

Regional Cluster Academies Summary Report September 2008

The Workforce Board along with the Community, Trade and Economic Development Department and six Workforce Development Councils co-hosted a series of Cluster Academies across the state. Events were held in Anacortes, Tacoma, Vancouver, Yakima, Tri-Cities and Spokane. The Academies gathered regional leaders to review and comment on the drafts of the state workforce and economic development plans.

Cluster Academy Comments in Response to the May 2008 draft of *Skills for the Next Washington and CTED Strategic Plan* - The comments are grouped by the major topics from the academy sessions.

Coordination

- There needs to be better coordination at the state level between workforce and economic development.
- There should be unified planning of workforce and economic development.
- The geographic boundary of cluster efforts should be defined by industry.
- There should be formal agreements on the roles and responsibilities of workforce and economic development agencies.
- The private sector should lead cluster efforts.
- The state should streamline and coordinate grant allocations and RFPs of multiple programs.
- The state should do more to incent inter-program coordination at the local level.
- Placing common definitions into statute will help with coordination.

Resources

- There needs to be some resources that are more flexible. Current funding is too limited to program "silos."
- Support for a state version of the federal WIRED grant program.
- There needs to be sustained funding for local cluster efforts.
- There should be some funds for planning.
- Funding allocations should support collaboration among agencies and programs.
- There should be more flexible funding available for skills training in industry clusters, including customized and short-term training for incumbent workers, and training for new employees.
- Resources should be pooled and leveraged from multiple sources.
- Funding should flow by cluster, not program.
- Program funding streams need to be better coordinated.
- Funding should follow locally defined priorities.
- Funding allocations should not be limited to a single year.

- State funding should not pit local areas of the state against one another in competition for funds.

Role of the Workforce Development Councils

- The WDCs should be placed into state statute.
- The role of the WDCs as the convener for workforce development should be recognized and accepted.
- There should be some state general fund resources for WDCs.

Data, Analysis, and Performance Measures

- Cluster efforts require up to date labor market information.
- There should be more funding for Labor Market and Economic Analysis regional economists.
- There should be funding for local cluster analysis.
- Industry metrics should be used to measure success.
- Emphasize results.
- There should be greater alignment of performance measures for cluster efforts.

Strategies

- Business recruitment efforts should focus on strategic clusters.
- Cluster efforts need branding and marketing.
- Local areas should share best practices in assisting clusters.
- There should also be Centers of Excellence at four year institutions.
- Rural areas need flexibility to support the growth of industries that are not yet concentrated in the area.

Changes to Current Programs

- The state should consider requesting a waiver to the federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) to allow training of people to become new employees in industry clusters.
- The colleges' Customized Training Program needs to be more flexible.
- Employers should be eligible providers under the states customized training programs.
- There should be greater flexibility to use WIA for contracted training, rather than Individual Training Accounts.

Other

- The cluster approach is a good idea; local areas are already doing it; the state is lagging behind.
- The state needs to demonstrate lasting commitment to the cluster approach. Past efforts have started and stopped after a few years.
- Four year colleges and universities should also adopt cluster strategies.