

GWDB Survey Summary: What's Next for Workforce Development?

Members of the Governor's Workforce Development Board (GWDB) and local workforce development boards throughout the state were invited to participate in a survey in late 2020 as a way to provide input for the public workforce development system – which will be a vital component of our state's economic recovery from the impacts of COVID-19.

Who responded to the survey?

- *Total Respondents: 56 individuals*
- **GWDB Members (or state-entity designees): 32 respondents*
- **Local workforce board members: 29 respondents*
- *Local workforce board staff: 5 respondents*
- *From Greater Minnesota: 22 respondents*
- *From Metro Area: 34 respondents*

**Some overlap (members serving on the GWDB and a local workforce development board)*

Best Practices Shared

- Calling recent retirees back to work for part-time and training-focused roles.
- Subsidizing internet or technology expenses for workers now working at home.
- Employers working with labor union members to co-establish safety protocols (based around compliance with CDC/MDH guidelines).
- Increasing partnerships with nonprofits and public libraries to help with digital literacy and getting people the physical technology/tools they need in order to learn or work from home.
- Various safety-related measures and adaptations for transitioning to working from home.
- Expanding where jobs are posted that will likely remain in telework status even after the pandemic, making it possible to attract talent from elsewhere in the state.

Recommendations on how to better address racial disparities

- Explore workforce programs with the highest levels of success (maintained employment and increased wages for BIPOC participants) and emulate those elsewhere, with emphasis on “earn and learn” models.
- Better partnerships between the workforce development system and the tribes. Local WIOA plans should include details as to how they will proactively engage with tribal partners (or community-organizations that already work with the tribes).
- Internet access needs to be reliable and affordable across the state to not add to disparities. Regulating internet like a utility would help in this effort.
- More multi-lingual state and local workforce services/communications are needed.

- The workforce development system needs to do more to provide employers with assistance in recruiting and retaining workers from communities not often represented in their organization or industry.
 - One respondent noted that this is particularly needed in the construction industry.
- Better connections between workforce development programs/services and other services like transportation or childcare to meet the needs of “the whole person”.
- Be purposeful/intentional about investments in skills-training for up-and-coming or growing industries like renewable energy, IT/tech, or some health care fields so that communities that have been impacted most by disparities have an opportunity to gain employment in an in-demand industry with less historical disenfranchisement/barriers for BIPOC communities.
- More STEM-focused courses and programs for youth, and more focus on certification and technical skill programs that will prepare individuals for specific high demand jobs.
- More individual analysis of current and potential future deterrents that would prevent an individual from obtaining and maintaining a position. While many programs have decent success rates in helping an individual obtain a job, the rates of maintaining the job are far less.
 - “The regional workforce board that I am part of seems to focus more on finding jobs for a large group of individuals and less focus on helping remove individual factors/influences that detract from maintaining the job. The long-term success of a few individuals in a community can make a larger impact than short-term wins for a larger subset.
 - “The focus on the short-term is preventing us from making progress towards the bigger picture – removing barriers to FINDING and MAINTAINING steady employment. There has to be a systemic approach, or we’ll always be limited to minimal, individualized impacts.”
- More People of Color and Indigenous People need to be a part of strategic discussions about engaging these communities and developing programs and service delivery models that will actually make sense when focusing on serving certain communities. The state and local levels need to do more to engage these communities DURING strategic planning, not after the fact.
- Consider engaging more community organizations that provide “social safety net”-type services and finding areas where new partnerships could be formed at the local level.
- Unless businesses are already partnering with/engaged with DEED/CareerForce or DLI, they likely have no idea what programs or services exist.
- Consider working with faith-based community organizations that already have relationships with individuals who are (or could be) served by the workforce system.
- Increased attention on youth programs in order to help up-skill younger individuals so that when they earn their diploma or GED they’ve proven they are ready to work (a diploma alone shows employers very little).
- Hire more BIPOC folks to work in the CareerForce locations, and be intentional about ensuring cultural competencies for customer-facing staff. There are Minnesotans who are deterred from going into a physical CareerForce location because individuals from their community previously had negative experiences.

Integrating “wrap-around services/supports” with workforce development programming

- Better coordination across state agencies involved in workforce development and those that provide supports for mental health, transportation, child care, etc.
- Consider consolidating workforce programming into fewer “buckets”, and better support the existing “buckets”.
- Create a matrix of workforce programs that career seekers, employers, and workforce staff can access and understand that lays out the different types of programs available across the state.
- Increased state support for childcare so that those who cannot afford childcare are not left with another hurdle in working/rejoining the workforce.
- More cohesion and coordination between secondary, postsecondary, and workforce development programs and services.
- More entrepreneurship and finance-focused programs.
- Making “soft skills” courses/training more readily available and accessible to BIPOC communities.
- Being intentional about the mental health or substance abuse supports that are needed by many who have troubling finding or maintaining employment, and figuring out how to incorporate those services into the services that individuals are already receiving.
- More partnerships with community action agencies, community colleges, school districts, community-based organizations/non-profits, philanthropic organizations, and chambers of commerce to better coordinate services and programs for participants at the local level.

Broadly or specifically, what would you change about MN’s public workforce development system?

- More engagement with industry at the state level when developing programs.
- Identifying the industries and skill-sets of those most impacted by COVID-19 and a coherent effort to direct them to programs/reskilling efforts to help connect them to a new career.
- Increase flexibility of funding for local workforce boards so that they are able to be more creative and innovative in responding to the workforce needs in their area.
- More digital skills training is needed, including free online learning opportunities, and connecting online learning/reskilling opportunities to real employment opportunities.
- Remote/online apprenticeships or apprenticeship pathways that begin with online learning.
- Use this pandemic as an opportunity to really rethink how programs and services are delivered. Is a physical location always ideal?
- Getting technology and equipment to online learners and career seekers.
- Develop “ala carte” earn-and-learn programming that employers and career seekers can easily tap into rather than having to respond to grant opportunities through a “one-off” approach.
- The system needs to better embrace the digital age and how learners want to learn in 2021.
- More intentional focus on entrepreneurship and business ownership in BIPOC communities.
- We MUST stop thinking about our workforce development system as a social safety net for those who have “already fallen”, and begin to think of it more as an economic driver. We can prevent future unemployment by focusing more on individuals and less on existing programs and funding streams (and how to serve individuals only through those narrow parameters).

Other recommendations for the state agencies or Legislature?

- More career navigation/exploration services, and other mentoring supports, for youth (especially in BIPOC communities).
- Increase in H1-B visas would help health care industry find new talent.
- Funding to support education for employers about hiring and retaining more members of BIPOC communities, more people from the disability community, and more women in male-dominated fields.
- Assistance for college students to continue learning and finding part-time work.
- More integration of programs for grades 11-14.
- Investments in renewable energy projects everywhere.
- Clarify the workforce development system’s role in partnering with tribes.
- Broadband internet access regulated as a utility and expanded to Greater Minnesota and low-income and vulnerable populations should be a high priority.

GWDB Meetings: Suggestions for 2021/going forward

- Continue to utilize Zoom/videoconference technology to hold committee meetings, and consider reducing the number of in-person full board meetings during the year to have some or all held virtually (or have a virtual option).
- More small group discussions/break-outs, as was done prior to COVID-19/virtual meetings.
- Schools, training organizations, and other workforce development partners are all preparing for the “light at the end of the tunnel”, yet there doesn’t seem to be a group or organization currently preparing for what that looks like (and ensuring that no opportunities are missed that may now be presenting themselves). Can the GWDB fill the void?

With over 60 voting and non-voting members, Minnesota has the largest state workforce development board in the nation. How do you feel about the size of the GWDB?

