

**WASHINGTON STATE
WORKFORCE TRAINING AND EDUCATION COORDINATING BOARD
MEETING NO. 153
MARCH 10, 2011**

RETOOLING WASHINGTON'S WORKFORCE

At the meeting, Workforce Development Council, Workforce Board and Employment Security Department staff will update the Board on the effort to Retool Washington's Workforce. In this tab are staff notes for a presentation made before the winter meeting of the Washington Economic Development Association (WEDA) that summarize the retooling effort as of mid-February.

Board Action Required: For discussion only.

**Retooling Washington's Workforce
Presentation before the Washington Economic Development Association
Winter Meeting 2-15-11**

As Washington grapples with the Great Recession and a very slow recovery in the job market, Workforce Board Chair Cindy Zehnder has helped initiate a Board focus this year on two things:

1. Helping unemployed workers find employment, especially those who need their skills retooled. (Last year, there were over 300,000 unemployed workers in Washington.)
2. Helping employers find the skilled workers they need. (Even in this economy, 11,000 employers left at least one job vacant because they could not find a qualified applicant, and at any one point in time there were approximately 40,000 job vacancies.)

To determine what to do about these problems, in August and September of 2010 the Board held:

- Regional forums at Highline and Spokane Community Colleges.
- A virtual forum with business representatives.
- A state forum in Everett.

These forums drew over 200 people from workforce development councils, economic development councils, community and technical colleges, WorkSource centers, businesses, labor unions, community-based organizations, and others.

Asked to come up with things that could be implemented and produce results quickly, forum participants identified:

1. Coordinating outreach to unemployment insurance exhaustees.
2. Increasing on-the-job training and direct-connect training (training that is directly connected to a job).
3. Coordinating employer outreach combined with improving job referrals and skill matching between employers and job seekers.

I. Coordinating outreach to UI exhaustees

The challenge we face is huge. Since the recession began, over 36,000 Washington workers have exhausted their unemployment insurance benefits. This year, tens of thousands more will exhaust their benefits. Where will they turn for help?

- The first step is to gather and share data on UI exhaustees: Provide exhaustee data monthly which shows exhaustions by county and demographics (age, education, gender, veteran and disability status, and occupation) each month to Workforce Development Councils and complete data sharing agreements with partner agencies.
- In early December, UI claimants who were about to exhaust their benefits received a one-page resource guide that included a list of statewide resource referrals. The letter was distributed to over 230,000 claimants. It was also posted electronically and available at WorkSource Centers.
- Employment Security Department (ESD) now offers a one-day class focusing on assessing and de-escalating angry, hostile and actual or potentially violent customers.

II. Increasing on-the-job training and direct-connect training

We face a training challenge today. Right now, the supply of people being trained each year is expected to exceed the number of job openings until at least 2013 and more likely 2014. So in order to help unemployed people get back to work and meet employer skill needs, how do we make sure there is a job at the end of training?

- **On-the-Job Training (OJT):** Provides employers with an incentive to hire at the same time workers' skills are retooled.
- **WIA 10 Percent:** The Governor has allocated \$1.5 million of her discretionary dollars to fund OJTs. UI exhaustees will be a priority. This money should be going out to the field by the end of this month.
- **E-Learning** is a great tool to train the unemployed.
- **Microsoft Training:** ESD has invested \$350,000 to offer unlimited access to Microsoft's e-Learning library so unemployed workers can build their computer skills and become more competitive in the job market. Over 14,000 people have signed up.
- **E-learning** is also a great way to train incumbent workers.
- **Workplace Digital Learning:** U.S. Department of Labor grant of \$850,000 beginning July 1.
- **Upskill-Backfill** to help incumbent workers gain skills and move up the career ladder, creating job openings from the positions they leave behind.
- **Learning is more valuable when there's a credential at the end.**
- **Individualized Certificate Programs:** Lower Columbia College.

III. Coordinating employer outreach combined with improving job referrals and skill matching between employers and job seekers.

- We need to get word out to employers about things such as OJTs and the training in Microsoft products.
- We need to connect employers with job openings to job seekers with the right skills.
- Lots of programs have staff doing business outreach. But there appears to be a lack of coordination. (Workforce Board is conducting a survey.)
- Workforce Development Councils are forming business outreach teams to increase outreach and improve coordination. We need to find the job openings, and do it as efficiently as possible.
- We will also work on better skill matching. The number one complaint of employers dissatisfied with WorkSource services is referred workers who are not qualified. The WorkSource system is working on this.

Three-pronged approach will help workers, businesses

We believe these three efforts (coordinated outreach to UI exhaustees, OJT and direct/connect training, coordinated outreach to employers) will help more unemployed workers find work and more employers find the skilled workers they need.

What can Economic Development Organizations do to help retooling?

If you are not already a members of your local Retooling Washington steering committee, call your local Workforce Development Council and become a member of your local area team.

The Washington Economic Development Association (WEDA) is already a part of the state steering committee, and also serves on the business outreach workgroup.

Thank you WEDA.