



## Policy Resolution 2025-03

### Workforce Development in the Western United States

#### A. **BACKGROUND**

Effective workforce development systems provide people with the opportunity to achieve economic security while ensuring that businesses have access to the workforce they need. Western Governors have prioritized modernizing workforce development systems to meet the evolving needs of employers and jobseekers in their states and territories. Each state and territory has its own workforce development needs, based on population, geography, industry, and other factors. Many western states serve populations across large rural areas, making it more challenging to support workers and employers. The national shortage of workers has made workforce development even more critical. Employers are innovating their hiring practices, including by removing degree requirements and focusing on skills and credentials. Workers are updating their skills more frequently and states and territories are preparing for potential disruption to their workforce due to the growing use of artificial intelligence.

#### B. **GOVERNORS' POLICY STATEMENT**

1. Western Governors recognize that there are many pathways that students can take to a successful career, including post-secondary education and skills training or work-based learning programs such as registered apprenticeships.
2. Education and workforce development policies should facilitate lifelong learning. Western Governors encourage Congress to expand student access to skills training programs, including through extending Pell Grant program eligibility to high-quality, short-term training programs leading to industry-recognized credentials, to increase access and completion for adult learners. These flexible, workforce-oriented funds should be coupled with plans to adopt and report outcomes metrics tied to employment and earnings to maximize the success of this policy in equipping workers for high-opportunity jobs and careers.
3. Western Governors also support the expansion of work-based learning programs, including registered apprenticeships. Western Governors encourage Congress and federal agencies to support and incentivize state-, local-, industry- and organized labor-led partnerships to create and scale up work-based learning and apprenticeship programs, including by providing states and territories technical assistance to strengthen partnerships between workforce and apprenticeship entities. Western Governors recommend that new federal investments be provided through line-item formula funding and aligned with existing efforts to foster a coherent system that expands work-based learning and registered apprenticeship with minimal duplication at the federal, state, territorial, and local level.
4. Registered apprenticeships can be certified by the Department of Labor (DOL) Office of Apprenticeship or a state apprenticeship agency (SAA) as being in compliance with applicable standards. DOL promulgates national standards; SAAs must ensure that state

certified programs satisfy these standards. Given that each state has diverse needs and one size does not fit all, DOL should ensure that federal apprenticeship regulations do not impede the growth of apprenticeships. Additionally, many western states have established SAAs. It is important that states with SAAs retain the authority to implement requirements beyond the minimum national standards determined by DOL.

5. Career and technical education (CTE) helps expose students to their career options and develop skills they will need in the workforce. Western Governors call on Congress to reauthorize and fully fund the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act. Reauthorization of the Act should take into consideration the following principles:
  - Governors and states are in the best position to determine how to use federal CTE funding to meet the unique needs of their economies.
  - High-quality CTE programs should lead to in-demand, high wage careers; include career and academic advising; include pathways to four-year degrees, for example through articulation agreements or stackable credentials; provide credit for prior learning; and develop employability skills through integrated education and training, work-based learning, or leadership opportunities.
6. Western Governors note that federal funding for workforce development through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) supports economic growth and job creation in the states. Congress should appropriate adequate funding for states to implement WIOA. Additionally, short term and competitive funding for innovative programs to transform the career services and skills development system is inefficient and creates unintended obstacles for small states with limited grant-writing resources.
7. Congress should grant states and tribes more flexibility under the current WIOA funding streams to better anticipate coming labor market disruptions and help workers who are not traditionally eligible for assistance or at-risk incumbent workers prepare for displacement. Increased WIOA funding flexibility should allow Governors to fund outreach and marketing of services to reach more people that these services are meant to impact, especially in states with larger rural populations. Western Governors request that the 15 percent reserve for statewide activities be maintained. This funding allows Governors to be flexible in addressing state needs and supports innovation.
8. Better coordination at the federal level is needed to enable states to effectively leverage federal funding across WIOA and other federal programs that support workforce development, including economic development and infrastructure investment. Programs that have similar purposes to WIOA should be designed in a way that allows states to braid funding more easily. Greater alignment of policies, performance metrics, regulations, and reporting requirements across federal workforce, human services, housing, and education agencies would support better outcomes for program participants.
9. Western Governors encourage federal agencies, including DOL and the U.S. Department of Education (ED), to coordinate their efforts to better align federal workforce development, career and technical education, and higher education programs. While federal funding for workforce development through WIOA supports economic growth and job creation in the states, that funding is very restrictive and limited in its capacity to affect students earlier on in their learning process. DOL and ED should be jointly accountable for the outcomes these

programs are meant to deliver to youth. This would enable industry to work collaboratively with government institutions to define the educational outcomes that will best lead to success in the economic ecosystem. It would also enable better alignment and preparation of the government institutions to anticipate labor market disruptions and changes so fewer workers find themselves at risk for displacement or in need of assistance.

10. Western Governors call for enhanced federal investments and an expanded WIOA funding stream for youth, targeted toward youth who are disconnected from school and work, as well as a carve-out of Carl Perkins funding directed to the workforce system to support stronger linkages to K-12 and higher education. Western Governors also call for the establishment of a Youth Employment Taskforce to make further recommendations on effective workforce strategies to address the crisis in youth employment.
11. Western Governors also call for matching incentives to encourage states to fund workforce efforts outside of WIOA, Wagner-Peyser, and other current mechanisms. State funds matched by federal funds would allow for the creative solutions and conditional flexibility states need to pivot with changing economic forces in real time and through situation-specific needs assessment and program adaptation.
12. Western Governors recognize the benefits of measuring and reporting outcomes by institution and program. Reporting completion rates, employment and earnings will provide useful information for students and their families and help promote the success of these programs to prepare students for in-demand jobs and careers in their regions. Western Governors encourage Congress to establish a national post-secondary data system to facilitate reporting on earnings, employment, and credential attainment metrics by education provider and individual program in a manner that protects student privacy and ensures data security.
13. Employers play an important role in state and territorial workforce development efforts. Western Governors support efforts to incentivize employers to play a more active role in talent development through partnership with state and territorial workforce development agencies and educational institutions or investments in the skills and training of their employees, including apprenticeship and other earn and learn strategies.
14. Rural communities are at risk of falling further behind in skills necessary for the economy of the future due to a lack of broadband access and digital skills. Western Governors encourage federal agencies and Congress to continue to deploy resources to solve this urgent need including funding for digital skills pilots and online training.
15. Professional licensing requirements vary by state and can create a barrier to mobility for professionals in western states. Where possible, Western Governors should work together to minimize this barrier and to establish reciprocity across states.
16. Automation and artificial intelligence could potentially help alleviate some of the workforce shortages affecting businesses in the West. Western Governors support efforts to help businesses and workers take advantage of these new technologies while also investing in skills training so that workers are not left behind.

17. Some highly-skilled occupations in high demand in the West require post-secondary credentials other than college degrees. Western Governors are interested in exploring foreign worker visa programs that allow consideration of alternative credentials.
18. Workplaces welcoming of the talents of all people, including people with disabilities, are critical to build an inclusive and strong economy. Workforce development programs and policies should be inclusive of people with disabilities. Congress and DOL should provide additional training and funding for states and territories to conduct outreach and education on equal opportunity and nondiscrimination and to link workforce programs with K-12 special education services.
19. Investments in state data infrastructure are needed to better support state education and workforce development, including responding to changing labor market demand, improving the effectiveness of policies and programs, and improving the delivery of services. Congress should:
  - a. Provide adequate funding to support state Labor Market Information (LMI) shops and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, a critical statistical agency, for production of labor market data under the federal-state cooperative statistics programs.
  - b. Ensure states a greater share of funds under the federal-state cooperative arrangement so they can fulfill their responsibilities to produce high quality survey data and statistics without diverting funds from other priority data products and projects.
  - c. Support significantly greater ongoing funding to enhance state capacity for evidence-based decision making and the production of locally relevant labor market intelligence.
  - d. Invest long-term in multi-state data collaboratives and in more voluntary state participation in collaboratives to enable a truly national data infrastructure to emerge.

**C. GOVERNORS' MANAGEMENT DIRECTIVE**

1. The Governors direct WGA staff to work with congressional committees of jurisdiction, the Executive Branch, and other entities, where appropriate, to achieve the objectives of this resolution.
2. Furthermore, the Governors direct WGA staff to consult with the Staff Advisory Council regarding its efforts to realize the objectives of this resolution and to keep the Governors apprised of its progress in this regard.

*This resolution will expire in December 2027. Western Governors enact new policy resolutions and amend existing resolutions on a semiannual basis. Please consult <http://www.westgov.org/resolutions> for the most current copy of a resolution and a list of all current WGA policy resolutions.*