Top 5 Issues in Workforce Development

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Implementation

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, also known as WIOA, became effective on July 1, 2015. However, the act includes several provisions that become effective on other dates. On March 1, 2016, governors must submit a Unified or Combined State Plan pertaining to workforce investment programs, adult education and vocational rehabilitation to the U.S. secretary of labor. Alignment between the four core programs within the law is to be a key focus of the state plans. The core programs consist of: (1) the Adult, Dislocated Worker and Youth formula programs administered by the U.S. Department of Labor, or DOL; (2) the Adult Education and Literacy program administered by the U.S. Department of Education; (3) the Wagner-Peyser Act employment services program administered by DOL; and (4) programs under the Vocational Rehabilitation Act. In addition, the new WIOA performance accountability provisions take effect on July 1, 2016.

A good resource for state workforce policy leaders is the Innovation and Opportunity Network (ION), which is a community of people, practitioners, programs, partnerships, and stakeholders that strive for system capacity building and excellence of the public workforce system. The ION is a national, regional, state and local alliance that provides and participates in technical assistance and training that moves towards the vision of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) that was signed into law in 2014.

For more information and resources: https://wioa.workforce3one.org/page/resource/1001515244837458722

Career Pathways

Students in K-12, postsecondary education and individuals re-entering the workforce are finding greater job-specific training opportunities and career pathways aligned with business needs in their states and local communities. In 2015, the states tuned in to the increased training and skills needed to compete in the global job market. According to the Center on Education and the Workforce at Georgetown University, 65 percent of all jobs in the economy will require some postsecondary education and training beyond high school by 2020, with 35 percent requiring at least a bachelor’s degree. Alignment between the education sector, workforce development and employers is crucial to meeting the job market needs of today and tomorrow.

The workplace is changing rapidly, making it imperative that state leaders develop innovative ways to educate and prepare students for the demands of an increasingly global economy. Most states are seeing evidence of economic growth—increases in job creation and overall decreases in unemployment—but too many people remain unemployed, the skills gap between the technical skills workers have and those needed by business and industry continues to grow, and the lack of opportunities to advance exists for many employees.

CSG State Pathways to Prosperity Initiative

As CSG’s 2014 national chair, Tennessee Senate Majority Leader Mark Norris helped create a vision to grow state economies and address workforce challenges. Built on Sen. Norris’ personal experience in Tennessee—a leader among states in education and workforce development reform—CSG’s State Pathways to Prosperity initiative is a multi-year effort to identify obstacles and alternative pathways to prosperity for so many Americans.
Read the full report for best practices on addressing workforce challenges from states across the country: [http://www.csg.org/programs/statepathwaystoprosperity.aspx](http://www.csg.org/programs/statepathwaystoprosperity.aspx)

State policymakers hear frequently from employers that they cannot find skilled workers for open positions. Many of these positions are middle-skill jobs that require some form of postsecondary training, but not a bachelor’s degree.

Bran Wilson, state policy director of the National Skills Coalition provides states with good information on how to address these challenges in the Closing Skills Gap article: [http://knowledgecenter.csg.org/kc/content/closing-skill-gaps](http://knowledgecenter.csg.org/kc/content/closing-skill-gaps)

**Employment Issues for Individuals with Criminal Records**

An estimated 70 million people in America have a criminal record. State leaders are focused on how employment can play a critical role in reducing recidivism and improving other long-term outcomes for people who have been involved with the criminal justice system. Understanding and addressing these challenges requires the collaboration of employers, workforce development officials and policy makers at every level of government. Each year, more states consider policy changes to address employability issues for people with criminal records. Policies being implemented at the state level to address this population include the adoption of fair-hiring policies that bar the inclusion of conviction history in job applications, increased access to occupational licensing and certificates of rehabilitation for people with criminal records, as well as the use of tax incentives and no-cost liability bonds to employers.

The National Reentry Resource Center provides education, training, and technical assistance to states, tribes, territories, local governments, service providers, non-profit organizations, and corrections institutions working on prisoner reentry. To learn more, click [csgjusticecenter.org/nrrc/publications/about-the-national-reentry-resource-center/](http://csgjusticecenter.org/nrrc/publications/about-the-national-reentry-resource-center/)

**Engaging Individuals with Disabilities in the Workforce**

Many working age adults with disabilities are faced with structural and attitudinal barriers that block access to steady employment and economic security. States are developing new and innovative pathways to meaningfully engage people with disabilities in the workforce. The recruitment, hiring, retention and promotion of people with disabilities in the workplace are of great benefit to employers. Individuals with disabilities can provide businesses with flexible, innovative thinking that provides a competitive advantage in today’s market. Addressing the barriers to employment is the first step to leveraging the substantial benefits of increased inclusion in the workforce.

**November 2015 Disability Employment Statistics**

**Labor Force Participation**

- People with disabilities: 19.2%
- People without disabilities: 68.3%

The disability employment statistics show the immediate need to meaningfully address the challenges that people with disabilities face in the labor market. The U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) is a great resource for state policy makers focused on increasing the number and quality of employment opportunities for people with disabilities: [http://www.dol.gov/odep/](http://www.dol.gov/odep/)

**Veteran Employment Issues**
Veterans’ employment outcomes in the civilian labor market are an issue of ongoing interest. According to federal data, the unemployment rate for veterans who served after September 2001 is almost double the unemployment rate for nonveterans. Veterans offer a unique set of skills, experiences and leadership abilities developed during their years of service in the armed forces that are highly desirable to employers. Finding how best to support veterans and separating service members with employment and education resources presents challenges and opportunities to today’s state leaders.

Looking at Veterans employment issues, it is important to highlight success stories from programs and states that are making strides in matching veterans with good paying jobs that utilize their unique skills and abilities.
Navigating Veteran Employment Issues

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- Veterans: 22 Million
- U.S. Unemployment Rate: 5%
- Unemployment Rate for Veterans Who Served After 2001: 7.2%
- Unemployment Rate for Male Veterans 18-24: 17.3%

The men and women who have served in the Armed Forces offer a unique set of skills, experiences, and leadership abilities developed during their years of service that are highly desirable to employers. Hiring managers may not understand what a petty officer or a bridge crew member can bring to their organization. Programs like Hiring Our Heroes and 100,000 Jobs Mission help veterans align and market their skills to best find how they can succeed in today’s job market.

Programs That Work

- **Hiring Our Heroes**
  - Hiring Our Heroes is a nationwide initiative to help veterans, transitioning service members, and military spouses find meaningful employment opportunities.
  - Since its founding in 2011, the Veteran Jobs Mission has grown to over 200 companies that have combined to hire 292,645 Veterans.

- **Paybacks for Patriots**
  - Paybacks for Patriots is a success with 230 Veteran-friendly employers on sites in nine Tennessee cities.

- **Troops to Teachers**
  - Troops to Teachers is a U.S. Department of Defense program that helps eligible military personnel begin a new career as teachers in public schools.

- **Operation Hire Maryland**
  - Operation Hire Maryland is a program that supports employers as they develop and expand upon their veteran hiring and retention initiatives.

For more info, visit: [http://knowledgecenter.csg.org](http://knowledgecenter.csg.org)

Infographic by the Council of State Governments 2015
Csg.org/knowledgecenter
For more information on these topics and for additional resources on workforce development policy, see www.csg.org/top5in2016 [6].

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