Data Sharing and Performance Accountability committee will oversee these many tasks.

Professional Development

A cross-agency team convened by the Workforce Board is building a professional development plan that helps field staff better understand and convey to customers the wide range of resources available within Washington's workforce development system. The Professional Development implementation committee will be led by the executive director of the Washington Workforce Association, which represents Washington's regional Workforce Development Councils. This committee will assess professional development needs for each of the 12 local workforce development areas, and identify common skills and knowledge that should be shared statewide. The committee will tap national professional organizations for research and comparisons to design a package of professional development training. This training will take into account emerging issues that result from greater collaboration, data sharing, and service integration.

To fulfill the promise of "no wrong door," the staff at each door and those that manage them, regardless of what program or agency, need to have the know-how to deliver the full range of workforce resources to each customer. A comprehensive professional development plan will help staff become expert navigators who understand the full range of services and how to tap those services to fit a customer's particular needs.

Summary

Washington's workforce system has a well-deserved reputation for excellence. Indeed, many of the concepts woven into WIOA were piloted here. But the bar has been raised, and for good reason. With WIOA as a centerpiece to Washington's *Talent and Prosperity for All* plan, partnership and collaboration are now rewarded, rather than devalued. While previous metrics reinforced a program-by-program approach rather than measuring their impact on the "whole customer," the state will now begin evaluating how each program contributes to a customer's

overall economic success. This is a substantial leap forward in helping people receive the full range of services they need. Also important was the process of creating TAP, a highly participatory process, with multiple agencies and stakeholders building a plan that serves all Washington residents, including those with disabilities, low education levels, language differences and other barriers. The collaboration continues as TAP is put into action and implementation committees ensure progress isn't a lofty goal on a dusty shelf, but a reality that helps propel both jobseekers and businesses to an economically prosperous future.

The next few years are critical as Washington's workforce system undergoes changes and begins the first steps of a transformational process that includes a renewed emphasis on business and helping populations with barriers to achieve success. Workforce system professionals are rolling up their sleeves to carry out the hard work that will lead to measurable results for Washington's many, diverse customers. Read more about this dynamic process and the implementation committees that are putting this ambitious plan into action at: <http://wtb.wa.gov/TAPcommittees.asp>