



Minnesota Workforce Council Association 2017 State Legislative Platform

It is the mission of the Minnesota Workforce Council Association to provide Minnesota with a skilled and competitive workforce through engaged and proactive local elected officials, Workforce Boards, and staff.

BEST IN THE NATION

Minnesota's workforce development system continues to be known nation-wide as a model for partnership and innovation. Our employer-led Workforce Development Boards,ⁱ in conjunction with local elected officials, are responsible for setting policy and priorities for their region and act as the accountability agents for local workforce funding. The local Workforce Development Boards have a demonstrated track record of continuous improvement in Minnesota's One-Stop Workforce Centers and in organizing the efforts of the broader workforce development system. Minnesota's Boards are consistently recognized for developing cutting edge strategies and their workforce programs achieve outstanding performance results. Significantly, Minnesota has been recognized as one of only three states to exceed its federal performance standards.

STATE OF THE WORKFORCE - Recovered from Recession with New Challenges

Minnesota prides itself on having a top-notch workforce; yet some critical gaps exist. The reasons for these gaps are complex; however, employment and training is essential to ensure our employers have the workers they need.

Minnesota's economy is strong. It has more than re-gained all the jobs lost in the recession. The problem is many of them aren't the same jobs. Paradoxically, there has been an increase in the number of part-time, low-wage service sector jobs – while at the same time there has been continued advancement in high skilled, high tech jobs. Career pathways programs, which help individuals with limited skills access education and training that lead to family sustaining employment in occupations and industries that are in high demand, have demonstrated success and are critical to address this gap.

The danger is, however, we are in the middle of a severe worker shortage. In the 1990s, Minnesota's workforce was growing at a healthy clip of 40,000 people a year; but it's only growing at about a fifth of that latelyⁱⁱ and will likely slow even more as baby boomers age and retire. With low statewide unemployment rates (3.2% - Oct '16), and some regional unemployment rates even lower we need to ensure we engage the entire workforce. An inadequate supply of qualified labor could cause the economy to stall, forcing businesses to export their work, or leave the State.

In many cases, those who are not yet working as the economy recovers face barriers to employment (for example low skills, low literacy, disability status, homelessness, ex-offenders, older workers and veterans); services provided through public investments *can* and *must* promote skills training, and other supportive services necessary to ensure that jobseekers are successful in attaining and retaining employment. At the same time, there exists significant income disparities amongst those who *are* working – those groups that face the highest inequities are racial minorities and women. As a State, we must come together to promote inclusion in order to address these disparities. Minnesota's Workforce Center system has an exemplary record of connecting to barriered populations, women and people of color, but we need the programmatic flexibility and partnered alignment at the local level to succeed.

Now, more than ever, the state needs strong Workforce Development Boards and a *coordinated* and *responsive* public workforce development system. This system deserves reinvigorated interest and investment from our elected leaders. While the locally-led system has the expertise and experience in place to address Minnesota's workforce development needs, the simple reality is that current resources do not meet the universe of need.

MWCA Priorities

Creating Connections for Adult Career Pathways

Local Workforce Development Boards are responsible for ensuring those who can work do work, for assisting individuals with career navigation, and for partnering with employers to increase the skills of those already employed. Minnesota businesses are demanding a pipeline of higher-skilled employees; however, **no** state general funds are currently appropriated to local Workforce Development Boards to initiate or further implement targeted, **sustained** workforce strategies **in every region** across the state for low-skilled, low-wage adult populations.

MWCA recommends dedicated funding via an allocation to the local Workforce Development Areas in order to advance career pathways and sector work, including incumbent worker training. This locally responsive approach allows Boards to identify the equity issues in their areas, create pathways for jobseekers, and coordinate education and training services to swiftly and strategically meet the needs of the region.

Improve Transparency and Accountability

MWCA recommends directing Job Skills Partnership Board funds, Workforce Development Funds and any competitive RFPs to the local Workforce Development Boards (WDB) for their administration. Any and all funds directed to other entities for workforce development or training efforts must be signed-off by the WDB's and aligned with the local Workforce Development Area's Regional WIOA plan.

Other Issues of Association Interest

- MWCA advocates for sufficient funding to implement the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) program state-wide to maximize federal match opportunities, and to promote skills development with the 100% matching program that are in alignment with local Workforce Development Board and Regional strategies.
- MWCA supports the dedication of federal Rapid Response funds to develop technological applications to provide quicker outreach to those effected by lay-offs, and to allow local staff to make earlier contacts with effected businesses.
- MWCA is supportive of restoring funding for childcare programs that help to encourage families to remain productively employed.
- MWCA supports efforts to fully invest in Minnesota's critical pre-K, K-12 and Post-Secondary education programs to prepare youth for competitive employment and life-long learning. A special effort should be made to support education in the Science, Technology, Education and Math (STEM) areas.
- MWCA is supportive of initiatives which ensure working low- and moderate- income people have access to stable and affordable housing, particularly near areas of employment growth.
- MWCA is supportive of any investments to improve our transportation infrastructure and provide jobs.

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ⁱ Referred to in federal statute as Local Workforce Development Boards and in Minnesota state statute as Workforce Councils.

ⁱⁱ U.S. Census Bureau; calculations by The Conference Board; <http://www.mprnews.org/story/2015/10/13/worker-shortage-worries-drive-twin-cities-recruitment-push>