Industry Engagement Strategies across Washington State – Findings Report

Prepared for the Washington State Education and Training Coordinating Board – July 2016

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Background

In support of the renewed emphasis on industry engagement in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and Washington State's *Talent and Prosperity for All*: *Strategic Plan for Unlocking Washington's Potential* Combined Plan, the Washington State Education and Training Coordinating Board (WTB) commissioned a short research project (March-May 2016) 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 professional development and policy intervention. Interviews were conducted with over thirty director-level individuals from Workforce Development Councils (WDCs), Community College Centers of Excellence, Skill Center Career & Technical Education (CTE) programs, organized labor councils, and Department of Commerce industry sector leads (see the Acknowledgements section for full interview list). Presented in this report are the findings, and a set of recommendations for potential training and professional development, as well as areas for policy focus.

Disclaimers: This research is *by no means exhaustive*. It is simply a scan via interviews of current industry engagement practices in Washington State. It is also *not evaluative*. It should be considered a snapshot of the varying models of industry engagement in use across the state, with some insights into common criteria for success. Finally, these findings are *not from the industry perspective*, but instead represent the experiences and insights from public support organizations in education, workforce development and economic development that directly engage with industry.

Also included in this version of the report (July 2016) is a *Response Chapter* with guiding questions for stakeholders to consider, react to and add further insight. A final version of this report with those responses will be completed by end of 2016.

Defining a Gold Standard of Industry Engagement

When pressed to define a *gold standard* of industry engagement, most individuals interviewed agreed to three indicators of success, and provided some self-assessment against them. It is important to note that these were standards of *best in class* industry engagement, mostly aspirational, and not demonstrative of the current state of play in most places. Interviews revealed that most programs and organizations had *some* experience with these indicators (and therefore felt they had at least witnessed or directly experienced success), but did not feel they executed their industry engagement practices to these standards consistently. The three indicators or standards include:

1. **A clear shift away from employers as *just customers*, or *just advisors*. Instead, employers engage as *partners* in defining and meeting human capital needs.** This was also described as companies or businesses engaging as co-investors in strategy development and in actual implementation of education and training programming. Most individuals interviewed indicated that they had some experience with this type of successful engagement, either currently or in the recent past. Most claim some experience with this shift, but by no means claimed it as the norm. A few described their models as nearly 100 percent in this category. Others described this as a rare experience. One interview said this would never happen.

2. **Deep engagement by employers, indicated by employers engaged as partners regularly, over a long period of time, *and* as partners at some level of "critical mass" for their industry and region.** Engaging at least a handful of employers as partners over the long term seemed fairly typical (i.e. most programs appear to have a few truly dedicated "champions" that have become long-term partners to a system), but only a few interviews cited critical mass engagement. Most describe "critical mass" engagement as aspirational, and also expressed real concern about mis-understanding skills needs of an industry based on narrow engagement of only a sampling of companies. Defining "critical mass" was difficult, but generally agreement exists engagement should be more than single-digit numbers. The definition was further complicated by *type of engagement*, i.e. survey vs. advisory council that meets regularly vs. a "sector panel" purposely only engaged once or twice.

3. **Coordination across programs and systems in employer engagement efforts.** Ideally more than one public program, organization or system benefits from an employer engagement endeavor (vs. each program engaging employers separately). When asked if programs or systems "bumped into each other" when engaging with industry, 28 of the 31 individuals interviewed said yes. The majority of these expressed concern, particularly in the context of renewed emphasis on employer engagement in WIOA. At least half of interviews revealed serious concern that a lack of coordinated outreach to industry resulted in egregious program redundancy, serious competition among programs for employers, mis-use of time and public resources, and ultimately employer disengagement due to fatigue and frustration. These interviewees felt the situation was getting messier and messier. Other interviews revealed a level of comfort with the current degree of coordination, or at least a feeling that the current status quo of overlap was somewhat inevitable.

Current State of Play

Common Threads related to Cross-System Coordination

Three common threads from interviews are worth additionally noting particularly related to coordination across programs and systems, and may be worth additional research:

1) *Why is coordination across programs and systems so difficult*? Interviews for this report indicated that ultimately each separate organization engages employers for a very specific program need (i.e. CTE programs need specific-level curriculum/credential approval; WDCs need strategic guidance for use of workforce program resources; Centers of Excellence need college-level course input; etc.). In other cases, organizations engage employers for a very specific event or grant need (e.g. a "Business Breakfast" to make employers aware of internships or work-based learning opportunities; or a temporary steering committee for a specific grant). Rarely, if ever, do specific program needs overlap *enough* to warrant shared or coordinated employer engagement. The outcome is therefore *many different asks* of employers' time from *many different organizations.* Questions for further exploration may include: Is a program agenda the right starting place? Or is there a way to reframe the starting place as the industry's agenda, and fit program needs in accordingly? Would this increase program coordination and reduce employer fatigue in the long run? Who leads in a situation like this? What are the staffing implications across organizations?

2) *Where does coordination occur?* Most interviews revealed better coordination inside of systems, but inconsistently across systems. Coordination is simply easier inside of a single system. For example, Centers of Excellence achieve coordination inside the community and technical college system by nature

of their mission statements (to be a clearinghouse and single point of contact with a target industry for colleges across the state). But few WDCs, for example, claimed high levels of coordination or partnership with Centers of Excellence, or vice versa, and Skill Centers lamented the lack of formal relationship with college Centers of Excellence. Another frequently cited example was the high level of coordination across the State's nine skill center campuses, as well as nineteen comprehensive high schools, to adopt CorePlus curriculum developed in partnership with Boeing, members of the Manufacturing Industry Council and the Office of the Superintendant of Public Instruction (OSPI). But Centers of Excellence and WDCs did not feel as linked in. Questions for further exploration may include: What kind of leadership is required to coordinate beyond a single system? Are there staffing models that help support cross-system coordination? Is there a role for industry or employer groups to help *push or pull* systems into stronger alignment or coordination?

3) *Does program coordination matter?* About a third of interviews cited a single indicator that outweighed all others in terms of successful employer engagement – placement into jobs, especially rapid placement. Where demand is so high that students get hired upon (or in some cases before) graduation or completion, little incentive to coordinate across systems exists. Put simply, *why bother?* Other interviews raised concerns about economic cycles, booms and busts, and not being opportunistic in good economic times to build cross-system connections that *will* matter more in poor economic times. Questions for further exploration may include: Why does coordination specifically around employer engagement matter in the end to jobseekers or students? Does it matter?

Industry Engagement Models in Use

Variation in models and approaches to industry engagement certainly exists across the state, and appears to largely depend on the type of organization doing the engagement (i.e. a WDC, a CTE program, etc.) and their individual program goals for engagement (i.e. *why* they are engaging industry in the first place). Models currently in play across the state include:

- *Sector or Industry Partnerships:* Long term partnerships of a "critical mass" of companies in one target industry sector in one local or sub-regional area (a labor market region), that represent a shared table for workforce development, education, organized labor, and economic development organizations to understand industry's needs, and coordinate to meet them in ways that benefit jobseekers and students. This definition according to most interviews represents the closest fit to the gold standard, but interviews did not reveal a current example in Washington State. There is strong interest by at least three WDCs (Snohomish, Olympic and Spokane) to design and implement these types of partnerships per this definition. These interviews did not reveal examples in Washington State of this definition in its complete form.
- *Sector Panels and associated strategic plans:* A model utilized by at least two WDCs (notably Seattle-King County and Southwest Washington) 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 (for a short, specified period of time) 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. In the best cases, this also guides procurement of community college and other vendor programming. Three WDCs (Spokane, Tacoma-Pierce County, Pacific Mountain) described, as an aspiration, a hybrid of this approach with the above definition of a sector or industry partnership.

- *Traditional 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. This model has been in use in Washington State for over fifteen years. It is still used by college programs and some WDCs. It was also cited by Department of Commerce industry sector leads as a model for statewide input from a target industry for skills development.
- *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. Perhaps unique to Snohomish WDC is a "blueprint" process every five years which facilitates selection of shared target industries across education, workforce development and economic development organizations. This acts as a foundation for coordination of efforts.
- *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. The Benton-Franklin WDC is actively using this model to bring coherence to industry outreach efforts. Seattle-King County WDC is also exploring this.
- *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.

Note on Nomenclature: About one third of interviewees suggested that a glossary of common nomenclature and definitions would be useful related to industry engagement models, and for the most part interviews revealed common terminology and understanding related to the above models. Some said they purposely avoid the term *sector strategies,* citing the term's lack of specificity as a problem.

What Works: Areas of Agreement

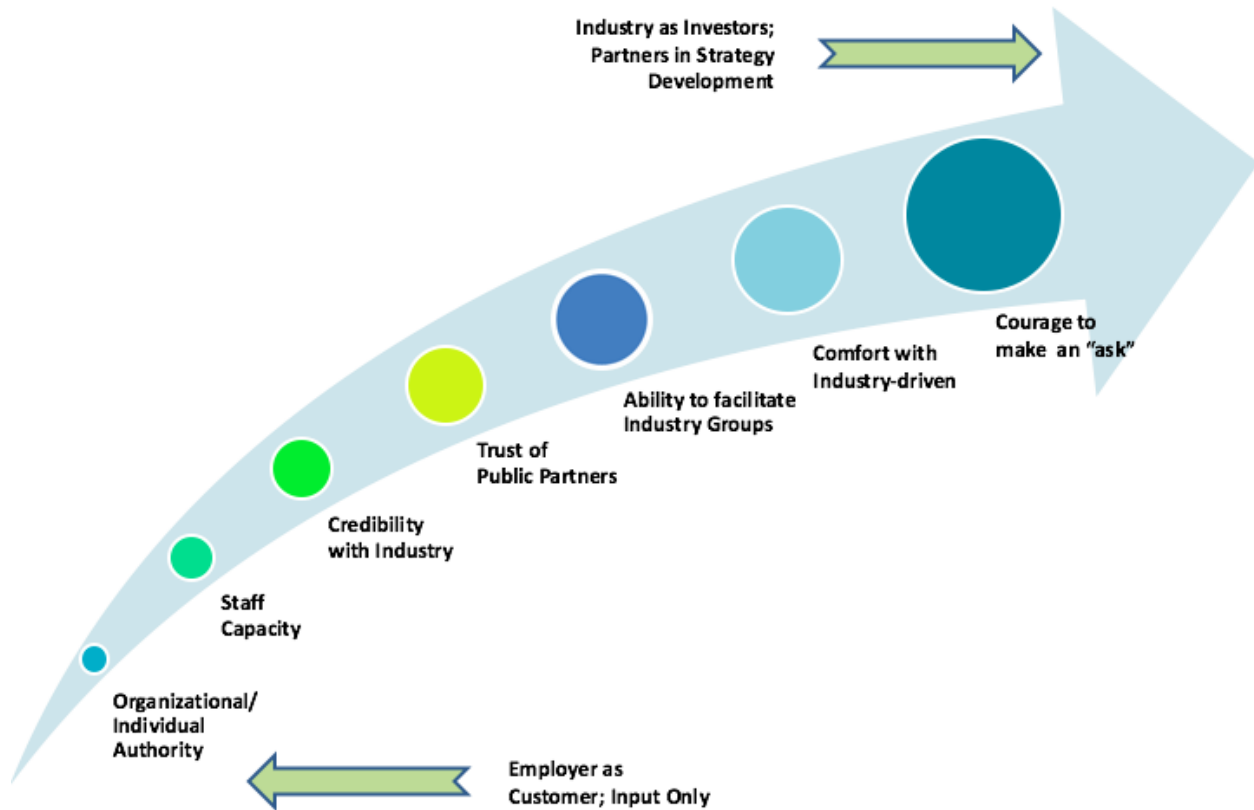### *Characteristics of a Successful "Convener"*

A handful of characteristics of a successful "convener" of industry rose to the top from the interviews. According to interviews, as these characteristics or factors improve, so does industry engagement.

1. Authority: Who is the organization, and who leads it? Who inside that organization is doing outreach to companies? Is it a CEO or Executive Director of an independent Workforce Development Council (perceived higher authority) or a program manager housed in a County Department of Human Services (perceived low authority)? Is it a CTE program federally mandated to have an industry advisory board (perceived lower authority), or an organization created explicitly as a forum for an industry to come together (perceived much higher authority, e.g. the MIC)? Interviews indicated that types of organizations and titles of individuals doing the outreach may make a difference in terms of credibility with companies.

2. Staff Capacity: Follow through, according the interviews, is one of the most critical factors to successfully engaging industry, and is dependent on staff capacity. This was defined in a few

ways. First, how many full time staff are in an organization, and therefore able to designate sufficient time to industry engagement? Second, are the staff skilled and capable at engaging industry? And finally, to what extent are staff shared across trusted organizations to do the work of industry engagement? Some interviews revealed an aspiration to be able to join multiple organizations together to appropriately staff a "gold standard" sector partnership.

3. Credibility with the Industry: What's the track record of the convener? About half of interviews commented on how long it takes to build trust with companies, and the importance of a solid track record of follow-through and action. Some individuals interviewed saw themselves as the "go-to" for certain industries, others acknowledged that they simply did not have a level of credibility to act in that capacity. This factor seemed closely related to staff capacity.

4. Trust/Coordination with Public Partners: Interviews revealed agreement that industry engagement improves when more than one program coordinates together in that engagement, but most also agree that very few organizations have the complete trust of others to be the point of contact with industry. Most relationships between public programs therefore fit three categories: 1) Transactional or vendor-based, i.e. WDCs using a college program as an approved vendor; 2) Trade-offs, i.e. I'll share this employer, if you share that employer; or 3) Parallel relationship – we do our own thing.

5. Comfort with Industry-driven: This emerged in at least half of interviews with wide variation in definitions of truly "industry driven", and associated comfort levels. Some see "industry-driven" and "demand-driven" as the same (e.g. programming guided by input from industry); others see "demand-driven" as a way to describe effective use of labor market information, and "industry-driven" as something bigger associated with allowing (even encouraging) industry to create an agenda that meets their multiple needs (even if not workforce or education related). About one third of interviews suggested that a fear of setting false expectations drove how much they allowed industry to drive the agenda.

6. Courage to Make an Ask: How much should be asked of employers? In practice, wide variation exists in answer to this question. Some believe companies have an obligation to invest directly, quickly and significantly into education and training programs. Others abide by asking what they perceive as the minimum amount of time necessary to understand workforce needs. In theory, most individuals interviewed believed that industry engagement is better when companies are asked to co-invest time, strategic thinking, and real resources (expertise, equipment, funding).

7. Ability to Facilitate a Critical Mass: Most interviews indicated that engaging some level of "critical mass" (this, however, was difficult to define) was important for two reasons: 1) for credibility in any curriculum, credential or training design (which in turn, theoretically, should lead to the skilled workforce industry needs, and therefore increased credibility of programs); and 2) to create peer pressure among employers to join the effort. Despite this, most interviews cited small industry groups, committees, advisory boards, etc. of under ten participants. Most interviews also cited one-on-one company transactions as their most relied-upon relationship with industry, verses engagement via industry groups. Exceptions exist, particularly in the larger, statewide efforts such as the Clean Tech Alliance, the Aerospace Partnership, Center of Excellence models, etc.

Figure 1: According to interviews, as these factors improve, so does industry engagement.

**Industry as Investors;
Partners in Strategy
Development**

**Courage to
make an "ask"**

**Comfort with
Industry-driven**

**Ability to facilitate
Industry Groups**

**Trust of
Public Partners**

**Credibility
with Industry**

**Staff
Capacity**

**Organizational/
Individual
Authority**

**Employer as
Customer; Input Only**

Promising Practices in the Field

A myriad of promising practices in the field likely exists that were not adequately captured in the interviews, and therefore in this findings report. A key set of practices, however, rise to the top in the context of the common gold standard elements and characteristics of an effective convener described above. It is fair to conclude that many organizations have strong pieces of a *best-in-class,* comprehensive industry engagement strategy, but few if any have *all the pieces*. The opportunity is wide open for organizations to build one. Here are ten potential promising practices gleaned from this research effort.

1. **Informed, Shared Decision Making about Target Industry Sectors:** The Snohomish WDC uses a unique 5-year Blueprint process that brings together workforce development, education (K-12 as well as post-secondary), economic development, elected officials, labor and other stakeholders for a significant shared review of industry and labor market information data. This process culminates in shared agreement about which industry sectors drive their regional economy. Why is this unique? Because in most areas, LMI data is reviewed independently by organizations, thereby missing key

opportunities to get on the same page about target industry sectors. This process lays the groundwork for common sectors of focus.

2. **Informed, Shared Agreement on *Coordinating* Target Industry Partnerships:** The Olympic WDC is in the early stages of planning and launching two new industry sector partnerships for their 3-county region (one in Construction and one in Healthcare). Part of the planning phase for these partnerships included a facilitated training and discussion among non-industry partners about who will take the lead in convening these partnerships, and who will co-lead and support. The training included key workforce development organizations (the Olympic Workforce Development Board and core partner programs), education (K-12, Olympic College, Peninsula College), organized labor, county commissioners, and the Economic Development Corporations (EDCs) from each county. Why is this unique? Because typically one organization convenes businesses for a specific programmatic purpose (e.g. as part of a curriculum advisory board, etc), or if for broader strategic input purposes, the engagement is usually driven from just one organization. In order to overcome staffing capacity barriers and to deliberately increase coordination between workforce development, education, and economic development, the OWDC is purposely planning a co-convening structure of support with EDCs and colleges.

3. **Industry Sector Panels and associated industry strategic plan development:** The Seattle-King county and Southwest WDCs utilize an industry sector panel process that is an advanced version of traditional skill panels. Panels of industry leaders are invited to participate in a scheduled set of conversations (time limited) about skill gaps, workforce challenges, and solutions. This provides real-time information that informs a strategic plan for the target industry, and provides points of intervention for specific education and training partners to the WDC to better support the industry's needs. These WDCs are unique in this approach based on their consistency in using it for target sectors, and their high level of organization and staffing in carrying out the panel discovery process. The Southwest WDC participates in a collaborative with two adjacent workforce areas in Oregon (Clackamas County Workforce Development Board and Work Systems Inc., the Board in the Portland Metro area) where for three target industry sector strategies they agree on one lead coordinator and three support staff (one from each area).

4. **Multiple operating industry partnerships in one region:** The Seattle-King county and Southwest WDCs rise to the top in terms of convening active industry *sector panels* to address the different critical industry sectors of their regions. Historically, the Spokane area has had up to five different active industry partnerships at a time (Energy, Construction, Healthcare, Professional Services and Manufacturing), and uniquely demonstrated a model of shared responsibility in convening those partnerships with their college and economic development partners. The WDC was a lead convener of two partnerships, the Chamber of Commerce (Greater Spokane Inc) was the lead convener of another, and the colleges convened an additional two partnerships. Each organization supported the sector partnership efforts and associated activities of the others'. This represents a unique model of shared convening roles, and therefore shared staffing, and eliminates otherwise duplicative efforts if each of these organizations were to attempt efforts in each of the five industries.

5. **Working across geopolitical boundaries:** While there are likely more examples of this, three WDCs specifically mentioned deliberate attempts to organize industry engagement across workforce area boundaries: the Southwest WDC, with two adjacent workforce areas in Oregon (Portland Metro and Clackamas County) via a formal Workforce Collaborative effort; the Eastern Washington WDC with the Spokane Area WDC; and the Pacific Mountain WDC expressing interest in working with Olympic WDC to the north and the North coast WDB in Oregon to the south.

6. **Building a Shared Table of Industry Leaders:** This concept assumes some level of shared industry group that meets the individual program needs of multiple programs, vs. each of them independently convening industry for unique program needs. This does not appear to be in true practice anywhere in the State, but the Manufacturing Industry Council of Seattle was highlighted repeatedly as a close-fit because it seemed to be a convened group of businesses that multiple organizations and systems accessed for their program needs.

7. **Industry-driven, industry-owned, industry-bought in:** Multiple interviews described a basic assumption that if industry is expected to truly buy into certain goals and activities, they need to be the definers and originators of the ideas. Most agreed that in the majority of circumstances "asks" are made of industry based on program-defined needs, not industry-defined needs. Two Centers of Excellence stood out in how they described facilitating a truly industry-driven agenda, and therefore the resuling level of participation and "asks" made to businesses: The Construction Center of Excellence housed at Renton Technical College and the Energy Center of Excellence housed at Centralia Community College.

8. **Long-term Engagement:** Almost every WDC, Skill Center and Center of Excellence can demonstrate high-quality (vs. high quantity) relationships with employers, indicated by the longevity of the relationship via their long-term engagement with certain employers (some over ten years), but Skill Center/CTE program advisory board stood out in terms of ability to hold onto employer partners for long periods of time and at deep levels of commitment to activities and advising.

9. **Coordinated business services outreach:** Benton-Franklin WDC convenes a Business Outreach Roundtable regularly of all business outreach staff of core workforce programs, colleges and economic development organizations. This began as a way to simply stay informed of each others' efforts, but has evolved into a formal way to coordination outreach to business, as well as a way to leverage individual subject matter expertise in certain industries. For them it's a precursor to being able to build industry sector partnerships in a coordinated way. Seattle-King county reports a similar approach. Others, such as the Snohomish WDC, report historical coordination and a desire to work across multiple workforce, education and economic development programs to coordinate business outreach.

10. **Balancing Statewide vs. Local industry engagement efforts:** The Center of Excellence for Marine Manufacturing and Technology housed at Skagit Valley College appears to pay unique deference to the role of the Center as a statewide source of information and resources compared to the role of local organizations also working with businesses in the maritime sector. The Center organizes skill panels, facilitated input sessions, training

activities, and regular Advisory Board meetings in different local areas, but always deliberately through local education and workforce partners. The Director describes this as engaging local partners as "advisory board members for a day." This way any follow up or sustained effort following an event has a chance of actually occurring. Similarly, the Make it in Washington initiative (co-led by the WTB, Department of Commerce, Impact Washington and Highline College) has done extensive outreach to small manufacturers in 31 of Washington's 39 counties, and is similarly purposeful in working with and through local and regional programs in workforce and economic development, with the intention of sparking new and sustained relationships between manufacturers and organizations in their areas that can offer ongoing support.

Figure 2: These are promising practices currently in use by organizations around Washington State. Together they may represent a complete picture of best-in-class industry engagement. No organization currently has all the pieces in place.

Other Common Themes from Interviews

The definitions, gold standards, and models of industry engagement, as well as the characteristics of successful conveners, above represent the main findings of this research project, but other themes emerged too. They include:

- **Different industries, different geographies**: 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 (vs. duplicating or over-riding).
- **Different organizations, different capacities:** 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, and an ability to sustain engagement over time. Organizations even within the same system do not have equal credibility or capacity for this type of work. Simply put, some will be stronger than their peers. This research suggests there may be implications on how organizations in local areas or sub-regions of the state do a better job self-assessing strengths and weaknesses, and coordinating together to improve overall.
- **Rural areas are different:** Related to the above point, it is clear that rural areas fall significantly shorter in overall capacity, staffing and resources.
- **Different levels and types of industry engagement exist:** Industry engagement at the local level is tiered: *High-level Strategy* (exemplified by a Sector Panel or Partnership); *Coordinated Business Outreach* (hopefully coordinated across multiple programs and organizations, illustrated by Business Outreach Roundtables); and *Transactional*, e.g. at the Worksource Center level (e.g. job matching, OJTs, etc) or customized college training for single employers. Discussions emerged from interviews about how these three levels of engagement work together.
- **Points of industry engagement do not align with the actual advancement trajectory of a worker:** Industry input is not holistic along a true pipeline or advancement pathway – 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). This was a repeated observation, and illustrative of the lack of coordination across systems in engaging industry.

Common themes raised by WDCs:

- **Staffing this up from WDCs** with extremely limited capacity, more than ever now than before, is a concern. Setting expectations with employers and industry that we cannot fulfill or follow through on is a persistent and real fear that prevents the building of real industry partnerships. For small WDCS, the administration components of operating prevent strategic engagement of industry.
- **Everyone is doing this now**: even the Department of Health and Human Services is now funding sector-like work, the Employment Security Department has sector

coordinators/navigators, and the Governor has Department of Commerce sector coordinators. Will we all connect? We are not currently connecting consistently.

- **Sustainability of industry relationships beyond a grant is an aspiration**, not a reality. Grants may help to get employers' attention, but keeping engagement remains a challenge. There is still a perception that industry will only engage if there is money. Or at least *consistent* money that can be relied upon.
- **The Incumbent Worker training funding of years past was an incredible tool** for sector partnership work. WIOA helps a bit with this, but not at the same level. WDCs feel they've lost a critical incentive for engaging industry.
- **For some WDCs, the National Emergency Grant is providing key focus** to target sectors that was not there before. This could lead to sector partnership approaches if staffing can be appropriated.
- **Sector partnerships bring focus**: Most agree that sector partnerships allow scarce funding and resources to be prioritized, focused and directive (vs. spreading funding and staffing thin with low overall impact).

Common themes raised by Skill Centers:

- **Some advisory boards stronger than others for 3 reasons:** Every CTE Director can report a handful of stronger program advisory boards as compared to their others. They cited three conditions for their best program advisory boards: 1) Industry demand is especially high (currently the case for STEM-based industries, particularly Healthcare/Bioscience, Aerospace, Manufacturing); 2) Target Industries are specifically and narrowly defined (e.g. Aerospace) vs. broad and generalized (e.g. Business & Marketing); and 3) Teachers are ready to listen and learn (helped by opportunities for direct coaching and training with members of industry).
- **Program advisory boards are small:** Most of these program advisory boards are small (5-10 individuals), but committed.
- **One-on-one engagement most important:** CTE Directors agree that most industry engagement is based on one-on-one relationships with individual companies.

Common themes raised by Centers of Excellence:

- **Codified points of contact and industry experts makes a distinct difference** in streamlining and reducing duplicative outreach and responses. The Centers of Excellence are one of the only examples of this playing out at least within a single system.
- **Targeting the right level of staff person** inside a company is important. Centers of Excellence do not want the CEO, they want hiring authorities and mid-level managers in order to find out the detailed needs of required sills and competencies of a job. Some acknowledgement that other organizations may benefit more from engaging the CEOs, depending on their purpose for engagement.
- **Engage industry at the right time**, not just to check the box of having engaged them. Do your homework first, inventory relevant programs, understand what you need.

Common themes raised by Department of Commerce sector coordinators:

- **Industry growth in terms of jobs is indicator of success:** Goals of Commerce Sector Coordinator positions are to find ways to increase overall industry sector income and employment.
- **Role of Department of Commerce sector coordinators is a statewide "dot connector"** of multiple existing efforts (both statewide and local, where significant) related to their target industry. To these efforts, their goals are to add value and weight.
- **Education and workforce skills are one piece,** but not the only piece.

Uncommon Themes

This research raised additional isolated thoughts and issues that may be worth highlighting. These were *not* common or repeated, but included here as potentially noteworthy.

- **State policies need to *require* coordination** across programs and systems. Currently there is "no carrot, no stick, and no reason" to make this really happen.
- **Sectors that are not on the State's priority list need to still be given respect at the local level**, including industry targets such as Retail, which should not be overlooked as a key "feeder" industry to other sectors.
- **Experimentation needs to also happen with the "Public sector" as a hiring body**, e.g. government jobs. This should be an industry sector partnership in most regions.
- **Some areas are a clean slate**: There may be a distinct advantage for areas (especially smaller, rural areas) who currently do *not* have examples of coordinated industry partnerships ("we represent a clean slate: no turf, no ownership, just the desire to figure this out").
- **Some organizations see distinct value in letting others lead**, based on authentic self-assessments of strengths and capacity ("If no one leads it, we'll give it a try. But I'd much rather see a stronger-suited organization take the helm, and let us add value as a support organization. We'll all get to take credit for the outcomes!")
- **Economic Development Organizations or Councils are significantly under-utilized** as the trusted conveners and points-of-contact for industry.
- **Local industry partnerships can fill a distinct niche by focusing on small and mid-sized companies.** Most statewide efforts target large companies. Many local organizations make the mistake of doing the same, when their job providers are in fact the collection of smaller employers that go un-tapped.

Recommendations

Training and Professional Development

Nearly every interview requested a stronger state role in providing tools, models and training on industry engagement. Below are the top requests:

- **Tools and models for local/regional coordinated engagement** that leads to a critical mass of employers engaged in target sectors (the "pull" approach described in TAP), including the nuanced approaches and detailed tools (like talking points, the right "ask", the right timing to the "asks", how to get to action/follow-through quickly, sample meeting agendas, facilitation tips, etc.)
- **Self-assessments for individual organization's capacity** to do this work well, *and* tools to help honestly assess strengths and weaknesses of organizations partnering together to do this work well ("We cannot keep pretending that each one of us is the *only* one to do this work well. We have to stop each trying to do the whole thing ourselves").
- **Training and capacity building on implementing the six phases** of the Washington Sector Partnership Framework in the TAP plan, including addressing ways to overcome staffing/resource issues associated with phases I-III ("we only ever start at phase IV because we've never had capacity to do otherwise").
- **Peer learning** groups focused on the characteristics of convening organizations.
- **Facilitation training** and access to a cadre of trusted, known facilitators (independent and trained state/local program staff that can be "borrowed") around the State so no effort is ever left without professional-level facilitation.
- **Suggested common terms and definitions** for sector partnerships, skill panels, sector strategies, business outreach, business services, etc ("We need some standardization").
- **Stronger state role in lifting up promising practices** (from Washington State and nationally) and replicating them with technical assistance and peer sharing ("Convene us once a year for shared learning. Don't make me sit through NAWB wondering if I'm at the right *quick shop")*.
- **Clarity about what is appropriately handled on a statewide basis vs. a local** or sub-regional basis, and shared learning about how to align and leverage.

Policy Interventions

- **Policies that incent/require participation in shared learning** and technical assistance efforts by WDCs, Skill Centers, ADOs/EDOs and Centers of Excellence.
- **Stronger policy instruments that incent public programs (Skill Centers, WDCs and Centers of Excellence at a minimum) to coordinate together** to engage industry, vs. independently building relationships and partnerships with employers, particularly in the same local area.
- **Stronger mechanisms for secondary and post-secondary to work in-sync**, to link up consistently for all students, not just those enrolled in CTE programming.
- **A policy mechanism to streamline the multiple and redundant (and expensive) industry research** related to skills needs and occupations in-demand.
- **Models for joint funding and staffing** across key systems (ESD, DHHS, Commerce, Education agencies) for industry partnership-building.
- **Policies that require teachers to use Continuing Education (CE) courses in coaching/training settings with industry,** targeting the three annual paid CE courses**.**

Practice Recommendations

This research indicates a set of recommended practices for on-the-ground programs based on the promising practices highlighted repeatedly during interviews. These include:

1. **Find ways to study labor market information together, across programs, instead of in isolation from each other**. Use the information and process to come to agreement about the industry sectors that truly drive employment and economic health.
2. **Work through the hard conversations about how to coordinate industry engagement efforts** for shared priority industry sectors, including who is best positioned in a region to take a lead role, a co-lead role, or a support role.
3. **Consider that each labor market region needs multiple, active industry partnerships** depending on the number of industry sectors that drive employment and economic health in that region. Share the staffing roles in order to support and sustain multiple partnerships across organizations.
4. **Be comfortable with a truly industry-driven agenda**, and prioritize industry-driven goals over program-driven goals where possible in order to experience sustained and deep engagement by companies.
5. **Build the shared table:** deliberately build a partnerships of companies that can act as the official advisory board for multiple programs and organizations. Focus on getting a critical mass at the table so that it truly carries weight and integrity.
6. **Pay deference to real labor market regions**, not geo-political lines. This most likely means working with other WDCs, multiple colleges, and multiple economic development entities from other counties or areas.
7. **Value quality relationships, but not to the detriment of quantity.** Narrow engagement of just a handful of companies will not give you a true understanding of industry-wide needs, and therefore will not be enough to ensure jobseekers are trained accurately.
8. **Be deliberate about coordinating business service outreach** across WIOA core programs, education agencies, labor organizations, economic development entities and others. Make eliminating redundancy a goal.
9. **Use industry sector panels to inform strategies and uses of financial resources.** These are deep dives into industry trends and needs.
10. **Be purposeful of how each effort targeting industry aligns or duplicates an existing statewide or local effort.** Find points of leverage.

Response Chapter

The Response period for this research project will be September 12th – October 31st, and is open to anyone. Responses should be emailed directly to Lindsey Woolsey at lindsey@woolseygroup.com with the subject-line heading: WTB Industry Engagement Responses. Responses should be categorized across the following six questions, but please note that respondents do *not* need to respond to *all* the questions.

1. What can you confirm or reiterate from this report based on your own experiences? i.e. what rings truest?

2. What surprised you in the findings? Were there areas where you were pleasantly surprised, or discouraged?
3. What is missing? What is not emphasized enough?
4. What are the implications in the findings for your practice and program? What are the implications for policy tools?
5. What specific policy or practice recommendations should be made based on these findings?
6. Any other comments?

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