



An Overview of Talent and Prosperity for All Washington's Workforce Plan

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Introduction

The *Talent and Prosperity for All (TAP) Plan*, Washington State’s strategic workforce plan for 2024-2028, champions long-term economic success for workers, employers, and communities and recognizes that a strong and stable workforce is critical for our state’s economy and quality of life. The plan provides vision and direction for a system that covers over \$1.3 billion in operations and supports close to 500,000 Washingtonians. It is our state’s response to new findings about our workforce system uncovered during the pandemic and post-pandemic years, and lessons learned during the Great Recession:

Spotlight: Economic Security for All

Content is pending.

- Our “averages” mask a true understanding of historically marginalized communities and people and do not show the full picture of our system. We must dig deeper and ensure we are addressing the needs of all current and potential workers.
- We are facing a paradox of employers searching for skilled workers while many potential workers are sitting on the sidelines because of a disconnect between non-traditional education pathways and traditional hiring practices.
- Businesses are undertaking initiatives outside their core operations to meet their urgent workforce needs. When health care and other industries get into the education business to develop the workforce they need, this is a sign of opportunity and urgency.
- We have a growing number of Washingtonians struggling with issues such as childcare, affordable housing, and transportation, and are in need of comprehensive supports to fully participate in the workforce.
- Youth are an underserved component of our workforce system that were significantly impacted by the pandemic. We must address the specific needs of youth and prepare them for an economically successful future.
- The needs of the workforce and the economic success of industry are inextricably bound together. We must do a better job of connecting employers with the workforce system. This is a pivotal moment to make this happen.

The 2024-2028 TAP Plan aims to harness the collective energy of the full complement of publicly funded programs and services. The plan encompasses the work of 55 programs across many state agencies, 12 local workforce boards covering every region of the state, hundreds of local unions, hundreds of thousands of businesses, and 7.9 million Washington residents. It also leverages support from the Workforce Board (Board); a critical leadership infrastructure comprised of business, labor, and government representatives that ensures and maintains collaborative momentum in addressing workforce issues. Over the next four years, the Board will focus on ensuring support for the TAP plan’s strategic priorities, identifying and applying tangible and measurable goals and metrics to track progress, and create a culture of continuous improvement. The Board’s mix of business, labor, and government representatives make it well suited to maintain focus on Washington’s strategic workforce priorities while also responding to emergent challenges.

Implementation Timeline

We have the partners and knowledge; now we take action. The next four years will build on our strong, existing coalitions. The knowledge and experience of our coalition partners will allow us to start work in 2024. In fact, you will see sprinkled through this plan “spotlights” on where the system has already done work on the topic, or we see promise in the results of innovative programs. New partners and new thoughts are always welcome as we move forward.

Taking action includes listening to new voices. The importance of the workforce drives us to keep pushing forward with innovation even as we incorporate feedback and build bigger coalitions.

We envision that each of the five strategic priorities will follow a similar implementation trajectory over the next four years:

Year 1: July 2024 -June 2025: ***Getting to work on the strategic priorities.***

Each strategic priority will have a leadership team identified by July 2024 to start. This leadership team will work closely with the Board sponsors to drive work forward. This leadership team and workforce board staff will develop the workplans, identify the pilot projects, research existing successes, and coordinate the full resources available from across the partner organizations. Measures for success of each project will be identified that will guide ongoing assessment and formal review in year 3. Regular reports will be provided to the Board as summarized in the Board commitments section.

Year 2: July 2025 – June 2026: ***Transition, framework development, and implementation***

The second year will capture the learnings of the first year and build those learnings into the strategic priority projects. This work will include identifying the aspects of each initial project that can scale across the network, and establishing mechanisms for shared learning. Those learnings will also drive the next round of pilot projects in each strategic priority.

Year 3: July 2026 – June 2027: ***Expansion, integration, and pilot testing***

The third year will be led by evaluating the first-year projects against the identified success metrics. Each pilot will have had at least a year’s worth of operational data for this evaluation. All projects will also be assessed for integration into existing operations. If project elements require more analysis, additional pilot projects will be identified.

Year 4: June 2027 – June 2028: ***Implementation, expansion, and strategic planning***

This fourth year will be focused on assessment of the entire plan against success criteria. The results of that assessment will lead the planning for the next four years, 2028 – 2032.

Spotlight: Health Care

Content is pending.

This general timeline will be overseen by the board, supported by Workforce Board staff with contributions from agency staff most closely doing the relevant front line work. Each strategic priority section provides more details on the timeline and process.

Current State

On average, Washington’s workforce looks strong. We have relatively high wages, low unemployment, a robust training and education system, and substantial levels of postsecondary education attainment. However, this enviable statewide average does not ring true across all regions and communities. For example, while Washington has the fourth highest average wage¹ in the country, that rank falls to 24th when excluding King County, the highest earning and most populated county in the state. In addition, one third of Washington households live below a financial level where they can readily afford housing, healthcare, childcare, transportation, and other necessities.

The same holds true for industry. Both labor and business also look strong on average. Over 650,000 Washingtonians (or one in five workers) are represented by labor unions, for the 3rd highest percentage in the country². However, the benefits of the relatively high-wage, high-skill jobs provided by unions are concentrated in a few industries and are not equitably accessed by all communities in Washington.

This strategic plan summarizes priorities over the next four years to go from our current state of average “success” to our future state of success for all. That path also includes the Workforce Board’s statutory role to inform the Governor, the Legislature, and Congress for the changes outlined in this plan that are necessary to build the strongest workforce.

Washington’s Workforce Board, anchored by the Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 28C.18, is committed to a strategic, collaborative approach in supporting and funding the priorities outlined in the Talent and Prosperity for All (TAP) Plan. This plan is a manifestation of our dedication to a systematic approach to workforce development, ensuring effective allocation of resources across the critical strategic priorities: system integration, industry support, youth opportunities, credential transparency, and the development of a robust job quality framework. In accordance with RCW 28C.18.080, one of the Board’s primary mandates is the development and implementation of a comprehensive state plan for workforce training and education. This plan is designed to align with labor market trends and Washington’s evolving economic landscape, ensuring that investments are strategically directed towards areas of high impact and need. The process emphasizes a rigorous, data-driven approach, involving extensive collaboration with key stakeholders including state agencies, educational institutions, and industry partners to identify and prioritize areas of critical need for funding and program development.

The Board’s responsibilities also extend to the meticulous evaluation of workforce training programs ensuring that our interventions are both effective and responsive to the needs of workers, employers, and communities. These evaluations are pivotal in guiding our funding requests and in shaping initiatives that demonstrably advance skills development and employment opportunities. Moreover, our role

¹ May 2022 Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics

² https://www.bls.gov/regions/west/news-release/pdf/unionmembership_washington.pdf, and <https://www.thestand.org/2023/01/washington-remains-the-3rd-most-unionized-state/>

encompasses a significant focus on legislative advocacy. We are committed to presenting well-researched recommendations to policymakers, in coordination with our system partners, advocating for the allocation of funds that will support and actualize the TAP Plan’s strategic priorities. This advocacy is integral to securing the resources necessary for the implementation of the plan over its four-year span, with a specific focus on initiatives that promote system integration, workforce equity, and the nurturing of a skilled and nimble workforce.

Future State

The next four years will build on past learnings as well as wisdom gained from our colleagues both nationally and internationally. We know that positive change will require new thinking, new approaches, and new strategies. Improvement doesn’t necessarily mean doubling down on a current strategy. It can also come from a new approach that reaches a community we are not yet serving in the best way that we can. This plan was developed to help all members of the workforce—including rural and historically marginalized and underserved communities—keep pace with the opportunities and broader gains that are typically confined to the greater Puget Sound region. We want to ensure that people who are currently struggling are not left behind as our state pulls farther ahead in post-pandemic recovery. It was informed by and aligned with other state initiatives that are on a similar trajectory, including those led by the Governor’s Poverty Reduction Work Group³, the Health and Human Services Coalition Master Person Index⁴, and the Washington Technology Solutions (WaTECH) State Plan⁵

The five strategic priorities within the TAP Plan are focused on the Workforce System, Industry, Youth, Credential Transparency, and Job Quality. They are all interconnected and represent our vision for Washington’s workforce system:

- We must do a better job of connecting our workforce system with our industry employers and with youth, our workforce of the future.
- We need to integrate our data systems so young people, those with disabilities, racial minorities, and other historically marginalized communities are better served.
- We need to connect the workforce support system with other support systems in the state such as child care, elder care, transportation, and housing to address issues that workers and employers are struggling with.
- We need to improve credential transparency and job quality so industry can tap into talent from all backgrounds and skill paths, workers can get better jobs, and youth can get on their career paths sooner.

We envision this will happen over the next four years by:

³ Washington State Poverty Reduction Work Group, “Blueprint for a Just and Equitable Future: The 10-Year Plan to Dismantle Poverty in Washington,” 2020, <https://dismantlepovertyinwa.com/wpcontent/uploads/2020/12/Final10yearPlan.pdf>.

⁴ <https://doh.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2022-10/IB-MasterPersonsIndexExpansion.pdf>

⁵ Washington Technology Solutions (WaTECH), “Statewide Information Technology Strategic Plan 2021- 2025,” 2021, <https://ocio.wa.gov/strategy>

- Improving our infrastructure by leveraging federal investments, implementing the Quality Jobs Framework, and (re)starting the Workforce Data Governance Council and the Credential Transparency Advisory Committee.
- Filling gaps in our enterprise data systems by creating tools such as a common intake form, a data look-up portal, and a specific resource portal for youth.
- Helping bridge connections between industry, education, and the workforce by testing business navigators, business liaisons, and youth workforce navigators.
- Expanding credential transparency efforts, such as Learning and Employment Records that put skills, competencies, education, and employment background in a portable, verifiable digital wallet, that enables workers to more easily showcase what they can do, and employers to more readily hire them.

These are just a few of the changes we plan to put in place through the 2024-2028 TAP Plan. We must also implement tangible and measurable goals and engage business in ensuring we evaluate what is working and how it is impacting employers, workers, and the entire system. We have a lot of work to do, but this is our watershed moment to make the big changes that will impact the trajectory of the next generation of Washington workers and employers.

Community Feedback

A critical part of developing the TAP Plan was gathering community input on the current state and future direction of the state's workforce system. Data was collected both in-person and virtually through forums, surveys and interviews. Several strong themes emerged that informed the TAP Plan:

- **Employees are an investment not an expense.**

The workforce system achieves its greatest success when employees and job seekers are seen as investments that will pay off over time, with the right levels of support and training, rather than a drain and an expense.

- **A watershed moment requires change from all parts of the system.**

While current collaborations were celebrated, the feedback highlighted more areas for engagement, including expanding beyond existing partners and forming new partnerships. No one recommended a smaller workforce system or reducing the number of partners involved.

- **Industry engagement is critical.**

Community feedback reinforced the importance of respecting businesses as customers. The ongoing voices of both employers and workers are needed to shape the success of our investments. Better outreach to and sustained engagement of a broader range of industry partners was identified as a clear need.

- **Culture needs to evolve along with the system.**

All forums had enthusiastic support for the cultural changes that complement the strategic priorities including those at the agency level and at the industry level to support the workforce.

- **Regional intermediary organizations are needed to ensure equitable access to services.**

Regional differentiation in service design and delivery is required to best serve customers throughout the state. However, these differences can inadvertently lead to slow adoption of best practices and some constituencies being disconnected from the larger vision. Strong support was voiced for a coordinated, regionally based navigation or concierge service that would facilitate achieving common outcomes from different areas.

- **Expansion beyond the hub and spoke model is needed.**

The current one-stop-shop model has achieved strong results for those who have used the services. However, potential customers are frequently prevented from receiving services because they cannot reach the one stop location and are unable to use online services. Many forums suggested using the full scope of public sector resources such as libraries, community halls, and school buildings to provide appropriate workforce services.

- **Increased data utilization and analysis**

Strong support for the guiding principles of closing economic disparities and comprehensive supports resulted in requests for data to help fully understand the issues and undertake evidence-based problem-solving. Suggestions included better use of existing data and collecting new data. Noted as an example is the recent passage of a bill requiring employers to report the job titles of their workers. ESD has begun collecting standard occupational classification (SOC) data from employers with their quarterly unemployment insurance forms, which should allow for more granular, meaningful program evaluations and performance tracking.

Principles and Priorities

The planning process for the Talent and Prosperity for All Plan began with a letter from Gov. Inslee to the Board, describing his vision for the future of the comprehensive workforce development system in Washington. This vision included stronger cross-agency collaboration and enhanced outcomes for all people, businesses, and communities, especially those historically and structurally marginalized from economic success. The Governor's vision supplied the foundation for discussions at the May 2023 retreat of the Board, where members and more than 60 stakeholder and partner representatives identified three guiding principles and five strategic priorities that would create the framework for the planning process moving forward. Interviews were then done with each collaborating agency to learn how the principles and priorities resonated within their own agencies which led to the creation of impact statements connected with each priority area. The spotlight at right highlights how the principles and priorities drive services for justice involved individuals and their reentry.

Spotlight: Reentry and Justice-Involved Populations

Content pending.

Guiding Principles:

1. **Close economic disparities for marginalized populations.**

Too many Washingtonians do not share in the state's prosperity. We are changing the measure of economic success so that it means more people will share in the prosperity rather than the average level of prosperity increasing.

2. Deliver comprehensive support for individuals with barriers to employment.

People are isolated from the workforce for many different reasons, including the need for child care, elder care, affordable housing, and transportation. Needs are not bound by the eligibility and service limitations established in federal and state statutes. Success over the next four years will be determined by how well we meet workers and industry where they need support, and work with them to achieve their workforce development goals. This may also require statutory and administrative reforms in how business is conducted. A positive example of how partners came together to change policy is in the creation of a state fund pool that allows for continued support for low-income workers once employed.

3. Provide systemwide performance metrics and accountability.

Data is critical for understanding how the workforce system is operating as a whole, rather than how any one program might be performing. We will need to be more expansive and inventive in our data collection and analysis to identify and address the disparities that still exist.

Strategic Priorities:

1. **System:** Integrate system services, data, accountability, and resources with clear partners and roles to expand, improve, and streamline customer outcomes.

Impact statements: A simplified and common intake; improved data sharing; data-informed integrated service delivery.

2. **Industry:** Support business development and competitiveness by aligning with economic development and growth efforts.

Impact statements: Support sustainable and equitable industry growth; build and expand career pathways for critical industries; expand the definition of worker supports.

3. **Youth:** Improve opportunities for young people to transition to an economically successful adulthood.

Impact statements: Increase youth awareness of services and programs; broaden access and shorten the time to gain industry-valued credentials.

4. **Credential Transparency:** Explore credential transparency and expansion to improve equitable access, mobility, and long-term economic success.

Impact statements: Create a common definition of credentials using a single taxonomy; put learners at the center of credential pathway reforms.

5. **Job Quality:** Develop a job quality framework to guide decisions and key investments in the delivery of business services.

Impact statements: Ensure pathways to living wage jobs that are critical to communities; expand registered apprenticeships to more fields.

The following sections detail each of the above strategic priorities.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Priority 1: System

Washington's workforce development system is broad and complex and is at a pivotal crossroads, grappling with the dual challenges of economic shifts and technological advancements while adapting to evolving labor market demands. Five state agencies – the Department of Commerce (COMM), Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), Employment Security Department (ESD), Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), and the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) - manage or coordinate 84 percent of these funds, but there are many additional agencies and partners providing public workforce services. Currently, the system, managed by these multiple state agencies and partners, presents a complex and fragmented array of programs and services. This disjointed nature often leads to inefficiencies and challenges for both staff and customers. Job seekers face repetitive and inconsistent procedures, encountering barriers to service, while businesses struggle

to navigate a diverse network to create or tap into the education and training pipelines necessary to connect with skilled talent. This situation breeds frustration and hampers effective service delivery, disproportionately affecting marginalized groups such as BIPOC communities, individuals with disabilities, justice involved individuals, and rural populations. In response, the WTECB, in partnership with public state workforce agencies and partners, is spearheading a move towards systemic integration.

To address the system's complexity and fragmentation, there is a need for a strategic focus on creating methods of shared governance across stakeholders. Resource sharing and leveraging will be emphasized to efficiently utilize resources by aligning funding, staff, and services among workforce partners. This will involve a focus on adopting shared processes and practices, such as data sharing, to avoid duplication and ensure high-quality service. This approach will align objectives and strategies for system integration, providing clarity and cohesion in the system's operation. The system must be sufficiently flexible and comprehensive to accommodate the varying needs of participants and employers. Effective coordination of service delivery and employer engagement are essential to system success.

System Integration: The objective of the system strategic priority is to integrate system services, data, accountability, and resources with clear partners and roles in the state's public workforce development efforts. Our goal is to transform the workforce system into a cohesive, customer-focused ecosystem, by breaking down siloes and fostering collaboration to achieve enhanced results. We aim to deliver services seamlessly and efficiently, employing a "no-wrong-door" approach by focusing on the following three areas:

- **Simplified, Common Shared Intake.** Reduce the amount of duplication for our customers through technology enhancements and process changes. This will be achieved through the following activities:
 - Develop and execute pilot projects that test common shared intake processes and forms and data-sharing pipelines; assess their impact in real-world settings for a more unified and customer-centric approach; refine the process based on feedback and performance metrics to ensure efficient service delivery.
 - Expand the scope of shared intake processes and systems to additional partners and agencies. Aim for broad participation and a culture of continuous feedback and adaptation.
 - Launch technology initiatives like the WorkSource Integrated Technology (WIT) to enhance shared intake, assessments, service tracking, and referral processes between WorkSource programs.
- **Improved Data Sharing.** Enhance coordination and customer experience through sharing customer data, operational data, and evaluation data between agency partners. This will be achieved through the following activities:
 - Formalize and stand-up the state workforce data governance council to oversee a portfolio of technology projects to enable secure and as-needed data sharing among service-providing partners.
 - Migration to cloud-based enterprise solution to meet data warehousing, integration, and analytic functions.
 - Implement identity resolution technology to triangulate across distinct data systems while honoring the agency and autonomy of partners in their technology operations.

- Launch technology initiatives like the WorkSource Integrated Technology (WIT) to enhance data sharing, and shared intake and referral processes within the WorkSource system.
- Establish a data lookup portal to break down data silos in the state's workforce system and equip operational staff with needed information to assess customer needs and effectively and efficiently support jobseekers.
- **Integrated Service Delivery.** Streamline how services are provided and account for the different experiences of our customers. This will be achieved through the following activities:
 - Build upon the data governance council to stand up an integrated service delivery advisory body to guide the priorities and direction of operational service delivery and processes. Focus areas include requesting legislative changes, memorandums of understanding between programs to clarify roles, responsibilities and collaborative efforts, statewide reporting and evaluations, restructuring program procedures or practices, and other programmatic change management. Coordination with the Data Governance Council, pertaining to efforts involving data and technology, is expected.
 - Enhance accessibility by using inclusive design practices and creating materials in multiple formats, working towards equitable digital access for all. Prioritize individuals with disabilities.
 - Compile a broad and adaptable menu of services that caters to the diverse needs of both businesses and job seekers and includes a range of services beyond traditional education and training, designed to support businesses in their growth and job seekers throughout their lifetime.

Operational Planning Elements

The establishment of the Workforce Data Governance Council, and a subsequent integrated service delivery advisory body, is at the heart of system integration and will form the foundations for oversight of this strategic priority (see Timeline below). The Council will oversee the coordination of data sharing technology projects across state agencies. It will ensure data security and maintain the autonomy of data-owning agencies to oversee how their information is used and shared. The Council and advisory body's roles will be to facilitate the creation of shared service delivery models and data systems, driving evidence-based workforce support.

In addition, the Workforce Board will continue to support workforce system integration efforts. Since 2016, the Board has laid the foundation for the System Strategic Priority. Noteworthy milestones include:

- 2016: Formation of the *Common Intake Committee, with pilots in 2 workforce regions.*
- 2018: Establishment of the *Integrated Services Delivery* workgroup to craft a vision and strategies based on earlier findings.
- 2019: Report outlining integration dimensions such as governance, funding, data sharing, and service delivery.
- 2021: Hiring of a contractor to build a governance structure to foster partner collaboration and innovation.

- 2022: State funds allocated for development of a potential workforce system data solution, with a report submitted to the legislature recommending a collaborative governance framework.
- 2023: Appointment of a Data Integration Manager by the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board, marking a significant move towards developing data integration strategies. In addition, recent technological upgrades across different workforce agencies present opportunities for modernizing service delivery, including:
 - **WorkSource Integrated Technology (WIT) Replacement Project:** Launched in 2023 by the ESD, the WIT project is set to transform the state's WorkSource case management system by fall 2025. It will replace the existing Efforts-to-Outcomes system and facilitate a more seamless enrollment and service path for WorkSource programs, including adult education, dislocated worker services, and youth programs. The new system aims to improve case management, expense tracking, and performance reporting, enhancing the operational efficiency of Washington's American Job Center staff.
 - **ctcLink Technology Project:** The ctcLink initiative by SBCTC represents a significant upgrade from the 42-year-old HP Legacy system to a suite of Oracle PeopleSoft products. This transition, completed in May 2022 for all community and technical colleges, provides a modern, centralized system for managing college operations, allowing anywhere access to a more efficient way of conducting college business. Beyond software, ctcLink harmonizes business practices across the college system, emphasizing standardized procedures and responsive customer support.
 - **Washington Connection Benefit Portal:** This portal used by DSHS is a model of integrated service access, enabling Washington residents to apply for over 35 different services, including food, cash, childcare, and medical assistance. As a collaborative effort, it streamlines application processes, allowing for easier benefit renewal and assisting residents in overcoming barriers to accessing benefits. The portal exemplifies system integration by providing a unified platform for diverse services, supported by the guidance of the Washington Connection Advisory Committee.
 - **Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) System Transition:** As part of DSHS, the DVR's shift to the WAVES platform marks a strategic move to update its case management system. This new platform enhances DVR's service delivery, offering a more user-friendly interface and improved functionality for case management and reporting. The transition supports DVR's strategic objectives to modernize operations and deliver seamless services to its clients.

Timeline & Milestones

Year 1: Foundation Establishment

- Form the Workforce Data Governance Council, with representation from key stakeholder groups, to guide data sharing and integration strategies. This is a collaborative governance structure starting in an advisory capacity with a charter and timeline and shifting to a decision-making entity. This phase involves defining the roles, responsibilities, and governance structure of the Council, setting the stage for an integrated data system and collaborative efforts across various state agencies and stakeholders.

- Build upon the Data Governance Council to create an Integrated Service Delivery advisory body to establish the set of initiatives towards streamlining how services are provided. The advisory body, representing the workforce system stakeholders, will set the vision and strategy of instrumental initiatives guided by programmatic, legislative, and technological infrastructure expertise as needed.
- Complete requisition processes or identity state-approved contracts for software and vendor services.

Year 2: Framework Development and Pilot Planning

- Launch the WorkSource Integrated Technology (WIT) and begin improvements on shared intake processes and technology in One Stop Centers for various core programs.
- Develop a transparent mechanism for pilots and project proposals, allowing agencies to put forth initiatives that would benefit from broader collaboration and advance the development of integrated service delivery frameworks that support a system viewpoint rather than siloed programs, such as functional teams.
- Establish a roadmap for upcoming work such as shared intake and determinations of statewide workforce system evaluations and studies.
- Implement identity matching software and data accessibility initiatives to facilitate statewide data integration and analysis.
- Migrate to a cloud-based data warehousing architecture for improved analytical and modeling functionality. Explore the creation of a document repository and data pipelines for shared agency customer data on an as-needed basis.
- Dedicate resources for structured pilot testing of proposed solutions and to enhance shared data systems and infrastructure.

Year 3: Expansion and Testing

- Conduct a feasibility study for a common intake process including coordination with participating agencies and technology solution advisement.
- Promote shared learning and the development of cross-program trainings for partner staff focused on providing support in using new technologies, understanding the value of a more integrated system, fostering a greater understanding of various program requirements and operations, and delivering customer-centered services.
- Develop a secure data lookup portal as a tool for frontline staff to see a holistic picture of workforce services and jobseeker insights.

Years 4 and 5: Modernization and Evaluation

- Pilot the common intake form, including testing automated eligibility and referral systems.
- Deploy more advanced technologies to automate analytics, reporting, and operations like eligibility determinations.
- Focus on refining intake processes and aligning strategies, emphasizing a feedback-driven culture for continual system evolution.

Priority 2: Industry

Industry input to the plan has been clear: workforce is critical, and it continues to be challenging to hire and retain skilled employees. Industry has demonstrated the urgency by developing training and upskilling programs in-house to supplement the work of the workforce system. Industry would prefer to use the workforce system where possible, but the urgency often requires industry move faster than the traditional speed of the system. A strong and stable workforce is critical to Washington's economic health and future success. Workers must be able to access high-wage, quality jobs to support families and communities. Employers need skilled workers to stay competitive, expand and grow in a global economy.

For many years, Washington employers have consistently listed workforce challenges as one of their top concerns. Workforce challenges are often listed as the No. 2 concern in surveys from the Association of Washington Business, topped only by issues like inflation, Covid-19, or supply chains. This concern is noted across the state, in urban and rural communities. Recent surveys and outreach associated with the TAP Plan development confirm this finding. For many employers, they report that it's difficult to hire – and retain – the workers needed to help industry expand and grow.

Over the next four years, the impacts of our work will focus in the following three areas:

- **Support sustainable, equitable industry growth.**
- **Build and expand career pathways for critical industries.**
- **Expand definition of workforce development system support.**

The state's ongoing work to double the number of women and minority-owned manufacturing firms over the next decade is an outstanding example of equitable industry growth. This targeted effort to support small businesses – and more living wage jobs in marginalized communities – can be replicated with other industries, including clean energy, construction and more.

Washington would also benefit from additional career pathways in critical industries such as long-term care, information technology, aerospace and others. Many employers report a mismatch between the jobs they need to fill, and the skills of those who apply. This issue is compounded by an overall workforce shortage nationwide. And some employers have begun their own internal training programs.

Workers and employers also face new challenges in recent years that have sparked discussion about the definition of workforce support. Many workers face logistical challenges around affordable housing, child care, long-term care and transportation that keep them out of the workforce. A recent report from the Washington Child Care Collaborative Task Force estimates the state economy loses \$6.5 billion a year due to employee turnover, missed work, and lost productivity and opportunity.

Washington's overall economy is relatively healthy, but this success depends on a strong workforce. Focusing on these strategies over the next four years will support a robust foundation for all communities to thrive.

Economic Overview

DRAFT

Washington's economy has been ranked as the best or among the best in the nation in recent years by U.S. News and World Report and CNBC. The state ranked No. 10 in the nation for employment growth in 2022, adding 145,800 jobs over a year. Washington ranked No. 7 in the nation for per capita personal income in 2021 at \$71,889. And exports per capita ranked fifth in the nation, reflecting the Evergreen state's long history as an international trading partner.

This success was built on a strong foundation over many years, especially in areas of natural resources, agriculture and manufacturing,

The forest products industry is the state's third largest manufacturing industry, the state Department of Commerce reports. This sector supports 42,000 workers and generates \$36 billion a year in business income. Notably, 25 percent of the nation's log and lumber exports come from Washington, which is the second largest producer of lumber in the United States. The forestry and wood products sector supports 1,700 businesses and more than 102,000 workers, generating nearly \$6 billion in wages annually. This industry also provides mitigation and adaption to climate change, including:

- Carbon sequestration
- Renewable energy
- Alternative to energy-intensive building materials
- Preventing deforestation
- Contributing to a circular economy / industrial symbiosis
- Further developing the cross-laminated timber industry

Agriculture also plays a pivotal role in the state economy. More than 300 crops are grown in Washington, home to a diverse range of crops and livestock, from tulips, berries and dairy herds in Western Washington to beef cattle, apples, wheat and hops in Eastern Washington.

More than one-third of Washington crops are exported all over the world, the Commerce Department reports. And food manufacturing, including potato and onion processing in Central Washington, is a \$12 billion industry. Agriculture employs more than 144,000 Washingtonians with average wages of \$55,000 per year. The agriculture and food processing industries generated \$8.8 billion in earnings and \$17 billion to the state's Gross Regional Product in 2022.

Manufacturing also plays a key role in the state and regional economy. The Boeing Co. hired 10,000 workers nationally in 2023, including many in Washington, as the company increases jetliner production. More than 60,000 Washingtonians worked at Boeing at the end of 2022. Boeing also supports many suppliers and contractors throughout the state and region. Many of these are small, family-owned firms that create jobs, generate tax revenue and generally support the communities where they are based. There were nearly 266,000 manufacturing workers in Washington in 2022, the state Employment Security Department reports. The average annual salary was \$88,402.

The information technology sector has also made extraordinary contributions to the state. Washington's technology industry ranked No. 1 in the nation for both median wages and share of total employment in 2021, according to the CompTIA: Cyberstates 2021 report.

Many other Washington-based companies have made impacts on the national and world economy, including Amazon, Microsoft, Starbucks, Costco and others. These high-profile firms, in addition to a

strong base of small businesses in each of the state's 39 counties, have contributed greatly to the state's overall positive trajectory in recent years.

Exports are also a critical component to the state, and nation's, economic strength. Washington ranked No. 8 in total value of exports among the states in 2022, totaling more than \$61 billion. Transportation equipment came in first at \$17.7 billion, followed by agricultural products at \$17.5 billion.

Additionally, Washington's state budget has benefitted greatly from this economic expansion. The state operating budget went from about \$35 billion in 2013 to \$76 billion in 2023. A strong economy creates more opportunities for a well-balanced workforce system.

Washington clearly has outstanding opportunities for workers, employers and investors. However, ongoing workforce shortages and turnover in a variety of industries pose significant challenges for continuing this progress.

Challenges

Several converging challenges have emerged in recent years to pose major barriers for a well-balanced workforce for Washington.

First, there appear to be missed opportunities between the publicly funded workforce system and employers. A significant portion of Washington employers remain disengaged with the workforce system. This system offers many services to help employers succeed. Examples include job fairs that match job seekers and employers; job marketing and recruitment services; access to labor market data and forecasts; tax incentives; worker training; programs that help avoid layoffs; research so employers can offer competitive wages; help writing job postings; and information about apprenticeships and internships.

Other considerations to support challenges to the workforce include:

- More staffing dedicated to employer needs.
- Greater communication and engagement between employers and the state workforce development system.
- Dedicated funds for marketing, public and employer outreach.
- A new and more responsive menu of services to help workers and employers succeed, especially in light of the cultural and societal changes that resulted from the pandemic.

Additionally, employers and job seekers are faced with these basic questions as Washington's economy expands: Where will the workforce live? Who will take care of young children, the elderly and those that need extra care? And crucially, how will people get to work? The state's workforce development system is most often viewed as skill-development and labor matching system. Over the years, the system has had to broaden its scope, usually through organizational partnerships, to offer a wide variety of needed wrap-around support services. A holistic view is clearly needed to achieve long-term, equitable and inclusive economic success for Washington's people, businesses, and communities. The workforce

Spotlight: Child Care Support

Content is pending.

development system must be brought into partnership with the state's other agencies that are struggling to address business and community needs.

Early retirements, an aging workforce, low migration, new business starts and a lack of childcare also impact the nation's workforce, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce reports. Washington had 77 available workers for every 100 open jobs in Sept. 2023, the chamber reports. The state's labor force participation rate was 64.6% and the unemployment rate was 3.6%. Even if all unemployed Washingtonians filled open jobs, a significant labor shortage would still exist.

There are several factors keeping workers on the sidelines:

Child care has emerged as a major challenge for Washington workers and employers. Child care shortages cost Washington's economy \$6.5 billion annually due to employee turnover, absences, lost productivity and missed opportunities for business and consumer spending according to the Washington Child Care Collaborative Task Force. Washington has 5 percent fewer childcare slots today than in 2014 even as Washington's overall population and economic growth have expanded significantly over the past nine years. The industry faces a 43% annual turnover rate. These factors helped Washington's childcare costs increase by 220% since 1990, outpacing inflation, according to the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The average yearly cost of sending a toddler to daycare in Washington is more than \$14,000, Axios reported in July 2023 -- more than a year's tuition at the University of Washington. Those costs can approach \$30,000 per year in Seattle.

Long-term care also poses challenges for working families. Washington's age 65 and older population will grow 30% by 2030, compared to just 5% for the state overall. And more than half of these seniors will need paid long-term care for an average of 3.2 years, a recent Workforce Board report shows. These services will cost from \$1,700-\$9,000 a month. Like child care, long-term care responsibilities drive many working people to drop out of the labor force and transition to caring for family members. The long-term care workforce also faces its own challenges. Turnover averages 50% a year for direct care workers, and nearly half of home care workers received public assistance in 2020.

Employers, workers and policymakers have also highlighted housing as a workforce challenge.

Washington housing prices have appreciated 6.3% per year on average over the past 25 years, the second highest in the country, according to federal data cited in the 2023 AWB Competitiveness Redbook. The statewide median home price was \$654,900 in the second quarter of 2023, according to the University of Washington's Center for Real Estate Research. In King County, home prices averaged \$913,200.

[Washington's Housing Affordability Index](#) was recorded at 57.2 in the second quarter of 2023, which means housing affordability continues to decline. [The index](#), tracked by the Center for Real Estate Research, measures the ability of a middle-income family to make mortgage payments on a median priced home. A score of 100 means a household pays 25% of its income to principal and interest. A state and national housing shortage also impacts renters. An estimated 23.5% of renters spent 50% or more of their income on housing in 2022, Census data shows.

An aging transportation infrastructure and transportation policy decisions have contributed to challenges for the workforce. The Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue metropolitan area had the 9th worst average

commute times in the country at 29.2 minutes, according to Census data highlighted in the 2023 Redbook report. State and local policymakers have invested heavily in road maintenance, planning and public transportation in recent years. But for 80% of commuters in the Seattle metro area, a single occupancy vehicle – often on Interstate 5 – is how they get to work. Washington workforce development leaders have highlighted other transportation challenges. Some employment experts have noticed a lack of viable public transit options between high poverty, high unemployment areas and manufacturing centers. Others noted public transportation routes that prioritized retail centers and urban cores over routes between residential areas and employers, including manufacturers that provide quality jobs. These experts stressed the need for local transportation authorities, including county governments, to adjust transportation routes to be more inclusive of working people who need to travel to employment centers for a variety of shifts. Others noted a lack of public transit options in many parts of Eastern Washington.

Spotlight: Eastern Washington Tech Hub

Content is pending.

Opportunities

There are numerous opportunities to address these challenges, which impact millions of Washingtonians.

First, President Biden and the Congress have passed historic legislation to rebuild our country's aging infrastructure and invest in the future. The American Rescue Plan, Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, CHIPS and Science Act and Inflation Reduction Act represent an extraordinary opportunity for Washington state, and our nation.

Our infrastructure needs are well-documented in Washington. In 2017 the Association of Washington Business, Washington State Association of Counties, Association of Washington Cities and Washington Public Ports Association commissioned a report on the state's infrastructure. Key findings include:

- Infrastructure is the foundation of a strong, competitive economy and thriving communities.
- Washington's diverse economy makes it uniquely situated to leverage federal investments.
- Washington's trade driven economy contributes more than \$300 billion a year to the U.S. economy.
- The state's total infrastructure needs were estimated at more than \$222 billion. This investment would create more than 700,000 jobs.

Recent federal investments are already making an impact. Washington will receive more than \$8.2 billion for transportation, clean energy, climate change, clean water, broadband, energy and healthcare projects, the White House reports. Additionally, private companies have announced investments of \$2 billion for semiconductor, electric vehicle, manufacturing and clean power projects.

Many of these projects will create high-paying union jobs. Many other jobs will be created across the workforce as a result of these major investments.

Focusing Washington's workforce development system on these once-in-a-generation opportunities stands out as one of the top priorities for the 2024-28 TAP plan. We recommend strong partnerships focused on better alignment between the state workforce system and the state and federal agencies associated with these projects, including agencies focused on transportation, commerce, labor, education and more.

Second, Gov. Jay Inslee and the Washington Legislature have made significant investments in transportation, housing reform, child care and long-term care needs in recent years. These investments represent tremendous progress, but challenges remain. We also recommend additional action in the following areas:

Increase the number of industry-recognized credential programs with stackable credentials. Programs that allow people to earn while they learn have shown great potential to create more skilled employees, and have those employees achieve quality jobs. These programs can also reach people experiencing barriers to receiving the training by collaborating with local CTE educators and utilizing existing local resources such as local schools, libraries, and businesses. This aligns closely with the credential strategic priority detailed later in the document.

Encourage the development of more housing options, as well as programs that help people access stable housing. This includes additional investments in the Washington State Housing Trust Fund; homelessness prevention; foreclosure fairness and mobile and manufactured home relocation assistance. Other strategies worth exploring include more support for missing middle housing; backyard cottages; splitting home lots to make way for new housing; more dense housing around public transit; single room occupancy apartments; rent stabilization and parking requirements for new apartments.

Explore the nation's first-ever long-term care payroll tax, and how this program can be improved. Consider additional subsidies and grants for child care providers; subsidies for working families; and accelerated training and education programs for workers seeking to enter this field.

Create additional apprenticeships and training programs designed to address key industry shortages. An example to follow is the establishment of a new licensed practical nurse apprenticeship by the Workforce Board that will ease the workforce shortage by increasing the supply of critical healthcare workers, and also create new career opportunities for frontline workers in this industry.

Invest in transportation infrastructure. In Washington's trade-driven economy, trucks need efficient access to ports; workers need access to jobsites and students need access to campus to improve their education and training. Increased road maintenance, alternative routes, public transit including buses, light rails and ferries, as well as incentives to walk and bike to work remain worthwhile investments of tax dollars. The addition of a few bus lines between high-unemployment areas and manufacturing firms would have a tremendous impact on both jobseekers and industry. The state should continue to work with local transportation providers to support new options for working families and bring in local workforce development boards to support their analysis and solution-finding.

Consider supporting employers as job seekers work to transition from public assistance. These job seekers often face child care and transportation challenges, especially when beginning a new job. This grace period would ultimately pay off for employers as job seekers settled into their new role and become loyal employees. Notably, several employers have been highlighted in state and national media

for creating their own internal programs to address these issues, including onsite health centers; onsite childcare facilities; childcare benefits to pay providers directly; internal training and apprenticeship programs; and more.

Build better relationships and communication channels between state government and private industry. For example, there may be a benefit to a single point of contact to act as a liaison between state agencies and employers. Small businesses are often communicating with several different state employees at the same time. One employer ambassador to help guide the business owner through various government incentives and regulations could help employers succeed and meet expectations.

Encourage local Workforce Development Councils and employers to continue strong partnerships. In addition, consider expanding local workforce development councils and the state Workforce Board by adding more labor and business representatives.

Invest in the relationship between state government and the private sector. Solutions include more liaisons to manage relationships between employers and state agencies; liaisons that represent various programs, including the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, and other major funding streams; and better paid liaisons, similar to neighboring states. Business liaisons have more flexibility to connect job seekers with quality, living-wage jobs rather than low-paid work with limited career advancement.

The next four years represent an opportunity to recreate the relationship between state government and Washington's private sector employers. Surveys show many employers are unaware of the state's publicly funded workforce system, and the opportunities it presents. But those employers and job seekers who do use the system are often pleased with the level of service and responsiveness of Washington's workforce development professionals. Relatively small investments in these relationships would yield significant dividends.

Washington's economy is expanding, but a number of challenges may limit these opportunities for workers and employers. These challenges are significant enough to warrant new strategies, and a new approach to workforce development.

Timelines and Milestones

Year 1: Organize stakeholders to focus on industry challenges

- Prioritize overall effort on new opportunities from federal infrastructure investments, and strengthen and create partnerships among the workforce system and state and federal agencies associated with new grant funding. The workforce needs are challenging now; new projects will amplify this concern.
- Define roles and scope, recruit members from industry, labor, state agencies, local workforce boards and small businesses. Prioritize challenges and opportunities for workers and employers.
- Effort led by Workforce Board with support of industry liaisons from partner organizations.

Year 2: Launch pilot projects and advocate for policy changes

- Support business navigators to help more employers access workforce system. Business navigators are funded at the local level for two years. This presents a tremendous opportunity to learn about future employer outreach. Aim to increase employer participation in the workforce system by 25 percent.
- Launch business liaisons to serve as a single point of contact between state agencies and employers. Aim to connect twelve newly created business liaisons – one for each Washington region -- with 100 businesses each over the course of a year.
- Invite existing or create new employer groups as advisors to state and local workforce boards.
- Invest in additional marketing and outreach to advertise business services to employers in select markets.
- Support local governments to add new public transit routes along major employment corridors.
- Evaluate the success of employer sponsored child care.
- Advocate for additional affordable housing near employment centers.
- Advocate for additional long-term care support for Washington workers.

Year 3: Evaluate pilot project results.

- Evaluate success of business navigators and liaisons.
- Analyze marketing campaigns focused on services for employers.
- Analyze and make policy recommendations based on successful child care programs supported by employers.

Year 4: Expand successful initiatives and plan for next four-year plan.

Priority 3: Youth

Youth were disproportionately affected by recent economic disruptions including the COVID pandemic and the great recession of 2008-2011. Many industries that typically employed young individuals, such as hospitality, retail, and entertainment, faced significant challenges, leading to fewer opportunities for employment, job losses, and reduced working hours. Additionally, disruptions in traditional education settings, including remote learning and school closures, affected youth skills development, mental health, and access to internships or work experience, further hindering youth employment prospects.

Overall, the pandemic created significant obstacles for youth seeking employment; both new challenges and the exacerbation of existing challenges in entering the workforce. Addressing the needs of all youth is critical to ensuring a more inclusive and equitable job market, especially those facing barriers to continued education and employment, including youth with disabilities; justice- and foster-involved youth; youth experiencing poverty and homelessness, racism, family disharmony, gender identification, and other socioeconomic challenges. Partnering with businesses is essential, as it helps tailor training programs to meet industry demands, fostering a symbiotic relationship between education and employment. Raising awareness of youth work opportunities not only empowers young individuals but also bridges the information gap between employers and potential employees and allows businesses to tap into crucial underutilized labor sources. By investing in comprehensive education and vocational

training programs, we can equip youth with the skills and knowledge needed to secure stable employment and financial independence.

The guiding principle of comprehensive supports for individuals with barriers to employment has heightened importance for youth populations. Effective support services for youth are designed within the core tenets of positive youth development and trauma-informed care. Such evidence-based, youth-centered services play a pivotal role in enhancing their educational attainment, training opportunities, and future productivity in the workforce. These services address various barriers that young individuals often face, enabling them to succeed in their educational pursuits and transition effectively into the workforce. Such supports enable many young workers to take advantage of training and education opportunities that may not be otherwise available.

Many young people lack confidence and self-awareness and when coupled with structural barriers, such as a lack of transportation or child care, food and housing insecurity, age caps on aid programs etc., many young adults are unable to utilize Washington's financial aid programs for post-secondary education and vocational training. This is especially true for historically marginalized populations, who are often as likely to enroll but less likely to persist to program completion, leading to fewer certificates, diplomas, and industry-valued credentials for this priority population.

The objective of this strategic priority is to improve opportunities for young people, especially those kept furthest from opportunity to transition to an economically successful adulthood by way of reinforcing the existing and bolstering new areas of impact, including:

- **Increasing youth awareness of workforce services and programs.** Connecting youth to the appropriate programs equips them with the knowledge and tools to build successful and fulfilling careers. We can achieve this impact by remaining youth-centered and focusing on:
 - Strengths-based, person-first programming. When we recognize that youth already possess skills, abilities, and strengths, we can build on and amplify these opportunities when we prioritize what is already going well for that youth.
 - Supporting co-enrollment in youth-opportunity and re-engagement programs, when appropriate, such as WIOA Youth and Open Doors. Such efforts will require the removal of barriers to co-enrollment in multiple programs.
 - Aligning youth programs with the needs and interests of young people in a geographic area.
 - Connecting business with formal education programs to create continuous pathways from education to employment to career.
 - Supporting the use of workforce and peer navigators with youth-serving programs.
 - Expand career-connected learning and exploration to in-school youth, starting as young as elementary and middle school.

- **Broadening access to and shortening the time required to achieve credentials.** Increasing rates of youth credentialing not only enhances the qualifications and employability of our future workforce, but also enables youth to embark on a pathway to economic stability, boosting long-term career prospects and contributing to overall economic growth in society. Shortening this transition period from secondary education to career will make them competitive candidates for

quality jobs earlier in life and should decrease the unemployment rate of this demographic. We can achieve this impact by focusing on:

- Exploring dual credit programs in secondary schools
- Strengthening and increasing available youth apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs and pathways
- Supporting Career and Technical Education (CTE) widely, across all occupational sectors
- Support CTE building trade and industrial arts programs to prepare for jobs created under new federal investments (IIJA, IRA, CIPS Act).
- Enhancing Transition and Pre-Employment Transition Services for young people with disabilities, including by using the strategies described above.

We've learned from prior investments in helping youth transition to successful careers. The following programs and services have proven successes to build upon:

Skill Centers are regional secondary schools that serve high school students from multiple school districts. They provide instruction in preparatory programs that are either too expensive or too specialized for schools or districts to operate individually. Currently, there are fourteen (14) skill centers in Washington state.

The **Running Start Program** allows 11th and 12th grade students to take college courses at Washington's thirty four (34) community and technical colleges. Students earn both high school and college credits for their successful completion of these courses.

Career Connect Washington (CCW) offers work-based and academic programs for young people to explore, learn, and/or earn money or college credits while learning. CCW was created by a partnership of business, labor, education, government and community leaders. Started in 2017, CCW bridges the gap between employers and educators by providing the connection, funding, and support they need to deliver high quality academic and work-based experiences for Washington students, especially those who have been kept furthest from opportunity.

Core Plus uses the power of hands-on learning to better integrate academic and career-based education. Core Plus is an industry-validated, skills-based manufacturing and industrial arts curriculum, with standardized certificate systems to document attainment of learning goals and objectives. It originated as a grassroots program led by industry to re-emphasize CTE in schools with Boeing collaborating on Core Plus Aerospace. It has now expanded to include construction and maritime curricula, as well.

Elective Credit for Paid Work Experience As of the 2023-2024 academic year, high school students are able to earn up to two, elective, high school credits for paid work experiences and/or employment.

High School and Beyond Plan This plan guides students' high school experiences and to prepare them for transition from K-12 to a successful career in the workforce. Students begin developing the plan in middle school and update it annually, with the support of educators and guidance counselors. In 2023, the legislature required a statewide universal platform for the plan. This continuous improvement will guide the use of the high school and beyond plan over the next four years.

Background

Historically, the workforce education system has been split into two parts – secondary (seventh through twelfth grade) and postsecondary. In the secondary system, learning focused on preparing students for future career training and was not student-centered. Emphasis and encouragement focused on entering a four-year college degree program after high school graduation. Little effort was spent developing student interests, capabilities or learning styles, especially beyond formal college education. By not making concerted efforts to place students on continuous learning pathways leading to careers of interest to them, most students are not set up to make meaningful progress towards entering the workforce. More career guidance, counseling, and navigator resources can help students to align their future goals with their current education pathways. Focusing on the learner, including how one learns, and embedding education and skills (advanced math and science) throughout K-12 courses, including CTE can also support students as they navigate their career path and transition to adulthood.

Historically, only in the postsecondary system could students continue their studies along more focused career pathways and earn degrees, certifications, and other types of recognized credentials. By undervaluing the education of those K-12 years and not making concerted efforts to place students on continuous learning pathways leading to careers, this system did not set up the majority of students to make meaningful progress towards entering the workforce. More career guidance, counseling and navigator resources can help students to align their future goals with their current education pathways. Furthermore, the additional high school graduation requirements added over the years can have the effect of making coursework less meaningful and relevant for students and restricting the responsiveness of schools. The process of transitioning from high school into post-secondary education is also in flux, as the education system moves away from standardized testing. Additionally, transcript evaluation and translation are not consistent across institutions. As a result, there are questions as to whether dual credit and CTE courses taken in high school will result in the intended credits awarded by postsecondary entities. These issues compound missed opportunities that are systemic, structural barriers and no fault of the youth nor the educators within these systems. Youth participation in the workforce is crucial for the future of the state's economy, providing a skilled talent pipeline for businesses, addressing labor market demands, and bringing fresh perspectives leading to adaptation and innovation. As such, we must proactively move to dismantle the harmful impacts of these systems, however unintentional, to create more holistic, supportive, and responsive pathways from education to credential attainment to self-sustaining employment.

Aligning programs and credentials to be responsive to student and industry needs must be supported. Industry-recognized credentials (IRCs) are crucial for students entering the workforce; leveraging partnerships between business and education can help create clearer pathways to employment. Apprenticeships are a proven model of attaining IRCs, while simultaneously earning money and embarking on a path towards a lifelong career. Yet, youth apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs face significant administrative hurdles; consequently, many of these programs restrict access to youth aged 18 or older, to comply with certification requirements, such as OSHA, forklift safety, etc.

Providing youth and young adults with opportunities to make meaningful strides towards IRCs and with job opportunities that allow them to earn and learn simultaneously, is crucial to their self-sufficiency. By engaging in the workforce during ages fifteen through eighteen youth are much more likely to remain in the workforce and advance in their careers. If students graduate from high school with no IRCs and little idea of what type of work they would like to do, they are more likely to forgo college and vocational training opportunities and have more limited prospects for participation in the workforce. They are

more likely to have entry-level jobs with fewer prospects for career advancement. Such stop-gap employment, where wages are unlikely to increase over time, can lead workers towards a “lost decade,” in which such workers drift in and out of similarly low-paying jobs with few prospects for advancement. As such workers age, they become less and less likely to attain additional education credentials and complete trainings due to multiple factors such as limited time and money, familial and dependent responsibilities due to a lack of adequate caregiving infrastructure in our society, and additional barriers to accessing support systems.

This strategic priority has significant interaction with Priority 1: System and Priority 4: Credential Transparency. For example, a youth-specific online portal to consolidate relevant youth-related resources would directly support system integration for youth. This could include services for youth with disabilities and other systemic barriers such as foster- and justice-involvement, federal definition language and requirements, and others. The portal could also serve as a data-sharing opportunity for support programs such as SNAP and TANF, as well as information and access to wrap-around services such as those noted in the youth support services section. In addition, a Learning and Employment Record (LER) could enable Washington to map available resources and launch a collective impact campaign to connect the most economically vulnerable jobseekers with clear, navigable routes to livable wages in high-demand, high-wage fields. It is envisioned as a key strategy for ameliorating systemic inequity and poverty and assisting workforce system customers achieve true self-sufficiency through the integration of diverse workforce, education, and supportive services and resources. The LER would employ a no-wrong-door approach, linking student academic records with the workforce and social support systems, in alignment with FERPA and other such safeguards for confidential information. Individuals would own their data and control access to it.

Critical Steps for Success

Dual Credit

Dual credit programs play a pivotal role in fostering youth employment and career pathways by offering high school students the opportunity to earn college credits while still in high school. By completing college-level courses in high school, students develop a solid foundation for further education or immediate entry into the workforce with advanced skills and qualifications. Such opportunities not only enhance their employability but also reduce the time and financial barriers often associated with traditional post-secondary education. To maximize these benefits, stakeholders need to explore how to better support and align dual credit and other credentialing opportunities for youth, including partnering with skill centers and other community-based organizations that support such pathways.

Dual credit programs in Washington include:

- Advanced Placement
- International Baccalaureate
- Cambridge International
- College in the High School
- Running Start
- Career and Technical Education

Opportunity youth

Youth who have historically been kept furthest from opportunity have the most to gain from engagement with education and employment supports. Current existing supports for such youth include the WIOA Youth program and Open Doors education reengagement programs. When state systems that support youth are better integrated and efforts are aligned to provide comprehensive, wraparound supports, youth are better prepared to complete secondary credentials, such as attainment of a high school diploma or an equivalent credential. Secondary credential attainment is a necessary pre-requisite to supporting youth towards their goals of employment, self-employment, and/or post-secondary education. We will continue to pursue alignment of overlapping program efforts that serve this vulnerable population, as well as seek to create more rigorous systems of measurement around upstream progress indicators, such as secondary credential attainment.

WIOA Youth prioritizes service delivery to youth and young adults aged 14-24 who identify as low-income, with emphasis on youth who have disconnected from formal education pathways and who experience additional barriers such as disability, homelessness, foster- and justice-system involvement, parenting, and English as a second language. WIOA Youth service providers partner with shelters, drop-in centers, transitional living centers, food banks, juvenile court systems, tribal partners, and others to provide warm hand-offs and referral pathways for youth with significant barriers.

Partnership between workforce pathway providers and the Open Doors program is a continual process of refining and iterating on existing state and local policies to ensure we are continuing to remove barriers at the administrative level so youth do not experience disconnection or disruption in engagement with education and workforce preparation activities. Washington State Employment Security Department is working in close partnership with the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction to remove and reduce policy barriers that limit co-enrollment in these two programs. Additionally, this state agency partnership is collaborating to ensure practitioners have awareness of and access to all relevant resources to support co-enrolled populations.

Youth apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship

Registered apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs are a valuable resource for many young people that don't thrive in traditional, formal education programs. Registered apprenticeship programs and their supporting feeder programs are seeing increased support at all levels – from federal funding infrastructure strategies to on-the-ground awareness and engagement from youth and young adults in reengagement education pathways.

There is renewed interest in Washington to coordinate career-connected learning pathways with apprenticeship opportunities. Career Connect WA (CCW) is an umbrella initiative that has invested in expanding apprenticeship and has grown to more than 30 programs across the state, creating more pathways to middle class jobs through apprenticeship. To continue this work, CCW, the Employment Security Department (ESD), Labor and Industry (L&I), and other partners worked together to apply for the Apprenticeship Building America grant (ABA) from U.S. Labor Department to expand registered apprenticeship and recognized pre-apprenticeship programs in high-growth and high-demand industry sectors. This grant was awarded in 2022 and ESD issued an RFP to award \$3,751,236.00 to Program

Builders ready to build and expand programs statewide. The ABA grant program aims to increase equity and accessibility in program delivery to apprentices and bring the Registered Apprenticeship model to more industries. ESD looks to use their ABA funds to bolster the already established CCW network and the established sector intermediary partnerships such as: clean energy, healthcare, advanced manufacturing and aerospace, technology, and cybersecurity, maritime, and construction.

In 2023, in partnership with The Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC), CCW received \$23 million in support from the U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration's Good Jobs Challenge grant to create the Washington Jobs Initiative (WJI). WJI is helping Washington residents, including youth and young adults, to connect to good jobs through registered apprenticeships and other technical training programs. The initiative leverages CCW's existing system to coordinate efforts across the state and ensure a focus on equity and diversity. Eight sectoral partnerships were awarded funds totaling nearly \$17 million to train and place nearly 3,000 Washingtonians into good jobs with a family-sustaining wage in five key industries: construction; healthcare; advanced manufacturing and aerospace; clean Technology and energy; and information technology and cybersecurity.

Increasing supports for youth

Better aligning youth programs with WIOA eligibility requirements

Aligning youth education programs with the WIOA funding eligibility requirements is one way to enable more young people to tap into and combine training programs and funding streams. WIOA provides limited federal funding to support youth workforce development initiatives; aligning youth education programs with WIOA requirements can help to leverage and maximize financial support for initiatives aimed at preparing youth for the workforce. Eligibility requirements help service providers prioritize youth and young adults most in need yet are flexible enough to ensure that even the most highly barriered youth can still access the program.

WIOA funding comes with federal and state-required performance and accountability reporting. In an integrated system, partner providers should look to system-wide metrics that track progress to mutually negotiated, cross-agency goals. Service integration should be responsive to the performance requirements of each, participating partner. WIOA metrics may add value to non-WIOA programs. For example, WIOA outlines guidelines and standards for program quality and effectiveness that are aligned to the principles of youth development through fourteen (14) youth program elements. Aligning youth education programs with these requirements helps ensure that programs are developmentally appropriate for all young people. Other WIOA components that align with the workforce plan priorities include increasing youth wraparound supports, especially mental health supports, creating seamless pathways from education and employment through high school into adulthood, enhancing collaboration and coordination within the workforce development system, and addressing the workforce needs of business.

Another program that could better align with WIOA eligibility is the Basic Food Employment and Training (BFET) program. This program is an important part of Washington State's comprehensive workforce development system serving the needs of low-income individuals from ages sixteen to fifty-nine (16-59), displaced workers, and employers. This program is committed to assist Basic Food recipients by encouraging economic well-being through skill acquisition and gainful employment. The program offers

job search, training, education, and job readiness activities to improve BFET participant's employment prospects and wage-earning potential.

For example, the BFET program partners with several community-based organizations and the State Board of Community and Technical Colleges that also receive WIOA funding. When a partner is unable to support a participant under BFET due to program restrictions, WIOA support is available and vice versa. The partnerships and alignments continue to develop to ensure youth are served and not left behind.

Connecting business and education

Connecting businesses and educational institutions is crucial for enhancing youth outcomes in workforce training. Businesses can provide insights into the skills, knowledge, and competencies needed in the workforce. This information helps educational institutions tailor their programs to align with current and future job market demands, ensuring that youth receive training relevant to industry needs.

Collaboration facilitates increased access to experiential learning opportunities like job shadowing, internships, apprenticeships, and informational interviews. These experiences offer valuable hands-on exposure to the workplace, allowing youth to gain practical skills, understand industry expectations, and build professional networks. Providing such opportunities, especially to historically marginalized communities that may have limited access, creates a more equitable playing field for entry into the workforce. These efforts could also align with CCW efforts, which specifically bridge training and support gaps for youth entering the workforce.

Transition and Pre-employment Transition Services

For youth with disabilities, enhancing Transition and Pre-employment Transition Services (PRE-ETS) significantly contributes to better youth support for workforce training by focusing on preparing students for successful transitions from school to the workforce. Coordinating work-based learning experiences for pre-employment transition students with employers through the workforce system is a crucial component of these services. Facilitating awareness and accessibility to such credentials – including some credentials as fundamental as a driver's license - can seem simple but remain a primary barrier for many youth in accessing post-secondary education and employment opportunities. For WIOA Title IV partners, the following credentials count and could be supported through the workforce partners:

- High school diploma or Washington State recognized equivalent
- Secondary and post-secondary report card and transcript continuity
- On-the-job-training for specific employment
- Registered apprenticeship training program
- Passage of exam(s) for industry or employer-recognized credentials (HVAC, Accounting Specialist, etc.)
- Development of career pathways with industry, vocational, and post-secondary training for pre-employment students and young adults, leading to employment

Workforce navigators

Using workforce system navigators significantly reduces barriers for youth entering the workforce preparation and employment systems by providing personalized guidance, support, and resources. Navigators act as advocates and mentors and help youth navigate the complexities of the job market, educational opportunities, and support services. By offering individualized assistance, addressing specific challenges, and connecting youth to relevant programs and resources, navigators empower young individuals to overcome barriers such as lack of information, limited access to opportunities, or uncertainty about career pathways. There is little funding explicitly for youth navigators. However, system partners could consider working across funding streams to redesign navigation services, carving out funds specifically for youth. For example, co-funding WIOA PRE-ETS navigator services with WIOA Title I funds, might create a direct point of contact for other WIOA-eligible youth to assist with work-based learning experiences, pre-internships, and internships.

Timeline and Milestones

This strategic priority follows a similar timeline to the other priorities:

Year 1: Establish partnerships across Workforce System

- Establish a work group with Workforce Board Sponsor.
- Conduct an environmental scan of existing efforts.
- Gather feedback from Youth through survey.
- Identify the most pressing barriers.
- Identify most relevant metrics for evaluating outcome performance.

Year 2: Pilot efforts for impact statements

- Identify and implement pilots for achieving impact and removing barriers.
- Track evaluation metrics.
- Write two-year update.

Year 3: Evaluate pilots and progress

- Evaluate pilots for impact and effectiveness.
- Identify pilots for expansion.

Year 4: Expand on best practices

- Develop the next iteration of pilots and innovations.
- Develop the next four-year strategy.

Priority 4: Credential Transparency

The Workforce Board's philosophy is that all learning is valuable and needs to be recognized. It doesn't matter *where* you learn, it's how and what you learn. More broadly, all learning that can be validated, should be able to be credentialed.

Washington is on the path to increase access to and attainment of postsecondary credentials for all residents, and to strengthen the connection between industry and education to improve economic outcomes for students and the competitive stature of businesses. We've received national recognition for the gains we've made over the last decade. In particular, successful advancements have been made in articulating and accelerating pathways from high school to postsecondary credentials, including registered apprenticeships, and two and four-year degrees.

The focus of this strategic objective is to explore credential transparency and expansion to improve equitable access, mobility, and long-term economic success. This will be achieved through the following impact statements:

- Create a common definition of credentials by:
 - Restarting and expanding the Credential Transparency Advisory Committee
 - Evaluating Credential Transparency Description Language
- Put learners at the center by:
 - Exploring and enhancing skill-based hiring
 - Creating and maintaining a statewide Learning and Employment Record
 - Analyzing and applying data from the Eligible Training Provider List

Both of these impact statements would benefit from the establishment of a credential transparency framework that:

- Is learner-centered, and meets a learner's needs throughout working life.
- Views diverse cultures, lived experiences, and learning styles as an asset. Diversity of experience is accommodated and supported.
- Deconstructs student learning by commonly defined knowledge, skills, and abilities.
- Provides momentum, mobility, and permeability along educational and career pathways.
- Identifies ways to award credit for prior learning to demonstrate that valid skills and knowledge can be gained outside of a college classroom.
- Is reliably evaluated.
- Is part of a single taxonomy.

Background

Credentials span a wide range of topics, time, and investment. They can be anything from micro-certifications to badges to registered apprenticeships and bootcamps. They can be associate degrees, bachelor's degrees, master's, and doctoral degrees. They can be occupational licenses and accreditations. Training can take a few days to a few months to many, many years in the case of your local pediatrician or post-doctoral microbiologist.

Credential transparency deconstructs student learning by commonly defined knowledge, skills, and abilities. If I get a certificate in cybersecurity, what exactly do I learn? How can we break this down so it's understandable and has a common understanding between and among educational institutions and employers?

We need to evaluate different credentials and what earnings and employment outcomes result. You can see some of this work already on the Workforce Board's Career Bridge, the state's public facing career

and education portal. On Career Bridge, a consumer report card can be seen for many credentials. The report card shows completion rate, employment rate, and median annual earnings and the industries where graduates were employed. We also need to make sure that credentials are interoperable and that you can view them among different computer systems and technologies. They must be truly portable among different online platforms.

We also want credentials to be learner centered. If you learned how to fix a motorcycle in your garage, why should you retake this learning? Can you build on what you already know? We need to make sure that folks get credit and recognition for what they can already do, and easily build on that.

Finally, we want credentials to provide momentum and mobility along educational and career pathways. Let's get people moving forward with their education and training. When credential transparency is working, students can readily track their progress, and get inspired to keep pushing ahead.

There are a lot of credentials in the marketplace and the number of credentials keeps growing. Credential Engine, a Washington, D.C., nonprofit estimates the U.S. alone now has over 1 million credentials. That's a lot of choices for consumers—good, bad, and in between. Whether it's a project management certificate from Google or a coding boot camp, there are all kinds of credentials. But customers, including disadvantaged populations, don't know the content of these credentials or if they have real value in the labor market.

We want people to be able to access all kinds of credentials and understand them. What skills, competencies, and abilities are contained in each credential? What are people really learning and how do those skills translate into the marketplace, especially as businesses increasingly do skills-based hiring? Which skills does someone gain from a credential? And do they produce real return on investment in the form of higher employment rates and higher earnings? Do they lead to actual jobs? How much do those jobs pay?

Skills-Based Hiring

Employers are facing tighter labor markets and traditional hiring metrics are coming up short. Skills-based hiring is increasing. But moving away from degree-based hiring to skills-based hiring can be a significant culture shift. It also requires more effort to break apart a traditional resume and work experience into discrete and verifiable skills.

Even so, Wal-Mart, the largest U.S. grocery chain in the U.S., is in the process of rewriting hundreds of job descriptions so that for many of its corporate titles, applicants can show they have the skills they need through experience and other pathways, not just via a traditional college degree. A couple of forces are at work in this shift, according to a September 28, 2023 Forbes Magazine article—shrinking college enrollment and fewer working-age applicants. Wal-Mart not only hopes to find more qualified candidates through skills-based hiring, but also to diversify its workforce.

Several companies, including Google, Accenture, and IBM, have shrunk the number of jobs at their firms that require a traditional college degree. A 2022 report by the Burning Glass Institute, a national nonprofit that focuses on labor market research, found that nearly half of all middle-skill occupations and close to a third of high-skill occupations slashed degree requirements between 2017 and 2019. Through the first half of 2023, 13 states (Washington was not included) had removed degree requirements from many state government jobs, according to the Brookings Institution. In addition to

skills-based hiring, many companies are also training their workers while they're on the clock—essentially becoming education and training providers to enable their employees to learn targeted skills. In Washington, this is happening in several hospital systems, including Providence, which is training some of their own staff to become certified nursing assistants through a targeted, skills-based approach.

Perhaps the next big challenge on the skills-based hiring front is to see whether removing degree requirements has made a difference in hiring and employing a more diverse, less traditional workforce. Hiring practices will need to substantially change and those changes will need to be measured to uncover whether these shifts are leading to successful outcomes for less traditional, often marginalized, job candidates.

Learning and Employment Records (LERs)—Digital Wallets Help Advance Credential Transparency

Right now, when a Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) customer completes training, the WIOA case manager must rely on the participant hand delivering their credential or transcript in order for the training provider to get credit. If the participant doesn't bring it in, providers do not get credit for their customer's credential attainment via the Participant Individual Record Layout or PIRL, as required by the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration. This inability to upload credentials for data validation in the current statewide case management system is true for any credential—from high school diplomas to GEDs to the Open Doors Program, to degree and industry credentials.

Because LERs can record any verifiable skills, competencies, and even job experiences, they can be particularly valuable for people who stop and start their education and career pathways. Owning and having agency over one's credential information can help motivate individuals to stay on track, especially if their credentials give them a leg up on a pathway and shorten the time to a higher order credential and higher wages (credit for prior learning). LERs, often called digital wallets, can track their progress and provide information to potential employers not only about a range of credentials, including micro credentials and badges, but also provides a place to validate and verify skills, competencies and abilities learned at home, in the workplace or through mentorships with professionals or friends and family members.

We acknowledge that it's difficult for many populations to wade through the processes necessary to receive a credential, or even a copy of the credentials they worked hard to earn. Creating and maintaining a statewide Learning and Employment Record (LER) that is portable and verifiable would make this new concept and new technology accessible and easy to use for jobseeker-learners, and also help state caseworkers and training providers get credit for helping their customers.

The implementation of LERs would also add value to the data-sharing and service integration priority of TAP. The recent enactment of a bill requiring ESD to obtain job title information for all UI-covered workers, will provide more granular data to help us understand if participation in specific training or obtaining a specific credential pays off in terms of employment and earnings.

These digital platforms come in a variety of formats and are offered by a range of national vendors who are working to achieve market share in this new but important arena.

Restarting and expanding the Credential Transparency Advisory Committee

The Credential Transparency Advisory Committee—representing Washington's public and private higher

education institutions, registered apprenticeships, K-12 education, the workforce development system, and policy makers—was convened by the Workforce Board beginning in 2019 to explore the role that credentialing plays in the educational and economic mobility of Washingtonians, and talent development for the state’s businesses. The Committee determined that reliable, meaningful information about credentials can have significant impact on a consumer’s decision-making process, including how they might invest in credential attainment, and in how far they might travel along an educational or career pathway. The Committee also saw the value in adopting a credential taxonomy (based on knowledge, skills and abilities attained), to facilitate ongoing communication channels with industry.

By deconstructing credentials into knowledge, skills, and abilities, there will be greater agreement about what is contained in each credential, and about a credential’s value to the learner. With credential transparency, each credential—whether it’s a PhD or a short-term certificate—will verify and validate that certain skills and competencies have been achieved and are meaningful and high value.

The Credential Transparency Advisory Committee formed immediately prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and met virtually during 2020 and into early 2021. The Committee viewed their exploration through an equity lens. This includes building awareness of how current credentialing practices might impact the career decisions of marginalized populations, as well as how/whether folks choose to access education and training in preparation for their desired careers or progress within their desired careers. A focus on equity is critical as Washington continues to address disadvantaged populations and create solutions for success. These populations often come from struggling socio-economic backgrounds and include communities of color as well as immigrants and refugees. Many are rural, and often they are women. These populations have historically been most negatively impacted when credentials do not include life skills and work experience to “count” toward credentials. The focus on equity and reaching out to underserved, disadvantaged populations featured prominently in the committee’s final report and recommendations. The report can be accessed at: <https://wtb.wa.gov/planning-programs/credential-transparency/>

Both the report and its recommendations were part of a larger grant-funded project with Credential Engine, a Washington, D.C. based nonprofit. The project ended in early 2021 and the report was distributed to the funders and through the Workforce Board via a statewide newsletter that’s delivered to over 3,000 stakeholders. The Committee is now officially inactive, although some members continued to weigh in, as warranted, on credential transparency policies and trends.

Now that credential transparency is one of the state’s strategic workforce plan’s top priorities, the Committee should be reactivated, with the addition of new committee members. By including new members representing employers, policymakers, and represented labor we would strengthen the committee work and begin to tackle the systemic issues of credential transparency.

Creating a permanent committee as part of the TAP plan, will help ensure that timely, trusted information about credential transparency is a long-term effort with deep buy-in from a broad coalition of partners. It will keep Washington’s credential transparency efforts on a surer path to success as disagreements and sometimes tough conversations are hashed out in a safe space.

Credential Transparency Description Language (CTDL)

As credential transparency gains momentum in the U.S., and in the world, a variety of languages have been created to provide clear technological pathways for linked, open data. One leading language is known as Credential Transparency Description Language (or CTDL) and is used by the national nonprofit Credential Engine to build its national credential registry, of which Washington state is a partner. When the Workforce Board partnered with Credential Engine through a grant project to publish Career Bridge's 6,500 postsecondary credentials to the national registry, this work was done in CTDL. By publishing in this language, it enables any changes on Washington's education and career platform Career Bridge to automatically update the national registry at the same time—reducing the hassles of re-inputting information every time a credential is updated or changed.

As more states have joined the national registry, CTDL use has increased and now is considered a dominant language in many states. In Washington, the Workforce Board's investment in CTDL through Career Bridge means that the state is ahead of others in identifying a common language that can move information swiftly and securely between multiple IT interfaces. As the Credential Transparency Advisory Committee restarts, members will need to evaluate whether to continue building out IT systems in this increasingly dominant language to better capture larger pieces of the credential marketplace and keep credential descriptions up-to-date, accurate, and actionable across many platforms.

Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL)

For true credential transparency to flourish, there needs to be a more objective way to assess a credential's performance outcomes. Right now, the Workforce Board does this work through the federally required Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL), mandated by the U.S. Department of Labor. Each year, agency research staff independently and objectively evaluate thousands of Washington postsecondary programs by matching Unemployment Insurance wage records with student-level data contained in secure data warehouses.

This data is not self-reported as it is in some states. Washington's ETPL is held up as a national model for being both rigorous and accurate. But the ETPL, which qualifies programs on the list for potential federal WIOA funding, along with some state training dollars, can only go so far. For one, ETPL participation is completely voluntary. For the most part, education institutions are not required to provide their program data for evaluation—unless they seek to have their programs join the list and qualify for federal funding. (One notable exception is that the 300-plus private career schools licensed and regulated by the Workforce Board, must submit their student-level data each year through the agency's secure, encrypted Student Data Portal.)

Washington's ETPL shows that at least some pieces of credential transparency are already possible—and are being pushed out through the public-facing career and education platform, Career Bridge. But many, many more credentials and programs are under-scrutinized and can potentially mislead students and employers because no one is accurately and independently tracking their performance.

Also, employment and earnings rates (along with completion rates as measured on the ETPL) are not the complete picture when it comes to performance. Currently, Washington's ETPL also provides a snapshot of the industry where recent graduates went to work. But that only tells part of the story. A worker at Amazon shows up in the retail industry regardless of whether they are a software engineer or a

warehouse worker. This will change soon when the state’s Employment Security Department collects sufficient job title information from Washington employers to evaluate the job or career people are actually in—not just the industry where they work. This data collection is happening right now, with the first mandatory collection of occupational codes/job titles from employers starting in the fourth quarter of 2022. This required data collection is the result of the 2020 passage of an occupational data bill that had its genesis in the Workforce Board’s Future of Work Project report, just prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Washington is just the third state in the U.S. to require employers to identify what their employees do as part of quarterly wage reports collected by our state’s Employment Security Department. As that data is collected and analyzed, students, employers, jobseekers and policymakers will have a much more granular view of whether a particular credential or education pathway resulted in the career for which students were training. Those performance results will be added to Career Bridge in the coming years.

Potential Metrics

In an enhanced, transparent state credentialing system, skills, competencies, and mastery levels will become the coin of the realm for both individuals and employers to navigate credentialing and occupational pathways. Right now, there can be a disconnect between the way credentials are described by education and training institutions and the language employers use in seeking skilled candidates. As credential transparency advances, job listings and descriptions will better align and be made visible in real-time with the common credential language, CTDL. It will be immediately evident when additional learning is required. By using the same description language, courses will be easier to find, as will other details including cost, likely skill gains, and whether courses are offered online or in person.

Career exploration, education planning, and personal investment are all enhanced by the availability of reliable data about the performance of credentials in the economy.

- Do people with the credential get jobs in a position for which they trained? How much do they earn when hired? How do they earn more— additional credentials, time on the job, etc.?
- Which employers value the credential in terms of hiring and promotional preference and pay?

Disaggregating performance data by population groups, geographic regions, occupational sectors, and other elements, provides even more clarity for users. For example, do older, mid-career changers do as well economically as younger students? A user might ask, “Do people who look like me and share my lived experience benefit from this program?” or “Do completers find jobs in my area or do they have to move?” Disaggregated data will also help policymakers understand who is being left behind economically. They can and should establish goals on economic equity and charter a system of checkpoints with benchmarks that lead to those goals. A data dashboard can and should be public facing.

Community feedback on where to start

During conversations with stakeholders and partners two groups rose to the top when speaking about the need for greater credential transparency. These two groups—immigrants & refugees, and Veterans—were not the only populations mentioned, but they came up with greater frequency and fervor as needing particular focus right now.

Immigrant Case Study

Ruben is an immigrant from Argentina. When he moved to the U.S. in his early 30s, he had completed a masters-level architecture program in Spanish. Because he struggled with English, it was very challenging for him to find work in the small community he lived in. He was passed over for dishwashing jobs. A construction firm eventually hired him at minimum wage, and he spent a year or so sweeping construction site floors. As he was able to navigate very basic English, he was asked to draw up blueprints for sites, with a wage increase of about \$2 per hour (total wage at that time was about \$10/hour in Oregon). This was a great deal for the employer and a slight increase for him, but it did not adequately value his skill. His language challenges made it difficult for him to pass the architectural exam, so eventually he worked with an engineer who signed off on every project and received a portion of the payment, even though his additional oversight was not needed. If we can create better pathways for immigrants and refugees to document their skills, perhaps with the assistance of multi-lingual navigators, they would be able to advance to higher-skilled positions and earn significantly higher wages much more quickly.

Veterans Case Study

The transitioning service member who is 24 months from retirement or 12 months from separation and the service member who has recently released from military service both face the challenge of adequately describing or translating what they accomplished during their military service in terms that a civilian employer will understand and value. This is also a challenge for wounded or ill service members who are separating due to service-connected injuries, or the veteran who is experiencing a RIF. They may come into the WorkSource employment center and when asked what they did in the military, the service member will respond with something like "Eleven Bravo" or "Aerographer's Mate 2nd class." For staff serving this customer, they too, may be at a loss to understand how to assist in translating this experience.

About a third of military spouses work in jobs that require a license, yet the barriers to transferring professional licenses into each state the military sends their family have historically contributed to the high unemployment rate (up to 21%) military spouses face. In 2023, Washington and the federal government passed legislation to ease this burden. However, each state has a different set of laws, policies, and requirements that military spouses must navigate and understand. While the recently passed legislation should eliminate the burden military spouses have historically faced, it is important that military installation staff, employment support staff (including at WorkSource centers), licensing agency partners, and members of licensing boards and commissions understand the new laws to help implement and communicate them to military spouses. In four years, our hope is that military spouses surveyed report that licensing is not a barrier to employment in Washington.

Timeline and Milestones

Year 1: Build a Level of Understanding

DRAFT

- Relaunch and expand the Credential Transparency Advisory Committee. Gather stakeholders to hold conversations on credential transparency.
- Establish a regular cycle of meetings and collaboration across workforce system.
- Forge agreements on common concepts.
- Establish a common vision...

Year 2: Test Ideas through Pilots

- Encourage and track pilots across Washington.
- Convene stakeholder groups to evaluate.
- Discuss more broadly with entire Credential Transparency Advisory Committee.
- Brainstorm new ideas and/or leverage existing projects.
- Discuss which projects can or should be brought to scale.
- Recommend funding opportunities - both legislative and philanthropic.

Year 3: Take Stock and Prioritize

- Leverage the existing credential database, Career Bridge
- Explore common taxonomy for an industry/sector/occupational area.
- Identify potential system partners.
- Gather feedback from higher ed/other training providers.
- Include this new taxonomy in certain sections of Career Bridge.
- Prepare mid-cycle TAP plan update.

Year 4: Expand on best practices

- Continue working with stakeholders on taxonomy and other improvements on Career Bridge.
- Continue regular check-ins with the Credential Transparency Advisory Committee.
- Brainstorm ideas for further credential transparency work for the state's next strategic workforce plan in 2028-2032.

Priority 5: Job Quality

The Job Quality strategic priority shows up here as Priority 5 but underpins each of the other four strategic priorities. Economic, societal, and ecological changes over the past few years, including rapid-fire technological advancements, have disrupted many industry sectors and caused modifications to workplace practices and the nature of work across occupations. In developing this strategic plan, there has been widespread agreement that the next generation of workforce development services should be focused on job quality. Public investments in workforce development should help workers access quality jobs, and should support businesses to develop and maintain quality jobs.

While quality is in the eye of the beholder, there are some givens, such as livable wages, worker safety, supportive benefit packages, and an opportunity to advance one's career and/or earning potential, among others. This priority represents a commitment among partners to work with workers,

employers, job seekers, community-based organizations, economic developers, advocates, and the state and local public sector to define, support and promote quality jobs. Like all workforce board initiatives, Job Quality strategic planning will use a “balanced scorecard” approach, ensuring that results benefit the workforce system’s three customers: workers/jobseekers, employers, and communities.

The impact of this work over the next four years will be seen in the following two areas:

1. Ensure pathways to living wage jobs critical to communities by:

Considering elements from the Quality Jobs Framework and evaluating for implementation strategies in order to close economic disparities for populations who have been marginalized by the Workforce Development system

- a. Establishing partnerships with industry to explore sector strategies, offering comprehensive supports for individuals with barriers to employment
2. Expand registered apprenticeships to more fields. Expanding registered apprenticeship programs can have a significant positive impact on job quality in our state. We can achieve this by exploring:
 - a. Preparatory apprenticeship programs
 - b. Community Workforce Agreements
 - c. Matching existing jobs with existing apprenticeship programs
 - d. Apprenticeship navigators that support potential employer sponsors and apprentices.

Background

Washington State has identified two existing models of defining job quality, one state and one federal, to help speed the early stages of this priority. The state model was developed by the Southwest Local Workforce Development Board (LWDB). The federal Good Jobs Principles model was created by the U.S. Departments of Labor and Commerce.

In mid-2021, Workforce Southwest Washington (WSW) was the first LWDB in WA to initiate this work, along with its Columbia-Willamette Workforce Collaborative partners (a joint Washington-Oregon partnership of seven counties on either side of the Columbia River). The Collaborative convened 19 cross-sectoral participants representing businesses, workers, labor, service providers, and government agencies located in the Portland-Southwest Washington Metropolitan area to develop and adopt a regional approach to creating quality jobs. The purpose of the Council was to (1) define a quality job for the region, (2) provide guidance on standards employers can adopt, (3) identify resources to help employers implement in accordance with their workplace needs, and (4) develop a roadmap—a framework of actions and implementation steps.

Quality Jobs Framework

The Collaborative’s [Quality Jobs Framework](#) was developed in close collaboration with the Regional Collaborative partners and informed by: (1) a multipronged research approach which included a review of existing regional case studies; (2) a nationwide scan of best practices; and (3) a series of interviews with relevant organizations and leaders throughout the region to identify core components of a quality job.

They have launched this regional effort and have built a public/private coalition to advance an equitable economic recovery. Through this Initiative, they hope to increase job quality by supporting strategies that lead to self-sufficiency wages, workplace safety, worker engagement, comprehensive benefit programs, predictable scheduling and hours, accessible hiring and onboarding, and training and advancement opportunities.

At the federal level, the U.S. Department of Labor and U.S. Department of Commerce have developed Good Jobs Principles. These principles establish the groundwork for more concrete strategies to achieve high quality jobs for all workers in our economy. There are eight principle categories:

1. Recruitment and Hiring
2. Benefits
3. Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility
4. Empowerment and Representation
5. Job Security and Working Conditions
6. Organizational Culture
7. Pay
8. Skills and Career Advancement.

Sector Strategies and Industry Partnerships

One well-regarded option to create more career pathways to quality jobs is through sector strategies. This approach incorporates a partnership of multiple employers within a critical industry that brings together education, economic development, workforce systems, and community organizations to identify and collaboratively meet the workforce needs of that industry within a regional labor market. Sector strategies are not new, and in fact were pioneered in Washington as Industry Skill Panels. Evaluations of Skill Panels and other sectoral programs from across the country demonstrated how this model moves workforce agencies from a restrictive “program administration” focus to a more strategic role building regional talent pipelines, addressing skill gaps, and creating meaningful career pathways for a range of workers in important regional industries.

The strategy is encouraged throughout the WIOA and Carl Perkins Acts. However, no new funds were added for this purpose and there is no ongoing fund source.

Industry/sector partnerships related to in-demand sectors and occupations can play a significant role in defining and improving job quality. Some strategies that may be considered for fostering such partnerships and creating pathways for individuals include:

- Develop sector-recognized credentials and certifications in partnership with industry stakeholders to ensure that workers are well-prepared for high-quality jobs.
- Offer pathways for workers to earn credentials while working, enabling career advancement and higher wages. While some entry level jobs may not fit the job quality framework, demonstrating a clear path in which an individual could advance in their career is key.
- Support stakeholders in fostering strong relationships with employers in in-demand sectors, involving them in curriculum development, job placement, and career services.
- Identify evidence-based promising practices created by employers to improve the quality of their jobs and their workplaces. Establish channels to share promising practices and lessons learned with the state’s employers, making certain to reach small and midsize businesses with limited resources.

Another way to enhance job quality in daily work is to encourage Local and State Workforce Development Boards and other agencies to incorporate job quality requirements into their procurement and subcontracts. They can support businesses who already provide quality jobs and prioritize people who have been left out of quality jobs. Another example is to prioritize funding for small businesses owned or operated by BIPOC, LGBTQ+, Veterans, women, and people with disabilities.

Critical Steps for Success

Evaluate the framework for implementation

It will be critical that we pay very close attention to equity and inclusivity to ensure the framework benefits all workers, especially those who have experienced longstanding inequities and exclusion from quality jobs. We must also ensure that the framework is sustainable and adaptable. The framework should acknowledge and address systemic inequities that create barriers to accessing quality jobs and create room for individuals to meet and exceed their economic needs so they can grow and create generational wealth, regardless of their background. This involves recognizing and actively working to dismantle discriminatory practices based on race, gender, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status. To ensure inclusivity, the framework should actively engage communities who have been marginalized by the workforce development system, including Black, Indigenous and People of Color, individuals with disabilities, immigrants, women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and those with a low socioeconomic status and others who have experienced longstanding discrimination in employment. Their perspectives and needs must be considered in the design and implementation of job quality policies.

Recognizing diverse needs, the framework should advocate for flexible work arrangements that accommodate various life circumstances, caregiving responsibilities, and individual preferences. This flexibility contributes to a more inclusive workforce by enabling individuals from different backgrounds to participate in the labor market. Equity in job quality will be achieved when racial gaps in employment and income are eliminated. Policies within the framework should focus on removing barriers to entry, ensuring fair recruitment and hiring practices, and promoting equal access to training, career advancement, and benefits.

Through a dynamic communications and educational outreach campaign, in partnership with other state agencies and groups, we hope to gain public support of using statewide quality job metrics to increase the number of good jobs in our state. Communities have a nuanced understanding of their local needs and challenges. Engaging with them helps in tailoring the job quality framework to address specific regional requirements. Their insights can ensure that the framework aligns with the realities of the community, making it more relevant and effective. When communities are involved in the development process, there's a higher likelihood of buy-in and support for the framework. This participation can range from providing feedback on proposed policies to actively engaging in implementation efforts.

In addition to community engagement this campaign will include system partners and the Washington employer community. Having the support of the employer community will be key as we devise effective strategies for implementing the job quality framework. Employer perspectives and buy-in is critical to

the success of a Job Quality initiative. Employers will help identify progress metrics that are meaningful to them. For example, by creating quality jobs has my company seen a reduction in recruitment and hiring costs? Have we reduced the amount of time that critical vacancies are open? Have we cut the cost of temp hiring because we've improved retention rates?

Community organizations, local leaders, and advocacy groups can also offer valuable input on how to best communicate, educate, and engage with the framework to ensure its successful adoption. The support of communities across the state and employers is instrumental in the successful implementation of a job quality framework. Their involvement ensures that the framework is responsive to local needs, enjoys widespread acceptance, incorporates diverse perspectives, and leads to lasting positive changes in the world of work.

A strategic stakeholder group will be established and should include community members from across Washington state, the employer community, labor, public entities, workers, local workforce development councils, and community-based organizations as well as other states and/or geographic regions, that have implemented similar frameworks. It is important that there is statewide agreement on definitions and opportunities. Involving a wide array of stakeholders ensures diverse perspectives. This diversity can include representatives from various industries, workers' unions, community organizations, government agencies, academia, and more. Each stakeholder brings unique insights and experiences to the table, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of job quality issues from multiple angles leading to a shared vision for the state.

Different stakeholders have different priorities and concerns related to job quality. By involving a broad range of stakeholders, the framework can be designed to address a wider spectrum of issues comprehensively. For instance, input from workers' unions might emphasize fair wages and working conditions, while employers might focus on meeting their specific industry standards and operational feasibility. A holistic approach that considers these diverse viewpoints leads to a more balanced and effective framework. Various stakeholders possess unique resources, expertise, and networks that can be leveraged for effective implementation. For example, involving community organizations can help in reaching out to marginalized or underrepresented groups, while businesses might offer insights into practical implementation strategies within workplaces. Utilizing these resources maximizes the chances of successful implementation and adoption. This inclusive approach of involving a diverse group of stakeholders ensures that the framework is well-rounded, addressing the needs and concerns of all stakeholders involved in the world of work and increases the adoption rate.

One specific subgroup that should be integrated into the statewide framework stakeholder group is the U.S. Department of Labor's Job Quality Academy. This group is designed and operated in partnership with Jobs for the Future (JFF) and other national partners. It presents a unique opportunity to help the workforce system focus on enhancing good jobs and opportunities for workers. The Academy seeks to provide teams with the knowledge and expertise to build the principles of a good job into their policies and programs.

The Job Quality Academy's Washington Team Lead is the Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King County, with strong support from the Washington Workforce Association and with core team members from the following organizations: MLK County Labor Council, Washington State Employment Security Department, Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, Washington State Department of Commerce.

The above-mentioned Columbia-Willamette Workforce Collaborative would also be a natural fit to join the stakeholder group given their experience developing a regional quality jobs framework in Washington State.

After the framework is set by the group and metrics are determined, it will be critical to start collecting data and research so that we can start to see evidence-based insights into the current state of job quality within the state. By collecting and analyzing relevant data we can help policymakers gain a clearer understanding of existing challenges, trends, and areas that require improvement, and therefore make informed decisions about service and policy reforms. Robust data collection can also help identify priority areas for intervention. We should be able to pinpoint specific sectors, industries, or geographic regions where job quality issues are most prevalent. This targeted approach ensures that efforts and resources are directed towards addressing the most pressing needs, maximizing the impact of the framework.

By establishing baseline data and setting clear metrics, we can track progress over time. Regular reporting and sharing of this information can enable stakeholders to assess whether the framework's goals are being achieved and make necessary adjustments if needed. Moreover, we can use data and research findings to craft policy recommendations that are grounded in evidence and have a higher chance of success. Collecting, reporting and sharing data provides the necessary foundation for evidence-based policymaking, monitoring progress, fostering transparency, and creating an environment conducive to continuous improvement in job quality standards.

By educating employers and the public about the benefits of job quality, a raised level of awareness can encourage participation, and may create a culture of support for the overall initiative. Through engagement with marginalized communities to gather input and involve them in the development of the framework this can help create more inclusive strategies for implementing data collection and analysis tools to track job quality metrics, assess economic disparities, and identify areas for improvement.

Data-driven insights can inform policy changes and interventions. Collaboration with government agencies, nonprofit organizations, labor unions, and industry groups would be needed to implement and enforce the framework. Partnerships can provide resources, support, and a unified effort to close economic disparities. Ensuring that job security and opportunities for career advancement are embedded in the framework to give workers a clear path to progress within the organization.

Establishing clear standards for wages and benefits within the framework is key. This can include minimum wage requirements, access to healthcare, retirement plans, and paid leave, ensuring that workers are not left behind. A job quality framework can include guidelines and standards for job postings, hiring practices, and promotions that promote equal access to employment opportunities for all workers. This can help reduce discrimination in hiring and retention.

Efforts such as these can help better tell the story of current state of job quality in Washington and identify needed focus areas to ensure representation, inclusion, equity, and prosperity. Not only recognizing strengths but opportunities for improvement are critical for strategic planning. The importance of creating opportunities for all workers to enter the workforce, be a part of a team or cause, thrive versus survive, and restore hope to make positive change and a better life is

immeasurable. This strategic plan will provide a roadmap for employers and realistic pathways for those pursuing employment opportunities that have previously not available/accessible.

Comprehensive support for individuals with barriers to employment

Many individuals face barriers to employment that can include access to child care, transportation, affordable housing, educational opportunities, etc. Providing comprehensive support for individuals facing these barriers is vital to an inclusive workforce. The following components are important to consider as part of a quality jobs framework:

- A focus on working with employers to help them make changes to make their jobs good jobs. Working with employers to acknowledge the importance of flexible work hours, remote work options, or part-time positions can all contribute to a larger number of quality jobs across the state.
- A focus on awareness of training programs that can help individuals acquire the necessary skills for specific job roles or to advance in their current roles. This can include technical skills, soft skills, and job-specific certifications. Additionally, mentorship is a great way to support individuals with barriers. Mentors or job coaches can work with individuals to provide ongoing guidance, feedback, and support as they look for their next opportunity or adapt to a new role.
- Inclusion of wrap-around services like transportation services or subsidies to help individuals with limited mobility access the workplace, especially if they have difficulty with public transportation are key. Offering childcare and elder care support by assistance or subsidies for individuals who have caregiving responsibilities, enabling them to balance work and family obligations effectively.
- The inclusion of mental health and counseling services: When systems offer access to counseling or mental health services to support employees dealing with mental health challenges or other emotional issues, this can break down barriers to employment. Job placement services can provide personalized job matching services that take into account an individual's skills, interests, and specific employment barriers. This may involve working with local employers who are open to hiring individuals with diverse needs.
- A focus on partnering with vocational rehabilitation agencies that specialize in assisting individuals with disabilities and other barriers to employment in finding suitable jobs.
- A commitment to equal access for all employees to similar benefits, advancement opportunities, and professional development programs.

Expanding registered apprenticeship programs to more fields

Apprenticeship program expansion is another important component of a quality jobs framework

Registered apprenticeship programs come with a progressive wage scale, which means that as apprentices gain experience and skills, their wages increase. This can lead to higher earnings compared to non-apprenticeship entry-level positions in the same field. Many registered apprenticeship programs offer benefits such as health insurance, retirement plans, and paid time off, which contribute to overall job quality. Apprenticeships can help reduce income inequality by providing individuals with a pathway to well-paying jobs without requiring a traditional college degree.

Spotlight: Public Workforce

Content is pending.

The development of preparatory apprenticeship programs is one of the best ways to formally create a connection between people who are interested in a field and the industry that needs people. One of the requirements for a preparatory apprenticeship program is to have a Memorandum of Understanding or other written agreement with an apprenticeship program that spells out a specific benefit to the preparatory participant. Apprenticeship preparatory programs also create inroads for women and people of color who want to pursue a career in construction. 81% of Washington's Registered Apprenticeship programs are in the Building and Construction Trades.

Community Workforce Agreements or Project Labor Agreements are another tool in expanding apprenticeships. In these agreements contractors must have a certain percentage of apprentices on the job in order to successfully bid on a given project. Of those apprentices that are hired there are also priority hire requirements that give preference to applicants who are preparatory program graduates.

In developing new preparatory programs, one strategy to consider is matching existing jobs with existing apprenticeship programs. Existing examples include the AJAC Manufacturing Academy or the Machinist Institute Career Accelerator preparatory programs, and also manufacturing jobs within Correctional Industries. Credit for work experience could be given and a preparatory apprenticeship certificate could be issued with direct or preferred placement into existing apprentice eligible positions. As another example, there is a robust textile industry within Correctional Industries and there is an "Industrial Sewing Machine Operator" apprenticeship in Mukilteo who may be a willing training or employer partner.

Expanding existing partnerships is another good way to increase registered apprenticeship opportunities. Community-based organizations like Apprenticeship and Non-traditional Employment for Women, Seattle Urban League, the Regional Pre-Apprenticeship Collaboration, and other preparatory apprenticeship organizations can be great partners to create consistent training standards, and equitable processes.

Potential metrics and accountability

It is important to set baseline measurements and a regular data collection schedule to track changes over time. Examples of important measurements:

- Compensation /wages can be measured to show the average increase in wages over time and analyze gender and racial pay gaps.
- Career Development can be measured by employee participation in training programs, tracking the number of internal promotions and assessing the acquisition of new skills and competencies.
- Diversity and Inclusion can be monitored for the increased representation of underrepresented groups within the workforce using job quality framework dimensions and metrics.
- Increased job quality
- Fewer people in poverty
- Employers have the talent they need
- Increased engagement on job quality from legislators, state agencies, and the Governor's Office
- Increased worker economic mobility and stability

Timeline and Milestones

Year 1:

- Existing frameworks and potential solutions to help guide setting the statewide framework will be explored in 2024. In 2024/25 we will engage with various stakeholders, including workforce associations, employees, employers, education leaders, unions and industry associations to gather input on job quality issues. It should be noted that the framework should at a minimum include employee basic needs: pay and benefits, consistent and predictable schedule/adequate hours, clear and fair advancement to higher pay/career paths, job security and safety. It will also be important to acknowledge that workforce culture has changed, and it will be important to work with stakeholders to explore and innovate around how this new culture can be embraced.

Year 2:

- By early to mid-2025 the dimensions/components/indicators that will be used for Washington's statewide job quality framework will be determined.
- In conjunction with the determination of dimensions/components/indicators, metrics will also be developed to measure each dimension/component/indicator of job quality. It will also be important at this time to establish benchmarks or standards for each metric to provide a basis for comparison. One metric that should be included is wages as we need to be able to determine how many jobs are paying a family sustaining wage or above and how many are not and if these numbers shift over time as we expand the state's knowledge of the quality jobs framework.
- In years two and three we also aim to be able to start collecting relevant data to assess the current state of job quality across the state. This data may come from surveys, employee feedback, HR records, or external sources. It is also our goal to use the framework at this point to prioritize policy changes, investments, and initiatives that will have the most significant impact on improving job quality.

Year 3:

- A milestone activity to occur in year three is communication of the state's commitment to job quality and the actions being taken to improve it. A roll out of the framework to local entities for adoption and use encouraging them to assess, validate and implement the framework for their use will also occur in year three. This rollout may include a job quality toolkit to assist local entities with implementation.

Year 4:

- A formal assessment is targeted to take place in year four.

- The overarching goal that we would like to see met by the end of year four is more quality jobs across the state.

Alignment with Federal Funding

The Washington State Workforce Board (WSWB) will strategically position its vision to maximize the transformative potential of federal investments provided through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), CHIPS and Science Act (CHIPS), and Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). This alignment will catalyze advancements across critical sectors including infrastructure, digital equity, clean energy, and advanced manufacturing, ensuring that the workforce development initiatives are responsive to the contemporary needs of these industries and are in sync with our mission to foster a robust, inclusive economic environment.

III. Strategic Goals and Sector-Specific Focus

Goal 1: Infrastructure Enhancement for Workforce Development

- Develop training programs in collaboration with transportation and infrastructure sectors, focusing on upskilling workers in sustainable construction methods, smart infrastructure maintenance, and transportation logistics in response to IIJA opportunities.
- Align workforce development initiatives with the surface transportation funding provided under IIJA, identifying new job roles and creating targeted training modules that support the construction and maintenance of green infrastructure projects.

Goal 2: Digital Literacy and Inclusion

- In accordance with the Digital Equity Act (DEA), create a statewide initiative to improve digital literacy, focusing on bridging the technology skills gap and enabling access to digital resources for marginalized communities.
- Enhance digital literacy and inclusion in workforce training programs, integrating digital skills across all levels of workforce education to ensure that all Washingtonians can participate fully in a digitally driven economy.

Goal 3: Clean Energy and Manufacturing

- Leverage CHIPS and IRA investments to build a talent pipeline for the semiconductor manufacturing industry, developing specialized training programs in microelectronics, nanotechnology, and related fields.
- Emphasize apprenticeship and skills training in alignment with IRA requirements, focusing on renewable energy sectors, battery technology, and energy efficiency industries to meet the growing demand for a skilled clean energy workforce.

IV. State Strategy and Actionable Steps

Strategy 1: Sector Partnerships and Career Pathways

- Establish sector partnerships with key industries vital to Washington’s economy, such as infrastructure, technology, and clean energy, fostering collaboration between employers, labor groups, educational institutions, and government agencies.
- Design comprehensive career pathways in coordination with federal investment strategies, ensuring that these pathways provide clear, attainable steps for individuals to secure employment in high-demand sectors, with a special emphasis on transitioning workers and underserved populations.

Strategy 2: Aligning Education and Training

- Align educational and training curricula with the needs of industries poised to benefit from federal investments, ensuring that programs are relevant, competency-based, and lead to recognized credentials.
- Develop inclusive training strategies to support individuals with barriers to employment, integrating support services such as career counseling, job placement assistance, and connections to social services to facilitate equitable access to emerging job opportunities.

Strategy 3: Stakeholder Collaboration

- Cultivate robust collaborations with a wide spectrum of stakeholders, tapping into local expertise, resources, and networks to create a synergistic workforce development environment.
- Establish Sector Partnership Committees that will serve as advisory and action-oriented bodies, driving the integration of strategic initiatives across workforce programs, and ensuring program alignment with state economic goals and federal investment opportunities.

Community Forums Process Summary

Guided by the TAP Plan’s mission to empower all Washingtonians, the state embarked on a statewide outreach effort to gather valuable insights using various methods. Washington State made a concerted effort to collect feedback from a diverse range of perspectives across the state to ensure the 2024-2028 TAP Plan accurately reflects the workforce needs of all distinct communities. To accomplish this, the state utilized surveys, in-person Community Forums, Virtual Feedback sessions, one-on-one interviews, and attended third-party hosted events. Local Workforce Development Councils, whose deep understanding of their communities’ unique strengths and challenges proved essential partners. Through this comprehensive outreach, connections were made with a remarkable array of passionate individuals statewide who harbor a profound love for and belief in their communities and a commitment to the expansion and fortification of the state’s workforce. The diversity of voices and breadth of feedback gathered provides a strong foundation upon which an impactful, equitable TAP Plan can be built.

The main themes that emerged from the community input are provided earlier in the document.

Workforce Development System Stakeholder Survey

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In October 2023 the Workforce Board published an online survey aimed at gathering broad stakeholder input about Washington’s publicly funded workforce system.

The survey was announced to the Washington news media and shared frequently with partners and stakeholders, electronically and in person at a variety of public meetings. The survey was also shared widely on the agency’s social media accounts, featured prominently on the website, and included in staff email signature blocks.

Survey Goal

The following introduction highlights the connection between the survey and Talent and Prosperity for All:

The Workforce Board seeks your input as we develop the strategic plan for workforce development services in Washington. Workforce development services help people find, prepare for, and maintain employment. The plan, called “Talent and Prosperity for All” or “TAP,” provides the roadmap for improving services over the next four years. It also helps employers find workers with the skills they need to stay competitive. We’re interested in learning what you think about the public workforce development system and how it can be improved. This system manages about \$1.3 billion in state and federal funds each year to train, educate and support nearly 480,000 workers and students.

Response

The survey received 542 responses as of Jan. 18, 2024.

Highlights include:

- 252 respondents have had experience working within the public workforce development system
- 173 respondents currently represent employers
- 33 respondents have accessed public workforce services as a job seeker

Survey Highlights

This survey supports the urgency around hiring and workforce issues frequently discussed by Washington employers.

Results include:

- 93% of employers who took the survey say it is difficult to hire and retain workers
- The severity of the recruitment and retention challenge was reported as 3.9 on a 5-point Likert scale
- 28% of employers hire from the publicly funded workforce system
- 64% of employers found it difficult to navigate publicly funded workforce services in the past

Top services used by employer respondents

Employers reported using the following services:

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1. Recruiting Job Seekers
2. Job Fairs
3. Jobs Skills Program

Also, 52% of employers found services ineffective.

Respondents that identified as jobseekers

The survey also captured experiences of job seekers, or those looking for work.

Results include:

- 57% of job seekers know how to find public services to help them find a job or get a better job
- 32% of job seekers have used public services to find a job or get a better job
- 60% found these public services difficult to navigate
- 60% found these services, when accessed, effective

The survey also included several opportunities for open-ended responses to questions. Those responses are included in this attachment.

Two notable highlights from these written comments refer to affordable housing and childcare as challenges facing stakeholders.

The appendix contains the responses to the open-ended question from the survey.

Workforce Board Role in Talent and Prosperity for All Plan

The Workforce Board will play a critical role in maintaining the collaborative momentum over the four years of the plan. The Board's mix of business, labor, and government make it well suited to help guide the necessary collaborations to maintain focus on the strategic priorities and respond to all the emergent challenges of the next four years.

The Board will adopt the following procedures to help ensure that momentum continues:

- Assign Board members to each strategic priority to serve as sponsors for the work. Include strategic priority review in each Board meeting agenda.
- Create a dashboard to track progress on the strategic priorities.
- Work closely with agencies and other partners to garner support for necessary workgroups, advisory councils, and other activities engaged in the strategic priorities.
- Commit to an environment of continuous improvement including the ability to fail, regroup, and try again.
- Hold to rigorous systemwide performance accountability including cross agency evaluation and research.

The first year of the plan will focus on building the workplan to implement the above commitments.