

# Washington's Strategic Workforce Development Plan

Draft: November 12, 2015



Washington State  
Workforce Training  
And Education  
Coordinating Board

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# WASHINGTON'S WORKFORCE PLAN 2015

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## I. Introduction-Draft

### A. Historic Opportunity to Strengthen Washington's Workforce System

The near unanimous, bipartisan passage of the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA), calls upon states to *"improve the quality of the workforce, reduce welfare dependency, increase economic self-sufficiency, meet the skill requirements of businesses and enhance the productivity and competitiveness of the Nation."*

Each year, hundreds of thousands of Washington residents enter our state's workforce system seeking new jobs, higher wages, greater skills, and prosperous futures. With the help of job counselors, teachers, and other service providers, they forge new pathways to self-sufficiency, undergo basic skills and English language training, and embark on career-focused education—from high school Career and Technical Education classes to postsecondary certificates and degrees. Still others begin apprenticeships in high-wage trades, or enter the workforce through targeted on-the-job training and other forms of work-based learning.

Some come to the system with significant barriers, such as physical or mental disabilities. Others face life challenges, such as poverty, past incarceration, or cultural and language differences. The majority enter the system largely ready for work, but need help with resume writing, career direction, and job search assistance. At the same time, Washington businesses seek capable workers who can enhance their capacity and competitiveness—workers who are willing and able to learn new skills in a fast-changing economy.

Washington's dual-customer focus on both workers and businesses is at the heart of the state's workforce system, and undergirds this report. Even before WIOA, the state's rich web of programs and resources have long worked together to integrate their services, improve outcomes, and evaluate results on behalf of these two key customers. Now, with this much anticipated revision to the federal workforce development act, Washington has the opportunity to bring greater alignment between federal, state, and local service delivery, allowing the system to build on its previous successes and overcome remaining obstacles.

#### Washington's Workforce System

The workforce system helps supply an appropriately skilled and able workforce that allows businesses to:

- Thrive and grow.
- Be competitive in a global economy.

The workforce system brings together workforce development, education and training, and human services, to help people, including those with barriers:

- Get and keep jobs.
- Grow along lifelong career pathways.

Specifically, this new strategic plan outlines an approach that empowers individuals, communities, and employers to realize their full potential through a universally accessible workforce system that continually improves and adapts to changing conditions and demands. This new plan comes with a new title – *Talent and Prosperity for All*.

## **B. A Coordinated Plan Aligned with Federal and State Mission and Goals**

Soon after the passage of WIOA, Governor Jay Inslee directed the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (Workforce Board) to work with the system’s stakeholders to shape Washington’s strategic plan toward three goals to maximize the workforce system’s impact:

1. *Help more people find and keep jobs that lead to economic self-sufficiency, with a focus on disadvantaged populations.*
2. *Close skill gaps for employers, with a focus on in-demand industry sectors and occupations, including through apprenticeships.*
3. *Work together as a single, seamless team to make this happen.*

The Governor also directed the Workforce Board to initiate several new activities while developing the state’s strategic workforce plan. These activities (see below) were to be completed before the Governor would approve the plan and before it was submitted to the U. S. Department of Labor (DOL) in March 2016:

- *Explore fully the benefits of a Combined Plan.<sup>1</sup>*
- *Conduct an examination of integrating Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program into the workforce system, including recommendations for serving the most at-risk customers.*
- *Provide a data-driven evaluation and recommendation for planning regions in consultation with chief elected officials, local workforce boards, and stakeholders.*
- *Provide recommendations for elevating the strategic role of both state and local workforce boards to focus on system goals and changing the service delivery system in order to improve outcomes for job seekers and employers.*

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<sup>1</sup> The U.S. Department of Labor provided states with two options for responding to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014. States could submit a “Unified Plan” that covers only “core programs” of workforce development: WIOA Title I (Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth Services), Basic Education for Adults, Wagner-Peyser Act services, and Vocational Rehabilitation programs. The unified plan would be limited to service delivery strategies and partner-to-partner operational commitments made between these core programs. States could also choose to create a “Combined Plan” that covers the core program and *one or more* of the additional partner programs listed in the act: postsecondary Carl Perkins Act programs, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families/WorkFirst, Trade Adjustment Assistance Act programs, veterans employment and training efforts, Unemployment Insurance services, SNAP Employment & Training, Senior Community Services Employment, Community Development Block Grant, Community Services Block Grant, and the Second Chance Act. The additional partners that join the plan coordinate service delivery strategies and make operational commitments in the plan among themselves and with the core partners.

### **Work on this Directive is Built on a Solid Foundation**

Washington's many successes in workforce development are detailed in a [2015 report by the State Auditor's Office](#) highlighting the overall effectiveness in coordinating services among 55 programs across 12 state agencies: *"Washington's approach to coordinated service delivery is highly regarded at the federal and state level . . . The Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (Workforce Board) is the lead agency responsible for coordinating system partners statewide. It works with them, as well as the Governor and Legislature, to develop the strategic vision and policies for workforce development in Washington."*

### **Washington's Choice of a Combined Plan**

The many partners of Washington's workforce system have chosen to submit a robust Combined Plan to federal partners—one of two options under WIOA. This decision was made with a clear eye towards improving the breadth and depth of services to workers and businesses across the state. By submitting a "Combined" Plan, partners are committing to working toward a seamless, customer-driven system that will not differentiate between programs and agencies whether local, state, or federal. The Combined Plan unites six core programs with any number of workforce services across the education and training system. Once included as "Combined" Plan partners, these programs will be aligned with the mission, goals, priorities, and performance standards within the combined state plan submitted to federal agencies by March of 2016.<sup>2</sup>

## **C. Sustaining Recovery by Unlocking Washington's Talent**

### **Business Demand Rises for Highly Skilled Workers**

The year 2014 was the best for job gains since 1999. Productivity has been rising in the United States, and as the economy recovers, gross domestic product for 2014 is estimated at \$16 trillion—besting the pre-recession high of \$14.9 trillion in 2007.<sup>3</sup> Much of this job growth has occurred at the higher end of the skill and wage scale. A 2015 [Seattle Times analysis](#) of Washington State Employment Security Department data highlighted an uneven recovery with less skilled, lower paying jobs between \$18 and \$36 per hour declining during the recession, while jobs paying over \$54 per hour grew during the same time period.

To fulfill this growing demand for highly skilled workers, Washington companies have turned to foreign workers to broaden their labor pool, tapping talent from across the world through the U.S. Department of Labor H-1B Foreign Worker Program. It's clear that this is a missed opportunity for Washington's workers, who would benefit from high-skill, high-wage jobs, especially in Washington's thriving tech

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<sup>2</sup> In Washington, the "Combined Plan" includes the following partners: core programs (Title I Adult/DW/Youth, Title II ABE, Title III Wagner-Peyser, Title IV Voc-Rehab), TANF/WorkFirst, SNAP E&T (used to be called Food Stamps), Senior Community Services, Community Development Block Grant, Community Services Block Grant, Unemployment Insurance (UI), Veterans, Trade Adjustment Act, and Unemployment Insurance.

<sup>3</sup> Source: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis

industry. Skilling up Washington’s workforce to meet the needs of businesses that import their talent requires greater collaboration and frank discussions among workforce professionals, education providers, and the business community. A more engaged and invested business community could help fill existing skill gaps through targeted training opportunities and help create a better skilled, homegrown workforce. This would give Washington workers a clearer pathway to higher paying jobs, and businesses a more direct connection to their talent pipeline. Already, the state has secured two grants totaling \$9.8 million through the U.S. Department of Labor for the [American Apprenticeship Initiative](#).<sup>4</sup> These grants will help reduce the number of imported workers. Registered Apprenticeship in Washington is growing. Since January 2014 the number of registered apprentices has grown by 25 percent to around 11,000 by the end of 2015.

**Focus on Youth with Barriers to Employment**

The Great Recession hit a generation of young workers hard. And so far, the recovery does not appear to be correcting the problem. Labor force participation for 16 to 19 year olds in Washington fell from 45.8 percent to 36.1 percent between 2007 and 2014.<sup>5</sup> While all young people, across all education levels, are experiencing difficulties with the labor market, those who lack a high school diploma are more likely to be unemployed, or drop out of the labor force altogether, than high school graduates and those with higher education levels. One important avenue to self-sufficiency and higher wages is apprenticeship. Youth-focused pre-apprenticeships have been recognized by Washington’s Apprenticeship and Training Council and these pre-apprenticeships are helping young people prepare for and enter apprenticeships.

**WIOA Designates Key Populations with Barriers**

Youth aren’t the only ones with employment challenges. Under WIOA, 14 populations were designated as those with barriers. These populations are as diverse as the state’s workforce system and face significant challenges in obtaining living-wage jobs that lead to self-sufficiency and economic prosperity. The 14 populations designated as “populations with barriers” under WIOA include:

<i>Displaced Homemakers</i>	<i>Youth in, or formerly in, Foster Care</i>
<i>Low-Income Individuals</i>	<i>English Language Learners</i>
<i>Native Americans, Alaska Natives, and Hawaiians</i>	<i>Migrant/Seasonal Farmworkers</i>
<i>Individuals with Disabilities</i>	<i>Individuals within Two Years of Exhausted TANF Eligibility</i>
<i>Older Individuals</i>	<i>Single Parents/Pregnant Women</i>
<i>Ex-Offenders</i>	<i>Long-Term Unemployed</i>
<i>Homeless Individuals</i>	<i>Veterans</i>
<i>“Other Groups” Designated by the Governor</i>	

<sup>4</sup> One of the grants, totaling \$1.5 million, is being administered by the state’s Department of Labor and Industries. It’s expected to provide training and jobs for up to 1,000 people, 600 of them in the technology industry. Another \$3.5 million will go to the Washington Technology Industry Association to create an apprenticeship program in the information technology industry. The initiative will be carried out through an innovative partnership between the state, WTIA, and technology companies, including Microsoft, F5 and AT&T.

<sup>5</sup> Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

## D. Talent and Prosperity for All - Organized Around Four Strategic Priorities

After many months of collaboration and consultation among Washington’s workforce development program leaders and their teams, including more than 70 meetings and engaging more than 500 people, the following key strategic priorities were adopted by the Workforce Board. These strategic priorities are the organizing principles around which Washington’s workforce plan is structured:

**1. Increased Business Engagement with a Clear Value Stream:** Only 8 percent of Washington businesses utilize the public workforce system.<sup>6</sup> This stark fact underscores the limited interaction between businesses and workforce development service providers at all levels. Businesses need simple paths to the workforce system and a better understanding of the benefits, whether it’s filling open positions with qualified applicants from WorkSource or shaping training programs to ensure workers have industry-specific skills. In addition, once businesses and industries *are* engaged—be it through sector strategies or recruitment services—the workforce system must build and sustain these partnerships. The system’s essential promise to these partnerships is streamlined and integrated services that are easy for an employer to navigate and perceive value.

**2. Workers Receive Integrated Services that Lead to Employment and Careers:** Workers need to be able to effectively find and navigate the workforce development pathway that is best for them. This means Washington’s richly complex system must eliminate duplication, increase transparency, and improve the customer experience. Services need to be designed and delivered with workers as the focal point. In addition to acquiring skills and jobs that put them on the path to prosperity, workers should also understand they have continuous access to the workforce development system throughout their working lives. For sustained lifelong success, individuals will reengage in the workforce system throughout their career and “Lifelong Learning” journey.

**3. Technology and Accessibility:** The use of technology to remove barriers for workers and enhance their access to services is a “game changer.” Advances in telecommunications and technology potentially allow for seamless, universal, and remote access to education, training, and other workforce development services. Imagine the possibilities! While technology cannot fix all barrier access problems, in many cases it will free up staff to tackle more difficult access issues. This plan seeks to convert the best of these possibilities into a reality. The Workforce Board is establishing a permanent advisory committee to support the barrier removal work of local Workforce Development Councils. This plan embraces barrier removal and universal accessibility of workforce development services—both physical and programmatic-- as core priorities.

**4. Next Generation Performance Accountability System:** Washington has led the nation in developing a rigorous system of performance accountability measures for state workforce development programs under WIOA’s predecessor acts. Washington’s annual workforce program evaluation [“Workforce](#)

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<sup>6</sup> Source: U.S. States: For Richer, For Poorer? Winning the battle for talent and securing our standard of living, Accenture report, Page 5: <http://www.wtb.wa.gov/Documents/U.S.StatesRicherPoorerCombined.pdf>

[Training Results](#)” shows whether participants of the state’s 12 largest workforce programs got jobs, how much they earned, the skills they obtained, and if they were satisfied with their program, among other measures. The Workforce Board’s Career Bridge website, home of the state’s Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL), also provides performance results for thousands of education programs. The site, which features over 6,300 Washington education programs, is used every day at WorkSource centers and in K-12 classrooms, community-based organizations, and colleges around the state. Workforce Training Results and Career Bridge shed light on workforce system performance for consumers, policymakers, and administrators across numerous programs areas. Policymakers can determine what the program’s return on investment was for taxpayers and for participants. However, a new generation of performance indicators is needed to pursue continuous improvement in the more integrated workforce system envisioned by this plan.

## E. Key Commitments Braided Throughout the Plan

Based on extensive stakeholder input, Governor directives, and customer needs, the following commitments underpin the *Talent and Prosperity for All* strategic plan:

**Focus on Workers Facing Barriers:** With the plan’s heightened emphasis on program alignment, many agencies and their stakeholders voiced concern that this would result in reduced services for their clients. Each community urged that customers receive increased services, not less. These services need to be provided in a manner that reflects their unique needs, ranging from one-on-one services for new immigrants to early intervention for youth while still in middle and high school. The plan consistently directs that priority populations receive the resources they require to be successful and that each community is included in the goal of prosperity and success for everyone. This is a “universal” plan.

**System-Wide Partnerships:** A culture of cooperation and partnership is needed to achieve positive results in a complex workforce system. Aligning goals across all service providers and customers is essential in building this culture of partnership. Through shared goals, Washington can achieve the seamless system envisioned in this plan. These goals include:

- A. Deliver prosperity and success in a measurable way for the system’s key customers: workers and businesses.
- B. Address strategically and efficiently the economic needs of workers and businesses.
- C. Ensure sustainable results.

**Career Pathways:** Career Pathways offer [an efficient and customer-centered approach](#) to workforce development because they structure intentional connections among workers, employers, and service providers. Aligning educational opportunities that lead to industry-recognized qualifications, skills, and academic credentials helps bring workers and employers into the training system on the front end. In turn, this transforms businesses from “customers” into “partners and co-investors” in the workforce system.

**Interdependency of Government and Non-Profit Agencies:** The mandates outlined in WIOA, the reality of limited resources, and the volume of work to accomplish points toward strategic leveraging of all available resources. Throughout the public input phase of developing this plan, members of the non-profit community actively promoted the idea of even closer collaboration with government agencies, including tribes. Interagency collaboration can foster increased business involvement, reduce unnecessary duplication of effort, thereby saving valuable resources, while also reducing business and worker fatigue in the process.

**Continuous Improvement-Old Way of Doing Business is Not an Option:** As the economy and population continue to change, Washington's workforce system must be even more nimble to adapt to new demands and challenges. Timely, clear, and informative performance indicators will help guide strategic course corrections and resource deployment. The Workforce Board, along with its partners, will continue to measure the impact of services to customers and will create an oversight system capable of responding as needed to ensure continued success and system improvements.

**Professional Development:** A highly-skilled and talented staff has played a pivotal role in Washington's workforce system success. The changes outlined in this plan will require continued investment in staff training and support across agencies and programs. To "manage the system to success," front-line staff and managers will need to be equipped to effectively respond to changing customers' needs and support the four key strategies outlined in the plan. Team members will require a broader and deeper understanding of the services provided, not just by their own organization, but by other partners throughout the workforce system. Raising the bar on customer service will require thoughtful and coordinated outreach to businesses, and a tailored approach to providing education and training, and wraparound services for workers.

**Leveraging Existing Successes:** Compelling stories of successful initiatives and programs are highlighted in this plan, bringing to life strategic objectives and system goals. These proven successes, and others, should be shared across the system. Too often, unique and successful pilot projects are abandoned due to lack of funding or changes in administration. Encouraging information to be shared across the system, and regularly drawing attention to achievements, will help partners replicate and build on successes.

**A Plan Embraced by All-Inclusive Development Process:** A key objective in developing and writing this plan was to have every team member and their stakeholders endorse and embrace the plan. This process has required time and engagement with numerous committees, task forces, public forums, and an inclusive writing team. This plan strives to honor that participation.

## Who is Involved?

WIOA requires Workforce Development Councils (WDCs) to lead business engagement and worker education and training efforts by developing a plan with other workforce partners that coordinates strategies and resources across the workforce system, in support of regional economies.

While any workforce system partner may potentially lead a business or training solution, all are expected to support WDCs in the development and implementation of aligned and effective regional

strategies. In turn, WDCs are expected to work with their partners to identify the approach taken within a region. Workforce system partners at the state and regional level should collaborate on the chosen approach. Workforce system partners in this approach include, but are not limited to:

<b>Workforce System Partner</b>	<b>Services</b>
Apprenticeship	A combination of on-the-job training (OJT) and related classroom instruction under the supervision of a journey-level craft person or trade professional in which workers learn the practical and theoretical aspects of a highly skilled occupation.
Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act*  *Carl Perkins is included in Washington’s workforce plan but is not a partner in the Combined WIOA plan.	Aims to increase the quality of technical education in the U.S. at both the secondary and postsecondary levels and provide students with academic and technical skills for in-demand, living wage careers that advance the economy.
Community Development Block Grant, Community Services Block Grant	Funds support the costs of implementing comprehensive local plans designed to eliminate barriers to self-sufficiency among needy residents. The grant supports activities and services provided by community action agencies across Washington. Some of these services include: housing assistance, energy assistance, emergency services, education, job readiness counseling, job placement assistance, nutrition, asset development, and transportation services.
Customized Training Program	A training institution delivers dedicated customized employee training as requested by the business. The level of customization ranges from existing training curriculum delivered at the job site to fully customized training curriculum developed exclusively for the business.
Higher Education (Community and Technical Colleges, Four-year Colleges and Universities, Private Career Schools)	Education and training, customized training, incumbent worker training, certification, apprenticeship related supplemental instruction (RSI), education and career counseling, small business resources.
Job Skills Program	Prospective and current employees of a business receiving a Job Skills Program (JSP) grant are eligible for training. Eligible businesses and industries include private firms and institutions, groups, or associations concerned with commerce, trade, manufacturing, or service provisions. Public or nonprofit hospitals are also eligible.
Title I Youth, Adult and Dislocated Worker programs (Various state and local service providers)	Workforce development workshops, assessment and career guidance, resources for worker training, on-the-job training, support services.
Title II Adult Literacy (Community and Technical Colleges)	Adult basic skills training, English as a Second Language training, GED

Title III Wagner-Peyser (Employment Security Department)	Job seeker assessment, job matching, and other business services. Washington labor market Information.
Title IV Vocational Rehabilitation (Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and Department of Service for the Blind)	Training, retraining of individuals with disabilities, identification and support for the implementation of assistive technologies for job seekers and businesses, job placement, job development, community rehabilitation providers.
Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (Department of Social and Health Services, Community and Technical Colleges, Community-Based Organizations, Employment Security Department, Department of Commerce, Department of Early Learning)	Assessment, case management, job placement, education and training, work study, workfare, support services, and job development.
Senior Community Services Employment	Provide subsidized, part-time, community service work-based training for low-income people age 55 or older who have poor employment prospects. Through this program, older workers have access to the SCSEP services as well as other employment assistance available through WorkSource, the state's one-stop career centers.
SNAP, E&T (Department of Social and Health Services, Community and Technical Colleges, Community-Based Organizations)	Food stamps, assessment, education and training, job search, job search skill development, and support services.
Trade Adjustment Assistance	A federal program that helps workers who have lost jobs due to foreign trade to gain the skills, resources, and support they need to become reemployed.
Training Benefits Program	Training benefits pay up to 52 times a participant's unemployment weekly benefit amount, minus any regular unemployment benefits received. These additional benefits are available to eligible dislocated workers in a full-time vocational training program approved by the unemployment insurance (UI) program.
Veterans Employment and Training	Workforce development workshops, assessment and career guidance, resources for worker training, on-the-job training, support services for veterans.
Worker Retraining Program	Serves the unemployed or those facing imminent layoffs. Community and technical colleges provide training in basic skills and literacy, occupational skills, vocational education, and related or supplemental instruction for apprentices. Qualified students may receive financial assistance to help with tuition, other costs. Private career schools and colleges enroll a small number of students.

## F. Critical Steps to Successful Plan Implementation

**A. Continued Focus on the Governor's Direction:** A culture of collaboration, with a laser-sharp focus on improving the outcomes for businesses and jobseekers.

**B. An Operational Plan Embraced by Partners:** The ability to put the principles of this strategic plan into day-to-day program practices to better serve our combined range of customers.

**C. Leadership and Sustained Commitment:** Leadership at every level to stay the course when necessary and adjust the sails when needed and the ability to make the right choice driven by data and other valid evidence.

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