



Engaging in the Public Workforce System

Options abound for workplace learning professionals who want to become engaged with the public sector.

By C. Michael Ferraro

As a learning professional, you understand the importance of engaging your employees in the work they do for your organization. And you probably stress this in all of your programs—the more employees engage in their own learning and development, the more they will get in return through personal and professional growth. It's a win-win situation.

Engagement in the public workforce system can also be a win-win for you and your organization. In 1998, Congress passed, and President Clinton signed, the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). WIA established the state and local workforce investment boards (nearly 600 across the country), and each of the boards has appointed state and local representation. You can apply to serve on your local workforce investment board.

But your engagement on the local workforce board doesn't have to be at the board level. You can meet with your local executive director and offer to be a business partner or engage with the board in some other capacity. By being aware of partnership opportunities at the local level, you may be able to access additional training funding for your organization that can help you grow and develop your talent. And you may

be able to participate in a partnership with a local institution of higher education (community college or university) or a not-for-profit organization (such as Goodwill), all of which could apply for a training grant. On the other hand, your organization may want to participate in a sector strategy approach to workforce development in your community.

In addition to the nearly 600 state and local workforce investment boards around the United States, WIA also created the nation's One-Stop Career Center system. Currently, there are more than 3,000 full-service and satellite one-stop centers throughout the United States. Visit one of these centers in your community, meet with the center's director, and find out how you can work more closely with the center to develop skilled talent in the community.

Some ASTD members have engaged in the workforce investment system on behalf of their organizations and have developed some very interesting programs. Bob Leber, director of education and workforce development for Northrop Grumman Shipbuilding's Newport News Operations, is one example (see sidebar for his story).

So where should you begin? One place to start is the Department of Labor's

Service Locator (www.careeronestop.org). It will help you to locate your state or local workforce investment board and your nearest one-stop center. Another resource is the workforce development or continuing education department of your local community college or university. They may be looking for employer partners for federal or state grant opportunities. You may also want to contact your state workforce agency for other funding sources.

Engagement with the workforce development system at the state and local levels can benefit you and your organization. And ASTD has tools to help you along the way. Visit www.astd.org/publicpolicy for more information. I wish you luck as you navigate the system.

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Upskilling the Workforce

While addressing the challenges of employee attrition and the retirement of baby boomers over the next several decades, Northrop Grumman Shipbuilding's Newport News Operations (NGSB) recognized that conventional hiring methods were insufficient to support its production requirements. To address this challenge, NGSB developed a program to provide entry-level workers with the skills required to be successful, as well as clear pipelines from high schools and employment services agencies to full-time jobs.

To support the program, NGSB created a collaborative model with the local One-Stop Career Center (Peninsula Worklink in Newport News, Virginia) and its workforce development partners. NGSB's primary purpose for the program is to systematically recruit, hire, and train production workers for careers in its shipbuilding and repair industry. With the local One-Stop Career Center as a partner, this program has created a replicable model supported by a compelling business case and positive return-on-investment for NGSB.