

## Minnesota Workforce Council Association – Core Services

The Minnesota Workforce Council Association (MWCA) believes workforce development is the key economic development issue in our economy. Minnesota is competing nationally and internationally to maintain and further the exceptional quality of life that has defined the state in the past and provided its competitive advantage. The projected shortage of workers caused by the combination of “baby boom” retirements, fewer new workers, reduced skill achievement of new workers and industry demand for highly skilled workers requires a renewed and collaborative commitment to guarantee current and future workers have the support necessary for Minnesota to remain competitive in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Minnesota’s workforce development system consists of a large community of stakeholders, including economic development, education, non-profits, and community leaders. Each play a vital role in ensuring that employers of all sizes have access to a prepared workforce and that jobseekers have access to services and resources that will enable them to obtain and keep good jobs. Local workforce councils act as leaders in their communities to both make connections among these stakeholders and leverage resources to bolster the overall effectiveness of the system.

The MWCA’s members include employment and training service providers, local elected officials, and workforce council leadership. This state-wide network of local leadership is positioned to promote a strong, locally-driven, responsive workforce system in Minnesota. Labor market research, discussions with employers, studies of best practices, and other assessments conducted at the state-wide, regional, and local level ensure that employment and training services are delivered in a manner that is market driven and targeted to the needs of local economies.

More recently, through regional sector strategies, MWCA members built partnerships of employers, community organizations, and other key stakeholders to address the workforce needs of employers and the training, employment, and career advancement needs of workers in specific industries.

To that end, we advocate the following strategies to strengthen our ability to achieve those goals.

### Career Planning, Assessment, Job Placement

A dynamic economy requires a highly trained and flexible workforce. Employers need for labor changes often and workers must be able to quickly adapt to changing skill and market requirements. Today’s workers are likely to change jobs 10-14 times over their lifetimes-sometimes by their own choice, often times not. The aging of Minnesota’s workforce will bring unique challenges; our economy will require that every person able to work participates in the workforce. Local workforce councils and WorkForce Centers have proven their ability to broker information and facilitate connections, bridging the needs of jobseekers and employers.

MWCA considers intensive job search, vocational assessment and career guidance to be critical services to which all job seekers should have access. The continually evolving employment market requires that these services are available throughout a worker’s lifetime so that career planning and training match employer demand. Furthermore, individual classes, group activities, and counseling should be available to assess and promote work and training readiness to help jobseekers maintain employment.

A steady reduction in federal funds devoted to career planning, assessment and job placement have adversely affected resources available to provide these basic services to Minnesotans. It is important to MWCA’s membership that these services are of highest quality and high value. **Establishing a line-item budget for adult career planning, assessment and job placement services would**

**create a relatively predictable amount of funding to support activities from year to year.** This would not constitute creating new services, but rather would dedicate funding for services that already exist – but rely on cobbled funding through programs with declining budgets. Further, such a line-item would encourage measurement of systems outputs (e.g., overall number of workers and businesses engaged, referrals to other programs and services, overall accessibility to community) that cannot be addressed by measures currently focused on individual worker outcomes. Funding should be directed to the local workforce councils so that they can strategically manage resources to address their communities' needs.

The need for higher level of career exposure and assessment for youth is also critical to address future workforce needs. Current funding levels to provide these high level services to youth, either in school or through other venues, are extremely limited. Minnesota currently has the second highest student-to-counselor ratio in the United States. There is a critical and pressing need for the system to address service needs of students who do not have career goals or postsecondary aspirations. These students are often overlooked and move in and out of the workforce. Even youth who enter post-secondary education lack good career guidance and realistic career goals.

Minnesota's workforce councils, which include representation from both educational partners and the business community, are ideally situated to be a key collaborator with educational institutions to enhance career services to students at high school and post high school levels. Close coordination between the education and WorkForce System will ensure lifelong use of career services for individuals. Furthermore, local workforce councils are in touch with the evolving needs of their regional economies and can provide leadership in exposing individuals to specific careers. The infrastructure is already in place through Federal WIA programs, the Minnesota Youth Program, and the Outreach to Schools Initiative. **Funds should be made available to improve the level of career services for youth.**

### **Special Services for At-Risk and Low Income Youth**

Work skills and the development of a work ethic are not just learned in classrooms; they are acquired through hands-on experience. The Minnesota Youth Program (MYP) is a state-funded program providing short-term employment and training services to disadvantaged and at-risk youth between the ages of 14-21 in all 87 counties. MYP engages an extremely disadvantaged group of young men and women; participants have multiple challenges such as substance abuse, criminal records and mental health issues, cognitive learning limitations, or may be homeless or aging out of foster care. Youth who are lacking both academic and "applied" skills have the opportunity to work on skills considered critical for current and future workplace needs. **Employment for teens is at the lowest level in 57 years; the unmet demand for MYP services continues to grow. Further investing in youth employment and training programs is critical to arming youth with the skills they need to be successful in the workplace.**

### **Employer Services**

It is critical that employers have convenient access to information and services which are designed to meet their workforce needs. MWCA members, through their direct ties to business and/or as employers themselves, work as intermediaries to create effective solutions by brokering collaborative partnerships, providing incumbent worker training, and assessing industry needs prior to directing jobseekers toward specific employment opportunities.

In addition to the work being done by WIA Title I partners and local workforce councils, helping employers solve their workforce needs is the primary mission of the DEED Business Service Specialists. **Staff should concentrate their efforts on helping employers who are identified and targeted by local workforce councils.** To create a more comprehensive approach to addressing

employer needs, MWCA encourages support of **employer teams that include representation from business service specialists, workforce center staff, adult basic education, and post-secondary training institutions.**

While local entities do not operate the current electronic labor exchange system, we view it as a critical venue to build relationships with employers at the local level and a source of information in assessing regional needs. **A premier state operated labor exchange system should be promoted.** The goal is to create an expectation among employers that the workforce system can be a key partner in addressing hiring and workforce needs.

MWCA also advocates for a continued focus on sector strategies. Sector or industry partnerships are a key strategic element within some of the most successful state and local workforce development efforts in the country. Sector partnerships organize the stakeholders connected to an industry—multiple firms (and/or their trade association), unions, education and training providers, and local workforce and education system administrators—to develop plans for growing (or saving) that industry. These partnerships often focus on building new skilled workforce pipelines where shortages exist, as well as changing how the industry's existing workers are utilized, trained and valued.

The existing workforce system is ideal for engaging in sector work, is flexible and can proactively assess the needs of various industries. WIBs and service providers have effectively successfully across geographic boundaries to address the needs of regional economies in an efficient, effective and timely manner.. We see excellent opportunities to continue serving employers while at the same time focusing on the needs of incumbent workers and jobseekers. Thus, **we encourage the state to continue to provide funding to promote sector strategies. Development of specific counseling expertise within WorkForce Centers for key sectors would also enhance the level of services for job seekers.**

## Training

Increasingly, today's jobs—including those at the entry-level—require far more technical and basic skills than similar positions did just a couple of decades ago. In fact, the Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that the number of jobs requiring either an associate's degree or a postsecondary vocational credential will grow by 24.1 percent during this decade. By 2020, according to another estimate, it is estimated that there will be 15 million new U.S. jobs requiring college preparation; yet, at current rates the U.S. will only add a net of 3 million workers with postsecondary credentials to its labor supply, leaving a potential 12 million skilled jobs unfilled.

If Minnesota's industries are to stay competitive in today's ever-changing global economy, it is imperative that we invest in training our future and incumbent workforce. Current opportunities, however, are not affordable or realistic options for many Minnesotans, particularly for those who are already working.

**MWCA strongly encourages the development of short-term and part time entry level vocational programs which lead to entry level jobs and provide stackable credentials.** We agree with the following strategies outlined in Minnesota's recent funding proposal to the Joyce Foundation, which state that short-term training opportunities should:

- Meet the needs of local employers in high demand industries;
- Include tactics such as providing some services online, offering flexible and "vertical" class scheduling, providing supportive services, and apprenticeships, internships and other non-traditional training approaches;

- Create navigable pathways to higher credentials based on “chunks” that add up to certificates/credentials;
- Have multiple entry and exit points; and
- Be coupled with career planning and counseling for adult workers to help them understand and navigate the array of opportunities.

Minnesota’s workforce council strategies are market-driven; councils strive to ensure that training resources are targeted to meet the needs of local and regional economies. Councils and workforce service providers serve as neutral brokers in identifying and connecting workers and employers to potential resources and educational institutions that can meet their needs. They are able to identify employer training and curriculum needs, evaluate the knowledge and skill levels of jobseekers, and create partnerships to encourage community and technical colleges to deliver training and curriculum in the most efficient and effective manner possible. **Therefore, MWCA advocates for direct appropriations to local workforce councils, enabling them to partner with local businesses and educational institutions to provide on-the-job training, short-term specific job training and work and training readiness for all individuals,** including disadvantaged adults, job seekers, and incumbent workers.