

Mapping The Strengths Of The WIB

Every Workforce Investment Board (WIB) has its own charter, organization, and unique context. What they all share, however, is a set of central roles. Each WIB provides oversight for the Workforce Investment Act program, acts as a catalyst to provide seamless services among various workforce programs, and provides community leadership around workforce issues.

As community leader, there are five ways that WIBs can carry out their role, which are the focus of this toolkit. The list is intended to be descriptive, rather than prescriptive - each WIB in California will find that it incorporates most of these roles in varying degrees in all aspects of their work.

- **CONVENER** - Bringing together business, labor, education, and economic development to focus on community workforce issues
- **WORKFORCE ANALYST** - Developing, disseminating and understanding current labor market and economic information and trends
- **BROKER** - Bring together systems to solve common problems, or broker new relationships with businesses and workers
- **COMMUNITY VOICE** - Advocating for the importance of workforce policy, providing perspective about the need for skilled workers
- **CAPACITY BUILDER** - Enhancing the region's ability to meet the workforce needs of local employers

The case studies in this toolkit have been organized around these five roles, with pages illustrating how successful programs have leveraged their positions in the workforce community to foster change.

The WIB as Convener

WIBs are an important nexus of communication, facilitating dialogue about workforce issues among employers, policymakers, labor, education, economic development and the public.

Regional economies have complex sets of workforce issues that span across business, community organizations, government, organized labor and residents. Workforce issues are about skilled workers, but they are also about the changing workplace, access to jobs for all populations, transportation and housing, and support for workers such as health care and childcare.

As intermediary organizations with participation from business, labor, non-profits, government, and educational institutions, WIBs can ensure that all of the right people are in the room for critical discussions about the region's economy and workforce needs.

WIBs bring together business leaders to respond to local workforce needs with an understanding and focus only possible at the regional level. Convening businesses within key industry sectors to better understand the needs of the industry provides valuable information for organizations providing

education and job readiness services. WIBs also convene around specific issues of critical importance to the community, such as low wage workers, the aging workforce, or school drop out rates.

The WIB as Workforce Analyst

WIBs play a key role in collecting and analyzing labor market data for their region. This entails not only finding and using statistical data to paint a picture of the local economy, but turning that data into useful information for educators, policy makers and the business community. Often, statistical information is several years old, so the WIB also takes a proactive role in using its convening role to bring together employers through focus groups and other mechanisms to understand the current and future skill requirements and hiring needs of key industries. Understanding and disseminating information about trends in employment can be valuable to One-Stop Career Centers, community colleges, and schools.

Mapping the gaps between the needs of the economy and the current delivery system is also a key function of the WIB. Many WIBs initiate asset mapping in their communities, to provide information about the services that are available. They also scan their region to learn about the potential mismatches between the skills required and the current workforce, or the education and training needed by residents and the actual offerings.

Information about jobs and career pathways, described in accessible ways for students and job seekers is also a critical function of the WIB. Often, employers can't see the career pathways within their industry, and the WIB works with tools to map occupations and skill requirements in ways that can be used by both people who want to enter a field, and incumbent workers who want to progress in their careers.

The WIB as Broker

WIBs play an important role in bringing people and groups together, providing them with access to the information that they need to make informed decisions, and brokering agreements between employers, government agencies, and various programs. A WIB functioning as an intermediary provides a mechanism to connect organizations, institutions, businesses and people to each other and to the services and information they need.

WIBs have served an important role in bringing together the business community in a particular industry sector and educational agencies to help "translate" from one system to the other, and to help develop services that meet the needs of business. In other places, WIBs have brokered training programs and services between employers and training providers.

The WIB as Community Voice

An important function underlying these roles is that of communication. WIBs serve as a community voice in a number of ways. By using the information gathered as a result of convening employers, WIBs can help regions articulate their needs to policymakers at all levels of government. WIBs can use

information gathered as part of their workforce intelligence activities to communicate key skill shortages, skill gaps, the need for labor and/or job opportunities.

WIBs also serve as the voice of the community, by articulating the needs of individuals looking for training and jobs. Returning Veterans, people being released from the correctional system, individuals with disabilities may have special needs or more intensive services.

With its diverse membership, the WIB is uniquely positioned to tell the whole story - not from the point of view of business, government, labor or community group - but from the whole. This voice can provide powerful messages to the Legislature, the Administration and other policy leaders.

The WIB as Capacity Builder

As a capacity builder, the WIB has a responsibility to scan the performance and effectiveness of One-Stop Career Centers, training programs and other community resources, and ensure that services are high quality. The WIB can provide critical guidance to agencies in the form of technical assistance, well articulated goals and performance measures, and insistence on excellence. Using their role as convener, the WIB can bring together service providers and educators to inform them of current and future workforce needs, to learn about best practices on the ground, and facilitate dialogue about the most effective way to serve businesses and job seekers.

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