

Northwest Workforce Council

Serving: Whatcom, Skagit, Island, & San Juan Counties

2009 – 2011

Strategic Plan

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Northwest Workforce Council

Whatcom, Skagit, Island, & San Juan Counties

The 2009 – 2011 Strategic Plan

April 2009

Executive Summary

The Northwest Workforce Council, in consultation with local elected officials, oversees the one-stop (WorkSource) system programs and WIA Title 1-B employment and training programs, coordinates local area workforce development services, and provides expertise and demand-driven workforce services to employers and job seekers in Whatcom, Skagit, Island, and San Juan Counties. The members of the Council are charting an important course to help our local businesses and communities realize a more prosperous future.

The strategic plan is a “living” document, particularly so in a time of volatility and uncertainty in the economy and a business environment under considerable strain. The Council and its Partners will consult it often, revise our course as necessary, and mark the milestones as we work to realize our shared vision.

The Strategic Plan for 2009-2011 assesses local industry and business talent needs and sets forth strategies for the local workforce development system consistent with the state strategic workforce system goals in “*High Skills, High Wages*” and in the Governor’s economic development plan for the state, “*The Next Washington, Growing Jobs and Income in a Global Economy*”. It describes how the Council will continue work already initiated to enhance services and outcomes for customers, including the pursuit of operating efficiencies within the local workforce development system.

The strategic plan reflects a deep commitment by the Council to the economic vitality of the community and a confidence in the ability to redesign and re-energize the workforce development system to meet the evolving demands of both local and global economies.

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Northwest Workforce Council
Whatcom, Skagit, Island & San Juan Counties

The 2009-2011 Updated Strategic Plan

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INTRODUCTION

The Northwest Workforce Council is a 27-member policy and oversight entity responsible for organizing a comprehensive, region-wide response to the challenges of building a highly skilled workforce. As defined in the Workforce Investment Act, the Council maintains majority private-sector representation to ensure the voices of local businesses, as key customers of the system, inform policy-setting and decision making. The Council works as an equal partner with local elected officials.

The Northwest Workforce Council strategically oversees the quality and design of the local workforce development system; comprised of all of the public and private investments and activities undertaken to ensure individuals are employable and have jobs, and simultaneously to ensure companies can find and develop the skilled workforce they need to be successful in the world marketplace.

Vision

To create a robust, sustainable, regional economy.

Mission

The preparation of a skilled, successful workforce aligned to the needs of business and industry.

The Council and Its Mandate

In 1998, Congress passed the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) to provide more flexibility in addressing local priorities and customer needs within the workforce development system. It was designed to be:

- **Market Based.** Driven by the demands of customers, particularly employer customers, employment and training programs should meet an identified need.
- **Comprehensive.** The system as a whole offers a wide array of services to those in need, whatever their need. It should provide a common assessment strategy, access to relevant labor market information, and individualized service plans.
- **Outcome Focused.** The *system* is driven by the Council's comprehensive plan based on the needs of the local labor market and the *system's* overall performance to meet outcome-based goals. Each component programs' measurement of concrete results contributes to the performance of the workforce *system* but they do not define that *system* in and of themselves.
- **Quality Conscious.** The system provides services of the highest quality. Feedback from customers is measured and acted upon to drive

- improvements in individual programs. A continuous improvement management system has been adopted and is used throughout.
- **Customer Friendly.** The system (and all its parts) should be easily accessible, easily navigable, flexible, and adaptable to changing demand. It must be well known and “transparent” to all its potential customers.
 - **Coordinated.** The system management and oversight is independent of any single program or service provider. A single set of strategic goals, plans and objectives, standards and evaluation criteria apply to all the various component programs. These help keep service providers aware of and focused on *overall* service quality and *overall* customer satisfaction, and working together as an integrated system rather than as a collection of free-standing entities.

The establishment of local, business majority-led Workforce Councils in partnership with Local Elected Officials, gives Councils a strategic role and broad systemic responsibility for planning and overseeing the complete range of job training and employment programs referred to as the workforce development system.

The workforce development system is comprised of those programs that use private and/or public funds to prepare workers for employment, upgrade worker skills, retrain workers, or provide employment or retention services for workers or employers. The system includes, but is not limited to:

- Secondary vocational education, including activities funded under the Federal Carl D. Perkins Vocational-Technical Education Act of 1998
- Community and Technical College Vocational Education Programs, including activities funded under the Federal Carl D. Perkins Vocational-Technical Education Act of 1998
- Private career schools and private college vocational programs
- Employer-sponsored training
- Youth, Adult, and Dislocated Worker Programs funded by Title I-B of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998
- Work-Related Adult Basic Education and Literacy Programs, including Programs funded under the Federal Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (WIA Title II)
- Activities funded under the Federal Wagner-Peyser Act (WIA Title III)
- Apprenticeships
- The One-Stop (WorkSource) Career Center System (WIA Sec. 121(b))
- The State Job Skills Program
- Worker Retraining Program or any successor program

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- Work-related components of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program (WIA Title IV)
- Services provided by the Department of Services for the Blind
- Programs offered by private and public nonprofit organizations that provide job training or work-related adult literacy services
- May include other local, State, and Federally funded workforce development programs; and
- May include other privately funded workforce development programs and initiatives.

THE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM TODAY

Framework for Doing Business

The *business* of integrated workforce development is strengthening the connection between responding to employer needs and providing qualified job seekers. Integration of services is seen as a way to respond to customers' expectations that access to jobs and qualified applicants should be convenient and user friendly.

In its broadest sense, workforce development is about:

- Ensuring a K-12 education system that equips students with skills to excel
- Developing a system of training providers that responds effectively to employer needs
- Ensuring a postsecondary education system that works closely with business
- Promoting the importance of lifelong learning
- Increasing employer-sponsored training and education opportunities for workers

The Council, in multiple productive partnerships, has a systematic approach to workforce development programs in the Northwest Workforce Investment Area comprised of Whatcom, Skagit, Island, and San Juan counties.

The Council, working with local elected officials, oversees a Memorandum of Understanding between the Council and workforce development partners regarding the operation of the integrated workforce delivery system in the local area.

The Council also monitors the development and operation of one-stop career centers (WorkSource) which serve as convenient access points to the workforce development system.

The Council is a powerful mechanism for comprehensive, community-wide workforce development planning and coordination. The Council promotes the closer integration of education, training and employment efforts coupled closely with economic revitalization strategies. The Council manages a workforce development system that provides funding, direction, and a commitment of support where services have fundamental characteristics which:

- Are focused on the customer, while organized to meet the needs of job seekers, students and other program participants, workers, and businesses.
- Are designed so that people can move easily among and between programs and the workplace.
- Meet the needs of learners, including those who have been underserved in the past because of racial, ethnic, or cultural differences, gender, disability, or learning style.

- Provide customized support services such as career counseling, childcare and financial aid to those who need them.
- Are competency based using Workforce Skill Standards and Performance Expectations (PEs) so that all students and trainees are able to master the skills and knowledge they require in as much or as little time as they need to do so.
- Are coordinated with private sector training programs, public education entities, social and other services, and economic development strategies.
- Rely on accurate and current labor market information so that people acquire the skills and knowledge local employers need to remain competitive and productive.
- Provide students and workers with a foundation of basic skills as well as the higher levels of skills and knowledge to equip them as lifelong learners.
- Are accountable for results and committed to using outcome measures to continuously improve quality.

The Workforce Development System in the Northwest

The Northwest Workforce Development Area developed functional partnerships in 1992 in Whatcom County and 1994 in Skagit, San Juan, and Island Counties. The ongoing objective is the integration of services across programs and across providers. Integration of services required a partnership be established among key organizations committed to a shared vision of an integrated, customer-focused, service delivery system. Integrated service is a mechanism designed to connect workforce development services for the customer, which increases customer access and helps to ensure enhanced outcomes. The system is continuously improved to be both accountable and results-driven. This Partnership structure functions as a one-stop partners' advisory council.

Northwest Partnership members currently include:

- Northwest Workforce Council
- Employment Security Department
- Whatcom Community College
- Bellingham Technical College
- Skagit Valley College
- Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
- Economic Development Association of Skagit County
- Skagit County Community Action Agency
- Job Corps
- OIC of Washington

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As the work evolves and the scope of design activities effect additional community stakeholders, the Partnership has restructured its processes and increased outreach and accessibility to stakeholders. The Northwest Partnership actively engages with the following community stakeholders, among others:

- Labor and Apprenticeship Organizations
- K-12 Educational Agencies including:
 - Whatcom County TechPrep Consortium
 - Skagit, Island, San Juan PrepWork Consortium
- The Opportunity Council
- Lummi, Nooksack, Upper Skagit & Swinomish Indian Nations
- Division of Child Support (DSHS)
- Bellingham/Whatcom Chamber of Commerce
- Bellingham/Whatcom Economic Development Council
- Center for Economic and Business Research (WWU)
- Center for Economic Vitality (WWU)
- Business Resource Center (SVC)
- Island County Economic Development Council
- San Juan County Economic Development Council
- The Ports of Bellingham and Skagit County
- Washington State Labor and Industries
- Washington State Department of Commerce (formerly Community Trade and Economic Development)
- Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE)

Since inception, the Partnership has voluntarily established a governance structure through a team-based management approach built on the fundamental principles of reengineering for quality and continuous improvement. The governance structure is designed to hold partners accountable, empower mid-managers and line staff with decision-making authority for the design and management of the system, and to manage both the performance and continuous quality improvement of the system.

The Northwest Area's strong workforce development system includes three community colleges, a technical college, apprenticeship training, twenty-two school districts with secondary vocational programs, three one stop centers (WorkSource), the Friday Harbor Career Center, a Job Corps Center, and a variety of other state and local programs for adults and youth needing assistance entering or transitioning into employment.

Linking Workforce Development and Economic Development

America's economic future depends on the strength of our workforce. Our businesses need skilled workers to continue producing goods and services characterized by innovation, knowledge and quality, characteristics which provide U.S. firms a competitive edge in the global marketplace. If we are to sustain the advantage, we must build a workforce enterprise that: improves the productivity and competitiveness of

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all workers and employers; builds the skills needed for quality jobs; supports the workers in managing their careers; and is supported by public and private investment. The U.S. Department of Labor has acknowledged workforce development as the single most important component of economic development in a region's economy. Absent a skilled workforce, business cannot grow and prosper.

The Council and its economic development counterparts (EDCs, Ports, ADOs, local governments, CTED) have increased their level of collaboration and identified shared goals in support of key industry clusters. The communication link between economic development agencies and the Council continues to strengthen and provides the vital information necessary to make coordinated adjustments to services and investment strategies that yield results. Communication and information sharing forums include, but are not limited to; regional industry summits, Center of Excellence advisory boards, labor market data and economic analysis, joint board membership, collaborative strategic planning, just-in-time consultations, coordinated economic publications, etc. Workforce and economic development entities throughout the region work in partnership to ensure the full range of system tools and expertise is available to support workers' talent development and business' recruitment, growth and retention strategies.

Nowhere are the area's collaboration and linkages with workforce and economic development better symbolized than in the recently funded High Skills, High Wage Strategic Fund project awarded to the Council, *Washington Intracoastal Marine and Manufacturing Industries Alliance*. The twelve county regional plan's Executive Team is comprised of nine members representing industry leadership, WDC directors, and lead ADO directors who are responsible for jointly managing the partnership and ensuring it achieves appropriate milestones.

A review of the workforce development programs and services indicates the area has thoughtfully targeted its employment and training resources toward developing a skilled workforce for a number of its key industries and sectors. These include health and allied services, manufacturing (including marine and advanced manufacturing), and construction and building trades, including energy conservation and generation. The area continues to respond to the need for a skilled workforce in the rapidly changing workplace. Training in technical areas including: information technology, healthcare, welding, process and manufacturing technology, and construction have each increased in direct response to developing employer and market needs.

Program and Service Overview

The following is a brief overview of the types of programs and services offered by the workforce development system in the Northwest area. These programs and activities reflect resources available to train, upgrade, and assist the jobseeker in obtaining employment while providing the employing community a qualified workforce to retain and grow viable business and industrial development.

Training Institutions

One of the strengths of the Northwest area is the number of two-year and certificate programs offered through Bellingham Technical, Whatcom Community, Skagit Valley, and Northwest Indian Colleges. Western Washington University has a variety of baccalaureate and market-driven post-baccalaureate programs. The presence of technology is not only evident in the types of training programs offered but in the method of delivering education through distance learning via telecourses, computers, interactive video and teleconferences, and hybrid models.

Bellingham Technical College

Bellingham Technical College (BTC) offers over 34 two-year degree programs and 57 certificate programs. Eighty five percent of the College's programs focus on professional technical careers. Recent program additions reflect the region's high-demand industries including the expansion of health and allied occupations training: Dental Hygiene, Radiologic Technology, Surgical Technology, Associate Degree in Nursing (LPN to RN), Veterinary Technology and advanced manufacturing and construction: Process Technology, Instrumentation, Electromechanical Technology, Aluminum Welding, and Pipefitting. The College is a State Board for Community and Technical College designated Center of Excellence in Process and Control Technology serving the State needs of the petroleum, power generating and food processing manufacturing sectors. BTC has the only State supported Instrumentation and Process Control programs. BTC is working to develop more flexible delivery options including online and hybrid courses and providing alternative program times. Recently BTC was awarded a Dept. of Labor grant to expand Advanced Manufacturing in twelve counties working with three other two-year colleges. The College has been at the forefront of developing Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (IBEST) programs designed for non-native speakers of English and/or students with low basic skills who wish to enter professional technical programs and career ladders. IBEST programs are approved in Health, Transportation, Pastry, Industrial Technology, Early Childhood, and Business and Computer Information Systems.

Whatcom Community College

Whatcom Community College is a comprehensive two-year college serving over 7,000 students. The College offers associate degrees in academic transfer, general studies, and professional technical areas, as well as opportunities to complete high school and take classes for personal enrichment and basic skills. In the College's emerging professional and technical programs, Whatcom offers 14 two-year degrees, 15 certificates, and 4 training endorsements (short-term training). The College works hard to meet community and industry needs. Recent program additions reflecting the high demand industry needs of the region include: Office Professional/Tech Support Specialist Certificate; Retail Management Certificate; Hospitality and Tourism Business Management Degree and Certificate. The College has expanded their RN Nursing Program and was just awarded a grant to create a part-time, online RN Nursing Program to meet the high demand for nurses. This online, part-time option is also available in the Physical Therapist Assistant Program. Students have newly expanded short-term certificate options in the Massage Practitioner, Health Unit Coordinator, and

Nursing Assistant programs. Whatcom offers IBEST pathways for certificates in Medical Front Office Reception, Medical Billing and Coding, Medical Assisting, Nursing Assistant, and Accounting Support Specialist. Non-credit courses are available for short-term training through the College's Community Education Programs.

Skagit Valley College

Skagit Valley College (SVC) offers 23 two-year degree programs and 43 certificate programs. New and expanded programs reflect the high demand industries of the area and include: Water/Wastewater Treatment Technician Certificate, participation in the Radiologic Technology Training Consortium, increased associate nursing training capacity, and designation as the Marine Manufacturing and Technology Center of Excellence for Washington State. In response to local employer skill needs, a Marine Aluminum Welding program has started and the College has expanded offerings in advanced boat manufacturing processes. The College continues its services to ESL populations and created an Automotive Light Maintenance certificate targeting English language learners. There are established Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) programs in Early Childhood Education, Welding Technology, Patient Registration Specialist, and Nursing Assistant Certified. The College continues to expand opportunities for ESL and ABE/GED populations by creating I-BEST programs which provide extra academic and support services to students pursuing vocational training. To increase opportunities for youth and adult students, Skagit Valley College will co-locate degree programs with the Northwest Career and Technical Academy in Anacortes and at the Mount Vernon Campus.

Northwest Indian College

The Northwest Indian College (NWIC) provides post-secondary educational opportunities for native peoples and other area residents. An accredited 2-year tribal college, NWIC is located on the Lummi Reservation in Whatcom County, with extension sites at the Upper Skagit and Swinomish Reservations in Skagit County. It houses the National Indian Center for Marine Environmental Research and Education. The college offers two year and transfer degree programs in; Associate of Arts and Science in Native American Studies, Oksale Native Education, Chemical Dependency Studies, and Life Sciences. The Northwest Indian College Training Institute provides certificated professional development and vocational training courses in an extensive variety of areas. Academic, vocational, continuing, and adult basic education is provided in an environment that recognizes and nurtures students' cultural identity. The college also provides business assistance.

Apprenticeship Training

Training for apprentices is offered at Bellingham Technical College and Skagit Valley College. Examples of courses offered include: Industrial Trade Math; Basic Mechanics for Electricians; Welding; Blueprint Reading; Basic Electricity for Mechanics, Millwrights and Non-Electricians; Apprentice Painter; and Apprentice Carpentry. The Electrical, Plumbing, Pipefitting, and Carpentry Technical Training Centers for joint apprenticeship programs are located in Skagit County. Each summer the area participates in recruiting

for special programs available to involve youth in apprenticeship vocational exploration in the area of construction.

Western Washington University

The area's workforce benefits from the presence of a nationally recognized institution of higher education. Continuing education and lifelong learning programs at Western Washington University (WWU) are particularly beneficial to incumbent workers and those seeking to upgrade skills. A variety of post-baccalaureate opportunities are offered in the education field. Western also offers technical and professional degrees well suited to the northwest area's needs; plastics technology, recreation management, computer science, business management, and the physical sciences. The University's Advanced Materials Science and Engineering Center is engaged with public and private stakeholders in support of the Intracoastal regional economy in marine and advanced manufacturing. Western is one of the partners in the Marine Trades Innovation Partnership Zone established with the Port of Bellingham. .

Additionally, WWU offers programs during the year for youth that serve as preparatory coursework for a wide-variety of future job requirements and interests. These programs cover academic enrichment, leadership training, and understanding private enterprise.

Strategic planning requires accurate and useful information about the workforce and the local economy. This area's workforce system benefits from a strong working relationship with WWU's Center for Economic and Business Research (CEBR), part of the College of Business and Economics (CBE). The Center assists by providing economic and business research activities for the University and for the region's workforce and economic development partners with:

- Econometric model building and dissemination of regional forecasts.
- Economic data base management for local, state, regional (including Alberta and British Columbia), national, and international economic activity.
- Construction and dissemination of an index of economic indicators for the local economy.
- Continued study of business cycles in Washington State, British Columbia and Alberta.

Secondary Vocational and Tech-Prep Programs

Among the four counties, there are 22 school districts. Additionally, the Stanwood-Camano School District serves Camano Island (Island County) students and offers a comprehensive academic program as well as a strong vocational-technical program, and an alternative school that provides for students who benefit from a nontraditional educational experience. Each of the school districts has vocational education programs to prepare youth for entry into the workforce.

Almost all have articulated agreements with the two-year colleges in the area. Skagit Valley College, Whatcom Community College and Bellingham Technical College

partner with secondary school districts through two tech-prep consortiums that offer programs designed to integrate high school and college vocational programs allowing students opportunity to earn a two-year college degree or certificate based on competencies. The tech-prep programs develop skills needed to work in a technologically oriented society by emphasizing math, science, and communications. Examples of tech-prep programs include the Whatcom County Tech Prep Consortium's Health Care Services Program offered in the Whatcom County school districts and the PrepWork Consortium's Manufacturing Program for Skagit, Island and San Juan School Districts. In addition, the Whatcom Tech Prep Consortium's Construction Academy prepares young people to explore and begin pre-apprenticeship activities in all areas of construction.

Many of the schools in the area are participating in educational or career pathways. These programs integrate vocational and academic learning in educational or career pathways related to large occupational fields including local high-demand sectors in health, construction and manufacturing.

One Stop Service Delivery System (WorkSource)

The One-Stop Career Development System (WorkSource) is the trusted source of employment and training services in the region. A comprehensive network of state and local programs meets customer needs and offers seamless, high quality service. A common look and feel to the system make it familiar and easily accessed wherever it is located. Currently, the Northwest has three certified one stop centers: WorkSource Whatcom located in Bellingham, WorkSource Whidbey located in Oak Harbor and WorkSource Skagit located in Mount Vernon. A well-appointed Career Center in Friday Harbor serves San Juan County.

Services offered to jobseekers at these sites include all core services including; labor market information, job counseling, job matching, and unemployment information and referral. At the one-stop centers, more intensive services including comprehensive assessments, individual counseling, and employment planning may be provided based upon the determination of need and satisfaction of any eligibility requirements. For those unable to find employment through self-service and individual counseling, training may be available.

Business services offered through the One-Stop (WorkSource) system in the Northwest include each of the nine Washington State core services for business as well as intensive and fee-based services which address unmet need. Business services are designed to provide employers' access to job seekers that match the business' talent needs and to develop demand-driven training for their current workforce. (See also Key Industry Panels.)

Efforts to improve integration of Wagner-Peyser services with the area's workforce system, as well as improve the reemployment outcomes of unemployed workers are system quality goals. WorkSource integration initiatives funded, in part, by the PY 2008

10% grant are underway in the WorkSource Northwest Partnership. The region's funding proposal of March 2009 outlined a plan of action which includes; enhancements to facilities and furnishings to advance the region's integration design, research and exploration of assessment and skill upgrade options, hardware procurement, staff competency assessment and skill development, business services and WorkSource integration, as well as application of the principles of lean and value stream mapping. These activities will be managed through existing Partnership teams.

Programs Funded Under the Work Force Investment Act, Title I-B

These programs include services for adults, low income youth and dislocated workers that are delivered through the area's WorkSource System with staff located within the one-stop centers. At three one-stop centers (WorkSource), and the San Juan Career Center, jobseekers, including adults in transition, low-income youth, and incumbent workers seeking self-sufficiency, access multiple programs offering core, intensive and training services.

Active outreach, recruitment and enrollment of youth, adults and dislocated workers are also conducted at appropriate sites in the community. For youth, services may be delivered at schools, including alternative schools, and at other youth service provider sites such as Boys and Girls Clubs.

Business closures and substantial layoffs are occurring regularly. Rapid response services continue to be coordinated by the Council with key stakeholders and service providers. Services delivered at the worksite include orientations to employment transition, intake activities, and skill building workshops for dislocated workers. Strategies to reemploy workers without a break in employment include "invitation only" hiring events which juxtapose those being displaced through layoff or closure with businesses actively recruiting workers with their skill sets. New and creative efforts to develop "early warning" systems from available data, coupled with proactive business contact and follow-up, are being developed to shorten the period of time between worker detachment and reemployment or occupational training.

Incumbent Worker Training

The Council recognizes the increasing need to train and retrain current workers to keep pace with the accelerating pace of technological advances and globalization. Customized training prepares workers with contemporary skills required to meet the needs of a particular employer or an occupational segment across a set of employers. Investments in employee skills enable businesses to increase their production and competitiveness. The Council actively pursues current worker training in the region's key industry sectors and has used its formula funds, targeting training for workers needing to increase their skills and earnings, and Governor's 10% funds to address current worker training needs in health and allied services, marine and advanced manufacturing.

Key Industry Panels

The Council continues its efforts to align training and service delivery with high-demand occupations and skill clusters in: 1) health and allied services, 2) marine and advanced manufacturing, and 3) construction. Industry panels include broad participation from industry leaders, organized labor, educators, workforce and economic development leadership. WIA institutional training funds are targeted to these identified sectors and occupations and the Council pursues additional funding sources to advance strategies in support of the region's key industry sectors. Industry panels continuously examine the workforce needs of industries they serve. Their action plans support the Council's sector strategies and build greater alignment between workforce and economic development. The Council has achieved success with numerous industry-led, sector-specific initiatives including the region's recent attainment of three DOL discretionary grants, two for health and one for advanced manufacturing, as well as a State Workforce Board *High Skills High Wage Strategic Fund* grant for marine and advanced manufacturing in the twelve county Intracoastal region.

Microsoft Unlimited Potential

In 2005, the Council supported the opportunity to become a pilot site for the delivery of Microsoft Unlimited Potential curriculum¹. The relevance and effectiveness of delivering basic computer literacy in the one-stop environment has been well proven through exceptional demand and strong customer support of the Unlimited Potential curriculum. The Council sustains the program through allocation of Workforce Investment Act 10% funds. The Council has implemented one of its long term sustainability strategies for the program through the launch of the Northwest Computer Literacy Instruction Corps (NW CLIC), a volunteer corps of instruction and support staff.

Programs Funded Under the Wagner-Peyser Act

Wagner-Peyser activities, also referred to as labor exchange, are those services provided to the employer and jobseekers by the State of Washington through the Employment Security Department. In the Northwest, Wagner-Peyser activities are provided through the WorkSource Centers. Wagner-Peyser funded staff are housed at each of the WorkSource Centers. Wagner-Peyser supported labor exchange services serve as a cornerstone of the WorkSource system. Activities are concentrated into efforts that support self-service, staff assisted self-service, and core services for job seekers and employers. Activities include the provision of all core services, such as assisting job seekers in finding employment, assisting employers in filling jobs and facilitating the match between qualified jobseekers and employers.

Worker Retraining

This state funded program for dislocated workers and long-term unemployed workers is offered through Bellingham Technical, Skagit Valley, and Whatcom Community Colleges in association with the Council and the Employment Security Department. The

¹ Microsoft Unlimited Potential is a global program focused on improving lifelong learning for young people and adults by providing technology skills training.

Colleges provide training in basic skills and literacy, vocational education, and related or supplemental instruction for apprentices.

Students who qualify for the program may receive financial assistance that can help with their tuition, as well as offset the costs of childcare and transportation. Training programs must prepare students for demand occupations that lead to jobs which provide a living wage for the area.

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) provides a full range of vocational services to enable individuals with disabilities to obtain and keep employment. Included in its services are vocational assessments for interest and abilities, labor market information, job search assistance, and assistance with physical and mental restoration services. Vocational Rehabilitation has staff collocated in the one-stop career centers (WorkSource) in Whatcom and Skagit counties. DVR staff provide a leadership role and technical assistance in designing and implementing systems, practices, and training which allow all Partners to better serve persons with disabilities.

WorkFirst Programs

There are a variety of programs in the area for low-income and individuals on Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). Housed in the WorkSource Centers, WorkFirst programs provide TANF recipients with job search, job retention, and wage progression assistance.

Cascades Job Corps Center

Cascades Job Corps Center is one of eleven training centers in the states of Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington serving individuals ages 16-24 who meet income and program eligibility. Job Corps offers training to earn a GED or high school diploma, English as a Second Language, and trade-specific career training. At Cascades, vocational courses include; Building and Apartment Maintenance, Business Occupations, Carpentry, Cement Masonry, Painting, Culinary Arts, Dental Assistant, Electrician, Nurse Assistant, Medical Assistant, and Medical Office Specialist. Eligible youth receive room and board and basic healthcare. Students who live near the Job Corps campus may train as a "non-resident". The Center also has a unique cooperative relationship with the Sedro Woolley School District that includes a Cascades Job Corps High School Completion Program allowing Job Corps participants to complete and receive a high school diploma from Sedro Woolley High School.

Mature Worker Services

The maturing workforce demographic is closely monitored by the Council through a variety of avenues, including economic indicators which track the age of the workforce in the area's key industries. Opportunities to expand and enhance current services to the cohort are actively pursued. Recently, the Council supported Whatcom Community College in its work to identify and provide appropriate services for the 55+ population. These efforts include the new ENCORE program within the Community Education department, and Council support of grant initiatives which connect mature worker

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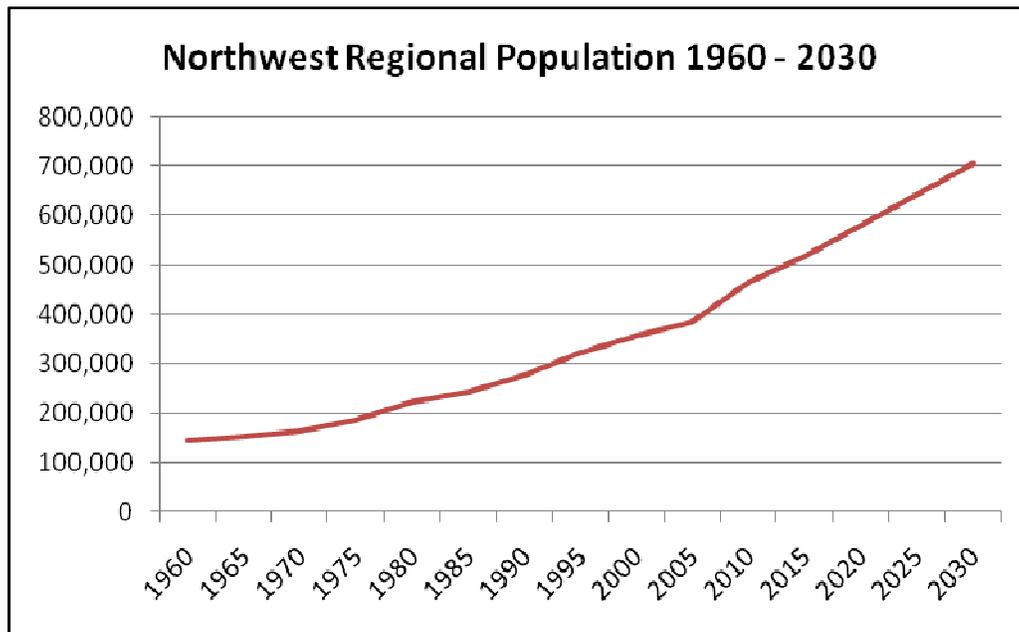
proposals with key industry sector and strategic initiatives of the Council. A range of services to older workers (“55 and Better”) is delivered through the area’s one-stop system, with staff housed within the centers. At each WorkSource Northwest one-stop career center and the San Juan Career Center, mature workers access multiple programs offering core, intensive and training services, including the Senior Community Services Employment Program (SCSEP) funded under Title V of the Older Americans Act. At WorkSource Whatcom, dedicated evening hours provide more staff support to orient and integrate mature workers into the available core, intensive and training services. Active outreach, recruitment, and enrollment of mature workers is also conducted at appropriate sites, such as senior centers, in the community.

TOMORROW'S NORTHWEST ECONOMY

The counties of Island, San Juan, Skagit and Whatcom form the Northwest Area of Washington State's Workforce Development System. Geographically located in the far northwest corner of the state, the area borders Canada to the north and Snohomish County to the south.

Skagit, Whatcom and Island Counties are part of the I-5 corridor that links two international, metropolitan cities, Seattle, Washington, and Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. The area's economy benefits from this location by increased trade and commerce and additional job opportunities for residents who choose to commute to jobs outside their residential areas. As an example, Canadian manufacturing and freight transfer businesses locate in the border areas of Whatcom County to take advantage of competitive efficiencies afforded by the North American Free Trade Act and International Free Trade Zones. Interstate 5 allows for trucking shipments to travel the corridor from Mexico to Canada while ports and rail lines facilitate the transfer of other products domestically and internationally.

The Northwest region is known for its abundance of natural resources, exceptional scenery, rural settings, and quality of life. These imbedded characteristics are characteristic of each of the four counties and are key factors for attracting and retaining businesses, workers, families and retirees. Conversely, a limited availability of industrial water sources and an environmental ethic discourages some types of manufacturing development. The desirable environment and close proximity to the two major metropolitan areas contributes to the growth in population and to the growth of tourism, recreation, service, and wholesale and retail trade.



Source: [Washington Office of Financial Management](#)

The presence of a nationally recognized four-year university, three community colleges and a technical college; a Naval air station, government services, four oil refineries, and notable retail, tourist and recreation industries provide stability to the area.

Rapid and steady growth in both the population and the area's industries are leading to growth in business. Population growth is expected to slow with the current economic downturn, but remain stronger in this region than many parts of the country.

The current recession also changes perceptions of which industries are growing or emerging. For example, both construction and finance and insurance are sectors that appear to be growing based on available data and traditional definitions. However, employment has fallen sharply in the last several months in construction and businesses in the finance and insurance sector face many uncertainties. Manufacturing is suffering in the downturn, but is fairing better in this region than in most parts of the country. Other industries highlighted as growth industries which appear strong and important, even in the current economy, include education and health care.

Description	2004 Jobs	2008 Jobs	Growth	% Growth
<i>Professional and business services</i>	9,355	11,449	2,095	22%
<i>Construction</i>	10,810	12,620	1,811	17%
<i>Education and health services</i>	14,819	17,050	2,230	15%
<i>Leisure and hospitality</i>	16,376	18,536	2,159	13%
<i>Manufacturing</i>	13,851	15,536	1,685	12%
<i>Financial activities</i>	5,554	5,978	424	8%
<i>Other services</i>	5,519	5,961	441	8%
<i>Trade, transportation, & utilities</i>	27,574	29,607	2,033	7%
<i>Government</i>	39,105	40,481	1,376	4%
<i>Information</i>	2,440	2,457	16	1%
<i>Agriculture, natural resources, & mining</i>	5,006	5,026	20	0%
	150,410	164,700	14,290	10%

Source: [Economic Modeling Specialists Incorporated](#)

Despite the current broad economic downturn, the Northwest region supports a new array of growth industries, particularly in marine, wood product and other advanced manufacturing.

This area's industry sectors are profiled in depth by Western Washington University's Center for Economic and Business Research and are available on their Web site at:

- <http://www.cbe.wvu.edu/cebr/Construction%20Tri%20County.pdf>
- <http://www.cbe.wvu.edu/cebr/Manufacturing%20Tri%20County.pdf>
- <http://www.cbe.wvu.edu/cebr/Health%20Care%20Tri-County.pdf>
- <http://www.cbe.wvu.edu/cebr/Finance.pdf>
- <http://www.cbe.wvu.edu/cebr/Forestry.pdf>

<http://www.cbe.wvu.edu/cebr/trade.pdf>
<http://www.cbe.wvu.edu/cebr/education.pdf>

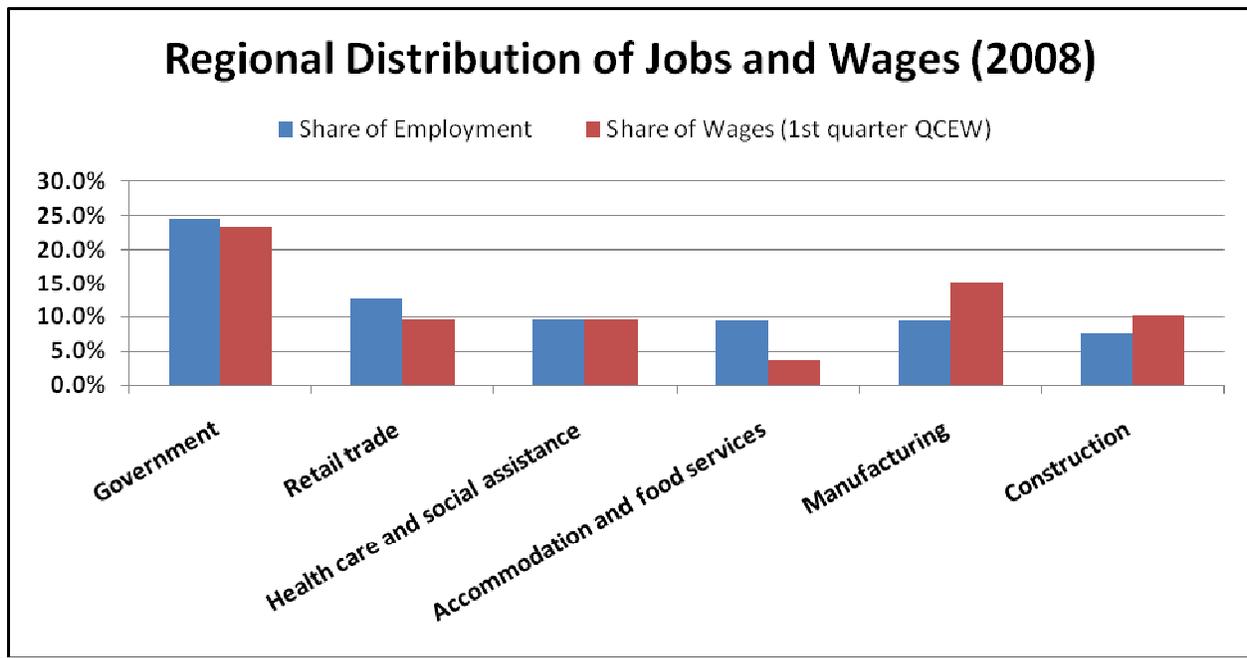
The region has been one of the fastest growing areas in employment in Washington, although the Seattle/King area is catching up and bringing the state with it.

Total Average Annual Employment Growth

Year	Northwest	Washington
2002-2005	8.5%	5.7%
2005-2008	7.9%	5.7%

Manufacturing grew 11.7% from 2004Q1 to 2006Q1, compared to 8% growth statewide while construction grew by 24% versus 21% statewide. However, from 2006 through 2008Q2, manufacturing grew less than 1% in the region compared to 2.7% statewide. Construction is contracting rapidly across the country, making assessments of the sector difficult with historical data.

Even with the slowdown, manufacturing remains important in the region, along with health and allied services. These sectors account for a high percentage of employment and wages in the region as reflected in the chart below.



Source: [Workforce Explorer Washington](#)

Manufacturing stakeholders have benefited from tangible labor market, economic and industry data from which to make informed workforce decisions. Industry forums and regional summits add valuable direct industry input to the strategic planning process of multiple workforce and economic development partners. In addition, workforce needs

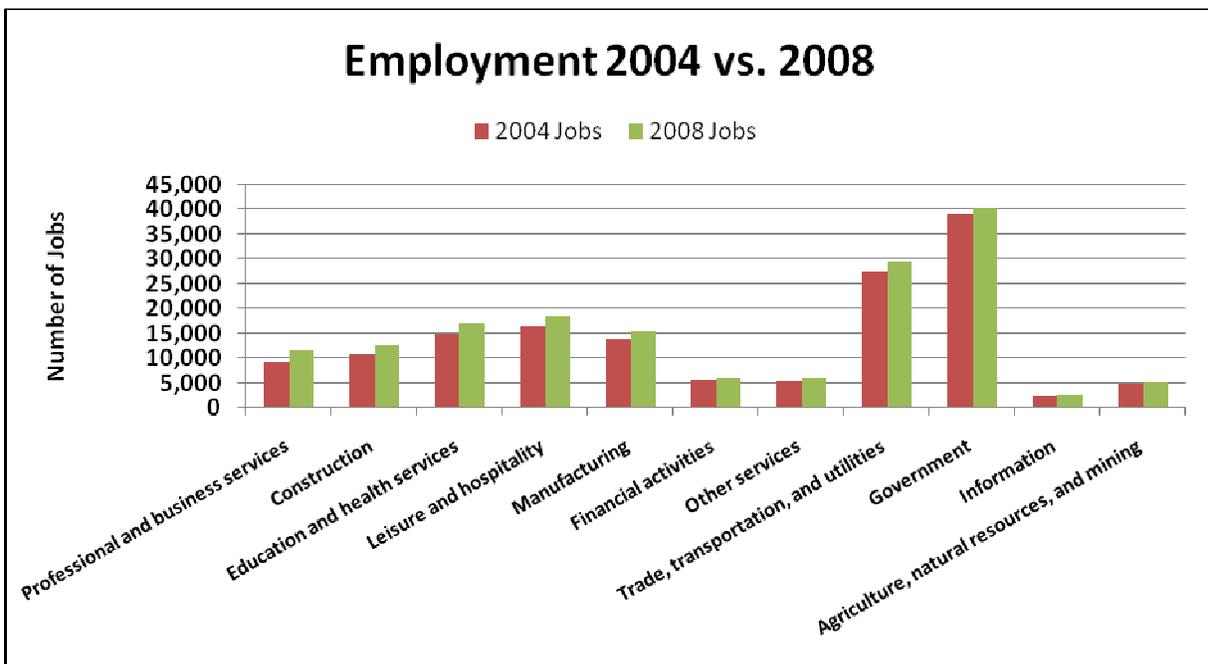
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surveys of marine services and manufacturing businesses were conducted in 2003 and 2005, and a statewide survey determining wage, fringe and related workforce issues in June 2007.

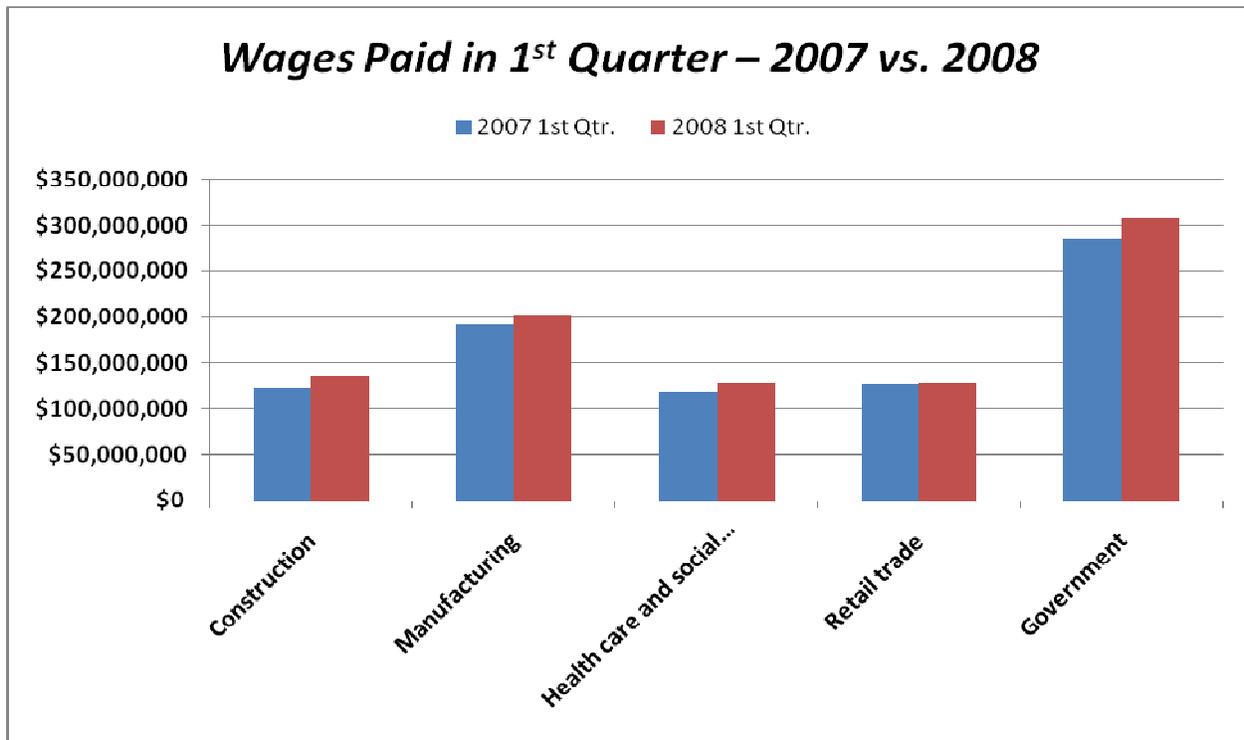
Coordination between workforce and economic development is occurring in key economic industry sectors. A partnership of the region's workforce and economic development entities, including all four of the region's economic development agencies, four Port authorities, local elected officials, area colleges, Western Washington University, the State Labor Market and Economic Analysis branch, and the Council came together and received a CTED regional, partnership-based economic development grant for the Marine Industry Cluster. This project helped to further develop industry cluster strategies and was the basis for a state-wide strategic plan for the Boat and Ship Building and Repair/Refit Industries. This work supported the expansion of the Northwest's already active collaboration with economic development and industry partners

In response to the growing health care sector in the region, the Council formed a Skill Panel for Health and Allied Services in 2001. An additional skill panel study focused on the Construction, Manufacturing and IT sectors with new skill panels established later in marine manufacturing and wood product manufacturing.

Factors considered in the selection of a key sector for workforce development investments include: the size and payroll (with hourly wages having greater weight) and projected growth which are reflected in the charts below. Another consideration is whether local investment of training resources can develop the talent pool needed to sustain and grow the sector.



Source: [Economic Modeling Specialists Incorporated](#)



Source: [Workforce Explorer Washington](#)

Using this information, and in alignment with economic development strategies, the Council identified health and allied services, construction, marine trades, and marine, wood product and other advanced manufacturing as the region's key sectors. More information on these selected sectors is available at Western Washington University's Center for Economic and Business Research Web site:

<http://www.cbe.wvu.edu/cebr/sector%20Profiles.asp>

The marine industry includes a vast range of enterprises that make up or support the marine trades, including boat/ship building, marine/waterfront infrastructure, marine service and repair, building products, construction and other related manufacturing. The in-demand occupations in this sector have similar characteristics and skills requirements to those in construction industries and wood product and other advanced manufacturing, including composites and food processing. Consequently, they are in competition with each other to find qualified workers to meet their growing workforce needs. Even in the economic downturn, many of the businesses in the marine manufacturing sector continue to fair well – making it important to continue looking at workforce needs.

Private sector leaders stress the industries are undergoing a dramatic transformation in terms of technology, market dynamics, demographics of the workforce and the skills

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required to work in an advanced manufacturing environment. Plans for expansion are hindered by a critical shortage of skilled workers, exacerbated by an aging workforce. These private sector leaders believe talent development is the key to their future growth and global competitiveness.

Despite the notable assets in the region and the success of efforts like the industry led skill panels, the Northwest WDA faces a number of challenges.

The region lies in the economic shadow of the greater Seattle metropolitan area where wages and per capita income tend to be above the national average. In the Northwest both are well below that standard.

Demographic patterns are such that many employers struggle to find qualified workers, especially in middle management and replacing senior workers. The aging of the baby boom generation and the much smaller subsequent 'generations X and Y' mean many communities have fewer people in their late 30s and early 40s compared to a decade ago.

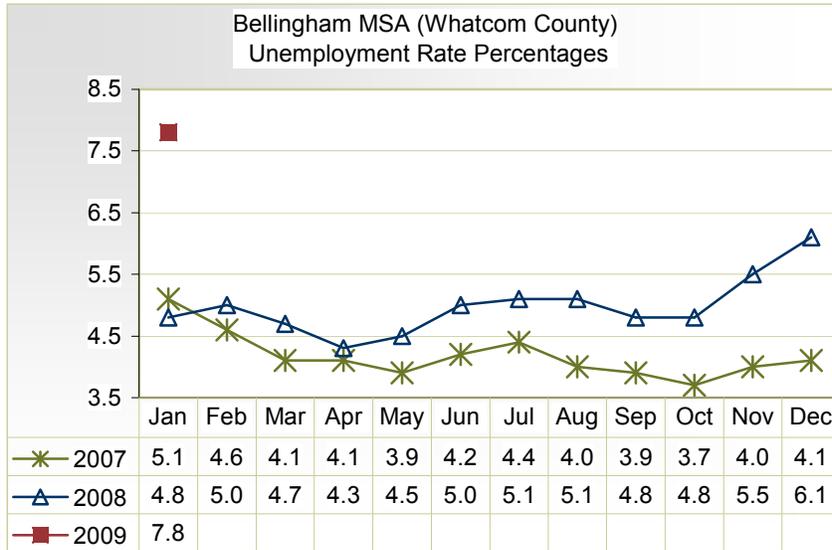
Unemployment in the region has increased sharply beginning in Q4 of 2008 and continuing into Q1 of 2009. The unemployment rate in the region had been slightly below the state level for most of this decade, but is now higher (as of January and February 2009). However, the higher unemployment rate does not mean employers are able to find qualified employees. Various skills gap remain an important issue for employers.

Resident Labor Force and Employment – January 2009 Revised

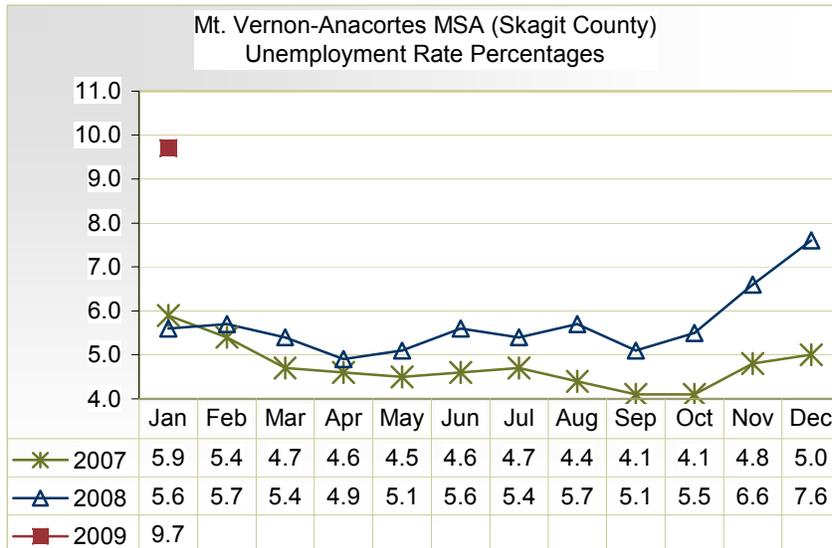
	Labor Force	Employment	Unemployment	Unemployment rate
Washington State	3,526,800	3,251,790	275,010	7.8
Northwest	211,790	194,030	17,740	8.4

Source: LMEA (figures for WA are seasonally adjusted; figures for region are only numbers reported)

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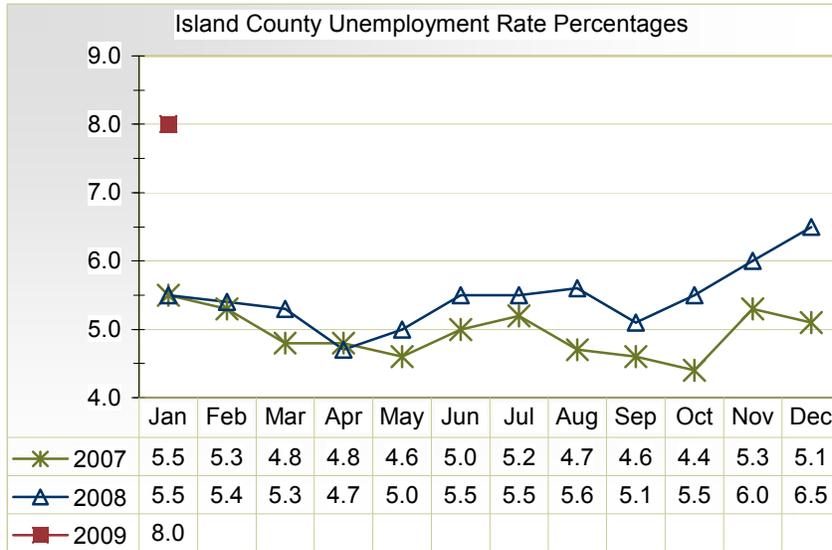


Source: ESD LMEA Northwest Regional Labor Economist

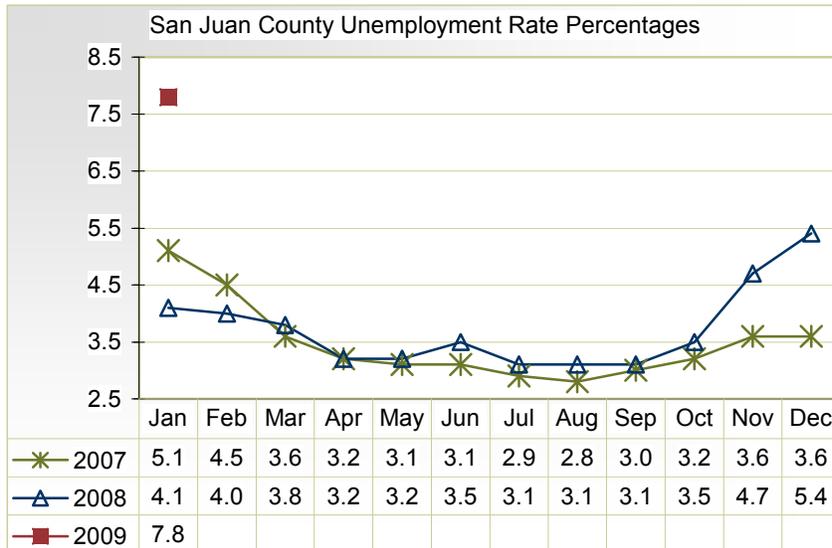


Source: ESD LMEA Northwest Regional Labor Economist

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Source: ESD LMEA Northwest Regional Labor Economist



Source: ESD LMEA Northwest Regional Labor Economist

NAICS Code	Description	2008 Jobs	Nov. Unemp.	% Total Jobs	State %	National %
61	<i>Educational services</i>	1,153	202	17.5%	9.6%	6.5%
23	<i>Construction</i>	12,620	1,864	14.8%	11.9%	14.4%
21	<i>Mining</i>	264	39	14.7%	20.1%	4.4%
56	<i>Administrative and waste services</i>	5,665	792	14.0%	11.4%	10.1%
71	<i>Arts, entertainment, and recreation</i>	2,734	280	10.2%	8.9%	9.2%
31-33	<i>Manufacturing</i>	15,536	1,468	9.5%	9.3%	9.3%
44-45	<i>Retail trade</i>	20,834	1,857	8.9%	9.2%	8.2%
53	<i>Real estate and rental and leasing</i>	2,101	176	8.4%	5.8%	6.8%
54	<i>Professional and technical services</i>	4,980	403	8.1%	5.6%	5.5%

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72	<i>Accommodation and food services</i>	15,802	1,269	8.0%	8.4%	7.5%
52	<i>Finance and insurance</i>	3,877	305	7.9%	6.8%	5.3%
48-49	<i>Transportation and warehousing</i>	3,850	276	7.2%	6.5%	5.6%
81	<i>Other services, except public administration</i>	5,961	425	7.1%	6.5%	7.7%
22	<i>Utilities</i>	528	34	6.4%	7.0%	2.8%
42	<i>Wholesale trade</i>	4,395	262	6.0%	5.5%	5.3%
51	<i>Information</i>	2,457	131	5.3%	3.8%	6.7%
62	<i>Health care and social assistance</i>	15,897	688	4.3%	4.5%	3.8%
55	<i>Management of companies and enterprises</i>	804	34	4.3%	3.0%	2.1%
11	<i>Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting</i>	4,762	151	3.2%	3.6%	11.0%
90	<i>Government</i>	40,481	749	1.9%	1.9%	2.1%
99	<i>Not elsewhere classified</i>	0	1,479	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
		164,700	12,884	7.8%		

Source: [Economic Modeling Specialists Incorporated](#)

Looking beyond the current recession – and in some cases even during the recession – the Northwest region faces a crucial shortage of skilled-labor. This shortage limits industries’ ability to expand and remain competitive. Skill sets are highly transportable across marine and wood product and other advanced manufacturing and construction industries, making skilled workers a competitive commodity. Welders are one example who remain in high demand in boat and ship building, refineries, manufacturing and construction. These industries will also be impacted by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), with its emphasis on construction and building retrofits and small shipyards.

The ability to enhance and sustain the region’s state, national and global market position depends upon an appropriately trained and skilled workforce. Manufacturing industries will cluster and grow around an available talent pool. The expanding need for health care can only be sustained with a right-sized and skilled labor force.

The synchronicity of workforce development and economic development in the Northwest is most recently illustrated by the receipt of the Workforce Training Board’s *High Skill High Wage Strategic Fund* for the *Washington Intracoastal Marine and Manufacturing Industries Alliance*, a regional partnership comprising three workforce development areas and 12 counties. By focusing investments on meeting the workforce needs of these sectors of the business community, tomorrow’s economy will enjoy dynamic and sustainable growth with high skill, high wage jobs.

WORKFORCE PROFILE IN THE NORTHWEST WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AREA

The Northwest, like most of the state, has and will continue to experience a significant change in the demographics of its population, particularly the advancing age of its citizens and workforce because of aging “baby boomers”. The number of citizens between the ages of 64-85 will increase because of: (a) the aging of the current 50-64 year olds; (b) the projected advanced longevity of its citizens; and (c) increased immigration of these age groups as a result of personal lifestyle changes and the presence of attractive retirement communities in the area. These will have a significant impact on the types of services provided and the corresponding workforce talent needed.

The Northwest is also experiencing a moderate increase in population attributable to people moving into the area. During the last five years, the area has grown by approximately 10% and is projected to grow an additional 10% over the next five-year period. Growth rates remains higher for the area than the state’s, although the rate has slowed compared to the prior ten years (as was predicted),

Population Size Over Time	Northwest	Washington
2008	413,274	6,540,960
2005	391,168	6,287,759
2000	355,428	5,894,121
1990	277,555	4,866,669
% change 2005-2008	5.7%	4.0%
% change 2000-2005	10.1%	6.7%
% change 90-00	28.1%	21.1%

Source: [Economic Modeling Specialists Incorporated](#)

Over the last five years, the most significant increases have taken place in the 40-64 year old population for all four Northwest counties. The next largest increase has occurred in the younger population, age 0 – 19. These increases should continue on a moderate basis over the next five year period.

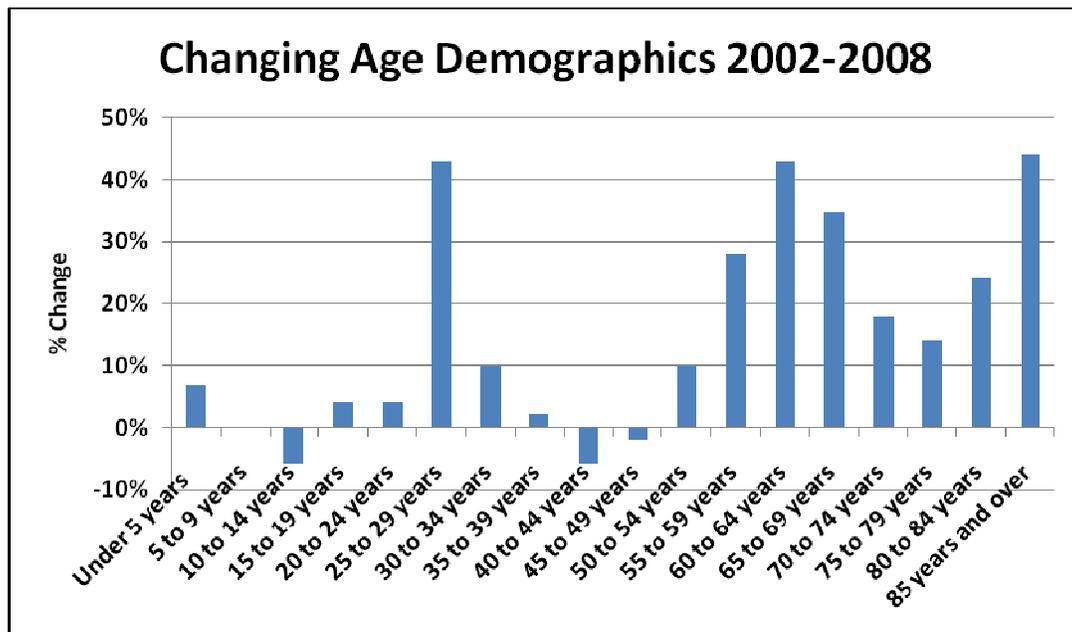
Population Estimates Age Distribution in 2008	Northwest	% of Total NW Pop.	Washington	% of Total WA Pop.
<i>Preschool (0 to 4)</i>	24,346	5.9%	20,918,793	6.9%
<i>School Age (5 to 19)</i>	77,827	18.8%	61,730,463	20.3%
<i>College Age (20 to 24)</i>	33,219	8.0%	21,184,836	7.0%
<i>Young Adult (25 to 44)</i>	109,811	26.6%	83,702,884	27.5%
<i>Older Adult (45 to 64)</i>	105,836	25.6%	78,150,467	25.7%
<i>Older (65 plus)</i>	62,234	15.1%	38,735,542	12.7%

Source: [Economic Modeling Specialists Incorporated](#)

With such an increase in the age of the workforce and its citizens, many workforce issues will come to the forefront over the next two decades. These include (a) age retirement patterns and their impact on the labor pool; (b) the impact of restructuring and dislocation on the older worker and the workforce as a whole; (c) the need for upgrading and retraining incumbent older workers for new, emerging occupations or increased technical job responsibilities and competencies; and (d) the compatibility of demand occupations and jobs with the interests and skills of the mature worker.

The area has seen a continued increase in the youth population over the last five years. This age group shares some similar workforce issues with older workers, including the compatibility of demand occupations and jobs aligned with the interests and skills of youth. The wage structure is also an issue in retaining youth in local employment. Known as the “baby boomlet”, this demographic cohort is not nearly the size of its baby boom predecessor and may be inadequate in size and current skills to replace the older workers retiring from the workforce. The challenge for the area will be in retaining and developing this valuable emergent labor resource. Over the next five years and beyond, there is potential to lose young workers to jobs in the Seattle metropolitan area, because either the wages are higher or the jobs more readily match their skills and interests.

WHAT ARE THE MAJOR DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS?

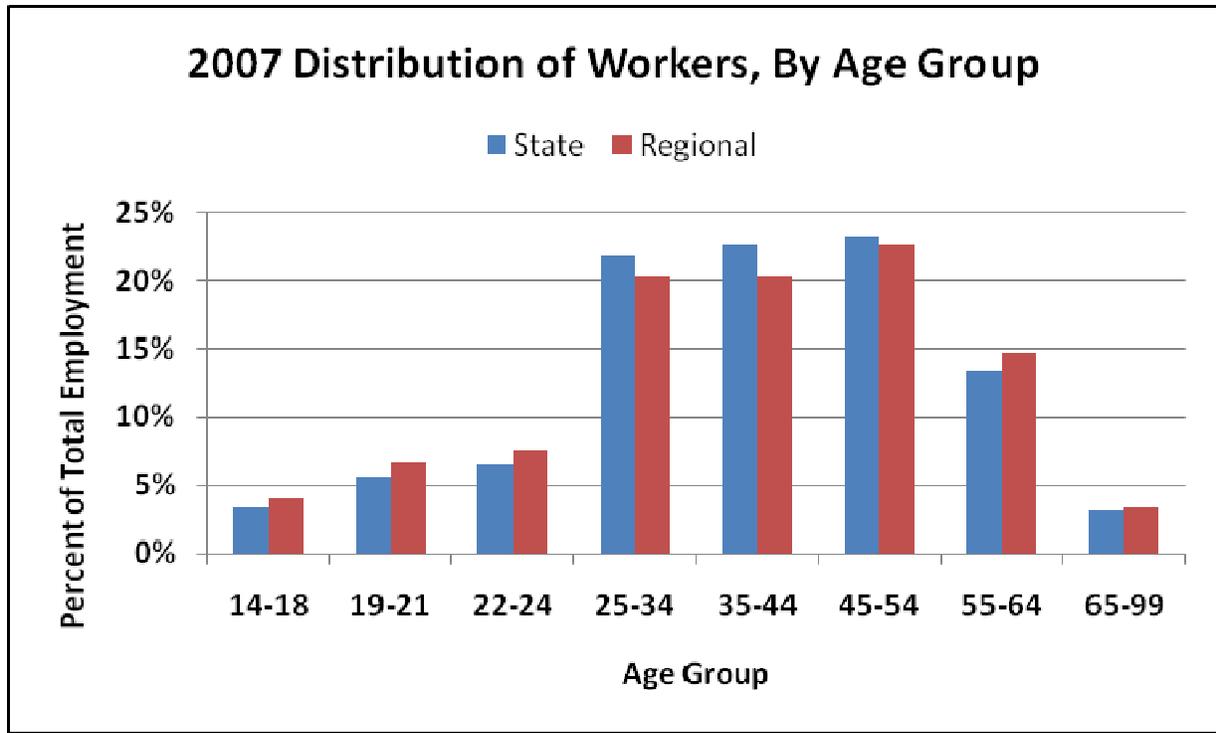


Source: [Economic Modeling Specialists Incorporated](#)

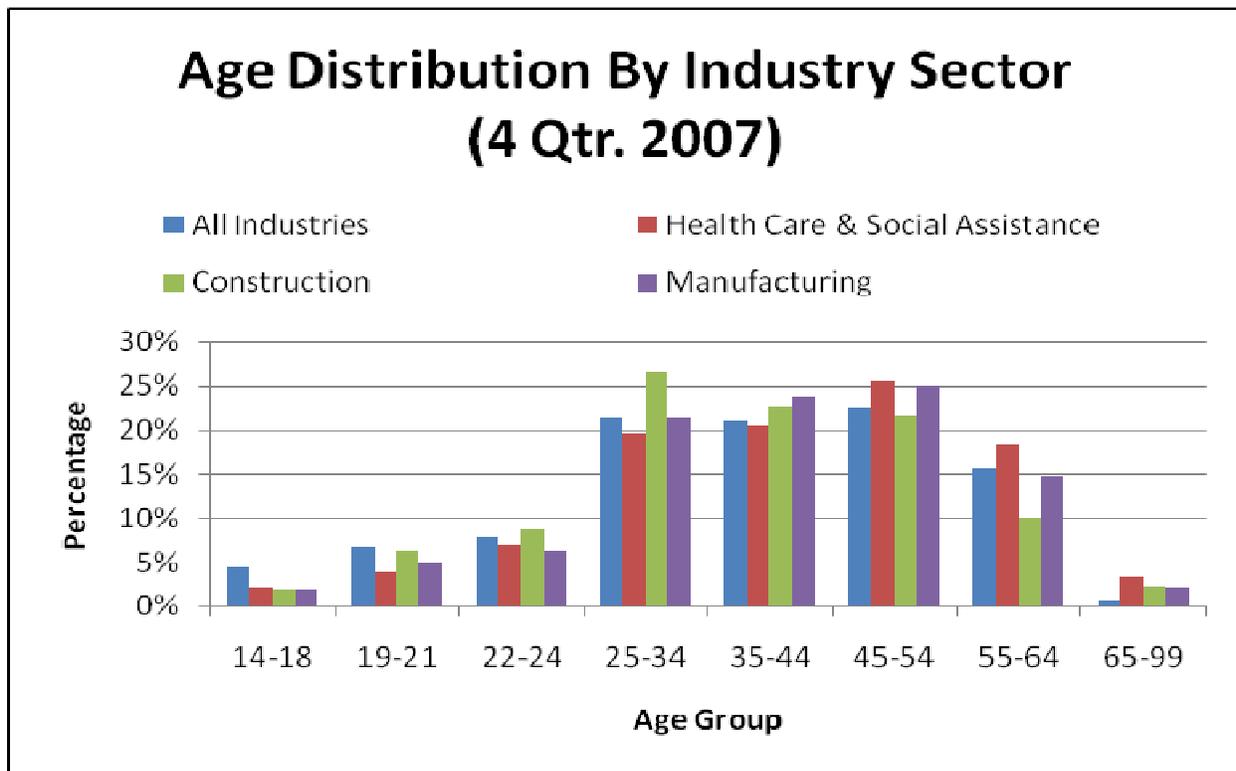
- All four Northwest counties had fewer people in their 30s in 2006 than in 1996. This was due to the smaller cohort now in its 30's and early 40's, as well as to people in their 30's relocating to larger metropolitan areas for higher wages (out-migration).

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- All Northwest counties experienced a significant increase in the number of people in their 50s. This was due in part to people in this age group making lifestyle changes moving to smaller metro markets and to coastal areas (in-migration).
- These demographic changes significantly influence the composition of the available workforce.



Source: [Workforce Explorer Washington](#)



Source: [Workforce Explorer Washington](#)

- The region's workforce has fewer people in the middle age ranges and more in both extremes than is evidenced in the statewide workforce.
- The large number of workers in the 18-24 year old group and relative "fall off" in the middle categories is consistent with the large number of education institutions which attract students into the area. Relatively low wages (compared to Seattle metropolitan area and the US) for workers in the 30-64 age range may encourage their out-migration to those areas.
- Specific sectors such as health and manufacturing show a more pronounced difference, with a relatively high share of workers in the 55-64 year old group (much more than statewide).

THE WORKFORCE IS INCREASINGLY ETHNICALLY DIVERSE

Percentage of Population Speaking a Language Other Than English at Home

County	2000 Survey	2005-2007 Survey
ISLAND	8.2	7.3
SAN JUAN	4.9	N/A
SKAGIT	11.7	15
WHATCOM	9.2	11.5
U.S.	17.9	19.5

Source: [US Census Bureau](#)

Employers here, as in all other parts of the US, must consider language ability and divergent cultural issues within the workforce. Recruiting and training methods are likely to change to better target and address concerns of minority and underserved populations. English as a Second Language (ESL) challenges will also increase in the region.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT PEOPLE WHO ARE UNEMPLOYED?

County	Education Attainment of Persons Claiming Unemployment Benefits				
	Percent				
	Less Than High School	High School Diploma or GED	College no degree	Associate Degree	Bachelor's or higher
ISLAND	7.64	49.51	17.06	13.50	12.29
SAN JUAN	10.21	37.54	14.71	16.52	21.02
SKAGIT	16.61	50.03	11.19	14.11	8.05
WHATCOM	11.63	46.91	12.70	15.84	12.93

Source: Employment Security – Regional Labor Economist for Northwest Region (2009)

The unemployment rate of those with a high school diploma or GED or less is more than twice their incidence in the population.

COMMUTING TRENDS

The workforce in the region is very mobile, with many people commuting across county lines. Data from the U.S. Census show the percentage of workers in different cities by their county of residence. These data show, for example, the percentage of people who live in Snohomish or King County but work in Bellingham. Data shows in which industries these workers are employed. Overall, people are most likely to commute long distances (e.g., greater than 30 miles each way) for jobs in manufacturing, health care, and, surprisingly, retail.

People Working in Bellingham

County of Residence	Percent of Workers
Whatcom Co.	79%
Skagit Co.	5%
King Co.	6%
Snohomish Co.	4%
All Other Locations	6%

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People Working in Mount Vernon

County of Residence	Percent of Workers
Skagit Co.	67%
Whatcom Co.	8%
Snohomish Co.	10%
Island Co.	5%
All Other Locations	11%

People Working in Anacortes

County of Residence	Percent of Workers
Skagit Co.	69%
Island Co.	11%
Whatcom Co.	6%
Snohomish Co.	5%
All Other Locations	9%

People Working in King County

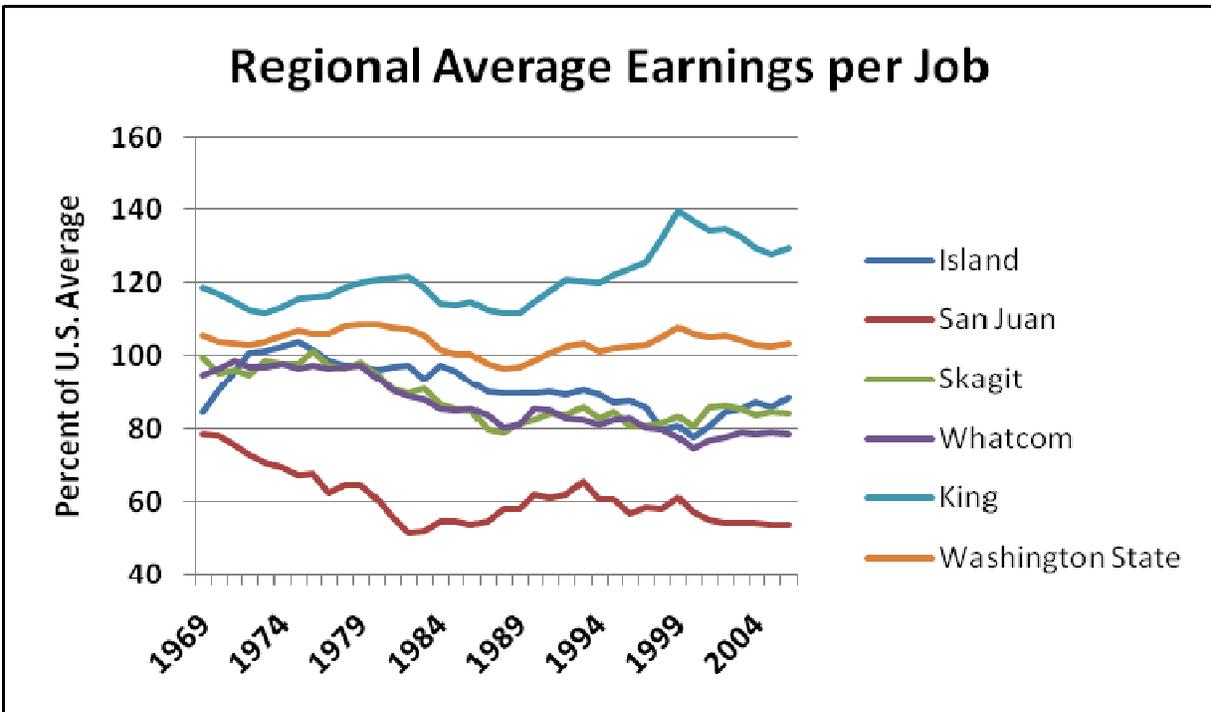
County of Residence	Percent of Workers
Whatcom Co.	0.6%*
Skagit Co.	0.5%
Island Co.	0.4%

Source: [US Census Bureau](#) ("On the Map" project)

* It may be important to note that 0.6 percent of the workers in King County translates to roughly 7,000 workers. That means 8.5 percent of the workers in Whatcom County commute to King County and 13 percent of Skagit County workers commute to King County for their employment.

Economic Issues

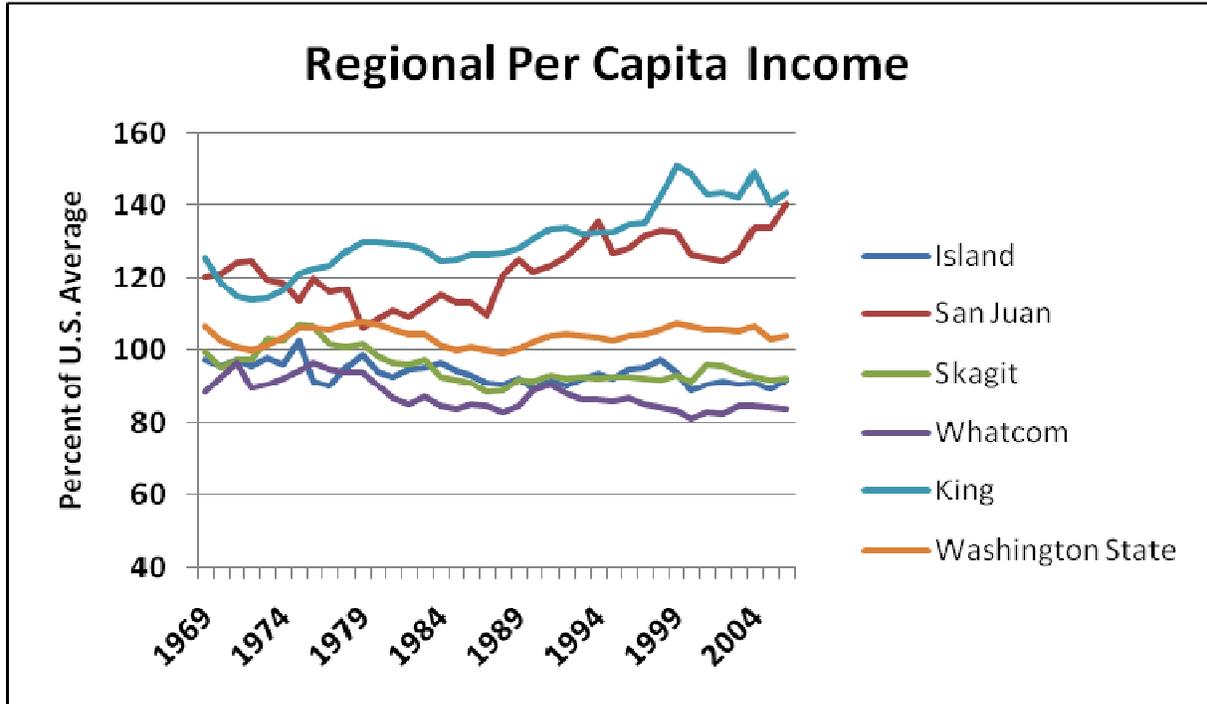
HOW DO WAGES IN THE AREA COMPARE TO THE U.S. AVERAGE?



Source: [Pacific Northwest Regional Economic Analysis Project](#)

- The average wage per worker in the region tended to be much closer to the U.S. average in the mid-1970s, but now falls below the U.S. average.
- Relative increases in wages from 2001-2003 reflect the limited impact of the last recession in this region – and may be signs of a stronger regional economy.
- People have valued living in the region and, as such, may forego a higher wage to accept a job in the region. This may change as residents redefine their economic choices during a recession.
- Wages in King County may offer one reason why the Northwest experiences as much out migration of people in their 30's and commuting to King County as it does.

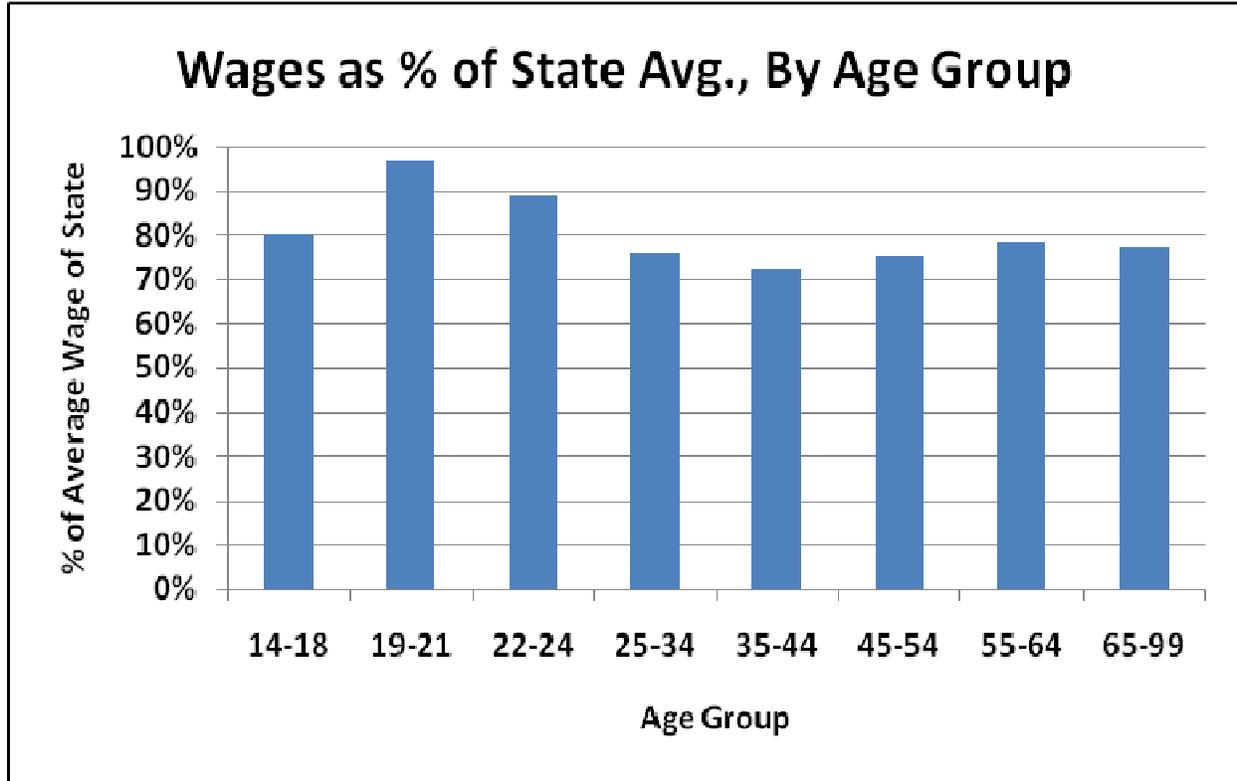
HOW DOES INCOME IN THE AREA COMPARE TO THE U.S. AVERAGE?



Source: [Pacific Northwest Regional Economic Analysis Project](#)

- Like wages, per capita income tends to be below the U.S. average. (It may be important to note per capita income in Washington State is above the level for the U.S. However, only two counties, King and San Juan, have income that is above the U.S. level. All other counties in the state are at or below the U.S. level.)
- It is important to remember wages are but one part of total household income. Notice the difference in relative wages and income in San Juan County. Their income is not generated by wages paid in the county.

HOW DO WAGES IN THE AREA COMPARE TO THE STATE AVERAGE?



Source: [Workforce Explorer Washington](#)

- Young workers do not face the same wage gap as other workers. This finding may be due to the fact many young workers are employed in jobs paying minimum or similar wage, so there is not as much wage disparity in general for younger workers.
- The growing wage gap as you move up in age is almost certainly part of the reason people in their 30s choose to leave the region.

EDUCATION ISSUES

WHAT SKILLS ARE NEEDED FOR JOBS IN THE REGION?

Percent of Jobs in Region	Education and Training Needed
22%	These occupations may require a high school diploma or GED certificate. Some may require a formal training course to obtain a license.
34%	These occupations usually require a high school diploma and may require some vocational training or job-related course work. In some cases, an associate's or bachelor's degree could be needed.
29%	Most occupations in this zone require training in vocational schools, related on-the-job experience, or an associate's degree. Some may require a bachelor's degree
11%	Most of these occupations require a four - year bachelor's degree, but some do not
5%	A bachelor's degree is the minimum formal education required for these occupations. However, many also require graduate school. For example, they may require a master's degree, and some require a Ph.D., M.D., or J.D. (law degree).

Source: Employment Security – Regional Labor Economist for Northwest Region

Basic Information Technology (IT) and Computer Fundamentals

Basic IT competency has become a minimum requirement for the preponderance of jobs in the Northwest. IT skills are a bridge to enter employment, academic classes, formal computer classes, or vocational training. For those already employed, basic IT competency is a key to keeping and advancing their employment.

The region's key industries each require an entry level workforce with information technology competencies. For example, hospitals are the largest private employers and require IT skills of their housekeeping and environmental services staff. Hiring needs and occupational vacancy survey data analyzed by the state's Workforce Board indicates employers' continuing demand for workers with technological skill sets and their ongoing difficulties in finding qualified workers.

Much of the current IT training misses those individuals seeking employment that lack basic IT skills. The region is becoming more ethnically diverse and service delivery models and training methods are changing to address minority populations. The region's workforce is aging and experiencing an out-migration of 20-40 year olds, a technically adept age cohort. As older workers exit full time employment or physically demanding occupations, their new employment opportunities will require basic computing skills. These trends point to the need provide basic IT skills to;

- Low skilled and low income individuals (including youth and welfare recipients)
- Speakers of non native language
- Mature workers

- Current workers whose IT skills no longer meet minimum requirements

DO WE HAVE ENOUGH YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE WORKFORCE TO REPLACE THE PEOPLE WHO WILL BE RETIRING?

From 2007 to 2008, Northwest employers added 3,590 jobs (excluding the agriculture, fishing, and forestry sector) but in the past year 4,260 jobs were lost. The most recent vacancy survey (October 2008) reflected 2,493 unfilled positions, less than half the number of vacancies two years ago.

For comparison, Western Washington University graduated 3,100 students. Skagit Valley, Bellingham Technical and Whatcom Community Colleges together graduated approximately 1,000 students who did not transfer to four year baccalaureate programs. An additional 864 students left programs early. About 80% percent of these students successfully entered employment with only some 373 individuals with some post-secondary training unaccounted for.

Each year, there are about 4,700 high school seniors starting 12th grade. Estimates are that no more than 40% go on to post-secondary training each year, leaving at least 2,820 potential new labor market entrants each year.

There would appear to be enough young people but how well and how quickly we engage youth in training and employment for high skill, high wage jobs is the real challenge.

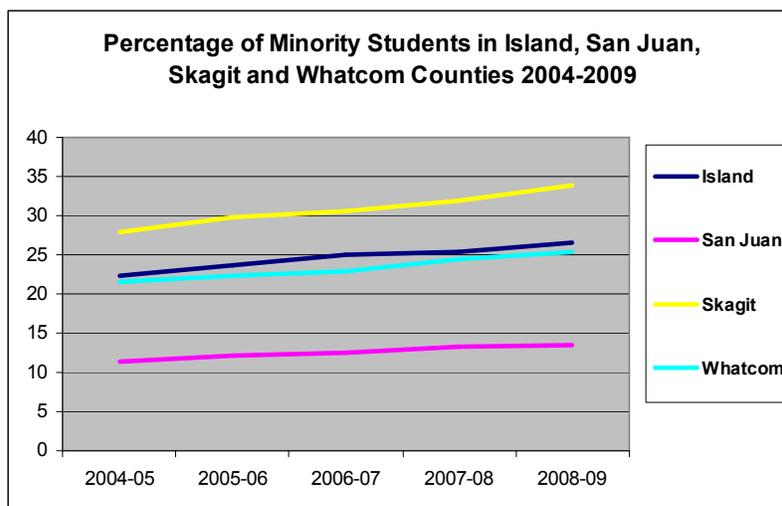
Minority Youth

The need to develop minority youth as a community and workforce resource is growing. Of youth enrolled in public and private schools, the percentage of minority students varies across counties. From 2000-2007 the region's school districts saw minority enrollments increase within a wide range of 3.1% in Island to a notable Skagit County increase of nearly 24%. Minority enrollment in the Northwest region as a percent of total is less than it is statewide (28.5% vs. 35.2%). It is, however, increasing faster in the region than it is statewide (21.3% vs. 18.5%). Minority student enrollment increases clearly indicate growing diversity in the workforce of tomorrow.

County	Enrollment		Percent Change	
	2008-09		2004-05 - 2008-09	
	Minority	White	Minority	White
Whatcom	25.9%	74.1%	19.9%	-5.5%
Skagit	34.2%	65.8%	22.6%	-8.8%
San Juan	14.4%	85.6%	27.9%	-3.6%
Island	26.5%	73.5%	18.8%	-5.4%
NW WA	28.5%	71.5%	21.3%	-6.5%
Washington	35.2%	64.8%	18.5%	-7.8%

To ensure minority youth are prepared to succeed in the workforce and have the opportunities to develop competitive skills, they should be encouraged to develop strong academic and computer skills, be exposed to occupations and participate in work experiences in the health, science, technology, manufacturing, construction, and business and commerce fields.

Within certain employment sectors, most notably health care, the need for a bi-lingual and bi-cultural workforce is an opportunity for minority and underrepresented youth to enter the labor market in high wage, high skill jobs if they are provided the necessary career education, academic preparation and technical training.



Dropout Youth

Minority youth dropout rate is higher in the region than statewide (10.8% vs. 8.0%) and the minority dropout rate is decreasing slower here than it is statewide (-4.4% vs. -15.5%). White student dropout rate is decreasing here at nearly the same pace as it is statewide (-16.3% vs. -16.6%). In Whatcom County, white student dropouts increased 3.2% between 2003 and 2006. Annual school dropout rates also vary greatly by county. For example, Island County went from 12 dropouts out of 539 minorities in 2003 to 35 dropouts out of 605 minorities in 2006, a 159.8% increase.

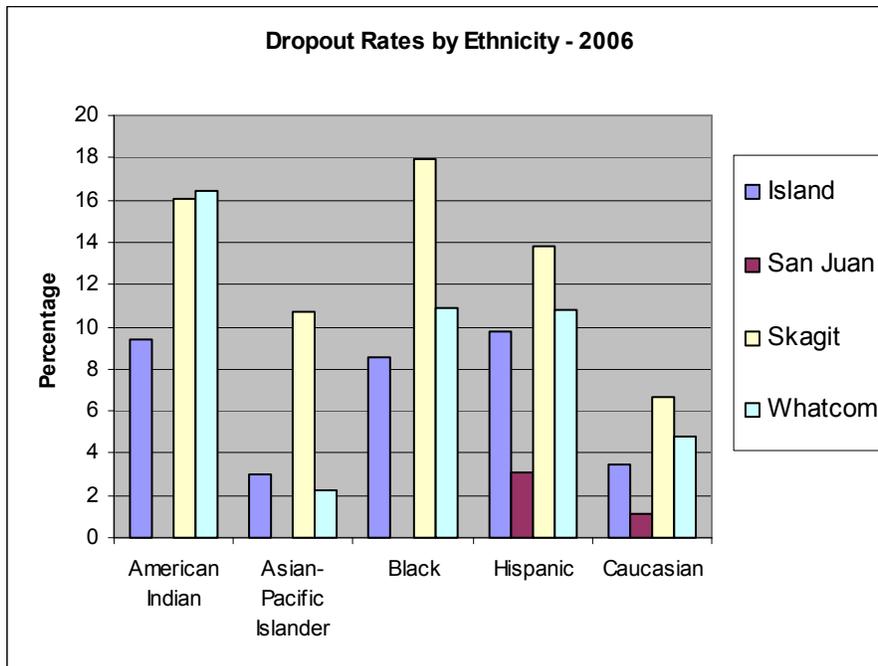
Education level is a predictor of ability to reach and sustain economic success. It is important the workforce development system encourage high school and post-secondary education completion by all groups, particularly those historically unsuccessful in completing high school, continuing at the post-secondary level, or traditionally employed in low-paying jobs. In addition to minority populations, these groups include low-income, disabled, limited English speaking, and women. Strategies important to the success of these groups include completion of high school and post-secondary training; and an emphasis on wage progression. Whether enough young people are in the workforce to replace retiring and downsizing workers depends on how well and how quickly we engage youth in training and employment strategies.

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County	Education Attainment of Total Student Population	
	Percent No HS Diploma 2007	Percent Change 2000 - 2007
Island	5.7%	-27.8%
San Juan	5.6%*	NA
Skagit	13.2%	-17.5%
Whatcom	9.8%	-21.6%

*San Juan value is from 2000. No education attainment data is available after 2000 for San Juan County.

Region	Dropout Rate		Percent Change	
	2005/06		2002/03 – 2005/06	
	Minority	White	Minority	White
NW WA	10.8%	5.3%	-4.4%	-16.3%
Washington	8.0%	4.8%	-15.5%	-16.6%



THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

With the above-mentioned trends and changes in workforce demographics, the Northwest Workforce Council and its partners face significant challenges in assisting all residents of the Northwest Area with access to the services and training needed to find and keep employment in local high-wage, high-demand industry clusters. Careful planning around these issues will help the system respond to the needs of industry, youth, and adult workers alike.

Reflecting on the continued strength and projected growth of the Intracoastal marine and advanced manufacturing cluster, industry leaders confirm talent development is key to their growth and global competitiveness. While current economic conditions have impacts across the spectrum of industries in the region, competition to find highly qualified manufacturing workers remains.

With swiftly rising unemployment across the state and the rapid increase of dislocated workers in this region, short term strategies must include effectively matching dislocated workers to existing job opportunities. This will entail providing necessary short term training, certifications and on-the job training to rapidly fill available positions and return these workers to employment as soon as possible. Long term strategies must also continue to address the underlying skill shortages that exist for projected medium and high skill jobs in the area's key industry sectors and clusters.

The opportunity to attract new entrants and to increase the skills of current or laid off workers in a slower economy is one that should be capitalized upon. To remain competitive in the national and global market, Intracoastal employers have identified the need for adding skills and certifying their workforce in composite boat builder, marine electrical, marine corrosion, and marine systems and with National Marine Electronics Association certificates and European Union compliance training. The Intracoastal marine and manufacturing cluster should be well prepared to infuse a skilled workforce into a rebounding economy, ensuring our industries are ready to take full advantage.

Employers express concern too few people consider manufacturing careers as their initial or post-dislocation careers, underscoring the region's need for a well-conceived, coordinated and executed pipeline strategy. At the same time, dislocations from resource extraction and production based industries represent a formidable talent pool if their skills sets can be retooled to the needs of marine and advanced manufacturing industries.

Other talent development opportunities include recently separated veterans, estimated at 1,000 discharges per month to Washington State. Military training can often be applied to manufacturing and construction skill requirements and provides opportunity for strategies to enhance veterans' transition to high-wage, high-demand, civilian work.

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A growing ethnically diverse population creates additional opportunities to increase the supply of workers to high-demand industries. More than 14,000 Intracoastal residents 18 years and older speak limited or no English,² constituting an untapped labor force cohort. Further refinement of recruiting and training methods to address ESL populations is required to bring the strategies to scale. One collaborative Intracoastal enterprise to address pipeline issues is underway. The DOL funded, *Pathways to Advanced Manufacturing Careers*, is a multi-partner strategy to attract, train and retrain workers with skills necessary for careers in advanced manufacturing.

While pleasure craft sales and production has experienced a downturn, working boat production continues to evidence strength. Other marine and manufacturing cluster-related businesses are expanding their composite product line and competing in new energy markets. Emerging technologies require education and training for both incumbent and new workers. The availability of an innovative, technology-savvy, workforce is critical to industry competitiveness. An investment in talent development and attraction made now will prove a wise long term investment for the Intracoastal cluster of industries, suppliers, and service businesses. The strength of the region's marine cluster was recognized by Legislative funding to build the Marine Skill Center Annex in Anacortes. The creation of this resource adds to the economic weight of the cluster and will draw more marine firms to the Intracoastal region because of the ready access to highly trained students and innovation in training methods and processes.

The age cohort in the general population with the greatest increase is 50-59 y/o while the number of 30-39 y/o in the Intracoastal region declined due to out migration to metropolitan areas.³ Employers remain concerned too few young people consider marine and manufacturing careers and are unaware of skills needed or the career's financial rewards. As experienced workers retire, they become difficult to replace because too few entry-level workers are equipped with the skills or preparation required to advance.

² ESD: LMEA

³ WWU: Center for Economic and Business Research

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The health and allied services sector remains in need of skilled workers beyond training programs' current capacity to produce them. To help alleviate training capacity issues and enhance worker access, colleges are working together with clinical sites to make clinical scheduling systems and student preparation more effective and dynamic. Local training programs are also embracing instructional technology to expand capacity as curriculum is developed for hybrid and on-line courses for prerequisites, nursing and allied health programs. With health care facilities feeling the pinch of the economy like other businesses, expenditures are under scrutiny. The Northwest Alliance for Health Care Skills' Health Occupation Training (HOT) fund underwrites training expenses, supporting enhanced training capacity and for which the colleges have been unable to source replacement funds in the three community and technical colleges.

The Council and partners have been able to leverage a substantial portion of resources that extend beyond those available through WIA Title IB to address the issues of creating pipelines of new workers to meet emerging skills gaps. This begins with K-12 career marketing programs that seek to attract and prepare students for the high-wage, high-demand industry clusters in the local economy. There should be an increased emphasis on apprenticeships for young adults. The Council has also used leveraged resources to attract minority individuals, especially those with limited English proficiency, to the career ladders in the high-wage, high-demand industry clusters in the local economy. Continuing to successfully serve the needs of the immigrants and refugees, the system needs to attract and mobilize new resources to expand on bilingual programs that integrate instruction in English with the foundation and technical skills needed by targeted industry clusters. The Council will remain active with community partners and stakeholders in focusing resources to collectively address systemic issues of workforce development.

For adults not currently in the labor force or for those transitioning within the labor force, every effort must be made to provide career guidance, training, income supports, and other supportive services to help fill shortages in identified local demand industry clusters. Part of this strategy includes providing rapid transition for those dislocated due to business closures, restructuring, and technological advances that support increased productivity without concomitant workforce increases. Another strategy is to map military training and experience to civilian opportunities in targeted industry sectors. Other dislocated workers also need rapid re-entry strategies, including skills training and/or upgrades. Many incumbent workers require training as technology changes in order to remain competitive in the labor pool. As the shortage of skilled workers increases with employee retirements, employers will have to turn to increasing the skills of their current workforce and critical to this will be effective training delivery methods for these employees.

PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY

The Northwest Area's Performance Accountability System is consistent with the accountability provisions of WIA, the State and the Department of Labor's regulations and guidelines. The Council uses the information collected and reported through the statewide information system (SKIES) and the data and post-program outcomes collected and reported by the State Workforce Board and the Employment Security Department, based upon data matches or state administered surveys of individuals and employers. The Council also applies the results of its continuous quality improvement methods, which include performance data, customer flow data, customer surveys, comment cards, and focus groups.

The purposes of the performance review and accountability system is to improve performance; provide quality and effective services to customers; and assist the Council in overseeing the one-stop (WorkSource) system programs, including WIA Title I-B programs (Appendix II). The Council carries out its performance accountability responsibilities on a regular and timely basis through its Quality Assurance Committee. This committee is responsible for reviewing the performance information provided by the State Board, Employment Security Department and that collected by the Northwest Workforce Council either through SKIES or its continuous quality improvement processes; incorporating the findings and conclusions of these efforts in its strategic planning; and initiating timely and effective performance-based consequences that may include incentives, improvement plans, or sanctions. Performance data is used to select and evaluate one-stop operators (WorkSource) and WIA Title I-B program operators and if determined necessary, initiate interventions or terminate the operators for cause.

The Council, in its strategic planning capacity, will review the performance of the other workforce development programs in the area which include Adult Basic Education, Post-Secondary Vocational Technical Education, Apprenticeships, Private Schools, and Secondary Vocational Education. The purposes of the performance review of these programs include but are not limited to; improving outcomes for its customers, expanding existing coordination efforts; increasing services and resources to customers; and providing quality and current information to employers and job seekers.

The Northwest Workforce Council acknowledges it is not directly responsible for the performance of the above local workforce development programs which are governed and administered by other agencies or organizations.

The Northwest Workforce Council has reviewed the performance of WIA Title I programs and the other workforce development programs throughout its strategic planning process to assist the Council in determining strategic goals and strategies for the workforce development system. To improve performance, meet customer needs and develop a world class workforce, it has set strategies that include skills standards, competency attainment, system integration, lifelong learning and a commitment to continuous quality improvement.

Performance Results for One-Stop (WorkSource) and WIA Title I and Expected Levels of Performance

The Northwest Workforce Development Area's current performance results using state and federal indicators for WIA Title I averaged more than 100 percent of the combined state and federal targets and all individual measure target goals were met or exceeded.

Appendix 1 displays the Federal and State core indicators and the Federal Common Measures the Council will use to evaluate WIA IB program performance. State targets have not been negotiated with DOL. Local targets will be negotiated using a process that uses the regression adjustment formulas to adjust statewide targets upwards or downwards, based on economic conditions in the region and the demographics of participants. These targets will then be incorporated as part of this Strategic Plan.

The Council recognizes the value and benefit of management indicators to track and predict performance. The Council continues to work closely with its partners, Employment Security Department, Job Corps, and Department of Social and Health Services Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, to address the tracking and reporting of DOL common measures across multiple federal workforce development programs. The Council has adopted a Quarterly WorkSource System Performance Dashboard which tracks common measure performance in the DOL federal programs operated by WorkSource Northwest partner organizations. The Council's Quarterly Report includes measures of importance to the Council and the one stop system which include; common measures, ESD's local GMAP, WorkSource Management Performance Indicators, WIA training investment, county and regional economic indicators, one stop customer flow, customer satisfaction, customer demographics, and media activity, together with significant one stop system events of the quarter. The report provides timely insight into performance attainment and aids the Council in its oversight role to ensure the region's programs meet performance goals.

The State's Workforce Board establishes criteria and performance levels and maintains the system for training services provider eligibility and performance. This information provides useful baseline data for reviewing the performance of other workforce development programs.

Continuous Quality Improvement System in WorkSource and WIA Title I-B

The Northwest Workforce Council, in conjunction with the WorkSource-Northwest Partnership, operates a quality improvement framework based upon a core set of fundamental elements. An organization's quality initiative must address its own unique needs to generate the level of human commitment needed to succeed. While individual partner organizations may use their own approach, the following elements provide a common understanding of the fundamental tenants of the Partnership's quality model:

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- An organizational culture of continuous examination and improvement
- A customer focus
- A process orientation
- Identification of key processes
- Benchmarking
- Teams as process owners
- Use of a formal improvement process
- Links process improvement to improved performance
- Investments in the organizations' human capital

The Council and the WorkSource Northwest Partnership are committed to continuous quality improvements. To meet this commitment, the Council requires each certified one-stop or affiliate site to report quarterly, respond to Council technical assistance advisories, and complete a certification process every three years.

The quantity of services delivered through the workforce development system will grow as our technological and WorkSource site infrastructure goals are achieved. The growth of services is dependent upon and reflective of our customers' needs, as expressed through a variety of feedback mechanisms, both informal and structured. Customer feedback and data is collected and quantified using quality problem solving tools and analysis of data generated from multiple methodologies. The knowledge gained from analysis of customer and performance data is used to:

- identify areas for improvement
- develop new product lines
- establish quality goals for the Partnership
- make improvements based on customer expectations to existing products, processes, and services.

Customer Flow

The Council fully implemented the WorkSource Membership System (WMS) to track and report customer flow within the one-stop centers, as well as those activities engaged in by job seekers using core one-stop services. The Northwest's use of WMS generates data useful in local management and has served as a model statewide. Data from WMS, combined with available data from SKIES, provides an opportunity to quantify regional quality initiatives, such as outreach to veterans, youth and persons with disabilities. The Council is active in statewide planning for a replacement of WMS functionality with a new SKIES-based Self Service Tracking System that will increase data security, minimize duplicate data entry and improve efficiencies in data gathering. The work team has completed the business requirements for the new system, which will be implemented in WorkSource Centers and WorkSource Affiliate sites.

Comment Card

The WorkSource Northwest system uses common customer comment cards for business and for job seekers. The feedback device is made widely available through

paper and electronic means throughout the centers' resource lobbies, staff offices, e-mail signatures, direct mail and other methods of distribution. Data has been used consistently for years at both the regional aggregate level and by individual sites to identify opportunities for quality improvements. The abundance of data from this source provides dependable baseline information. The Northwest's business comment card was developed through a national benchmarking process and was adopted by the state WorkSource Marketing Committee to be used as the model for use statewide. Additionally, the Northwest's job seeker comment card was adopted for use across three WDAs.

Customer Surveys

The Council and one-stop site based Center Use Teams utilize customer satisfaction data from surveys conducted by other entities that have results pertinent to the Northwest's workforce development system. One example is the customer satisfaction survey conducted by the State Workforce Board. Sampling includes businesses and jobseekers who have used the Wagner-Peyser public labor exchange and WIA Program services systems. Results are reported as American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) scores, which may be benchmarked against other workforce development areas and against industries' outside of workforce development.

The results of the analysis of this and other surveys have lead to setting priorities for improving upon the WorkSource Northwest system. Survey results have been used to identify key processes for reengineering and as subject matter to further explore in focus groups.

A large-scale employer survey was conducted, with the support of the Council by the Partnership in 1995 to identify the workplace skill competencies, attitudes, and behaviors local employers seek in their workforce. The survey results were then validated by a series of focus groups and became the Workforce Skill Standards. The Workforce Skill Standards are continually validated by both informal and structured methodology. This has been accomplished through key informant interviews and surveys conducted as part of Industry Skill Panels in health and allied services, construction, advanced manufacturing, including boat building and wood products. Addressing the gaps between employer expectations for these generic workplace skills and workers' demonstrated competencies is a key local strategy to meet the state's goals for closing skill gaps and providing wage progression.

Additionally, the Center Use Teams conduct exit interviews of all customers using a one-stop site on a randomly selected day at least once per year. This larger sampling of customers helps to validate the results of comment card respondents and provide additional insight into customers' experience with the one-stop system.

Focus Groups of Job Seekers and Employers

Key industry tables provide a valuable source of information for the Council and the area's workforce development practitioners. These facilitated forums function as a workable focus group to examine the challenges and issues facing the area's key

industries. Additionally, forums convened of economic development, labor market data providers, and stakeholder groups all provide timely and usable data to aid in the development of strategies and responses to emerging needs within the region.

The WorkSource Northwest Partnership convenes customer focus groups when more in depth information is desired to interpret other forms of data, to explore customer reactions and needs, and to identify new strategies or product refinements. For example, customers were actively involved through survey and focus group methodologies in the design and functional testing of www.WorksourceNorthwest.com, the region's public website. Additionally, customer focus groups have helped to shape the Council's and WorkSource Northwest's approach and products in serving customers with disabilities, a major initiative of the region.

Performance-based Intervention

The Northwest Workforce Council is accountable for the results of WIA Title I-B through a system of performance-based interventions, and shares in accountability for vocational education and adult education results through a system of incentives.

WIA authorizes incentive funding for states that exceed the "adjusted levels of performance" in WIA Title I, adult education and family literacy, and vocational education. A state that achieves 100 percent on the average for all the federal core indicators will be considered to have exceeded the "adjusted levels of performance." To date, the state met this goal in 2003 and received over \$3 million, and again in 2007 with, \$1.8 million in Section 503 Grant funds for exceeding PY 2005 performance.

The State Workforce Board allocated the funds to local areas that exceeded their expected level of performance in these programs. Washington State used a similar formula for determining whether areas have exceeded their expected levels of performance and included performance on the state core indicators, as well as the federal core indicators.

For WIA Title I B, the state earmarks a portion of the state set aside to reward local areas that exceed 100 percent of the average of the expected levels of performance for the state and federal core indicators. ESD has allocated these funds to local areas and are used locally to advance other strategic initiatives.

If the state fails to meet the "adjusted levels of performance" on the core indicators for WIA Title I B for two consecutive years, the Department of Labor (DOL) will withhold up to five percent of the state's WIA Title I B funds. DOL will consider states to have failed to meet the levels if the average level of performance across the indicators falls below 80 percent.

If a local area fails to achieve 80 percent average performance across the state and federal core indicators for WIA Title I, ESD will require the local council to submit either a performance improvement plan or a modified local plan to the State. If such failure

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continues for a second consecutive year, the Governor may require the development of a reorganization plan. If the state is sanctioned by DOL for poor performance, ESD will withhold a proportional amount of funds from local areas based on their average performance across the state and federal core indicators.

AGENDA FOR ACTION 2009-2011

The Northwest Workforce Council is dedicated to addressing the full spectrum of workforce needs through an outcome and customer based model that addresses the needs of both employers and job seekers. The Council's core business is to improve the ability of our workforce to meet the demands of business and industry. The Council envisions a cohesive workforce strategy created through the common goals of business, education, labor, and community organizations will yield strong economic outcomes and an adaptable and skilled workforce. To that end, the Council has adopted the following Strategic Goals:

Goal 1: Lead the Northwest area's One-Stop career center system which:

- integrates and streamlines education, employment and training services for youth and adults;
- reinforces retraining and retention of the current workforce;
- provides valued services and dependable results for business and the workforce; and
- embeds the principles of continuous quality improvement.

Goal 2: Champion the importance of lifelong learning for workers and a systemic approach which:

- enables youth and new workers to identify opportunities and pathways for career success;
- ensures workers opportunities to upgrade their skills in response to changing workforce needs and challenges; and
- promotes competency-based education and training programs to ensure the workforce is appropriately skilled.

Goal 3: Strengthen the responsiveness of the workforce development system which:

- expands ways in which business needs are assessed and addressed;
- leverages resources and aligns strategies of key partners; and
- aligns services and products with the current requirements of business.

Goal 4: Elevate support of workforce development issues, policies, and initiatives through inclusive community collaborations and broad partnerships.

Goal 5: Strategically partner with regional economic development to align education, workforce, and economic development initiatives.

The Council has identified the following strategic actions and initiatives for the Northwest Workforce Development System. It should be noted the rapid and unpredictable changes to the regional, state, and national economy may, indeed, make this strategic plan a "living" document. Changes in course or ability to accomplish all strategies in the Action Plan may well be compromised by events beyond the power of the Council to influence. It is the Council's intent to pursue the following actions to the best of our ability and modify the Plan as circumstances warrant.

I. TALENT POOL: Increase the size and quality of the talent pool to support and expand Northwest industries that create high-skill, high-wage jobs.

A. Expedite worker training to meet industry and market demands for just-in-time, incremental learning, and skill credentialing.

1. Career readiness certificates recognized by industry are implemented with three certified assessment and testing centers. Identify and facilitate the development of MSSC Training and Assessment Centers at selected One-stops and community and technical colleges within the region. . Instructors will be certified for one-stop centers and/or associated colleges that will provide training all four MSSC modules: Manufacturing Processes and Production; Quality Assurance; Maintenance Awareness; and Safety. Support and promote industry recognition of the MTAG Manufacturing Technology Achievement Certificate for high school students.
2. Collaborate with relevant Centers of Excellence and Community and Technical colleges to implement training models responsive to the rural geography, distribution and size of employers, and the diversity of targeted occupations are delivered, e.g., portable interactive TV and internet classrooms, DVDs, Webinars, hybrid and distance learning.
3. Develop short-term occupational training, customized, and on-the-job training opportunities to address the recruitment and retention issues of the long-term and acute care sectors in health care.
4. Continue and expand the *Unlimited Potential: Providing Technology Skills in a One-Stop* program. Develop a Digital Literacy Corps of trained volunteers, work experience participants, and interns to assist in instruction and learner support functions that will sustain and allow the program to grow. The “*Digital Learning Corps*” will also provide a pathway for mature workers to reenter the labor force.

B. Accelerate current and develop new pipeline activities for entry-level and skilled workers.

1. Increase retention and career focus for High School students using:
 - a) Basic skills remediation services to identified youth to reach grade level equivalency and to meet on-time graduation rate
 - b) Partner with secondary schools and community partners for basic skills and work based learning opportunities
 - c) The successful Sedro-Woolley School District’s Dropout Prevention and Intervention program model has been successfully implemented within two other school districts. The Council will continue to market the program to other Superintendents within the region and seek leveraged support for additional funding, funneled to this intervention model for drop out prevention.

2. Create summer youth employment opportunities that maximize the development of employability skills. Include activities to develop career awareness of middle-wage and high-wage job opportunities in the region's key industry sectors and clusters.
3. Expand partnerships with industries to market their career opportunities to youth and their parents. Introduce K-12 and other young adults, their advisors, and parents to career information and connecting activities, e.g., Career Camps which incorporate Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) in industry-designed, hands-on learning activities.
4. Engage in joint outreach, marketing and recruiting efforts with Community and Technical College and other partner staff to target population including high school students, recent high school graduates, AA graduates who are not transferring to a four year institution, drop outs and underserved populations. Coordinated approach with the school system to include presentations on high demand careers and training options.
5. Engage community based organizations for referral for youth program services.
6. Improve communications with post-secondary institutions' staff to refer more adults and youth for scholarships in key sector occupational programs, e.g., Health, Instrumentation, Process Technology, Welding, Machine Operator, etc.
7. Improve post-secondary workforce student access and retention
 - a) Connect key WIA and identified college staff (usually the Student Outreach person for adults and youth and the Worker Retraining Coordinator for dislocated workers) to work on common case management and coordination of services.
 - b) Collaboration allows for maximum coordination of resources through Pell Grants, State Need Grants, FSET and Opportunities Grants to ensure student succeeds in training. Students awarded a WIA Individual Training Scholarship access funds prior to Pell award, allowing efficient program entry. Adjustments made to WIA Training amounts reflect any subsequent Pell funds.
 - c) Coordinate with Financial Aid office to identify "Change of Circumstances", allowing dislocated workers to receive State Need Grants and limited Pell Grants during their training.
8. Work with industry partners to increase the number of out of school youth enrolled in pre-apprenticeships and on the job training in the areas of construction, especially energy conservation and generation, and manufacturing.
9. Expand the use of occupational skills crosswalks that map military training and experience to civilian opportunities in targeted industry sectors to increase the

ease and number of transitioning veterans into health, marine and other high demand advanced manufacturing occupations.

10. Expand amount and access for limited and non-English speaking and low basic skill individuals, including at-risk youth, to Vocational English as a Second Language (VESL) and Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) classes in health, manufacturing and other high-demand, high-wage career paths.
11. Plan and develop products, services, and procedures for referral or entry into WIA Title 1-B and WIA and other partner programs by consistently following the principles of Universal Design - creating products and environments meant to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialization. Following Universal Design principles ensures that equal access to services (MSFW's, Persons with Disabilities, Limited English Speaking Individuals) is a reality.

C. Increase the skills of current employees and improve their retention.

1. Maximize resources by coordinating use of Job Skills, Customized Training and Incumbent Worker Training Program funds to expand training to incumbent workers in new skills and production processes. Insure respective staff can market integrated funding packages.
2. Identify, develop and provide training sessions to catalyze employer-based retention strategies for the aging workforce.
3. Continue to use key industry panels to embed industry skill standards in incumbent worker training and in secondary and post-secondary curricula, thereby enabling a skilled labor pool to readily shift between employers and sectors as contracts and demand for labor fluctuate.

II. SYSTEM ALIGNMENT: Enhance the capacity of the education, workforce and economic development systems to meet the needs of the region's industries and its workers.

A. Continue to develop the region's analytical framework to inform systems planning and to help direct the allocation of resources to high value returns on investment in the regional economy.

1. In coordination with Western Washington University's (WWU) Center for Economic and Business Research (CEBR) and the Labor Market Economic Analysis (LMEA) regional labor economist, refine data sources, metrics and analysis currently in use and improve accessibility to provide fact-based decision models and performance metrics

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2. In coordination with WWU's CEBR and the LMEA regional labor economist, implement the regionally defined economic model to define a baseline to track growth in employment, wages, and size of targeted industries and evaluate investments
3. Develop a complete list of all digital literacy resources in the county – locations, hours of availability, courses offered, and means of contact. Advertise/promote all partner offerings in a single marketing piece. Develop and implement a communication plan with the business community and with regional providers. Develop referral system and coordinate curriculum with one another.
4. Continue collaboration and support for Whatcom Community College in its work to identify and provide appropriate services for the 55+ population. These efforts include the new ENCORE program within the Community Education department and support of initiatives which connect mature workers with key industry sector and strategic initiatives of the Council. Continue to seek data and assess regional retirees' and mature workers' skills and needs. Increase communications with the network of senior centers, volunteer centers, SCORE, WWU's Center for Economic Vitality, SVC's Small Business Resource Center, etc, to to develop service strategies for workers and business to maximize talent pool.

B. Establish a regional communications plan that:

1. Advertises up-to-date occupational openings, career opportunities and skill transferability information throughout the region.
2. Develops agreed upon talking points and communication tools to communicate systemic barriers, regulatory and statutory impediments to business success and innovation.
3. Creates and implements strategies for networking across geographic, professional, business and interest-based communities.
4. Improves information flow and coordination activities about what is available at WorkSource to professional and technical college staff and other vocational programs

C. Ensure the sustainability and ongoing value of the region's industry panels and key industries leadership forums.

1. Conduct and/or participate in annual regional conferences on key industry sectors to foster the exchange of ideas and innovations.
2. Accelerate the alignment of partner organizations and agencies to achieve regional goals.

3. Develop and implement strategies to align budget and strategic planning processes with key regional priorities.
4. Develop action plan to aid in influencing public policy decisions that support the expansion and job growth of regional industries.
5. Economic development, one-stop and other workforce development field staff are trained to ensure fluency in regional labor and economic landscape, their role in transformational work, and assure value solutions for workers and business.
6. Businesses are satisfied with a single point of contact system in which any Northwest workforce system partner accurately directs them to needed services.

III. *INNOVATION*: Catalyze innovation and foster an entrepreneurial climate for business creation and expansion.

A. Use the Intracoastal Leadership Committee, an industry-led research and development taskforce of marine and advanced manufacturing companies, to identify challenges, opportunities and solutions to support research and development, and the commercialization of new technologies.

1. Expand use of environmentally-acceptable, advanced composite manufacturing processes.
2. Identify and support proposals for “green” solutions to energy conservation and generation, e.g., anaerobic digesters, low wake marine propulsion systems, etc
3. Identify and influence improvements to regulatory/statutory impediments to business success and innovation.

B. Champion the development of regional hubs for innovation that foster the research and development of new technologies, small business development and entrepreneurialism, and community development.

1. Training scholarships aligned with the Vocational Skills Center and its Marine Trades Annex.
2. Expand partnerships with region’s Native American Tribes to foster collaboration and entrepreneurship.
3. Promote an entrepreneurial culture and training to expand small business opportunities.
4. Work in coordination with the Workforce Training and Education Council, Small Business Advisory and Microenterprise Center, Small Business Development Center, Service Corps of Retired Executives, Center for Economic Vitality, and other appropriate state and local partner organizations to develop strategies that

will ensure entrepreneurial training opportunities are offered through the WorkSource Northwest system.

C. Assist in the development of new markets by growing their customer base, applying existing and new technology in different ways, expansion of infrastructure, and support of innovation.

1. Establish linkages with WWU's Center for Economic Vitality's Research Center to coordinate research services to promote industry growth, especially for "Stage 2" companies, with 10 to 99 employees, which have survived start-up mode, and are planning further job growth.
2. Increase the number of companies using economic development resources or marketing opportunities.

PLAN DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The plan development process involved a range of activities over a several month period extending to April 29, 2009, including:

- research and analysis on the regional economy and labor market, the current and future workforce, and the workforce development system;
- board member input at NWC committee meetings;
- targeted stakeholder input solicited from partner and community leadership;
- participation of NWC staff members in strategic planning activities of partner agencies to help ensure continuity of plans;
- incorporation of strategic directions and actions from multiple complementary and parallel planning documents, grants and contracts, and action plans drawn from throughout the region;
- review of board member and community stakeholder input and approval of the draft Plan by the local elected officials and full Council at March board meeting;
- early community notification of plan development guidelines and solicitation of comment and issues as the plan was being developed;
- a forty-five day public comment period;
- comments compiled and reviewed from public posting period;
- meeting with Local Elected Official Consortium Committee to review update and public comments;
- public meeting of Council's Executive Committee for consideration of public comment and plan update;
- final vote for approval by the local elected officials and full Council

SIGNATURE PAGE

We the undersigned, hereby acknowledge and support the Northwest Workforce Council's 2009 – 2011 Strategic Plan as the guideline for continued integration and enhancement of the Northwest workforce development system and for the efficient implementation of the Workforce Investment Act in our workforce development area.

Jeff Kochman, Chair
Northwest Workforce Council

The Honorable Ken Dahlstedt
Commissioner, Skagit County

Appendix I

**STATE AND FEDERAL CORE INDICATORS &
EXPECTED LEVELS OF PERFORMANCE FOR PY 2009/2010**

Performance Targets for Years 10 and 11 of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Title I-B		
Performance Measure	New Targets	
	PY 2009	PY 2010
<u>Federal Common Adult Measures</u>		
<i>Entered Employment</i>		
<i>Retention</i>		
<i>Earnings</i>		
Credential		
<u>Federal Common Dislocated Worker Measures</u>		
<i>Entered Employment</i>		
<i>Retention</i>		
<i>Earnings</i>		
Credential		
<u>Federal Common Measures - Youth</u>		
<i>Placement in Employment or Education</i>		
<i>Degree or Certificate</i>		
<i>Literacy and Numeracy Gains</i>		
<u>Federal Older Youth Measures</u>		
Entered Employment		
Retention		
Earnings		
Employment and Credential		
<u>Federal Younger Youth Measures</u>		
Skill Gains		
High School Diploma Rate		
Retention		

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<u>Federal Customer Satisfaction</u>		
Employers		
Participants		
<u>State Adult Measures</u>		
Credential Rate		
Employment Q3 After Exit		
Annualized Median Earnings (Q1 2003 \$)		
Participant Satisfaction		
<u>State Dislocated Worker Measures</u>		
Credential Rate		
Employment Q3 After Exit		
Annualized Median Earnings (Q1 2003 \$)		
Participant Satisfaction		
<u>State Youth Measures</u>		
Credential Rate		
Employment Q3 After Exit		
Annualized Median Earnings (Q1 2003 \$)		
Participant Satisfaction		
State Employer Satisfaction Measure		

Appendix II

How is “Local Workforce Development System” Defined?

The “Workforce Development System” means programs that use private and/or public (local, state, and federal) funds to prepare workers for employment, upgrade worker skills, retrain workers, or provide employment or retention services for workers or employers. The “Workforce Development System” includes, but is not limited to:

- Secondary vocational education, including activities funded under the federal Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act of 2006.
- Community and technical college vocational education programs, including activities funded under the federal Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act of 2006.
- Private career schools and private college vocational programs.
- Employer-sponsored training.
- Youth, adult, and dislocated worker programs funded by Title I-B of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998.
- Work-related adult basic education and literacy programs, including programs funded under the federal Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (WIA Title II).
- Activities funded under the federal Wagner-Peyser Act (WIA Title III).
- Apprenticeships.
- The One-Stop System [as described in WIA Sec.121(b)].
- The state Job Skills Program.
- The state Customized Employment Program.
- Training Benefits Program.
- Work-related components of the vocational rehabilitation program (WIA Title IV).
- Services provided by the Department of Services for the Blind.
- Programs offered by private and public nonprofit organizations that provide job training or work-related adult literacy services.
- May include other local, state, and federally funded workforce development programs.
- May include other privately funded workforce development programs and initiatives.