

# Improving the Customer Experience

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## Better Serving Current and Future Workers

The federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), envisions a streamlined, demand-driven, integrated, and business-informed system that can support the talent needs of business, and the education and training needs of a diverse population of current and future jobseekers and workers, including those most in need.

In many ways, streamlining and integrating the delivery system is the first step in helping all of the state's current and future workers gain a foothold in Washington's economy. Finding more efficient and

successful ways to engage these individuals will create a sustainable talent pipeline. The diverse populations served by the state's workforce system include unemployed or underemployed people, those seeking additional education to advance their careers, highly skilled workers, and those facing barriers to employment. Some will pass through the system with minimal support, while others will require multiple resources. The state's economy benefits when the entire workforce is engaged in productive, meaningful employment, and the state's business community is more competitive and prosperous as a result.

Service delivery integration means current and future workers can access the state's workforce system, at any level throughout their lives, and are able to obtain the appropriate mix of services to put them on, or propel them along, a pathway to economic self-sufficiency. Current and future workers are able to connect to the system quickly and efficiently through a common intake process. They meet, or are connected technologically, to an individual navigator or team of navigators with a broad knowledge of available education, training, and support services. These navigators are trained to provide culturally competent services, ensuring that all current and future workers have a roadmap to achieve their goals. They ensure that all individuals can access and are enrolled in every program that can help meet their needs, in a way that is transparent to the customer.

### **Serving all seamlessly**

The system's goal is to ensure every customer has the education, employability skills, work experience, and credentials needed to move into sustained employment and economic self-sufficiency, and receives the wraparound services needed to pursue his or her career pathway.

## Improving the Customer Experience Goals

The following goals will help move Washington's system forward:

- *Increase the number of designated navigators available within the One-Stop system.*
- *Develop an intake process that eliminates redundant assessments and streamlines customer experience.*
- *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.*

In addition, soon after the passage of WIOA, Governor Jay Inslee directed the Workforce Board to work with the system's stakeholders to shape Washington's strategic plan toward three goals to maximize the workforce system's impact:

1. *Help more people find and keep jobs that lead to economic self-sufficiency, with a focus on disadvantaged populations.*
2. *Close skill gaps for employers, with a focus on in-demand industry sectors and occupations, including through apprenticeships.*
3. *Work together as a single, seamless team to make this happen.*

These three goals will inform the larger system and guide any changes. Below are ways the system is evolving to better serve all populations through a more integrated system.

### Greater Flexibility and Access to Services

In general, services are integrated to provide greater flexibility and a better fit for people who may need skill-specific training or other intensive services right from the start, rather than moving more deliberately through a predetermined, sequence of steps. Customers will be enrolled simultaneously in any service for which they are eligible and that can help them achieve their goal.

This streamlined integration requires all service providers to quickly identify needs, and then match resources to meet those needs. Increased collaboration and coordination among system partners ensures that the best of what the system has to offer comes forward with a minimum of duplication. Integration provides a flexible, interconnected set of services tailored to each customer. Customers receive a range of services via various providers and funding streams that may be braided together to meet their specific needs.

One key to service integration is a career pathway approach. This approach connects levels of education, training, counseling, support services, and credentials for specific occupations in a

way that optimizes continuous progress toward the education, employment, and career goals of individuals of all ages, abilities, and needs. Career pathways fully engage businesses to help meet their workforce needs. In turn, customers are encouraged to choose among a full range of education and work-based learning opportunities that allows them to earn marketable credentials. Ultimately, the goal is to connect the customer to a career pathway that taps their talents and leads to long-term economic security.

## **Service Delivery Integration**

### **Customer Choice and Asset-based Programming**

Integration honors the assets and interests of customers at every stage of service delivery. This customer-centered approach recognizes that the needs and interests of customers may change as they engage in services, learn more about their abilities and aptitudes, and consider new career options. Customers help shape their individual pathways and plans to achieve desired outcomes, with periodic check-ins and adjustments to ensure their plans continue to be both appropriate and effective.

In addition to being program experts, staff must think holistically about customers, their goals, and their skill-sets when they enter the system, and be knowledgeable about the full array of services that an individual requires. This asset-based approach focuses first on the strengths and positive experiences each customer brings, and then builds on those assets by connecting individuals with an appropriate mix of services.

### **Intake**

During initial customer contact, all necessary information will be collected to identify potential eligibility for all available services and provide the individual with a full menu of relevant options. The individual's initial intake responses will be available to all partners, helping eliminate multiple requests for the same information. Ideally, the first interview will: evaluate the individual's immediate needs and career interests; compile education and job history; identify any barriers to employment and ability to access education and training; and screen for eligibility for services, funding, and other resources. The intake process will also include working with the customer to identify potential effective learning modalities (learning styles, modes of instruction and training) or successful prior learning experiences for which they may obtain credit (such as competencies, military training experiences, foreign degrees and certifications, and skills).

### **Triage and Follow-up**

Based on intake information, a navigator or navigation team will evaluate a customer's need for support services, readiness to pursue education, training, employment, or a combination, and make appropriate referrals. The navigator or navigation team will follow up with the customer to ensure smooth transition, or to redirect the customer if needed. Partners will work together

beyond the points of program transition to braid funding and services across organizations for the benefit of the customer.

### **Assessment**

Customers will enter career pathway programs at a level that makes sense for them, depending on their career readiness, while also taking advantage of multiple entry and exit points as they develop new skills. Assessment may vary, and can include standardized tests, criterion referencing, personal interviews, hands-on skill trials, and portfolios. Assessments should be tied to a credentialing process recognized by a targeted industry. A key piece of assessment is determining whether an individual faces barriers to employment, and then identifying the services needed to reduce or eliminate those barriers. The state approved basic skills assessment Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) is an example of effective assessment because it aligns with the state's community and technical college system and many other service providers, saving customers time and potential frustration that come with multiple tests. With CASAS, customers complete only one assessment before they begin basic skills training

### **Career and Education Exploration and Guidance**

All customers, but especially those with little or no work experience, need sufficient information to make informed career decisions and education choices. By fully exploring their career and education options, customers are able to choose a career pathway based on their interests, needs, and capabilities. Career pathway exploration should include timely information about a wide range of occupations and whether they're in demand by industry, connections to apprenticeship and other work-and-learn programs, and encouragement to consider non-traditional occupations for both women and men. Career guidance should also include a review of any foreign degrees and professional expertise held by educated, skilled refugees and immigrants experiencing unemployment or under-employment.

### **Customer Pathway and Outcome Plan**

Every customer will work with staff to develop a plan with clear and measureable outcomes. Staff will facilitate conversations with customers to better understand their immediate needs, interests, passions, assets and current capabilities and experience, and career goals. Staff will then help customers develop education and career pathways and outcome plans, and provide necessary information and guidance, including labor market trends, wages, and training and education opportunities. These plans are considered "living documents," subject to change as customers learn more about career and education options and discover new areas of interest and capacity.

### **Case Management**

For individuals with barriers to employment, or any eligible customers who need more support,

career counseling and case management will be provided as they move through each stage of a program. Career counselors not only help with career and life choices, they assist customers during tough transition points, increasing the likelihood of success. At a minimum, the career counselor/case manager provides stability and continuity, while offering encouragement and acknowledging successes. When necessary, career counselors/case managers will work as a team to streamline and expedite services. Career counselors/case managers with particular knowledge, skills and expertise in serving individuals with unique, multiple, or the most complex barriers to employment will be available to assist customers who need more specialized or intensive support.

### **Support Services**

Support services help customers overcome employment barriers. For many customers, career pathway success is directly linked to their ability to overcome significant barriers. A variety of social, medical, behavioral, economic, and other support services can help individuals overcome employment obstacles. These services, in tandem with occupational skill development and other career pathway components, enable individuals with barriers to land a job, and keep a job.

### **Customer Pathway and Outcome Plan Options**

#### **Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST)**

Day-to-day living calls for literacy and numeracy skills, as do careers. Basic skills are needed across all occupations, both in landing a job and progressing within a career. Basic skills are also required for more advanced, career-specific education and training. Evidence shows that I-BEST education, pioneered by Washington's community and technical college system, improves and accelerates the attainment of important learning outcomes and meaningful work credentials. This model, which blends basic skills training with high-demand occupational training, has been replicated and expanded in numerous states. Service integration and cross-training of national staff will increase the number of I-BEST participants who have access to these accelerated pathways to living-wage employment.

#### **Contextualized English Language Acquisition**

English proficiency, including speaking, reading and writing, along with math, listening, employability skills, and solving problems in technology-rich environments, is required to enter and progress within most occupations. Language acquisition is also a necessary ingredient for high-skill, foreign educated professionals to transition into the same or similar employment in the United States. Because evidence clearly indicates that contextualized English Language Acquisition improves and accelerates the attainment of desired learning outcomes, this is considered an optimal instruction method and is being expanded across the Title II system.

### **Work Readiness and Employability Skills Instruction**

Work readiness is an individual's preparedness for getting a job and keeping a job. With work readiness training, customers learn about the structure and culture of the workplace, and about what makes a valuable employee—beyond job-specific skills. Topics typically include communication skills, decision-making and problem-solving, team building and teamwork, following instructions, healthy relationships with authority figures, leadership skills, personal growth, stress management, health and hygiene, and dealing with difficult people and situations. Customers should be able to show through their attitude and behavior that they understand these concepts, rather than simply scoring well on a standardized test. Work readiness is best taught when embedded in an education or training program, not as a stand-alone component.

### **Development of Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities for Job Entry**

Skill development in this model refers not just to those skills needed to enter the field, but building skills that allow individuals to advance within the field. Wherever possible, skill development activities should be integrated with work. Models of work-integrated learning include: project-based learning in the classroom, online coursework, industry guest lecturers, or direct workplace experience, including job shadows, mentorships, internships (paid or unpaid), work study, clinicals, cooperative learning models, and apprenticeships. Paid work experience or earn-and-learn models are optimal, but understandably the most difficult to achieve and sustain. Where possible, industry credentials should be integrated into job-entry programs, demonstrating competencies and reducing hiring costs for business partners. Skill development activities should be appropriate to the learning styles, interests and capabilities of each customer. Early intake and assessments will help determine the appropriate pathway and point of entry for each customer.

### **Skills Upgrading for Occupational Advancement**

Skills upgrading refers to development of skills beyond entry-level (first employment during program participation). Skills upgrading should be tied to an industry-recognized credential, whenever possible. Industry credentials should include college credits so customers can more readily add and build on their education to help them move up the career ladder.

### **Business Engagement, Job Development, and Placement**

Successfully connecting customers with jobs requires working with businesses to determine which jobs are currently available, or projected to become available, along with the skill requirements for these jobs. Engaging businesses and sharing labor market data will better inform curriculum development, support work-integrated activities, enhance program offerings, and assist in evaluating the effectiveness of the program in meeting industry needs. Staff responsible for job development and placement, and faculty responsible for curriculum

development and delivery, will need to work closely with industry representatives to ensure skill development curriculum and materials are directly applicable to the workplace, and that participants are adequately prepared to meet the needs of business once on the job. This is an ongoing, fluid process. Curriculum may need to be modified or enhanced as new jobs become available or if participants are unable to perform effectively on the job.

### **Post-Job Placement Support for the Customer and Employer**

Landing a job is often just the first step for customers, even if they have benefited from effective pre-placement services. Once on the job they may struggle with child or elder care, transportation, interpersonal issues, family difficulties, medical needs, basic skills development, and court involvement. Or an individual may require additional skill development in specific areas to improve job performance or to keep pace with industry changes. Support services for customers and the businesses who hire them may involve: periodic contact, information and referral for necessary services, and, when necessary, advocacy for the individual on the job.

## **System Training and Support**

### **Professional Development**

Integrated services require a system-wide emphasis on professional development and cross-training for both leadership and front-line staff. Professional development that cuts across all programs and strategies is a foundational element of system accessibility. Training includes: outreach; the intake and triage process; customer choice; coaching and navigation; asset-based programming; and broad and basic knowledge of workforce education and training programs. Key skills for frontline staff include cultural competency, technical fluency, and command of motivational interviewing techniques. These core skills will significantly improve outcomes by connecting customers to the workforce system. Training and cross-training will ensure staff is able to serve a diverse population who experience a wide range of barriers to employment and require an array of integrated services to be successful along their career pathways.

### **Implementation of Technology**

This streamlined, integrated approach requires staff to use technology in new ways to simplify administrative processes, provide the customer with easy-to-use interfaces to access relevant information, connect to resources, and expand the options available for skill development certification, and portfolio management. New technologies will enable jobseekers to use their own devices to connect easily and effectively to public systems and take advantage of state-of-the-art communications, and networking and accessibility tools.

## **Replication of Promising Practices**

Adopting streamlined customer service and service delivery integration does not mean that Washington must reinvent the wheel. In many instances, the state leads the nation in education and training programs, in performance accountability, and in service delivery.

The following programs and models, among many others, have proven results in their programmatic areas. They provide examples of “how-to’s” for the workforce system to employ:

**Co-enrollment** allows customers to access more resources and provides staff an easier way to serve all customers, regardless of their eligibility for services. Several Workforce Development Areas across the state are working on a pilot to automate co-enrollment of future and current workers seeking new or better jobs. While current efforts focus entirely on the co-enrollment of customers in the WIOA Adult and WIOA Wagner-Peyser programs, the goal is to create a template that will support co-enrollment into additional programs.

**Labor–Management Committees** are formed during major closures and facilitate the coordination between labor and business representatives, the workforce system and community partners. These committees are often the platform for pursuing Trade Adjustment Assistance, National Emergency Grants or other forms of funding to assist transition.

**Peer Outreach** contracts place workers from an affected group, during closure, on-site in WorkSource offices to offer support and ease the transition to training, job search and/or relocation activities, as appropriate. These individuals offer the emotional and motivational support necessary to assist a community recovering from a major layoff.

**Puget Sound Welcome Back Center** builds bridges between the pool of internationally trained professionals living in Washington and the need for linguistically and culturally competent professional services. Its goal is to assist these professionals to make the best use of their professional skills through respectful, innovative, and individualized career counseling, and educational services.

**Transition Centers** offer a tailored space to serve large impacted workgroups. Based on individual circumstances, these centers may be implemented within a One-Stop office or nearby location. *(An example is the Simpson Lumber Mill closure in Mason County in 2015. Through a Labor-Management Committee, the company was certified for Trade Adjustment Assistance and two Peer Outreach Workers were funded to staff a Transition Center, alongside workforce system partners, in the office space next door to the Shelton WorkSource Center.)*

**Bachelors in Applied Science (BAS) degrees** create expanded opportunities for both students and businesses by providing upper-division coursework at community and technical colleges in an applied field. These degrees, many of them online and tailored to working adults, build upon professional-technical associate’s degrees.

**Bachelor and Graduate degrees** create expanded opportunities for both students and businesses. Washington’s public four-year colleges and universities, along with the state’s community and technical colleges, provide opportunities for Washington residents to obtain a

bachelor's degree to meet the state's growing need for an educated workforce. In addition to the four-year degree pathways at Washington's public colleges and universities, community and technical colleges offer applied bachelor's degree (BAS) programs. The state's two- and four-year institutions have also forged articulation agreements that help students transfer between institutions. In addition, Washington's public four-year institutions offer access to a range of quality graduate degree programs.

**Centers of Excellence** are flagship institutions located at Washington's community and technical colleges that focus on a targeted industry and are designed to provide fast, flexible, quality education and training programs. (A targeted industry is identified as one that is strategic to the economic growth of a region or state.) Centers are guided by industry representatives to lead collaborative and coordinated statewide education and training efforts.

**Workforce and Education Program Advisory Boards** are long standing, with private sector business and labor representatives serving as advisors to two- and four-year college programs, providing: advocacy, curriculum recommendations, and support for quality higher education programs.

**HS 21+** allows students 21 and older to attain a competency-based high school diploma. The program awards credit for prior learning, military training, and work experience.

### **I-BEST Programs**

**Professional Technical I-BEST** co-enrolls students in adult basic education and college credit-bearing career pathways that lead to living wage jobs. I-BEST accelerates students down their career pathway, by contextualizing and team teaching the language, math, and other foundational skills needed to succeed in their professional-technical program. I-BEST students are nine times more likely to earn a workforce credential than students in traditional basic education programs.

**Professional Technical Expansion I-BEST** allows students to move further and faster down their career pathway by putting English and math courses in context, as needed for longer-term certificate and degree programs. This allows students to skip developmental education and earn their college or terminal-level English and math credits through contextualization and team teaching.

**Academic I-BEST** co-enrolls students in adult basic education and Direct Transfer Agreement (DTA) courses for students intending to earn a transfer degree. Through Academic I-BEST, adult education students can accelerate their progress down a transfer career pathway and reduce or eliminate time spent in developmental education.

**I-BEST at Work** is based upon a partnership between a community college or community-based organization, and an employer, in which the college or organization provides a basic skills instructor who team-teaches with a representative from the employer. It is part of the comprehensive I-BEST Pathway, designed to accelerate the progress of basic skills students within the context of work.

**I-DEA** Integrated Digital English Acceleration is an on-ramp to I-BEST that, in collaboration with the Gates Foundation, provides the least English proficient ESL students with a laptop computer. Half of the instruction is delivered online, offering 24-7 accessiblity.

**Industry DACUM** incorporates the use of a business or industry focus group to capture the major duties and related tasks included in an occupation, as well as the necessary knowledge, skills, and traits, in a process facilitated by a Center of Excellence or community college. This cost-effective method provides a quick and thorough analysis of any job.

**Industry showcases** highlight how industry skills are put to use in the work world and serve as an example of how community and technical colleges are responsive to the changing needs of businesses.

**Industry Skill Panels** are public/private partnerships of business, labor, and education working together to improve the skills of workers in industries vital to Washington's economy. Washington has worked with Industry Skill Panels since 2000.

**Workforce Program Review** is a community college review of a vocational education program's intent and objectives. Industry representatives participate on evaluations teams that look at: program accomplishments, student performance standards compared to the needs of industry, facility adequacy as a training site, quantity and quality of graduates, and job placements. This review team then makes recommendations for any identified program improvements or innovations.

## Summary and Goals

In conclusion, a truly integrated service delivery system holds promise for Washington's workforce by helping people reach their goals no matter their barriers, their background, or where they entered the system. Doing this effectively calls for increasing the number of navigators in the state's WorkSource system, eliminating redundant assessments, and helping more customers define career pathways that help them achieve portable skills, higher education levels, industry credentials, and satisfying, living-wage careers.