

Kentucky Workforce Investment Board

Education and Workforce Development Cabinet

Follow Up Report

From 2008 through early 2009, then- cabinet secretary Helen Mountjoy held several meetings with representatives of the Local Workforce Investment Areas, Economic Development, workforce partners, KCTCS, former KWIB members and other groups. The purpose of these meetings was to gather input about where the workforce system needed improvement and how it could best respond to the needs of jobseekers and employers in Kentucky. Listed below are several key findings from her meetings with the local WIA group as well as the workforce partners, which included the local workforce investment board executive directors.

Following the statements of need gathered during the meetings, is a brief description of activities and initiatives the KWIB and Cabinet have undertaken to respond to the stated needs. This list is not exhaustive, but does represent the major themes communicated by stakeholders during these sessions.

Vision

The need for developing a statewide vision for the workforce system was communicated in many of the meetings. One local director commented that there was a need for leadership at the state level in order to make the system work statewide. Developing that vision and corresponding clear goals were responsibilities recommended for the newly reformed Kentucky Workforce Investment Board (KWIB). Participants also asked that actions be put to the discussions.

In June of 2009, the newly appointed KWIB met for the first time and immediately began work on developing a strategic action plan to address the needs identified in the work of Secretary Mountjoy. In less than a year, the board adopted the WORKSmart Kentucky strategic plan. This plan included a clear and concise vision for the state's workforce system and four clearly defined goals. In order to assure that this document would breathe new life into the system, 25 action steps were also included in support of achieving the goals and realizing the vision. The basis of the plan included the input gathered by the Secretary as well as additional stakeholder input sessions. Over the past three years the KWIB and the cabinet have responded to the call and worked to fulfill the roles of vision-keeper, strategic investor and leadership of a statewide system.



System Transformation

Comments from the input meetings included references to the system as “overwhelming” and “defensive.” “Turf issues regarding funding, etc.” was also revealed as a problem in the system. Other references to a lack of cohesion, consistency and communication were reported.

Among the goals of the KWIB’s strategic plan are: simplifying the system and developing a customer-centric approach. A number of initiatives currently underway are designed to support this goal and build a “team approach” to delivery of services and collaboration to produce workable solutions with the customer (jobseeker and employer) at the forefront. Partner for Success and the new Workforce Academy have been implemented to build cohesion and understanding among partners to better serve customers. Creating a common brand and single point of entry for on line services are anticipated to make the system easy to understand and more appealing to use.

Branding & Outreach

One of the local WIB Directors listed a statewide brand and one name as one of four principles of a successful workforce system. But he was not alone, others called for a one stop system to be “built on an economic development foundation – not ‘oh this is the unemployment office.’” The branding of education and workforce was called for in several of the sessions while others communicated the need for consistency by examples such as a common web site and the desire for the KWIB to bring all partners together.

The plan prescribes strategic initiatives which address branding through the development of the new Kentucky Career Center name, mark, brand promise, and rolling out those elements. Local adaptation is part of the brand which allows flexibility while maintaining the integrity of the overall brand.



Additionally, a common message of transformation away from “our job is to run government programs” to one of, “we are here to listen, understand and help find solutions to our customers’ challenges,” has permeated such initiatives as Partner for Success, Workforce Academy, One Stop Certification, High Impact WIBs, User-Friendly On Line Services, and many others. This culture change represents living the brand promise.

Employer Needs

Throughout all of the meetings, it was made very clear that the workforce system needs to be more responsive to the needs of employers. From references to the need for focus on industry clusters to comments about the slow response to requests and delivery of services, improving service to these critical customers of the workforce system with efficiency, consistency and relevance was identified as high priority for transforming Kentucky’s approach.

From the beginning of the strategic planning process , the KWIB developed a system model which placed jobseekers, students and other individuals as inputs into a value added system where employers are shown as the ultimate customer of that process. The idea behind this model was that without employers with jobs to fill, there really was no need for the system as a whole. There is a range of initiatives designed to transform the system and bring efficiency, consistency and relevance to our approach to addressing the needs of employers. Among these efforts are, first and foremost, the Sector Strategies initiative which has yielded a data base to aid local boards with making informed investment decisions around the sectors of the economy important to the sustainability of their regions. This effort also produced an on line tool kit and a two rounds of industry partnership planning grants.

Technical assistance for High Impact Local WIBs has employed two opportunities to learn from others outside the commonwealth, including Texas and Oregon. The redesign of the Rapid Response program included taking a bigger picture view and applies similar principles to delivering for employers throughout the business cycle and not just during times of unemployment.

Conversion of the Kentucky employability certificate to the National Career Readiness Certificate also offers local business service teams another tool in their kit when developing solutions-based approaches for their employer customers.

Work Ready Communities is a program that requires the input of local employers and their continued to participation in assuring the development of a skilled workforce today and a robust pipeline of qualified workers for the future.



The state submitted a \$7 million Workforce Innovation Fund grant proposal in March designed to build a team approach among economic development and workforce partners to provide employers locating or expanding in Kentucky with a unified approach to addressing their needs.

In an indirect way, the changes being proposed for the state’s eligible training provider list processes are anticipated to assure that funds are invest where they will provide the greatest return by developing workers with the skills required by local employers.

Partnerships & One Stop Improvements

Another overarching theme in the sessions held with the Secretary was the need to develop and nurture meaningful partnerships. Comments ranged from the need to have all required partners represented in the One Stop system to partnering with economic development as a peer. Somewhat related was the call to improve the one stops by providing cross training of staff and addressing the overall approach to service delivery in these centers, with comments like “build up the one stops,” “strengthen one stops,” and having one stops “built on economic development foundation.”

Through initiatives like Partner for Success, Workforce Academy and the One Stop Certification Policy Framework, the KWIB and the cabinet have focused resources and energy on these issues. This focus is

driven by the belief that these physical manifestations of the workforce system are the face of the system to many customers and if a cultural change is to occur that impacts our customers, it needs to happen on these front lines.



The cabinet has also taken steps and continues to move away from stand-alone agency offices for partner organizations within the cabinet. The desire is to locate these facilities within the one stops. The cabinet is also working with partners outside the cabinet to find ways to engage them in the one stop system. Some local areas have had success with this, while others need influence at the state level to affect change.

The Workforce Innovation Fund grant is based in the concept embraced by both the Economic Development and Education and Workforce Development cabinet secretaries that we must be partners for Kentucky to succeed. If successful, this grant will fund training opportunities to build this team approach and tear down the silos that have long existed, build trust between the two groups and unify our efforts as true partners.

Support for Local WIBs

To some extent, concerns were expressed that the new state board and cabinet should “have input into LWIB priorities but not micro manage details. Others called for “leadership at the state level to make the system work statewide.” One of the local directors commented that the KWIB should “set priorities for regions,” including “key indicators and workforce preparedness.” Another advocated for the Local WIBs to have input to and on the KWIB.

Throughout the planning and implementation process, the KWIB has been very conscious of the need to provide local boards with the tools they need to be success, bring a level of consistency across the state expected by employers, and not engage in micromanagement of local program management.

Clearly, the voluntary High Impact WIB standards were developed as a means for local boards to take advantage of best practices from across the nation and were developed with input of local board staff and board leadership. These standards along with the associated Technical Assistance Grants are designed to empower local board leaders to become the guiding force for workforce in their regions.

Local WIBs were also encouraged to participate in the development of all KWIB initiatives, including Work Ready Communities, One Stop Certification, Branding & Identity, Business Services Redesign, Workforce Academy, High School Outreach, Sector Strategies, etc. This input has been valuable to the KWIB and creates ownership among the team.

LWIBs are required to serve as the fiscal agents for all industry partnership planning grants and are recommended participants in each county’s work ready community application process. These and other

efforts are designed to elevate the stature and visibility of the work and value of local WIBs, a tactic to support the High Impact status of each local WIB.

Technology

Numerous comments about the existing technology employed by the workforce system focused on problems with the Employ Kentucky Operating System and the E3 (Employment, Education and Economic Development) site which was created several years ago and not significantly updated to match the services offered by private-sector sites such as Monster, Career Builder, etc. There were also several requests to create or purchase and deploy new technology to keep the Kentucky system relevant and competitive.

Changes to EKOS Platform

The job search, resume posting, job posting and job matching functions within EKOS were migrated to the new Burning Glass platform. EKOS is now primarily used for case management and federal reporting.



Investment in Burning Glass

Total software investment of 1.5 M. Four components of Burning Glass have been deployed: These components replace the employer portion of e3.

Focus Career

This module is the new public service interface for job seekers, enabling job seekers to build dynamic resumes, see automatic job matches, receive electronic job alerts and access career assessment and planning tools.

Focus Talent

The module enables employers to post jobs, match job seeker's skills with available jobs, set up job referrals, and initiate job alerts. Talent alerts can also be established by employers to notify them when new applicants enter the system and match a specific job posting.

Focus Assist

This staff administration module allows staff to assist job seekers and employers. Job seekers have access to hands on staff assistance with all labor exchange activities, such as job matches, helping update resumes, creating job alerts and career counseling. Staff can assist employers to make successful resume and job matches, create resume alerts targeting new talent entering the employment pipeline and mediate job orders.

Labor Insight

This module will supply necessary labor market information that readily interfaces with the Focus/Career job matching module and enables linkages between job seekers and jobs through skill and experienced based job matching. Labor market information shows both job seekers and employers the employment landscape, what jobs are available, what skills are needed for those jobs, emerging employment trends,

and education/training/skill upgrade information. Having this information available to job seekers and employers in one system will help them more easily access data they need to make the most appropriate job match.

Advances made with the Unemployment Insurance System

Direct Deposit Automation

Unemployment Insurance claimants may now opt for direct deposit of benefits to their checking count. Initially piloted in five offices during September 2010, this service was made available statewide in November 2010.

Withholding State Taxes for UI Checks

UI claimants can opt to have state income tax withheld from their UI benefit check. This new capability parallels existing services for federal tax withholding, and will reduce questions and confusion for UI claimants prior to tax preparation. This service was made available in December 2010.

Eligibility Review Automation

Implementation of an online eligibility review for Unemployment Insurance was made available to UI claimants in January 2012. This service will reduce both time and travel to local offices for claimants responding to education, training and work-search requirements that qualify them for UI benefits. A unique feature will enable applicants to participate in a survey, and the survey results will be used to refer the applicant to DWI agencies for vital, additional support services.

New Interactive Voice Response System

Three separate applications comprise the IVR System. Outbound, Initial and Continued Claims. Continued Claims facilitates claimants' telephonic benefit check requests. The Initial Claims application enables claimants to initiate telephonic claim filing and is targeted at those who cannot visit local offices or do not have Internet capabilities. Outbound allows claimants and employers to receive telephonic notifications regarding job fairs, job vacancies, and job postings, among other services. Operational functionality has been signed off on pending Caller ID issue resolution.

Self-Service Reporting Functionality

Through the use of a business analytics tool, Business Objects, workforce investment board staff now have ad-hoc reporting capability using EKOS data.

National Career Readiness Certification System

This system tracks, manages and reports on Kentuckians who achieve the national certification.

Areas for Improvement

Changing the culture of an institutionalized array of silos to become a seamless system which serves the private sector in a manner that helps business and industry compete is no easy task, nor is it one which can be accomplished overnight. While many of the initiatives and projects described above continue to be implemented, even with shrinking and disappearing resources, there is still much more to be done.

Calls for the system to respond quicker, be proactive rather than reactive, promote true and equitable partnerships are driving forces behind the efforts underway, but we are not there yet.

The cabinet and the KWIB join the call of local WIBs in the push for stronger unity among partners. A major change in the way we do business is not only a desire, it is a necessity. Continued reliance on one or two sources of revenue to fuel the system is also an area where change needs to occur. Looking beyond the funding provided by the Workforce Investment Act, to include leveraged resources from other public and private entities is an area where we must do a better job.

Together, Local WIBs, the state WIB, the cabinet, and our partners have made great strides toward creating the system that Kentucky's workers and employers expect and deserve.