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# Northwest Workforce Council

## Regional Business Services Plan (2025)

### Purpose of the Plan

Northwest Workforce Council (NWC) is committed to building a skilled workforce for Workforce Development Area 3 (Whatcom, Skagit, Island and San Juan counties) that supports growth and competitiveness for all businesses in the region. This Regional Business Services Plan sets the framework for innovation and quality in service delivery and community engagement for the delivery of services that respond to the workforce needs of businesses.

This plan recognizes that businesses are the primary customer, stakeholder, and investor in the local workforce development system. The goal of the plan is to act as a talent development and delivery system for the good of businesses in the region. Working to make job seekers work-ready through relevant work-based training and/or career and technical education, the plan establishes a coordinated and responsive system of outreach, services and appropriate talent referrals to employers. Through these sets of services, businesses will grow, as will the regional economy.

Focusing on key sectors and industries (construction, manufacturing (to include marine), healthcare), the plan embraces technological advancements and collaboration with partners with the goal to create a skilled and adaptable workforce that bolsters the region's economy through opportunities for quality jobs. This plan's regional, demand-driven approach aligns with the Northwest Workforce Council's Regional Workforce Plan, as well as with the strategic and operational functions of the NWC Board and committees of the Board. In addition, the plan is aligned with the Washington Workforce Plan, Talent and Prosperity for All, and Northwest Workforce Council's WorkSource Certification criterion.

### NWC's Strategic Goals for Meeting Employer Needs

**Focus, Align, and Improve Effectiveness of the Region's Business Services Delivery:** Through recommendations by businesses, align business services delivery to regional economic priorities. This includes targeting high-growth, high-wage industries and ensuring that services are relevant and impactful.

**Increase Value of Services Available and Business Customers' Satisfaction with Those Services:** Adopt continuous improvement-based standards and adapt to business needs, guided by feedback from businesses and job seekers.

**Build Collaborative Opportunities with Partners to Achieve:** Collaborating with partners such as economic development agencies, chambers of commerce, industry associations, career and

technical colleges, K-12 education, labor organizations, and Washington State Employment Security Department is essential to reaching the goals of plan. These partnerships help leverage resources and expertise to provide comprehensive business services.

**Create Effective Customer-Preferred Point of Contact Processes:** Through a business customer centric consultative approach, discover the preferred method of contact for business customers to ensure that businesses can easily access services, receive appropriate materials and access to the services they wish to receive.

**Enhance Business' Use of WorkSource Services to Address Their Workforce Needs:** NWC will promote the benefits of WorkSource services and ensure that businesses are aware of the available resources, receiving a cohesive set of services that address business needs.

**Lead the Region's One-Stop Career Center System:** The Council will lead the one-stop career center system, ensuring that it provides high-quality, customer-driven services to businesses and job seekers.

**Strengthening the Regional Workforce Development System:** The Council seeks to strengthen the workforce development system by leveraging resources that are responsive to regional economic priorities and ensuring that they meet the needs of businesses and job seekers.

**Champion a Systemic Approach to Lifelong Learning:** The Council promotes lifelong learning by supporting training and development programs that enhance the skills of the workforce and meet the evolving needs of businesses.

**Strategically Partner with Regional Economic Development:** The Council collaborates with regional economic development agencies to support business growth and retention, ensuring that workforce development efforts align with economic development priorities.

The Council's vision is to create a robust, sustainable regional economy through strong, vibrant businesses tapping into a talent pipeline of work-ready job seekers who either have received career/technical training or will learn skills through work-based training aligned with the needs of businesses. The strategic plan reflects a deep commitment to other investments in business services and training, with the aim to increasing regional economic vitality and strengthening the workforce development system.

## **The Council's Vision for Business Services**

- Provide services on a universal basis with a business customer-focused, market-driven approach
- Enhance the workforce development system's capacity for responsiveness to a rapidly changing marketplace
- Promote a healthy business climate to attract and retain businesses and jobs

Plan objectives, including key goals:

- Create branded work-based training and career education program services to feed the talent pipeline

- Increase the value of services available and business customers' satisfaction with those services
- Align separately funded workforce development programs to provide comprehensive solutions to business customers
- Improve the effectiveness of the region's business services delivery
- Build collaborative partnerships and opportunities to achieve goals
- Create an effective, efficient single point-of-contact process
- Enhance business' use of WorkSource services to address their workforce needs
- Develop career pathways for identified key sector occupations in the region

## Guiding Principles

- **Recognition of Business as the Primary Customer, Stakeholder, and Investor:** NWC recognizes that businesses are the key customers for driving economic growth in the service area. Job seekers are the product for the customer and career and technical colleges and other training providers are the manufacturers of the product. Services administered by NWC will be aimed toward this principle.
- **Alignment of Service Delivery Strategies to Respond to Business Customer Demand:** Working together with all WorkSource partners, NWC assures the alignment of service delivery partners and strategies, so businesses are receiving the appropriate types and levels of service necessary for optimum business growth.
- **Prioritizing the Delivery of Select Services to Business Most Able to Fuel Regional Economic and Community Growth Targeting Sectors with High-Wage, High-Skill Occupations:** NWC and partners, through research and data analysis, identifies and promotes the services deemed to be the best for fueling regional economic and community growth. Market-driven research will guide the Board in identifying and selecting key sectors to support.
- **Deployment of a Highly Competent Professional Staff Able to Deliver Quality Products and Services:** NWC will promote an atmosphere of continuous quality improvement and hire highly competent professional staff to assure business customers are delivered products and services that are relevant and appropriate to their needs.
- **Promote a Robust Labor Exchange System Which Provides Job Seekers Access to Job Opportunities and Businesses Access to an Available, Skilled Workforce:** Partners will work together to assist businesses in finding quality, work-ready employees.

## Responsive Services

**Defining a Business' Preferred Point of Contact:** Through adopting a consultative sales philosophy to facilitate ease of access to services for business customers, a "preferred point of contact" marketing approach is adopted. This consultative sales approach to business outreach ensures an integrated provision of services.

**Servicing Businesses On-Demand:** Business services are established to serve the demand side of the workforce talent equation by strengthening relationships with employers and generating access to more and better jobs. Services that develop businesses contribute to workforce development, and vice versa.

**Key Industry Initiatives:** The Council aligns WIOA training resources and service delivery with high-demand occupations and skill clusters in growth industries. Industry panels, industry tables, surveys and other initiatives that help inform and address workforce issues, including recruitment, hiring, training, and retention.

**Closing Skill Gaps:** Developing strategies to address skill gaps beginning with the K-12 system and continuing into career and technical colleges and other training providers, working with key industry leadership to identify existing, emerging, and anticipated worker skill gaps. These gaps are addressed through training programs and curriculum development.

**Labor Exchange:** Labor exchange activities include assisting employers in filling jobs, assisting job seekers in finding employment, and facilitating the match between employers and job seekers. Coordination begins with customers' introduction to an automated labor exchange system.

**Engaging Established Employer Organizations and Business Coalitions:** Alliances with local chambers of commerce, economic development agencies, small business development centers, and port authorities are important market-based connections for workforce development. The Council collaborates with partners to support economic development agencies in recruitment and retention activities.

**Business Services Within the WorkSource One-Stop Career Centers:** The Council oversees the operation of one-stop career centers (WorkSource), which serve as convenient access points to the workforce development system. The Council is responsible for developing and implementing policies and procedures that align partners' activities and resources into a seamless delivery system.

**Northwest Workforce Partner Management Team:** The Council's One-Stop System Operator is responsible for assisting with aligning business services at the WorkSource Centers and providing the highest and most consistent quality service to employer customers. The Partner Management Team plays a vital role in linking the business community with system partners and developing comprehensive solutions to meet business needs.

## **Levels of Business Services to Meet Specific Needs of Businesses**

A three-tier service delivery model (Enhanced, Intensive, and Basic services) empowers partners to offer a wide array of services that best meet business customers' needs, to create talent pipelines for businesses to fill positions and grow.

## Enhanced Services

- **Work-Based Training:** Prioritizing the implementation of work-based training programs for employers and demand occupations. The focus may be on key sectors and in-demand occupations and include professional and essential skills for all individual participants:
  - **On-the-Job Training (OJT):** Offering OJT programs that provide hands-on training for new hires, allowing them to gain practical experience while earning a wage. This helps businesses develop a skilled workforce and improves job retention.
  - **Work Experience/Paid Internships:** Developing short-term paid or unpaid internships for individuals who lack formal work experience, as well as professional and essential skills, or individuals who have been out of the workforce for some time, gaining skills and experience they may otherwise lack.
  - **Incumbent Worker Training:** Providing training programs to upskill current employees and help businesses meet business needs, such as opening a new business line, meeting new industry standards, integrating technological advances, or averting a layoff. This includes short-term training, certifications, industry-recognized credentialing and professional development opportunities for employees, which will benefit businesses. The net result can be wage enhancement and promotion opportunities for employees and creating backfill opportunities that lead to hiring more staff.
- **Customized Training and Increased Capacity Training:** Identifying and servicing businesses to develop Customized Training, as well as identifying overall sector needs that can lead to Increased Capacity Training which can quickly fill the talent pipeline for businesses.
- **Customized Labor Market Information:** Providing businesses with tailored labor market data specific to their industry and region. This includes information on wage trends, employment projections, and skill requirements, helping businesses make informed decisions about hiring and training.
- **Facilitation of Industry Panels:** Organizing industry panels that bring together leaders from business, labor, workforce development, economic development, and education to address workforce issues and improve the skills of workers in key industries. These panels provide a platform for collaboration and sharing best practices.
- **Promotion of Career Opportunities Within Industry to Targeted Populations:** Marketing career opportunities within specific industries to targeted populations.
- **Seminars or Workshops Targeted to Meet Business Needs:** Organizing seminars and workshops on topics relevant to businesses, such as leadership development, regulatory compliance, and technological advancements.

- **Connecting Private Employers to K-12 Systems and Career and Technical Colleges:** Facilitating partnerships between private employers and K-12 education systems and Career and Technical Colleges to create career pathways and pipeline programs.
- **Partnership with Economic Development Agencies:** Collaborating with economic development agencies to support business growth and retention.
- **Fee-for-Service Options:** Offering services to businesses on a fee basis, such as pre-employment screening, drug testing, background checks, and training services for incumbent workers not covered or allowed by systems partners.

### **Intensive Services**

- **Mass Recruitment:** Coordinating large-scale recruitment efforts to meet the hiring needs of businesses.
- **Job Fairs/Hiring Events:** Organizing events to connect businesses with potential job seekers.
- **Access to Facilities and Office Space:** Providing businesses with access to facilities and office space for recruitment and training activities.

### **Basic Services**

- **Determining Businesses' Needs for Services:** Initial assessment of business needs to identify appropriate services.
- **Listing Job Openings:** Providing businesses with a platform to list job openings and attract qualified candidates.
- **Referring Qualified Applicants to Employers:** Matching job seekers with businesses based on skills and qualifications.
- **Rapid Response (Layoff Aversion and Assistance):** Offering support to businesses facing layoffs, including strategies to avert layoffs and assistance for affected workers.
- **Providing Labor Market Information:** Supplying businesses with relevant labor market data to inform decision-making.
- **Providing Information on and Access to Training Options:** Connecting businesses with training programs and resources to upskill their workforce.
- **Wagner-Peyser resources support labor exchange activities for businesses such as, but not limited to matching employers with job seekers, assisting employers in filling jobs.**

## **Conclusion**

Through robust partnerships with business, WorkSource partners, and training providers, Northwest Workforce Council strives to create an organized, vital, and responsive system of job seeker development to feed the talent pipelines to employers throughout the region.