

# Washington leads nation in measuring workforce training results

Federal government could look at the state's practices as a model for assuring better results.

**By Eleni Papadakis**

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**Congressional proposals regarding** federal job-training programs and a recent national report have raised questions as to whether workforce training programs really make a difference?

In Washington state, at least, they do.

We know because an independent agency, guided by business and labor, routinely and rigorously measures how well they work for Washington's workers and employers, and ultimately, taxpayers.

In many cases, these programs show impressive results. For example, a federally funded workforce program that targets laid off workers has made a big difference in helping participants in our state land new jobs, as compared to the job placement rate of those who did not participate.

**To determine the effectiveness** of workforce programs, the state's Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board routinely applies a rigorous set of performance measures — including employment rates and earnings — to 12 of Washington's largest workforce training programs. The Workforce Board then compares the employment and earnings experience of training participants with the performance of those who were similar to the participants but did not take part in the training. This comparison allows our state to answer a key question: Did a workforce program help participants reach goals they would not have reached on their own?

For example, the latest study shows the Workforce Investment Act program for Dislocated Workers provides a significant edge in both employment and earnings. Employment for participants was almost 17 percentage points higher than for non-participants, and average annual earnings topped comparable non-participants by almost \$10,000.

Low-income, disadvantaged adults participating in the Workforce Investment Act Title I-B Adult program notched a 7.4 percentage-point boost in employment and earned an additional \$2,800 annually, as compared to non-participants. Roughly 14,000 Washington residents participate in these two programs annually.

**This detailed performance information** stands in marked contrast to the Government Accountability Office's recent national report, which found few of the federal workforce training programs assessed whether outcomes resulted from the program "and not some other cause." The GAO report also pointed to a mish-mash of federal performance measures that vary program by program. Without some kind of standardization, it's difficult to discover which programs truly measure up.

Washington's Workforce Board has long pushed for changes to performance measures at the federal level, with the agency's research team and its private sector led board spearheading a national, next-generation performance management system known as "Integrated Performance Information."

Adapted and endorsed by the National Governor's Association and the National Association of State Workforce Agencies, this performance management system may be included in the long overdue reauthorization of the federal Workforce Investment Act. Such action would go a long way toward the nation doing what Washington has been doing since 1996, learning what works and what doesn't through rigorous, consistent performance measures.

*Eleni Papadakis is executive director of Washington's Workforce Board, which produces the state's workforce development strategy, High Skills, High Wages. The Workforce Board is a partnership of labor, business, and government.*

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