

## **Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board Executive Director's Report**

Meeting No. 235  
April 15, 2020

### **1. Board Requests from March 11 Meeting:**

The impact of the COVID-19 on our system was already significant at the time of the last Board meeting, and has continued to grow almost exponentially. The Board requested that staff seek relief from current deliverables in order to free up capacity to address COVID-related work. Staff has been working with staff of ESD and USDOL, and the Washington Workforce Association on these matters. Following is a brief synopsis of the exploration and results:

Local Plan Development: The federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) does not require specific deliverable timeframes for local plans, leaving the scheduling to states. However, the law requires that each local board have an approved plan in order to receive formula WIOA funds. The Employment Security Department has the ability to extend the life of an approved plan for contracting purposes, with the exception of needing certain information updated: Identification of the local entity responsible for disbursement of the grant funds per WIOA Section 108(b)(15); Description of the competitive process to be used to award the subgrants and contracts to carry out local WIOA Title I activities per WIOA Section 108(b)(16), including Local Workforce Development Board (LWDB) requests for waivers to provide direct services per WIOA Title I Policy 5404; and a set of assurances regarding administration of funds signed by chief local elected official and board chair.

ESD staff are working on the minimal requirements to be able to issue FY'21 WIOA contracts to each of the Workforce Development Councils. Workforce Board and ESD staff will develop new planning guidelines and submission dates. We are aiming for late summer or early fall, but will also consider the trajectory of the COVID-19 crisis, and the impact on local agencies to establish the later submission date.

Performance Target-Setting and Modifying Current Targets: We learned that a number of other states also asked for relief on these items, which caused the USDOL national office to engage in the decision-making process. On the question of modifying current performance targets, USDOL has said they would make adjustments to performance criteria and models at the national level, once they have adequate data on the economic and employment impact of the pandemic crisis. The adjustments will then be transferred to states to utilize in making local area adjustments. They are not yet able to predict the timeframe for this work.

WIOA does specify the timeframe for target-setting, which must be completed prior to the start of the federal fiscal year (October 1). USDOL has asked that we keep to the planned schedule for target negotiations, with the understanding that we will be able to modify negotiated targets at

a later date. Our Research Director, Dave Wallace, and his research team have been working with staff of the WDCs to develop Washington's proposed targets to USDOL, which begins the formal negotiation process. The Workforce board will take action on the proposal at the May meeting.

## **2. COVID-19 Response:**

Workforce board staff, along with so many others, have been consumed with supporting the state's response to the pandemic. Staff are adjusting well to new ways of working, with each other and with external partners and constituents, and have taken on new responsibilities with their usual determination and good humor. Some of the largest areas of activity have included:

Modifying workplace practices: CFO/COO Vicki DeBoer has led our transition to an almost fully remote workforce. IT manager, Robert Hinsch, has done the hard work of ensuring that every employee has adequate access to the systems they need to maintain high performance levels. The physical office is closed to the public. Vicki and CJ Teague spend time at the office, abiding by CDC protocols, in order to manage certain fiscal and contracting operations that are not yet automated. The staff meets weekly, virtually, to update on work, ask for or offer help and support, and share insights and anecdotes on the new normal. Erica Wollen, Caroline Metzger, and Lindsay Elwanger are becoming our resident experts on Zoom and GoToMeeting, supporting all staff as they continue connecting with external partners.

Private Career School Oversight and Veteran Student Assistance: Jim Parker and his team have been working overtime to help WA's 320+ private career schools and schools serving veterans to adjust to the Governor's "Stay Home, Stay Healthy" orders. Developing guidance for the schools, helping them transition to online education, and answering questions from a wide range of from schools, students, and industry advocates. Because these schools are mostly small and very small businesses, Jim and his Team are also learning about the resources available to them to survive the crisis and keep their staff and faculty employed.

For veterans, there are many parameters and restrictions that govern whether or not GI Bill benefits can be used to pay tuition costs and monthly living expenses. The US Veterans Administration did not believe they had any latitude to alter the current rules. John Murray, Veterans Program Specialist and Contracts Subcommittee chair of the National Association of State Approving Agencies (NASAA), worked with a team from NASAA, and other national veteran support organizations to develop legislation to make necessary changes to the current GI Bill statutes. The team worked quickly, found sponsors and supporters in the House and Senate, to get the bill approved within a few days. We are thankful to Sen. Murray and her staff for their guidance and support to see this bill move so quickly.

Dislocated Worker Emergency Grant Application: U.S. Department of Labor announced availability of \$100 million to support dislocated worker disaster recovery activities. These grants are generally made available for natural disasters, such as floods and hurricanes, and include funding to subsidize wages for short-term clean-up activities and humanitarian assistance. The grant will also cover training and education costs and support services to prepare dislocated workers for jobs expected to be in demand in the economic recovery. States could apply for up

to \$25 million. The application was due 15 days after the national emergency was declared. It was submitted April 3.

Workforce Board staff partnered with ESD and the Washington Workforce Association to develop the application. Board staff brought together a large, broad group of agency, business and labor partners of the system to help inform the goals, service strategies, and guiding principles. The resulting design is demonstrative of the many years these partners have worked together towards true talent and prosperity for all, including a commitment to traditionally underserved populations and those with significant barriers to economic success. The service strategy is customer-focused and built on a commitment to integrated service delivery and resource sharing. Putting the needs of the jobseeker and business customer at the forefront helped bring down silo walls.

Board staff was also assigned to identify the types, numbers and geographic distribution of clean-up, mitigation, and recovery jobs that this grant could potentially support. There was no central source for this information. Staff solicited information from dozens of state and local agencies involved in COVID-19 response efforts. Our research staff also developed models to help project the surge in certain types of jobs.

CARES Act and Congressional COVID Response: Staff have been working with members of Washington's Congressional delegation, Governor Inslee's D.C. office, and national organizations to inform the development of portions of the federal COVID-response packages that impact the workforce development system. Our efforts were instrumental in negotiations on veteran's education, funding for higher education stabilization, and increased flexible funding for dislocated worker services. The level of funding provided for higher education and workforce development are much lower than requested, however. The emphasis has been on containing virus spread, providing financial support to individuals and families, and supporting businesses to stay afloat and maintain workers on the payroll. The next federal package will hopefully have more of an emphasis on economic recovery.

### **3. Workforce Board applies for National Science Foundation grant focused on COVID-19**

Workforce Board staff applied for a (very) quick turnaround National Science Foundation grant opportunity that would pay as much as \$15,000 to rapidly publish healthcare-related credentials from Career Bridge to Credential Engine's national credential registry. The Workforce Board's proposal is one of several Credential Engine is bundling together in an effort to land National Science Foundation coronavirus recovery funds that can be distributed to participating states. This grant would build on an existing grant project already underway between the Workforce Board and Credential Engine. The Workforce Board is currently working to publish as many as 3,800 credentials from the agency's career and education platform CareerBridge.wa.gov to Credential Engine's national registry. Additional funds will allow the Workforce Board to quickly focus on publishing healthcare occupation credentials.

As the COVID-19 crisis intensifies, the demand for healthcare workers is growing and will continue to unprecedented levels over the coming weeks and months--calling for more training options, particularly accelerated, and/or abbreviated training. As providers develop plans to

deliver new, abbreviated training to respond to the crisis, and changes are made to licensing and certification criteria, it's critical that these new educational pathways are published for broad consumption, creating awareness and boosting enrollment.

#### **4. Occupational Data Bill Passes into Law...Just Barely**

It was a roller coaster ride for this game-changing bill (House Bill 2308), which requires employers to report the job titles of their workers through an additional occupational field in quarterly wage records. The bill, sponsored by Future of Work Task Force member Rep. Vandana Slatter, D-Bellevue, promises to help the state better track the performance and return on investment of postsecondary/higher education programs and whether they lead to the jobs for which students trained. The data also will provide a more accurate on-the-ground picture of our state's labor market than is currently gleaned through voluntary surveys. Despite these benefits, the bill faced initial opposition from small business because the reporting requirements were viewed as burdensome. It was retooled after input from the National Federation of Independent Business and eventually gained bipartisan traction. But it was almost defeated when it was tucked in with several other bills that were voted down in a group. Resuscitated and finally voted off the floor of the House and Senate, the bill's passage was cause for celebration among Workforce Board staff, Rep. Slatter, and a slew of other supporters.

But the bill's celebration was short-lived. On April 3, staff were informed that Governor Inslee planned to veto the bill as a cost-cutting measure in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. However, in the 11<sup>th</sup> hour, (literally that same day) advocates were able to make the case that this policy, and the information gained from the data collection, would be critical as the state recovers from the COVID-19 crisis and challenges from a derailed economy. Big thanks to our staff, Nick Streuli from ESD, the Future of Work Task Force members, and to Larry Brown and many labor members who took swift action and were able to show the value of keeping this policy. With this additional data point, we can much more accurately show how education and training leads to specific job outcomes, which will allow students and policymakers to strategically invest in the programs that work best for them. Washington is now just the third state in the nation to collect this key data piece.

The bill's success was particularly satisfying for Nova, and Lew & Joe from the Future of Work, (whose Task Force identified occupational data collection as a recommendation). Workforce Board staff, including Marina, Dave Wallace, and Eric, spent many hours educating legislators, staff, and business organizations. It was truly a team effort. Now signed into law, occupational data will begin to be collected from Washington employers in October of 2021 as optional, and October 2022 as mandatory. We recognize that we may have to slow implementation if needed for funding or staff bandwidth, but the policy remains intact.