Frequently asked questions

Q What are industry skill panels?

A They are public/private partnerships of business, labor, and education—alliances working together to improve the skills of workers in industries vital to Washington's economy.

Q What do industry skill panels do?

A Industry skill panels continuously examine the workforce needs of the industries they serve. Panels push for change. They recommend new training programs where none existed before. They demand more training capacity when there are not enough graduates to go around. They press for modernized training for the industry's current workforce. They demand that public training budgets are strategically used. They support economic development initiatives aimed at building industry competitiveness. Their work has mobilized the workforce development system to action. For example, Community colleges are responding to employer needs with more flexible, higher quality training. They are expanding and creating more modular courseware options, providing additional weekend and evening classes, offering greater numbers of distance learning opportunities, and improving their systems in countless other ways. As a result, today's workforce development system participants are leaving their training programs better prepared for tomorrow's jobs.

Q Why do we need industry skill panels?

A Skill panels are the prime locally-driven industry initiative in place to quickly address immediate workforce needs, and to solve long-term workforce issues for both the private and public sectors.

The panels encourage companies normally in competition with each other to solve shared human resource problems. They identify and prioritize workforce needs in order to make impacts benefiting many employers across their industry. Then, the panel members produce or update curricula, specific courses, or complete training programs in

order to shorten the time it takes to move a student into the workforce, upgrade incumbent skills, and improve the overall quality of knowledge and abilities. They also develop training-related products and activities, such as: career guidance materials; vocational English as a Second-Language courses; and technical assessments and certifications; pre-apprenticeship and K-12 career fairs, programs, and articulation agreements; mentoring, tutoring and intern/externships; clinical coordination; and industry conferences disseminating best practices and lean principles. Industry skill panels also reveal what kinds of jobs are emerging in an industry. And finally we build employers confidence by being more responsive and creating more measurable results.

Q When did industry skill panels start in Washington?

A They began in 2000 as an economic development tool to close the gap between industry's needs for skilled workers and the training and education employees received.

Q What industries have been served since 2000?

A Industries include agriculture and food processing, biotechnology, computer game software, construction, electronics, energy, health care, homeland security, information technology, manufacturing, marine technology and services, and transportation.

Q How many industry skill panels does Washington have?

A Today more than 49 industry skill panels are advising 20 key industries in the state. The greatest number serve the health care industry and are operating in every Washington county.

Q What have industry skill panels accomplished?

A Success is measured by the meeting the needs of the particular industry involved. Below are just a few examples:

- **Food processing**: Community and technical colleges created 26 customized courses offering certification and opportunities for career advancement. Nearly 800 incumbent workers received training in 32 companies.

- **Health care:** Skagit Valley Community College added 36 slots for students in its Registered Nurse program. South Puget Sound Community College doubled the capacity of its Medical Assisting program to 40 and expanded its part-time evening nursing program as well. And Centralia College doubled capacity in its two-year nursing program.
- **Game software development:** One hundred Zombie, Cranky Pants Games, and Greenhouse Media employees were trained using curricula identified and developed by the industry skill panel.
- **Information technology:** Eleven information technology agreements were established, enabling students to transfer IT credits from high school to college.

For a more extensive list of results, go to www.wtb.wa.gov.

Q How do we know industry skill panels are working?

A We know the alliances of skill panels are working by the numbers of businesses continuing to participate in panels, and most importantly, the numbers, types and quality of training-related products, projects and services created through these alliances.

The era when industry competitors could find and keep skilled employees without external workforce resources is long gone. Industry skill panels harness the new cooperative spirit driving workforce decisions. Companies are facing similar demographic and productivity issues, such as an aging workforce, the inability to find qualified workers, and the frustration of trying to attract youth to jobs in their industries. Together, businesses can exert influence with public workforce partners, such as educators, training providers and labor. In turn, these groups benefit because they produce people with skills that can lead to satisfying careers and wages.