

White Paper #1: Workforce Development & Community Technology Programs

The purpose of this paper is to inform community technology providers to the opportunities they have in interfacing with the workforce development system in the State of Washington.

Any partnership must be grounded in the history and structure of workforce programs in the State, and a solid understanding of how the system provides Washington residents with opportunities to improve their career choices. Finally, the paper lays out several strategies for community technology agencies to develop partnerships with their local workforce system.

What is Workforce Development?

Workforce development is simply activities that prepare people for their first job or for a better job. It is a process of helping people find jobs that match their skills so that they can move up the career ladder, while at the same time establishing educational and training programs to develop the pool of skilled workers that businesses and industries need in order to compete and succeed.

Typical workforce activities include: job search counseling and job placement, general and career skill specific training, and other types of supports that help people be prepared for, find and keep a job. (i.e. child care, transportation, etc.)

How does the Workforce Development System Operate?

The workforce development system flows from a statewide policy making body, the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (www.wtb.wa.gov/default.asp), through regional workforce investment boards (www.washingtonworkforce.org/WDCs/index.php), both of whom formulate and approve state and regional workforce policies and monitor outcomes, all the way to local One-Stop Career Centers. (See Exhibit 1)

One-Stop Career Centers are community-located centers that each provides employment, education, and training services all in one place. The centers include programs such as Job Services, Unemployment Insurance, Vocational Education, Vocational Rehabilitation, and Youth services. Certain One-Stop Career Centers have all employment, training, and education partners and their programs on-site, while others have mainly focus on assessment of clients, and basic job seeker services and training. In all One Stops, there is a referral process that connects job seekers that qualify for benefits to affiliate programs. (For example, specialized vocational rehabilitation training or job skill training may take place at an off-site location.)

Through the One Stops, job seekers can qualify for two types of support:

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- **Core Services** – basic services include orientation to career & job training services, job search & placement assistance, basic job training (e.g. computer literacy, resume writing), job vacancy listings, information on local occupations, access to training services, and referral to supportive services (i.e. child care, transportation, etc.). This is open to everyone.
- **Intensive Services** – services for people who are unemployed or employed and need services to retain employment and who cannot secure employment through Core Services. Services include personalized assessments of job and soft skills, development of an individualized employment plan, individual counseling and career planning, and both soft-skill (i.e. development of learning skills, communication skills, interviewing skills, punctuality, and professional conduct) and employment skills training, including on-the-job training.

In conjunction with Intensive Services, some job seekers might qualify for additional, specialized job skill training. The job seeker, after an eligibility assessment and case management provided under intensive services can also receive an **individual training account (ITA)**, which can be used to pay for training services that “directly linked to occupations that are in demand in the local area”. The hallmark of the program is that the job seeker with the ITA can, largely, self-select their own training provider from a list maintained by the regional workforce investment board.

Another major area of support for job seekers comes from the **Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR)** (<http://www1.dshs.wa.gov/dvr/>). They provide employment-related services to individuals with disabilities who have difficulty getting or keeping a job due to a physical, sensory and/or mental disability. A DVR counselor works with each individual to develop a customized plan of services designed to help the individual achieve his or her job goal. DVR services include, counseling, medical/psychological services (therapy, medical devices), specific job skill/training services, *rehabilitation technology services* and job placement and retention services.

Lastly, there is a whole range of funding and training activities for specialized workforce funding, with the most prominent directed to **youth**, but also include migrant workers, older adults, veterans, etc. In a subsequent White Paper about youth development we will explore the youth services in more depth.

How is Technology Playing a Role in Workforce Development?

Technology is increasingly becoming the fundamental currency for an innovative workforce system. From job skill training to the direct delivery of workforce services to clients to managing the provider transactions, technology has become the most important tool for regional systems to implement programs and policies.

In general, all workforce actors – regional Workforce Development Boards, One Stop providers, community colleges – will tell you that “IT skills” are critical for job seekers in a majority of careers. They will also acknowledge that using technology for service delivery offers considerable opportunities for local providers to reach more clients at an affordable price point.

However, a closer look at the system will show that there is still an incomplete understanding of how to actually implement a strategic approach to promoting IT skills, and using technology to deliver training and other services. Each of the 12 regional workforce boards have different approaches to integrating IT skills curriculum, and each of the community colleges have different capacities in providing technology-enhanced training. And from a state policy perspective there is little directive on the role of technology in terms of training or service delivery.

Training – Most workforce professionals acknowledge the critical role that IT skills – everything from basic digital literacy to more dynamic “knowledge economy” skills – plays in successful job seeking. Today, according to Department of Labor statistics, over 80% of new jobs will require at least a basic level of computer skills. However, past studies have shown that there is a great mismatch between adults entering the labor market and the technology skills that are required for work.

Currently, the provision of IT skill training is not organized throughout the workforce system. In general, basic IT training, as exemplified by Microsoft’s Unlimited Potential program (www.microsoft.com/unlimitedpotential), are not regularly or evenly delivered to the Core Services clients that utilized WorkSource One Stop centers. Clients generally have the opportunity of taking self-paced training modules at computer workstations, attending very introductory training classes, paying for community college training sessions or being referred out to community technology providers, which either charge the client or bear the costs of providing the workforce-related services themselves.

Another aspect of the role of technology in workforce training is on the delivery side. Self-paced computer classes in One Stop resource centers, as well as online classes through community colleges are increasingly used as delivery mechanisms. Online delivery of curriculum can be effective in reaching mass audiences more economically in a climate of staff cut-backs and restructuring.

The workforce system has largely made three types of technology training investments:

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1. *Basic IT Skill Training* – sessions that are focused on very low computer literacy students who need basic introductions to operating a computer, the online environment (i.e. email basics, navigating the web) and some office productivity tools. There are very limited resources dedicated to this type of training in terms of Core Services, although if a client is eligible to receive Intensive Services, they may have the opportunity to take more sophisticated certificate training through a local community college. In general, for the basic workforce client, these services are provided through short-term classes (1 hour – 2 days), self-paced modules or referrals to a community college class (unsubsidized) or local community technology providers.
2. *Career Specific Technology Skill Training* – the workforce training system, primarily through the community college system, but also through the regional workforce boards, are increasingly pursuing the development of career-specific technology training. Through both existing certificate and sometimes degree programs, or through customized certificate training built for a company or cluster of companies, clients can get training on specific work processes or pieces of equipment. For example, training to either recruit or retain food processing employees using the latest inventory management software.

This type of training also includes certificate or degree programs that clients can elect to take through their ITA account. Through the ITA program, the workforce system will pay for more rigorous, career-specific training that directly contributes to the client's ability to find and retain a job in a career field they have chosen through the Intensive Services program. Examples include advanced office productivity training, technology training for auto or aviation mechanics, software for accounting, etc. In general, these courses are largely offered through community colleges and vocational/technical schools, but can also be offered by other certified providers, called "Private Vocational Schools". It is interesting to note, that using Washington's online eligible ITA provider list, there is only one provider for *Computer Technology* and eighteen (18) providers for *Microcomputer Applications, General*, of which thirteen (13) are community or technical colleges. Below is a sample of ITA providers, as they relate to generic community technology providers and their typical course offerings.

| ITA Course of Study | Providers (statewide) / Private Vocational Providers |
|---|--|
| Computer Technology | 1 / 0 |
| Microcomputer Applications | 9 / 1 |
| Microcomputer Applications, General | 18 / 5 |
| Office Applications & Clerical Services | 19 / 6 |
| Web/Multimedia/Webmasters | 13 / 3 |
| Word Processing | 5 / 0 |

3. *Assistive Technology Training for Individuals with Disabilities* – if clients have a mental or physical barrier the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and to a lesser

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extent the One Stop systems, offer access to job seeker services. When those services transition out of just providing basic access to career specific training, Vocational Rehab otherwise know as DVR can provide a job seeker with assessment, career counseling training and access to and training on assistive technology.

General costs for vocational rehab (VR) range from \$1,500 (learning disabilities) to \$5,000+ (visual, hearing or orthopedic barriers). Assistive technology is one aspect of those costs. In Washington, as well as across the country, Goodwill Industries is a leader in vocational rehabilitation training, as well as community technology services. Every two years there is a call for new DVR providers, which is similar to the ITA program, meaning that you are certified as a DVR trainer and could be selected by a client or case manager to provide services.

Even as the workforce development system and community colleges are becoming more responsive to employers through “sector” or “cluster-based” strategies by developing more career-specific technology training (i.e. technology training for food-processing jobs), the application of these training systems are uneven at best. From a system perspective there is not guiding hand for cataloging the IT skill needs of in-demand careers, especially entry level jobs. There is no strategy for providing incentives for more advanced, career-specific training, let alone pushing the curriculum to an online environment. Nor is there a central repository for cataloging the curriculum that could be utilized by other community colleges or training providers, forcing a regular “reinvention of the wheel”. The following chart outlines the general structure of IT related training as it currently is formulated within the workforce development system.

| Workforce Services | Types of Training | Recognized Delivery Methods |
|--|--|---|
| Core Services <i>Basic digital skills for all populations</i> | Basic IT Skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital Literacy • Basic Productivity Products • Basic Internet | Limited One Stop Computer Classes Self-paced Learning Modules Community College Certificate Programs Referrals to CT Providers |
| Intensive Services <i>Advanced training that leads to specific careers</i> | Career-specific Skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Productivity skills • Industry-specific skills | Community College Certificates/ Degree Programs Customized Training Created by Community Colleges |
| Knowledge Economy <i>High-level skills utilized for technology-based careers</i> | Advanced IT Skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Software Engineers • Hardware/Networking Graphics, etc. | Private/Public University Degree Programs Community College Degree Programs |

Service Delivery – Beyond using technology to deliver services, workforce systems are beginning to experiment with the delivery of services either remotely to users or through the Resource Centers found at One Stops. In its most basic form the WorkSource system in Washington delivers basic information about its services online through their “corporate website”. This includes basic description of workforce services, a calendar of classes, contact information, directions to the One Stops, etc.

Another example of online service delivery is providing access to job search, resume posting, career exploration, etc. through its Go2WorkSource site or the list of eligible training providers under the Individual Training Account program.

Lastly, there are a number of local Workforce Development Councils that are pioneering the provision of additional services, such as Seattle-King Counties Self-Sufficiency Calculator that helps clients determine an income that would lead to self-sufficiency

- WorkSource Spokane (<http://www.workspokane.org/jobseeker/default.asp>) –job seeker content on how to access the system
- Go2Worksource (<https://fortress.wa.gov/esd/worksource/Employment.aspx>) – online job search, resume posting, etc.
- Eligible Training Provider List (<http://www.wtb.wa.gov/etp/>) – database of eligible providers under the Individual Training Account (ITA) program
- Seattle King County WDC Self-Sufficiency Calculator (<http://www.wdcssc.com/ssc/sschome.aspx>)

Internal System Processes – the workforce system uses a database system called SKIES for internal reporting of performance. It is recognized that the SKIES system is going through continual improvement to meet a variety of demands, including performance reporting, case management and evaluation of the system as a whole.

How can Community Technology Providers Partner with the Workforce System?

Community Technology (CT) providers have much to offer to the workforce development system in terms of providing high quality technology-related training services, as well as potential remote resource centers that provide additional access points into the system.

First, there are a number of CT providers who deliver niche training services (i.e. assistive learning environments) or specialized skill development (i.e. IT certification programs) that is of use to the workforce development system.

Second, the workforce system is starting to recognize the value of a baseline of IT skills in most of the working population. In general, CT providers are well positioned to participate in this type of training, and already participating formally or informally around the state.

Lastly, CT providers also deliver services online and there may be opportunities for providers to work innovatively with their local workforce development systems to create online applications, such as career coaches or expert support systems.

The biggest barrier that many CT providers will face is the question of the scaling their capacity to the workforce system and dealing with the complexity of regulations and rules. The analogy is that the workforce development system is a fire hose of job seekers needing services on-demand, especially when you consider clients receiving Core Services. That fire hose can only be directed by certain federally-directed organizations, such as the workforce development system, using very restricted, limited funding. There is very little funding that is based on opportunity or innovation.

The challenge is for CT providers to conform to the system where the workforce system does have resources. Most opportunities in the short-term are primarily within the training sector. However, based on organizational relationships that a CT provider may have with the workforce system in their community, there may be opportunities for additional program connections. Presented below are a series of ideas that CT providers might follow in pursuing a relationship with the workforce development system.

Become a Certified ITA Provider: work with your local workforce development council to determine the demand for short-term IT skill or career-specific skill training. If there seems to be demand, you may want to pursue becoming an Eligible Training Provider (ETP). Inclusion on the ETP List does not guarantee you clients or funding, but you will be on a list that allows Intensive Service clients to select a provider and pay for those funds from the assigned ITA.

There is no regulation of prices that an ETP provider can charge, but whatever the fee the enrolled client must be able to complete the certification course for the amount paid.

There is no clear regulation of what counts as a certificate program, other than it being a generally recognized achievement/skill developed. For instance Microsoft's Office Specialist (MOS, www.microsoft.com/learning/mcp/OfficeSpecialist/default.asp) is not a state standard, but a recognized industry standard and if a CT provider can train a client to reach that standard they could be an ETP. The same is true with Microsoft A+ or any other known certificate.

Washington has an online form to allow potential providers to demonstrate their credentials. (www.wtb.wa.gov/etp/selectschool.asp) However, most CT providers fall under the "non-degree vocational training provider", which means they need to be licensed by the state Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board, as a Private Vocational School. (www.wtb.wa.gov/etp/licenseinfo.htm) or contact our Private Vocational School Licensing Division at (360) 753-5673).

Provide Assistive Learning Technology Training as a DVR Provider: similar to the ETP above, there are also certified vendors of career specific assistive technology skills, called Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRP); everything from basic IT skills to training on specific pieces of assistive technology that enable a person to be employed. And like being

an ETP, becoming a “DVR Provider” does not ensure clients or cases, but rather you are placed on a list that is eligible for clients to select for support.

For most CT providers Assistive Learning Technology training will not be clear choice, but for others, like the Goodwill who already serve this clientele, this can be a positive augmentation of their programs and financial income.

CT providers would, generally, fall under one or more of three types of CRP training services: Intensive Training Services, Job Retention Services or Transitional Employment Services. In this capacity, CT providers would train clients on specific job functions or pieces of equipment.

To become an eligible CRP training provider your organization must meet standard financial stability, insurance and other business criteria. You must also have a clean record with the state in the provision of services, as well as have your staff pass a background check. However the biggest barrier is that you will need certified staff to provide the training. The staff must have at least one of the following: (a) Certified Vocational Evaluator (CVE) by the Commission on Certification of Work Adjustment and Vocational Evaluation Specialists (CCWAVES); or (b) Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) by the Commission of Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC) or be (c) Accredited in Comprehensive Vocational Evaluation Services by CARF.

Your vendor qualifications last for two years before renewal, and the fees are structured on the type of service and the intensity of the program. Basic fees start at \$1,500 to over \$5,000 per client.

For more information about the eligibility and application process:

<http://www1.dshs.wa.gov/dvr/serviceproviders/CRPNewContract.htm>

Provide Basic IT Skills Training on Contract: it is increasingly being recognized that at least a basic level of digital literacy significantly enhances the opportunities for job seekers. Today, IT skills as a matter of course are provided by the workforce development system, but skill-building is available through online self-paced curriculum, random classes at One Stops or through paid training at community colleges or a few private providers.

However, Microsoft and others are starting to promote basic IT literacy throughout the system, which, if successful, will create additional opportunities for CT providers. While there is no specific implementation vision today, there is the possibility that CT provider could forge a sustainable partnership with their local One Stop and/or workforce development council. CT providers could formulate a vision where they provide training at One Stops on specific computer applications or uses (i.e. teaching word processing skills & writing a resume). In order to entertain these opportunities, a CT provider should spend some time at their local One Stop understanding how clients interact with the system and what are essential computer-based skills that are being taught. By building a relationship with the local system, they may be able to create innovative training curriculum for the One Stop that allows them to reallocate staff towards other critical issues.

Some ideas for discussion include: short-term IT skill development (a la Microsoft's Unlimited Potential), job seeker IT-related skill development (i.e. Internet skills for online job search, word processing/resume writing), support for online assessments, and even industry-specific, short-term skill development.

Other Ideas: Beyond the resources that are already paid for by the workforce development system, there are a number of emerging opportunities for CT providers to discuss with their local systems. These include

- **Provide Remote Access to Job Seekers:** the WorkSource Seattle-King County One Stop contracted with a number of community organizations to provide intake, assessment and support services in their neighborhoods. WorkSource staff trained and supported the community nonprofits to function as an extension of the One Stop site out into the neighborhoods under an innovative grant program. While the funding for this experiment concluded, the nonprofits are still providing a level of the contracted services to this day. This model might provide a template for future WorkSource – CT provider relationships.
- **Contract to Manage Resource Room Computer Labs:** currently the resource rooms and computer labs at One Stops are overhead costs for the workforce system. They are sometimes managed by paid staff, other times by local volunteers. As IT skills are pushed through the workforce system, CT providers might make a persuasive case to rid the Centers of their overhead costs in favor for a contract with a local CT provider to manage the in-One Stop computer labs. This could include both equipment, maintenance, management and training components.
- **Development of Innovative Online Applications:** the workforce development system puts a premium on clients self-directing (and taking responsibility) for their own career growth. The development of robust online environments that help a client determine their career path, evaluate potential support and training services and communicate their plans to appropriate case managers will be increasingly important to help the system reach the highest number of people with the lowest cost point. CT providers could play a role in developing and implementing those applications.

These could include: career pathway exploration, IT skill assessment, online job seeker communications, social networking applications in service to job seekers among others. Interested CT providers should partner with the local workforce development councils to talk about what is needed and how to go about developing those opportunities.

How can the Community Technology Movement Build A Permanent Partnership with the Workforce System?

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CT providers are a part of the “informal workforce development system” by providing both direct, unpaid services to WorkSource centers (i.e. client referrals for IT training), as well as indirectly by helping to increase access to job information and skills through their sites.

In order to transform the “informal” relationship into a more structured, formal relationship, one based on a contract, CT providers must participate in the reformation of the workforce system. Earlier this year, Governor Gregoire has asked the state board, the Workforce Education & Training Board, to undertake a review of Washington’s statewide system and suggest improvements.

The draft report is currently under review and public hearing. A final recommended report will most likely be published later this year.

(<http://www.wtb.wa.gov/DevelopmentReview.asp>) It is imperative for ACT and CT providers in general to offer their opinion and recommendations on how they could make their relationship with the system more formalized.

Issues that we should consider promoting include:

- Defining the assessment and then **acquisition of IT skills as a Core Service**, so that WorkSource sites, either themselves, through community colleges or community partnerships, would assist all Washington job seekers to be literate in computer and Internet skills.
- Promote the **cataloguing of IT skills required for a variety of industries and jobs**, including entry-level work. A clear appreciation of specific IT skills required for different jobs will enable the workforce development system to allocate resources to promote training for job seekers.
- Have the system create **innovative community partnership grants** that allow the regional workforce development councils to work with a range of non-workforce partners, including CT providers, to support job seekers in the neighborhoods where they live.
- Promote the development of **online service delivery tools** that enable clients to navigate and utilize the resources of the workforce development system for career development from remote locations, such as home, community technology centers, libraries, etc.

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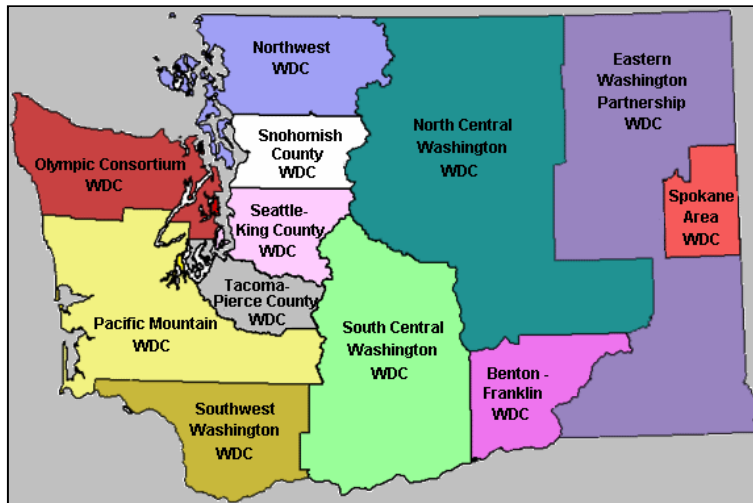
Exhibit 1

Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board
Statewide Workforce Investment Board

- Create & update statewide workforce plan/policies
- Ensure quality & accountability of workforce system

Regional Workforce Councils

- Regional workforce plan/policies
- Selection of One Stop/Youth & Other Training/Service Providers
 - Ensure quality & accountability of workforce system



One Stop Delivery System

- Multiple regional centers holding employment, training & job support services
- Key partners: WA Employment Security, community & technical colleges, Workfirst (welfare-to-work) and nonprofit providers.
 - Core (basic) & Intensive Services

Youth Service Providers

(Funding for youth training & support)

Training Service Providers

(Dedicated list of eligible training providers)

Adult & Dislocated Worker Training

(Funding training & support of dislocated workers)

Vocational Rehabilitation

(Funding training & support of job seekers with disabilities)