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## Washington's Application for the Workforce Innovation Network

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STATE OF WASHINGTON  
— OFFICE OF GOVERNOR JAY INSLEE —



# Team Contact Information and Proposal Contents

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STATE OF WASHINGTON  
— OFFICE OF GOVERNOR JAY INSLEE —

February 11, 2021

Rachael Stephens  
Program Director  
Workforce Development & Economic Policy  
National Governors Association  
444 N. Capitol St. NW, Ste. 267  
Washington, D.C. 20001

Dear Director Stephens:

As the state of Washington enters our second year of pandemic response, and our work turns with increasing focus towards economic stabilization and rebuilding, we are committed to learning the lessons of past downturns. And we are dedicated to ensuring that all Washingtonians, regardless of geographic location or family background, enjoy an equitable economic recovery. In the wake of the last recession, Washington experienced an unprecedented period of economic growth culminating in historically low unemployment. But even in this season of plenty, we recognized that many rural and BIPOC communities were not sharing the full benefit of our broader economic success. It was with this experience in mind that I charged the state Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (Workforce Board) with creating a recovery plan for the state's workforce in fall 2020. Key to the success of the plan is an agreement among workforce system partners, including leaders from business and organized labor, to adopt a collective impact campaign that supports inclusive, equitable economic recovery by connecting the most economically vulnerable with clear, navigable routes to livable wages in high-demand, high-wage fields.

Because inclusive, equitable economic recovery has many interdependent facets, I have asked the Workforce Board to coordinate and align the efforts of the workforce development system with all other economic recovery efforts of my administration. This includes the 17-agency Workforce Recovery Group, my cross-agency performance accountability effort, Results Washington, the Department of Commerce, the Department of Social and Health Services, and the multi-stakeholder Poverty Reduction Workgroup. I have asked a great deal of my Cabinet, but this work is critically important. The status quo is not an option. We will only achieve success by working together across program and funding silos, with a collective vision and clear objectives to close economic disparity gaps across our state.

This project will enable the Workforce Board to coordinate, on my behalf, identifying and planning for the use of a common metric for family-sustaining wage goals for jobseekers across workforce and economic development, social services, and community and technical colleges. The tools we are considering will recognize the variation in financial needs for each of our 39

counties, and also offer career counseling and service planning resources. Project staff will also work with partners to identify high-demand, high-wage jobs that will be targeted, and to develop a range of pathways to ensure equitable and inclusive access and economic success.

The support and technical assistance offered by this opportunity will help project partners fully explore options for a common system of measuring the impact of our programs on all populations, based on a standard calculation of “self-sufficiency.” This, in turn, will enable us to dashboard and identify gaps and shortfalls in service delivery, both geographically and by population group. The richness and granularity of information will allow collective impact partners to “swarm” around specific problems to implement solutions that improve participants’ economic outcomes.

Moreover, the expertise, wide field of vision, and extensive contacts offered by the National Governors Association and its policy staff, honed in the partnership work with states across the country, will allow us to continue to learn from other states that have explored self-sufficiency measurement tools and pathway models to high-demand careers. This opportunity will also support our partnership work, including with our partners in business and the labor community, in designing and executing a series of agreements to define self-sufficiency and occupation-related goals and objectives for the collective impact initiative, mapping mutually-reinforcing activities to support the initiative, and establishing an on-going backbone organizational group to support the initiative until goals are achieved.

Washington’s team will include:

- John Aultman, my Senior Policy Advisor for education and workforce development
- Eleni Papadakis, Executive Director of the state Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board
- Cheryl Strange, Secretary of the Department of Social and Health Services
- Jan Yoshiwara, Executive Director of the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges
- Cami Feek, Interim Commissioner of the Employment Security Department
- Lisa Brown, Executive Director of the Department of Commerce

Ms. Papadakis will be the team lead for this project. Please direct any questions about this application to her at [eleni.papadakis@wtb.wa.gov](mailto:eleni.papadakis@wtb.wa.gov) or 360-507-3161.

Thank you for this timely and significant opportunity to collaborate with the National Governors Association and other states to bring best practices and expert assistance to the people of Washington.

Very truly yours,



Jay Inslee  
Governor

## **NGA Workforce Innovation Network**

### **Washington Partnership Application: Context and Vision for Change**

Inclusive and equitable economic recovery is a top priority of Governor Jay Inslee, and having systems and services in place to solidly connect jobseekers to high-demand, high-wage employment is a key component of his vision.

In spring 2020, Gov. Inslee charged the state Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (Workforce Board) with creating the workforce development component of the state's economic recovery plan. In order to advance the recommendations in the plan, the Workforce Board is developing a framework for an inter-agency, multi-stakeholder collective impact campaign that will connect the most economically vulnerable Washingtonians with clear, navigable routes to livable wages in high-demand, high-wage fields. Key to the success of the plan is an agreement among a range workforce system partners, including leaders from business and organized labor, to adopt a measurement system that enables the collective—and the public—to track our progress towards the goal of equitable access to family-sustaining jobs for all Washingtonians. Washington maintains a broad definition of its workforce system, overseen in part by the state Workforce Board, which includes economic and community development, social and health services, secondary and postsecondary education providers, registered apprenticeship and career connected learning, in addition to the federally funded WIOA system.

Washington's project will help advance the state's inclusive and equitable economic recovery. The state's economic recovery plans call for aligning and integrating services across program and funding silos, with a focus on lifting up those populations that have been historically left behind economically. In order to achieve our goals, project partners have agreed to work together towards a collective vision of economic security for all, and a commitment to measuring our progress towards that vision. Defining economic self-sufficiency is a critical, yet complicated, first step in this process.

This project will enable the Washington team to explore various options for defining economic self-sufficiency and to select a single metric or metric system that can be utilized across agency partners. Such a metric or measurement system will enable partners to know to what level our programs work together to help people and families achieve self-sufficiency: a level of financial success where families can meet their living expenses without government assistance. To do this, partners are agreed on exploring the potential of a Self-Sufficiency Standard calculator to begin tracking where our system's customers are at in terms of self-sufficiency before and after they interact with us. Tracking and dash-boarding how our programs propel participants out of poverty and towards a living wage will help policymakers and our state Workforce Board members create more targeted and equitable strategies that support all Washingtonians. Additionally, this support will allow the state's partners to move forward on cross-agency memoranda of understanding to guide implementation of the plan and future governance.

Once identified, the team will create the plan for use of the common metric for family-sustaining wage goals for our jobseekers, across workforce and economic development, social services, and our community and technical colleges. The tools we are considering will recognize the variation in financial needs for each of our 39 counties, and also offer career counseling and service planning resources for use with customers. Common intake and coordinated, customer-centered service planning are objectives of the state plan. Aligning customer service planning using similar tools, definitions, and goals will help advance efforts towards these objectives.

The team will also identify three to six industry or occupational sectors with high demand, high-wage job opportunities available currently or projected for near-term growth. Project staff will work with partners to develop a range of pathways to ensure equitable and inclusive access and economic success, including, but not limited to traditional degree pathways, apprenticeship and career connected learning, Guided Pathway and integrated ABE and occupational training programs at the community and technical colleges, AmeriCorps, on-line certification programs, and others.

**Challenges for Current Job Seekers and Employers:** The Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (Workforce Board) was tasked by Governor Inslee to develop the workforce development component of Washington’s post- pandemic economic recovery plan. In just two months, unemployment climbed from a historic low of 3.8 percent (February) to a historic high of 16.3 percent (April). The December 2020 rate was 7.1 percent, representing nearly 300,000 dislocated workers. That tally does not include the thousands more unemployed “gig” workers, small business owners, or the underemployed.

Industries employing a larger proportion of underrepresented and under-educated populations were hit hardest. Leisure and hospitality lost over 240,000 jobs from a year ago. These hard-hit industries were also among the lowest paying, according to the Employment Security Department’s seasonally adjusted figures. Workers in these industries were economically vulnerable before the pandemic, often working two or more jobs to make ends meet. Drilling into the unemployment insurance (UI) demographics depicts enormous challenges. Among unemployed workers, under age 25 are over-represented by about 30% of their share of the labor force (16% unemployed vs. 12% pre-COVID employment). Those with a high school diploma or less make up 37% of the UI rolls, but only 25% of the pre-COVID labor force. High school graduates without a college degree are over-represented by 13% among laid-off workers (26% vs. 23%). These industries, along with agriculture also employ the largest proportion of populations of color, immigrants and refugees. These workers may realize they need more training to find gainful re-employment opportunities but are driven to find paid work right now to support themselves and their families—thus returning to the churn of low-wage work.

Helping these economically vulnerable individuals attain high-wage career goals will require a worker-centered approach to service planning, where services are not constrained by the limitations of time, place, program or funding stream. We must be able to provide a full menu of services and a variety of pathway opportunities that can accommodate the life circumstances

and needs of each jobseeker. This is a tall order, but we are buoyed by Gov. Inslee's vision and leadership, by the support of our state's business and labor communities (represented equally on the Workforce Board), and by the commitment of Washington's agency leaders to a shared vision of economic security for all.

To accelerate economic recovery for the targeted populations we need to understand the impact of COVID-19 on the job landscape in the near-term and in the future. Most job outlook reports do not account for the pandemic. The Workforce Board used state and federal data sources, data from commercial vendors, such as Dun & Bradstreet, Burning Glass and Help Wanted On Line, from recent industry association surveys (Association of Washington Business, Washington Technology Industry Association, and Impact Washington), and from Microsoft and LinkedIn to identify high-demand jobs that pay, or lead to, livable wages. Two high-demand sectors—IT and healthcare—are highlighted in the economic recovery plan for their statewide reach, including into Washington's under-served communities. Jobs in these two categories represent the majority of job listings paying above minimum wage in every WA county.

IT is both an industry and occupational sector. The ability to use IT is a growing necessity of most jobs in the labor market today—and the proportion of IT to non-IT functions is expected to continue growing. The pandemic has accelerated the need for functional IT skills among workers for whom this hadn't been a requirement. The pandemic also caused many employers to consider investment in automation technology.

For the economically vulnerable, IT knowledge, skills and abilities are often lacking, which relegates them to a shrinking pool of lower-wage occupations with limited opportunities for economic mobility. Whether because of the inequities associated with broadband distribution and cost, the expense of owning up-to-date hardware, the lack of IT-related educational, work or life experiences, or all of the above, digital illiteracy is derailing the train to good jobs and economic prosperity for too many Washingtonians. Identifying adequate and appropriate opportunities and resources for jobseekers to develop relevant, career-focused IT skills will be a priority for this project team.

The talent pipeline for the health sector had significant challenges before the pandemic, and the situation has hit crisis proportions as a result of COVID-19. However, due to the dire need for more qualified workers, there is renewed interest in creating more accessible and navigable pathways to high-demand, high-wage health careers. The team will work with employer and labor representatives from the healthcare sector to create pathways from low-barrier entry, such as home health aides and CNAs to nursing and other professional positions.

After any economic downturn, there are always job growth opportunities that could not have been anticipated. A manufacturing company may find a new market for its products, a new company may form from graduate research, or a business owner may decide to expand operations or relocate to a rural community. In any event, the system must be able to respond to the new workforce demands of the business and find pathways to these opportunities for

their jobseekers. The project team will also consider strategies that enable flexibility and responsiveness to local employers, whenever and wherever job growth occurs.

**Alignment with Governor Inslee’s Workforce and Economic Recovery Priorities:** Gov. Inslee has made inclusive, equitable economic recovery a priority of his administration, and has sponsored a number of efforts that align with the goals of the Workforce Innovation Network, including a multi-agency, multi-stakeholder effort to identify policy, practice and funding recommendations to support community and business economic resilience; a cabinet-level exploration using lessons from the pandemic to reform state government for both post-pandemic recovery and closing disparity gaps in service provision for good; a multi-stakeholder Poverty Reduction Workgroup, a collaboration of the state’s social service and health agencies to improve equitable access to high quality support services. He has also focused his performance accountability effort, Results Washington, on a set of specific inter-agency projects to improve customer outcomes within existing resources.

As stated above, Gov. Inslee directed the Workforce Board to develop the workforce development component of the state’s economic recovery plan. He asked the Board to coordinate with the other groups he commissioned to work on various aspects of the state plan. At the December 2020 Workforce Board meeting, in order to bring these many efforts together, members discussed framing a collective impact campaign around one system-wide goal that measures our impact on poverty reduction. Members suggested that setting a static threshold above the federal poverty line as a goal for all Washington communities was not feasible, as very disparate living costs in different areas of the state make it difficult to create one meaningful, universal goal. Also, a single threshold may not be useful for each agency, program or funding stream within our broad system, as each is governed under specific performance accountability parameters. Instead, members suggested staff investigate tools that recognize the variations among the 39 counties, and the various income needs for different family sizes and types, beginning with the Self-Sufficiency Standard and Calculator Tool developed by the University of Washington and updated every three years.

**Other Aligned Partnerships:** In addition to active involvement with the NGA, including most recently, NGA’s Reskilling and Recovery Network, Washington participates on the national level with a wide range of organizations, including the National Associations of State Workforce Agencies, Workforce Boards, American Public Human Services , Economic Development Executives, to name only a few. Washington has also been actively engaged in a number of philanthropic-sponsored national initiatives on credential mobility, apprenticeship and work-based learning expansion, and multigenerational approaches to anti-poverty services. Learning from these partnerships often helps inform policy development.

Additionally, Washington has contracted with a number of national organizations to assist with particular aspects of system improvements, including most recently, Kinetic West, McKinsey, Boston Consulting Group, and Research Improving the Lives of People (RIPL).

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## Goal Overview

This project comes at a particularly helpful time as Washington works to advance its economic recovery plans. The funds available will support dedicated staff or a contractor to facilitate inter-agency work among agencies that are each currently over-burdened and short-staffed. Additionally, we value the opportunity to learn from NGA staff and advisors, as well as from the other states in the network.

Washington has four major goals for this technical assistance opportunity:

- 1) Research and identify self-sufficiency standard resources from around the country, including from states that have already begun implementing and tracking progress using such a tool;
- 2) Facilitate the creation of an implementation plan and cross-agency memoranda of understanding, as appropriate.
- 3) Focus on engaging our system's partners in the business and labor community to ensure broad community consultation and buy-in to the vision and goals;
- 4) Expand or create new pathways to high demand career pathways, with a focus on economic security for economically vulnerable and marginalized communities.

*Identifying Self-Sufficiency Resources and Best Practices:* Washington seeks support which will allow us to identify the self-sufficiency standard tool and begin constructing a cross-program dashboard that identifies how our programs are moving populations across the state towards economic self-sufficiency—one standard measure applied across all workforce programs. This will involve a close review of the Self-Sufficiency Standard and Calculator tools developed by researchers at the University of Washington (UW), and performing a comparative analysis of other such tools in the marketplace.

UW's Self-Sufficiency Standard defines the income working families need to meet their basic necessities without private or public assistance. Basic minimum needs include: housing, childcare, food, transportation, health care, miscellaneous expenses (clothing, telephone, household items), and taxes (minus federal and state tax credits). The Standard is calculated for 719 different family types for each county or area in a state. In the case of large counties in Washington, the Standard is calculated by sub-regions, providing a more granular snapshot of the living costs associated with Seattle (King County), south King County, and East King County, for example. The family types for which a Standard is calculated range from one adult with no children, to one adult with one infant, one adult with one preschooler, and so forth, up to two-adult families with six teenagers.

Partners could use technical assistance in learning from other states that have adopted and applied self-sufficiency tools to inform equity-based goal setting and customer counseling and service design.

*Facilitating Cross-Agency Collaboration:* Dedicated staff or a contractor will be assigned to facilitate cross-agency selection and adoption of the self-sufficiency standard and will help to

develop inter-agency MOUs that articulate the mutually reinforcing activities that will lead to better participant outcomes.

*Engaging Business and Labor Partners on Designing a Strategy for Equitable Economic Recovery*  
Uniquely, Washington's Workforce Board is organized to give equal voice to business, labor, and government providers of workforce services. Valuing and centering partnership with both the business and labor communities is in our DNA. Their voice and participation in developing strategies for inclusive economic recovery, focused on developing accessible, navigable pathways to family-sustaining wages, will be informed by the self-sufficiency tools selected by project partners. We are very interested in learning about business-labor partnerships that have successfully created pathways with an equity lens.

*Pathways to High-Demand, High-Wage Careers:* Partners are interested to learn from other states about models to improve access and navigability to high-demand, high-wage careers. Credit mobility and work-based learning models are of particular interest to project partners. The project team will identify 3 to 6 occupations or industry sectors on which to focus their plans but will begin with a specific focus on high-demand pathways in information technology, specifically leveraging the rich business culture of IT in the Pacific Northwest.

Washington has been investing in the development of "upskill-backfill" program models that provide training for incumbent workers as well as preparatory training for new hires. We would be very interested to learn how other states might be integrating support for incumbent worker upskilling with more traditional workforce development programs.

**Washington's Response to COVID19:** Much of this is described in the above section, "Alignment with Governor Inslee's Workforce and Economic Recovery Priorities." Additionally, state partners have worked together on the deployment of Cares Act resources and other discretionary grants to ensure that impacted individuals, families, businesses and communities have the resources they need to weather the conditions imposed by the pandemic and to prepare for recovery. Partner agencies have been working to involve individuals experiencing the impacts of the pandemic in the development of COVID response efforts. Project partners have also been working with local service representatives and customer advocates to hone service delivery during the pandemic. Gov. Inslee has also convened citizen advisory committees to help inform resource deployment and policy changes.

**Indicators of Progress towards State Goals:** Many executive agencies have collaborated on data dashboarding projects to track the state's COVID19 response efforts. The state's Roadmap to Recovery Dashboard tracks key public health metrics that inform phased re-openings across the state. Another dashboard focused on key economic recovery indicators is curated by the state's Department of Commerce. The data from these and other dashboards is disaggregated by county, and where possible by industry sector and population group. Dashboards are publicly available to enable informed decision-making by local governments, policy-makers, service providers, and the general public.

The core theme of the state’s workforce economic recovery plan was to learn from the lessons of the previous Great Recession and avoid an inequitable economic recovery, one that left some parts of the state thriving, but others locked in a state of economic recession. It is for this reason that this project is focused on finding the right metric or metrics to know if the most economically vulnerable; those in the bottom two economic quintiles, are finding pathways to family-sustaining employment.

**Proposed Use of Funds:** Funds will be used primarily to pay for staff and/or contractor support to facilitate the project goals among partner agencies. The state will engage a contractor to manage a literature review and gather resources on self-sufficiency from peer states. Lead staff that will be partially supported by these funds will convene agency partners around the development of a plan to implement a self-sufficiency tool for service planning, and for tracking and dashboarding participant data.

### **State Team Leadership and Membership**

Because the Washington team aims to make critical decisions through this project, it is important to have the executive leadership of the core agencies at the table. Washington’s team is therefore comprised of the following state leaders:

<b><u>NAME</u></b>	<b><u>POSITION</u></b>
<b>John Aultman</b>	Senior Policy Advisor, Governor’s Office
<b>Eleni Papadakis (Team Leader)</b>	Executive Director, Workforce Training & Education Coordinating Board
<b>Cheryl Strange</b>	Secretary, Department of Social and Human Services
<b>Jan Yoshiwara</b>	Executive Director, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges
<b>Lisa Brown</b>	Director, Department of Commerce

Additionally, the project team will inform the collective impact work of the state Workforce Board and will engage the business and labor leaders on the Board in policy and planning recommendations.