



MINNESOTA ASSOCIATION OF WORKFORCE BOARDS

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

Who We Are

Minnesota's workforce development system continues to be a national model for excellence and innovation in employment and training programs. The sixteen local, employer-led Workforce Development Boards (WDBs), in conjunction with local elected officials, are responsible for:

- Setting policy and priorities in their communities;
- Engaging employers to determine strategies and organizing the efforts of the broader workforce system to address employer needs; and
- Being the accountability agents for local employment and training programs.

The Minnesota WDBs have a long-standing and demonstrated track record of developing cutting-edge new programs and strategies- while continuously improving services offered through Minnesota's CareerForce system and achieving outstanding performance results.

State of the Workforce

Minnesota's current employment landscape is complex and rapidly changing, due to the coronavirus pandemic. Labor market indicators continue to show that in most states, including Minnesota, the road to recovery will be long and gradual. ^[1]

Due to this complexity, proven employment and training programs are as critical as ever to ensure jobseekers are prepared to meet the current and future needs of employers. Funding needs to be better targeted and aligned to achieve the best return on these investments. A strong workforce system is imperative, regardless of the status of the economy in order to be prepared for the future.

A proactive approach to recovery will include engaging the *entire* workforce. An inadequate supply of qualified labor could cause the economy to further stall, forcing businesses to leave Minnesota or delay or eliminate expansion. In many cases, those who were not working prior to the pandemic or are not yet reattached to the workforce face barriers to employment such as low skills, low literacy, homelessness, disability status, ex-offenders, older workers, and veterans. Moreover, youth continue to experience unemployment at higher rates than adults.

Furthermore, significant income disparities exist among not only the unemployed, but among those who *are* working – groups that face the highest inequities are racial minorities, individuals with disabilities, youth and women. As a state, we must intentionally come together to address these disparities. Services provided through public investments *can* and *must* promote skills training for those who are un- or under-employed so that they can access the jobs that employers struggle to fill. We must also fund supportive services, such as transportation and childcare, necessary to ensure that jobseekers are successful in attaining and retaining employment.

There is great concern that those Minnesotans experiencing economic disparities may be left even further behind due to the pandemic. Other significant shifts include the number of women and older workers who have dropped out of the labor force. In some parts of the state and/or specific industry sectors, however, worker shortages are similar to pre-pandemic levels, or even increased over the past months.

^[1] <https://mn.gov/deed/newscenter/publications/trends/september-2020/labor-market-indicators.jsp>

Minnesota's CareerForce system has an exemplary record of leveraging public investments to connect employers and jobseekers to the resources they need to be successful. Career pathways programs, which help individuals with barriers and/or limited skills access education and training that lead to family sustaining employment in high-demand occupations and industries, have demonstrated success and are critical to address gaps between employers and potential workers. Other targeted investments support youth career counseling and work experience, dislocated worker retraining, and incumbent worker training. Programmatic flexibility and partnered alignment are crucial to continued success.

Now, more than ever, Minnesota must rely on strong WDBs as we provide the *coordinated* and *responsive* public workforce development system many other states envy. This system deserves reinvigorated interest and investment from our elected leaders.

2021 State Legislative Platform

MAWB Priorities: FUNDING

Local Workforce Development Boards are responsible for ensuring those who can work do work; for assisting individuals with career navigation; for addressing barriers to employment; and for partnering with employers to increase the skills of those already employed. As a state, we must provide those who are unemployed, under-employed, or under-represented in the workforce opportunities to succeed, reduce disparities, and to promote a diverse and inclusive workforce. The simple reality is that current investments are not targeted or sustained in a way that will make a real impact for Minnesota's employers.

- MAWB encourages legislative leadership to provide the Jobs and Economic Development finance divisions with funding targets that allow for substantial general fund investments in employment and training programs.
- MAWB advocates for formula funding to advance career pathways, sector strategies, incumbent worker training and employer outreach and engagement. MAWB particularly supports opportunities where adults can learn while they are working and gain employability skills at the same time.
- MAWB recognizes the unemployment rate for youth is consistently higher than that of other age groups and our high school student to counselor ratio remains unacceptably high. MAWB, therefore, advocates for an increase in formula funding for the statewide Minnesota Youth Program which provides career counseling and on the job training opportunities for youth in all 87 counties. MAWB encourages efforts to increase employer engagement in youth counseling, mentoring and training opportunities.
- MAWB encourages legislators to be mindful that the original intent of the Workforce Development Fund was to provide resources for dislocated worker and incumbent worker training and ensure that a balance that can fully address those needs be maintained particularly in times of recession.
- MAWB supports state investments in the Minnesota Family Investment Program, and other safety-net programs, particularly those that maximize federal match opportunities.

MAWB Priorities: POLICY

- MAWB encourages the Legislature to carefully review waivers implemented during the pandemic and make permanent changes that have proven to be innovative and beneficial; particularly those that streamline processes and reduce barriers for participants.

- MAWB advocates that any and all funds directed to other entities for workforce development or training efforts be coordinated and aligned with Workforce Development Board plans, to swiftly and strategically meet the unique needs of business in each of the local labor sheds. **MAWB encourages allowing maximum flexibility in the use of state funds to encourage innovation and allow local boards to design programs that best meet the needs of employers and jobseekers in their local areas.**
- MAWB encourages the Legislature to align investments and eliminate silos across the workforce development system, regardless of funding committee or state agency structures. The workforce system, unified under the brand CareerForce, must be fully aligned to meet the needs of career seekers and employers who benefit from a coordinated approach to service delivery.
- MAWB recognizes the need to reduce disparities is paramount and supports initiatives that directly and successfully address this issue and increases equity in employment.
- MAWB supports legislative and policy measures that further empower and streamline the Governor's Workforce Development Board.

Other Issues of Association Interest

- MAWB supports efforts to update state statutes regarding SNAP Employment and Training to provide clarity and better align with federal changes.
- MAWB 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.
- MAWB supports the availability of a wide range of secondary and post-secondary options, including investments in Career and Technical Education programs (and integration with partners like Adult Basic Education), with a priority on assistance for those pursuing high skilled occupations in demand.
- MAWB supports further development of apprenticeship opportunities and encourages the use of WDBs as the intermediary for apprenticeship programs across the state.
- MAWB is supportive of full funding for childcare programs that assist families in remaining productively employed.
- MAWB 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. More robust career pathway opportunities and career readiness state learning standards for all grades should be considered. MAWB also supports increased funding for career counseling in the K-12 system as well as utilizing CareerForceMN.com as a career counseling tool.
- MAWB is supportive of any investments to improve our infrastructure including in transportation and clean energy. Expand broadband initiatives to close the digital divide in all parts of the state. To remain competitive, Minnesota must be forward thinking in these areas.

Staff Contact: Jeanna Fortney, Director

jfortney@mncounties.org

Cell: 703.606.2442

www.mawb-mn.org