

# The Virginia Board of Workforce Development: 2017-2018 Policy Recommendations

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## Who We Are and What We Do

The Virginia Board of Workforce Development is business-led board that acts as the principal advisor to the Governor and the legislature on issues related to engaging and developing a world-class workforce in Virginia. The Board provides strategic leadership, direction, and oversight to the workforce development system and its efforts to create a strong workforce aligned with employer needs.

Virginia's publicly-funded workforce system includes a network of 8 agency partners and 24 workforce programs that collectively serve more than 1 million job seekers each year, representing a combined total of state and federal funding exceeding \$344 million.

The Board is appointed by the Governor and includes a diverse representation of members from across the Commonwealth. The majority of the Board is comprised of private sector business leaders from a wide variety of industries. Also included are cabinet-level officials from various secretariats whose agencies deliver and direct workforce services and programs; state and local elected officials; and representatives of the workforce itself. These representatives include labor organizations and community-based organizations who serve populations with barriers to employment.

## 2017-2018 Policy Recommendations

### Providing Strategic Leadership and Operational Continuity

Virginia's Workforce System and the State Workforce Board needs strong leadership. Due to new board compositions requirements in Workforce Innovation and opportunity Act (WIOA), Virginia's sitting Governor has an opportunity to appoint 10 new business members to the Board. We recommend that the Governor be actively involved in filling these critical board seats. Board members must have optimum decision-making authority within their organizations and should represent priority industries in Virginia.

The future Governor has an opportunity to make critical personnel decisions in at least two key areas: the new, cabinet-level position of Chief Workforce Development Advisor and the Executive Director of the Workforce Board. In considering these appointments, the Governor should recognize that the Board needs continuity and the system needs a strategic leader that can lead it to higher levels of performance.

### Creating a Best-in- Class Workforce Service Delivery System

Virginia operates a network of One-Stop Career Centers in 15 designated local workforce areas. Unfortunately, the lack of a coordinated marketing effort for these centers has led to a low level of awareness and utilization, especially among those who could most benefit from these services. A 2017 VCU Public Policy Poll found that *“over half of those surveyed (57%) said they were not familiar with job and career opportunities in their community. More concerning is that 80% of those with less than a high school diploma are unfamiliar with the education and training opportunities in their community. Just*

*over 70 percent (72%) were not familiar with the state's One-Stop Career Centers, which give Virginians access to the resources needed to search for jobs and improve their professional employment skills.”*

Virginia supports more than 60 One-Stop Career Centers through its 15 local workforce development boards. We must ensure that these resources are known and used by those who need them most. We request the current and future Governor actively support efforts to create a unified brand for the workforce system, local boards, and Virginia's network of One-Stop Career Centers. Further, the Governor should use his authority to ensure there are adequate resources for full deployment of the new statewide brand, and direct a sustained effort to improve awareness and utilization of the workforce system while also improving service delivery.

Virginia's workforce system must create and deliver value-added workforce solutions for businesses. The Board has established a framework for a compelling business services offering. The Board is requesting that the Governor support and ensure execution of the Board's business services strategy and immediately institute a statewide business satisfaction survey to measure progress in this area.

To support integrated service delivery in the One-Stop environment, we recommend that the future Governor direct responsible agencies to integrate technology, setting a specific date for the implementation of a universal registration and customer needs assessment process.

#### **Driving Program and Resource Alignment**

Key to the success of Virginia's workforce development efforts will be continued alignment with industries and occupations that drive Virginia's economic growth. To achieve this alignment, we recommend that the Governor continue to use his executive authority to coordinate strategies, resources, and operations; and endorse statewide common performance measures to support this goal.

Virginia's workforce system has long suffered from a fragmented service delivery structure that creates financial and operational silos. We recommend that the next administration act immediately to consolidate and better align programs across agencies, identifying cost and operational efficiencies that streamline and improve service delivery to individuals and businesses.

While Virginia has 15 local workforce development areas, the Board encourages the future Governor, in consultation with local elected officials, to identify and explore opportunities to more closely align these workforce regions with economic development regions, specifically those created through GO Virginia. This alignment will create opportunities to realize operational efficiencies, leverage federal resources, and improve outcomes.

The WIOA creates a unique opportunity for Governors to utilize up to 15% of the federal Title I grant for statewide strategic initiatives. The Board recommends the Governor direct the Chief Workforce Development Advisor to work in collaboration with the Virginia Board of Workforce Development to determine the appropriate strategic priorities and investment strategy for the Governor's Workforce Discretionary Fund to ensure it is aligned with the priorities of the Commonwealth.

#### **Building Talent Pipelines and an Industry-Focused Workforce System**

The Board believes that workforce development activities should be directed to support high impact industry sectors – those aligned with state and regional economic development priorities – to prepare people for high-demand, high-quality jobs.

To better anticipate changing workforce needs in this dynamic economy, the Board proposes establishing private sector-led Industry Skills Councils. These Councils should be organized around high priority industry sectors and administered by the Board. Board members will serve as Sector Champions, convene conversations with CEO's and provide regular updates on labor market conditions within industries and on emerging workforce challenges to the Governor, the Chief Workforce Development Advisor, and the Board itself.

One of the significant successes of this administration was the Governor's Competition for Talent Solutions. This grant supported an innovative public-private partnership model that engaged business, industry, and education to address skills shortages. While state funding was lost in 2016, we recommend that the Governor restore state funding for the Governor's Competition for Talent Solutions and allow the Virginia Board of Workforce Development to assume responsibilities for oversight of the grant.

While much progress has been made in preparing Virginians with occupationally specific vocational skills, employers are still struggling to find employees with basic employability skills. The State Workforce Board is uniquely positioned to identify and endorse a common set of competencies for employability skills and recommend that they be incorporated in workforce development programs across the system.

These common competencies would position Virginia to create an impactful statewide "work ready" initiative, which would focus on universally in-demand employability skills and demonstrate to businesses that every customer who passes through Virginia's workforce system is "work ready".

To foster an effective Board and workforce system, the Commonwealth must produce and have access to actionable labor market information. We recommend that the Governor act immediately to ensure that all available resources are being utilized to provide quality, comprehensive, relevant, and actionable labor market information to the workforce system and system stakeholders. Specifically, we believe this can be accomplished by directing the Virginia Employment Commission Economic Information Systems division to work collaboratively with the Virginia Board of Workforce Development and other system stakeholders to develop an annual work plan and supporting budget.

#### **Unwavering Commitment to System Performance and Accountability**

During this administration, the Governor endorsed a set of common measures to apply to all workforce development programs. This has been a critical step, along with the development of the Combined State Plan for Workforce Development, to drive improved system alignment. We encourage the future Governor to continue to refine and support statewide common performance measures for all workforce programs.

We recommend that the Virginia Board of Workforce Development assume responsibility for the Workforce System Report Card, formerly administered by the Council for Virginia's Future. Further, we recommend that the Governor consider establishing and funding, using federal workforce resources, a Performance and Evaluation Director position which would report to the Executive Director of the Board.