

Retooling Washington's Workforce

Washington's Workforce Development System
Addressing today's needs and building a stronger economy

December 2011



Acknowledgements

The Retooling Washington's Workforce initiative has benefitted from the human talent and resources brought to it through its many partners, especially:

Washington State Employment Security Department

Department of Social & Health Services (Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and Economic Services Administration)

State Board for Community and Technical Colleges

Department of Commerce

Department of Labor & Industries

Washington Workforce Association

Washington Economic Development Association

Workforce Training & Education Coordinating Board

Association of Washington Business

Washington State Labor Council

Retooling Washington's Workforce

Addressing today's needs and building a stronger economy.

The economy in the state of Washington, as with most other areas of the country, has continued to struggle since the Great Recession. Hitting a peak of 10 percent, the unemployment rate has yet to drop below 9 percent and over 320,000 residents are still looking, but have not found, work. Meanwhile, some of the businesses that are recovering and beginning to hire complain that they cannot find workers with the right set of skills.

It was this economic reality that prompted the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (Workforce Board), and its many partners, to launch a multi-faceted initiative (Retooling Washington's Workforce) designed to improve the job prospects of Washington's unemployed while ensuring our state's businesses have the talent they need to grow and prosper.

Specifically, the Retooling Washington's Workforce initiative set out to enhance the workforce system's ability to:

1. Find and assist those employers who are hiring (or would hire) if they could find the right people.
2. Deliver a quality pool of workers capable of meeting employers' needs, and,
3. To the greatest extent possible, draw from the ranks of the unemployed, particularly long-term unemployed, when filling these new job openings

Central to this initiative are the WorkSource centers which serve as a key onramp to the state's workforce system for job seekers and employers. Washington's WorkSource is a statewide network of offices and partnerships that bring federal, state and local employment service resources together under one roof. Every working day, thousands of unemployed workers stream through the state's 80 WorkSource centers and affiliate sites looking for help in re-entering the job market. These offices have been at the front line of our state's battle in putting people back to work, supported by a broad range of training and support services available through the workforce system's many partners.

As part of its planning and performance monitoring role, the state's Workforce Board has witnessed how the many parts of the system have risen to the challenge and come up with innovations in service delivery that respond specifically to the economic crisis. The purpose of the Retooling Washington's Workforce initiative has been to identify and channel these innovations

to the rest of the system—creating efficiencies today. In the process, the initiative’s many partners (see Acknowledgements) present a vision of how Washington can have an even stronger, more responsive system for job seekers and employers in the future.

Specifically, the Retooling initiative has outlined areas for further discussion and work:

1. **Employer Engagement** – How can Washington involve more employers with the design and outcomes of the workforce system to deliver workers that meet industry’s rapidly changing needs?
2. **Leveraging Resources** – Facing a future of limited resources, can Washington stretch the capacity of the workforce system through non-public resources?
3. **The value of sharing information in aligning services** – With new technologies eliminating mechanical barriers to information sharing, how can Washington foster information sharing and nurture partnerships?
4. **Early intervention for long-term unemployed** – Can the workforce system target its services more effectively to reach the unemployed when they are ready to use these services and still have time to benefit from them?
5. **Use of assessments and national certifications** – Can Washington do more to make it easier for job seekers to understand their skills and training needs, and employers to recognize the value of the state’s workforce and find the workers they need?

This report summarizes the Retooling initiative’s activities, successes and lessons, and provides more detail on the above discussion topics. Also, performance indicators that have tracked the results of this Retooling initiative to date are included as an appendix.

How it started

The initiative began with an extensive stakeholder process that drew professionals from the fields of education, human resources, and economic development throughout the state. Business owners and labor leaders participated alongside community college deans, WorkSource Center managers, and community-based organizations.

The stakeholder process pursued answers to the following questions:

- 1) How do we work together to help the unemployed who need to have their skills retooled for jobs now and in the future?
- 2) How do we work together to respond to the needs of employers when they come to us to help them have the workforce they need now and in the future?

The goal was to accomplish measureable results within 12 to 18 months. By design, the initiative did not receive any new special funding. Support was provided by existing resources from partner organizations.

At the stakeholder meetings, participants identified a broad range of issues and opportunities. Generally, there was recognition that the system could do a better job of linking job seekers with employers who were hiring. Many were concerned that employers were not using the system either because they were not informed of the employment services available or because employers did not believe the services would help them. Meanwhile, as economic recovery lagged, an increasing number of unemployed residents were approaching the end of their Unemployment Insurance (UI) benefits while many employers exhibited reluctance to hire in the face of uncertainty.

After reviewing these issues, stakeholders voted to target the following strategies:

- Improved Job Referral/Skills Matching & Coordinated Employer Outreach
- Expand and Improve the use of On-the-Job Training (OJT) and Direct-Connect Training
- Coordinated Outreach to Long-Term Unemployed

Committees formed to develop work plans on the above strategies, coordinate state efforts and to monitor activities of local work groups organized around the same purposes.

The following organizations participated in stakeholder meetings to determine the strategies for Retooling Washington's Workforce:

Anthony's Restaurant (Spokane)
Association of Washington Business
Bates Technical College
Bellevue College
Benton-Franklin Workforce Development Council
The Boeing Company
Building Changes
Carrington College
Cascadia Community College
City of Lakewood
City of Lynnwood
Clover Park Technical College
Coffee Systems, Inc.
Community-Minded Enterprises
Construction Industry Training Council
Department of Commerce
Department of Labor & Industries
Department of Health and Social Services
Eastern Washington Apprenticeship Coordinators Association
Eastern Washington Partnership WDC
Employment Security Department
GEAR UP
Goodwill Industries of the Inland Northwest
Governor Gregoire's office
Grays Harbor College
Greater Spokane Incorporated
Haskins Steel Company
Health Workforce Institute
Higher Education Coordinating Board
Highline Community College
IAM/Boeing Joint Programs
Interim Healthcare of Spokane
Lakewood Economic Development Council
LU-112-NECA Electrical JATC
Microsoft Corporation
Multicultural Self-Sufficiency Movement
North Central Washington Workforce Development Council
Northwest Career Colleges Federation
Northwest Washington Electrical Industry J.A.T.C.
Northwest Workforce Development Council
Olympic College
Olympic Workforce Development Council
Opportunities Industrialization Center of Washington
Pacific Mountain Workforce Development Council
Pierce College
Puget Sound Regional Council
Seattle Community Colleges
SEIU Healthcare 1199NW
Senator Maria Cantwell's office
Sheet Metal Workers Local 66
Shoreline Community College
Snohomish County Workforce Development Council
South Central Workforce Development Council
South Puget Sound Community College
Southwest Washington Workforce Development Council
Spokane Area Workforce Development Council
Spokane Community Colleges
State Board for Community & Technical Colleges
Tacoma Community College
Tri-County Economic Development District
Triumph Composite Systems
U.S. Senate HELP Committee Staff
Washington Economic Development Association
Washington State Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs
Washington State Labor Council
Workforce Central (Pierce County WDC)
Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King County
Workforce Training & Education Coordinating Board

The work plans were then presented to the Workforce Board—whose voting members have equal representation from business, labor, and government—and approved in November 2010. Efforts progressed at the state and local level throughout the next 12 months. What follows is a summary of actions taken, success stories and recommendations based on the Retooling Washington's Workforce initiative.

Find and assist those employers who are hiring (or would hire) if they could find the right people.

Coordinated Employer Outreach

The stakeholder process generated two key observations of business outreach efforts in Washington: Some employers were receiving multiple contacts from employment programs causing some confusion as to which program to access, while other employers seemed unaware of the employment services available to them.

Many organizations conduct non-commercial outreach to employers, including Chambers of Commerce, community and technical colleges, community-based organizations, Economic Development Councils, Employment Security Department, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, the apprenticeship program of Department of Labor and Industries, Joint Apprenticeship and Training Committees, local governments, Workforce Development Councils, and others. A survey of these organizations, conducted by the Retooling initiative, revealed that 87percent of them partnered with at least one other organization for outreach activities. Almost 75 percent of those surveyed said they shared business contact information. However, only 50 percent said they were part of an on-going inter-organization business outreach team and only 29 percent said they contributed to a common business contact database.

The survey indicated the potential for collaboration as respondents listed the following activities as most likely undertaken through a team approach: 1) Identifying business skill needs; 2) Identifying business growth plans; 3) Identifying barriers to business retention or expansion; 4) Providing labor market information; and 5) Providing referrals to other sources of workforce information.

On July 1, 2010, a new WorkSource Service Delivery System Policy went into effect on Coordinated Employer/Business Services. This policy called for clarified roles, joint outreach planning and information sharing among WorkSource partners. The Retooling initiative encouraged that as these policies took effect that WorkSource teams broaden their outreach partnerships to include Economic Development Councils, community-based organizations, municipalities and Chambers of Commerce.

Another survey was distributed to employers who work with WorkSource. This survey found that most employers are satisfied with the quality of the information they receive through outreach efforts. Employers, however, are about evenly split as to whether or not duplication of outreach efforts is a problem in their area.

The Business Outreach effort came at a key time in. In 2009, the Legislature adopted House Bill 1323 which called for greater

Single Point of Contact

Workforce Central, Pierce County's Workforce Development Council, supports a co-located Business Specialist with the Tacoma-Pierce County Economic Development Board, providing a single point of contact for workforce development assistance within the local economic board's staff.

coordination between workforce and economic development organizations, calling on Workforce Development Councils and Associate Development Organizations to work together in planning and delivering services to employers.

Local efforts in coordinating employer outreach

The real work in bridging the divide between outreach efforts occurred at the local level. For instance, Spokane redesigned its Business Solutions Team by assigning “Market Managers” along industry sectors who in turn designed marketing strategies and service delivery to meet the specific needs of their assigned industries. Workforce Central, serving Pierce County, supports a co-located business specialist with the Tacoma-Pierce County Economic Development Board. Other Workforce Development Councils and Economic Development Councils have similar close relationships, either through co-location, intertwined boards and/or shared staff.

Eastern Washington Partnership and North Central Washington WDC use regular weekly meetings between local outreach staff of various state and local government agencies to help coordinate outreach in their large, rural areas.

Washington’s investment in Industry Skill Panels is also paying off by providing a forum for local employers to come together with educators, labor, and local officials to identify and close skill gaps and other common workforce issues. These business-led partnerships focus a region’s resources on creating training solutions tailored to a local area’s growing industry sector by bringing key players to the table. For instance, 22 employers from King County’s rapidly growing interactive media industry are members of a Skill Panel which brings together the state’s Department of Commerce, gaming and technology companies, Seattle colleges, universities and art schools, as well as the Seattle- King County WDC and enterpriseSeattle—King County’s EDC. Another panel, Intracoastal Marine and Advanced Manufacturing Industry Alliance, got its start in Western Washington’s coastal areas but has since achieved statewide status with 30 employers engaged in efforts to build training curriculum to meet common workforce needs.

Improving the coordination of business outreach is an ongoing effort. Outreach personnel who develop good working relationships with their colleagues in partner organizations will change over time, creating the need to build new relationships. Structural changes such as collocating personnel or hiring common staff can institutionalize these gains. The state should continue its leadership in fostering coordination through professional development, technical assistance and support for projects that can serve as a catalyst for partnering.

Deliver a quality pool of workers capable of meeting employers’ needs.

Improved Job Referral/Skills Matching

The flipside to coordinating business outreach is to improve the services offered to employers. Good outreach matched by good services can build strong brand loyalty to the WorkSource centers. Conversely, any difficulty in matching job orders with applicants can undercut efforts to improve outreach.

The minority of employers who report dissatisfaction with outreach services in the previously mentioned ESD survey expressed disappointment with the quality of job referrals. A separate ESD survey found that only about half of employers with staff-assisted job orders were satisfied with the quality of candidates referred by WorkSource. Employer satisfaction is even lower with self-referred candidates.

ESD has been taking steps to identify ways to improve job referrals. The agency has focused on job matching and job referral procedures and staff training. As part of this effort, ESD and its partners are developing tools, such as checklists, that WorkSource staff can use in taking and recording job orders and making referrals of job seekers. These products are in draft form and available for review and testing at www.wtb.wa.gov/QualityJobReferrals.asp.

Local efforts in improving job referral and skills matching

To improve the quality of referred job candidates, staff at many WorkSource centers are taking a more active role in screening candidates to make sure a jobseeker's skills are a good fit for an open position. In the best cases, efforts are made to assess the types of skills a firm's current employees possess, and then apply those same standards to new applicants. Assessment tools, such as WorkKeys, help evaluate a job seeker's skills and determine what training, if any, is required to correct skill gaps. In Clallam County, the Olympic Workforce Development Council used this approach to screen for, and find, qualified local job applicants for an aerospace firm.

In Whatcom County, the Northwest Workforce Development Council headed up a highly successful public-private partnership that connected hundreds of unemployed workers with an employer's specific needs. The process began with the Bellingham WorkSource office providing an initial screen. Private sector staffing services, contracted by the employer, followed up with more specific screening. Survivors of these two screens then underwent short-term training that directly addressed the employer's needs.

Workforce Central in Pierce County operates a pre-employment training and recruitment program designed by local manufacturers and taught by industry professionals. Employers hire directly from the pool of applicants who attend the Manufacturing Academy and complete this nine-week, 360-hour, 30 college credit program.

Meanwhile, the Spokane Area Workforce Development Council has the bold goal of getting as much of its labor force as possible assessed under the National Career Readiness Certification. Currently, three employers have contracted to have their job applicants tested at Spokane's WorkSource center, bringing job seekers into the local employment office where additional services and training are available, including the free test-compatible KeyTrain remediation program.

This close employer relationship is getting unemployed workers back into good paying jobs quickly while helping others connect with the training and placement services they'll need to be competitive for future job openings.

By developing ways to assess and match jobseeker skills with employer needs, WorkSource centers are able to save businesses money in recruitment costs while ensuring that job seekers who have the skills get a chance to use them. For those whose skills fall short, it's important to connect them quickly to training that will close the skill gap for them.

Applicant Pre-Screening

Pre-screening and pre-employment training services have been used by a number of Workforce Development Councils to build a closer relationship between employers and the local pool of unemployed workers.

On-the-Job Training and other Direct Connect Training

On-the-Job Training (OJT) provides compensation to the employer for the cost of training new employees in job-specific skills. While not in common use in recent years, OJTs are a proven tool that encourages employers to hire new employees, filling those new positions from the ranks of the unemployed.

The basic premise is that it's harder to find applicants with specific occupational skills than it is to find good applicants who can learn those skills. The Workforce Board's Employer Survey, conducted every two years, routinely finds that the number one reason employers have difficulty hiring personnel is because of a lack of occupational skills. No matter how finely tuned the state's workforce training system is, Washington's dynamic economy will always put new demands on it. By providing training that allows new or existing employees to "directly connect" to an employer's skill needs, OJT and other Direct Connect tools make it possible to quickly broaden the pool of applicants by enlisting those who may not have the particular skills sought by employers, but have the capability of mastering new occupational skills on the job.

At the state level, ESD looked at how other states and areas throughout Washington have administered OJTs, and conducted a webinar on best practices attended by over 70 staff. Specifically, ESD looked at ways to streamline the employer contract part of the process and has created a template for WorkSource staff and its partners which should make OJT contracts easier for employers to complete.

In an example of collaboration, the state's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) at the Department of Social and Health Services is launching a one-year pilot project to contract with ESD to provide up to 180 DVR customers with On-the-Job Training placements. ESD will be placing DVR clients into OJTs at 14 sites around the state to test a collaborative service delivery model that is aimed at creating more OJT opportunities by braiding DVR and ESD resources.

In another sharing of best practices, the state's Workforce Board and Lower Columbia College in Longview are working together to spread the use of a program that can be closely tailored to the needs of specific employers that aren't large enough to warrant a dedicated college program. Offered by Lower Columbia College, the Individual Certificate Program (ICP) allows students to pursue a custom-designed worksite-based learning program not currently available through apprenticeship or other college programs while earning college credit.

When combined with OJT, the program delivers locally trained workers to growing businesses. (To learn more about the expansion of ICP to other parts of Washington, go to: www.wtb.wa.gov/ICP.asp.)

OJT Best Practices Sharing

See OJT Resources and Tools:
www.wtb.wa.gov/RetoolingOJT.asp

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Direct Connect Training

A high-tech testing company in the semi-rural community of Kelso was struggling to find lab technicians until Southwest Washington Workforce Development Council teamed up with Lower Columbia College and its Individualized Certificate Program. The employer was able to identify specific competencies it needed and match them with academic coursework, creating a Chemical Technician certificate. The company then hired students, using OJTs to complete their training.

Through an agreement with Microsoft, ESD has made Microsoft's E-Learning library available through the WorkSource system and to any Washington resident who registers through a WorkSource website (regardless of employment status). Over 10,000 individuals have taken advantage of this opportunity and that number is increasing. ESD has extended the Microsoft E-Learning library through October 2012.

Such online learning might not be directly connected to employer needs but by increasing the accessibility and capacity of these training options, online courses make it possible for Washington residents to prepare for better paying jobs. Consequently, the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges made additional funds available in 2011 to colleges to establish online and hybrid courses, which are typically easier for workers to access than classroom-only courses. As a result, over 500 students have completed over 2,000 college credits.

While the statewide effort focused on identifying and removing obstacles, raising awareness and sharing best practices, local Workforce Development Councils (WDCs) drew on two pools of federal dollars (National Emergency Grant and Workforce Investment Act dollars from the Governor's discretionary fund) to broaden the application of OJTs. This funding has been instrumental in fostering additional partnerships as these WDCs have teamed up with other organizations in expanding their outreach to employers.

Local efforts in OJT and Direct Connect training

Getting employers to become comfortable with hiring new employees at a time of economic uncertainty, even with a wage subsidy, took concerted effort and resulted in some new strategies developed at the local level.

In Spokane, the WDC found that small- to medium-sized businesses were screening out too many applicants because they lacked skills—the very skills that applicants would have acquired during their OJT experience. In response, the WDC created an OJT specialist to help employers understand how to screen applicants for other job-ready characteristics such as the ability to learn and acquire new skills. This effort included holding workshops for personnel managers and business owners on how to interview for fit, rather than specific skills. In doing so, Spokane not only was able to use OJTs to spur hiring but also as a way to build a closer relationship between employers and its WorkSource employment services.

By moving unemployed workers into fields that are in-demand and essential to our state's economy, OJTs are both a workforce and economic development tool. In Seattle, long-term unemployed applicants are being screened and referred for 10-week OJTs with Burlington Northern-Santa Fe Rails—helping them start on careers in the high-demand field of transportation and logistics. OJTs are also helping the new SGL Automotive Carbon Fibers plant in Moses Lake staff up to build the next generation of BMW car bodies.

The Eastern Washington Partnership worked with its region's Economic Development Councils and Associate Development Organizations to develop an OJT marketing strategy, and did some joint presentations before business audiences. A similar collaboration of the South Central Washington WDC and Economic Development Group of Kittitas County led to using OJT as an incentive to recruiting a new aerospace subcontractor (siting decision was indefinitely postponed for economic reasons).

OJTs have been valuable to the Retooling initiative by:

- Providing a tool that fosters partnerships among business outreach staff.
- Broadening the applicant pool that can satisfy specific employer needs.
- Filling skilled positions essential to the state's economic recovery.
- Helping long-term unemployed return to the workforce.

To the greatest extent possible, draw from the ranks of the unemployed, particularly long-term unemployed, when filling new job openings.

Coordinated Outreach to Long Term Unemployed

When work on the Retooling initiative began in earnest, the number of Washington residents exhausting their Unemployment Insurance (UI) benefits had reached over a 1,000 per week with the threat of greater numbers when federal UI extensions expired. Currently, the estimated number of unemployed in Washington is over 320,000 with over 65,000 having used up their UI benefits. As laid off workers lose their benefits and are still unable to find work in a sluggish economy, their families run the risk of slipping into poverty and homelessness, creating

Running out of benefits

Each week, in Washington, an average of 1,000 people are exhausting all of their unemployment insurance benefits.

conducted earlier in the year revealed that 75 percent of the UI exhaustees were still unemployed.

ESD took the lead in coordinating the strategy for outreach to UI exhaustees through a range of projects intended to identify the population and target them for more intensive information and services.

To effectively coordinate outreach activities to the growing population of those exhausting all unemployment insurance benefits, the strategy established three deliverables:

- **Data:** Provide regular exhaustee data reports to inform outreach efforts and service provision.
- **Outreach:** In collaboration with local partners, identify outreach goals and strategies and provide resource referral information.
- **Resources for front line service providers:** Share information with front line staff working in WorkSource offices; provide training as possible.

Data - To help inform outreach efforts and service provision statewide, ESD collects and publishes monthly reports on the UI exhaustee population which includes demographics such as age, education, gender, occupation, industry, veterans' status, and disability status. The reports present information broken out by county, and by legislative and congressional districts. These reports have been effective in raising awareness among the congressional and legislative delegation as well as with community and business leaders. This data also shows the percentages of UI exhaustees by occupation, education level and industry field providing the workforce system with a picture of the available workforce.

Outreach - ESD produced a resource guide to assist exhaustees and their families to quickly locate community resources, such as health care, housing and food assistance programs. To date, over 240,000 claimants who were about to exhaust their UI benefits received the resource guide. The guide is also available on the web, in both English and Spanish. In another effort to reach UI exhaustees, ESD deployed an automatic dialing and message delivery service to call and encourage former UI recipients to visit their local WorkSource career center for job assistance and other referrals. ESD also deployed a new service delivery model that helped assess job seekers' skills and outline their best options for finding living wage jobs.

Resources for front line service providers - Thanks to a partnership with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation within the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), close to 300 frontline WorkSource and partner staff have been trained in motivational interviewing techniques that have helped them engage clients in pursuing the services they need to find a job. These include job-search preparation, job and training referrals, connection to other employment and training resources, and information about other community resources. The training enhanced the skills of frontline staff in serving unemployed individuals who are uncertain or seriously distressed about their employment futures. Additionally, ESD and DVR/DSHS continue to partner to improve the referral process, including designing and implementing an online referral tool to more easily and rapidly refer job seekers with disabilities who require DVR services.

Local efforts to coordinate outreach to long-term unemployed

Throughout the state, local efforts have arisen to meet the needs of long-term unemployed. Workforce Development Council Snohomish County set up Project RISE (Reconnecting Individuals in Sustaining Employment) that provided a mix of group workshops and individual, personalized employment counseling sessions for those who have been on UI for over 79 weeks. This partnership with WorkSource and ResCare Workforce Solutions help participants focus on part-time and transitional employment, while also building new connections, and greater confidence and optimism. Because many struggle with Boeing's online application process, Snohomish County's WorkSource center offered workshops that helped 2,400 applicants learn more about how to apply to the state's largest and currently most active employer.

The Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King County created an intensive job-placement service for long-term unemployed. The Back2Work Now project featured a job-club structure, a LinkedIn group and more than 30 employers who offered mock interviews and advice. . . as well as jobs.

Pierce County's WorkSource partners, including Workforce Central, created The Hiring Academy which focused on assessing jobseeker skills and preparing job seekers to apply for jobs. After graduating from the Hiring Academy, attendees earned a VIP pass that gave them exclusive entrance into a Job Fair that took place a few weeks later. The approach was two-fold. It created an incentive for job seekers to stay engaged and it provided employers an opportunity to meet attendees who have demonstrated a commitment to the job search process.

Professional Development

Motivational Interviewing is a non-judgmental style of interaction that allows acceptance of an individual's ambivalence or frustrations about change. A partnership between Employment Security and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (within DSHS) produced a series of hands-on training that has helped WorkSource staff engage more effectively with customers and increase successful outcomes and decrease frustration. Those who have gone through this training report it resulted in a high success rate and improved interaction with customers.

South Central Workforce Development Council created a Career Broker position to target and serve long-term unemployed customers. The broker served as a career coach, helping to guide claimants to a successful job search by identifying barriers and referring appropriate services. This intensive effort not only helped job seekers but also improved the job referral match. The Career Broker was able to gather more detailed information about those looking for work, what skills they possessed and how those skills aligned with job openings.

Spokane designated claims specialists who provided services to long-term UI claimants and those likely to become long-term unemployed.

This strategy is helping Washington to:

- Raise awareness and understanding of its pool of long-term unemployed.
- Target services to reduce social costs in the future.
- Take full advantage of this ready labor pool in fueling our state's recovering economy.

Where do we go from here?

The state's workforce system is arrayed across a wide range of state and local organizations with a variety of missions, funding sources and constituencies. Yet, the Retooling Washington's Workforce initiative has demonstrated the capacity of these organizations to knit together as needed to respond to the changing demands of Washington's economy. This initiative will be successful if the cooperation and service alignment that have occurred to meet the challenge of the Great Recession carry over to create a stronger foundation for supporting a responsive, innovative new economy.

There is every indication that this momentum can be maintained. In a forum of Retooling initiative participants held in October 2011, the 150 attendees shared the many innovations and practices that had emerged in response to the recession and its lingering effects. The general sense is that these practices, many of which have been referred to in this paper, deserve to be continued and extended throughout Washington.

Here are some of the broader lessons that can inform how Washington sustains this effort.

Employer Engagement

No amount of training and education will help applicants get jobs if it doesn't match what employers need. By building more direct connections to employers and developing tools that meet their needs, the workforce system can be more effective and nimble.

Successful projects that retrain workers and place them in good paying jobs invariably involve a partnership between workforce development and economic development organizations, and a business organization or employer(s).

Employer engagement should be fostered at every level of the workforce system, from the planning and policy to the implementation and project completion. An example of this model is the Industry Skill Panel concept developed and perfected by Washington's workforce system. Skill Panels are industry-led partnerships that bring together a wide range of community resources, including industry, educators and labor, to address the workforce concerns of a growing industry sector. In general, they identify and seek to close skill gaps and address other

common workforce issues by developing job-related training, expanding training capacity, and raising awareness about job opportunities. These panels bring disparate groups together for a common goal, helping to build trust and awareness about each partner's strength that can lead to future cooperation. The bottom line is that with employer engagement, resources are used more efficiently toward preparing local residents for higher paying jobs in their area.

Leveraging resources

Part of the new reality for the workforce system is that it must continue to find ways to do more with less. This means building solutions with sufficient value, so that other partners—particularly employers—are willing to invest. Tools such as On-the-Job Training and Individual Certificates as well as projects such as the Heath Tecna pre-employment screening and training effort in Whatcom County have demonstrated the importance and value of co-investment. These projects stretch public dollars and result in employment.

Leveraging can come in other ways as well, through organizations cooperating to provide a single point of contact or through sharing of facilities. Northwest Workforce Development Council leveraged its own customers by recruiting unemployed volunteers with computer experience to help other unemployed workers learn more about computer software. For the price of a one-fourth time coordinator, the WDC leveraged over 2,500 hours of volunteer time and helped over 900 people get needed computer training while providing work experience for the volunteers.

The value of sharing information in aligning services

Given the diversity of funding, missions and leadership within the many organizations that constitute Washington's workforce system, coordination can be difficult. But sharing information can help these organizations align and coordinate their resources. This was particularly evident as information about the extent of the UI exhaustees was shared at the local level. By hearing unemployment numbers translated to a county level, organizations were able to better understand the significance of the issue and were provided with information useful in marshaling resources.

Information sharing is at the core of the more successful business outreach efforts. By meeting regularly, sharing leads, and in some cases, presenting to businesses together, the business services outreach of the workforce system identifies new opportunities and stretches its limited resources. Equally important, the message to employers is one of a workforce system that, if not unified under one roof, is still cooperating and communicating with each other.

As a state, Washington should reinforce this direction by nurturing the use of new technologies that make information sharing and joint planning easier, and by rewarding organizations who work together.

Early intervention for long-term unemployed

This protracted recession has taught the workforce system too much about the struggles of the unemployed, coping first with record numbers of unemployed followed by record numbers of people exhausting their benefits. Losing a job is an emotional and financial strain for the individual and their family. Because each person will react differently, it can be difficult for a

state system to determine effective response mechanisms. There are only so many dollars that can be spent on case management. A lot has been learned about how and when to intervene. Washington needs to harvest this information and continue to find new and innovative ways to service the unemployed.

Conclusion

With the state's unemployment rate stuck above 9 percent and the number of UI exhaustees rising, Washington's battle to retool its workers is far from over. Still, the recession and the Retooling Initiative has brought to light and enhanced the many strengths of Washington's workforce system. The system has shown the potential of being more nimble, cooperative and capable of contributing to Washington's economic recovery and growth.

For Appendices, please go to: www.wtb.wa.gov/retoolingwashington.asp

