



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 workforce development 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**
- **Serving as 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 as it still grapples with a statewide worker shortage and racial disparities, both of which were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. With a historically low unemployment rate, there are currently more than two job vacancies for every jobseeker looking for work. This worker shortage is taking a toll on Minnesota employers as they struggle to fill positions and retain talent. Though the gaps have lessened over time, Minnesota has also had some of the starkest racial disparities in the country, with unemployment rates typically coming in much higher for black, Indigenous, and Hispanic or Latino Minnesotans.

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.** An inadequate supply of qualified labor could cause the economy to further stall, forcing businesses to leave Minnesota or delay/cancel planned expansions. A strong workforce system is imperative, regardless of the status of the economy, in order to be prepared for the future. Funding needs to be better targeted and aligned to achieve the best return on these investments.

A proactive approach to address these challenges will include engaging the entire workforce, including those who are currently underrepresented. There is great concern that Minnesotans experiencing economic disparities may be left even further behind due to the ongoing impacts of the pandemic. 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 unstable housing, lack of childcare, skill mismatch, or struggles with mental health and addiction. People with disabilities, ex-offenders, older workers, and veterans face additional barriers to gaining employment.

Significant income disparities exist among not only the unemployed, but also among many 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 in workforce development must promote skills training for those who are un- or under-employed so that they can access the jobs that employers struggle most to fill. We must also fund workforce adjacent needs, such as transportation, housing, and childcare, which are necessary to ensure that jobseekers are successful in attaining and retaining employment.

In addition to ongoing disparities, Minnesota has seen significant shifts in the labor market, including women and older workers who have dropped out of the labor force. In some parts of the state and/or in specific industry sectors, worker shortages have increased and surpassed pre-pandemic levels.

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 pathway programs, which help individuals with barriers and/or limited skills access education and training that leads to family sustaining employment in high-demand occupations and industries, have demonstrated success and are critical to addressing gaps between employers and potential workers. Other targeted investments support youth career exploration 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 Workforce Development Boards 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.

2024 MAWB State Legislative Platform

WORKFORCE POLICY

- MAWB advocates for **updating the State Dislocated Worker** Program to improve flexibility and expand eligibility to best meet the needs of Minnesota jobseekers and employers.
- MAWB advocates for allowing the provision of **training stipends and/or incentives for participants enrolled in training** programs to support successful program completion.
- MAWB advocates that **any and all funds directed to other entities for workforce development or training efforts be coordinated by Workforce Development Boards and aligned with local and regional plans**, to swiftly and strategically meet the unique needs of businesses 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 meet the needs of employers and jobseekers in their 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 in our state** as paramount. MAWB 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.**

WORKFORCE FUNDING

Local Workforce Development Boards are responsible for ensuring those who want to work, can work; for assisting individuals with career navigation; for addressing barriers to employment; and for ensuring our local labor force meets the needs of employers. **As a state, we must provide those who are unemployed, under-employed, or under-represented in the workforce with opportunities to succeed, reduce disparities, and**

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 advocates for **formula funding for local workforce development boards to address local post-pandemic workforce challenges**, including serving youth and adults with high barriers to employment and providing intensive services to employers in need of talent attraction and retention assistance.
- MAWB recognizes that in today's economy, employers need our assistance like never before to ensure they can attract, hire, and retain qualified talent. **Funding to expand our services to employers**, such as diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, incumbent worker training, and talent attraction and retention strategies is needed to expand this work.
- 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 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 a **sustained 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 remains which can fully address those needs, 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.

OTHER ISSUES OF ASSOCIATION INTEREST

- 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 employed.
- MAWB supports efforts to **fully invest in Minnesota's critical pre-K, K-12, and post-secondary education programs** that encourage completion and that prepare youth and adults 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 transportation and clean energy, which have a strong workforce development component built in. MAWB also supports expanded broadband initiatives and other digital equity initiatives to **close the digital divide in all parts of the state**. To remain competitive, Minnesota must be forward thinking in these areas.

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