



STATE OF WASHINGTON
WORKFORCE TRAINING AND EDUCATION COORDINATING BOARD

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May 14, 2014

Vice President Joe Biden
Old Executive Office Building
Washington, DC 20501

Dear Mr. Vice President:

During the January 2014 State of the Union address, President Obama called for you to conduct a comprehensive review of all federally funded employment and training programs. Your review, through consultations, will identify ways to make our nation's workforce development system more job-driven, integrated and efficient, focusing on evidence-based best practices and identifying barriers to effectiveness.

Washington's state and local public partners have worked at length with business and labor stakeholders to ensure that these two customers are always clearly in focus for all public investments in workforce development. The benefits to and satisfaction of Washington's employers and its residents are the outcomes that we measure and use to shape continuous improvements to our strategies, programs and services. For this reason, we are usually quite clear on what is working well, and can identify when investments are not working as they should. Most often, the hurdles we grapple with are structural: statutory parameters, administrative policies or practices, or funding limitations.

Washington's Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board convened state stakeholders to provide informed input to your review. The process asked, "How can we better meet the needs of employers and improve employment results for job seeker participants?" Please see the attached document for the full list of recommendations. The recommendations received consensus approval and are itemized in five broad categories:

- **Engaging Industry in Workforce Development** – Includes recommendations for every government program to spur the creation of employment opportunities for U.S. residents by engaging employers in workforce development programs and to use state and local workforce investment boards to achieve this goal.



- **Efficiency and Access** - Program administrators are challenged with limited time and resources due to funding cuts, yet the demands for public services have steadily increased. Recommendations include ways for the administration to meet the increasing demands by leveraging across federal resources.
- **Transitions / Jobs Connections** - If the objective of training a workforce is connecting to a job, it is important to reduce the barriers that challenge or inhibit job attainment. Recommendations are offered to minimize the artificial barriers facing job seekers and job providers.
- **Investment in Alternative Learning Options** - There is no cookie cutter approach to learning. Multiple pathways should be available to every learner. Recommendations include proven strategies that provide multiple pathways for every learner.
- **Youth** - Youth unemployment has reached an unprecedented crisis. Federally funded programs can create more opportunities for students and out-of-school youth to have work experiences. Recommendations would help states address the need to connect youth to employment. .

Washington State's stakeholders thank you for the opportunity to participate in your review of the federally funded workforce education and training programs. Providing streamlined opportunities to better serve our nation's workforce is a key component in economic and workforce development.

Sincerely,



Cindy Zehnder, Chair
Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board

Attachment

cc: Washington's Congressional Delegation
Sam Ricketts, Director, Washington DC Office of Governor Jay Inslee
Kelly Wicker, Deputy Chief of Staff, Office of the Governor

Washington State

Recommendations for a Jobs-Driven Integrated System

Engaging Industry in Workforce Development

Every government agency should have an objective of enhancing employment opportunities for U.S. residents. State and local workforce investment boards are uniquely positioned to provide leadership in this effort. The following recommendations can help achieve this objective:

- Programs in federal agencies that provide funding directly to businesses should direct businesses to consult with local Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) to help build their workforce. The state and local WIBs have been established by statute to coordinate with education, training, and employment services providers who can help any business develop their workforce.
- Allow federal funding streams to be used to incent employers to loan experts to local programs. Incentives can be in various forms, but may include: wages, stipends, and the ability to back-fill the expert's time in the program.
- All federal offices should work with local WIBs, not just to list jobs, but also to help create work experience opportunities for local residents and engage in career exploration for young people.
- Federal investments in education and training should encourage and support skill development of students toward industry standards; training should follow industry standards, not single employer need.
- Federal programs should encourage and support increased usage of industry-recognized credentials where possible/available.

Efficiency and Access

Program administrators are challenged with limited time and resources due to funding cuts, yet the demands for public services have steadily increased. To meet the increasing demands, administrators are trying to leverage across federal resources. The following recommendations would provide efficiency and access for those trying to navigate the federal funding systems' requirements:

- Create standardized report tools across federal agencies and funding streams, where the reporting periods are reduced from quarterly to annually or semi-annually.
- Wherever possible, federal agencies and funding streams should use common definitions, measures, and planning time frames.
- Develop and staff a technical support, online chat service for grantees or grant applicants, making it available during standard work hours across the U.S., not just EST or EDT.

- Waiver requests and approval process should be streamlined--working across systems to grant waivers when it makes sense to implement a program.
- Provide flexibility for mid-grant changes. While maintaining a focus on original performance outcomes, allow modifications based on circumstance or findings.
- Improve response times for modification requests.
- Do not create duplicative structures that can also destabilize existing systems. The state and local WIBs were established to be the convening body to make partnerships happen, per the Workforce Investment Act, and should be used whenever such partnerships are expected or desired in federal grant programs.

Transitions / Jobs Connections

If the objective of training a workforce is connecting to a job, it is important to reduce the barriers that challenge or inhibit job attainment. The following recommendations can minimize the artificial barriers facing job seekers and job providers:

- Keep the focus on getting more people into jobs, and then help the client navigate a pathway lattice that moves them into a family wage job and beyond.
- Increase the use of navigators to create links: Education-to-Employer; Industry-to-Education; Education and training-to-support services (No one federal funding stream fully supports the navigator role. This requires working across all federal agencies and braiding of the funding streams.)
- For dislocated workers, the Individual Training Accounts can be the best (and sometimes only) resource to support skill development for reemployment at a suitable wage. Recent trends demonstrate an increasing preference for on-the-job training and short-term skill-matching tools, but these must not come at the expense of options that lead to degrees, credentials and certificates and ultimately, transferable job skills.
- If the goal is economic self-sufficiency--keep people enrolled until the goal is met and acknowledge that participants receive services from multiple funding streams.
 - As long as a client is progressing through the system toward meeting their goals, programs from all of the relevant funding streams should get credit for positive outcomes. (Recognize that the outcome goal of one program may be an interim goal of another.)
 - If there is nothing in statute that limits time or duration of services, do not develop policies that discourage long-term training or other services required to meet participants' goals.
- Goal-setting targets should be established that do not dictate the length of a program or the services received.

Investment in Alternative Learning Options

There is no cookie cutter approach to learning. Multiple pathways should be available to every learner. The following recommendations can provide opportunities for a learning workforce:

- Apprenticeships are recognized as successful earn-and-learn and jobs-driven training models, ensuring workers are trained in transferable skills that translate across a broad job market. Engagement within apprenticeships should not be difficult. Identify and remove barriers that discourage schools and service providers from working with apprenticeship programs.
- Encourage federal work/study investments, aligned with a student's career pathway program, as an allowable work experience.
- Open AmeriCorps (an earn-and-learn experience) to support long-term unemployed to transition to gainful employment and to create opportunities for unemployed youth.

Youth

Youth unemployment has reached an unprecedented crisis. Federally funded programs can create more opportunities for students and out-of-school youth to have work experiences. These experiences may include opportunities such as: paid and unpaid internships, workplace mentorships, pre-apprenticeships and apprenticeships, cooperative education, summer employment, and work study. The following recommendations would help states address the needs of connecting youth to employment:

- It is difficult to find consistent, reliable data about youth employment. The Department of Labor website should provide drilled-down youth employment data that provides useful data sets that can be analyzed at the state and local levels.
- If there is flexibility in federal funding streams, youth summer employment programs should be a priority. The ARRA Summer Youth program successfully engaged youth, connecting them to the workforce. There is no longer a single funding stream focused on summer youth employment. Where federal funding streams allow for summer youth employment, encourage connections with the local WIBs, as they can expedite program start-up and coordinate and leverage across funding streams.
- All federal programs should be directed to develop and offer work-integrated learning opportunities, whether internships, classroom-based projects, or career exploration.