

Executive Summary

Partnering for a Competitive Workforce: Philadelphia Works Strategic Plan 2013-2018

Background

More than 490,000 Philadelphia residents of working age (16 and older) are not employed or looking for jobs. Even more residents work in low-wage jobs with insufficient hours to meet their families' needs. At the same time, employers express concerns about the availability of qualified workers. It is the role of the workforce system -- which Philadelphia Works coordinates and oversees -- to make the match between employers and jobseekers.

Philadelphia Works helps employers find skilled workers and helps job seekers develop the skills they need to succeed in the workplace. The organization is the result of a 2012 merger of the Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board and the Philadelphia Workforce Development Corporation into a single new organization. It has a more integrated governance and staff structure to guide the provision of workforce services, strong fiscal oversight and controls, and essential workforce-related research functions.

This strategic plan for Philadelphia Works is premised on achieving transformation of Philadelphia's workforce through a collective impact approach. Within such an approach, there are clearly defined roles for everyone, including elected and appointed officials, funders and resource providers, and service providers. There are mutually agreed goals that all participants work together to achieve. There is also shared accountability for results that can be measured and a mutual commitment to gathering the information needed to track progress throughout the system.

Priorities

This plan is based on achieving five broad priorities to produce a more integrated and better-functioning system.

Priority one: *better coordinating Philadelphia's workforce and economic development systems*

This entails increasing coordination between Philadelphia Works and the City of Philadelphia Commerce Department and PIDC, the City's economic development agencies. Activities include collaborating more closely on marketing and promotion, using on-line methods of communicating with employers, and jointly addressing the workforce needs of industry partnerships, which bring together employers, workers, and job training providers from a single industry cluster to address common workforce needs.

Priority Two: *Serving smaller employers*

Smaller employers account for the majority of jobs in the city, but most are unaware of Philadelphia Works or our services and those offered through our largest workforce system partner, PA CareerLink® Philadelphia. To address this problem we will introduce a marketing effort to increase our visibility among small businesses. This will also provide us with information about the needs of small businesses and enable us to refine our efforts accordingly. We'll also be: (1) establishing a team of experts who specialize in small businesses and entrepreneurs; (2) ensuring that workforce development staff who support small firms are specifically trained to do so; (3) ensuring that all workforce development staff members are aware of (and can refer potential candidates to) the system's small business services; and (4) making available a wide variety of services, e.g., training funds for small businesses on such topics as business and financial management.

Priority three: *Implementing a "no wrong door" approach*

This priority will ultimately result in integrating services now offered separately by EARN and PA CareerLink® centers. This entails opening three integrated centers which meet market needs and achieve performance measures. Our aim is to enhance and enlarge the services that are provided, including using virtual tools to reach and serve both employers and job seekers. The integration of services under one roof will allow all customers to receive assistance at any point in our workforce system.

Priority four: *Adopting common employer-driven standards for education and training*

To better match labor market needs, Philadelphia Works will coordinate increased collaboration between educational and training providers and industry partnerships. Our aim is to achieve a more uniform approach to assessment and work-readiness standards as well as agreement on which industry sectors and clusters to focus on. Two key activities will be 1) piloting work-based curricula that prepare job seekers to work in fast-growing industry clusters; and 2) collaboratively identifying critical skills and appropriate credentials, as well as developing model career pathways, needed for future employment success.

Priority five: *Targeting hardest-to-serve populations*

We have identified several priority populations for targeted, intensified services. These include dislocated workers with outmoded skills, people with low literacy and no or limited/sporadic work history, ex-offenders, immigrants/refugees/limited English speakers, and people with disabilities. Steps will include expanding the use of evidenced-based, computer-assisted learning; helping identify funding for training organizations to expand their use of technology; and involving employers, faith communities, service clubs, and literacy and workforce providers in establishing job clubs and other practices shown to improve literacy and bring work-readiness skills to residents.

Figure 1
Five strategic priorities for the Philadelphia workforce system



Implementation

Funding: To carry out this strategic plan and improve the quality of services we deliver to job seekers and businesses, the City of Philadelphia's workforce system needs broader and more flexible funding. Therefore we will work to expand our funding base from primarily government sources to include more flexible private sector funding and foundation gifts. We will seek approval from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to redeploy public resources whenever this can lead to better results for job seekers and businesses. We will examine our own policies and procedures to identify self-imposed resource restrictions that we can change without the involvement of government agencies. And we will import successful strategies other workforce systems have used to relax or change rules that limit innovation.

Technology: Philadelphia Works will convene workforce system participants and develop strategies for making maximum use of resources through better coordination and non-duplication of technology-based programs. We will base our own funding decisions to system participants on requirements that they coordinate their technology initiatives with colleague agencies whenever possible. Steps will include building consensus on common goals and standards, developing shared information systems, and submitting joint applications for funding for multi-agency projects that invite economies of scale.

Assessment: A critical component of the new workforce system must be an improved method for measuring the performance of those playing key roles in the system. The Research Committee of the Philadelphia Works board (assisted by Philadelphia Works staff members and outside agency representatives) is working to develop a new dashboard that includes measurement standards for assessing system and agency progress toward goals and objectives.

Marketing: Of an estimated 30,000 employers in Philadelphia, fewer than ten percent are making use of the public workforce system. To improve this rate of usage we will begin a public information campaign using both traditional and new media. Our aim is to increase our visibility among businesses and make our business services more responsive to customers' needs.

Research: We will build on our expertise in providing accurate and timely labor market information and economic analyses for businesses, academics, and others. This will include conducting findings on best practices, tracking workforce system data to monitor agency and system progress in achieving goals, and carrying out customized project evaluations.

Carrying out the strategic plan: We will convene and lead multi-organizational working groups to begin implementation of the strategic plan and for tracking progress on key activities. We will also establish a broader advisory group comprising key workforce system participants. This governance group will assemble several times annually to oversee progress and resolve issues that may arise during implementation of the plan.