

Executive Director's Report
Workforce Board Meeting, September 21—Meeting No. 259

We always hope the summer months will be a little less active than usual for Board staff, who have worked so hard over the legislative session, but that rarely works out to be so. These past couple of months staff have been working hard to help actualize the Board's legislative agenda, especially the development of prioritized Decision Packages. Our CFO/COO Lisa Engelhart and fiscal analyst, Kathy Borges have been occupied with end of year fiscal close-out, which is never easy for our complicated little agency.

I mentioned a few reports back that we were doing some organizational development work and strategic planning. We're taking this somewhat slowly so that we don't get ahead of the Board or the state strategic planning process. However, in anticipation of that work, I've done some restructuring, which I describe in item #1. We are also occupied, edified, and sometimes energized over the summer with a number of conferences. In many instances we are asked to be presenters at these conferences as well. I provide a short list of those activities in item #2. And in item #3, you'll see that the Board's top priority for legislative support last session, modernizing Career Bridge is starting to take shape with a dynamic design thinking kick-off session. Lastly, please see information in item #4 on the Washington Workforce Association annual conference coming up in November. Get that in your calendar if you can. I always learn so much and am inspired during this well-organized conference from presentations from local, state, and national experts.

1. Agency Organizational Development—Important New Leadership Positions

Coming through the pandemic, like almost all workplaces, the agency of the Workforce Board had to reimagine its workplace operations. We've been considering how to build a work environment that actualizes the best of both remote and in-office work. We are thankful for our CFO/COO Lisa Engelhart, who has been leading efforts to keep our operations running smoothly while we transition to a hybrid work environment. But we are digging deeper and taking the opportunity of such dynamic change all around us to consider how our organization can step up to meet the challenges and opportunities facing our system.

It was easy to identify a few areas where we have gaps and could benefit from additional staff and resources—that's always the easiest list to generate. We chose though, to focus on our core strengths and how we might build on them. At the top of that list is our talented, small but mighty team, each member a high performer in their discipline, and each dedicated to the mission of the organization. We recognized that retaining staff was critical, and being attractive to new talented, mission-driven individuals was a close second. Our aim is to organize and behave in ways that support each employee's passion for their work and their ability to perform successfully, while also promoting healthy work-life balance and a culture of inclusion and belonging.

We continue our focus on diversifying our staff and also on how our work might better support system service providers and policymakers to achieve equitable, inclusive economic prosperity for all Washingtonians. We've seen time and again that bringing diverse thinking into our work is beneficial, especially when the communities we aim to impact results in better outcomes. We are thankful to Commissioner Cami Feek and her Director of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, Ayanna Colman, who have welcomed us into their agency's exploration of these very questions, and in the development of their Pro-Equity Anti-Racism (PEAR) plan.

Another important strength that we took into account is the new leadership and renewed energy of the Board. We appreciate Gov. Inslee's willingness to experiment with a co-chairmanship of business and labor leaders, and

the appointment of dedicated workforce development advocates to fill those roles. Staff are both inspired and motivated by the commitment that co-chairs Gary Chandler and Larry Brown have shown to the mission of the Board, and especially by their dedication to the core principles of the tri-partite structure and the power of collective impact. As the Board builds its agenda for the coming year and beyond, we want to make certain that we are organized to support their efforts well. The Board's legislative agenda and the state strategic planning process that will be discussed at the 9/21 meeting are important drivers in our organizational thinking as we work with our system partners to answer the question: *"How might the state's workforce development system need to change to respond to the new economic context, while meeting the Board's vision for inclusive economic vitality and resilience in every community across the state?"*

2. **New Leadership Positions:**

In order to prepare for what we believe will be a robust planning effort in an environment where many more stakeholders are interested in workforce issues, system partners are developing responsive service innovations, and funders, policymakers and other influencers are attempting to engage to make a positive difference, we've created the position **Director of Workforce System Advancement**, and have promoted our ace communications director, **Marina Parr** to fill this important new role.

Marina will be developing this position as she goes, building on her amazing talents as a journalist and storyteller, a convener and facilitator, of course marketing and communications expert, but also as one of the most passionate advocates for the workforce development system. Marina is also a true relationship-builder who sees every new person she meets as a friend and potential partner. She will be calling on our system partners and stakeholders to identify priorities for system advancement, and to build solid messaging and other resources for collective impact initiatives of the system. She will also begin meeting with the state and national network of influencers of workforce development policy and funding to tell Washington's story.

As Marina's role takes shape, I expect to be engaged with her in external advancement activities. I realize that I may at times not be able to handle all the important items currently on my plate. With the departure of Deputy Director for Policy and Programs, Eric Wolf, I chose to create a single, **Deputy Executive Director** position and promote our own **Nova Gattman** into the role. Nova has been our Deputy Director for External Affairs, for the past few years, having started with us as a policy analyst and legislative liaison. But over her 10 years with the Board, she has also overseen the healthcare workforce policy portfolio, has supported numerous policy and planning efforts across a wide range of issues with numerous partners and stakeholders, and has filled in for me many times, including as a presenter to the U.S. House Congressional Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Investment.

Nova will also be developing this position while undertaking it. In both cases we will be backfilling some of the work of these two high-test contributors—we really need 4 or 5 people to fully backfill all that they currently do. Please congratulate Nova and Marina—and join me in thanking them for taking on these challenging roles.

3. **Summer Conferences:**

Western Association of Veterans Education Specialists (WAVES)—Darlene Bartlett, John Murray, and Lane Anderson from our Consumer Protection team attended the annual WAVES conference, held this year in Portland (July 17-20), where the National Training representatives presented information on the VA's new systems, and the team participated in more training on the new Risk Based Surveys that will replace the Compliance Audit structure in FY23. The in-person format allowed the group to meet and connect with the

schools they oversee. Bonus: The Eyes of Freedom traveling memorial was on-site during the conference. This traveling memorial honors the service and sacrifice of all who answer our nation's call.

Future of the Health Workforce Summit —In late July, Nova Gattman and Renee Fullerton, our new Health & Social Policy Associate attended the Future of Health Workforce Summit in Walla Walla hosted by the Greater Columbia Accountable Community of Health (now known as Greater Health Now). Nova presented as part of a well-received panel about state health workforce efforts such as the Health Workforce Council, Health Workforce Sentinel Network and Behavioral Health Workforce Advisory Committee. The conference focused on ways to strengthen and optimize an organization's workforce strategy. Topics included improving diversity, equity, and inclusion in the health workforce, innovative solutions, and healthcare workforce wellness and retention.

Washington Association for Career and Technical Education Summer Conference —This annual conference (Aug. 7-10 in Spokane) draws hundreds of CTE teachers and administrators each summer. Workforce Board staff Eleni Papadakis, Nova Gattman, Elizabeth Court, and Joe Wilcox (our new Career Pathways Manager) attended this year and I provided a presentation on how Washington will soon be collecting occupational data from employers, and how that will help provide further transparency in whether education programs are delivering the careers Washington residents are training for. A highlight of this year's conference included a presentation from leadership of the Work-Integrated Learning Advisory Committee (Board members Chris Alejano, Larry Brown, and Gary Chandler are active participants for our Board seat on that group), which facilitated conversation about implementation issues, including input for policy recommendations about how to equitably deliver high-quality CTE programs throughout Washington state. Also, keynote speaker Kevin Fleming provided a presentation on new paradigms and tangible action steps to help all students gain a competitive advantage. When they weren't busy attending sessions or networking, Workforce Board staff took turns running a booth that included the latest version of the always popular Where Are You Going? career guide.

SHEEO Higher Education Policy Conference—Marina Parr attended and presented at the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association conference in Indianapolis (Aug. 8-11). She was part of a four-state panel presenting on credential transparency efforts in Washington, Indiana, Connecticut, and Alabama. Marina also networked with partners from other states and learned more about efforts to provide better credit transfer between in-state institutions, marketing to increase flagging enrollment throughout higher education, and how several states are advancing efforts to provide credit for prior learning to increase learner mobility and momentum.

NGA Summer Workforce Summit for State Workforce Board Chairs, Directors, and Liaisons—This is always an exceptional opportunity to learn about how other states are tackling similar challenges. We always come away with interesting new ideas to consider and lessons learned from trials that didn't work out as planned. We had a great team representing Washington this year in Oklahoma City (103° on hottest day) August 14-17. Both our co-chairs, Gary Chandler and Larry Brown attended, along with ESD Commissioner Cami Feek and ESD Employment Connections Director, Jairus Rice. Nova Gattman and I rounded out the crew. The key themes this year revolved around how states were organizing to regroup from the pandemic and preparing for future economic tumult. Organizing for strategic leadership, new state investments in workforce development, digital equity, removing barriers on the path out of poverty, and preparing for new job growth as a result of federal spending bills were among the topics discussed.

The National Association of State Approving Agencies (NASAA) Summer Training and Business meeting—Darlene, John, and Lane attended the NASAA conference in San Antonio (Aug. 20-26), which meets twice a year and facilitates the efforts of its member State Approving Agencies (SAA) in promoting and safeguarding quality

education and training programs for veterans. For the past two years, the group met virtually. Unfortunately, while they received valuable training and information, the group missed the critical relationship building needed to shape greater education and training opportunities for veterans and protect the GI Bill's integrity. An award and banquet ceremony capped this year's training event. President Michelle Hill recognized our own John Murray with a star award for his contributions as the Contract Committee Chair for the past five years. After ceding his chair position, John will serve as the next NASAA secretary. (Way to go, John!)

State of Reform, Health Policy Conference—Dr. Donald Smith, the agency's new Long-term Care Policy Manager, attended this conference on September 8. The conference offered the chance to hear and interact with influential healthcare executives, policymakers, and thought leaders about trends shaping the future of healthcare delivery, policy, and finance. The presenters included Dr. Suzanne Allen, Chair of the Health Workforce Council, along with educators and elected state representatives who discussed the upcoming legislative session and highlighted the policy focus of the next session.

Association of Washington Business Policy Summit—Dr. Donald Smith attended the summit on Sept. 14. The summit was held in Spokane and attended by elected officials, business leaders, and policy advocates from Washington and other states. Gary Chandler, Workforce Board Co-chair, was in attendance and played a prominent role in the activities of the summit. Workforce issues were a significant focus of this summit and included Washington State legislation and the impact on HR, the remote workforce, childcare concerns and its impact on the workforce, and challenges facing executive leadership.

National Clean Energy Workforce Alliance meeting—Staff continued to connect with the National Clean Energy Workforce Alliance, a cross-sector effort to improve clean energy education, training, and job placement outcomes—and ensure that expanding clean energy job opportunities are inclusive of diverse candidates and underserved communities. Elizabeth Court attended (virtually) the September 14 national meeting focused on curricular resources and solutions for improving job placement outcomes in the Clean Energy Sector. Also highlighted: advanced measures to increase employability, including fostering more effective connections between training providers and employers. There was also an opportunity to help shape the Alliance Plan which will feature outcomes at future Solution Summits.

4. Workforce Board partners with RIPL to host Career Bridge modernization brainstorming session:

The Workforce Board partnered with RIPL (Research Improving People's Lives) to hold a brainstorming session to modernize Career Bridge that drew stakeholders across the state (both in-person and online) to discuss ideas to increase site usability, upgrade technology in key places, and maximize its impact with Washington students and jobseekers. The hybrid meeting, held Sept. 13, included an in-person group at Lacey Community Center, along with a virtual group working through the same questions about how to best meet user needs and enhance the site with technological and other upgrades. Workforce Board staffers Marina Parr and Randy Smith, working with their contracted Career Bridge Modernization project manager Mitesh Shah, pulled together a wide audience of education, workforce, and business representatives to help shape ideas as work gets underway in the next few months to modernize the site and make it more user friendly. (Big thanks to Workforce Board member and Spokane Workforce Council CEO Mark Mattke for being part of the in-person session.)

Dubbed a Design Thinking Workshop, it was a joint effort of the Workforce Board and RIPL, a nonprofit that specializes in working with state governments to use data, science and user-centered technology to improve policy. This hybrid session was the first of a two-part workshop designed to improve outcomes for Washington students, jobseekers, and employers. A second session will focus more specifically on another RIPL project—this one with the state's Employment Security Department's project called DOORS, that focuses on custom career

recommendations backed by data. RIPL is also providing additional support for the Career Bridge modernization project, which is funded at \$460,000 for year 1, and ends June 30, 2023. This funding includes Mitesh's position, as well as funding for vendors for site architecture improvements, user experience storyboarding, and a Quality Assurance contractor to help with risk mitigation.

Agency staff are also submitting a Decision Package for the upcoming legislative session to request an additional \$950,00 over the next biennium, plus \$300,000 (ongoing) for dedicated staff (two FTEs—a Career Bridge Manager and an IT System Specialist). This would help to fully modernize and continue to update this nationally recognized, public-facing website, making IT accessible to disadvantaged, diverse, and rural populations across Washington. It would also provide funding to build a long-requested digital portfolio that aligns with High School and Beyond Plans.

5. Washington Workforce Association conference:

Workforce Board staff will attend this annual conference November 8-10 in SeaTac. (Yes, there is some overlap with our scheduled November Board meeting so we will work around that.) The conference, dubbed "Stronger Together" brings together area leaders, industry experts, and workforce professionals to provide workshops that address new and growing demands on the state's workforce system. Marina will provide a presentation on current Career Bridge modernization efforts, as well as quick tips for frontline professionals on how to best use the site. Workforce Board staff also will be promoting the beginning of our state's formal strategic planning process and asking for feedback from conference participants. At this time, we expect to hold a session on state planning in a friendly lounge setting that encourages our partners to stop and talk about current workforce development, along with their ideas for what should come next.

Please keep an eye out for more information on this worthwhile conference!