INTRODUCTION

The Washington Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (Board) contracted with Social Policy Research Associates (SPR) to conduct three short-term research projects on integrating the state's workforce development system:

1. Best practices of state-level consolidation, coordination, and integration in other states.
2. Integrating partners and services in WorkSource centers.
3. Consolidating workforce development financial aid.

SPR subcontracted portions of the research for the second and third studies to the Social and Economic Sciences Research Center of Washington State University (WSU). The projects began on June 1, with a draft report to the Board due on August 1.

Each report stands by itself, but all are part of the Board's broader research initiative to improve workforce development integration. SPR's research complements another research project that the Board contracted separately to WSU and several projects carried out by Board staff.

This introduction provides basic details on the scope of the research for each of three studies and the methodologies used.

Best Practices

The Best Practices study looks at workforce-development-reform strategies of consolidation, coordination, and integration. SPR researchers focused on identifying exemplary practices at the state level. With the help of a panel of national experts representing the key workforce programs and partners and consultation with Board staff, we selected six states to review (see Appendix A for the list of experts): Florida, Michigan, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Utah. The states were selected because they implemented one or more of the three reform strategies. We also considered certain policy and structural issues of interest to Washington policy-makers.

Based on references provided by our panel of experts, and building on suggestions made by the initial state respondent, we interviewed four individuals in each state. These respondents represent a spectrum of participants in the state workforce system, including state workforce agency directors, board chairs, and partners such as the community colleges and adult basic education. The interviews followed a basic protocol that included questions associated with the states' approaches to consolidation, coordination, and integration, and assessments of the costs, benefits, and contexts of the reform efforts. The protocol guided the discussions.

For background, we conducted a literature review that encompassed national studies and findings related to the consolidation, coordination, or integration of workforce programs, as well as state specific publications and findings to deepen our knowledge of the history, structures, and innovative work in the states we selected. Appendix B contains an annotated bibliography of the literature reviewed.

WorkSource Integration

The WorkSource study is about partner and service integration in WorkSource. We focused very tightly on integration and did not examine issues of program quality and outcomes, nor did we look at youth services. SPR and WSU staff collected information through two methods: site visits and a survey of staff. We made site visits to six comprehensive WorkSource centers in the local areas of six Workforce Development Councils between June 26 and July 6 of this year. The areas were deliberately selected to reflect program size and the geographic and economic diversity of the state, but they are not necessarily representative of the entire system. Within those areas, we selected the largest comprehensive center in four areas. In Olympic and Eastern, we selected centers because their size, location, and economic circumstances contributed to the diversity of the overall sample. Exhibit 1 displays the Councils and WorkSource centers that we visited:

Exhibit 1:
Workforce Development Councils and Centers Visited

WDC	WorkSource Center
Seattle/King	Renton
Tri-County	Yakima
Southwest	Vancouver
Olympic	Port Angeles
Eastern	Colville
Spokane	Spokane

The site visits examined integration at the particular center rather than the local workforce area as a whole. The one-and-one-half-day site visits to each center included interviews with managers and staff and focus groups with 1) job seekers who had registered in multiple programs and 2) employer customers with extensive experience with WorkSource. Each site visitor used a common research protocol that loosely structured a discussion between the researcher and respondent on the important topics but did not produce strictly comparable responses, as in a survey. In total, we interviewed 115 managers and staff and talked with 40 job-seeker and 36 employer customers.

The staff survey was conducted over the Internet between June 23 and July 7 by inviting all WorkSource staff to participate by email. Messages were sent out to 1,092 WorkSource employees from several distribution lists used by the Employment Security Department to communicate with the system. This figure represents the best available estimate of the total number of WorkSource employees. The invitation email asked recipients to disseminate the email to others in their centers that may not have received the original invitation. Two reminder messages were also sent during the period to the same lists. Additionally, the Washington Workforce Association sent out an email to all Workforce Development Council directors, announcing the survey and asking them to forward the survey link to WorkSource staff in their areas. Finally, a related survey of this group, using the same distribution lists, was administered by the Board staff on the topic of financial aid. The invitations to each survey encouraged participation in the other survey.

Of the estimated 1092 WorkSource employees, 429 completed all or part of the survey, a response rate of 39 percent. We received responses from 36 of the 53 comprehensive and affiliate centers in the state. Because of the method of distribution, the uncertainty about whether it reached all WorkSource employees equally, and the relatively low response rate, the survey results cannot be considered to represent the entire system. Nevertheless, the results provide useful information from a large group of staff from many sites and complement the narrower, but deeper, site-visit data.

Financial Aid Consolidation

The financial aid study looks at the current state of financial aid for workforce development students and the potential for consolidating aid to improve access to training and completion rates. The study has two major components:

The first collected basic program information on funding for training, training expenditures, and program eligibility at the state level for the following programs:

- Workforce Investment Act, Adult and Dislocated Worker funding streams
- Trade Adjustment Assistance
- State Training Benefits
- State Training Completion Aid
- TANF Work First
- Vocational Rehabilitation

The second component examined how WorkSource partners provide financial aid from their programs and assist prospective and current trainees to obtain other funding. SPR and WSU staff collected data during the same site visits described above in Study #2, following the same methods. Most of the 115 staff members and managers whom we interviewed for the integration study were also questioned about financial aid. We also held focus groups of 26 job seekers who received financial aid for training from at least two sources.

A Note on Terminology

Throughout the reports, we refer to local areas or local workforce areas to denote the state's 12 Workforce Development Council areas or Local Workforce Investment Areas, as they are technically described in the Workforce Investment Act. The term local board, used in the Workforce Investment Act, encompasses the Washington Workforce Development Councils that govern local WorkSource systems.