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A S S O C I A T I O N

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WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD AND COMMUNITY  
COLLEGE COLLABORATION

BUILDING A COMPETITIVE WORKFORCE ADVANTAGE



# Keeping California Competitive: California's Workforce Investment Boards and Community Colleges

## Background

This monograph is intended to be used by California Workforce Investment Board (WIB) members and staff to help understand ways in which the WIBs can collaborate with community colleges to address community and regional workforce issues. We use a framework developed by the California Workforce Association, which describes the seven characteristics of a competitive workforce advantage. This framework was developed with the input of hundreds of workforce, education and economic development professionals, who collectively came to the conclusion that the "end game" for our collaboration is to work towards building the skilled workforce that business needs, and build an infrastructure that supports this work. In this monograph, we focus specifically on the ways that the education and workforce system can effectively develop a competitive workforce.



Recently, the Government Accountability Office (GAO), at the request of Congress, researched and wrote a report<sup>1</sup> about the collaboration across the country between community colleges and WIBs. The report describes various ways that the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) includes roles for community colleges:

*Community colleges can play important roles in the federal workforce programs under WIA. One potential role is to serve on the state and local WIBs responsible for the WIA system. Governors and the chief local officials select the representatives to their respective boards following the membership criteria prescribed by WIA and its implementing regulations. While WIA specifies that membership of the WIBs is to include representatives of various types of entities, the regulations make clear that community college representatives should be given special consideration for membership.*

*Another possible role for community colleges is to become a one-stop operator. Community colleges may apply to a WIB to become the operator of the one-stop center, overseeing its daily operation and services. In addition, as a key provider of both education and career and technical training programs in their communities,*

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<sup>1</sup> For more information and to read the report, go to [www.gao.gov](http://www.gao.gov), report GAO-08-547 Workforce Development  
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*community colleges can meet the education and training needs of one-stop clients by working closely with their local one-stop centers to understand these needs and meeting WIA requirements to become eligible training providers. For example, community college staff at the one-stop can provide information on the variety of classes available at the college, such as General Equivalency Diploma (GED), English as a Second Language (ESL), or adult basic education classes; conduct formal screenings or assessments of clients to determine literacy levels; or determine eligibility for financial aid options through the college.*

*Individuals who are found eligible for training under WIA receive vouchers—called Individual Training Accounts (ITA)—to pay for training. ITAs can be used at the training provider of their choice, which can include community colleges.*

## **The California Landscape**

California is home to 109 community colleges organized into 72 districts, serving more than 2.5 million students and representing the largest system of higher education in the world. California is also comprised of 49 Workforce Investment Boards, private sector-led boards and organizations focused on finding solutions to workforce issues throughout the State and providing services to millions of Californians through One-Stop Career Centers.

Historically, these systems and institutions have had mixed success in working together. The changes in federal law that came in at the beginning of the Workforce Investment Act, while well intended, drove the two systems away from each other. The strict reporting rules in the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) list make it almost impossible for community colleges to comply. On the other side, the lengthy process entailed in developing new curriculum and semester based courses make it difficult for many WIBs to develop collaborative projects with the colleges. In spite of these system issues, there is substantial progress in California, and this document describes that progress in statewide policy and local practice.

In the last few years, the California Workforce Investment Board has developed several collaborative initiatives with the Chancellor's Office of the California Community Colleges. Career Advancement Academies are a good example of this collaborative approach, in which the Chancellor's Office developed RFPs funded by the community college funding that required collaboration with WIBs; although often the CWIB required collaboration with colleges using WIA funding, this is one of the first times that the Chancellor consulted with the CWIB and required WIB collaboration.

California's WIRED grant, administered by the California Space Authority, has from the beginning encouraged and expected collaboration between WIBs and community colleges.

At a policy level, colleges and WIBs have joined together to work on the California EDGE Campaign, created by a very diverse coalition of organizations. Colleges and WIBs, labor unions and employer associations, non-profits and local chambers of commerce have all endorsed the Campaign. What is important *here* is that both the Community College League, representing community college districts, locally-

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elected governing boards, and the chief executive officers and the California Workforce Association, representing California's WIBs, are founding members of the EGDE Campaign. We believe that collaborating together on changes in California's workforce and education systems will create powerful and significant change. To learn more about the EDGE Campaign go to [www.californiaEDGEcampaign.org](http://www.californiaEDGEcampaign.org).

### **Competitive Workforce Advantage Framework**

The current workforce development system can and should be improved. What we think has been missing, however, is a vision of the "end game." Efforts to streamline systems and coordinate agencies and services are taking place at every level of government, and these efforts are needed. Streamlined systems are good government. More recent initiatives have centered on ways to realign workforce development agencies to respond to the demands of businesses. Better more relevant services to employers will definitely improve their bottom line. But what outcomes will serve the broadest interests of the community and assure California's economic vitality?

This framework shifts attention away from workforce agencies and delivery systems, broadening the vision instead to the overall competitiveness of communities and regions. The end game is best played when we focus on the overall competitiveness of the labor force in our local communities and regions. We believe that Workforce Investment Boards should see their role as stewards of this framework, ensuring that each characteristic of such a community has active champions and players. The WIB's role is to catalyze attention and action in each arena, and to seek data and information with which community leaders in all domains can make better public policy decisions. Fulfilling the 5 roles of the WIB, as described at the [wibtoolkit.net](http://wibtoolkit.net) website, WIBs will serve as broker, convener, workforce analyst, voice of the community, and capacity builder.

In the following paragraphs, we have described the ideal community, in which all of the seven characteristics are in place (the italicized paragraphs are from our framework document). We use the term community, but this could refer to a region, a group of cities or counties, or one city. To stimulate thinking, we have included examples of the kinds of roles WIBs and community colleges are currently playing in each of the arenas.

#### **Forward Thinking Community Leaders**

*Each community with a competitive workforce advantage has a set of community leaders who care about and are engaged in workforce issues. This leadership includes local elected officials, business, non-profit and faith-based leaders, and "civic entrepreneurs," all of whom understand that the needs of business and the skills of its workers are critically important to the economic health of the region. There is strategic rather than reactive political leadership. Community planning is based on data, and leaders have a deep understanding of the demographics of its workforce and the present and future skill requirements of its key industries.*

In order to build a cadre of forward thinking leaders, WIBs and Community Colleges can engage and inform County Boards of Supervisors, Mayors and City Councils. These local elected officials are often making funding decisions about scarce general fund money, which often connects to workforce and education programs. In this era of

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term limits, the Board of Governors of Community Colleges are often a stepping stone to Boards of Supervisors and the California State Legislature, and engaging them in cross-agency workforce issues is an important way to get these issues on a larger radar screen. WIBs and Colleges can use the newly developed "clusters of opportunity" data methodology, which can help cross agency understanding of the regional labor market, and the industry clusters driving economic growth. The data can be used to convene summits about workforce issues, and publish "State of the Workforce" reports - which can be branded as products of elected officials. WIBs, community colleges and schools can convene focus groups with key industry clusters and participate in community planning efforts - all to help build the knowledge and interest of community leaders and local elected officials.

### **Business Investment in Human Capital**

*Each community with a competitive workforce advantage has businesses in which workers are viewed as assets. Employers invest in training workers to meet present and future needs. Employers work with others in their industry -- both other companies and organized labor -- to anticipate training and skills development needs. Employees are aware of opportunities for advancement and are given incentives to improve their skills.*

WIBs can convene employers in the same industry to discuss skills needs; connect employers to public resources for skills upgrade training; act as a broker with community colleges/higher education and University Extensions for curriculum design; provide data about prevailing wages, occupations, future trends and act as human resource departments for small business. Community colleges can convene employers to understand current and future skill needs, and design both regular credentialed classes, and contract education strategies with specific employers and industry associations. There are numerous government bodies and professional organizations within the colleges that provide leadership development and management seminars.

### **Strong and Diverse Economy**

*Each community with a competitive workforce advantage uses workforce as part of their economic development strategy. The community has both a business retention and a growth strategy, as well as the more traditional business attraction approach. There are multiple sectors represented in the region. There is "life cycle" diversity within the region -- a mix of older established industries, growing sectors, and new and emerging industries. Investments in economic development are strategic and focus on employers with high wage jobs in addition to businesses with high sales tax revenue.*

WIBs and community colleges often have cross representation on WIBs and Economic Development corporations and agencies. They both participate in overall economic development planning, and some WIBs in California now actually are responsible for designing the Community Economic Development Strategy (CEDs) for their counties. WIBs and community college Workforce and Economic Development Programs can cross-train front line staff in One-Stops, colleges, and economic development organizations. WIBs can collect and provide information about the community's workers and their skills and colleges can assess the skilled workers graduating from their programs. They can both participate in co-developed employer retention surveys with economic development.

Occupational programs at the colleges are required to maintain active industry and business advisory committees that assist the programs with current growth and retention strategies for their industry sector. The Regional Consortia attempt to address the regional economy by working closely with employers especially in the areas of corporate education and training. Some colleges have strong and integrated corporate training components and others do not. The colleges that provide sound leadership through a Dean or Director of Workforce and Economic Development tend to have the more industry-engaged programs. Some colleges don't have a formal Economic Development program but have very active faculty and administrators who work closely with the surrounding community to respond to employer/worker needs.

### **Integrated Infrastructure**

*Each community with a competitive workforce advantage has an infrastructure for both employers and workers. In addition to physical infrastructure for businesses -- such as roads, water, and electricity -- it includes a diverse housing supply, access to affordable quality childcare, health care and adequate regional transportation. Residents have access to a One-Stop career center system that helps them find and keep jobs. There are sufficient cultural and recreational opportunities and other "quality of life" assets.*

WIBs often participate in a broad range of regional and community planning efforts, such as P-16, First Five, and other community initiatives. They always include a broad range of partners and services in One-Stops, and often advocate for changes in public policy and administrative procedures to make it easier for residents to access services. They engage local elected officials in problem solving and have cross representation on WIB and community boards and agencies.

Most colleges have student support services components that include industry internships, a job placement offices, and work experience components (students get college credit for relevant work performed on the job). In addition to the programs listed above, student support services often include the following programs: child development center on campus; student health center; transportation office or information center; career counseling; financial aid (grants, loans, and scholarships); computer labs and student resource centers (some college libraries belong to a larger consortia of libraries where currently enrolled students can borrow books from university and local library collections); ambassadorship programs where students learn leadership skills and practice them through outreach to local schools and community organizations.

### **Effective, Articulated Education System**

*Each community with a competitive workforce advantage has a K-12 system that works. High school graduates have the requisite skills to enter the labor force or go on to college. The education system is responsive to employer needs. The system is well articulated from high school to community college and higher education programs. Residents have easy access to higher education and non-degree occupational training that prepares them well for jobs in the community. All students have access to the supportive services they need, career guidance, caring adults, leadership opportunities and academic excellence.*

WIBs establish and nurture strong youth councils that work for all youth. They serve as a catalyst for dialogue between employers and education, and in some cases have created on-going mechanisms for interaction, such as the Alliance for Business and Education in San Bernardino. WIBs collect and provide information about skills needs

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and communicate this information to schools. They include youth in One-Stop system services and provide accessible information about careers, performance of job training programs and providers.

Most colleges are extremely active with their feeder high schools. Colleges provide education planning conferences and seminars for their local middle schools and high schools. They also make numerous visits to high schools during the school year at high school events and/or have regularly scheduled outreach activities arranged. Colleges take their student ambassadors, staff and administrators to these events so potential students can speak to people with differing college experiences. Many colleges maintain non-credit as well as credit programs so that the community is fully served with the college's offerings.

### **Clearly Defined and Accessible Career Pathways**

*Each community with a competitive workforce advantage has ongoing communication between industry and education/training entities. Education & training programs are designed with a deep understanding of how people move within occupational clusters. Students, job seekers and workers see clear career pathways within occupational groupings and understand how skills build upon one another to meet the needs of business. There are strong connections to union apprenticeship programs. Employers within an industry understand their career pathways and encourage skill development within the worker pipeline.*

WIBs convene employers within an industry to study career pathways, and often are able to help employers understand their own industry. Part of this effort is to collect and disseminate information about career pathways and occupation requirements for people seeing work in a certain field. They partner with labor unions to ensure access to pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs. WIBs often train career guidance counselors and others in career information.

Occupational programs are required to stay closely linked to their industry sector. Not all colleges have apprenticeship programs but there are some very large and active programs that exist around the state. Many colleges are involved in corporate training and education and have very active and strong programs throughout the state.

### **Ready, Willing, and Able Workforce**

*Each community with a competitive workforce advantage has employers who can recruit local residents for available jobs. The labor pool has the knowledge, skills and ability needed by employers. Job training programs produce workers who meet employers' needs. Job applicants have minimally acceptable soft skills. People have the willingness to perform jobs. Economic Development uses information about the available labor pool as a key component of their business attraction strategy.*

WIBs develop measures to evaluate the quality of job training programs and ensure quality in One-Stop career centers. Both WIBs and community colleges develop customized training to meet employer needs and partner with each other and other education programs to deliver quality training. They both reach into all communities and constituencies to connect people to jobs and training and seek funding to meet community needs for training.



The community colleges have been developing a competitive and adaptive workforce for the last 30 years. A variety of initiatives have been implemented over the years, like SCANS, that address the soft skills of students ready to enter the workforce. There is no way to guarantee the willingness of a person to perform the job but colleges actively work with students in the classroom, in counseling sessions and with the job placement coordinators to address this issue.

### **Local Collaboration**

WIBs and colleges have been working together in the last few years in many different ways to help create communities and regions with a competitive workforce advantage. The San Diego Workforce Partnership has recently completed a study funded by the WIRED initiative that describes other important collaboration projects, in a report: *Innovating Workforce Development By Supporting Business Innovation: Case Studies from California* (see [www.innovatecalifornia.net](http://www.innovatecalifornia.net)).

Below are examples of sector-based projects and on-going system integration efforts, which we hope will give readers new ideas about the kinds of collaboration that is possible.

### **Sector-Based Projects**

Over two years ago, the Verdugo WIB in Los Angeles County pulled together 4 regional hospitals and 3 community colleges to discuss the local nursing shortage in the region. The WIB had identified between 400 to 500 unfilled nursing job openings at 5 regional hospitals. Glendale Community College and Los Angeles Valley College nursing departments took an active role to help the WIB design a training program to address the nursing shortage. Later, Los Angeles Pierce College was added as a partner. The WIB/College collaboration won several competitive grants, which concentrate on 2-year RN programs and 1-year LVN-to-RN programs. Since most experts view attrition as one of the key reasons for a shortage of nursing graduates, the most remarkable feature of their success is that there is almost no attrition in both programs.

In a similar effort, the Marin Employment Connection has a contract with the College of Marin to provide funds for extra tutoring and advising for their nursing students. As a result of this collaboration, the nursing program experienced its lowest attrition rate in nine years.

At the California/Mexico border, the Imperial County WIB has collaborated with Imperial Valley College for the past three years to train LVNs. This project is unique because it includes both hospitals in the County utilizing a program called "20/40" where nurses in classroom training can get credit for 40 hours of hospital work while only working 20 hours. The other 20 hours are in class. This is really a three-way partnership among the WIB, colleges and hospitals. They will also be establishing other health care industry courses in the next year including imaging, lab techs, and pharmacy techs.

In California's Central Valley, there is a very successful collaborative effort between the Tulare County WIB, the Employment Training Resource, Porterville College and the College of the Sequoias in Visalia for the development of a Registered Nurse

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"Bridge Program." This allows participants to transition from a LVN to a RN within one year. In addition, the WIB delivered "wrap around services" to 160 Registered Nurse students as part of a DOL Community Based Job Training grant received by College of the Sequoias.

In the Bay Area, there are a number of projects focused on the biotech industry. The Alameda County and San Mateo County WIBs partnered with Ohlone Community College Skyline College. This project was designed to place 193 dislocated workers as manufacturing technician positions at Genentech, Bayer, Chiron, and other biotech firms. Although the grant funding ends in December '06, the Alameda County WIB is committed to carry on the program using formula funds for several more classes into '07, as Alameda County has over 450 biotech firms, and therefore represents an important industry sector. The program won two awards in 2006: NAWB's Theodore Small Workforce Award, and U.S. Department of Labor's Recognition of Excellence in building business/industry award.

In the Inland Empire, east of Los Angeles County, the San Bernardino County WIB, San Bernardino Valley College and Chaffey Community College, in collaboration with the San Bernardino Manufacturer's Council, are operating customized training programs to upgrade the skills of incumbent workers. This initiative prepares workers for promotion in Electrical and Mechanical advanced occupations, which pay over \$50,000 annually. Chaffey College has received an additional grant to train the entry-level electrical skills needed for heavy manufacturing. The WIB supports half of the cost of the training with the participating companies supporting the other half and paying workers while they attend the training classes. All classes are offered on Friday and Saturday to have the least amount of impact on production.

### ***Systems Integration***

The Tulare County and Kern/Inyo/Mono County WIBs collaborated to develop a 20/20 program with local employers. The employee receives a full 40-hour salary but works for 20 hours and attends class at the College of the Sequoias and Porterville College to gain additional training for 20 hours to upgrade skills.

Alameda County's Career Pathways Project is a pilot project designed to build career pathways for high-risk and foster care youth. Three of the Community College Districts in the County have implemented the program (Ohlone, Peralta and Chabot). The project is funded through the WIB's youth formula and with a grant from the Walter Johnson Foundation. Upon successful completion of the project, 80 youth will either continue on to a 2 or 4 year college or enter into several career pathways programs (biotech, construction, apprenticeship programs, etc.).

The San Benito County WIB has collaborated with Gavilan College by utilizing their computer lab and classrooms during the summer months to teach their Educational Component. Their intention was to expose young adults to a college environment, and encourage them to consider continuing their education with Gavilan College. They arranged for a number of programs, including the Financial Aid office, and past and current students to come in and speak to the students. The instructor hired to teach the educational component already taught classes at the college and was familiar with the building and the College's structure.

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Several years ago the Sonoma County WIB started a program for youth living in foster care who will soon turn 18 and no longer be eligible for the shelter provided by foster and group homes. The program is called the "Independent Living Skills Program" and is available to youth currently or formerly in foster care and who are between the ages of 16 to 21 years of age. The program is funded jointly by the California State Department of Social Services and the Community College Foundation. Students are officially enrolled in the College and they receive high school and college credit along with earned pay for each class attended.

Oxnard College and the County of Ventura's Job and Career Center is one of the few such collaboratives in the nation. The Center is located in a new, 14,000 square foot facility at Oxnard College that houses an array of programs and services designed to meet the needs of the community including welfare-to-work programs and services, behavioral health, public health, cash assistance programs, college CalWORKS (TANF) counseling services, a child-care waiting room support for parents visiting the Center, personal and on-line job placement services, assistance with the student financial aid application process, business development and planning assistance for new and incumbent entrepreneurs, customized workforce training support for business and industry, and access to mainstream instructional and student services programs at Oxnard College.

Developed through collaboration between the San Diego & Imperial Counties Community Colleges Association and the San Diego Workforce Partnership, the Workforce Alliance Project was designed to foster a stronger dialogue between industry and education and to focus on the ongoing challenge of educating and training San Diegans to fill the high-demand, high-wage occupations that are shaping the region's diverse economy. The Workforce Alliance Project brings educators from the community colleges and four-year universities together with key representatives from local businesses. These industry cluster advisory groups will develop and oversee meaningful projects in Biotechnology, Healthcare & Medical Services, Hospitality & Visitor Services, and Telecommunications.

The Santa Cruz County WIB conducted research through an Economic Development Administration (EDA) grant that verified need for a regional training facility. The WIB worked with the Cabrillo Community College to include the construction and curriculum development for the facility in their long range plan. They are now the lead on the construction grant with EDA for the facility. This investment in the community could only be done with the strong on-going partnership between the WIB and the College. The Santa Cruz WIB is now responsible for the development of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, which sets the economic development goals for the county, and allows the draw down of federal economic development funding.

## What's Next?

We are poised to do some great new collaborative work in California. The California Workforce Investment Board will be initiating a broad based strategic plan for workforce development. We will work to launch a set of initiatives through the EDGE

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Campaign to increase access for all Californians to skills training and education. And the legacy of the WIRED initiative has and will spur new projects with new sets of players.

As more and more of these types of collaborations enjoy success, we are spreading the word in the hopes of bringing even more projects online, building a track record that will help eventually take many of these efforts to scale. Just as we talk of the need for bipartisanship politically when we discuss education and training, community colleges, economic developers and workforce professionals need to see themselves as part of a team ensuring a strong regional economic base for their communities.

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