

# REAL ROLE OF WORKFORCE BOARDS REPORT

2024



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## OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND

In 2019, based on experience and research, CWA developed a training program called, “The Real Role of Workforce Boards.” The training is designed for local workforce board members, their local elected officials, executive staff, and other community leaders who focus on workforce issues in their respective communities. It

incorporates the theory of workforce development and how it supports local communities, along with the how WIOA and the U.S Department of Labor view local workforce boards in legislation and regulation. The training explores how workforce development and workforce boards operate in local communities as they relate to economic opportunities and socio-economic issues. It is designed to be highly customized incorporating examples from the local labor markets.

Towards the end of the year, CWA began rolling out the training, working with individual workforce boards across California helping them understand that the role of workforce boards is one of community development. At the heart of the training, we explore how workforce boards are strategic bodies that are appointed by local elected officials and charged with the responsibility of identifying challenges

that relate to talent development and economic prosperity, then work to assist the communities in developing strategies to combat these challenges. One of our key goals in this initiative is to help leaders who serve on and work with local workforce boards understand this at their core. This is to say that these bodies are designed to capitalize on economic opportunities and solve socio-economic challenges present in their local and regional labor markets.

CWA hypothesized and tested this theory in partnership through grant support from the California Employment Development Department and the James Irvine Foundation. We worked with several boards across the state using a combination of interactive training and facilitation, primarily using the Technology of Participation (ToP) facilitation methodology. The local boards who participated in this training/ planning effort reported a deepening of the understanding and commitment of board members, an increase in engagement and the ability to leverage funding, furthering of stakeholder alignment and industry support to build talent pipelines and strategies to address some of the more critical opportunities and challenges in their localities and regions.

**The training is designed for local workforce board members, their local elected officials, executive staff, and other community leaders who focus on workforce issues in their respective communities.**



# RESULTS/FOCUS GROUP FEEDBACK

To date, the Association has delivered the Real Role of Workforce Board training to **19 local boards in California**. The response has been extremely positive and the demand strong. The workforce boards who have been through the training have reported significant outcomes that have resulted in tangible changes to their board members and how the boards operate within their communities. Additionally, local boards have reported that their executive staff have also benefited, changing their views of how their roles play out in support of their board and their communities.

In 2023, CWA hosted a focus group with local boards who had participated in the training to gain feedback, explore outcomes and to check in on the boards that have participated.

The following are some of the key findings and observations from the local boards listed below:

Humboldt  
Sacramento Employment & Training Agency  
Richmond  
Contra Costa  
Monterey  
San Benito  
Tulare  
Madera  
Stanislaus  
Foothill  
Southeast Los Angeles County  
Long Beach  
Workforce Alliance of the North Bay  
Solano  
Orange  
Yolo  
San Luis Obispo  
Santa Cruz

## Key Findings



**Deeper Understanding** – Boards reported that their members and elected officials present developed a deeper understanding of the work that local boards should be focused on. This has allowed boards to participate in discussions and initiatives within their communities that go far above and beyond the Federal WIOA program. Members on local boards reported that this was the first time they understood what their roles should be and how they can support their communities by serving on their local workforce boards. Additionally, local elected officials who attended stated that they now understand the value and possible return on investment local boards can bring to their region and planned to leverage their local boards.



**Board Transformation** – Local Workforce Board Directors and their Chairs reported that their boards transformed in a variety of ways. One of more common reports was that board meetings had changed considerably. This included the development of new agenda formats and discussion items that held the attention of local board members. Boards reported that attendance for their meetings increased dramatically as conversations were held that were of local importance and value. The action plans that were outcomes of the training are often used as key dashboards and focus of board meetings keeping conversations on track increasing commitments of local board members.

# RESULTS/FOCUS GROUP FEEDBACK

## Key Findings (cont.)



**Community Enhancement** – This is one of the key outcomes of the Real Role of Workforce Board Training. Through our training, local board members develop a deep understanding of what is possible and how they individually, and collectively, can support and take a leadership role in their community. The key message of the Real Role training is that the board members themselves are the experts and are chosen for their role and responsibility within their communities. They learn that the real role of a local board is to identify key economic opportunities taking place in their communities or regions as well as socio-economic challenges that may exist. Once they identify these issues, they then prioritize and catalyze activities, and support and address needs in the communities they serve. This naturally creates an enhanced role for local boards within their communities and tightens relationships with key stakeholders and partners such as local elected officials, industry leaders, education, community-based organizations, and other civic leaders.



**Leveraging WIOA Funding** – One of CWA's goals for every local workforce board in California is for them to develop an understanding that the work of supporting their communities and addressing workforce and education challenges that are present cannot be done solely with WIOA funding. These Federal funds are often too rigid with many eligibility and expenditure requirements and cannot be used to address many of the economic opportunities and socio-economic challenges. We stress that WIOA should only be a part of a local board's budget (ideally no more than 50%), and through identifying systemic workforce and education issues present in their regions, a board will be able to identify pathways to additional grants, and financial resources to support this broader work. The Real Role of Workforce Board training demonstrates this knowledge and the follow up work through action planning clearly identifies strategies local boards can take to leverage the WIOA and diversify their funding portfolio. In this way, WIOA is seen as the seed investment that sets up the local board and programming from which a board and their partners can develop into an overall strategy to support their community.



**Individualized & Customized Research** – Without exception, providing the boards that go through this training with customized research has been reported as the most important and galvanizing message delivered. This is the crescendo for the training. Before every session we research key economic opportunities and socio-economic challenges present at the time of our training and review these with members present. Many of the board members are unaware of these opportunities and data that surround their communities' challenges.

# RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

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## **Each region has its own unique set of economic opportunities and socio-economic challenges.**

The State of California is the fifth largest economy in the world. It is comprised of diverse demographic and geographic economies that thrive from industry production and the skillsets of job seekers. Each region has its own unique set of economic opportunities and socio-economic challenges. CWA is aware of the diverse communities that reside in California and spearhead our research with the understanding that each local and regional economy has their own top industry sectors that provide self-sustaining lifestyles for individuals in their communities. With that understanding and awareness, CWA tailors each of the Real Role of Workforce Board training to the specific local workforce board where the training is being conducted. CWA's research comprises analyzing key economic data in the local area, using platforms like the US census data, city reports, local economic development analysis, and labor market information to identify these socio-economic opportunities and challenges within their communities.

During the training, we share current economic development efforts and initiatives, including specific commercial development and infrastructure projects. We examine and share the assets within specific communities and regions, like the prevalence of higher education opportunities, key industry sectors and growth. Once we review economic opportunities, we

then expose board members to socio-economic challenges that exist in their local area. We share data such as the number of people living in poverty, homeless rates, job-housing imbalance, commute time, lack of childcare and other challenges that a local workforce board should be aware of.

Inevitably, the conversation surrounds whether a local board can be responsible for solving some of these huge challenges or even capitalizing on economic opportunity. Our message is that a board is not solely responsible for solving these issues on their own, in fact it is highly unlikely they can. However, a local board has as one of its responsibilities, the ability to focus on these issues and catalyze or participate in community conversation and strategies to address them.

This leads our Real Role training to the next step, which is action planning. At this point, boards get together and identify the issues present in their communities that they could work on. Once these issues and opportunities are identified, we suggest strategically prioritizing the 3-5 that the board wants to address in the coming 2-3 years. This then helps a board focus, engage its members, and enhance their role in the communities they serve.



## ACTION PLANNING

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**This process is designed to build deep engagement and ownership of the local board members, key leadership staff and partners that participate. Many board members have reported that this has been the most engaged they have been on this board in many years.**

The Real Role of Workforce Boards has been very effective. In most cases after participating in the training, LWDBs understand their roles and utilize CWAs deep technical assistance to move them to becoming community centered. CWA does this through an action planning session as mentioned previously.

CWA staff facilitates the process of boards identifying key economic opportunities and socio-economic challenges, then categorizing these into strategic priority areas, from which 3-5 are chosen by consensus as the most critical for the local board to address.

To accomplish this, our action planning session has local boards envision what success would look like if their communities were thriving to its

capacity, we then examine that vision through the lens of their current reality, looking at strengths and weaknesses of the local board as well as benefits and dangers that could be encountered if the board was successful in reaching their vision. Given the vision of success and current reality, we ask each board member, individually and collectively to commit to 5-7 ways they can support the local board in reaching their vision. Once this step is complete, we then identify practical actions a local board can take over the next 2 years to move towards their vision of success. These practical actions form the basis of their action plans. We complete the process by working with key board members and staff to plot these practical actions on an eight-quarter calendar. This becomes their accountability dashboard and is used to guide them over the next couple of years.

This process is designed to build deep engagement and ownership of the local board members, key leadership staff and partners that participate. Many board members have reported that this has been the most engaged they have been on their board in many years. Furthermore, board members, particularly newer ones, have cited that they now really understand their role, not only individually but collectively in their community.



# APPLIED RESULTS/TANGIBLE EXAMPLES

While there are numerous applied results and tangible examples of how local workforce boards have changed as a result of the Real Role of Workforce Board Training, we are inclined to share the following examples from around the State. These examples showcase how local boards, their leadership staff, and key stakeholders have begun to change their strategic priorities from a lens where program design and outcomes (WIOA) are the main driver, to one where the needs of their local community and economy shape their work. **Furthermore, it is important to take note that NOT ONE of the goals below is to increase WIOA performance.**



## The Sacramento Employment and Training Agency (SETA)

The strategic priorities that the SETA board developed in their action plan included the goal of “seeking strategic partnerships that provide targeted populations opportunities to quality jobs and expand and enhance Sacramento Works capacity.” One of the action items in that priority area was to implement a partnership with Aggie Square. This focus resulted in a \$5 million dollar grant being awarded to SETA for

the development of public pathways. The Aggie Square Community Partnership plans to connect underserved populations with career, education, training, and skills in high-road, high demand career pathways, including public sector/business, healthcare, biotechnology, and community workers. This is one of the key outcome goals for the Real Role Training.



## Stanislaus County Workforce Board

During our focus group in 2023, the Stanislaus County Board reported that moving forward, all initiatives developed or implemented by their board must be connected or aligned to their local economic development strategy (Stanislaus 2030 plan). Stanislaus 2030 was developed in coordination with aligned efforts across governmental agencies, private-public partnerships, education institutions, businesses, service providers and community groups for the greatest impact for all in the

community. Stanislaus County Workforce Development brings an agenda Item to each Workforce Development Board meeting to share activities and initiatives that were completed and how they align with the action plan developed at the Real Role of Workforce Boards training.

# APPLIED RESULTS/TANGIBLE EXAMPLES



## **Southeast Los Angeles Workforce Board (SELACO)**

After their board and staff participated in the training and subsequent action planning, the SELACO board has launched a sector strategy to address the shortage of IT and AI workers in their region. This sector strategy will include research and development of industry demand, career pathway mapping and articulation, and connection to the region’s vulnerable population. The strategy also includes skill development training for SELACO staff in the IT and AI industry sector.



## **Workforce Alliance of the North Bay (WANB)**

After completing the training and action planning sessions, the WANB created a set of strategic priorities to accomplish over the course of the next two years that identified 5 key areas including; attracting out of market talent to fill jobs where demand eclipses capacity, upskilling and reskilling workers with short-term training credentials to meet industry demand, and facilitating attainment of the most relevant degrees and certifications based on demand.



## **The Madera County Workforce Board**

The Madera Board dove headfirst into the action planning activities that follow the Real Role Training. Several board members commented that this was the most engaged individual board members have been in the five years they have served on the board and that the outcomes of the session were the most productive and tangible. Their strategic priorities for the next two years include; increasing community focus on cultural adaptability and work ethics, implementing a marketing plan that highlights the economic benefits of Madera County,

re-evaluating the workforce board to ensure that the “right” leaders of today are investing in the leaders of tomorrow, supporting and developing responsive training to meet industry demand by partnering with Madera Unified School District and local community colleges, and creating a unified vision between Madera County communities that support inclusive policies and demonstrates connectedness.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

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## **Every community and region in California will be served by a local board that understands its role as a catalyst and key leader in developing economic opportunities and solving socio-economic issues.**

To date, thanks to generous support from The California Employment Development Department, the California Labor and Workforce Development Agency and The James Irvine Foundation, 19 local boards in California have gone through the Real Role of Workforce Board Training. Additionally, 7 boards are in the process of taking that training through the action planning phase.

While this process is extremely valuable and useful in moving our local boards from being WIOA program focused to a board that is centered in the community they serve, this training and the subsequent action planning is staff intensive. This process usually takes place over 3-5 meetings with both the local board

members and key leadership staff. However, when complete the boards have a clear action plan and a customized dashboard that they can use to hold themselves accountable as they move towards being community-centered. CWA and local boards could use future investment to provide this training to even more local boards. We believe every board in the State could benefit from understanding the Real Role of Workforce Boards.

The following recommendations are presented with the goal in mind that every community and region in California will be served by a local board that understands its role as a catalyst and key leader in developing economic opportunities and solving socio-economic issues that go far beyond WIOA.



### **1 Creation of a training module that teaches local boards to leverage WIOA and diversify their funding.**

Research and experience show us that WIOA funding alone is not enough, nor does it contain the flexibility needed to address community workforce and vocational education issues. Local board leaders often are unaware how to leverage and grow their budget and portfolio. Technical assistance can be delivered to show that once strategic areas are identified, a fund development strategy can be created and implemented to support this work. This strategy often needs to be multilayered as well as incorporated into the governance structure of the local board and the jurisdiction they serve. Once this is done, the board becomes a recognized value and asset to the community often attracting additional resources as leaders and stakeholders alike turn to community-centered boards to address challenges within the community and implement innovative initiatives.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

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**Build the curriculum out further to incorporate the 13 Functions of a Community-Centered Workforce Board.** With support through The James Irvine Foundation, CWA has developed 13 key functions that local boards provide when they are community centered.

These functions include:



**Business Focused** - Aligning with key industry sectors.



**Small Business** - Supporting and assisting the small business community.



**Entrepreneurship** - Providing training and assistance for start-ups.



**Economic Development** - Partners on business attraction, retention, and talent pipeline management



**Worker Mobility** - Addressing the challenges of low-wage workers.



**Career Pathways** - Developing and articulating career pathways, working to align education systems to economic development and business demand.



**Earn and Learn Models** - Supporting workers with robust earn and learn models, such as apprenticeship.



**Resource Diversity** - Operating with a portfolio of investments providing flexible funding.



**Childcare** - Considers the availability of affordable childcare, increases workforce options in this area.



**Vulnerable Populations** - Works to incorporate target populations and incorporate HCD principles in solving challenges facing these groups.



**Race, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion** - Incorporates REDI principles and strategies into program design, measures progress through data.



**Homelessness** - Has focused initiatives in partnership with local, county or state efforts.



**TANF and Public Assistance** - Partners with county and state organizations to move people out of poverty.

The Real Role of Workforce Board training is currently being updated to incorporate these areas. We believe workforce boards can use the areas above to assist in identifying the opportunities and challenges to address when developing their strategic priority areas.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

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**3 Work with State and local leadership to develop a return on investment (ROI) model that shows how WIOA can be leveraged to create tangible and lasting change within local and regional communities.** Our experience in delivering the Real Role of Workforce Board training and the subsequent action planning has clearly shown that workforce boards across the State are leading and participating in efforts that have deep and lasting effects. However, WIOA data does not illuminate this work. This work is often done outside of WIOA funding, and the outcomes are reported in a myriad of funding streams ranging from Federal, State, local and philanthropic investments. We must work together to identify ways to quantify this work and show impact. We must find a way to aggregate this work to show the real ROI that the State's system of local workforce boards brings to their respective communities. We believe that we can categorize the work done locally into the functions of a community-centered board to accomplish this.

**4 Leverage the power of the more than 1,000 local board members.** The State's 45 local boards have an estimated 1,000 members serving on their boards. A majority of these members are from private industry representing our State's key industry sectors. California should work with these members to support workforce development and vocational education efforts across the State. Additionally, local boards have many educational, government and non-profit civic leaders serving. This resource is currently woefully underutilized. This group of leaders can provide valuable feedback and input to the California Workforce Board, the Labor Agency, EDD, the Chancellor's Office, and many other State agencies on the work being conducted in the field. As local boards work to incorporate human-centered design into their local programs, the State should work to use this model to gain key insights from these leaders in aggregate. Our Real Role of Workforce Board training has deepened the knowledge of local boards throughout California and board leaders and members are "ready to roll up their sleeves" and work on issues that will support our State's businesses and citizens.

2024

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