



Building the World's Best Workforce

WWA represents Washington's local Workforce Development Councils, including nearly 400 business and labor leaders, local elected officials, and education and workforce development executives in communities throughout the state. We recommend the following reforms in support of Governor Gregoire's efforts to create the best workforce development system in the world.

1. Convene local leadership to align workforce development resources to meet business demand, labor market demand and local economic development goals.
 - a) Workforce development will be the number one economic development challenge in the coming decade. The key to the strength and success of the local workforce development system is that it is locally driven and led by business, labor and community leaders. These local leaders, members of the Workforce Development Councils, are able to collaborate with local elected officials and other stakeholders to tailor workforce strategies to the needs of the local economy. This strength must be maintained.
 - b) Washington is among the lowest contributors of state funds to workforce development programs in the nation. This makes our system dependent on inflexible federal Workforce Investment Act funding. Flexible state funding should be allocated to improve the capacity of the local Workforce Development Councils to respond to local economic conditions.

2. Rapidly adapt training programs to produce workers with the most-needed skills on a timely basis.
 - a) Define high-demand skills for each region locally, by using a wide array of partners led by local Workforce and Economic Development Councils. These efforts must include consideration of the earning potential of local residents; the key industry sectors that each community has targeted for retention, recruitment and growth; and the skill sets that best serve both goals. Encourage and endorse this collaboration and use the results.
 - b) Provide colleges, skills centers, and other training programs with the flexibility they need in order to target existing resources into programs that address high-demand skills. Target new funding streams toward locally-defined high demand skills and programs that coordinate with other community providers via the Workforce Development Council.
 - c) Increase access to training programs to ensure that life-long learning is attainable. Expand innovative strategies such as distance learning, credit for prior learning, transferable credits, fast-track credentials and flexible training schedules.

3. Help Washington residents understand the changing labor market and plan for their own self-sufficiency and upward mobility, and help businesses find skilled workers on a timely basis.
 - a) Support the local One-Stop system (WorkSource). One-Stop Centers help over 12,000 people per month enter employment. They use sophisticated assessment tools such as JobFit, WorkKeys, and the Self-Sufficiency Calculator to help people create employment plans and then match them to realistic options in the local labor market. One-Stops have specialized business liaisons that focus on specific industries and broker hiring, assessment, retention and training services. Federal funding is declining and current services are being cut. New funding must be identified.

- b) By law, local Workforce Development Councils have the operational and oversight responsibility for One-Stop Centers. In practice, this keeps the One-Stop Centers close to the local business and labor customers and under the direction of local boards and elected officials. The state should not attempt to weaken this role but should more clearly identify the policy and performance priorities for the One-Stop system and then hold the local Workforce Development Councils accountable for the results.
- c) Identify Workforce Development Councils as customers of the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (WTECB) and the Employment Security Department. Supporting Workforce Development Councils' local strategies for performance improvement should be a clearly articulated goal of the WTECB and Employment Security Department.
- d) Add a representative nominated by the local Workforce Development Councils to the WTECB to reflect this new organizational goal and to add insight from the local system to the Board's deliberations.

4. Help traditionally underserved populations enter successful careers, including low-income persons, the unemployed, the disabled, and people of color, refugees, immigrants and youth.

- a) Recognize and strengthen the One-Stop system's contribution to this effort. Washington's One-Stop Centers emphasize universal service. One-Stop Centers serve a high volume of low-income people and people with obstacles to employment while maintaining a strong reputation among business customers.
- b) Continue to focus Opportunity Grants on disadvantaged populations and allow Opportunity Grants to pay for all post-secondary skills training including apprenticeship and private career schools as well as community college courses.
- c) Improve outcomes for Opportunity Grants and other state-funded tuition programs by focusing on the high-demand skill sets described above, and use the One-Stop system to provide supportive services and career exploration for tuition recipients.
- d) Increase funding for programs that link business partners with schools, broker experiential learning and business mentoring, connect youths to careers in local industries, and fund creation of local summer youth programs.