

**WASHINGTON STATE
WORKFORCE TRAINING AND EDUCATION COORDINATING BOARD
MEETING NO. 200
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INDUSTRY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES ACROSS THE STATE

Background

In support of the renewed emphasis on industry engagement in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and Washington State's combined plan *Talent and Prosperity for All*, the Board commissioned a short research project (March-May) to find out what is currently going on across the state related to industry engagement and industry sector partnerships. This research provided insights into key areas of interest such as types of organizations in Washington State engaged in industry outreach; breadth and depth of industry engagement; promising practices or "gold standards"; outcomes of engagement; challenges and persistent issues; and areas for potential policy intervention. Interviews, conducted by Lindsey Woolsey with the Woolsey Group, have so far been completed with 40 director-level individuals from WDCs, Centers of Excellence, Skill Centers and CTE, community colleges, organized labor councils, Department of Commerce sector leads, and others. Presented here is a snapshot of findings. This research is by no means exhaustive. It is also not evaluative. It is simply a scan via interviews of current industry engagement practice. Interview findings will be summarized in a final report, including recommendations for activities and next steps going forward, and an opportunity for stakeholders to react and add further insight to the findings.

Current State of Play

Variation in models and approaches to industry engagement exists in Washington State, largely depending on the type of organization doing the engagement. Strategies vary across two primary factors: 1) what and how much is asked of employers; and 2) how well coordinated industry engagement is across multiple public sector partners. The first factor seems to be a common concern, with assumptions on how long an employer will stay engaged if asked to do too much. The second factor varies from real concern that public programs are redundant and directly competing with each other for employers' time, to an admission of possible overlap but general comfort that each public program is getting what they need to understand industry demand.

When pressed to define a *gold standard*, most interviewed agreed that ideally more than one public program benefits from an employer engagement endeavor (vs. each engaging employers separately), and that employers engage as *partners* in defining human capital needs, over a long period of time, and at some critical mass. Most also felt that this gold standard is very difficult to achieve. Examples of strategies that come close to the gold standard exist, but warrant further profiling. Examples of strategies, each with variation in approach, currently in play across the state include:

- *Sector Partnerships*: Partnerships of companies in one target sector in one local or sub-regional area, that coordinate with workforce development, education and economic development to meet industry's needs and meet jobseekers' needs. There may be a few examples of this, per this definition, in Washington State. Strong interest by some WDCs to design and implement these per this definition.
- *Sector Panels and Strategic Plans*: A model utilized by at least two WDCs with purported success in effectively understanding industry demand and applying it to workforce programming. It requires definite credibility with employers in a target sector to convene them and facilitate an

understanding of their needs. It also requires staffing levels that can follow through on creating an industry “roadmap” or strategic plan that guides new or revised workforce programming.

- *Skills Panels or Focus Groups*: Usually referred to as one-time events to inform the use of workforce or education resources, often as part of a grant with particular sectors of focus.
- *Critical Sectors of Focus*: Common among WDCs, but may not mean there is a strategy for each sector of focus. Often a result of a grant requirement.
- *Cross-program Business Service Teams*: Does not appear to be common, but in some areas it is a new way of coordinating across multiple programs and systems. “Roundtables” or teams of multiple business service representatives or outreach coordinators come together regularly to share business contacts and business knowledge, and to strategize effective ways to streamline and engage industry together.
- *Advisory Councils for CTE Programs of Study*: Some very strong examples of CTE Programs of Study, particularly in aerospace, manufacturing, and healthcare.
- *Apprenticeships and associated advisory groups*: Strong examples of longstanding apprenticeship programming and advisory groups, with strong job outcomes.
- *Centers of Excellence*: Still relatively unique to Washington State, and represent in the best cases a model of designating a single institution as the point of contact, clearinghouse and “expert” for certain industry programming. Wide variation among Centers in terms of level of employer engagement, statewide or multi-state scope, credibility with other organizations, etc.

Common Themes

- Some industries may warrant a coordinated engagement strategy at a statewide or even cross-state level (e.g. energy and aerospace); other industries deserve coordinated approaches at the local or sub-regional level (e.g. healthcare, construction, some manufacturing); and others may benefit from a combination of both, as long as a statewide effort compliments a local effort.
- Different organizations have different capacities (including authority and credibility) to do this work well, depending on staff capacity, credibility with industry, trust built with other program partners, flexibility to engage employers on their terms (vs. to fulfill a specific program advising need), and an ability to sustain engagement over time. In some cases an organization in one area can have far better capacity than the same type of organization in another area.
- Industry engagement at local level is tiered: *High-level Strategy* (exemplified by a Sector Panel or Partnership); *Coordinated Business Outreach* (hopefully coordinated across multiple programs and organizations); and *Transactional* (e.g. at Worksource Center: job matching, OJTs, etc).
- Industry input is not holistic along a true pipeline – it is piecemeal depending on the need of the program doing the engagement (e.g. engagement to meet one specific advising need, or to secure one type of work experience placement, etc).
- At-scale and consistent application of quality industry-driven programming is hard to find (e.g. some great CTE programs and outcomes but only targeted at a handful of high school aged kids – why not all HS kids?; e.g. some great examples of real “sector partnerships” but not lifted up and modeled as something to replicate, etc).

Repeated Requests

- Clarity and shared learning about what is appropriately handled on a statewide basis, vs. a local or sub-regional basis;
- Mechanisms that incent public programs to coordinate together to engage industry, vs. independently building relationships and partnerships with employers in the same local area (a definite feeling that “everyone is doing this now”);

- Tools and models for coordinated engagement that leads to a critical mass of employers engaged in target sectors;
- Stronger state role in lifting up promising practices and replicating them with technical assistance and peer sharing.

Board Action: For discussion only.